

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community and Protective Services Committee
From: Kevin Dickins, Acting Managing Director, Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home
Subject: A New Provincial-Municipal Vision for Social Assistance
Date: March 2, 2021

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Acting Managing Director, Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home, this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Executive Summary

Since 2018, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) has taken steps to reform and transform the delivery of Social Assistance. Strategies initiated to date include service delivery modernization, efforts to improve coordination across ministries, reduce administrative burdens and employment services integration. Linkages between the strategies that have been announced since 2018 include emphasis on the importance of life stabilization, employment supports and recognizing the local context.

On Feb 11, 2021, MCCSS outlined a renewed vision for Social Assistance in Ontario - A working vision for social assistance attached as Schedule 1. Key elements of the vision include maintaining person-centred services, a shift in services provided and responsibilities at the provincial and municipal levels, working towards an integrated human services model and commitments to co-designing the new system with Municipal service delivery partners. Associated timelines include work that began in 2020 up until 2024 for full implementation of the vision. Phase 1 and 2 of the plan aims to realign functions and service delivery responsibilities, in order to streamline social services systems and create an effective integrated human services model.

There is no immediate impact as a result of these developments, as this is a long-term vision for social assistance transformation that will happen in phases, taking place over multiple years.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

Strengthening our Community

- Londoners have access to the supports they need to be successful
- Londoners have access to the services and supports that promote well-being, health, and safety in their neighbourhoods and across the city

Growing our Economy

- London will develop a top-quality workforce
- London creates a supportive environment where entrepreneurs, businesses and talent can thrive

Creating a Safe City for Women and Girls

- London has enhanced the potential for women and girls to live safe lives

Leading in Public Service

- The City of London is trusted, open, and accountable in service of our community
- Londoners experience exceptional and valued customer service

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- CPSC December 13, 2106 Basic Income Pilot Project for Ontario
- CPSC November 25, 2013 Provincial Social Assistance Service and Rate Structure Reviews
- CPSC November 25, 2013 Action Related to Provincial Social Assistance Reviews
- CPSC March 18, 2013 Social Assistance Review Commission Report: Brighter Prospects Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario

1.2 Timeline Review

In July 2018, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) announced intentions to implement a new social assistance program to improve an existing “patchwork” system. Following a 100-day review, in November 2018 a high-level strategic framework was announced, which included emphasis on simplified rates, local flexibility, life stabilization supports, and employment supports focused on empowering individuals. Additionally, key priorities included a coordinated multi-ministry approach, reduce administrative burdens and continued service delivery modernization so front-line staff can spend more time working with people to address complex needs. The Ministry committed to working closely with service delivery partners to develop a phased plan for changes, affording flexibility to focus on the local context.

As part of prioritizing a multi-ministry approach, on February 12, 2019, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) along with MCCSS announced a plan to integrate Employment Services between Ontario Works, ODSP, and Employment Ontario. The model intends to manage the employment service system more effectively and support people who find themselves facing barriers to employment or precariously employed, in getting the help they need. In January 2021, three prototype regions (Hamilton-Niagara Peninsula, Muskoka-Kawarthas and Peel Region) implemented the integrated employment system and updates are expected to be shared when available. The City of London remains committed to existing Purchase of Service agreements with local employment agencies and will continue to be held accountable to the province for existing employment outcomes and targets within the current Ontario Works Service Plan. There remains no known timeline for when the London Economic Region would transition from the current service delivery model on employment to a new regional transformation model.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, the ministry announced a recovery and renewal plan for Social Assistance to address the economic realities being experienced in the province. The first phase of the plan was built on learnings gathered during the COVID-19 outbreak, as well as the need to fundamentally change ways services are delivered. The plan focused on four key areas:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accelerated digital delivery solutions• Centralized and automated delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Risk-based eligibility review• Access to employment and training
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The changes intend to improve the effectiveness of connecting people to supports to achieve greater independence and actively participate in local communities.

