



To: Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee
From: Stuart Beumer, Director of Ontario Works
Date: Wednesday, June 14, 2023
Subject: **2019-2023 Ontario Works Caseload Profile**

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 both prior to the pandemic, during the peak of the public health emergency, and in the current time period following the emergency.

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, as our communities plan for post-pandemic recovery.

Summary of 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.

Once federal benefit programmes ended in November 2021, application levels experienced an immediate increase and have returned to pre-pandemic patterns. An increase to the Ontario Works caseload to pre-pandemic levels was forecast by the province to occur by early 2023, but the caseload has grown at a somewhat slower rate and remains below pre-pandemic levels.

Identified below are some key trends from the report:

- The Ontario Works caseload continues to increase but remains below pre-pandemic levels.
- The trend of long-term reliance on Ontario Works continues, with a year-over-year increase seen in the number of households on assistance for longer than five years.
- Fewer younger people are coming onto Ontario Works assistance- the total number of cases with applicants under the age of 25 has shown a steady decline year-over-year.
- Exits to employment remain below the provincial average, but a higher percentage of Ontario Works recipients in Wellington-Guelph report income from employment compared to the province as a whole.

- With low vacancy rates and the high cost of housing, use of Emergency Assistance remains high to meet eviction prevention needs, in line with province-wide trends.

The report also provides comparative information about client employment and earnings outcomes between 2019 and 2023, and how these have been impacted by the pandemic both locally and at a provincial level.

Attachment: 2019-2023 Ontario Works Caseload Profile, June 2023.

Recommendation:

That report, 2019-2023 Ontario Works Caseload Profile be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart B', written in a cursive style.

Stuart Beumer
Director of Ontario Works