



**February 10, 2021**

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy  
Minister of Finance  
c/o Budget Secretariat, Frost Building North  
95 Grosvenor Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
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Sent via: [submissions@ontario.ca](mailto:submissions@ontario.ca)

## Re: OMSSA's 2021 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide consultation on Ontario's 2021 budget. The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) is a non-profit association whose members are Ontario's Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). This includes:

- 37 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs), or upper and single-tier municipalities across Ontario.
- 10 District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) in areas where no upper-tier municipality exists in Northern Ontario.

OMSSA's members are represented by senior human services staff, who are governed by local municipal councils or a board of directors, representing urban, rural and Northern communities across the province.

Ontario's 47 Service System Managers partner with the Province to fund and deliver social assistance, employment supports, child care, early years and child care, homelessness prevention, community housing, long-term care and emergency social services in communities across Ontario.

OMSSA's members collaborate regularly with local public health units, school boards, non-profits and local service providers within their communities. Some of our member municipalities also manage the local public health units in their areas.

Our members support strong local service system management in collaboration with our provincial partners and bring decades of technical expertise and experience to the table.



## Support for Municipalities

In Ontario, core social services like income support, early years and child care and social housing are planned, managed and co-funded by Ontario's 47 Service System Managers. Service System Managers have an in-depth understanding of the unique social, economic, regional and demographic forces that shape and define their communities. They understand that what works best in Windsor may not be the right approach in Ottawa or Kenora, and they need the flexibility to deliver services in ways that meet unique local needs.

According to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), Ontario's municipalities take in a collective \$51 billion in annual revenues, of which \$41 billion is self-sourced – primarily from property taxes and user fees. Collectively, Ontario's municipalities receive \$1.6 billion in federal grants and \$8.5 billion in provincial grants annually.

Despite their growing list of responsibilities, the municipal level of government collects only 9 cents on every dollar taxed in Canada. On average, local residents (as opposed to commercial businesses) pay 68 per cent of property taxes collected in Ontario. Ontario's residents also face the second highest property tax burden in Canada, behind only Alberta.

OMSSA recognizes that all three levels of government are facing budget challenges and are searching for efficiencies. "Easy" cuts will be nearly impossible to find without impacting front-line services. According to AMO, municipal expenditures on health services, social housing, and social and family services exceeded total provincial grants by more than \$3 billion. Without the uploading that occurred between 2008 and 2018, this gap would be \$5 billion.

According to AMO, about 27 per cent of aggregate municipal operations budgets go to services that are conventionally considered a provincial responsibility in most other Canadian jurisdictions, such as child care, public health, social assistance and community housing. Reduced funding transfers will result in either a reduction or elimination of services, or further increases in property taxes.

Additional funding through the Safe Restart Agreement and Social Services Relief Fund is appreciated, but continued support will be required to deliver the same level of services and to address the growing demand for human services resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**OMSSA encourages the Province to work with the federal government on a new round of funding under the Safe Restart Agreement for the remainder of 2021 to support local municipalities with their COVID responses and economic recovery. OMSSA also encourages the Province to support Service System Managers with a third phase of the Social Services Relief Fund. The provincial and federal funding during the COVID-19 pandemic has been vital to preventing homelessness, delivering emergency child care and providing important health and human services during the emergency faced by all Ontario communities.**



OMSSA encourages the Province to maintain or increase municipal funding, and to avoid changes or surprises that would negatively impact municipal cost-sharing, provincial transfers or funding agreements, particularly after municipal budgets have already been passed. The provincial government should not attempt to balance the books through municipal downloading.

OMSSA encourages Ontario to continue exploring the alignment of provincial and local budget cycles, as suggested by Ontario's Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Steve Clark in 2019. Operating on two different fiscal cycles has been a challenge for both the province and service system managers.

[For more information, see OMSSA's Briefing: Local Service System Management in Ontario](#)

## Investing in People

A study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal compared funding for health care and social services from 1981 to 2011. They found that average per capita spending for health was \$2,900, almost three times the \$930 per capita spending for social services. The study suggests if governments had spent one more cent on social services for every dollar spent on health, life expectancy in this country could have increased by another 5 per cent and avoidable mortality could have dropped an additional 3 per cent.

