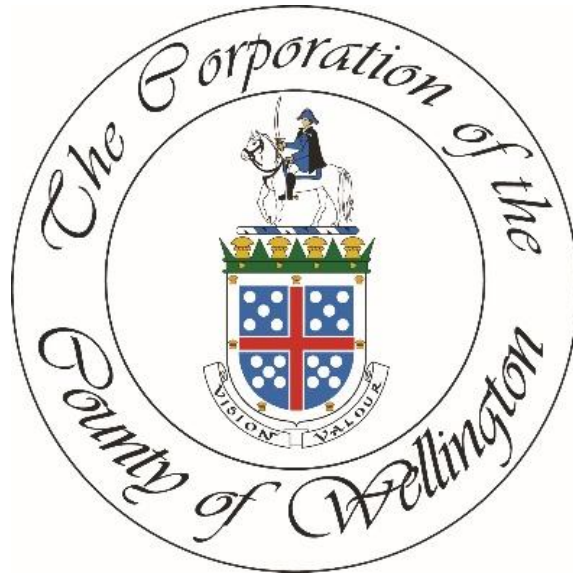


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2020 – 2024

Wellington Service Delivery Area

Ontario Works Caseload Profile

September 2024

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Introduction

The Ontario Works Caseload Profile provides a look at how local Ontario Works caseloads have changed over time, by focusing on caseload demographics over the last five years. This report offers a point-in-time look at the demographic characteristics of the Ontario Works caseload for Guelph and Wellington County, capturing the caseload from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 to July 2024. The Caseload Profile provides local data for use in service planning and to support community initiatives focused on poverty reduction and low income households in the City of Guelph and the County of Wellington.

Summary of Mid-Year 2024 Key Trends

- The caseload has increased 1% above pre-pandemic levels to 2,095 cases.
- 35% of all beneficiaries reliant on Ontario Works 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.
- Fewer younger people are coming onto assistance. The total number of cases with applicants under the age of 25 continues to show a steady decline year-over-year.
- Single individuals continue to represent the greatest share of the Ontario Works caseload, followed by sole support parents.
- Age distribution of dependent children on the caseload remains largely aligned with trends seen in previous years, with children under 6 making up the largest share of dependents.
- 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 in 2024, 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.

Data and Methodology

The data presented in this report represents a point in time, capturing all cases on the caseload as of March 31st of 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. The data is sourced from internal reports generated by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. All data represents the primary applicant and their associated dependents, where applicable. The analysis in this Caseload Profile focuses on relative shares of the caseload for each demographic variable to provide an overview of caseload trends and characteristics over time. Different source reports were used in order to access all available demographic data. Due to the different methodologies used by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to compile data in each of the source reports, as well as entries with incomplete

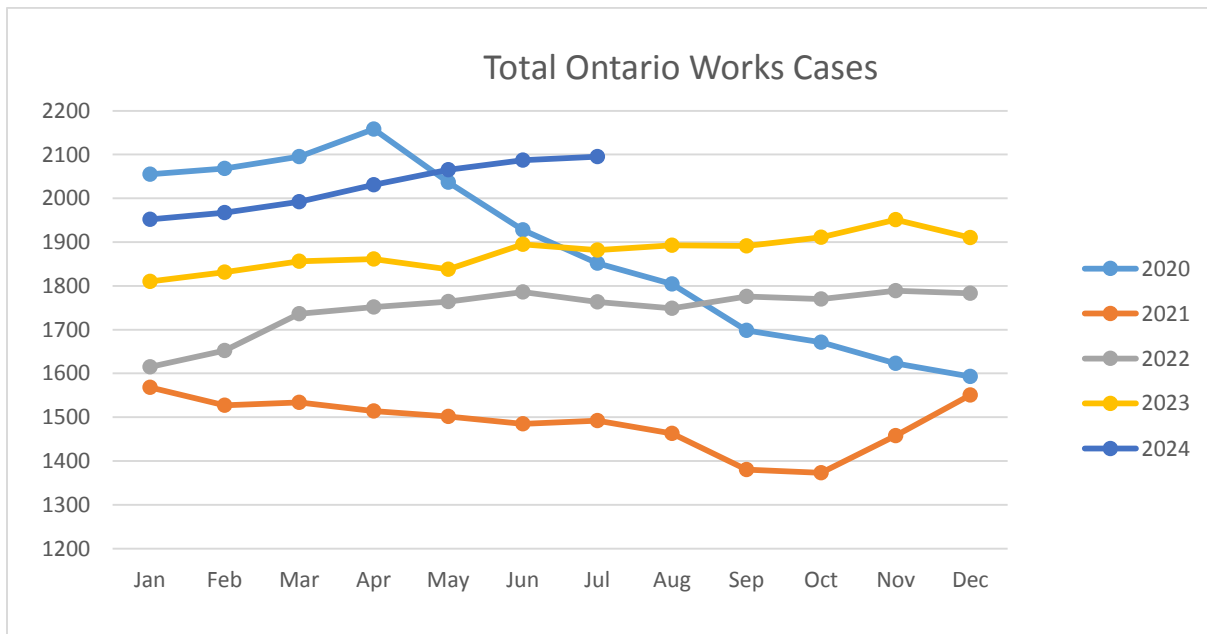
information, total caseload figures differ slightly in each source report. Details on the source reports are provided in the table below.

