



COMMITTEE REPORT

OW-23-02

To: Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee
From: Stuart Beumer, Director of Ontario Works
Date: Wednesday, April 13, 2022
Subject: **100% Municipally Funded Discretionary Benefits – 2022 Annual Report**

Background:

This report provides an overview of the 100% municipally funded discretionary benefits that the Ontario Works division has delivered to individuals and families in 2022. These benefits are primarily delivered to low-income individuals and families who are not eligible for assistance through the provincial Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Programmes (ODSP). In exceptional circumstances, OW and ODSP recipients may be assisted with costs for a necessary item that is not eligible for coverage by the province or another source of funding. These investments are focused on the immediate medical and emergency needs of low-income individuals in our community and are a vital component of our local community support system.

The approval of these benefits for an individual or a family follows a two-step process. The first step is to determine financial eligibility, and this is completed through a needs test that assesses household income, assets, and basic eligible expenses in relation to the cost of the particular benefit required. The second step involves reviewing the medical verification that has been provided to support the request, when applicable. Value for money is ensured in a number of different ways which may include one or more of the following:

- Requiring multiple quotes for higher cost or non-standard items
- Establishing benefit limits/maximums
- Entering into service agreements with benefit providers
- Cost-sharing items with clients or partner service providers

The attached report, 100% Municipally Funded Discretionary Benefits to Individuals and Families – 2022 Annual Report, provides a brief overview of benefit categories and details the expenditures made by category in 2022. The Report also indicates both the total number of clients served as well as a unique client count by category. Service disruptions and changes in medical service delivery brought about as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted how individuals accessed care and medical necessities, resulting in lower discretionary benefit spending in 2020 and 2021. Spending and usage patterns in 2022 suggest a return to pre-pandemic levels with the gradual easing of emergency measures over the course of the year.

The report also includes information concerning the 100% County funded Market Bucks Programme. The Market Bucks programme provides households of the County in receipt of Ontario Works and

Settlement Services with vouchers to purchase products at participating Wellington County farmer's markets throughout the market season.

2022 Report Highlights:

In 2022, municipally funded discretionary benefits provided health-related assistance to 392 unique individuals/families across all categories, with a total of 1300 requests. The majority of individuals accessing these discretionary benefits are retirement home residents, accounting for 83% of all requests.

Total health-related discretionary expenditures in 2022 were \$271,754; this is a 34% increase from 2020. The increase in expenditures is largely related to cost categories that are driven by an aging population such as funerals and incontinence supplies. Medical transportation also increased significantly due to a return to more in-person, routine medical services and rising transportation fees charged by service providers.

In 2022, 199 County-based households received Market Bucks, with 79% of vouchers redeemed. Market Bucks purchased \$9,240 worth of goods from farmers and producers across Wellington County during the 2022 farmer's market season. This represented a significant increase in the redemption rate, that is likely due to a return to normal farmer's market operations and expansion over the past three years to include more farmer's markets across the County.

Attachment:

100% Municipal Discretionary Benefits to Individuals and Families - 2022 Annual Report. Prepared by Dunja Lukić, Social Planning and Policy Analyst, April 2023.

Recommendation:

That the report, 100% Municipally Funded Discretionary Benefits – 2022 Annual Report, be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,



Stuart Beumer
Director of Ontario Works