

Ontario Works Division

Service Delivery Overview

June 14, 2023

Service Delivery Agent for Ontario Works

- ▶ The County of Wellington is a Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for Social Services
- ▶ Designated by the province of Ontario to deliver income support through the Ontario Works programme to residents in the County of Wellington and City of Guelph
- ▶ Contracted by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services under the *Ontario Works Act, 1997*
- ▶ Offices in Guelph and Fergus, itinerant services in Mount Forest



Understanding Poverty and Low-Income Thresholds

Approximate Income Thresholds 4-person Family in Guelph Census Metropolitan Area (2021 Census)	
Average Income	\$140,200
Median Income	\$125,000
Living Wage (2 adults full time)	\$69,500
Minimum Wage (2 adults full time)	\$59,520
Low Income Measure	> \$62,500
Official Poverty Line (Market Basket Measure)	> \$49,290
Low Income Cut-Off	> \$35,274
Ontario Works	\$15,000



Social Assistance in Ontario

- ▶ Ontario Works provides temporary financial assistance to residents in need while they are being actively assisted in becoming employed and achieving self-reliance.
- ▶ Ontario Disability Support Programme provides income and employment supports for people with disabilities in financial need.



Determining your OW Monthly Assistance

- ▶ Basic needs and shelter portion
- ▶ Amounts vary based on family size and individual circumstances

Family Type	Total Monthly Benefit (Max.)
Single Person	\$733
Couple with 2 Dependents	\$1250
Single Parent with 2 Dependents	\$1057
Couple with 4 Dependents	\$1338



OW Benefits

- ▶ OW clients are eligible to receive mandatory and discretionary benefits to assist with costs related to medical needs and employment:
 - ▶ Ontario Drug Benefit Card
 - ▶ Emergency Dental Care
 - ▶ Basic vision care
 - ▶ Other health-related costs for medical care and supplies not covered by healthcare system
 - ▶ Extended health benefits
 - ▶ Special Diet Allowance
 - ▶ Employment Benefits
 - ▶ Housing Stability Programme



Determining and Maintaining Eligibility

- ▶ Applications are completed online or over the phone through the provincial centralized intake line and are processed by the IBAU
- ▶ Intake team assesses initial eligibility and schedules first interview with OW Caseworker
- ▶ Caseworkers review documents related to identity and eligibility
- ▶ Clients must report changes in their personal and financial situation to maintain eligibility



Help Centre and Application Intake

- ▶ Our Help Centre and Intake teams provide integrated supports to Social Services clients and members of the public including:
 - ▶ In-person application assistance
 - ▶ Processing Emergency Assistance applications
 - ▶ OW Application Intake and Verification
 - ▶ System navigation and referrals



Case Management and Stability Supports

- ▶ Ontario Works currently supports 1,861 households consisting of more than 3,200 individuals
- ▶ Client participation agreements and outcome plans are required under programme legislation-developed by client and Caseworker
- ▶ Caseworkers utilize the full range of benefits and supports available in our service area to support their clients in achieving their life stability or employment goals, serve as a central referral point
- ▶ Ontario Works administers and manages specialized caseloads including:
 - ▶ Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP)
 - ▶ Temporary Care Assistance
 - ▶ Life Skills



Employment Supports

- ▶ Employment Facilitators work in tandem with Caseworkers to support clients in preparing for employment, looking for work, and maintaining employment
- ▶ Close collaboration with Employment Ontario service providers
- ▶ Employment Specialist connects with employers and offers incentives, recruitment and employment maintenance supports to encourage hiring OW clients
- ▶ Transportation assistance and Digital Equity Supports available to clients



Eligibility Review

- ▶ Eligibility Review Officers (ERO) manage complaints, referrals, and fraud allegations from various sources inside and outside of Ontario Works
- ▶ Eligibility Verification Process (EVP) ensures the right benefits are being delivered to eligible recipients by performing risk-based case audits bi-monthly
- ▶ When a client's assistance is reduced, suspended, or terminated as a result of changes flagged during EVP or through an ERO investigation, clients have the right to request an internal review of the decision
- ▶ If a decision is upheld after an internal review, clients can appeal the decision to the provincial Social Benefits Tribunal
- ▶ If a client has received more assistance than they are eligible for, overpayments are reviewed and a re-payment plan is established with the client to recover any excess benefits where possible.



Discretionary and Low-Income Programmes

- ▶ Ontario Works delivers discretionary benefits for social assistance recipients (Ontario Works and ODSP clients) as well as other low-income individuals in the community.
- ▶ Ontario Works clients access provincially cost-shared discretionary benefits through their caseworker
- ▶ ODSP clients and those not in receipt of social assistance receive this assistance through our Special Benefits Caseworker and Programme Integrity and Support Workers
- ▶ Municipally funded discretionary benefits are provided to low-income residents of Wellington-Guelph when there is no other social assistance programme or other community support that meets their need.



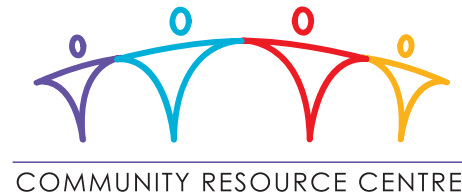
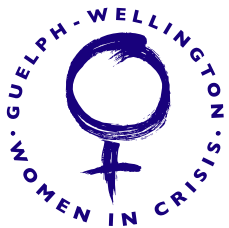
Settlement Services – Wellington County Focused

- ▶ Settlement workers provide services across the County and at the Fergus Social Services office
- ▶ Assist newcomers to Canada to access community services and adjust to life in their new communities
- ▶ Services available to Permanent Residents, Convention Refugees and Live-in Caregivers
- ▶ Team assisted 227 new clients and hosted 69 group sessions in 2022



Community Grants and Partnerships

- ▶ Many grants supporting low income and other vulnerable residents across Wellington-Guelph are managed through the Ontario Works division on behalf of the Social Services Department
- ▶ Allows Social Services to work collaboratively as a community to better meet the needs of vulnerable residents in Wellington County and Guelph



Future Directions

- ▶ Employment Services Transformation
 - ▶ SSM to take over administration of employment supports by January 2024
- ▶ Social Assistance Modernization
 - ▶ Centralized intake, risk-based eligibility determination, automatic granting, paperless strategy, enhanced online tools
- ▶ Anticipated Caseload Growth
 - ▶ Forecasted to grow by 8.3% to a monthly average of 2,064 cases by early 2024
- ▶ Financial Pressures for Clients
 - ▶ Significant gap between social assistance rates and poverty line and rapidly increasing market rents making it increasingly difficult for OW recipients to find and maintain housing and meet basic needs