Source Report	Data Used
March 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 CRS 100M Integrated Case Summary Report (Guelph and Fergus offices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Age • Family Composition • Months on Assistance • Age of Dependent Children • Caseload Distribution
Social Assistance Performance Operations Report v5.2 May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total Caseload • Total Beneficiaries • Total Applications for Emergency Assistance
Ontario Works Caseload at a Glance Report June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Time on Assistance • Total Cases with No Fixed Address • Asylum Seekers

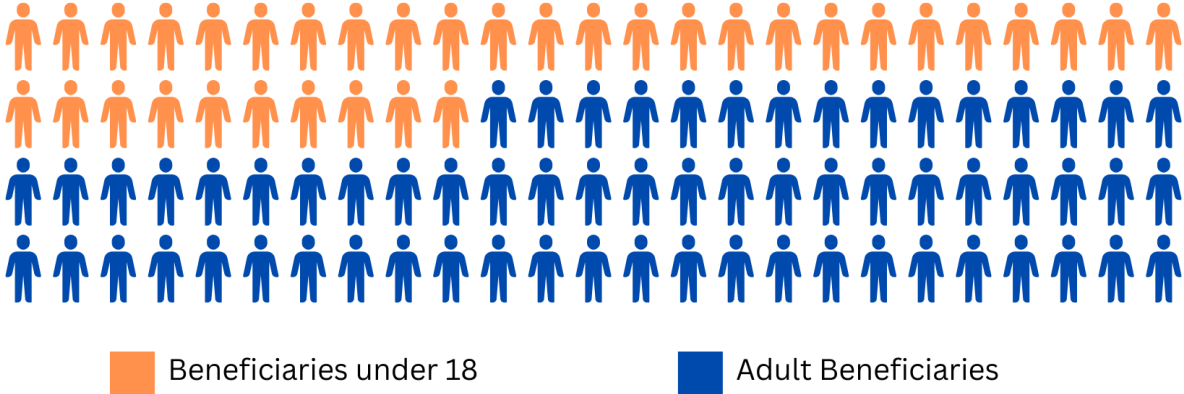
There are some discrepancies and limitations in the data sources used, particularly due to reliance on a centralized provincial system for access to local caseload data.

Total Cases and Beneficiaries

The Ontario Works Division saw a surge in demand for assistance at the outset of the COVID-19 public health emergency in spring of 2020. Demand for financial assistance dropped significantly with the introduction of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, and continued to decline until October 2021, when federal benefit programmes ended. The Ontario Works caseload for the City of Guelph and the County of Wellington has increased 1% above pre-pandemic levels to 2,095 cases as of July 2024.