Towards year end of 2020, the ministry released a life stabilization framework that acknowledged the critical importance of addressing barriers to employment readiness and independence within the community. Four categories of barriers identified in the framework were basic needs, community support, health, and life skills. The ministry recognized that current policies do not define life stabilization, nor reflect the supports that are needed for clients to address barriers to employment. Additionally, the lack of tools and resources to determine life stabilization needs as well as inconsistencies in local and system (ministry, federal) partnerships to support social assistance outcomes were identified. The proposed future state within the life stabilization framework seeks

to improve client access to employment services, improved readiness for employment and improve client access to other services that support life stabilization.

Since the initial strategic framework was announced in 2018, the ministry has continued to identify the importance of clear expectations for delivery partners within updated program and policy design, as well as better data to support accountability. Through both the recovery and renewal plan and life stabilization framework, the ministry identified the importance working with service delivery partners to co-design system changes in order to fully understand impacts at the local level.

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 A New Provincial-Municipal Vision for Social Assistance

Further to the recovery and renewal plan unveiled in fall 2020, on February 11, 2021, Minister Smith [announced](#) next steps in the province's plan to modernize and transform the delivery of Social Assistance. The vision outlines strategies for a new Social Assistance delivery model that allows frontline workers to focus on individualized supports at the local level as well as ensure it is easier for people to navigate the system. The integrated service delivery vision identifies municipalities as a key partner for life stabilization efforts.

The ministry recognizes the continued impacts of COVID-19 and the hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who are currently unable to return to the labour market. Anticipating an increased demand on Social Assistance supports (depending on the future of enhanced federal income benefits), the ministry is positioning service delivery systems to support employment, independence, and life stabilization. The new vision for Social Assistance aims to focus on people by connecting them with a range of local services and supports that respond to their unique needs and address barriers. These supports include, but are not limited to, job-readiness programs, housing, childcare, skills training and mental health services.

As illustrated in the attached Schedule 1, streamlining the Social Assistance system will include realignment in the deliverables at provincial and municipal levels. The province will be responsible for centralized financial assistance, financial controls and back-office functions suited to centralization or automation. Municipalities will deliver life stabilization supports, including needs assessment, service planning, warm referrals and discretionary benefits. The integrated service design is person-centred, with omni channel access to life stabilization, financial and employment supports. It also includes connection and navigation of broader systems (e.g., housing, employment, mental health) with the goal of contributing to better outcomes in all areas of an individual's life.

The implementation of the vision began in 2020 with prototyping the centralization of provincial functions and will continue into 2024. A summary of the phased approach identified by the ministry is as follows:

Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2020-2022 • Focus on realigning functions • Distinguish centralized provincial functions and person-centred municipal supports
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022-2024 • Focus on realigning service delivery at the local level • Municipally delivered life stabilization for OW & ODSP
Human Services Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2024 & beyond • Broaden community access to caseworkers • Municipally delivered life stabilization for social assistance clients, people in crisis & other municipal programs

For the most part, 2021 and 2022 will be “learning and testing years,” that will include prototypes, iterations, and evaluation. This will include small samples of local offices and gradual expansion when appropriate and feasible to do so. The phase 1 and 2

models are designed to support both the ministry and municipalities in working towards the human services model. The integrated human services model aims to broaden access to caseworkers at the municipal level, including life stabilization supports for the community. The ultimate objective is to create a better human services system for Ontarians. A full illustration of the timelines is provided in Schedule 1.

