



## Social Assistance Summaries

# Ontario

**2017**

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## About Social Assistance Summaries

### What is Social Assistance Summaries?

*Social Assistance Summaries* uses data provided by provincial and territorial government officials to track the number of social assistance recipients across Canada. It also includes a brief description of the social assistance programs in each jurisdiction.

This resource was established by the Caledon Institute of Social Policy to maintain data previously published in the *Social Assistance Statistical Report* by the federal government. In 2018, Maytree assumed responsibility for updating the series.

### Who can claim social assistance?

Eligibility for social assistance is determined on the basis of a needs test. This test takes into account the household's basic needs and its financial resources, which include both assets and income. The needs test assesses whether there is a shortfall between available financial resources and the legislated amounts for basic needs (i.e., food, shelter, clothing, household, and personal needs). Additional amounts may be paid on a discretionary basis for special needs based on each household's circumstances.

### Where does the data come from?

Every year provincial and territorial government officials provide us with an update of the social assistance case and recipient numbers. (Some jurisdictions also publish this information online.) They can provide this data as a calendar year average, a fiscal year average or as point-in-time data for March 31.

Data from before 2014 comes from two federal government reports: the *Social Assistance Statistical Report: 2008* and the *Social Assistance Statistical Report: 2009-13*. When the federal data did not reconcile with provincial/territorial figures, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy worked with jurisdictional representatives to present data in the format most often used by their governments.



## What is the difference between cases and beneficiaries?

Cases are equivalent to an individual or family: the person who applied for benefits, their partner, and any dependent children count as a single case.

Beneficiaries or recipients refer to the total number of people who benefit from a single social assistance claim, i.e., the individual claimant plus their partner, and any dependent children within their household.

## How does each jurisdiction vary in its reporting?

Each jurisdiction uses its own methodology for tracking and reporting social assistance caseloads. For example, some provinces include households that receive a partial benefit or top-up from social assistance while others do not; some include First Nations living on reserve while others do not.

## Can I compare the data for different jurisdictions?

Comparisons between jurisdictions can be misleading because each jurisdiction has different eligibility criteria for social assistance and different methods for recording social assistance data. For example, the numbers will be lower for jurisdictions that count only households in receipt of full benefits.

The data is also affected by how federal programs interact with provincial/territorial benefits. For example, a higher take-up of related income security programs such as Employment Insurance typically reduces social assistance caseloads.



## Why does the number of claims change from year to year?

There are two main reasons why the social assistance caseloads change from year to year. One reason is a change in the social and economic situation in an area. For example, a rise in unemployment is likely to result in a rise in social assistance claims. The other reason is a change in the way that social assistance programs operate. For example, people are ineligible for social assistance if their savings are above a certain threshold; if a jurisdiction increases this threshold, more people would be eligible and the number of claimants is likely to increase. Similarly, changes to eligibility for federal benefits can also have a knock-on effect on provincial/territorial caseloads.



## Ontario's social assistance program

Social assistance is the income program of last resort. It is intended for those who have exhausted all other means of financial support. Every province and territory has its own social assistance program(s) and no two are the same.

In Ontario, social assistance is composed of two programs:

1. Ontario Works (OW), which provides income and employment assistance to people in financial need
2. Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), which is intended to help people with disabilities and their families live as independently as possible, and to reduce or eliminate disability-related barriers to employment

Both Ontario Works and ODSP provide income and employment supports, as well as a range of benefits.

### Ontario Works

Ontario Works income assistance includes an amount for shelter and basic needs such as food and clothing. In addition, employment assistance helps clients find, prepare for, and maintain a job.

### Ontario Disability Support Program

ODSP provides income support and employment supports to eligible individuals with disabilities and their families. ODSP income support helps with the cost of basic needs as well as providing certain health-related and employment related benefits.

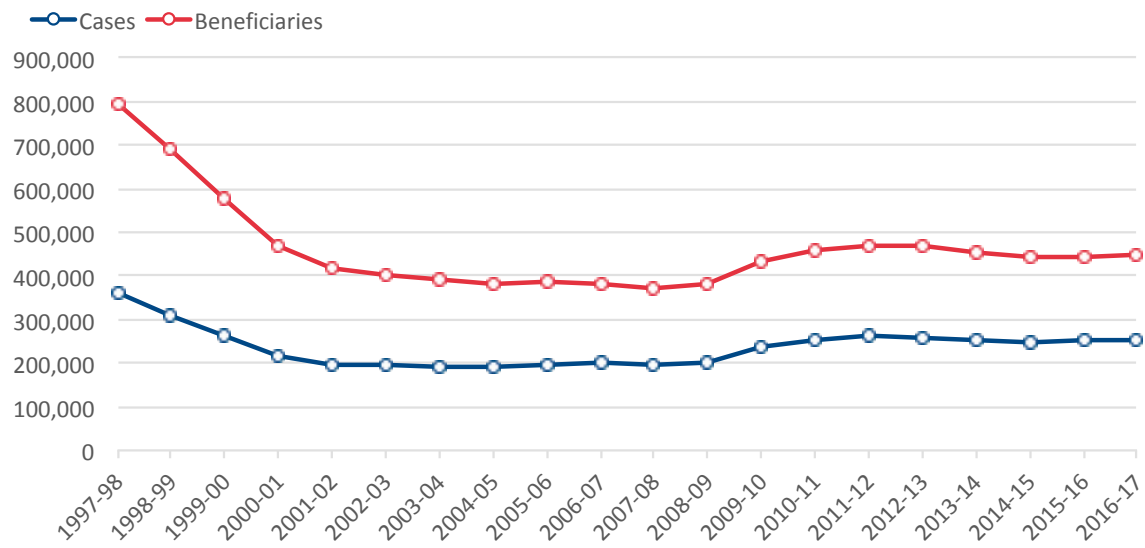
ODSP includes employment supports – a voluntary program that provides employment assistance to help people with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep a job. Individuals do not have to receive ODSP income support to be eligible for employment supports.

