

100% Municipal Discretionary Benefits to Individuals and Families

2022 Annual Report

April 2023

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Introduction

Municipally funded discretionary benefits are provided to low income residents of Guelph and Wellington County when there is no other social assistance programme or other community support that meets their need. Wherever possible, cost sharing options with other agencies and programmes is sought. These benefits are approved on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the Director of Ontario Works or their designate. Requests for 100% municipally funded Discretionary Benefits are handled by the Ontario Works Cost Recovery Unit.

In all cases, sufficient medical verification and/or determination of financial need is required. Financial eligibility to receive Discretionary Benefits is determined through a needs test (see Appendix A for the assessment form used). In order to determine the resident's eligibility and ability to contribute towards the cost of a discretionary item/benefit, the eligible household expenses are compared against household income and assets.

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.

Data Considerations

Discretionary benefit requests are tracked by Social Services staff across the Ontario Works and Housing Services divisions to obtain total and unique client counts for each benefit type. The spending figures are drawn from the JD Edwards General Ledger by the Treasury Department. Due to significant changes in team responsibilities as well as staffing gaps during recruitment and hiring periods, discretionary benefit data tracking was impacted in 2022. Total request and unique client counts for some benefit types were impacted, and as a result, the counts included in this report may show total request and total client numbers as lower than actual figures. The spending figures are complete and accurate and are drawn from the JD Edwards General Ledger by the Treasury Department, and supported by financial documentation.

Medical and Funeral Expenditures

The following section lists each category of municipally funded discretionary benefits approved for health-related needs as well as funerals, including a breakdown of approximately how many individual clients accessed the benefit throughout the year, and a year over year comparison. The tables show total requests for assistance, illustrating how often a benefit was accessed and unique client counts to indicate how many individuals accessed the benefit. The benefit assisted 392 unique individuals with a total of 1,300 requests for assistance in 2022. The majority of individuals accessing 100% municipally funded discretionary benefits are retirement home residents, accounting for 83% of all medical benefit requests.

Dental

Expenditures for dental care include dentures, emergency dental care for adults as well as dental care that supports employability or quality of life. Services for cosmetic or preventative reasons are not provided.

Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Requests	Unique Clients
2018	\$46,329.93	120	\$16,011.15	11	\$62,341.08	131	79
2019	\$61,594.60	81	\$15,224.74	42	\$76,819.34	123	79
2020	\$31,182.23	38	\$3,694.60	9	\$34,876.83	47	27
2021	\$24,513.98	41	\$8,296.07	14	\$32,810.05	55	30
2022	\$25,231.23	43	\$14,145.14	25	\$39,376.37	68	44

Expenditures in this area have shown a gradual year-over-year increase since 2020. Although changes in service availability have impacted usage levels over the last two years, the number of clients seeking dental treatment and/or dentures shows a steady rise to more than 55% of pre-pandemic levels from a low of 38% of pre-pandemic levels in 2020. As in previous years, staff have continued routing patients to dentists with hospital privileges where possible for severe and complex treatment needs, to minimize dental expenditure growth. Due to healthcare system capacity, hospital-based dental treatment options continued to be more limited in 2022. Non-emergency dental services under the provincial Ontario Senior's Dental Care Programme are gradually restarting and may take some pressure off municipal discretionary benefit spending in this area.

Diabetic Supplies

Expenditures in this category include assistance with diabetic necessities such as alcohol swabs, lancets, monitors, syringes, test strips or other medically necessary items not covered by another source.

Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Requests	Unique Clients
2018	\$15,479.16	189	\$3,198.56	56	\$18,677.72	245	34
2019	\$13,588.59	124	\$915.85	40	\$14,504.44	164	30
2020	\$7,976.72	72	\$3,404.33	19	\$11,381.05	91	23
2021	\$7,750.40	81	\$5,090.50	31	\$12,840.90	112	21
2022	\$6,287.01	43	\$4,875.98	10	\$11,162.99	53	15

Expenditures in this area are primarily associated with supporting older adults with complex needs living in subsidized retirement home settings. Retirement homes continue to be subject to strict public health infection prevention measures following the COVID-19 pandemic, including some restrictions on outside service providers entering the facility. These measures may have contributed to lower usage and spending for this benefit in 2022 compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Funerals

Funerals and burials are approved at prescribed rates for eligible applicants. See Appendix B for the 2022 Funeral Fee Schedule. The Cost Recovery Unit pursues all possible reimbursements to contribute to the cost of funerals and burials. The costs listed below include reimbursements received in 2022

(total expenditures net of reimbursements). The time period to settle estates is often lengthy and further reimbursements may be received in the future.

Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Clients
2018	\$41,142.30	15	-\$400.73	8	\$44,223.54	23
2019	\$18,372.74	13	\$11,724.63	9	\$30,097.37	22
2020	\$34,730.24	17	\$16,214.07	12	\$50,944.31	29
2021	\$17,741.67	12	\$4,958.22	8	\$22,699.89	20
2022	\$60,561.56	20	\$11,459.94	8	\$72,021.50	28

Due to the unpredictable nature of requests for this benefit, funeral expenditures are highly variable from year to year. Total spending was higher in 2022 than in previous years, due to a combination of more total funerals, and lower reimbursement rates for funerals conducted in 2021 and in 2022.

Hearing Aids

Hearing aids can be approved where medically necessary and are provided based on the most cost-effective estimate submitted. Expenditures in this category also include hearing aid batteries.

Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Requests	Unique Clients
2018	\$8,000.00	9	\$1,315.26	3	\$9,315.26	12	12
2019	\$2,359.50	5	\$4,050.00	4	\$6,409.50	9	9
2020	\$8,195.00	7	\$500.00	1	\$8,695.00	8	8
2021	\$7,246.50	8	\$1,000.00	1	\$8,246.50	9	8
2022	\$9,479.00	12	\$6,498.00	4	\$15,977.00	16	15

Usage and spending in this benefit nearly doubled in 2022 compared to the previous year. The maximum amount of coverage for this benefit was updated in 2022 to align more closely with the current cost of hearing aids in our service area. A higher number of individuals requesting initial hearing aids, along with a higher coverage maximum may have contributed to the increase in spending in this benefit area.

Medical Travel and Transportation

Medical Travel and Transportation costs, when not covered by another source, can be approved using the most cost effective and appropriate method of transportation.

Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Requests	Unique Clients
2018	\$12,899.49	190	\$11,360.07	128	\$24,259.56	318	69
2019	\$11,859.21	157	\$7,970.36	76	\$19,829.57	233	71
2020	\$6,282.60	75	\$4,353.52	36	\$10,636.12	111	50
2021	\$8,533.45	121	\$3,035.65	28	\$11,569.10	149	49
2022	13,893.57	103	\$11,740.77	53	\$25,634.34	156	46

Usage of the medical travel and transportation benefit decreased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the lifting of emergency measures limiting travel outside of the home, and a return to more in-person medical care, usage of this benefit has increased. Usage patterns indicate that costs for supporting a small number of clients with frequent usage of the benefit were high in 2022, driven by complex kidney dialysis needs that required clients to be transported to hospitals outside of Guelph and Wellington for treatment. Staff explore all available transportation options on a continuous basis to reduce municipal cost wherever possible.

Other Special Benefits

Other Special Benefits consist of items deemed medically necessary that do not fall into any of the previously listed categories. Most often in this category are payments for blood tests, equipment recommended by occupational therapists like shower chairs and grab bars, as well as mobility aids such as walkers and wheelchairs.

Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Requests	Unique Clients
2018	\$15,723.23	157	\$2,464.05	45	\$18,187.28	202	100
2019	\$22,115.23	74	\$3,735.01	27	\$25,850.24	101	50
2020	\$17,163.03	113	\$3,416.93	60	\$20,579.96	173	85
2021	\$24,704.89	195	\$2,858.60	67	\$27,563.49	262	94
2022	\$24,110.96	159	\$3,219.53	77	\$27,330.49	236	85

Spending in this benefit area in 2022 represented a wide range of medical needs, including home visit fees for individuals in subsidized retirement homes, oxygen tanks, mobility aids such as walkers and higher-cost expenditures for wheelchairs and wheelchair repairs.

