

Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Common Assessment Overview

Presentation to Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

December 3, 2020

Context

- Ontario is integrating and transforming the employment system to help more people find and keep quality jobs, including those on social assistance and people with disabilities, and increase the number of businesses finding the right workers with the right skills.
- Through Employment Services Transformation (EST), social assistance employment programs are being integrated into Employment Ontario to create a stronger employment services system that's easy to use, more responsive to local conditions and creates better outcomes for workers and communities.
- A key part of the new system is the establishment of service system managers (SSMs) in three prototype catchment areas: Peel, Hamilton-Niagara and Muskoka-Kawartha. Since April 1, 2020, service system managers have been responsible for managing in-scope Employment Ontario programs and Ontario Disability Support Program Employment Supports (ODSP-ES).
- As of January 1, 2021, with the integration of Ontario Works-Employment Assistance (OW-EA), SSMs will be responsible for the planning, design and delivery of integrated employment services at for Employment Ontario and Social Assistance clients.

Common Assessment Tool



- The Common Assessment Tool (CAT) is a digital questionnaire. It is a shared, common intake approach administered by both Employment Ontario (EO) and Social Assistance (SA).
- The CAT will support the consistent collection of information on incoming clients including strengths, barriers to employment and life stabilization needs.
- The CAT Minimum Viable Product (MVP) was launched in April 2020 in the three EST prototype communities. This provided an opportunity to test and refine the tool prior to its formal launch.
- In January 2021, the CAT will become mandatory in the prototype communities as part of the client intake process, replacing many of previous EO registration and intake forms and supporting referrals between Social Assistance and Employment Ontario.

Common Assessment Objectives



Support a **user centred experience** where clients do not need to tell their story more than once.



Identify what **supports clients will need** to help them stabilize their lives and/or find work.



Provide an **integrated viewpoint on clients**, guiding referrals and coordination between systems.



Support more **consistent information collection** for the employment services and social assistance systems



Tied to **client outcomes and performance-based funding** through the **segmentation model**.

Common Assessment Development

The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) conducted **extensive research** on the pre-conditions and barriers to employment to inform **what information needed to be collected (indicators)** and **how to collect the information (questions and response options)**.

- This research and analysis built on previous stakeholder engagements and included jurisdictional scans and reviews of existing questionnaires, scales and tools. The development was also informed by regular consultation at provincial and municipal tables.

In designing the Common Assessment questions, the ministries centred efforts on:

- Identifying information that would inform **life stabilization and employment needs** and support **employment service planning and coordination**.
- Balancing **client-focused** factors (e.g. time to complete, telling story once, services that fit their needs) and **integrated and accountable delivery** (e.g. continuous improvement, performance management, reporting requirements).
- Pulling from **existing validated tools and surveys** and using questions already implemented within Employment Ontario, the Social Assistance system and other provincial or federal programs.
- Building the **segmentation model** that streams clients according to their risk of long-term unemployment and estimated service intensity.

Common Assessment Design

The Common Assessment questions are organized into two modules based on question theme and alignment to Social Assistance (SA) and Employment Ontario (EO) system accountabilities.

Module One

- Administrative
- Demographic Information
- Skills
- Life Stabilization

Module Two

- Income & Assistance
- Disability Information
- Employment Status & History
- Employment Goals

Due to skip logic and question conditions, clients will not be asked all questions in CA.

Benefit for SSMs, Service Providers and Social Assistance

Through the Common Assessment Tool, EO Service System Managers (SSMs), Service Providers (SPs) and Municipalities will gain a shared understanding of client abilities and needs. The CAT will also support appropriate referrals provide a singular view of the client to support better coordination and service sequencing through integrated case management.

A client's unique demographic information

Circumstances or basic needs that could be a barrier to employment

Client skills and their confidence in performing certain tasks

Conditions or difficulties that impact a client's ability to perform daily activities

Income source information to understand a client's financial situation

Employment and education experience and current situation

Motivation and employment goals of the client

Benefits for Ontario Works and ODSP

The Common Assessment tool will support the new life stabilization framework that will become the focus of the Social Assistance offices in the EST prototype catchment areas.

For caseworkers and staff...

it will facilitate conversations with clients about their needs and barriers – and it will help to build clients' life stabilization action plans.

For Social Assistance as a program...

it will be a way to consistently collect information on the needs of clients and the broader need and availability of services.

For clients...

it will mean fewer instances of repeating themselves and their story.

Piloting the Common Assessment in Ontario Works and ODSP

Pilots were conducted in select EST Social Assistance offices to determine the most appropriate approach for using the Common Assessment with clients.