## How many people claim social assistance?

On average, there were 598,000 cases (families and single adults) in Ontario's social assistance programs during 2016/17. Around 40 per cent (252,000) received Ontario Works and 60 per cent (346,000) received ODSP. The number of cases of both forms of social assistance was slightly higher than in 2015/16.

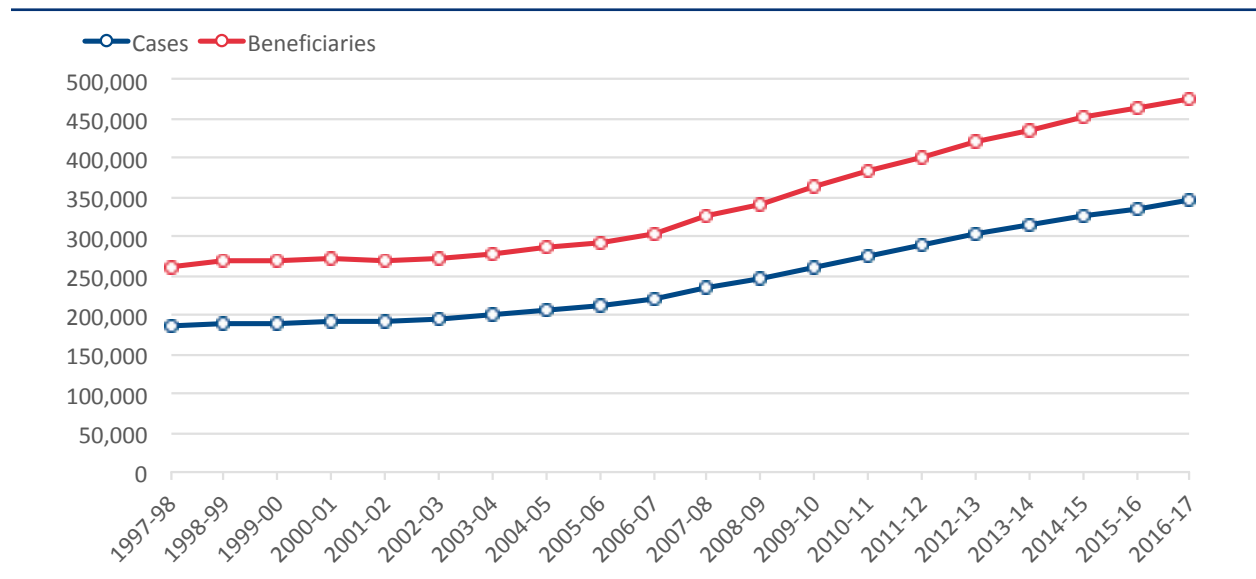
### Ontario Works

After increasing in the late-2000s/early-2010s the number of families or individuals receiving Ontario Works has been reasonably flat in recent years at 252,000 in 2016/17. This is about half the level of the mid-1990s peak. The number of beneficiaries (the number of individual claimants, their partners, and dependent children) has followed a similar pattern over time and stood at 447,000 in 2016/17.



## Ontario Disability Support Program

In 2016/17, there was an average of 346,000 cases in the Ontario Disability Support Program, and 476,000 beneficiaries. Both numbers have been steadily rising since the early-2000s.



Year	Ontario Works		ODSP		Total	
	Cases	Beneficiaries	Cases	Beneficiaries	Cases	Beneficiaries
1997-98	362,334	796,109	185,479	261,737	547,813	1,057,846
1998-99	310,493	690,608	189,392	268,159	499,884	958,767
1999-00	262,439	577,620	189,536	268,286	451,975	845,907
2000-01	215,618	469,494	191,885	271,144	407,503	740,637
2001-02	196,596	419,493	192,048	270,558	388,644	690,051
2002-03	195,137	404,067	194,140	271,740	389,277	675,807
2003-04	192,096	389,754	200,087	278,393	392,183	668,148
2004-05	191,723	380,670	205,880	285,231	397,603	665,901
2005-06	198,377	386,801	212,058	292,622	410,435	679,423
2006-07	199,242	383,068	221,718	305,202	420,960	688,270
2007-08	194,920	371,876	235,672	325,552	430,592	697,428
2008-09	202,181	380,442	247,476	342,149	449,657	722,591
2009-10	237,634	435,721	261,509	362,594	499,143	798,315
2010-11	251,280	457,774	276,191	383,341	527,471	841,115
2011-12	260,766	471,154	289,676	402,307	550,441	873,461
2012-13	259,819	468,074	302,733	420,128	562,552	888,202
2013-14	252,767	454,520	314,033	435,052	566,800	889,572
2014-15	246,903	442,942	326,293	451,576	573,196	894,518
2015-16	250,640	445,466	335,933	463,889	586,573	909,355
2016-17	252,247	447,408	346,070	475,637	598,317	923,044

## Data notes

- The data reflects the average number of cases and beneficiaries over the fiscal year (April 1 to March 31)
- The numbers do not include First Nations living on reserves

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