



Committee Report

OW-24-04

To: Chair and Members of the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee
From: Krista Card, Director of Ontario Works
Date: Wednesday, September 11, 2024
Subject: 2020- 2024 Wellington Service Delivery Area Ontario Works Caseload Profile Report

Background:

The Ontario Works division has completed a point-in time look at the demographic characteristics of the Ontario Works caseload for Wellington County and Guelph. The report builds on previous reports, providing additional context, analysis and rationale for trends in the Ontario Works caseload, capturing the caseload from the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 to July 2024.

The report is intended to serve as a tool for service planning and to support community initiatives focused on poverty reduction and assistance to low-income households within our service delivery area.

Summary of Mid-Year 2024 Key Trends:

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ontario Works office experienced an initial increase in applications and requests for emergency assistance. This ended with the introduction of federal emergency benefits to individuals and the caseload experienced a significant decline as new applications for assistance reduced significantly. The caseload has grown to above pre-pandemic levels.

Identified below are some key trends from the mid-year 2024 report:

- The caseload has increased 1% above pre-pandemic levels to 2,095 cases.
- 35% of all beneficiaries reliant on Ontario Works assistance in the County of Wellington and the City of Guelph are children under the age of 18.
- Caseload distribution remains in line with previous years with 80% of Ontario Works recipients residing in the City of Guelph and 20% of recipients residing across the County of Wellington.
- The gap between the number of men and women receiving Ontario Works assistance narrowed to 52% female and 48% male.
- Single individuals continue to represent the greatest share of the Ontario Works caseload, followed by sole support parents.
- The average length of time households remain on assistance is 31.5 months in 2024, below the provincial average of 36 months.
- Cases with no fixed address account for 7.1% of the total Ontario Works caseload, a slight increase from 2023.
- The number of asylum claimants on the Ontario Works caseload has doubled compared to 2023, to 5.6% of the total caseload.

Looking Ahead:

Caseload numbers province-wide are growing above pre-pandemic levels. Provincial forecasts suggest a monthly average of 2,203 cases in Wellington and Guelph over the course of the current fiscal year, a 15% increase over the 2023-2024 fiscal year average caseload.

The County of Wellington Ontario Works office transitioned to a separate Service System Manager model for the delivery of employment services in January of 2024. The transition places an emphasis on the role of the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager to focus on delivering supports to Ontario Works recipients to help them in stabilizing their lives, including needs assessment, warm referrals to community agencies and issuing benefits for medical needs. The Ontario Works division is working closely with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and the Employment Services System Manager (Serco Canada) to monitor the impact of this Employment Services Transformation on service delivery, outcomes and caseload size.

The cost of housing and basic necessities exceeds the financial assistance amounts provided through Ontario Works. Current benefit rates leave Ontario Works recipients unable to meet their basic human needs. Increased Ontario Works rates would enable recipients to move beyond survival and crisis management so that they can participate in the labour market and move towards financial independence.

Attachment:

2020- 2024 Wellington Service Delivery Area Ontario Works Caseload Profile Report.

Strategic Action Plan:

This report relates to the following objectives and priorities in the County's Strategic Action Plan: Doing What the County Does Best – Providing Critical Daily Services for Your Residents; and Making the Best Decisions for the Betterment of the Community.

Recommendation:

That the report, 2020- 2024 Wellington Service Delivery Area Ontario Works Caseload Profile Report, be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,



Krista Card

Director of Ontario Works