

REPORT



System transformation in Ontario Works

Considerations for Ontario

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Introduction

It is an important time for social policy—and social assistance, more specifically—in Ontario.

Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) largely make up the province’s social assistance system. Although these programs focus on providing support to individuals and families with very low incomes, policy debates about the effectiveness of the province’s social assistance system are frequently framed in incomplete trade-offs between rates and caseloads. Policymakers and economists often argue that low rates incentivize employment, decrease the social assistance caseload, and decrease dependency on the system. This is particularly true of Ontario Works.

In spite of the low rates, however, the caseload and the length of time on social assistance are not decreasing (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2019).

The Ontario Works caseload increased by almost 30 per cent over the course of a decade (from 2006-07 to 2016-17).¹ In 2016, Ontario Works rates for a single adult amounted to about 36 per cent of the low income measure.² Contrary to traditional policy thinking, and despite the benefit amount being so low, 9 per cent of single adults receiving Ontario Works had employment earnings and the average length of time on social assistance was over 2 years (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2019).

Ontario Works is not meeting its primary program objectives—not because the rates are too high or because the earnings clawback rates are insufficient. Ontario Works is not meeting its primary objective because a focus on keeping benefit rates low has come at the cost of undertaking a broadened understanding of “employability,” and developing a program that addresses the prevailing contextual factors (e.g., type of work available in local economies) that affect a low-income person’s or family’s need for support from social assistance.

1 Internal calculations using data from Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2019).

2 Internal calculations using data from Tweddle, Battle, Torjman (2017) and Statistics Canada (2019).

There is a need to reform Ontario Works.

In the fall of 2018, the Ontario government announced that it would be reforming social assistance with the aim of developing “a more effective, sustainable approach to helping people find and keep jobs and achieve better outcomes” (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2018). The reforms are intended to primarily address the government’s priorities around decreasing the number of social assistance recipients, the length of time people receive social assistance, and the number of people returning to social assistance within a year of leaving it.

The government intends to deliver on these goals while pursuing significant spending decreases in social assistance. The Ontario 2019 Budget outlined the government’s intention to reduce spending in social assistance by about 10 per cent, or \$1 billion, from 2018-19 to 2021-22 (Ministry of Finance, 2019).

As part of its reform plans, the government introduced—and subsequently repealed—some policy changes on the income support side of the program (e.g., changes to earnings exemptions). However, there are also less known changes underway in the employment and training side of social assistance that structurally change social assistance, and could have deep impacts on recipients.

On employment and training services changes, the Ontario government is “creating a new service delivery model that will integrate social assistance employment services into Employment Ontario” (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2019). For those who may not benefit from employment or training supports until other issues are addressed, the Ontario government is seeking to provide “wrap-around supports to help vulnerable social assistance recipients address barriers and access employment supports” (Ministry of Finance, 2018). The wrap-around supports model will focus on “life stabilization” for people who would not immediately benefit from employment and training services (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2019).

Given that the government’s plans for social assistance reform lie primarily in the structure of what supports and services are delivered and for whom, this paper focuses on proposed system transformation in Ontario Works, and explores the possibilities and limitations associated with the proposed changes.

First, it looks at the broader context within which the government's social assistance reforms are taking place. Second, it provides an overview of what is known about some of the structural changes in social assistance to date, as well as an overview of the experiences in other jurisdictions that have undertaken similar reforms. In conclusion, the paper outlines some key considerations and unresolved questions that the government will need to address before it can move forward with a plan for reform.

Context

The Ontario government undertook significant welfare reforms in the late 1990s. These reforms separated those in need of social assistance into two categories—people unemployed but considered employable, and people with disabilities (Community Development Halton, 1998). Ontario Works became the program intended to support those in need but considered employable. As articulated in the preamble of the *Ontario Works Act, 1997*, the program is “intended to provide temporary financial assistance to those most in need while they satisfy obligations to become and stay employed.” In addition to emphasizing the individual’s responsibility and promoting “self reliance through employment,” the Act also sets out to “effectively serve” the people needing assistance (Government of Ontario, 1997).

The underlying philosophy of the program is that poverty and income insecurity are likely to be short-lived, and that a strong economy buoyed with employment opportunities should be able to reabsorb people into the labour market, particularly those who “satisfy their obligations to become and stay employed” (Government of Ontario, 1997), therefore making poverty a temporary experience.

As such, the focus of Ontario Works has been on providing recipients with some income support and some other needed benefits while trying to integrate them into the labour market. Under this approach, “outcomes” have been measured by a narrow definition of success (e.g., the number of people exiting Ontario Works for work). This approach, however, neglects a fuller understanding of the environment and circumstances that lead people to require support from Ontario Works in the first place.

The following section explores some of the contextual factors (e.g., labour market and housing trends) that have changed considerably since Ontario Works was first introduced, and demonstrates why the underlying philosophy of the program is antiquated. This will help establish the foundation for analysis and discussions on the future trajectory of social assistance reform.

Labour market trends

Over the past several decades, the combined impacts of globalization, technological change, and automation (among other factors) have significantly changed the nature of Ontario’s labour market. These trends were well underway before 1997, when Ontario Works was established, and have since continued. Ontario Works was designed with a particular (and fairly outdated) type of labour market in mind, and the significant changes in the labour market have since created a schism between the goals that the program sets out for people needing support, and the realities of the types of jobs available in the labour market.

For example, goods-producing sectors (such as manufacturing), represented about 35 per cent of total employment in 1976.³ According to the Ontario Ministry of Finance’s *Long-Term Report on the Economy* (2017), these manual, routine work jobs (generally deemed low-skill) paid good wages, and were often unionized jobs with benefits. These jobs often hired people without post-secondary education credentials, and employers often provided on-the-job training. By 1997, jobs in the goods-producing sector declined to about 25 per cent of Ontario’s total employment, and declined further to about 20 per cent by 2018.⁴ In contrast, there were significant increases in non-routine jobs, mostly in the services sector (whether high-skilled or not) (Ministry of Finance, 2017). In 1976, service sector jobs made up about 65 per cent of total employment in Ontario.⁵ This increased to just over 70 per cent in 1997, and increased further to just under 80 per cent in 2018.⁶

The shift in the industrial composition of Ontario’s labour market has had implications for the types of jobs available and the skills required to be employed. According to the Ontario Ministry of Finance (2017), while more “routine” jobs (largely in the goods-producing sector) made up about 60 per cent of the labour force in 1987, this proportion declined to about 47 per cent in 2016. At the same time, non-routine “cognitive” jobs that are often deemed “higher-skills,” increased from over 30 per cent in 1987 to over 40 per cent in

3 Internal calculations using data from Statistics Canada (2019).

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

2016. Non-routine “manual” jobs, as a share of total employment, remained relatively the same (10 per cent in 1987 and 11 per cent in 2016).