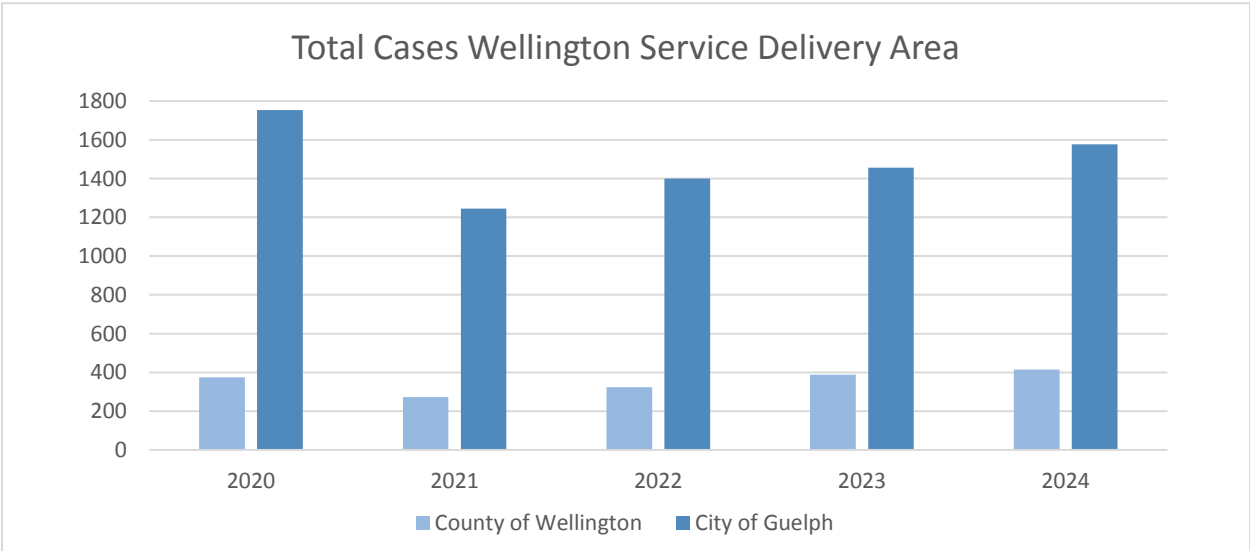


The total number of beneficiaries supported by Ontario Works remains proportional to the number of cases. Children under the age of 18 represent 35% of all beneficiaries reliant on Ontario Works assistance in 2024. This percentage has remained constant with a minor +/-3% variance year-over-year.



Caseload Distribution

Ontario Works recipients residing in the City of Guelph account for 80% of the total caseload, with 20% distributed across the seven County of Wellington townships. This ratio has remained relatively consistent, with a small variance (+/- 2%) year over year.