Within the renewed vision for Social Assistance, emphasis is placed on partnerships and collaboration with municipalities in designing and implementing operation models along with associated principles and processes. The primary short-term priority is to co-design a renewed operating model, which includes funding prototypes (as illustrated in Schedule 1). The ministry also acknowledges that renewing the operating model will involve legislative and regulatory changes to enable greater flexibility in decision making and service provision. In terms of long-term planning, the priority is to move towards a human services delivery model, which is predicated on person-centred municipal supports driven by local focus and access to community programs and services. In the human services delivery model, Social Assistance becomes a tool in the toolbox for caseworkers. With a broad knowledge of system benefits and supports, caseworkers will be able to guide and triage individuals depending on their needs.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

There are no budget impacts at this time. The Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Questions and Answers for Stakeholders and Partners (Q & A) identifies that as transformation of both employment services and Social Assistance delivery proceeds, the funding model will evolve, attached as Schedule 2. Municipal partners will be included in co-design of an updated funding model as well as a new performance and accountability framework.

Conclusion

The ministry's renewed vision for social assistance focuses on people, including connections to services and supports to meet individualized needs, with a goal of life stabilization and a better quality of life. Municipal service delivery partners will be integral for the co-design and implementation of renewed operating models as well as updates to policy and legislation. This will allow for greater flexibility in decision making and supporting clients at the local level. City of London Social Services will remain committed to supporting co-design and consultation opportunities with the ministry, including participation in prototype initiatives if applicable. Person-centred service delivery has been a longstanding fundamental aspect of the local approach in providing Ontario Works supports for the London community. The envisioned integrated approach will build on existing philosophies with the goal to provide supports that focus on stability, independence, and ability to fully participant in the local community.

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A working vision for social assistance

Vision:

To create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, providing them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success so they can move towards employment and independence.

How we will realign:

Province

Delivers:

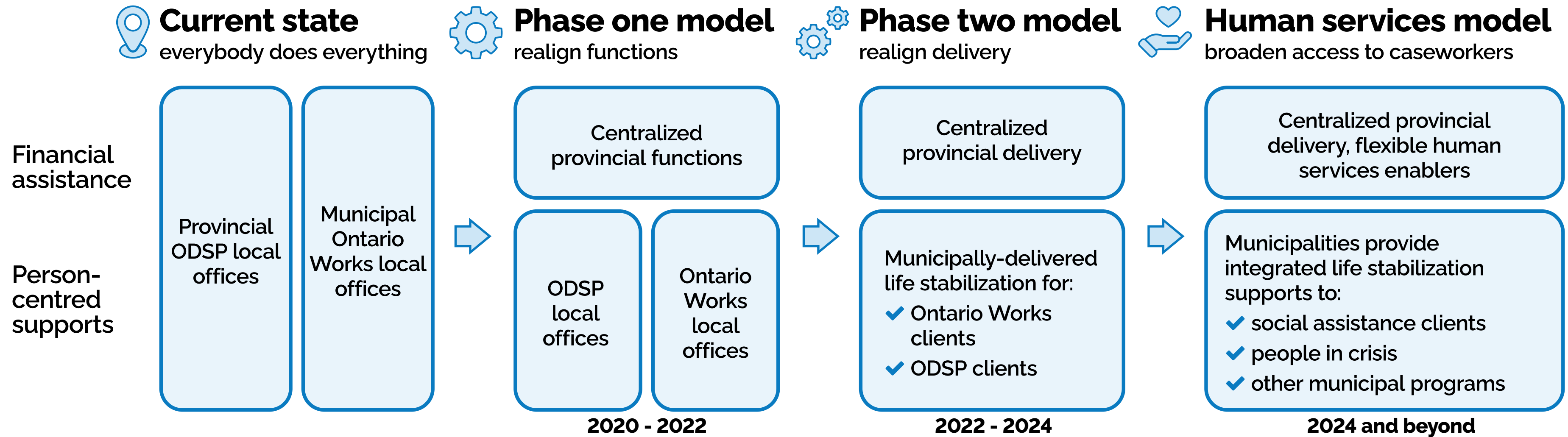
- ✓ Centralized financial assistance
- ✓ Financial controls and back-office functions suited to centralization or automation