Over the past couple of decades, demand for non-routine jobs has been outweighing routine jobs, and these changes have led to a polarization of the skills needed and the jobs available in the labour market. Furthermore, skills polarization mirrors wage polarization, or wage inequities (Bank of Canada, 2017). Thus, higher skilled workers in non-routine cognitive jobs are generally better paid than others in the labour market. Moreover, while all types of jobs will experience the impacts of some levels of automation, employees in non-routine jobs (whether high-skilled or not) will not experience the same impacts that people in routine jobs are at risk of experiencing.

These industrial and occupational changes have led to serious concerns about the type of employment that is available in the province’s labour market. Advocates, academics, and policy thinkers have focused on the prevalence of non-standard and/or precarious employment. Given the difficulty in measuring precarious employment, the Government of Ontario uses “non-standard employment” to capture different types of employment, including temporary employment, involuntary part-time employment, self-employment without paid help, and employment in multiple, lower-wage jobs (Ministry of Finance, 2017).

Workers in non-standard employment are more likely to have low wages, low rates of unionization, little non-wage compensation benefits (e.g., health insurance), and other factors that make their work precarious. In Ontario, the rate of non-standard work increased from 23 per cent of total employment in 1997, to over 26 per cent in 2016 (Ministry of Finance, 2017).

Although these trends may be obvious, it is important to understand them within the context of social assistance reform. While policymakers and caseworkers are trying to get people who require support from social assistance “back to work,” it is challenging when almost a quarter of new jobs in Ontario are considered non-standard (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Although some people receiving social assistance may have the credentials and skill set to retain a non-routine job, many social assistance recipients do not. For example, in 2004, just under 70 per cent of the heads of households that receive Ontario Works had high school as their highest education credential (Federal-Provincial-Territorial Directors of Income Support, 2016), and this

figure remained largely unchanged in 2013 (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2019). As the labour market continues to evolve, routine, low-wage, low-security jobs will continue to be impacted by automation. This could lower the employment opportunities that social assistance recipients may, on the surface at least, seem most eligible for.

Ultimately, while the labour market has evolved, Ontario Works—its goals, structure, and delivery mechanisms—has largely remained the same. As some people receiving Ontario Works become distant from the labour market, the average length of time that someone receives support will only grow. Ontario Works must be reformed so that the focus is not on making the program so unbearable that it somehow “incentivizes” employment, but rather on understanding that prospective employment for many receiving Ontario Works is rife with low-paid and low-security jobs.

Housing costs

The cost of housing has increased dramatically in Ontario over the past decade, and the implications for people receiving social assistance have been dire.

Many people often assume that a majority of social assistance recipients live in publicly-funded social housing, or Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) housing.⁷ According to internal calculations, however, in March 2017, almost 90 per cent of Ontario Works renters lived in private market rental housing.⁸ As such, and contrary to popular belief, a majority of Ontario Works recipients are just as exposed as the rest of the Ontario population to market volatility in rental housing costs, and are likely to suffer the consequences more acutely.

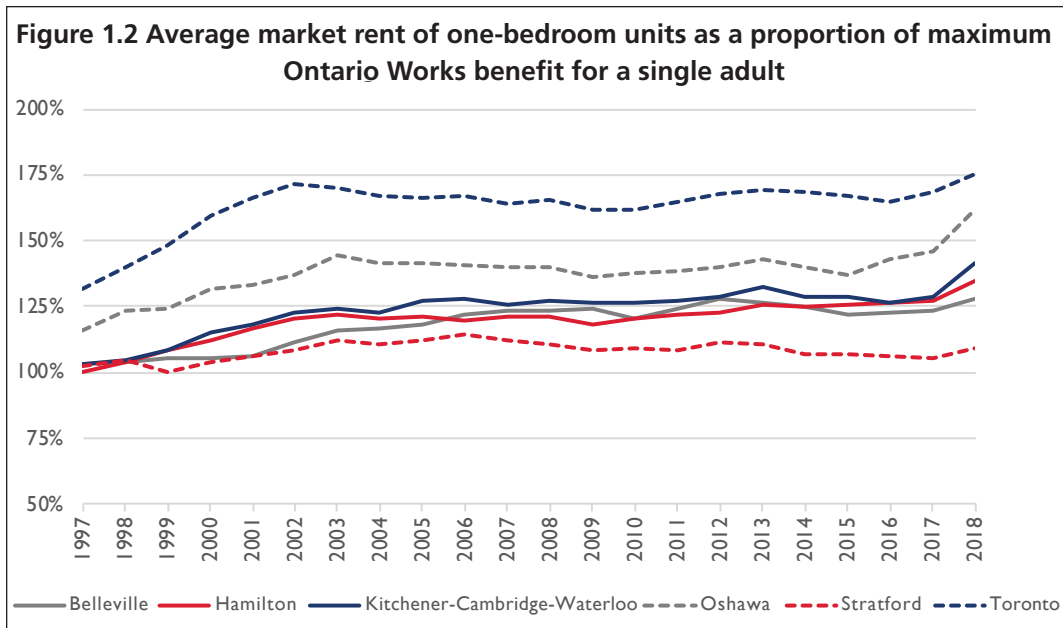
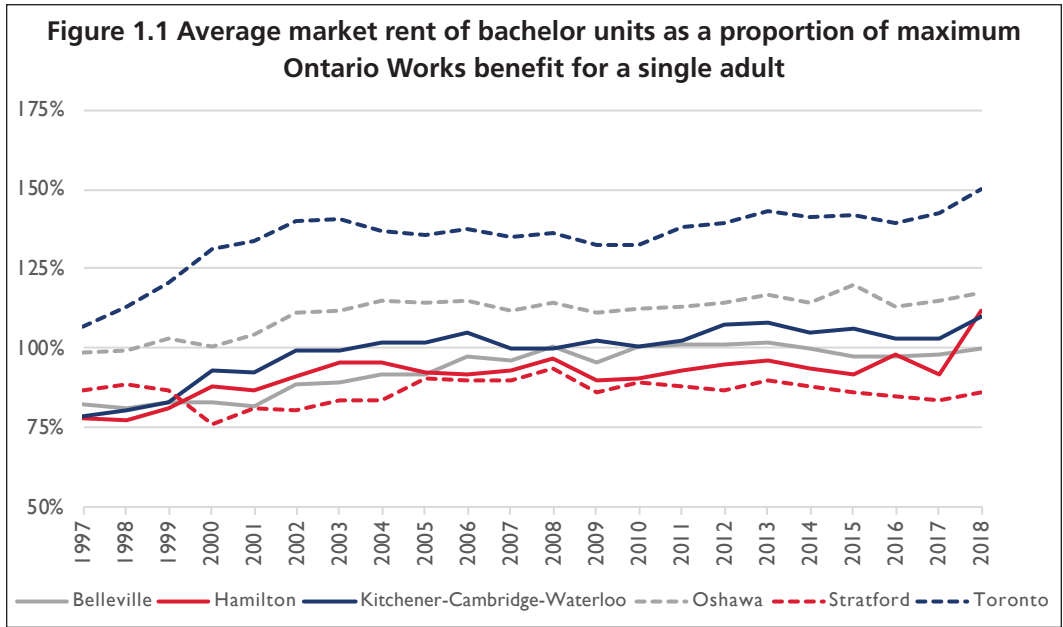
Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below show the average rent for bachelor and one-bedroom units in six Ontario municipalities, as a proportion of the maximum Ontario Works benefit for a single adult.⁹ Even in 1997, average market rent in these municipalities was at least 75 per cent of the maximum Ontario Works benefit

7 Rent-Geared-to-Income housing provides eligible individuals and families with financial assistance to help with the cost of rent (often referred to as social or subsidized housing).