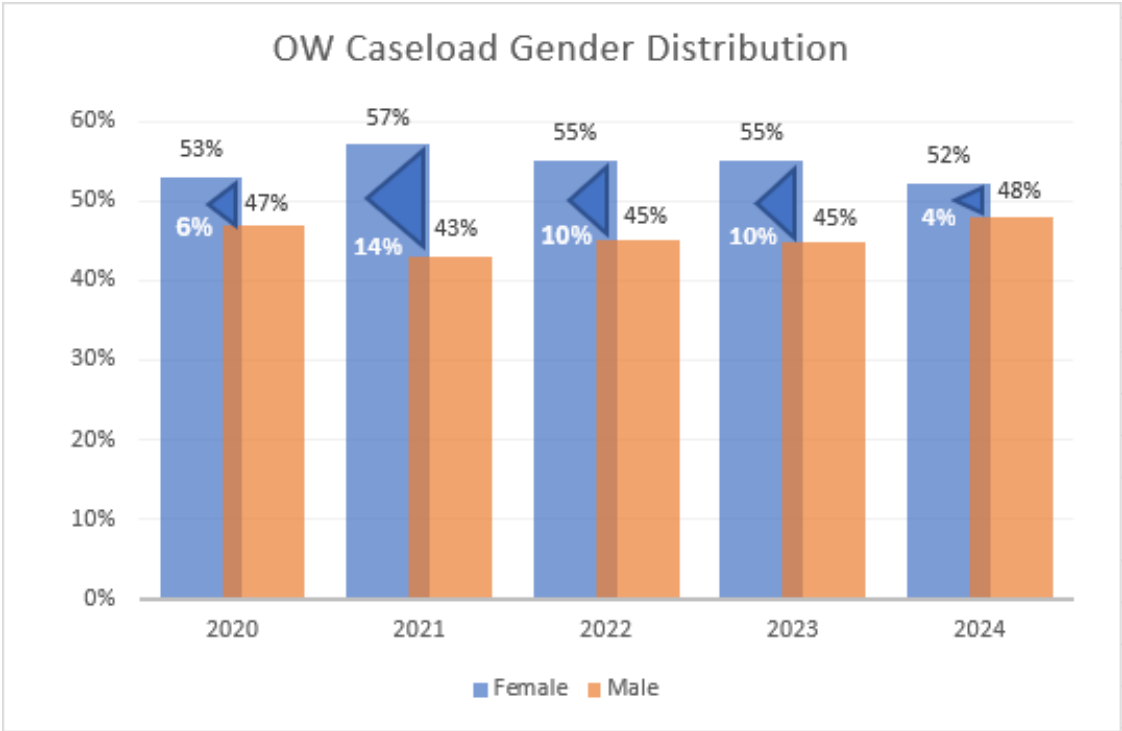
Caseload Demographics

The following section looks at caseload demographics in five areas: gender and age of primary applicant, family composition, dependents, and length of time on assistance. These five variables are chosen based on the reliability and availability of provincially generated caseload data. The analysis in this report

focuses on relative shares of the caseload for each demographic variable to provide an overview of caseload trends and characteristics over time.

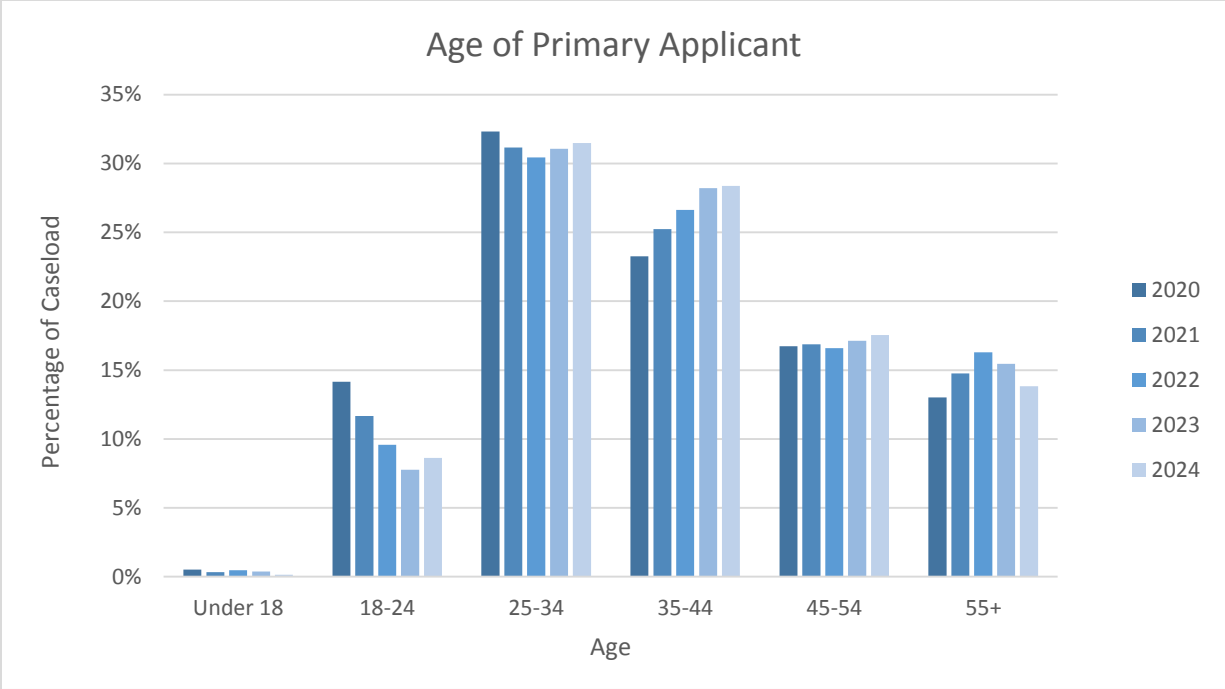
Gender

Although there is a long-standing gender gap on the Ontario Works caseload, the gap between the number of men and women receiving Ontario Works assistance narrowed in 2024, to 52% female and 48% male.



