



Income and Employment Services in Ontario



In Ontario, **Service System Managers** play a central role in the **planning, funding, administration and delivery** of income support (Ontario Works) and employment services

Across Ontario, Service System Managers are responsible for:

- Administering and delivering **Ontario Works (OW)** – also known as social assistance or income security – providing **financial and skills supports** to eligible individuals and families in their communities
- Providing **face-to-face case management** services to support people along the **continuum from income support to employment**
- Negotiating and maintaining **service contracts with local employment services providers** to ensure these needs are met in the most coordinated and effective ways
- Supporting people in **navigating and connecting to life stabilization services**, to ensure they have the additional supports needed to thrive and be successful in finding and keeping employment
- **Setting local policies and developing operational and strategic plans**, in coordination with community service agencies, to meet the needs of their communities now and into the future
- **Co-funding the administration and delivery** of local income support and employment programs
- Ensuring that local income and employment services **meet provincial standards**
- Finalizing and implementing **Community Safety and Well Being Plans** to coordinate human services with health, policing, educational and other vital services within communities
- Working towards **human services integration** to improve efficiency in services and outcomes

Ontario's 47 Service System Managers are **Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs)**, or **upper-tier (regional) and single-tier municipalities** across Ontario, and **District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs)** in areas where there are no regional municipalities in Ontario's north

The **Value** of Service System Management in Income and Employment

The Service System Management role is critical

for the long-term success of and positive outcomes for Ontario's most vulnerable residents. There is a growing recognition of the value of providing integrated services and supports at the local level – an approach that allows people to access the right mix of social and financial assistance, employment supports, and services related to housing, child care, public health and others, all through one agency located right in their home community. For over a decade, OMSSA members have advocated and worked towards greater human services integration.

When these services are offered independently – in piecemeal 'silos' – we fail to support the "whole person" with wraparound services, we are less effective in helping people reach the outcomes they need to prosper, and we are less efficient with taxpayer dollars.

For Ontario to achieve the vision of an effective, accessible and efficient system of income and employment supports that meets local needs and allows our communities to prosper, Service System Managers must continue to play a central role:

LOCAL EXPERTISE

Service System Managers bring a deep level of expertise, experience and local knowledge to the table. As arms of municipal government, Service System Managers are tapped into the broader community planning and economic development process, bringing a **long-term vision** and a sophisticated level of local **data, research, needs mapping and local economic and labour market analysis** to guide their work.

They understand the **unique social, economic, regional and demographic forces** that shape their communities, and their strong

relationships with local service providers help them deliver the **right mix of services** – with the right community partners – to address specific local needs.

Service System Managers are **heavily invested** in a system that provides the best outcomes for Ontario's communities – directing additional resources to provide effective local employment services, and innovating to find **creative, home-grown solutions** to reducing poverty, boosting employment, and achieving better long-term outcomes.

The **Value** of Service System Management in Income and Employment

COORDINATION

Service System Managers' deep local knowledge and well-established relationships with community service providers enables them to play an important system planning role – leveraging local connections to **align service delivery**, **minimize duplication**, coordinate to **achieve shared goals and outcomes**, and **maximize resources** to meet local needs in efficient and effective ways.

They also have a **deep understanding of their local labour market** and **established relationships with local employers**, making them best-positioned to deliver employment services that will be effective within their community's unique contexts.

These connections – along with their ongoing work to integrate and streamline the delivery of all human services at the local level – help to achieve the **best value for money for taxpayers**.

PEOPLE-CENTERED SERVICES

Local, case-managed service delivery brings a **human face** and **tailored approach** that leads to **better outcomes** for people and communities. In many cases, a person may need **extra support or skills development** beyond financial assistance. Service System Managers have **decades of experience helping clients who face multiple barriers** to entering or returning to the workforce.

When people can access a **dedicated case manager** right in their community – who can understand the specific supports and approaches they need to thrive, and help make those connections – they can achieve **better employment, social and health outcomes**, and will be more likely to engage with and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.

And when services like social assistance, employment support, housing, child care and other municipal services can be accessed in one central place, we can achieve a better, **more efficient use of taxpayer resources**.

ACCOUNTABILITY

As local governments, municipal Service System Managers are **accountable to their communities**, subject to oversight of locally elected officials, and local taxpayers and residents.

They are the level of government that is **closest to the communities they serve**, and they play a key role in ensuring that the local delivery of income and employment services is **efficient, effective and accountable**.