8 Internal calculations using data from Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2019) and Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (2017).

9 Internal calculations using internal Maytree data on historical social assistance rates and Statistics Canada (2019).

a single adult could receive.¹⁰ By 2018, average rent for a bachelor unit in Stratford was more than 85 per cent of the maximum Ontario Works benefit.¹¹ In Toronto, the average rent for a bachelor unit was 150 per cent of the maximum Ontario Works benefit for a single adult.¹²



10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

The graphs above show that while the benefit amount received from Ontario Works makes it impossible to afford average market rental units today, Ontario Works rates (even if we take the maximum of both the Basic Needs and Shelter Allowance provided to social assistance recipients in 1997) were not sufficient even when Ontario Works was first established.

Undoubtedly, the challenges that are experienced by social assistance recipients in market rental housing have been compounded by the lack of below-market rental housing supply. According to the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario's *Value-for-Money Audit* in 2017, soon after Ontario Works was introduced, the Ontario government downloaded responsibility for RGI to municipalities in 2001. With the exception of providing a rent supplement to about 6,000 low-income individuals and families, the provincial government has largely removed itself from funding social housing at a time when the continued rise in market rental housing costs necessitated an increase in supply of social and/or affordable housing. In 2016, \$1.35 billion was spent on RGI in Ontario for 187,000 households—municipalities paid 70 per cent of this expense, and the federal government covered 29 per cent. Ontario provided the remaining one per cent. The province's social housing waitlist grew by almost 36 per cent from 2004 to 2016. In 2016, there were 185,000 eligible households (or about 480,000 people) on the social housing waitlist.

This stagnation in funding has prevented affordable housing supply growth. Along with 78,000 additional units for low-income households, approximately 250,000 social/affordable units were built before 1996 (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2017). From 1996 to 2016, 20,000 affordable units, 61,000 market rental units, and 1.3 million condominium units were built (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2017).

The lack of social housing supply has different impacts across the province. Although RGI is not intended to be solely used by social assistance recipients, it is likely the most affordable type of housing available for people receiving social assistance. In Appendix 1, the number of social assistance cases, relative to the number of RGI units available, in each “municipal area”—Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) and District Social Service Administration Board (DSAAB)—is shown.¹³ Although social assistance cases make up about

13 Internal calculations using data from Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2019) and the Government of Ontario (2011).

30 per cent of RGI tenancies,¹⁴ the overall social assistance caseload is more than three times the number of RGI units available. In Peterborough, the social assistance caseload is about six times as much as the number of RGI units.¹⁵ In Parry Sound, the social assistance caseload is almost eight times greater than the number of RGI units available.¹⁶

Appendices 1 and 2 demonstrate the extreme pressures that caseworkers in CMSMs and DSSABs experience in trying to find people below-market rent housing, and these pressures vary by municipality.¹⁷ The current social housing stock is not enough to meet likely demand from social assistance recipients, let alone the broader low-income population in Ontario.

As approximately 90 per cent of Ontario Works cases live in market-rental housing,¹⁸ with average market rents significantly exceeding Ontario Works benefit amounts for a single adult, it is clear that people need assistance to pay market rents. Although some municipalities do provide additional support for rent costs (if their budgets allow it), an underlying problem is the separation of Basic Needs and Shelter Allowance in the social assistance rate structure. The Basic Needs part of the social assistance rate provides individuals and families with a base amount for necessities (e.g., food). The Shelter Allowance is calculated based on actual housing expenses, up to a maximum. This separation assumes that many social assistance recipients do not have housing costs high enough to meet the Shelter Allowance maximum. However, most meet, or exceed, the shelter rate set by the government. As such, the rate structure is antiquated.

While funding challenges continue, there is support from the federal government on providing funding for about 131,100 social housing units under the National Housing Strategy (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation; Minister of Housing, 2018). In addition, other new important policy tools,

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Internal calculations using data from Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (2017), Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2019), and Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (2017).

18 Internal calculations using data from Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2019), Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (2017).

may reduce the waitlist by providing an income-tested benefit to help recipients afford market rental costs. One such example is the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit—which requires cost-sharing between the federal and provincial government and will be introduced in 2020 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation; Minister of Housing, 2018).