The team members prioritizing flexibility and sensitivity so that caseworkers could work with clients to understand their needs and begin building a relationship - not just complete a tool.

This design work directly contributed to how the tool will work in the rest of the prototype offices – including how to pivot the conversation towards action planning with the clients.

As more feedback is captured, the Common Assessment and how it's delivered in Social Assistance will improve and evolve. The ODSP & Ontario Works pilot members will continue to meet in 2021 to discuss and provide feedback for continuous improvement of the tool.

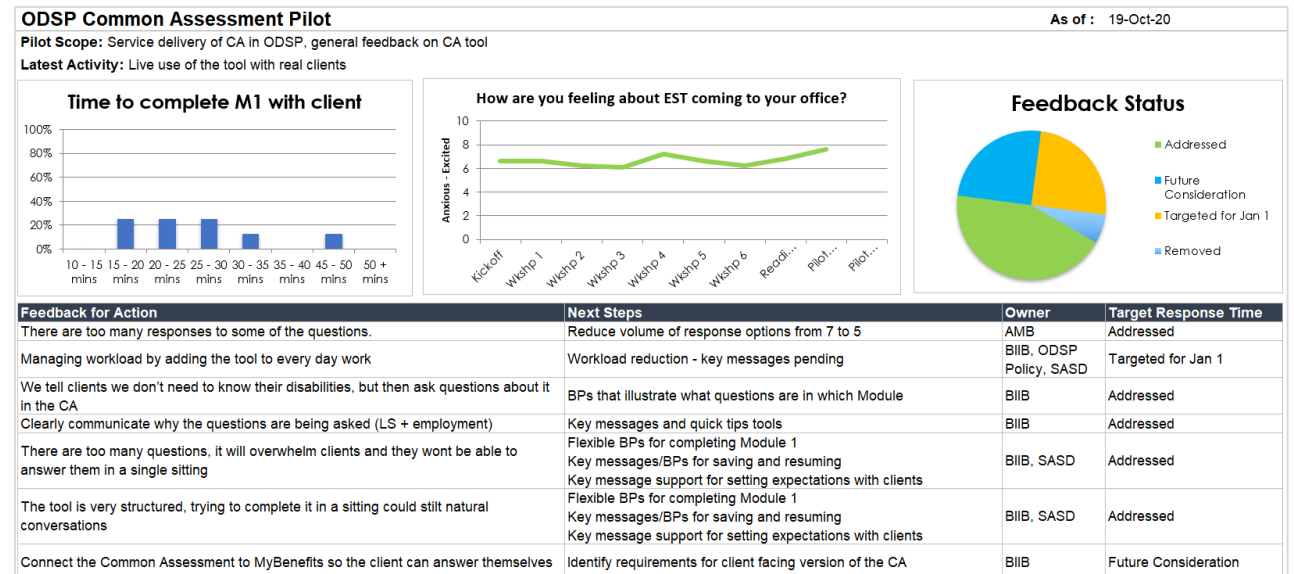


Image of dashboard tracker used for ODSP. Ontario Works pilot group has a similar dashboard.

Learning & Development for Ontario Works & ODSP

The Common Assessment was introduced to Ontario Works & ODSP staff as part of a broader EST curriculum.

During the facilitated session, caseworkers and staff were walked through the administration of the CA tool, including examples of roadblocks they may encounter with clients. The learners were asked to frame the Common Assessment within a person-centred approach, promoting the CA tool as a way to assist clients on planning for their path to improvement.



The EST curriculum including Supportive Approaches in Innovative Learning (SAIL) competencies:

- Discovery through the CA tool
- Communication style when administering the CA tool
- Same-sized circles by using more inclusive words to describe government terms and acronyms
- Accountability as it relates to privacy of personal information and informed consent