Age

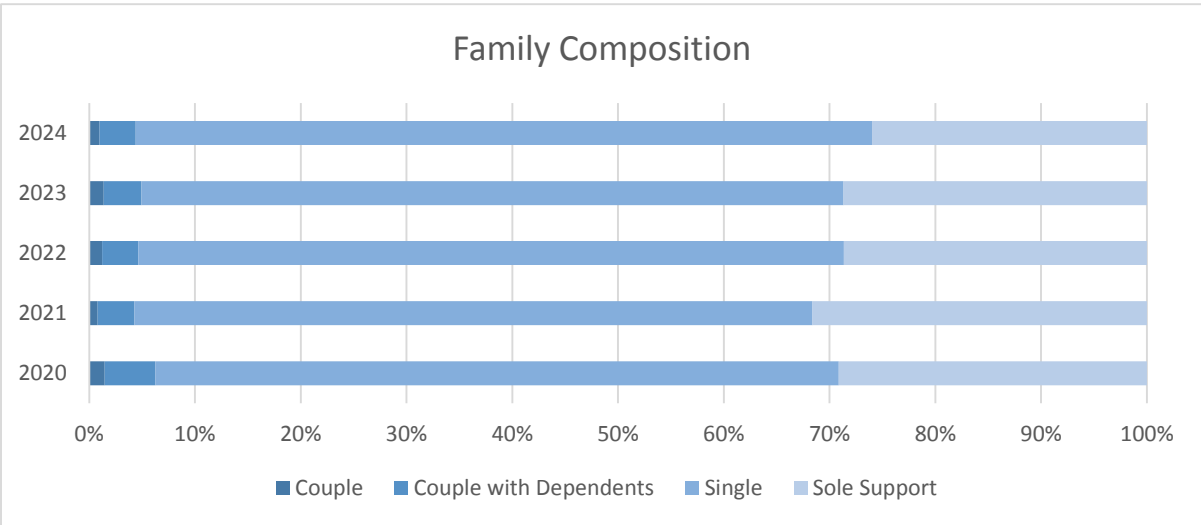
Those aged 25-34 make up the largest age cohort on the caseload, representing just under one third of all cases, in line with caseload age distribution in previous years. The total number of cases for applicants aged 34 years and under has generally decreased year over year, particularly for individuals under 25 years of age. Overall age distribution continues to align with caseload demographic patterns seen in previous years.



Although the percentage of primary applicants aged 55 and older dropped slightly in 2024, the proportion of the caseload in this age group remains higher than pre-pandemic. Lack of a current skill set after employment loss, and lack of re-skilling and training programmes for older workers may be barriers to exiting assistance for those aged 55 and older.