Investing in people through human services makes sense. In partnership with the Province, OMSSA's members play an important role in supporting vulnerable people in vital areas including social assistance, housing, employment services, child care, ambulance services and public health. OMSSA and its members believe that investing in local human services will help prepare people for employment, create healthy and safe communities, make life more affordable and help make government smarter, as prioritized in the Province's 2020 provincial budget priorities.

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, we learned how crucial services such as homelessness prevention, emergency child care and timely social assistance were to supporting vulnerable Ontario citizens during this crisis. OMSSA understands the fiscal situation the Province is facing with current provincial deficit and debt levels. Ontario's municipalities are also facing major fiscal challenges stemming from the pandemic.**

Despite these challenges, health and human services are essential to Ontario's economic recovery. Service System Managers are ready to partner with the Province to ensure we can maintain and enhance social services that Ontarians rely on, while improving efficiencies through human services integration, modernization, technology and reducing administrative burdens



## Early Years and Child Care

OMSSA and its members appreciate and value our partnership with the Ministry of Education as we work towards building capacity and enhancing the early years and child care system in Ontario. Service System Managers appreciate the opportunities they have had to consult with senior Ministry of Education staff on emergency child care, the new child care funding formula, the five-year review of the Child Care and Early Years Act, and the Province's new child care plan and through our Children's Services Leads group, our Children's Services Network and the Provincial-Municipal Early Years and Child Care Technical Table.

Investing in child care is crucial to the economy. Public investment in early years and child care has a multiplying or "ripple" effect of positive economic benefits. In Ontario, the multiplying effect of investing in child care is approximately 2.27, meaning that every dollar invested in child care results in an economic output of \$2.27. Affordable child care can help boost women's workforce participation, with significant economic benefits. Mothers with young children are currently contributing an estimated \$53 billion per year to the Canadian economy. Investing in early years and child care services is also consistent with work in life stabilization and human services integration.

**Given these benefits, the Province should prioritize, maintain or increase investments in expanding licensed child care, child care fee subsidies, special needs resourcing, Ontario's Child and Family Centres, EarlyON, Indigenous child care and capital expansion.** OMSSA strongly supports expanding access to culturally relevant and Indigenous led early years and child care.

**OMSSA members are concerned with increased cost sharing requirements and look forward to further consultation on the funding formula.** OMSSA appreciates the transitional funding for this year, but requests that the decision related to these extra costs be reconsidered to assist Service System Managers who are negatively impacted by changes to their allocations for 2021. This is important as Service System Managers focus on providing emergency child care during the second wave, increasing enrollment to pre-pandemic levels and work towards sustaining and stabilizing the sector to ensure economic recovery once the pandemic ends, vaccinations are complete and people return to their normal work routines.

OMSSA also appreciates the additional flexibility and extension on the Safe Restart Agreement, which helped to ensure the sustainability of the early years and child care sector. **Given the second wave, new lockdowns in many parts of Ontario and the longer than expected vaccination rollout, OMSSA requests that the Province negotiate a new round for the Safe Restart Agreement until there is a full reopening and significant progress towards economic recovery and system sustainably. There is currently significant uncertainty due to these benefits expiring on March 31, 2021.**



The first phase of the Safe Restart Agreement was crucial to providing emergency child care and helping sustain licensed child care spaces during the closure period. Funding clarity is required as soon as possible for municipal governments to prepare budgets and make informed recommendations to municipal Councils. Multi-year planning allocations are appreciated to help ensure predictability for the sector and long-term sustainability of local systems.

Recruiting and retaining Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) remains a pressing challenge and an important priority for OMSSA's members. RECEs should be treated equal to their school board colleagues. **Service System Managers would like to work with the Ministry of Education on a provincial recruitment and retention strategy for RECEs.**

OMSSA is disappointed that RECEs did not receive pandemic pay or recognition for their efforts and work supporting emergency child care during the peak of the pandemic. As we continue to expand emergency child care, it is crucial that RECEs and child care workers are provided with personal protective equipment and are prioritized for vaccination once supply is available in Ontario.