Municipalities

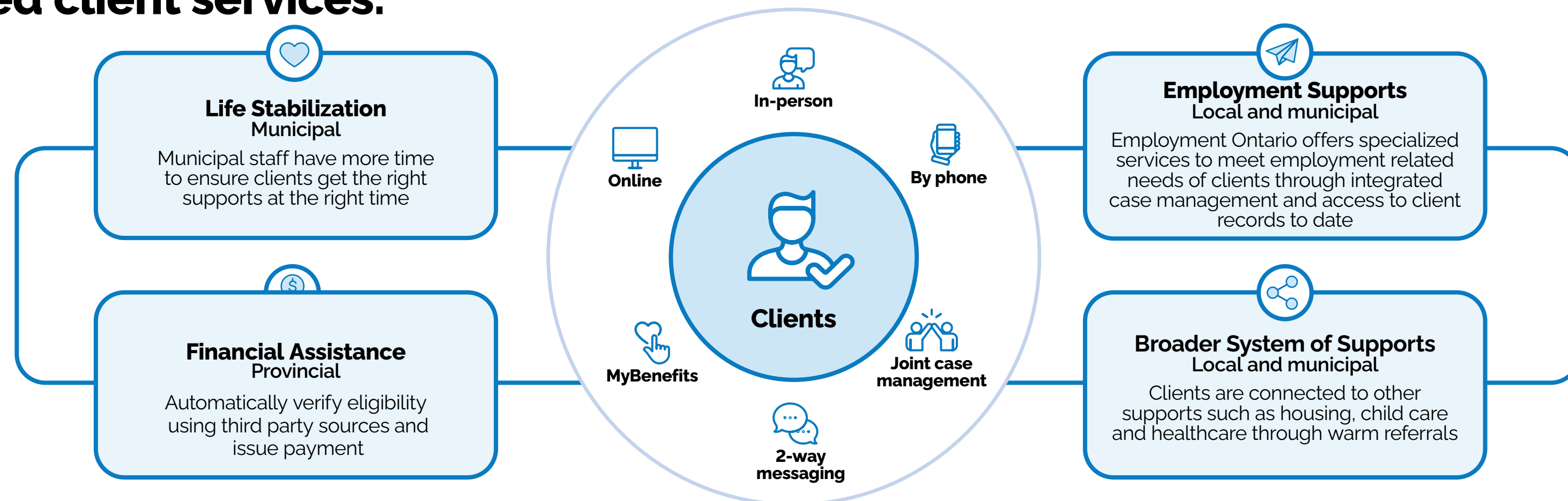
Delivers:

- ✓ Life stabilization – including needs assessment, service planning, warm referrals, discretionary benefits
- ✓ Person-centred, connected supports, and navigation of broader system (e.g., housing, employment, mental health)

How we will evolve over time:



Integrated client services:

