

ACTION BULLETIN:

What's Happening with Delivery of Social Assistance and What Are the Next Steps for a Robust CUPE Response

Background:

Provincial income assistance and support programs are undergoing massive reform in the province. There are two tracts of transformation:

- A new central intake stream for both Ontario Works and ODSP applicants that is being delivered by the Province directly and represented by OPSEU. The centralization is under the principle of service integration, which is in place at eight Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) across the province. New CMSM's are expected to onboard into the "prototypes" in the coming weeks. Automation of benefits grants and payments through technology are also widespread using a "risk-based approach"

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Which Locals and Locations will be Impacted?

Learn more about where current prototypes sites are and which areas will be impacted by delivery changes.

[**Learn More**](#)

Action 1: Host Local Meeting to Harvest Information from Members

Take action today by compiling information on the impacts, challenges, and general problems with the rollout.

[**Read More**](#)

Action 2: Get a Council Motion Passed to Provide Adequate Oversight to the Service Delivery Changes

Learn more about how and where to submit a motion and find an example motions to draw from.

[**Read More**](#)



What's Happening with Delivery of Social Assistance and What Are the Next Steps for a Robust CUPE Response

- Employment Ontario (EO) programs that have been shifted to the Ministry of Labour and through a Request for Proposal contracts have been awarded to system managers outside of Municipalities and in two instances awarded to privatize for profit corporations. At this time three geographic regions have been impacted and 9 CMSM's and DSSABs impacted and additional regions are expected to onboard into the "prototypes" in the coming months after another round of Service manager proposals are completed.

These reforms are happening with staged expansion and it is expected that these changes will involve more system managers this year and both prototype models are happening in tandem with overlap. Some jurisdictions, like Ottawa, are in the early stages of onboarding for central intake. Eventually based on the Provinces Vision of Social Assistance delivery reform, CUPE members primary focus will be delivering more intensive case management, so-called "life stabilization" to not only Ontario Works recipients, but also ODSP household members and the broader community who is in need of support, while the financial administration of programs will be delivered by the province.

In February 2021, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) released Recovery and Renewal: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation, Ontario's vision for a renewed social assistance system to help more people move towards

employment and independence. This built on previous changes and has led to the next stage in a three-stage process taking place over four years. The Conservative government has rolled out further reforms and tabled legislation for them. Already, there has also been some disruption, including layoffs and position adjustments, to bargaining units as a result of these changes. While the timeline does extend into 2022 for reforms, we can expect that the province's early adopter "prototype" model will continue in advance of 2022.

It is noteworthy that these proposed reforms do nothing to bring system recipients out of poverty. In 1995 OW rates were reduced by 21%; in that same period inflation in the province had risen 56%. This has put recipients' income impossibly behind in society. If the single rate for recipients had raised with the provinces' inflation rates it would be \$812 per month—an 11% increase from current rates. We believe that unless adequacy of rates is addressed, and significant investments in low-income housing supply, accessible child care, quick access to mental health and addiction supports, "Life Stabilization" will become a cycle of crisis management and the front-line feeling helpless with providing supports.

CUPE is activating further on this rapid reform for the following reasons:

- **Central intake and benefit automation could significantly alter service delivery both in the way our members perform their work and certain jobs may not be**



required anymore due to technological implementation and automation. An example of changes could be how intensive case management, including life-sustaining activities, could be handled on a caseload basis. Workers with general caseloads could have as many as 140 clients, whereas specialists in housing and addictions, for example, engage with half as many due to the intensive and detailed nature of the work. This could fundamentally change how our members work day-to-day and would have bargaining implications.

- **EO changes have further privatized program delivery** and for the first time moved to include multi-national companies. This privatization pilot is also emulating a failed project in the U.K. – there is no reason to expect a different outcome here.

Acting on these reforms meets CUPE’s mandate to protect our members’ bargaining unit work and fight the government’s privatization agenda.

Locals/Locations

The Ministry has confirmed that the eight prototype sites for the centralized intake are: Hamilton, York, Chatham-Kent, Parry Sound, Durham, Sudbury, and Renfrew County. MCCSS Deputy Minister Menard indicated that all eight sites expressed interest in being part of the initial rollout. COVID-19 did accelerate this plan; however, they had been working on this prototype for more than a year. The plan at this stage is to test the current model, make any adaptations, and then onboard additional CMSMs and DSSABs late spring/summer 2021.

There was a similar timeline associated with the EO changes, and they are taking place in Niagara Region, Kawartha Lakes, and Peel. We expect that the first quarter of reporting would have taken place in Q1 2021.