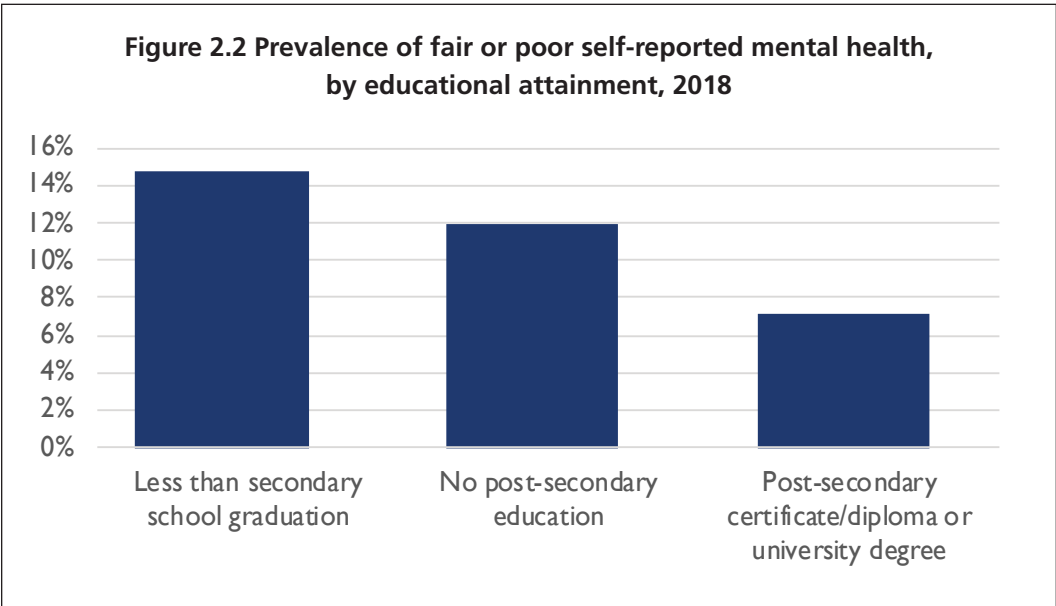
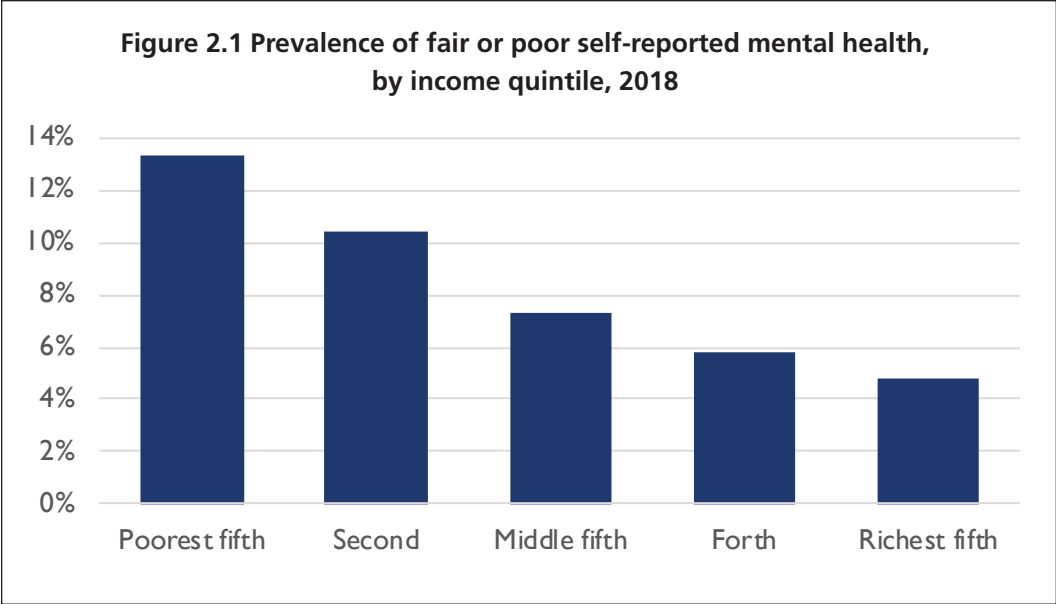
Taken together, the extremely low supply of social housing stock, the extremely high market rental rates, and an extremely challenging labour market, give many low-income people little choice but to seek income support.

Mental health and other illnesses

In 2016, approximately 90 per cent of service managers in CMSMs/DSSABs across Ontario identified mental health and addictions as the top two significant barriers to employment (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2018). They identified 100,000 Ontario Works recipients—or about 36 per cent of adults receiving support—as having significant barriers to employability, including mental health concerns (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2018). About 20 per cent of the Ontario Works caseload were exempt from undertaking employment or training measures to help increase their employment because of their illness (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2018). In the City of Toronto, 45 per cent of Ontario Works recipients report that someone in their family has a short-term or chronic health issue (Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis; Canadian Urban Institute, 2019).

Figures 2.1 and 2.2 below illustrate the rates of perceived fair or poor mental health, by income, and then by educational attainment, in Ontario. The charts show a strong gradient effect—as household income or educational attainment increases, the prevalence of perceived fair or poor mental health decreases.¹⁹

19 Internal calculations using data from Statistics Canada, 2019. Statistics Canada defines perceived health as follows: “Population aged 12 and over who reported perceiving their own health status as being either excellent or very good or fair or poor, depending on the indicator. Perceived health refers to the perception of a person’s health in general, either by the person himself or herself, or, in the case of proxy response, by the person responding. Health means not only the absence of disease or injury but also physical, mental and social well-being.”



For many, the poor health outcomes experienced by Ontario Works recipients would not come as a surprise. While public health research often points to the relationship between low incomes and poor health outcomes, what may be surprising is that recent research demonstrates that the health outcomes of social assistance recipients are worse than those of low-income people not receiving social assistance (Vahid Shahidi, Sod-Erdene, Ramraj, et al., 2019). Although there could be a number of reasons behind this (e.g., income support not high enough to improve outcomes, selection bias), this has significant implications for how we think about the supports that Ontario Works

recipients need. While the mandate of the program is focused on improving employment outcomes, one of the largest impediments to employment has little to do with direct skills or training development.

This, along with the other factors contributing to a persistent Ontario Works caseload, demonstrates why an insular focus on employment outcomes alone is not sufficient. To achieve better outcomes, an interactive employability definition is needed in Ontario Works—one that assesses and addresses an individual’s personal and environmental barriers to work (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Understanding the broader context can help provide the foundational knowledge needed to assess whether the government’s plan for social assistance reform will yield positive outcomes for those who receive support.

Overview of Ontario's reform proposal to date

Although the Ontario government announced its intention to reform the social assistance system in the summer of 2018, it has provided few details on changes to the income support side of social assistance. Moreover, many of the concrete policy decisions that the government had proposed on the income support side of the system have subsequently been cancelled.

The future of social assistance reform may not solely lie in changes to income support, but rather in the government's proposed changes to the service delivery side of the system. Such changes will have an impact on how the system is structured, how public dollars are spent, and how municipalities deliver income and wrap-around supports, and introduce non-profit and for-profit organizations into the management of employment and training services. Importantly, it is unclear whether these changes will address some of the contextual reasons that lead people to require support from social assistance. And although the proposed changes seem to be at an administrative, systems level, they will lead to downstream impacts on recipients.

Employment and training services transformation, and other changes in social assistance

The province has announced significant changes to the way in which employment and training services will be delivered in the province. The government is moving to integrate employment and training services provided to social assistance recipients into Employment Ontario (EO) (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2019). As of October 2019, employment and training programming provided through EO fall under the mandate of the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) (Government of Ontario, 2019). Currently, responsibility for EO is separate from the employment and training services provided to social assistance recipients. The integration of social assistance employment and training supports into EO would move policy responsibility for employment and training programming out of MCCSS—the ministry responsible for social assistance writ large—to MLTSD.

From a service-delivery perspective, employment services provided to social assistance recipients will be transferred from 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs)/District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) to 15 EO catchment areas across the province (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2019).

Each catchment area will be managed by a Service System Manager (SSM), and a competitive process for selecting the organizations—be they municipalities, or non-profit or for-profit entities—will be undertaken (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2019). This represents a significant shift from how these services are currently delivered, as the competitive process will introduce private entities into the mix of employment and training service managers.

To help provide support to those with barriers to employment that cannot be addressed through traditional employment and training programming, the government is also proposing the introduction of processes that promote “life stabilization” (e.g., through referrals to health services one may need). Life stabilization (or wrap-around supports as they are more commonly referred to) will help address barriers to employment that can be best addressed by other services. CMSMs/DSAABs will be responsible for life stabilization programming.