OMSSA has a keen interest in working closely with the Ministry of Education to work towards strengthening relationships with school boards, providing better access to child care spaces, standardizing the sale of vacant public properties, creating community hubs and addressing school rents for child care programs. OMSSA looks forward to building on our strong relationship with the Ministry to address priorities including quality, affordability, access, choice and reducing administrative and reporting burdens.

**OMSSA supports providing incentives for non-licensed child care providers to be part of the licensed system. The Province should work with local Service System Managers to promote licensed child care, quality and safety to parents so that they can make informed decisions related to child care.** OMSSA believes that investing in early years and child care is crucial to making life more affordable, preparing people for jobs and creating healthy and safe communities. The Province should consider an education and awareness campaign to promote licensed child care across Ontario.

For parents and families, child care is becoming increasingly unaffordable. Ontario families are paying from \$750 to \$1,700 per month for child care and of the Canadian cities with the highest child care costs, 8 of the top 10 are in Ontario. **The Province should work with the federal government to pursue a national universal child care program with a strong role for the municipal level of government that focuses on quality, access, affordability and choice.**

[For more information, please see OMSSA's Briefing on Early Years and Child Care](#)



## Housing and Homelessness

Ontario's Service System Managers are responsible for managing more than 260,000 affordable housing units, representing a combined \$40-billion asset. According to the latest available figures, the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing in Ontario has grown to more than 170,000 people, with little new development to accommodate it.

In Ontario, the municipal level of government covers 58% of community housing costs. OMSSA's members are also focused on supporting and housing victims of domestic violence and human trafficking through local Special Priority Policies. OMSSA has been working closely with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on the Social Services Relief Fund, Community Housing Renewal Strategy, Supportive Housing Review and Housing Supply Action Plan.

OMSSA supports the intentions of Bill 184 and looks forward to further consultation between Service System Managers and MMAH. OMSSA applauds the progress that has been made together on regulations related to Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) simplification, local rules, access, asset limits and community housing waitlists as part of the Community Housing Renewal Strategy. OMSSA members look forward to working on end of operating agreements, end of mortgage, the *Housing Services Act* funding formula, entry and exit of providers from the community housing system and suggested service agreements.

**OMSSA supports a strong community housing sector and wants to work with MMAH, non-profit housing providers and co-ops to ensure sustainability of the sector. Federal and provincial funding is needed to clear the \$1.5B backlog of repairs and to create new capacity in the system.**

Additional federal funding through the National Housing Strategy and Social Services Relief Fund is welcome. **It is crucial that the Province of Ontario and Federal government maintain and enhance funding for programs such as OPHI, COCHI, COHB, Home for Good, Reaching Home and the Rapid Housing Initiative. Capital dollars are appreciated but flexibility is needed around deadlines to ensure projects can move forward. Predictable operational funding is also required to ensure these projects are sustainable well into the future.**

Many local programs and municipal contributions supporting affordable housing and homelessness prevention are currently not being recognized under existing service level standards. It is important to recognize these contributions and encourage flexibility and innovation locally. **Ontario's Service System Managers are responsible for their 10-year housing and homelessness plans. These plans have been approved by Council holding service managers accountable and should be used to replace the current service level standards framework.**



Ontario's Service System Managers have pursued innovative solutions and achieved strong outcomes in homelessness prevention through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI). **It is vital that CHPI funding be maintained and enhanced to build on work being done to reduce homelessness and poverty in Ontario's communities. Additional funding through the Social Services Relief Fund and Safe Restart Agreement has been helpful but must be extended until the end of 2021 to support municipal governments with their COVID-19 response and economic recovery. Extending operating funding to previous capital projects resulting from the Social Services Relief Fund is required to keep these projects sustainable and ensure that increased capacity is not lost.**

This includes the work of supporting vulnerable residents, controlling the spread of COVID, increasing shelter capacity, preventing homelessness and ensuring that people have access to needed services with appropriate social distancing precautions. The Province should also review allocations and the CHPI funding formula, as some Service System Managers have seen a reduction in funding.