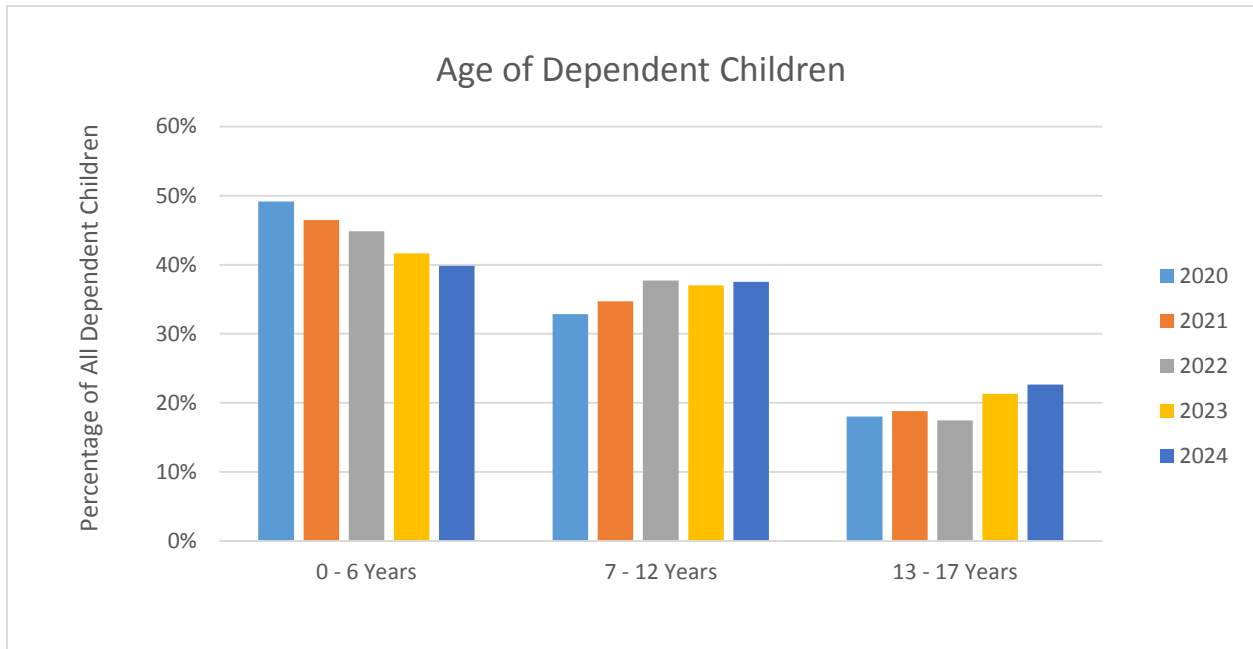
Family Composition

Single individuals continue to represent the greatest share of the Ontario Works caseload, followed by sole support parents. While there are minor variances from year to year, the relative share of the caseload for each family type has remained steady over the last five years.