Prescription Medication

Prescription medication expenditures include co-pay and deductible amounts for eligible low-income residents. The vast majority of expenses are related to coverage for co-pay amounts for seniors living in subsidized retirement homes. Short-term prescription medication may be covered while coverage from other funding sources such as the Trillium Drug Programme and the Exceptional Access Programme are pursued.

Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Requests	Unique Clients
2018	\$25,921.97	580	\$10,279.73	221	\$36,201.70	801	101
2019	\$26,193.06	634	\$10,641.56	224	\$36,834.62	858	121
2020	\$23,665.94	532	\$9,309.90	106	\$32,975.84	638	90
2021	\$21,190.95	590	\$16,431.18	144	\$37,622.13	734	92
2022	\$21,007.91	436	\$18,026.25	95	\$39,034.16	531	81

The majority of spending in this benefit area continues to reflect a significant number of low-cost co-pays for seniors living in retirement homes.

Prosthetics

Expenditures in this category are for devices that strengthen a bodily function, and include orthotics and wigs when medically necessary.

Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Requests	Unique Clients
2018	\$5,513.56	5	\$103.79	1	\$5,617.35	6	4
2019	\$863.58	4	\$367.00	1	\$1,230.58	5	5
2020	\$2,851.98	4	\$707.00	3	\$3,558.98	7	7
2021	\$7,145.20	9	\$420.00	3	\$7,565.20	12	7
2022	\$6,799.72	9	\$1,373.25	1	\$8,172.97	10	8

Spending and usage in this benefit area was higher in 2022 compared to previous years. Individuals eligible for this benefit are able to access coverage for orthopedic footwear once every two years, and orthotics every four years. Renewed coverage periods for this benefit, and more combined requests for footwear and orthotics may have contributed to higher expenditures in 2022.

Surgical Supplies

Surgical supplies are items required by a person being treated at home for an injury, infection or other condition. Surgical supplies may include catheters, colostomy supplies, incontinence supplies, and dressings.

Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Requests	Unique Clients
2018	\$24,022.65	220	\$11,626.37	109	\$35,649.02	329	58
2019	\$29,708.38	203	\$8,511.33	88	\$38,219.71	291	55
2020	\$27,245.26	145	\$8,326.10	48	\$35,571.36	193	45
2021	\$25,896.18	188	\$10,633.01	79	\$36,529.19	267	48
2022	\$18,293.95	126	\$7,606.17	41	\$25,900.12	167	40

Incontinence supplies drive the vast majority of spending in this category, supporting the needs of low-income older adults in retirement homes with increasingly complex medical needs.

Vision

Adult vision care expenditures include retinal exams, eyeglasses, lenses and frames, repairs or replacements. These requests are approved based on a cost estimate once in a 4-year period or with a significant prescription change.