Municipalities have found much success in addressing homelessness locally through the Home for Good and Reaching Home initiatives. These programs should be expanded to include all communities in Ontario. Emergency shelters are at, over or lacking capacity in many communities. The demand is expected to increase resulting from the economic recession caused by COVID-19. Over the long term, it is important to promote a housing first strategy to reduce pressure on emergency shelters and eliminate the need for homelessness encampments.

OMSSA encourages the Province to further invest in supportive housing as a means of preventing homelessness. The supportive housing review requires funding resources to address local needs and demand. This is a multi-Ministry initiative that will require cooperation between the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. **Investing in supportive housing makes economic sense, as the cost to support an individual through supportive housing is \$98 per day compared to \$235 per day for corrections facilities and \$962 per day for hospitals.**

Social assistance shelter allowances remain a challenge for Service System Managers. **Rent scales and utility scales do not reflect true costs and are not keeping pace with cost of living increases. Discrepancies in the current scales create additional costs for municipalities of more than \$200 million per year. OMSSA encourages the Province to review the Social Assistance Rent and Utility Scales and to increase them incrementally, in order to reduce this cost burden on Service System Managers.**

OMSSA supports the intention of the Ontario rent freeze legislation. Unfortunately, this has led to increased costs for Service System Managers and housing providers through RGI calculations. Additional funding or funding flexibility is required to address these cost pressures. OMSSA welcomes the ban of residential rental evictions to reduce pressures on emergency shelters and





prevent homelessness. It should be recognized that this is only a temporary solution and has a financial impact on private and non-profit landlords as rental arrears accumulate. **The Province should consider a residential rental relief program similar to the rental relief program that exists commercially.**

Adjudicator shortages at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) have created hearing backlogs and costly delays for landlords across the province. Delays for standard cases around non-payment of rent are reported to extend well beyond the LTB's service standard of 25 to 30 business days. **OMSSA encourages the Province to provide additional resources and explore alternative solutions to resolve issues at the LTB sooner.**

As the federal and provincial governments pursue investments in infrastructure as part of economic stimulus, increasing community housing supply across Ontario should be a key priority. According to recent estimates on funding sources for community housing in Ontario (2017-2018), municipal service managers pay 58 per cent of the cost of community housing, compared to 26 per cent for the federal government and 16 per cent for the provincial government. Most of the community housing stock in Ontario is between 20 and 50 years old, with a significant backlog of needed repairs costing close to \$1.5 billion. Funding from all levels of government will be needed to maintain and expand existing community housing and affordable rental stock.

OMSSA looks forward to continued collaboration on issues related to community housing, supportive housing and homelessness prevention with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and other stakeholders.

[For more information, please see OMSSA's Briefing on Housing and Homelessness](#)

## Social Assistance and Employment

OMSSA members are generally supportive of social assistance reform, increased use of technology and centralized intake. OMSSA supports the goal of reducing reporting and administration burdens to allow for more time spent on case work and client outcomes. OMSSA and its members look forward to continued consultation and collaboration on social assistance reform, social services modernization, human services integration, poverty reduction and employment system transformation through provincial-municipal tables.

**OMSSA encourages the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to review social assistance rates and rent and utility scales, to address inflation and rising costs of living. OMSSA members are also facing challenges with program delivery funding frozen to 2018 actuals despite rising costs.** OMSSA members are concerned with reductions in funding for employment services as funding is transferred to new Service System Managers for Employment Ontario.





OMSSA members support modernization tools such as electronic document management, reloadable payment cards and MyBenefits that have potential to save costs and reduce administration. The Province has made good progress on technology and should continue this work with enhancements to SAMS, as well as allowing for integration with third party software programs that have proven helpful to Service System Managers.