As part of a phased approach to transformation, the government is currently running a pilot to prototype the proposed changes in three communities across the province (Peel, Hamilton-Niagara, and Muskoka-Kawarthas) from 2020-2022 (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2019). The province is currently undertaking a competitive process for selecting the organizations that will become the SSMs in the three pilot communities. The government expects that the lessons from these pilots will inform transformation across all communities in Ontario.

Importantly, First Nations communities will not be part of the pilot phase. The government has indicated that it will work directly with First Nations communities on an overall plan for social assistance transformation.

The following provides a high-level overview of what the future state of employment and training services for people receiving social assistance would look like (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2019). It demonstrates the magnitude of the changes, if they proceed as conceptualized

after the pilot phase is over. See Appendix 3 for a more detailed overview of the proposed changes.

Current system
Employment Ontario is managed and delivered by MLTSD.
Employment and training services for Ontario Works recipients are delivered by 47 CMSMs/DSSABs. Recipients develop Participation Agreements.
CMSMs/DSSABs are responsible for the administration of Ontario Works, the delivery of income support, and connections with other support services.
Employment and training services for ODSP recipients are delivered by CMSMs/DSSABs.



Proposed system
Social assistance employment and training supports are integrated with Employment Ontario.
There will be 15 catchment areas across the province, and each catchment area will be managed by Service System Managers (SSMs).
CMSMs/DSSABs will continue to administer Ontario Works income support, and will likely be responsible for delivering life stabilization services to those that need it.
CMSMs/DSSABs will use a Common Assessment tool to understand the types of employment services and social supports an Ontario Works client needs.
This will allow for client segmentation, which would assess a social assistance recipient's risk for being unemployed over the long term.
Social assistance recipients will be streamed into different groups according to the types and intensity of different supports they need.
Those deemed to be at low risk of long-term unemployment would be in stream A, at medium risk would be in stream B, and high risk would be stream C.
For those assessed to be able to undertake some employment and training services, CMSMs/DSSABs will be required to refer social assistance recipients to their SSM. Each client will be required to work with their caseworkers to develop an Employment Action Plan.
Funding made available to SSMs for each client would depend on the assessed employability of the social assistance recipients. Higher funding amounts will be provided for those furthest from the labour market or specified "inclusion" groups (e.g., people with disabilities), in an effort to ensure that SSMs are incentivized to provide services to those that may have greater challenges in being employed.
SSMs will have multiple CMSMs/DSSABs to interact with to ensure service coordination between Ontario Works financial assistance, life stabilization supports, and employment and training services provided by SSMs.
SSMs will have to manage relationships with a network of service providers, who deliver the employment supports.
Funding for SSMs will be contingent not only on operational needs, but performance outcomes.

These reforms may appear to align with the government’s overall goal of increasing efficiencies and developing “a locally responsive employment services system that reduces red tape, restores accountability while helping people move into employment” (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2018). It is important that the government move forward with the integration of human and social services to help social assistance recipients better navigate the supports they need—at the same time, however, careful consideration of the proposed structural changes demonstrate that the Ontario government’s proposed plan for reform could create unintended consequences. While they may sound like opaque bureaucratic changes, these structural reforms could have significant impacts on municipalities that deliver Ontario Works and social assistance recipients themselves.

Jurisdictional review

Ontario is not the first jurisdiction to undertake such reforms. Under similar policy imperatives (i.e., increasing labour market participation among social assistance recipients, reducing government expenditures), service delivery transformation in employment and training services has been undertaken in Australia and the United Kingdom, with varying outcomes. Some of these changes have also focused on wrap-around supports, like in New York City and in pilot projects in Toronto.

The following provides an overview of the nature of some of these reforms, and will provide some lessons and considerations as the province thinks about how best to transform social assistance in Ontario.

Australia

In 1998, the Australian government moved to fully privatize employment and training services offered to unemployed people, which included those receiving income support (Parliament of Australia: The Senate, 2019). Although the Ontario government's competitive process does not preclude public entities (e.g., municipalities) from bidding on service contracts, unlike in Australia, the main features of the Australian system resemble the reforms the Ontario government is hoping to undertake.

Over the past 20 years, a number of reforms have been undertaken by governments of various stripes to try to get the Australian employment and training system to deliver better results. In its current form, as a condition of their income support, about 400,000 unemployed Australians are required to engage with Jobactive (Kurmelovs, 2019). Jobactive serves as the government's main employment services program at about AUD \$1.3 billion/year (Wright, 2019). While there are some exceptions, unemployed Australians receiving income support are required to participate in employment and training services.

The intensity and level of services depend on what "stream" an income support recipient falls in (like Ontario's proposal, stream A means that clients are close to the labour market, stream B means that clients are a little bit further from the labour market, and stream C means clients are the most distant from the labour market) (Parliament of Australia: The Senate, 2019). Furthermore,

like Ontario's proposal, Australia provides service providers with graduated funding, so that service providers (procured by the government) have an incentive to work with multi-barriered clients and help them find work. For clients who do not comply with the requirements set out in their Jobs Plan (an agreement between a case worker and the client on the steps the client will take to find a job), demerit points are levied. If enough demerit points are collected, then the client can risk losing some of their income support (Parliament of Australia: The Senate, 2019).

Critics contend that the Australian demerit point system is punitive, and does not address the barriers that prevent people from complying with their Jobs Plan. Although this is disconcerting, it is important to note that this does not seem to be the case in Ontario. While the Jobs Plan is similar to Ontario's proposal for an Employment Action Plan, it does not appear that failure to comply by the EAP would result in someone on Ontario Works losing their income support. Such a change would be counter to the underlying ethos of the proposed changes to promote the dignity of recipients.

In early 2019, the Australian Senate released a report based on its inquiry into the Jobactive program. To set the stage, the National Employment Services Association's submission to the Senate's inquiry said:

Australia's employment services caseload continues to feature a high proportion of job seekers with low educational attainment, low levels of literacy (digital and language)/numeracy and no post-secondary qualification. Economic and social observers alike predict the technological revolution will increase in momentum. As such, those already displaced, face greater barriers to securing work; with less skilled workers likely to experience the most significant displacement and risk of long-term unemployment as technology continues to change the nature of work.

Despite the Australian government's efforts, the Senate report concluded that the Jobactive program was not achieving the goals that the government has set out for it. For example, 40 per cent of clients in stream A had multiple barriers to work, and were long-term unemployed, despite the initial screening tool demonstrating otherwise (Parliament of Australia: The Senate, 2019). This prevented people from being able to receive the supports they needed,

and instead forced them to comply with the bureaucratic requirements set out by their employment services provider. The program was also not equipped to address the mental health challenges that job seekers faced, and was found to exacerbate illnesses for some job seekers.

