

**Ministry of Children,
Community and Social
Services**

**Ministère des Services à
l'enfance et des Services
sociaux et communautaires**



Assistant Deputy Minister
Social Assistance Programs
Division

Sous-ministre adjoint
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Memorandum

To: All OW Administrators and ODSP offices

From: Susan Erwin
ADM, SAPD,
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Date: March 17, 2020

Subject: **Social Assistance COVID-19 Early Measures**

Dear colleagues,

I am writing with respect to measures that the ministry is taking in the social assistance system to respond to COVID-19.

This morning, the Premier declared a State of Emergency in Ontario to help prevent the spread of the virus and give everyone the tools they need to put their health and the health of others first.

As the Ministers of Children, Community and Social Services and Health stated yesterday, protecting the health and well-being of all Ontarians, including staff and clients in Ontario's social services sector, is the government's number one priority. In the social assistance context, this means working together with partners to ensure the continued delivery of essential supports in an uncertain and evolving context and responding quickly to critical emerging needs.

Effective immediately, the ministry will be implementing the following measures on a temporary basis:

- 1) **Reducing the need for in-person contact** by authorizing risk-based approaches to eligibility determination and other verification requirements, including deferral of visual verification requirements of original documents.
- 2) **Helping to reduce the burden on program staff** by modifying certain program requirements – including no longer suspending clients who do not report income and suspending Eligibility Verification Process reviews – to enable deployment of resources to priority activities.
- 3) **Helping to reduce the burden on the healthcare system** by enabling program staff to approve extensions to Special Diet Allowance, Mandatory Special Necessities benefits, and medical transportation/supplies without endorsement from a health professional.

Detailed Qs&As to help staff to implement these measures will be available shortly.

As the COVID-19 situation and the government response continues to evolve, we can anticipate that there will be implications for the social assistance system. The ministry will provide information and guidance as soon as it becomes available.

We are continuing to explore other ways to adapt the social assistance system in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to protect the health and safety of staff and clients and invite your suggestions and questions. I know that you are all in close contact with your Program Supervisors, and I would encourage frequent and open communication as much as possible.

We recognize the challenges that frontline staff and delivery partners face during the current uncertainty and would like to acknowledge your continued dedication to social assistance clients. Our solid foundation of trust and close collaboration will be critical to supporting Ontario's most vulnerable over the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Susan Erwin
ADM, Social Assistance Programs Division
MCCSS