Reducing administration allows for more caseworker time to provide supports to clients in need. OMSSA supports a vision of human services integration, and efforts should be made to integrate technology with early years and child care as well as community housing and homelessness prevention services.

**OMSSA also encourages the collection and sharing of provincial data with Service System Managers, as well as efforts to reduce privacy-related barriers that force clients to tell their story multiple times.**

OMSSA members support life stabilization and preparing social assistance recipients for employment. Defining life stabilization and outlining clear expectations on outcomes for this work is crucial to Service System Managers. Access to mental health and addictions supports in all urban, suburban, rural and Northern communities must be a priority. Outcomes should be based on the social determinants of health requiring collaboration and integration across ministries and local human services programs delivered by municipal Service System Managers.

OMSSA encourages the Province to exercise caution when considering changing the definition of disability or the requirements related to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). These changes could lead to unintended negative consequences and could result in Ontario Works caseloads increasing by up to 30 per cent.

The Province is moving forward with Employment System Transformation. Three prototype zones were subject to an active competitive bidding process for service system management of Employment Ontario services.

OMSSA is disappointed that no municipalities were selected to manage Employment Ontario services. OMSSA and its members believe that the municipal level of government has strong service system management experience in child care, housing and social assistance, and as a result, are best positioned to serve in this role for employment services.

Through administering Ontario Works, municipal and DSSAB caseworkers have achieved positive outcomes in the areas of employment support and life stabilization. OMSSA's members continue to focus on improving employment outcomes and providing life stabilization support to enable job-readiness and prepare clients for employment.

OMSSA members would like to see improved access to justice and increased resources to speed up decisions at the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT). OMSSA members stand ready to collaborate



and consult with MCCSS to improve the SBT experience for the Province, Service System Managers and individuals.

The economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to lead to a surge in cases once federal benefits expire. Ontario must be prepared to serve a new group of clients in the event these federal benefits expire in 2021. OMSSA members will work closely with the Province to prepare for this potential surge and ensure a smooth transition should federal benefits expire.

**OMSSA also encourages the Province to work with the federal government on a broadband strategy to ensure all Ontario residents have access to new digital tools. Broadband and cellular connectivity remain an issue in some rural and Northern communities.** As we move towards a digital economy and digital services, it is important to make sure nobody is left behind because they do not have access to these vital services that have now become an important utility that is as essential as water, electricity, natural gas, phone and cable.

OMSSA looks forward to building on the strong partnership with MCCSS and working together on initiatives including social assistance reform, employment services transformation, poverty reduction, human trafficking and child welfare in order to maximize positive outcomes for Ontario's most vulnerable residents and communities across Ontario. This work will be important as Ontario continues to support people through the pandemic and moves towards economic recovery once vaccination is complete.

[For more information, please see OMSSA's Briefing on Social Assistance and Employment](#)

## Emergency Social Services and Climate Change

**Ontario's communities have seen increased incidents of flooding, forest fires, blizzards and extreme weather event. This often results in the need to provide emergency social services at the local level. To help reduce the costs and impacts of climate change, OMSSA requests that federal and provincial government support local municipalities with efforts to adapt to climate change and reduce carbon emissions.** Assistance in retrofitting community housing and municipal buildings would go a long way towards helping Canada reach its climate change targets as part of the Paris Accord and Ontario reach its carbon reduction targets as well.

## Mental Health and Addictions

Life stabilization is crucial work being done by Ontario Works and ODSP case workers in Ontario. The pandemic has threatened people's mental health and led to increased addictions. Social distancing has moved many supportive services to a virtual format, but prior to the pandemic, many communities did not have access to mental health and addictions services locally.



It is important for the federal and provincial government to increase funding to support a national and provincial mental health program and ensure all who need these services have quick access. Resources to address mental health issues are needed across urban, suburban, rural and Northern communities in Ontario. Mental health issues can be a significant barrier to employment-readiness, and services to address these challenges are a crucial component to life stabilization for many Ontario Works clients. Investing in mental health supports will also reduce pressures on hospitals, emergency shelters, the justice system and schools.