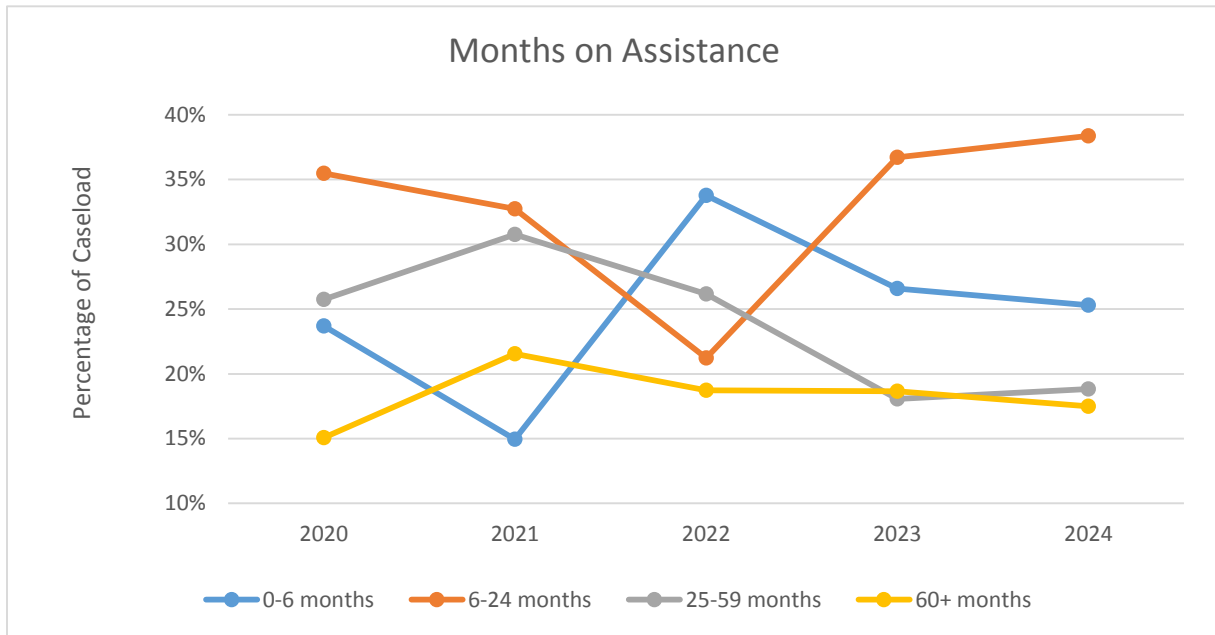
Dependents

40% of dependent children on the Ontario Works caseload are between birth and six years of age. This age breakdown has remained consistent over time, although the relative share has decreased year over year, from 49% in 2020 down to 40% of all dependent children in 2024. Age distribution of dependent children on the Ontario Works caseload reflects the demands and challenges associated with caregiving in the early years, as well as Ontario Works participation requirements that enable single parents of young children to temporarily defer employment activities until children are of school age.



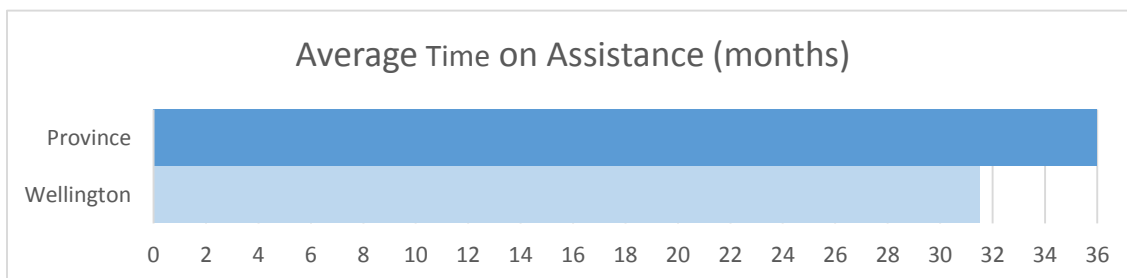
While the share of children under the age of 6 has gradually decreased year over year, the share of school-aged children (7-17 years old) on the Ontario Works caseload increased slightly, with the percentage of dependent children aged 7-12 rising by 4% and the percentage of dependent children 13-17 rising by 2% from 2020 to 2024. Pandemic-related school closures in Ontario from 2020 to early 2022 placed tremendous pressure on families, particularly those with school-aged children, to cope with increased caregiving responsibilities. Age distribution of dependent children on the caseload however remains largely aligned with trends seen in previous years, with children under 6 making up the largest share of dependents.

Length of Time on Assistance



Those who have come onto Ontario Works in the last 2 years represent the highest percentage of the total caseload at 38%. The large decline in cases on Ontario Works for less than six months, and a large increase in cases on assistance for longer than two years between 2020 and 2021 suggested that those with no recent employment history, and therefore no eligibility for federal recovery benefits, remained on assistance, while the availability of federal benefits kept the inflow of new cases low over that time period. The sharp increase in the share of new cases (>6 months on assistance) from 2021 to 2022 coincides with the rise in cases in fall of 2021 after federal pandemic benefit programmes ended. Although the share of the caseload for those on assistance for longer than five years decreased slightly in 2024, the total number of cases has remained flat, indicating that long-term reliance on Ontario Works persists. On average, sole support parents remain on assistance for the longest period of time, while couples without dependent children tend to exit assistance faster than other household types.

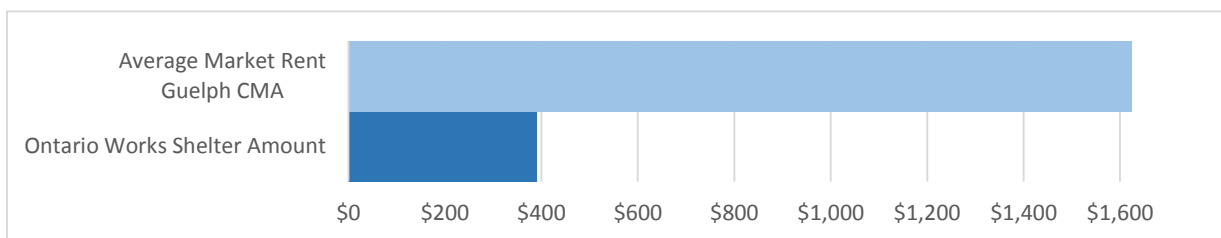
The average length of time households remain on assistance is 31.5 months in 2024, below the provincial average of 36 months.