While 50 per cent of Jobactive participants were employed three months after starting the program (Parliament of Australia: The Senate, 2019), many participants cycled on and off the program because the job placements were precarious, short-term work opportunities (Kumelovs, 2019). From a service provider perspective, the structure of funding and incentive mechanisms led to high caseloads among caseworkers (on average about 150 clients a caseworker) and high staff turnover (about 42 per cent) (Parliament of Australia: The Senate, 2019). Publicly, there has been a debate about transferring billions in public dollars to the private sector, with little long-term outcomes to show for it (Henriques-Gomes, 2019).

Although the Jobactive program was rife with problems, the Senate's first recommendation to the government was not to focus directly on service delivery, but rather to increase the very low income support rates available (Parliament of Australia: The Senate, 2019).²⁰ Although the Australian government is currently combining and/or suspending several different income support programs (which are currently targeted to different income groups) into a new Jobseeker Allowance (set to begin in March 2020), an increase in rates is not projected (Australian Government: Department of Human Services, 2019).

The issues that are being raised in Australia are important to note. Although the economic and social contexts for policy reform are similar, the Australian example demonstrates that this delegated system may not yield the results that the Ontario government is looking for. As such, it is incumbent on the provincial government to first really think about the structure it will be progressively creating, and whether it will yield the results it is looking for.

As Australia does not appear to have the equivalent of a life stabilization plan (as proposed by Ontario), it may be that Ontario's reforms, while structurally similar in many respects to Australia's, are closer in conception to the United Kingdom's.

²⁰ Notably, among OECD countries, Australia provides the second lowest amount in income support for unemployed people (Henriques-Gomes, 2019)

United Kingdom

Like Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) has been undertaking several reforms in its welfare-to-work programs since the late 1990s (Riley, Bewley, Kirby et al., 2011). Like Australia, the UK government has the main responsibility for designing and delivering income support and employment programs, but unlike Australia, there is a mixed system of employment and training service delivery, where public, private, and non-profit entities are part of the service delivery ecosystem.

In 2011, the UK government introduced the Work Programme, an effort to integrate various employment and training services into one large program (Department of Work and Pensions, 2012). Despite the massive undertaking to integrate employment programs and the considerable public investment in the program (approximately £416.4 million in 2015-16) (Powell, 2018), the Work Programme was not achieving its objectives (National Audit Office, 2014). Within the first 14 months of the program, 3.6 per cent of clients had moved off of income support and into employment—this was well below the 11.9 per cent target that the government had set out at the start of the program (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2013). As service providers—many of whom were private companies—were only provided a majority of their funding upon the successful placement of job seekers (and at three and six months after a client found a job), issues arose around “creaming” and “parking,” where service providers focused on those who had higher chances of finding employment (Carter & Whitworth, 2015). Within the first two years of the program, not one of the providers had met their contractual targets (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2013).

At the same time, the government sought to integrate a number of different income support programs into one benefit—Universal Credit—in an effort to help simplify the system, increase work incentives, and reduce administration costs (Aldridge, 2018). Although both the Work Programme and the Universal Credit were large undertakings and cost significantly more than the UK government expected, the government continued with Universal Credit while winding down the Work Programme in 2017. It replaced the latter with the Work and Health Programme (Powell, 2018).

According to a UK House of Commons' report (2018), the Work and Health Programme (WHP) is a smaller initiative than the Work Programme (about £130 million/year), but is focused on those with multiple barriers to employment and those who are long-term unemployed. The WHP was launched in Northwest England and Wales in November 2017, and then implemented across the rest of England in 2018. While five service providers across six regions in England and Wales are responsible for delivering the WHP, London and Greater Manchester, as large municipalities, have been given the responsibility of directly managing the WHP. Those receiving income support and unemployed for less than two years receive employment supports through Jobcentres, a public employment services network. Once an income support recipient is unemployed for more than two years, Jobcentres refers people to the WHP, which is delivered by a mix of public, private, and voluntary/non-profit organizations. These providers are paid for service delivery and also client outcomes (e.g., when a person starts work and reaches a specified level of earnings).

Early outcomes data demonstrates that of those enrolled, 78 per cent have a disability or health condition and 13 per cent are long-term unemployed (Department of Work and Pensions, 2019).

While the WHP is still in its early stages, the matching of service delivery agents with the type of support that clients need may help ensure that service providers—be they public, private, or non-profit entities—have the focused mandate and capacity to deliver services with greater success than seen in previous iterations of such programs. This is reflected in the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (2018) principles for administering the WHP, which include:

- Personalized Support—bids from potential service providers need to highlight their focus on providing personalized support to clients, and helping clients navigate integrated supports. The WHP will address the barriers to employment that clients face, and will provide clients with the range and types of support they need.
- Integration—local services are integrated, and case workers are both aware and integrated into the ecosystem of supports.

- Enhancing the ecosystem of work, health, and skills—continue to change how skills, employment and health services work together, and move towards a seamless and coordinated system; and
- Evaluation—learn from the successes and challenges of various service providers so that they can inform future policy and program development.

The cancellation of the Work Programme (which delegated responsibility for employment service delivery to external service providers only) within six years of starting the program (Powell, 2018), and the move towards a mixed-delivery/responsibility model targeting the type of service provider and intensity of supports based on the needs of the client, may be instructive for Ontario. The WHP’s sole mandate to provide supports to those who have multiple barriers or are long-term unemployed may better enable service providers to focus the types of services they provide (Powell, 2018). Meanwhile, Jobcentres (much like Ontario’s CMSMs/DSSABs) retain the responsibility for income support administration and for delivering employment supports to those who do not need intensive supports (Riley, Bewley, Kirby et al., 2011).

Wrap-around supports in New York City and Toronto

Although the Ontario government has outlined some of its expectations with respect to employment and training service delivery, much less has been articulated with respect to the government’s focus on providing “life stabilization” or wrap-around services programming for those who are further from the labour market. There are some examples from New York City and the City of Toronto that might help the government develop its policy and programming on life stabilization.

A privatized system of delivering employment and training support has existed in New York City for several decades. Although the combined impacts of welfare reforms from the previous decade and a strong economy helped to lower the number of people receiving income support (Smith Nightingale, et al., 2002), the city undertook a transformation of its welfare program in 2005 to better support those not readily available to work (Chan, 2006). As part of this transformation, the city introduced the WeCARE (Wellness, Comprehensive

Assessment, Rehabilitation, and Employment) program (Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, 2010).

WeCARE integrates health and employment services for social assistance recipients who face employment barriers related to physical health, medical health, and/or substance use (Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, 2010). Clients follow individualized service plans based on an assessment of their health and social needs. These plans focus on stabilizing health conditions (“wellness rehabilitation”), before moving on to “vocational rehabilitation” which tackles employment barriers (e.g., training, skills development, work placements) (Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, 2010).