The following Locals will be impacted by both these reforms:

- 5167, Hamilton
- 504, Peterborough
- 905, York
- 12, Chatham Kent
- 17, Parry Sound
- 1764, Durham
- 4705, Sudbury
- 4425, Renfrew County
- 1287, Niagara Region
- 855, Kawartha Lakes
- 966, Peel Region
- 181, Brant County
- 4700, Haldimand Norfolk

This list makes up the critical areas we will be monitoring and taking action in. There are expected additions, such as CUPE 503, representing workers at the City of Ottawa, as we understand that they have an expressed interest in being a pilot expansion site. CUPE Local 79, representing workers at the City of Toronto, could also be added as they have the largest intake system in the country and may be targeted for future reform.

ACTION 1: Local Meeting to Harvest Issues from Members

The reforms are profound. We are asking that you host a local meeting with your members in Ontario Works delivery to discuss these reforms. It is important that we have a good understanding of what is happening on the ground and the stresses members may be experiencing. Hosting a local meeting is the most efficient way to gather information so that we can act on it. The SSWCC can support these meetings with attending, providing a slide deck with questions/prompts to ask the members and being able to document the trends that your members express.

In addition to these meetings, we need to collect member stories on the implementation of the reforms in their areas. A formal notice and background could be sent to members through National Representatives and local executives to solicit stories based on identified common themes. Members could be directed to report on some of the following criteria:

- Impacts of layoffs and other staff reorganization
- Workload and ratio adjustments
- Administration challenges
- General problems with the rollout

Those interested in sharing their story on how reforms have impacted them can contact Paul Whyte, CUPE Communications Representative, at pwhyte@cupe.ca.

Once these stories are gathered, a formal report could be issued detailing members concerns (while protecting their identities) with reforms. A specific reporting period could be set with built-in reminders for members to provide feedback to the committee and staff team.

Centrally your social services team is tracking and researching the changes and Social Service Workers Coordinating Committee (SSWCC) Chair Carrie Lynn is in touch with Ministry officials and in the coming weeks will be able to report on a central table where CUPE will have a voice and the outcomes of these membership meetings and member impact stories can be advanced.



ACTION 2: City/Town/Regional Council Motions for Data and Reports

First, we could select specific municipalities in the eight jurisdictions where the EO and central intake has already been rolled out and seek to get a council motion passed that would provide regular updates on the reforms, explaining how they are impacting both members and service delivery for recipients. The motion could include a requirement of a quarterly report on the following components of OW changes:

1. [for EO jurisdictions] The number of clients being served, work placements, and case discharges.
2. [for EO jurisdictions] The number of clients being served by both EO agencies and the municipal jurisdiction.
3. The number of clients who accessed central intake and entered service manager programs.
4. Any changes in caseloads ratios.
5. Any complaints or disputes between third party providers, the Ministries, and service managers.
6. Additional funds the service manager was required to pay as a result of reforms.

In advance or accompanying this motion, there will be the need for a staff report. In some jurisdictions, there may have already been reports or memoranda internally discussing this matter. Given the size and scope of reforms, committees and councils of elected members should be made aware of the changes and the potential challenges associated with them.

Here is a good example of a motion from Toronto:

City Council direct the General Manager, Toronto Employment and Social Services to report in the second quarter of 2022 on the co-design and implementation of Phase 1 of Ontario's Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal plan, including updates on the impact of the centralization of Ontario Works financial assistance application administration on related roles and functions at the City of Toronto's Application and Support Centre and Toronto Employment and Social Services, budget implications for the City of Toronto, and progress on the Provincial plan for human services integration.



Any motion that locals propose should ideally include language on also examining and raising social assistance rates that enable at least subsistence or more. This may not end up passing in the final language, but many councils may take a positive position on this, especially as the province pays for this so it would have little to no impact on municipal budgets. Sometimes this can be done by requesting city staff to examine impacts through an equity lens.

Please join us in acting on these reforms so that CUPE members' concerns and experiences can be brought forward with a robust response to government:

- **Action 1: Local Meeting to Harvest Issues from Members**
Please contact SSWCC Chair Carrie Lynn to schedule your Local meeting of members working in social assistance delivery by emailing sswcc@cupe.on.ca
- **Action 2: City/Town/Regional Council Motions for Data and Reports**
You can contact Simon Collins, CUPE National Researcher, at scollins@cupe.ca for assistance writing a motion.

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.