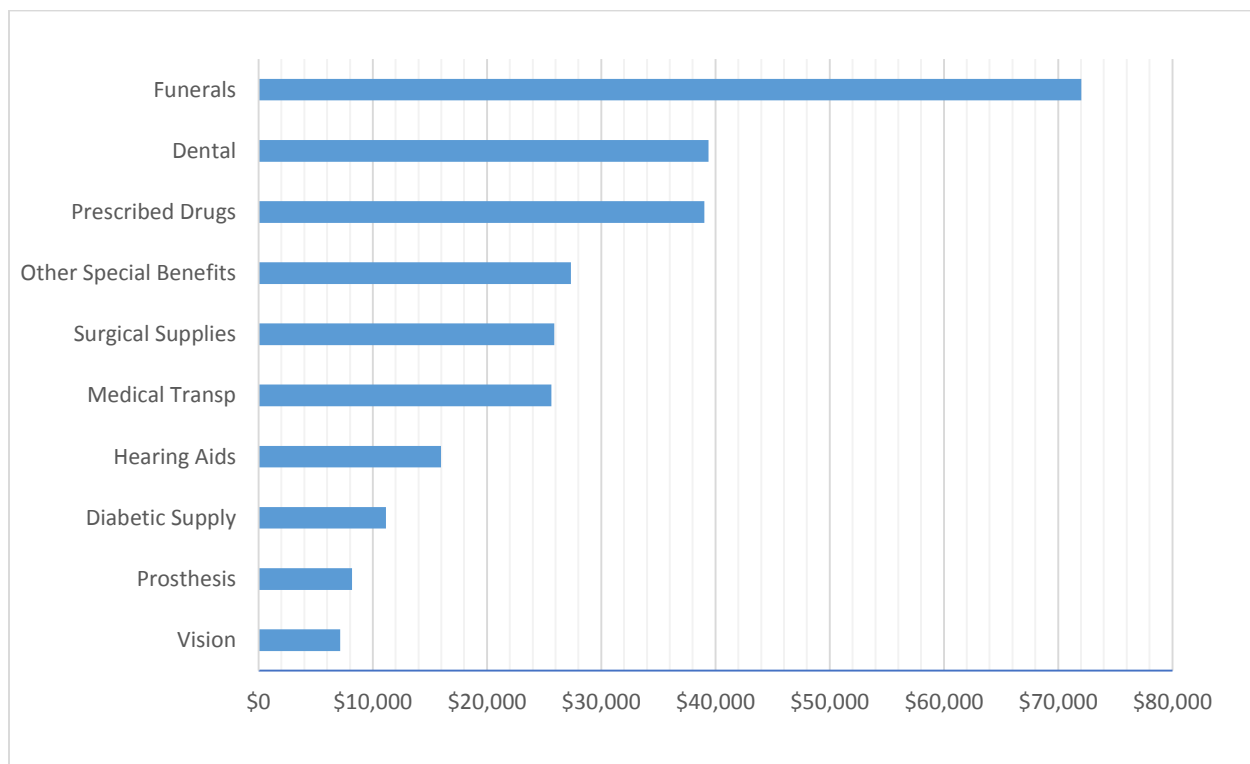
Year	City \$	City Clients	County \$	County Clients	Total \$	Total Requests	Unique Clients
2018	\$3,565.50	17	\$916.64	4	\$4,482.14	21	21
2019	\$4,766.08	20	\$1,050.00	6	\$5,816.08	26	22
2020	\$2,063.87	9	\$1,128.50	3	\$3,192.37	12	11
2021	\$4,047.86	13	\$1,074.92	6	\$5,122.78	19	17
2022	\$5,294.02	25	\$1,850.00	10	\$7,144.02	35	30

After a decrease in usage and expenditure in 2020, usage of this benefit has reached a five year high due to renewal of coverage periods, and the lifting of service restrictions for vision care providers in 2022.