Ontario also needs a strategy to address the opioid crisis, which has impacts on nearly every community in Ontario. This strategy would require predictable long-term funding. Ontario's municipalities are on the front lines of this crisis and many are working on local strategies, creating opportunities for provincial-municipal collaboration. The Province should collaborate with Service System Managers, Ontario Health Teams and public health units to address this crisis.

**OMSSA and its members are also concerned about the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and burnout on PSWs in long-term care, front-line caseworkers, EMS and emergency services workers. Given the challenges faced on their jobs, it is important to consider the mental health and wellness of municipal employees working in all Ontario communities. Investing in mental health and addictions support is crucial to creating healthy and safe communities.** OMSSA looks forward to learning more about the Province's upcoming Mental Health Strategy.

## Public Health, Long-Term Care and Ambulance Services

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role of Ontario's public health units. Many of Ontario's municipalities are actively involved and integrated with public health. There is a benefit to having public health, community housing and Ontario Works linked and managed within the same organization.

The role of local public health services is crucial to reducing hospital wait times and ending hallway medicine. There are many opportunities for better local collaboration with Ontario Health Teams, hospitals and other stakeholders when public health units are aligned locally. Local representation and alignment are important, and public health units should maintain existing alignment with regional and municipal boundaries.

OMSSA encourages better integration across human services and health services in the province. More clarity is needed regarding the respective responsibilities of Public Health Ontario and local public health units, in order to avoid duplication and maximize existing resources towards preventive health services.

Public health funding must be predictable in order to enable long-term planning. Increased cost sharing burdens are putting further pressure on municipal budgets. Amalgamations of public



health units should be pursued only on a voluntary basis, and if a case can be made for the amalgamation to improve services based on local circumstances.

**Protecting residents in long-term care settings has been the biggest challenge for Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic. Major issues have come to light that will need to be addressed through a full system review.**

Ontario's aging population has led to local challenges in providing accessible supportive services for seniors. The number of seniors in Ontario will double between 2016 and 2041 from 2.3 million to 4.6 million, representing a quarter of the province's population. Wait times for long-term care can range from months to years, and the system is not keeping up with demand. Investments are required in both seniors housing and long-term care. The Ontario government has made significant announcements in recent months, but major challenges remain in the sector.

The quality of ambulance services have improved since these services were transferred to the municipal level of government in Ontario. Ontario's municipalities have invested in emergency health services and integrated these services within their organizations. Increased funding and cost-sharing demands are placing pressure on municipal budgets as demand for these services increases.

Rural and Northern communities face unique challenges due to geography and the transfer of medically stable patients. Offload wait times are a growing issue. Improved technology and dispatch systems are needed to better differentiate between emergency and non-emergency calls. Data-sharing and improved paramedic access to patient records is also needed to improve care.

Investing in ambulance and emergency health services is critical to connecting people to places and creating healthy and safe communities. OMSSA supports enabling new models of care to improve ambulance availability and promote patient-centred care. The Province should prioritize and fully fund initiatives designed to expand community paramedicine across Ontario.

## Community Safety and Well-Being Plans

OMSSA strongly supports and sees great value in developing and implementing Community Safety and Well-Being Plans. It is important to link local human services with the health, justice, education, child welfare and the non-profit sector. Community Safety and Well Being Plans have the potential to enhance human services integration and are helpful with community-wide human services planning.

Municipalities are responsible for completing local Community Safety and Well-Being Plans. In many cases, CMSMs and DSSABs have been tasked to coordinate Community Safety and Well Being plans on behalf of several lower-tier municipalities within their jurisdiction. Public



consultations are a crucial component of these plans along with collaboration among all community stakeholders.

Unfortunately, there have been no resources, financial or otherwise, to support their development. OMSSA members request additional financial resources to support the full potential that could be realized from the development of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plans. It is important for all provincial Ministries who work and intersect with Service System Managers to be aware of the obligations these plans have on municipalities, so that this may be coordinated with and around other planning initiatives and reporting requirements from the Province. This would help us move forward together with human services integration and continue to reduce reporting and administrative burdens.