Reforming Social Assistance

The Province has been working to review and reform Ontario's social assistance programs, implement new technology for modernization and reduce administrative red-tape to focus on better case management, life stabilization and supporting quicker re-entry into the workforce. Service System Managers were quick to respond with emergency assistance, discretionary benefits and ensuring that vulnerable people received needed supports during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Provincial and federal support through the Social Services Relief Fund and the Safe Restart Agreement was crucial to supporting vulnerable populations across all communities in Ontario.

OMSSA and its members encourage the Province to move forward with human services integration, social assistance reform and social services modernization to achieve better outcomes for people and communities. Ontario's Service System Managers are heavily invested in achieving these goals given the central role they play in delivering social assistance and other critical human services through provincial-municipal programs. Service System Managers are crucial to successfully delivering these programs and achieving the Province's goals at the local level.

- ▶ **OMSSA encourages the Province to work with Service System Managers as partners** in designing and implementing needed reforms to social assistance in Ontario.

As the Province moves forward with this work, it is important to consider:

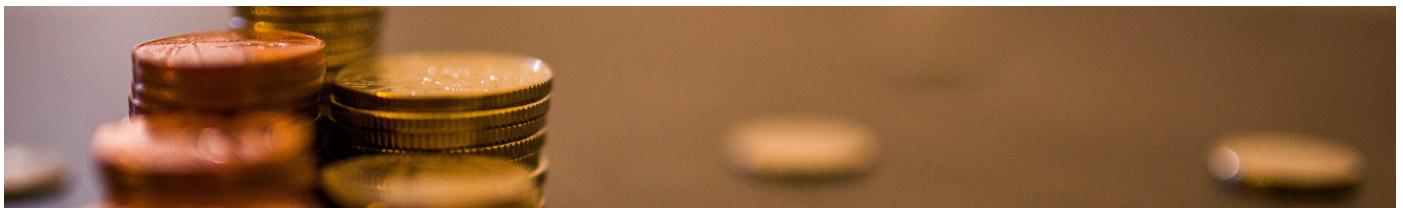
- ▶ That many individuals require support services **beyond financial assistance** in order to thrive and contribute to Ontario's workforce, economy and their communities.
- ▶ That **valuable work has been undertaken by the multi-stakeholder Income Security Reform Working Group** – a diverse, non-partisan body leveraging expertise from across Ontario's business, health, law and social policy sectors – to review and propose key reforms designed to maximize people's ability to work, reduce pressures on Ontario's health system, reduce administrative burdens and enable program staff to focus on supporting people to lift themselves out of the cycle of poverty.
- ▶ **OMSSA and Service System Managers support the recommendations** outlined in the Income Security Working Group's report and **encourage the Province to leverage and build on this work** to achieve their goals in reforming Ontario's social assistance programs.

Increasing Social Assistance Rates

To effectively support people in lifting themselves out of poverty, **social assistance rates must realistically keep pace with inflation** and rising costs of basic necessities in Ontario. This is especially true for singles on Ontario Works. The Income Security Working Group recommended a 10% increase from current rates that have not kept up with the cost of living or inflation. Adequacy in social assistance rates is crucial to reducing poverty in Ontario.

A single Ontario Works recipient currently receives \$9,604 per year, which is **well below any standard measure of poverty or low income**. Increasingly, low-income Ontarians are turning to services like food banks to meet basic needs. Between 2017 and 2019, Ontario saw a **27% increase in the proportion of adults with employment income accessing Ontario's food banks**. The pandemic has only increased challenges with poverty and food security.

- ▶ OMSSA acknowledges the Province's 2018 move to increase OW and ODSP rates by 1.5%, and **encourages the Province to build on these increases** as it works to reform Ontario's social assistance programs. OW and ODSP recipients receive far less than those supported by the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) and other federal programs.
- ▶ **Poor health acts as an added barrier** to addressing the cycle of poverty and re-entering the workforce. Recognizing the strong link between poverty and health, the Province should consider **expanding dental and drug coverage for social assistance recipients** and linking social assistance outcomes with social determinants of health.



Reforming Social Assistance Rent Scales

The social assistance rent scales outlined in the *Housing Services Act, 2011 Regulation 298/01* have not been updated since 2000 and do not reflect the current cost of living. Shelter allowances are currently inadequate.

- ▶ The **rent scales must be examined and updated** to match the maximum shelter rate for OW and ODSP recipients living in the private market to address current realities.