According to a report by New York City’s Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network (2010), WeCARE has been running successfully since the mid-2000s and costs approximately US \$1,095 per person (but can cost up to US \$6,000 per person). The results of the program are slightly stronger than standard programs (by its fourth year, wellness rehabilitation plans had reached a 40 per cent completion rate, and 26 per cent of clients had achieved job placements).

In Toronto, the Toronto Employment and Social Service (TESS) has implemented a number of intensive case management (ICM) pilots to provide the services needed to better support those who are distant from the labour market. According to a City of Toronto profile of its Ontario Works caseload (2017), TESS recognizes that ICM is part of a “continuum of service planning approaches,” and for those who require it, intensive supports will often need to be tailored to unique circumstances (e.g., focus on mental health supports).

Although TESS recognizes that ICM has not been emphasized in social assistance programming, given the focus on getting people the employment and training supports that they need, TESS has developed five pilots that offer a specific sub-set of Ontario Works recipients intense and customized support packages. An action plan is developed for each participant, with additional training, educational upgrading, employment, or counselling and mental health supports on top of the standard support offered to Ontario Works recipients. These services are provided in partnership by divisions across the city, community-based agencies, and service providers. Over 100 people are involved in these pilots, and early results demonstrate significant improvements in several areas, including in mental health outcomes and stress levels.

Considerations and the work ahead

There are many lessons to consider from other jurisdictions that have undertaken similar employment and training service delivery reforms. The government's plan to focus on "life stabilization" programming for those who are distant from the labour market is welcome. However, the information available about the government's plans for service delivery reform in Ontario Works does not clearly demonstrate how the changes respond to the contextual factors impacting the caseload, or what implications they might have for municipalities and recipients.

There are a number of questions and policy ideas for social assistance reform that need to be further developed and communicated. The following section provides some considerations that could inform the work ahead.

Clarify what is meant by "life stabilization" or "wrap-around supports" programming, and how it will be delivered

The government's proposals to introduce a "life stabilization" or wrap-around support model in social assistance to help people with multiple barriers to the labour market are important, and the most compelling part of the government's plans for reform to date. However, it is unclear how the government will operationalize wrap-around supports. While this term is being increasingly used within the context of health care transformation in Ontario (e.g., through the development of Ontario Health Teams), there is an opportunity to solidify what this means in social policy.

The development of an evidence-based Common Assessment tool is critical for success

The use of the Common Assessment tool during the intake process for Ontario Works recipients (and others who access employment services directly from SSMs) will stream and triage the needs of clients. However, testing and validating a reliable Common Assessment tool is required, so that social assistance recipients can receive the types of support they need. In Australia, the improper streaming of income support recipients has contributed to some of the challenges its system is experiencing.

While the development of a rigorous tool may require time, it will help ensure that the intensity of support provided to people is reflective of their needs. That means those who are most distant from the labour market and facing multiple barriers to employment will not be required to participate in employment and training programming until those barriers are addressed. Others who are deemed able to engage in both employment and skills training programming, along with life stabilization programming, will be required to do so. Those deemed close to the labour market may only require support from an SSM for employment and training services, and may not need wrap-around supports from their local CMSMs/DSSABs.

Wrap-around supports will require alignment of human services policy goals and the integration of program administration

Currently, funding and administration for housing, child care fee subsidies, and mental health supports, for example, are siloed—each of these supports has its own sets of eligibility rules and administration, with the goals of these programs often conflicting with each other. As these silos create challenges for people trying to navigate the system, efforts to integrate back-office administration of programming within the responsibility of municipalities need to continue across the province.

However, one of the first steps towards effective wrap-around supports delivery is the cultivation of a policy environment that facilitates integration. To effectively move towards human services integration, clarity on the goals and principles for the system needs to be established. This will help align the purpose of different types of support, so that they are complementary and not contradictory.

This will require government to re-frame how it develops policies and implement programs for people. Alignment of purpose and goals can drive legislative and funding administration changes needed (e.g., flexible funding envelopes) to better integrate the delivery of services on the ground. Such transformation, however, requires a new way of thinking about policy—from how policy ideas are conceptualized, to ensuring that all ministries/divisions are part of the “central agency” or “council” approval process and held accountable.

Undoubtedly, this marks a significant departure from how human services are administered and funded at the moment. From the legislation that guides

program development, to divided fiscal responsibility for related social services, we have created silos that may work for bureaucracy and government, but often amplify the challenges people face in navigating complex care systems. To harmonize the way in which we conceptualize, fund, administer, and govern human/social services, we need political leadership—across different levels of government and sectors—to articulate a spirit of collaboration, and empower decision-makers to take responsibility for success/failures in policy areas that may not be in their direct line of responsibility.

Life stabilization programming will require collaboration across sectors and levels of government

The introduction of life stabilization programming will not mean that CMSMs/DSSABs will be responsible for providing all of the supports an individual may need. While municipalities will continue to provide social assistance, housing, and child care services fee subsidies, they will have to work with other orders of government and sectors to develop a true wrap-around model for those who need the most support.

For example, we know—anecdotally and empirically—about the close connection between community/social services and health care. Administratively, however, these services are often treated separately, and the resulting silos deepen poor health outcomes. As the health care, public health, and social assistance systems undergo transformation, there is little discussion on how transformation in each sector can be complementary.

With the creation of Ontario Health Teams (OHTs), there is an opportunity to better integrate the health care and social services sectors. If CMSMs/DSSABs are recognized as service partners in OHTs across the province, health care professionals can note that a patient's health concerns can be mitigated by the provision of a social service (e.g., social assistance), and also help the patient more seamlessly navigate the two systems. Without mindfully addressing this, there is a risk that transformation in silos will only exacerbate the silos that already exist.

Life stabilization programming will require “person-centred” policy and the active involvement and collaboration of caseworkers

From a system-level perspective, it’s important to acknowledge that the integration of services is an important ingredient for effective life stabilization programming—whether within or outside of social assistance—but integration alone does not necessitate the creation of the types of wrap-around support programming needed to stabilize people’s lives.

Once a comprehensive assessment of the needs of recipients is conducted (whether they are Ontario Works recipients or not), caseworkers can advise on the range of services that clients could benefit from, how those supports can be accessed, and, if applicable, what the associated wait times are.

However, simply telling clients what supports are available is not enough. For example, if someone applies for support from Ontario Works, they should not only be made aware of child care support (for example) that they could be eligible for at their first meeting. An effective life stabilization approach would ensure that caseworkers take enough time at intake to understand and document a client’s circumstances, but also encourage clients to explain the type of child care they need/prefer, and create a system of information-sharing that enables a caseworker to advise about the options available to the family. Whether caseworkers are helping their clients develop their Employment Action Plans or life stabilization programming, it is critical that plans are developed in conjunction with clients to be effective. This will help ensure that there is buy-in from the client, and ensure that the dignity and preferences of the individual are at the centre of service provision.