OMSSA appreciates the extension of the deadline to complete Community Safety and Well-Being Plans. The current deadline is now July 1, 2021, but given current circumstances, our members have expressed major concerns with meeting this deadline. New issues in policing and other areas resulting from the pandemic have made it important to get these plans right. OMSSA has confidence they will guide overall human services planning and wants to support our members in ensuring that they are the best plans they can be. It is important to support quality rather than quickly put something together to meet a tight deadline.

**The second wave of COVID-19 and the priority to vaccinate local populations has presented challenges to completing these plans on time. OMSSA members believe an extension to January 1, 2022 would allow for sufficient time to consult and develop these plans. One-time funding is also needed to assist with planning and work required to develop these plans.** These plans are an important priority and there is no desire on behalf of local municipalities to put this on the backburner indefinitely.

## Human Services Integration, Data and Privacy

Currently, Service System Managers are subject to over 200 service agreements with the provincial government. OMSSA's members support provincial initiatives that lead to better human services program and policy alignment; streamline transfer and service agreements; increase information sharing; and reduce administrative and reporting burdens while enhancing the overall client experience.

OMSSA appreciates its close relationship with Ontario's Human Services Integration Office (HSIO) as CMSMs and DSSABs continue to push forward on integrating and enhancing human services delivery for people in their communities. OMSSA supports a vision where there are less silos between provincial Ministries. OMSSA supports increased integration between childcare services, housing, homelessness prevention, social assistance, employment services and emergency social services at the municipal level.



OMSSA encourages the Province to continue to prioritize human services integration, and to enable greater data and information sharing with municipalities as part of the Ontario Data Strategy and eliminate privacy barriers to support individuals without them having to tell their story twice. **Human services integration has been a long-term goal of both the provincial government and Ontario's Service System Managers. OMSSA members look forward to continuing this partnership and making further progress on this work.**

## Partnership with the Province

OMSSA appreciates and values our strong partnership with the Ontario government and all the Ministry officials we work with. Ontario's model of service delivery is unique within Canada. In most provinces, provincial governments are solely responsible for services such as social assistance, social housing, child care, paramedic services, public health and others. In Ontario, the provincial and municipal levels of government share responsibilities for human services integration, social assistance, employment services, child care and early years services, community housing, homelessness, poverty reduction, community safety and public health.

Ontario's Service System Managers bring more than 20 years' experience in outcomes-focused, integrated social services delivery to the table and they know their communities best. It's crucial that Service System Managers be engaged and leveraged as partners in the design of social policy and programs impacting local government, from the outset. This is especially true when the municipality is funding the program, as is the case in Ontario with community housing.

Program design must have the flexibility to account for the unique circumstances and challenges of urban, rural, suburban, large, small, remote and northern communities, rather than employing a one-size-fits-all approach. To expand and maintain quality human services in Ontario, Service System Managers also require adequate, consistent, long-term funding.

OMSSA members appreciate the opportunity to consult at confidential municipal-provincial tables focused on early years and child care, housing and homelessness, social assistance and employment, and reducing administrative and reporting burdens. The provincial government has gone above and beyond in consulting with municipalities over the past year.

OMSSA encourages increased engagement and consultation at existing municipal-provincial tables, particularly with the Ministry of Health, to continue to integrate human services and health outcomes. The new PMHSC table is a positive step in this direction and will be very helpful in collaborating on health and human services issues during the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery. OMSSA also supports continued dialogue, engagement and consultation with all CMSMs and DSSABs where possible with our provincial colleagues.



Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback and input on Ontario's 2021 Budget. We wish you and Ministry officials all the best in finalizing the budget and look forward to continuing our work together on mutual priorities at the provincial and local levels of government as Ontario works towards defeating COVID-19, vaccination and economic recovery.

Sincerely,

**Doug Ball**  
**Executive Director**  
OMSSA

**Dan McCormick**  
**President**  
OMSSA