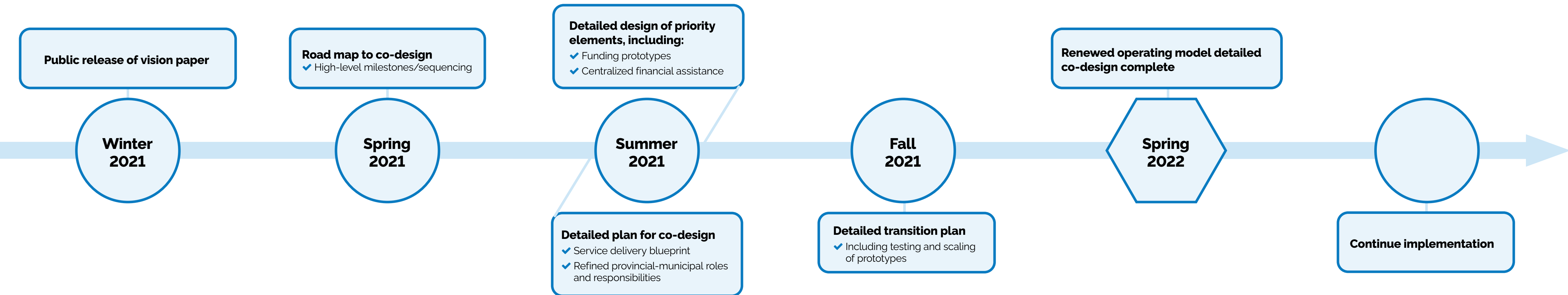


Social assistance: where we're headed

In the short term: co-designing a renewed operating model

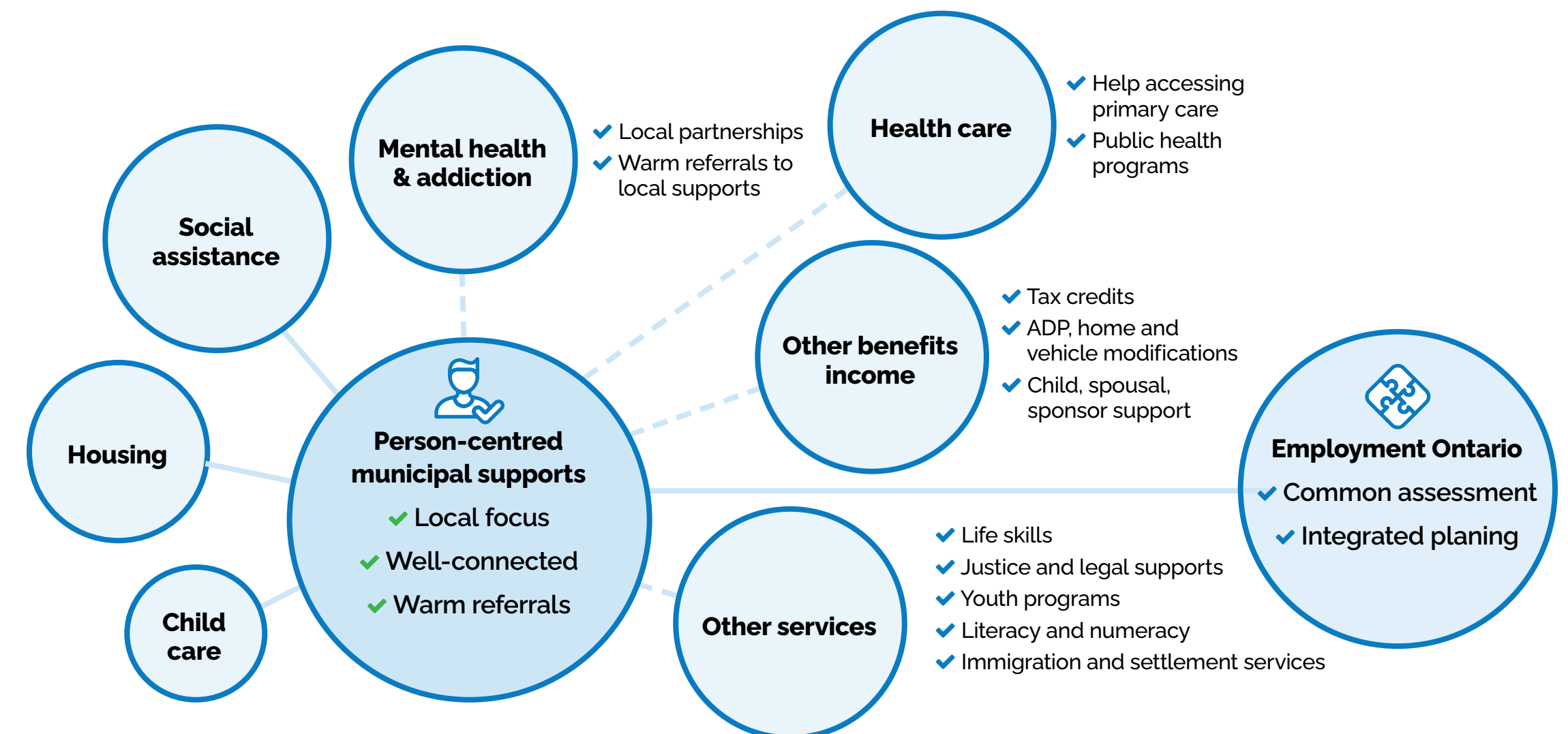
Prototype and implement: developing centralized provincial functions, starting with intake, and tools and processes to support life stabilization