Removing Administrative Burdens

Unnecessary administrative burdens and inconsistencies **divert important resources** that can be better directed to serving the needs of Ontario's communities and **add unnecessary costs** to municipalities and the Province. OMSSA and its members encourage the Province to:

- ▶ **Move forward in partnership** with municipalities and Service System Managers to remove unnecessary administrative burdens, to enable program staff to focus on supporting people in lifting themselves out of poverty and finding meaningful employment in their communities.
- ▶ **Streamline the approach to defining, measuring and verifying income across all "income-tested" programs**, including income support (Ontario Works), rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing, and subsidized child care.
- ▶ **Leverage technology to support modernization**, while enabling a "no wrong door" approach is to ensure that clients with additional barriers do not fall through the cracks.



Expanding Local Employment Supports

Service System Managers have a deep understanding of their local labour market and established relationships with local employers, making them best-positioned to deliver employment services that will be effective within their community's unique contexts.

Service System Managers have the relevant experience and a strong track record for supporting clients with barriers in life stabilization and employment. OMSSA is disappointed that no municipalities were successful in their bid for Employment Ontario system service management within the three prototype areas.

- ▶ The Province should consider the unique **strengths and benefits of the service system management approach** to employment services, and work with Ontario's Service System Managers to **explore an expanded role in delivering local employment programs** as designated Employment Ontario providers, where interest exists.



Investing in Mental Health Services

OMSSA and its members welcome the Province's commitment to investing \$1.9 billion in mental health services supports over the next ten years. These services are integral to achieving better income, employment, homelessness prevention and poverty reduction outcomes in communities across Ontario.

- ▶ OMSSA and its members encourage the Province to **collaborate with Service System Managers**, whose experience in serving the needs of Ontario's most vulnerable and implementing provincial policy at the local level will be a strong asset.
- ▶ **Increased investment is needed for mental health and addiction services** along with wraparound supportive services to help address life stabilization for clients.
- ▶ **The Ministry of Health must be at the table** when discussing and developing human services policy. It is important to coordinate and collaborate with public health, Ontario Health Teams, paramedicine and the health sector.

Integrating and Modernizing Human Services Delivery and Funding

Service System Managers have been leaders and partners in integrating and modernizing human services delivery in Ontario.

- ▶ OMSSA and its members encourage the Province to work with them to explore continued technological enhancements and innovations to achieve **greater efficiency, reduce red tape and administrative burdens**, and **improve people's experience**.



Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) is working in partnership with Service System Managers to further integrate the planning and delivery of human services programs, to **simplify access for people, streamline service delivery** and **improve service system management**.

- ▶ OMSSA and its members encourage the Province to continue with and prioritize this work, as it has **strong potential to achieve savings that can be reinvested** into needed services for Ontario's people and communities. Case workers need to focus on supporting people, not paperwork and administration.
- ▶ Recognizing the strong linkages between human services and health, the Province should work towards greater **collaboration and coordination** between Provincial Ministries in the areas of **community and social services, housing and health**.
- ▶ **Additional funding is required to support economic recovery** and the delivery of social assistance during a pandemic. Program delivery funding (PDF) has been frozen since 2018, causing increased cost pressures on Service System Managers.

Service System Manager Priorities in Income and Employment



Partnering with the Province

The economic costs of poverty have been well-documented. In Ontario, it is estimated that **poverty costs \$32 to \$38 billion per year** – or \$2,300 per year per household.¹

Service System Managers have collaborated with the Province on **Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy** through local poverty reduction efforts and the development of 10-year housing and homelessness plans. Service System Managers are undertaking additional planning through their Community Safety and Well-Being plans. These plans have value, but **resources are needed** to allow Service System Managers to develop and implement the best plans possible.

- ▶ OMSSA and its members encourage the Province to **work in partnership to achieve provincial goals in poverty reduction and ending chronic homelessness** in Ontario's communities.
- ▶ As key partners in administration, funding and delivery, **Service System Managers must be engaged and leveraged at all stages of policy design and development** in income and employment services and programs in Ontario.
- ▶ **OMSSA members are ready to collaborate and coordinate on economic recovery and reopening** to ensure vulnerable populations continue to receive required supports during this critical time. As the Province continues its work on social assistance reform, social services modernization, human services integration and employment services transformation, **it is important to engage in frequent and transparent communication** so that all Service System Managers in Ontario have consistent information as they plan for these changes.

Working Together

OMSSA and its members are ready to build on our relationships and work in partnership with the provincial and federal governments to lend our expertise and experience towards integrated human service delivery and improved outcomes in employment, income security and poverty reduction.

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization whose members are Ontario's Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). By supporting, connecting and advocating for our members across Ontario, we help them to achieve their collective mission of delivering the best human services outcomes for Ontario's communities | www.omssa.com

¹ Ontario Association of Food Banks, *The Cost of Poverty: An Analysis of the Economic Cost of Poverty in Ontario*, 2008.