



August 9, 2017

Memo to Presidents of Municipal Social Service Workers' locals

**Subject: Government initiatives in Municipal Social Services
(including Basic Income Pilot)**

**From: Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, Chair, SSWCC
Bev Patchell, Coordinator, SSWCC**

Basic Income Pilot

In our last Municipal Social Services Bulletin in June, we provided an update after our technical briefing with the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS); this briefing came after the government's announcement of the four sites of the Basic Income Pilot (Hamilton, Brantford/Brant County, Thunder Bay and vicinity, and the City of Lindsay).

Shortly thereafter, the Social Service Workers Coordinating Committee (SSWCC) convened a meeting to discuss next steps. At this meeting were Municipal Social Services representatives to the SSWCC; CUPE staff assigned to SSWCC; leaders from CUPE locals that represent workers at the pilot sites; and their CUPE national servicing representatives.

We reviewed the technical briefing information closely and compiled a list of additional questions that were site-specific. The Ministry did respond to these inquiries and provided some additional information as well.

There still remains more questions than answers about the Basic Income Pilot. However, we do know that the first BI Pilot cheques were planned to roll out on July 23, 2017, and we have an inquiry into the Ministry to confirm how many participants were on the first run of payments.

One of our key questions is to confirm how many Basic Income participants will be from ODSP/OW in each pilot site. The only breakdown we have received so far is that the Province expects that at least 70% of participants will be low-income Ontarians who **do not** currently have active ODSP/OW files.

As of our last point of contact with the Pilot Team, an evaluator of the pilot has not yet been confirmed.

CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn and SSWCC Chair Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam are scheduled to have a meeting with MCSS Minister Helena Jaczek at the end of August. The conversation with her will be about, among other things, any future announcements that may take place in the lead up to the provincial election.

Raise the Rates Coalition in response to the Ontario Basic Income Pilot

The Raise the Rates campaign has been re-activated and has evolved into a Raise the Rates Coalition. The coalition now has more partners who can call on the government to meet Raise the Rates demands. These include increasing the rates for all social-assistance recipients to match those of the Basic Income Pilot; and ensuring that all supports, programs and services to OW/ODSP recipients are strengthened, especially in light of the fact that the Basic Income Pilot eliminates all such supports to BI participants.

Mobilization in communities across Ontario will commence in September. There is a week of action scheduled in October and a Call to Action on October 17, 2017, on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Through engagement in communities, the next steps will increase political pressure on the government in advance of their election budget and concentrate focus on MPPs and candidates in advance of the June 2018 election.

While we know that the Basic Income is a hot topic among CUPE members, there are other government initiatives underway that will also transform social assistance delivery.

Human Services Integration

The pace in the Human Services Integration (HSI) team has accelerated significantly since our last update. The small team is now fully staffed and they are working across government ministries. The scope continues to be concentrated on OW/OW Employment Programs, Child Fee Subsidy, and Housing Programs.

Consultations have taken place with all municipalities/DSSABs at the senior management level and with corporate finance representatives. These consultations took the form of a series of workshops that concluded at the end of June.

The HSI team has completed the inventory of the Municipal Service managers' roles and what they consist of; outlined the province's role; completed a jurisdictional literature review; and identified the misalignments across the 3 programs in scope, policy, legislation, regulations, and differences in funding cycles.

The Ministry had a number of takeaways from their engagement with the service managers, including that some municipalities/DSSAB's are well on their way to integration and are already able to identify many challenges that they encounter. There were a series of themes that emerged from these workshops that will require action on the part of the government to move HSI forward:

- **Policy Alignment:** There is a misalignment of file-review timing for all 3 programs. as well as duplication of review processes, which are not client-focused.
- **IT Systems:** Operating systems do not communicate well with one another, and some municipalities have added additional data capture systems and there is duplication across all systems of collecting recipient data.
- **Information Sharing:** consents and authority for cross-program data sharing is not clear.
- **Planning Processes and Reporting:** There is a misalignment of all timelines across programs.
- **Change Management:** Changing business processes through HSI must be careful, measured, and clearly communicated.
- **Access to Services:** Access to broadband as well as geographical factors in Northern Ontario communities can create real challenges for service delivery and barriers for recipients.

The next phase for the HSI Team is to have a convergence of conversations, which will then expand to recipients and frontline staff.

CUPE Ontario has been very clear with the Ministry that we expect province-wide participation in these "conversations". The method that we proposed included CUPE-designated seats at the Local level, which we would coordinate centrally; and 1-2 seats with province-wide scope to ensure there is continuity of representation.

We expect follow-up about our request in the early fall. We also inquired about how the HSI Team workplan intersects with the Community Hub Model being rolled out. There is acknowledgement that there is information sharing underway, but that the two initiatives are not aligned nor working in tandem.

We also inquired about the HSI team's involvement with OMSSA, as HSI was an OMSSA initiative for the last 10 years; the response was that they are partnering where they can, but that their most direct relationship right now is with the municipal/DSSAB service managers.

The MCSS HSI Team will be presenting at the upcoming AMO/OMSSA HSI 2.0 conference in September and your SSWCC Municipal Social Services representatives will be in attendance.

Social Assistance Modernization

MCSS has been providing a high-level summary to Municipalities/DSSAB Senior Management about its 5-year roadmap for modernizing social assistance in Ontario. The goal of the modernization is to “empower people through modern, client-centred services,” which will improve the client experience and outcomes as well as achieve “efficiencies” in social assistance delivery. The 5-year plan will look at the following priorities:

- Moving towards a risk-based intake model (i.e. the recent change of increasing the reapplication period to 6 months from 1 month is based on this risk-based model). We understand that, with this model, that Eligibility Review Programs will continue, because they are seen as the backbone to this risk based model and the Province has just introduced Eligibility Review Officer programs to ODSP.
- Client communication and digital tools: the SAMS client portal that was announced when SAMS went live is now transforming into a Client Mobile Application to submit information and communicate through SAMS.
- Payment Administration (i.e. Reloadable Payment Card instead of paper cheques).
- Benefit Delivery (i.e. Paperless Drug Cards).
- By removing the administration burden from social assistance, the goal is to have more focus on high-impact interactions between recipients and social assistance delivery staff.

This modernization plan will be aligned with Human Services Integration, and will also be presenting at the AMO/OMSSA HSI 2.0 conference in September.

A request has been long-standing to have CUPE Ontario representatives on the Social Assistance Modernization working group and it has never come to be. This issue will be addressed at the face-to-face meeting with Minister Jaczek the end of August.

Wrap-up

It is very clear we are entering a period of fast-paced change in Municipal Social Services delivery. We understand that with change comes uncertainty and sometimes more questions than answers. Your Municipal Social Services representatives on the SSWCC will be attending a number of events over the coming months to gain as much insight into the changes as possible so we can provide you the most up-to-date information.

How to receive updates?

Our goal is to be able to communicate not only with CUPE Local leadership, but also with our rank-and-file membership. If you wish to receive updates, please email sswcc@cupe.on.ca and we will add you to the distribution list.

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