Co-design: engaging to design key operating model layers, provincial and municipal functions, principles and processes



In the long term: moving to a human services delivery model

- ✓ In the human services model, benefits like social assistance become “tools” in the caseworker toolbox, as opposed to the other way around
- ✓ Caseworkers are knowledgeable about the broader system of benefits and supports, and can guide people to the supports they need – whether Ontario Works or something else
- ✓ People seeking help are triaged by municipal caseworkers, supported as needed, and potentially diverted from social assistance



Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal
Questions and Answers for Stakeholders and Partners

General

1. Why does the social assistance system in Ontario require transformation?

The COVID-19 outbreak has shown us a new approach is needed now more than ever - more Ontarians are looking to us for help with basic needs, to stabilize their family's lives, and to get back to work and financial security. Now is the time to build on the learnings from COVID-19 and work to fundamentally change how we deliver services.

Ontario finds itself at a critical juncture, with uncertainties about what economic recovery will look like for our most vulnerable. Ontario's social assistance system must be ready to focus on supporting people back into towards employment, independence and stability.

The new vision for social assistance aims to create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, connecting them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success. It is a critical enabler to a whole-of-government approach to accessing human services that will not only help more people succeed in employment, but also support better outcomes in other areas of life, like health and education. The pandemic has caused a protracted economic downturn and for some, a longer than expected absence from employment and as such, it will take an all of system approach to achieve economic recovery and supporting people back into jobs. That is why we need to act now and accelerate work towards this critical transformation to support Ontario's economic recovery.

2. What will the roles of the province, and municipalities and DSSABs be in the new vision?

At the core of this plan is a new delivery model for social assistance that looks at provincial and municipal roles - not along the traditional program lines of Ontario Works and ODSP, but around who can best provide the service to get the best results.

The premise of the vision is for the province to automate, streamline and realign functions that are largely administrative (e.g., provision of financial assistance),

making it quick and easy for people to access the system while ensuring program integrity.

At the same time, municipal partners will use their expertise in delivering person-centred casework and knowledge of local community supports to provide all of the activities that support people on a pathway to greater independence and employment.

We will start by exploring how to realign ‘who does what’, designing with our municipal partners a phased multi-year plan that will transform the delivery of social assistance in Ontario. Broad engagement, testing and prototyping, and appropriate phasing will be key.

3. Why is there a focus on realigning provincial and municipal roles and responsibilities?

In the current state, we know that programs are hard to navigate, and many clients are unable to access the broader system of supports they need. By working with other ministries to build better connections between programs, Ontarians will better be able to access the supports they need.

We envision a human services model where:

- people can access support to stabilize their lives before and after someone qualifies for social assistance
- supports across the system are better aligned and integrated where possible
- social assistance is just one of many tools available to help people improve their quality of life

This system will allow caseworkers to focus on results for people, rather than on paperwork, helping those people who can get back to work and support the Province’s economic recovery.

The changes will support us achieving this vision by allowing the province to leverage its ability to provide a consistent, efficient, cost-effective, and technology-based administrative system. It will also allow municipalities and DSSABs to leverage in-depth knowledge of local communities to help build a life stabilization framework that works at the local level.

This builds on our continued focus on the integrity and sustainability of social assistance programs. By specializing based on function rather than program, we increase the efficiency, integrity and effectiveness of the overall system and free up

space to enable us to provide the level of service people need to make a difference in their lives.

4. How will other ministries be involved in this process?

Work is underway with other ministries to build better connections between programs so Ontarians can access the supports they need. Taking a whole-of-government approach will not only help more people succeed in employment, it will also support better outcomes in other areas of life, like health and education.