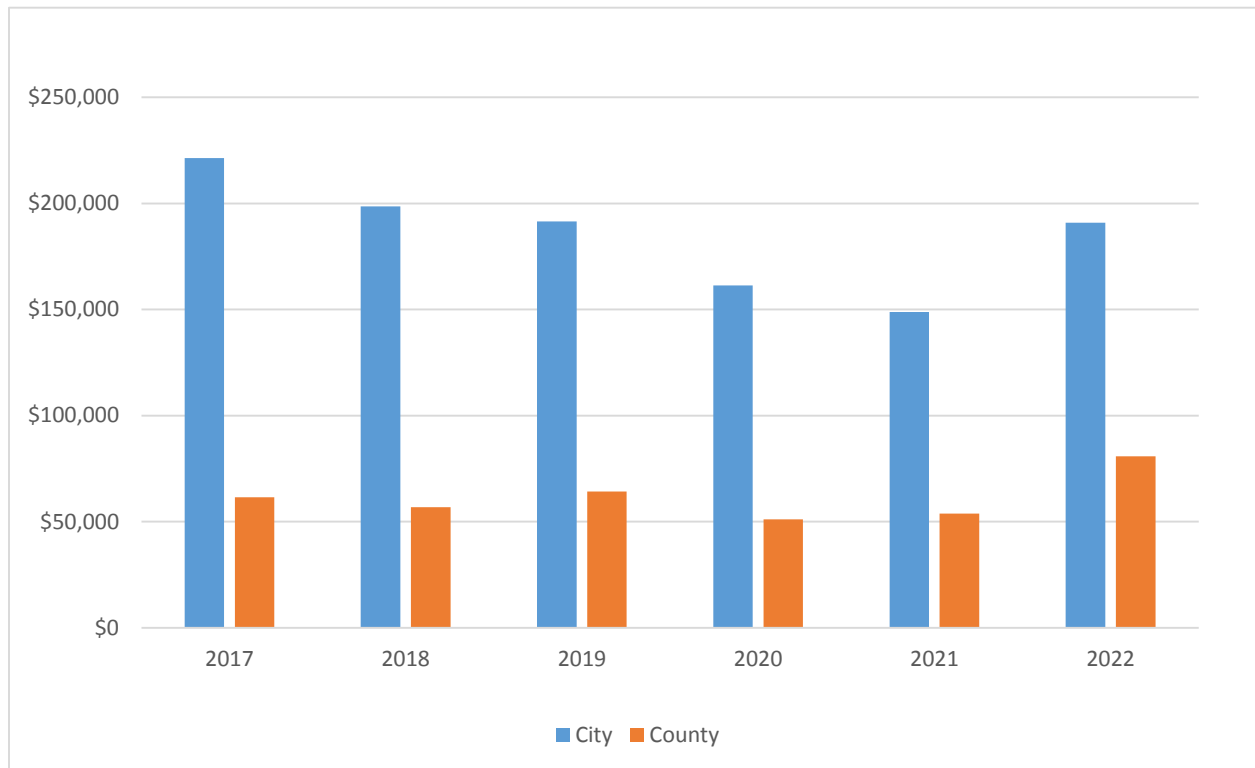
Total Medical Expenditures

Benefit Type	Total City \$	Total County \$	Total Spending
Dental	\$25,231.23	\$14,145.14	\$39,376.37
Diabetic Supplies	\$6,287.01	\$4,875.98	\$11,162.99
Funerals	\$60,561.56	\$11,459.94	\$72,021.50
Hearing Aids	\$9,479.00	\$6,498.00	\$15,977.00
Medical Travel and Transportation	\$13,893.57	\$11,740.77	\$25,634.34
Other Special Benefits	\$24,110.96	\$3,219.53	\$27,330.49
Prescription Medication	\$21,007.91	\$18,026.25	\$39,034.16
Prosthetics	\$6,799.72	\$1,373.25	\$8,172.97
Surgical Supplies	\$18,293.95	\$7,606.17	\$25,900.12
Vision	\$5,294.02	\$1,850.00	\$7,144.02
Total	\$190,958.93	\$80,795.03	\$271,753.96

