

For Information

DATE: March 12, 2012

REPORT TITLE: **ONTARIO WORKS: TIME ON ASSISTANCE UPDATE**

FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide comparative data on Ontario Works clients' average length of time on assistance as requested by members of Council at its meeting on December 15, 2011, Regional Council Budget.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In September 2011:
 - clients in receipt of Ontario Works in Peel remained on assistance an average of 17 months
 - the provincial average for Ontario Works clients was 21 months on assistance
 - depending on family type, length of time on assistance in Peel ranged from 13 months (singles) to 23 months (sole support parents)
 - this compares to provincial averages of 17 months for singles and 28 months for sole support parents
 - Peel's average "time on assistance" also compares favourably to other municipalities in the GTA, at 17 months versus an average of 19 months.

DISCUSSION**1. Background**

The Ontario Works program is delivered throughout Ontario by 47 municipalities designated by the province as Consolidated Municipal Service Managers or District Social Services Administration Boards in northern Ontario. The program is intended to provide short term and emergency assistance to Ontario residents who are unable to or unsuccessful at obtaining and maintaining employment. Services include, but are not limited to, financial assistance for basic needs and shelter and employment related supports to help clients prepare for and obtain employment. While most financial supports defined through regulation are mandatory, some are discretionary and are based on the needs of the individual.

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Persons apply for and receive social assistance for many reasons. Some apply because they are single parents with children, unemployable due to physical and /or mental health illness or disability, or they are unable to obtain employment. Ongoing eligibility for social assistance is dependent on continued financial need and client compliance with obligations while on social assistance.

2. Time on Assistance Data

The following chart compares the average months on assistance for Peel Ontario Works clients against other GTA municipalities and the provincial average for September 2011.

Case Type	Peel	Toronto	York	Durham	Halton	GTA Average Excluding Peel	Ontario Average
Singles without children	13	20	13	15	11	15	17
Couples without children	15	20	16	18	12	17	17
Couples with children	16	27	17	22	12	20	23
Singles with children	23	36	24	23	19	26	28
Total Average Months	17	25	17	18	14	19	21

3. Factors Impacting Time on Assistance

Time on assistance is impacted by many factors including, but not limited to, client employment readiness, which can be influenced by family stability, accessibility to child care, and individual health; ongoing assessment of continued eligibility; and timelines of transfer to other income support programs such as CPP, EI and ODSP.

a) Client Employment Readiness

Clients are coming to Ontario Works with more complex needs and at times require more intense supports to prepare them for employment. A high percentage of the Ontario Works caseload is made up of newcomers to Canada, many who have language barriers. These clients require language training before they are able to enter the work force which in turn, increases the length of time that they are in need of Ontario Works. In addition to this, many clients come to Ontario Works with addictions and may also require mental health supports. As not all clients with mental health issues are eligible for other support programs such as ODSP, it is the goal of Ontario Works to assist them in overcoming their personal barrier, so that they can eventually successfully exit Ontario Works and enter employment.

Finally, at times clients require more intense assistance with family stabilization prior to becoming job ready. This can mean that they require suitable housing, care for their children, or at times assistance with care for elderly family members. Until the family unit is stable, many clients are not in a position to enter employment. Given the current waitlists for services such as child care and housing, this can create quite a barrier to clients exiting to employment.

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b) Current Job Market

Today's labour market is rapidly changing from traditional long term, full time work to more short term contract and part time positions. For many Ontario Works recipients, this means low earnings, as well as the loss of extended health benefits such as prescription drugs, vision and dental care. For clients, losing these health benefits upon moving into employment can be a powerful disincentive to exiting the Ontario Works program.

c) Ontario Disability Support Program Clients

Persons who are permanently disabled are referred to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), delivered by the Province of Ontario. Peel staff work with these clients through the ODSP application and approval process, which is often complicated and lengthy. In Peel, staff work closely with local community legal service offices to ensure that clients are fully supported through the ODSP application, approval and often times, appeal process. In 2011, the Region of Peel and the local community legal clinics initiated a pilot project to streamline payments to physicians in order to assist ODSP applicants with the appeal process for not disabled decisions. In 2011, Ontario Works was able to close 1,354 cases as a result of ODSP grants.

4. Financial Impact

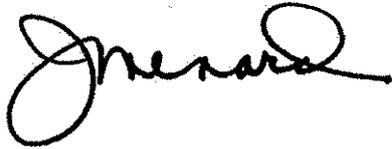
Time on assistance significantly impacts social assistance costs. A monthly caseload of 15,375, at an average cost per case of \$750, costs approximately \$11.6 million. An additional four months on assistance equates to approximately \$46.4 million gross and \$8.7 million net municipal cost (81.2 per cent provincial cost sharing).

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CONCLUSION

Clients in receipt of Ontario Works in Peel stay on assistance an average of four months fewer than the provincial average. Although this appears promising, there are several factors why recipients of social assistance are hesitant to leave assistance and move into employment. It is the continuing goal of Ontario Works in Peel to maintain aggressive and positive case management techniques and resourcing and to offer a comprehensive range of client related supports in order to assist clients who are ready to become competitive in the job market.



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Commissioner of Human Services

Approved for Submission:



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