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March 23, 2020

TO: Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs)
District Social Services Administration Boards (DSAABs)
Ontario Works Delivery Partners, ODSP Offices

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FROM: Susan Erwin
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SUBJECT: Social Services Relief Funding

Vulnerable Ontarians, including those who live in poverty, are homeless or unemployed, face even more significant impacts as the COVID-19 public health crisis evolves globally and locally.

In addition to early measures already announced, effective immediately, the government is providing \$200 million in social services relief funding to help protect the health and safety of the province's most vulnerable people, through assistance to individuals and to frontline agencies.

We know that food banks, charitable organizations, shelters and individuals living in poverty are feeling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and through this fund the government will be providing support.

This fund will provide funding through two streams:

- (1) Funding to Individuals for current and non social assistance clients (\$52M); and
- (2) Funding to Service Managers (\$148M) who would have the flexibility to allocate this funding as they see fit to keep frontline critical social services operating to support Ontario's most vulnerable.

Funding to Individuals: Expanding Emergency Assistance

We are expanding access to temporary emergency assistance under Ontario Works for those in financial crisis who have no access to other supports, including those who are waiting for support from the federal government to become available. This funding will help to cover needs such as food, rent, medicine, transportation and other services during this public health crisis. Individuals can apply for this assistance online or through local Ontario Works offices.

Further measures to expand Emergency Assistance include:

- Suspending the rule that limits emergency assistance provision to only once in a six-month period for individuals and families affected by COVID-19
- Allowing people to receive emergency assistance for longer (48 days) without submitting a full Ontario Works application

To manage increased demand, Ontario is working to develop a more streamlined and accessible application for emergency assistance that will be available as soon as possible. The ministry is putting in place a centralized team to help support increased inquiries regarding assistance and to support people to complete their applications. We will update you as this develops.

Expanding Discretionary Benefits

The government is also providing resources to enable frontline staff and delivery partners to provide additional discretionary benefits to those currently in receipt of social assistance, by removing the cap on these benefits for March and April 2020. This funding can be used to meet a broad range of emergency needs, including cleaning supplies, transportation, food or clothing.

Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients are also eligible to receive these benefits. We are aware that this will put additional pressure on Ontario Works to review and assess requests and as mentioned above, we are developing options to reduce this demand.

Health and Safety

To protect the health and safety of frontline staff and clients and limit the spread of the virus, the ministry is modifying certain social assistance program requirements on a temporary basis, and is:

- 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 and allowing for the use of email or alternative methods to submit reports or documents. This documentation may be requested at a later date.

- 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.
- 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.

Funding to Service Managers

The funding is intended to enable the support of vulnerable populations, including the homeless, low-income individuals and others who use social services, by providing funding that can be used by service managers to:

- Fund service providers, such as shelters, food banks, charities and non-profits;
- Fund the expansion of existing house stability programs operated by service managers;
- Purchase goods and services, such as food, transportation, medical supplies, or hotel rooms; or
- Fund administration needs, including staffing.

The intention is to provide Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSAABs) the flexibility they need to allocate funding, based on local priorities and locally managed programs that can be quickly leveraged at this time.

This funding will be made available as soon as possible. Further details will be available soon from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Funding will also be made available to organizations delivering services to vulnerable First Nations individuals and families. Further details will be available shortly through MCCSS.

We share the government's strong conviction that no one should have to worry about how they are going to provide for themselves and their families, and we know you do as well. It is our hope that this commitment, applied in partnership with our municipal delivery partners, will help Ontario's most vulnerable get through this difficult and challenging time.

Visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

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