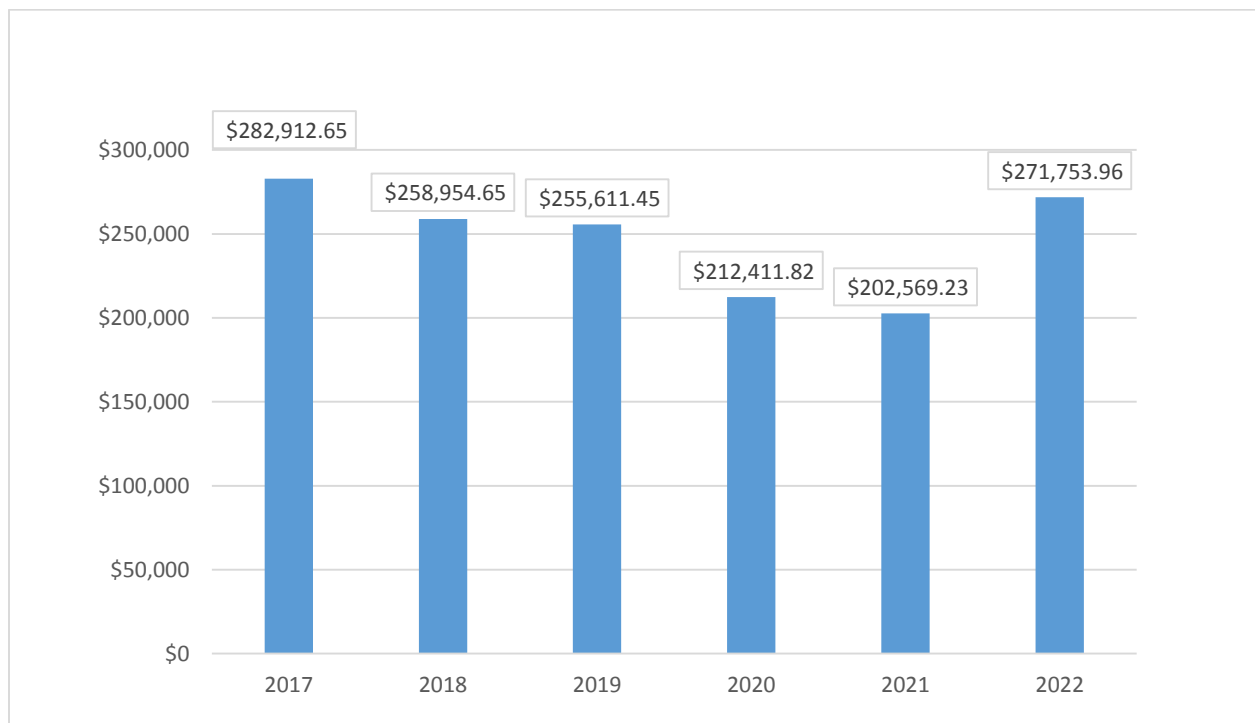
2022 Medical Discretionary Benefit Expenditures by Benefit Type



Total Annual Medical Discretionary Benefit Expenditure by City and County



Total Annual Medical Discretionary Benefit Expenditure



Notes on Medical Expenditures

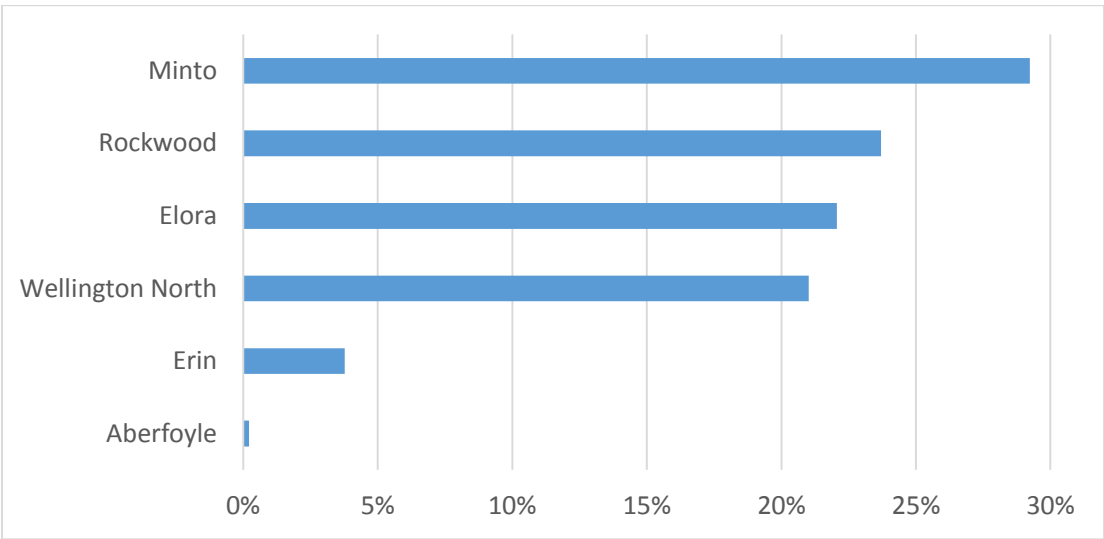
Year-to-year variability in expenditure by category of spending is expected to continue based on demand, particularly for expenditures driven by an aging population such as funerals and incontinence supplies. Government policy decisions around coverage of certain items can also have a significant impact on client demand and municipal costs related to these services. Due to an aging population and increased demand for healthcare as a result of backlogs and disruptions in access to care over the last two years, discretionary benefit spending is expected to grow in future years. Impacts to programme expenditures are most likely to occur if health benefit programmes are introduced by other levels of government.