We will work across government to engage partner ministries to collaborate and align on pieces of this work.

5. Where and when are these changes taking effect?

These changes will take effect over the next several years in phases.

We are working with municipalities and DSSABs to co-design and implement a plan that will gradually transform the delivery of social assistance across Ontario, beginning with co-designing a new operation model and consolidating financial assistance.

In general, 2021 and 2022 will be largely “learning and testing years,” as multiple projects are being prototyped, iterated and evaluated starting with a small sample of local offices and gradually expanding into more offices.

By the end of 2022, we hope to have reached full consolidation of financial assistance, and by 2024, we hope to begin rolling out a new human services model.

6. How will municipalities and DSSABs deliver life stabilization supports?

As the ministry seeks to improve client outcomes and relieve administrative burden for local office staff, life stabilization will become the foundational and measurable component of supporting a client’s progress towards employment.

The province, municipalities and community at large must all work together to help stabilize people’s lives and better employment outcomes for those who need help. The new vision is a starting point for further discussion among all sectors. The Province will continue to work with our municipal and DSSAB partners to engage with clients, staff, the community and those who will be an essential part of this transformation.

The province has been working with municipalities and DSSABs to develop a life stabilization framework and to work through what supports and changes are needed

and how we will continue to support clients to help them prepare for participation in employment activities.

7. Given the current COVID-19 emergency, why isn't the government raising social assistance rates?

The amount of financial assistance a person may be entitled to will depend on their individual circumstances including their income, expenses and family composition.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has made significant additional investments through the Social Services Relief Fund, so that shelters, food banks, charities, non-profits and municipalities will have access to flexible funding to help cope with growing demands and extraordinary circumstances.

We are working with our municipal partners on developing a social assistance system that is modern, sustainable, and connects people to the supports they need to help them on a path to greater independence and employment. Our plan will see people on social assistance achieve independence and financial resilience through a network of supports that are right for them and their communities.

It's a long road ahead and we continue to build on the work we are doing to transform employment services in Ontario, streamline processes to make it easier for people to connect to the services they need, and refocus the efforts of caseworkers to provide one-on-one help to those who need it in this difficult time.

8. Are ODSP and Ontario Works being merged into one program?

No, the ministry is not combining the Ontario Works and ODSP programs. These programs remain distinct programs with different policy objectives. We are realigning the work that is done in both programs along functional lines to enhance effectiveness and efficiency.

Ontario Works

9. How was this vision developed?

Municipal and district partners, such as the Provincial Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Committee, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the City of Toronto, have been key partners in the development of this work and will continue to be engaged, along with other stakeholders and partners, as this work moves forward.

This new vision builds on the conversations that have been ongoing at various tables with municipal and DSSAB partners for a number years and learnings from previous reform plans and efforts, as well research in this sector including the Lankin and

Sheikh 2012 Report to MCCSS by the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: [Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario](#) and the more recent Maytree [Report on System Transformation in Ontario Works](#). Both of these reports focus on the importance of aligning and integrating human services around locally delivered services and a person-centred approach.

The new vision for social assistance also takes into consideration the recommendations from the Auditor General, which highlighted the need to focus administration and strengthened program integrity.

While this plan identifies a path forward, it is the start of collaboration, not the end. The Province will continue to work closely with its municipal delivery partners – and with others – to refine the plan to create a better system for Ontarians.

10. What is in scope for co-design and who will be engaged?

We are committed to working collaboratively to co-design throughout the transformation process. Leveraging the capacity and expertise of the province and municipalities and DSSABs is central to developing a system that meets the needs of social assistance clients.

The co-design process will focus on developing a new operating model for social assistance, including roles and processes, the new human services approach, and funding, performance and accountability frameworks.