Common Assessment Data and Integration

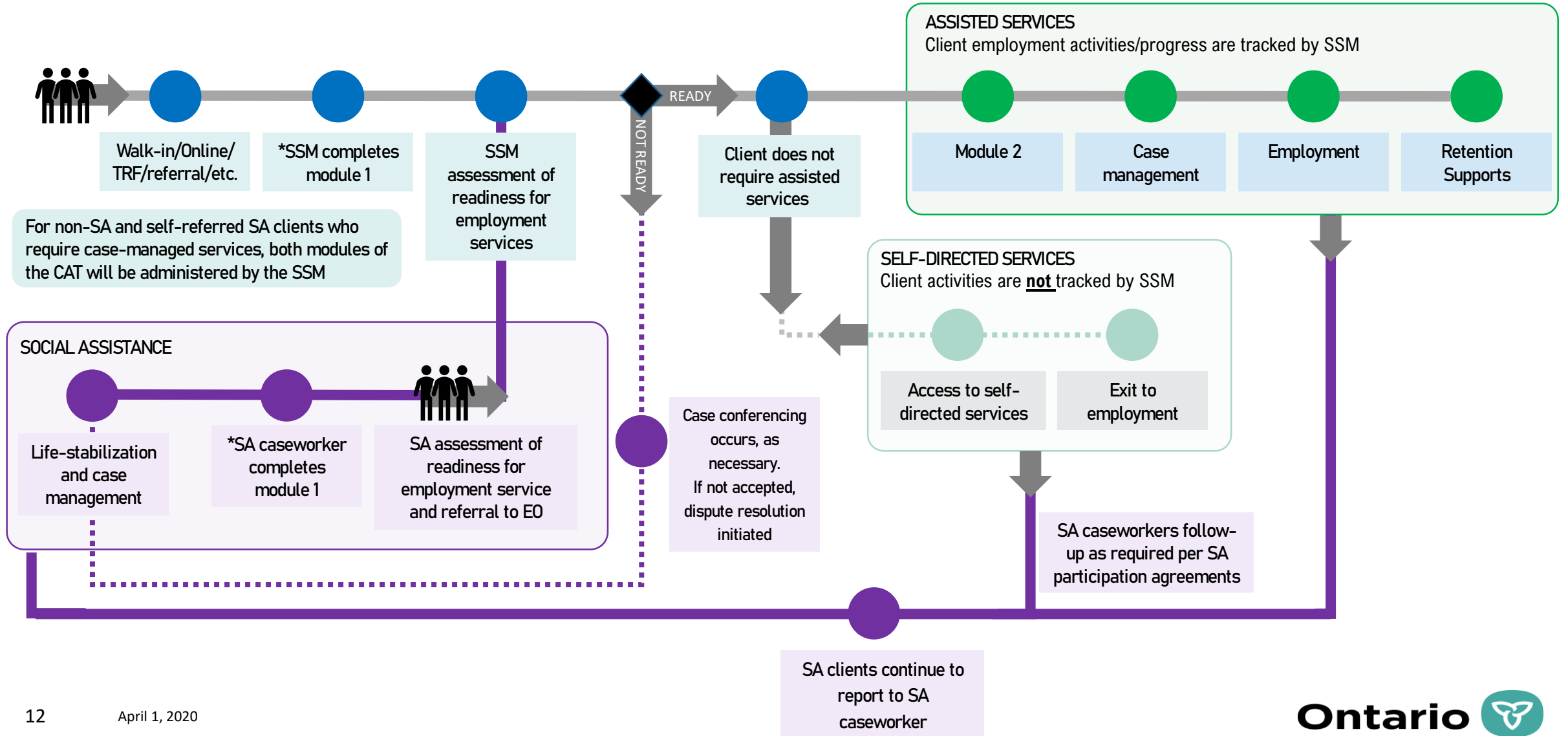
Common Assessment is one tool that SSMs and SPs will use to support their activities to plan, design and deliver employment services in the prototype areas.

Common Assessment data will serve the following purposes:

- Provide **key client information** including: demographics; current circumstances; potential supports and services needs; employment situation, history and goals, **to ultimately provide tailored service and help clients reach their goals**
- **Stream clients** according to their risk of unemployment and estimated service intensity needs using the Segmentation Model
- **Support referrals** between SA and EO, the **development of action plans**, and management and planning of **life stabilization and employment services**
- **Inform refinement** of the tool, segmentation model, and system over time

The tool works in conjunction with other EO system features, including: Integrated Case Management; the Segmentation Model; Performance-Based Funding and the Performance Management Framework.

Integrated Client Pathway (January 2021)



Looking Forward

- MCCSS and MLSTD will continue to **conduct research and consult with appropriate parties** and subject matter experts to understand and address outstanding feedback to inform changes for future releases of the Common Assessment Tool.
- Continue to compile, track and prioritize feedback received from **User Feedback Survey** from fall onwards.
- Work with delivery partners to:
 - Plan approach to continuing to collect and discuss **outstanding or new content-related feedback** (e.g. more feedback sessions with caseworker staff, user feedback survey)
 - Continue to **monitor and address sensitivity concerns** (e.g. further changes to content, change management supports, training materials)
- Validation of the **French version** of the tool.