Market Bucks (Wellington County only)

The Market Bucks programme provides individuals and families with vouchers to purchase products at participating Wellington County farmer’s markets throughout the market season. Vouchers are issued in \$5 denominations to Ontario Works clients and newcomer clients accessing Settlement Services. Community organizations and municipalities are also able to purchase Market Bucks at a 50% discount. In 2022, discounted Market Bucks were purchased by three County farmer’s markets and the Mount Forest Family Health Team. The funds received from these sales help to offset the overall cost of the programme to the County of Wellington.

Market Bucks vouchers may be redeemed with any vendor at the participating markets. Social Services clients were able to use Market Bucks at seven farmer’s markets during the 2022 season: Aberfoyle, Elora, Erin, Mapleton, Minto, Rockwood and Wellington North. The programme aims to increase access to fresh, healthy food for Social Services clients and community members, increase exposure and revenue for local farmers, and to build community connections. In 2022, 199 households received Market Bucks through County of Wellington Social Services, with 79% of vouchers redeemed. Market Bucks purchased \$9,240 worth of goods from farmers and producers across the County of Wellington during the 2022 farmer’s market season.

Percentage Shares of Market Bucks Redeemed per Market Location



Appendices

Appendix A: Needs Test

Discretionary Benefit Calculation Sheet

Name:	
Address:	

Member ID:	
City/County:	City

Section 1 - Basic Needs	
Adults	
Dependents 0-17	
Dependents 18+	
Total Basic Needs	

Section 2 - Shelter Detail - Actual Cost	
Mortgage	
Rent	
Taxes	
Fire Insurance	
Hydro	
Fuel	
Utilities	
Phone	
Other (specify)	
Total Shelter	

Section 3 - Total Need	
Total Basic Needs	
Add 20%	
Total Shelter	
Advanced Age	
Other (specify)	
Other (specify)	
Base	
Total Need	

Section 4- Income	
Gross Earnings	
Mandatory Deductions	
Child Care expenses	
Net Earnings	
Total Income	

Section 5 - Net Assistance	
Total Need	
Total Monthly Income	
Net Assistance	

Section 5 - Comments	

Prepared By: _____ Date: _____

Approved By: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Funeral Rates

MAXIMUM RATES EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2022

Container	
Casket – cloth covered, plywood construction	\$904
Direct Cremation - minimum available container	\$221
Professional and Staff Services	
Arrangements and Required Services	\$759
Removal – 16km radius – over 16km x 0.54	\$113
Basic preparation and care of remains	\$123
Embalming	\$247
Visitation	\$261
Conducting of Services	\$555
Documentation – registering, record vital stats, secure legal docs, obtain certificates & permits, clerical & office staff	\$386
Facility Charges	
Basic Required	\$360
Funeral Home Facilities for service(s) or from other place of worship	\$607
Visitation – two hour visitation	\$353
Register Book & Acknowledgement Cards	\$100
Vehicles/Transportation	
Funeral Coach	\$345
Car for Clergy	\$203
Service Vehicle (all transfers)	\$160
Additional mileage if travelling outside a 16km radius	\$0.54/km
Cemetery Costs	
Includes plot, opening/closing, all other fees	Maximum \$1300 plus HST
Maximum (Funeral Services + Cemetery Costs)	\$5473 plus HST AND \$1300 plus HST

Items Covered at Actual Cost (most affordable option available)

Cremation Cost	Hermetically Sealed Liners
Lowering Device & Grass (if not supplied)	Sealed Pouches
Winter Storage – if burial to be in Spring	Coroner's Certificate – If cremation occurs
All Outer Containers – if required	Death registration
Oversize Casket	

Funeral Services for Children

Children's funeral services will be billed to the County at the same rate the Funeral Home charges to the public but should not exceed the maximum amounts outlined below:

Over 4 x 6" casket and Services (adult rate)	\$5473
2 x 6" to 4 x 6" casket and Services	\$4145
Newborn to one year of age	\$3250
Stillborn – funeral service at graveside or funeral home – no visitation or local newspaper notice	\$349