

Plans to Boost Support for Low-Income Residents in Ontario Are Underway

The Ministry of Community and Social Services is pushing for reforms to income security which are expected to benefit all low-income Ontarians. With almost one million people on social assistance in the province, the goal of the reforms is to create a system of support both inside and outside social assistance that provides adequate incomes, is simple to understand and is administered equitably across the province.

The reforms are expected to begin implementation in January 2018, even though the Minister of Community and Social Services, Dr. Helena Jaczek, vows it won't be called a social assistance reform. "When we say income security, we are talking about all low-income people, not just the welfare wall and the disincentives to getting off social assistance," she said in a recent interview for Toronto Star.

The working group on the income security reform will work in parallel to the province's recently proposed basic-income pilot. The proposed pilot will test the growing view that a basic income could help deliver income support more efficiently, while improving health, employment and housing outcomes for Ontarians and is scheduled to begin a year from now.

Apart from the broader reforms, in the recent months the province has taken a number of other steps to make life easier for people on social assistance. The reloadable payment card for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) pilot was launched in May. The card allows those without bank accounts to access their benefits without having to pay cheque-cashing outlets.

The government also announced plans to end dollar-for-dollar clawbacks of child-support payments for single parents on social assistance by early next year.

The Minister of Community and Social Services has also changed earning exemption rules in months with three pay periods for people on social assistance with part-time or occasional jobs. In the past, the extra payday meant some people were automatically kicked off the system, lost their health benefits and were forced to reapply the following month.

Looking ahead, in November of this year a simpler medical review process for disabled people is expected to be in place, before broader reforms are rolled out in January 2018.

Key numbers:

- **453,000:** Number living on Ontario Works (OW) benefits.
- **543,000:** Number living on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits.
- **\$681:** Monthly OW benefit for a single person.

- **\$1,110:** Monthly ODSP benefit for a single person.
- **\$1,744:** Monthly income, after taxes, for a single person to live at the poverty line.
- **\$37,288:** Average individual income in Peterborough from the 2011 National Household Survey (lower than the average for Ontario i.e. \$42,264.)
- Ontario Works caseload during 2015 in Peterborough varied from **3,800-4,000**.
- Over **16%** of population and nearly **20%** of children in the Peterborough City and County live in poverty (CFGF Vital Signs 2014)
- **\$17.65/hr** is Peterborough's living wage reflecting on the needs of a family of four, where each parent works 37.5 hrs/week to afford basic needs (PSPC Living Wage Report 2016)

Source:

<https://www.thestar.com/news/queenspark/2016/06/27/province-aims-to-boost-support-for-low-income-residents.html>

https://news.ontario.ca/mcss/en/2016/06/ontario-moving-forward-with-basic-income-pilot.html?_ga=1.204393808.1586484995.1463510036

<http://www.peterborough.ca/Assets/City+Assets/Social+Services/Documents/Reports+and+Research/Statistical+Reports/2015+Year+End+Stats+Report.pdf>

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