Representatives from across the social assistance and human services sector in Ontario will all have a role to play in the co-design process. This includes municipalities and DSSABs, partners across the provincial government, frontline staff, client groups, community organizations, disability organizations, urban Indigenous partners and other key partners.

As we consider the broader human services system and navigation of services to support life stabilization, sectors beyond social assistance will also be included as necessary (e.g., housing, child-care, mental health and addictions).

11. How will municipalities be engaged on co-design and implementation?

The Province will work with municipalities and DSSABs to set the stage for system transformation that drives outcomes, accountability and system performance.

This work will take place through channels such as the Provincial-Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Committee (PMSAEC), PMSAEC subcommittees and the Provincial Municipal Human Services Collaborative (PMHSC). PMHSC will be a forum to share information and receive early input from

municipal and DSSAB partners into the design process. PMSAEC is working to refine a detailed co-design plan that will provide clarity as to how different delivery partners and stakeholders will be able to participate.

We are committed to prototyping as much as possible, and the evidence from these prototypes will inform how we proceed as we work together to transform the social assistance system. Municipalities and DSSABs will also be involved in prototyping a range of initiatives including the Employment Services Transformation and centralized intake prototypes that are already underway.

12. Do these plans apply to First Nations Ontario Works delivery partners?

No. In recognition of their unique needs and priorities, the province will work with First Nations delivery partners, including at the MCCSS-First Nations Joint Social Services Table on a separate plan to renew social assistance in First Nations communities.

13. How will Ontario Works applicants and clients be informed of any potential impacts?

Clients will be contacted by their local office as needed, and we will utilize the MCCSS website and social media to ensure clients are made aware of any changes as they take place.

The province will work closely with municipalities and DSSABs at the Provincial Municipal Social Assistance Employment Committee to plan communications in a coordinated and aligned way.

14. How do these changes fit with the Employment Services Transformation in Ontario Works prototype offices?

The new vision for social assistance builds on work that is currently underway to transform employment services in Ontario, starting with three prototype sites.

In the prototype sites, municipalities are now focused on life stabilization activities, and these prototypes will help inform how life stabilization is delivered.

15. When will EST be rolled out province-wide? When will municipalities and DSSABs be informed?

EST is currently in the prototyping phase as MTLSD monitors and evaluates the prototypes. Lessons learned from the prototype regions will be applied to the future roll-out across the province.

Once timelines for full provincial implementation have been established, they will be communicated with to partners and stakeholders. The ministry remains committed to providing regular communications to help our partners and stakeholders understand and prepare for any changes.

16. Will funding for municipal and district delivery agents be affected?

As transformation of both employment services and social assistance delivery proceeds, the funding model will evolve alongside the shifts in roles and responsibilities.

The co-designed system will include a new approach to funding and a new performance and accountability framework. The province and municipalities will work together to develop a funding approach that addresses administrative costs appropriately and realigns any municipal and provincial savings.

17. Who should municipalities and DSSABs contact if they have questions or concerns?

For program-specific questions, please contact your program supervisor.

Ontario Disability Support Program

18. How will this vision affect people with disabilities?

Streamlining and automating financial assistance and expanding digital and self-serve options will allow us to redirect resources to provide more life stabilization supports to people with disabilities. The new vision for the social assistance system where municipalities deliver life stabilization supports has the potential to provide a significant benefit to Ontarians with disabilities.

There is no immediate impact to the way ODSP clients access services, except for previously announced life stabilization supports being prototyped in the Employment Services Transformation (EST) prototype sites.

19. How will ODSP clients be informed of any potential impacts?

Clients will be contacted by their local office as needed. We will also use the MCCSS website and social media to ensure clients are made aware of any changes as they take place.

To support further communication, we will also work with municipal service managers to share information and resources with community services agencies and networks.

20. How will this impact ODSP local offices and their staff?

Today's announcement is introducing the long-term vision for social assistance transformation, that will happen in phases, taking place over several years. There are no immediate changes within ODSP or to the way clients currently access ODSP.