Housing and Homelessness

Ontario Works files with no fixed address account for 7.1% of the total Ontario Works caseload in 2024, a slight increase from the previous year. Ontario Works rates have remained unchanged since 2018, when the basic rates were increased by 1.5%, representing a negligible change in income for Ontario Works recipients. The gap between social assistance rates and the poverty line is significant. A single individual receiving Ontario Works in the City of Guelph lives on an income that is equal to 34% of the income at the poverty line as defined by Statistics Canada¹. This gap, coupled with rapidly increasing average market rent in our service area is making it increasingly more difficult for individuals and families receiving Ontario Works to find and maintain affordable housing.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation estimates that the average market rent in the Guelph Census Metropolitan Area (across all unit sizes) amounts to \$1,624². Local news reports and Housing Services research suggests that local rents are higher, with average asking rent estimated to be above \$2,000³. The shelter portion for a single individual receiving Ontario Works assistance would cover just 24% of the average rent in our service area.



Ontario Works recipients who are homeless are not entitled to receive the shelter portion of Ontario Works benefits. Without this benefit, moving out of homelessness becomes a significant, nearly insurmountable challenge. In the current housing climate, the need for social and affordable housing stock is growing as affordable rental options become increasingly difficult to find.

Asylum Claimants

The number of asylum claimants on the Ontario Works caseload has doubled compared to 2023, a trend mirrored province wide. While the total number of cases locally remains relatively small at 5.6% of the caseload as of June 2024 (117 cases), the rapid increase of this demographic on the Ontario Works caseload suggests that the numbers of asylum claimants may continue to rise. Global events and policies at other levels of government are likely to impact the numbers of asylum claimants seeking Ontario Works assistance in Wellington County and Guelph. The complex circumstances of asylum claimants, including limited eligibility for federally funded newcomer settlement services, may require Ontario Works offices to review service delivery and client needs in order to support this vulnerable population.

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 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 the Employment Services Transformation on service delivery and outcomes. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has set new performance outcomes and targets for all sites who have transitioned to the new model. This recent change in service delivery means that impacts on the Ontario Works caseload are not yet known, but the County of Wellington Ontario Works office is exceeding client transition plan targets and continues to collaborate closely with Employment Ontario providers in the County of Wellington and the City of Guelph to support Ontario of Works recipients.

With the rising costs of housing and basic necessities including food, Ontario Works recipients are not able to meet their most basic human needs. Lack of suitable housing and food insecurity are directly correlated with poor health outcomes and increased healthcare costs⁴, making it difficult for recipients to move beyond survival and participate in employment-related activities. The County Wellington, in line with municipalities across the province, has called for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to increase to social assistance rates. Increased rates would enable Ontario Works recipients to move beyond survival and crisis management so that they can participate in the labour market and move towards financial independence.

Endnotes

¹ Statistics Canada. (2024 August 19) *Table 11-10-0066-01 Market Basket Measure (MBM) thresholds for the reference family by Market Basket Measure region, component and base year.*

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110006601>

² Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2024). *Ontario — Rental Market Statistics Summary by Metropolitan Areas, Census Agglomerations and Cities* [Table]. Primary Rental Market Summary Statistics, CMHC. Retrieved July 31, 2024 from <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/TableMapChart/Table?TableId=2.1.31.2&GeographyId=35&GeographyTypeId=2&DisplayAs=Table&GeographyName=Ontario>

³ Guelph Today. (2024, June 6) *Asking rents in Canada reach record high in 2023.*

<https://www.guelphtoday.com/local-news/asking-rents-in-canada-reach-record-high-in-2023-9010072>

⁴ *Association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs.*

Valerie Tarasuk, Joyce Cheng, Claire de Oliveira, Naomi Dachner, Craig Gundersen, Paul Kurdyak. CMAJ Oct 2015, 187 (14) E429-E436; DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.150234 Retrieved from <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/187/14/E429>