In the future, a province-wide system of ensuring that there is a “warm hand-off” between service providers (within municipalities or not), so that clients do not have to navigate the system on their own, would better support recipients. This will help ensure that there truly is “no wrong door” to seeking support. Centralizing information about services and/or service provider specialties and wait times could help caseworkers to make more evidence-informed decisions about the types of services people are connected to and to better forecast the length of time someone may need support from their CMSM/DSSAB caseworker. Centralized databases of physician specialties and wait times are

being used successfully to lower wait times in some areas of Ontario's health care system, and a similar process could be used in social services.

Importantly, wrap-around supports cannot be delivered simply by creating a program on paper or by creating a policy framework that outlines the theory of change. The Ontario government will need to think closely about the cultural shifts (e.g., supporting, not policing, clients) amongst caseworkers and program management to make wrap-around supports successful. A report by KPMG and Mowat Centre (2013) pointed to culture, within management and amongst staff, as one of the key predictors of success for human-services integration and wrap-around support delivery.

Work with CMSMs/DSSABs to identify performance measures

As the government clarifies plans to integrate support services and help caseworkers navigate supports, it will also need to think about what outcomes are being measured within CMSMs/DSSABs. Outcome metrics will need to extend beyond the rate at which Ontario Works recipients find employment. For some social assistance recipients, outcomes may not at first mean the time it took for someone to find a job.

If the government is truly seeking to realize “better outcomes” amongst Ontario Works recipients, it will need a holistic approach to measuring outcomes. Furthermore, precise metrics that will measure progress against a variety of life stabilization goals is required. These measures could include improvements in self-reported health outcomes, for example. Performance measures beyond traditional “employability” concepts would better capture the circumstances of an individual, and emphasize that a wrap-around supports model would centre the dignity of the person in service delivery. Undoubtedly, this would mark a significant change in how we understand the effectiveness of social assistance. Further clarity on how such performance measures will feed into the funding that municipalities receive is also required.

While identifying appropriate outcome measures and finding the correct data collection tools are challenging in themselves, sincere efforts will also need to be made in sharing the data that is collected. The seamless sharing of a client's circumstances and progress cannot solely be a function of updates made through the Common Assessment tool or the Employment Action Plan.

Instead, the government will also need to find a way of integrating data sets (guided by a robust data strategy), develop common methods of data entry and measurement, and ideally provide this information publicly (on a de-identified basis) so that civil society, industry, and the broader public sector can use this information for their own business planning and support of evidence-based policy proposals.

Work with municipalities to clarify how CMSMs/DSSABs will be funded in the future

While SSMs will be funded based on the number and outcomes of clients on a graduated basis (therefore, the most funding would go toward successfully placing people who are at greatest risk of long-term unemployment), it's unclear how CMSMs/DSSABs will be funded for providing life stabilization supports. The Ontario government will need to work with municipalities across the province to determine how best to fund the work of CMSMs/DSSABs, especially since some of the core work of municipalities (i.e., employment and training service delivery) is shifting to SSMs.

In principle, administrative funding provided to CMSMs/DSSABs should be provided to also reflect the time and energy that CMSM/DSSAB caseworkers may increasingly spend with Ontario Works recipients, especially those who require intensive case management, to provide them with the life stabilization supports they need. In addition, the success of caseworkers finding the types of supports people need will depend on what types of supports are locally available. Flexible funding models (e.g., akin to alternative levels of care models used in health care) would take into account the time and intensity of supports provided and help ensure that caseworkers are not driven simply by short-term performance measures, but invested in providing the type of care people need.

Clarify how the changes will reduce administrative burdens and unnecessary bureaucracy

Although the integration of Employment Ontario and social assistance employment and training services may sound like a good idea, the creation of SSMs creates a layer of bureaucracy that does not currently exist. SSMs will be responsible for administering much of Ontario's employment and training services in the future, but will have to work with multiple CMSMs/

DSSABs (to get social assistance recipients as clients) and service providers. In effect, the government is creating a structure akin to Ontario's Local Health Integration Networks, which it has dissolved for being an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. While the government is moving towards the greater centralization of health care management, and moving towards creating localized delivery through new OHTs, it is decentralizing employment and training service provision. Furthermore, from a service provider perspective, the myriad of regional boundaries (e.g., CMSMs/DSSABs, SSMs, OHTs) may make it more challenging for clients and/or service providers trying to navigate the health/social systems.

While there are differing perspectives on whether centralized or decentralized health care management works best, it is unclear that creating an additional layer of bureaucracy and regional boundaries while decentralizing employment and training supports serves the best interests of low-income people. It is incumbent upon the government to clearly make this case, and demonstrate why potentially shifting administrative responsibility from municipalities to non-profit and for-profit entities is beneficial from both a social and fiscal policy perspective — and not just in the short term, but also in the long term.

Clarify who will evaluate the three pilot sites and what will be evaluated

The government expects that the three pilots in Peel, Hamilton-Niagara, and Muskoka-Kawarths will inform transformation across the province. However, the government has provided little clarity on how these pilots are going to be evaluated, and by whom.

If one of the main purposes of reform is to support people who are distant from the labour market, it is unclear that the duration of the pilot will allow evaluators, the government, or the public to understand what the long-term impacts of such reforms could be. If one of the main drivers of reform is to decrease public expenditure, the government has not identified how the reforms will help it reach its spending reduction targets (which are about \$1 billion in social assistance alone from 2018-19 to 2021-22). Furthermore, although the government's call for proposals for the pilots makes it clear that SSMs will have to provide supports to all types of clients (irrespective of how challenging their employment prospects may be), an evaluation of how best to avoid “creaming”

and “parking” is needed (so that SSMs don’t only provide service to those closest to the labour market).

Based on experience from other jurisdictions that have undertaken similar reforms, positive outcomes take a long time to be realized, if at all. It is also unclear whether the cost for such changes results in the savings targets governments identify.

To ensure that the government and the public learn from these pilots, and to maintain the integrity of the findings, it is important that an impartial third party entity be tasked with developing the evaluation of the pilots. If the evaluation results do not demonstrate positive results, the government should not proceed with reform for the sake of proceeding with reform. Experience from the UK, for example, demonstrates that the government had to change course after six years of a similar program.

Clarify the human resources/staffing implications of the proposed changes

The Ontario government will need to think about the human resources implications of the proposed changes. The creation of SSMs and the shifting of responsibility for Ontario Works employment and training service management from CMSMs/DSSABs to SSMs will change the nature of the work that CMSM/DSSAB caseworkers undertake. While many caseworkers get into their field of work with the hope of better supporting—and not policing—low-income people, effective change management strategies that clearly outline the new responsibilities of caseworkers will be required.

The introduction of a competitive process for the selection of SSMs will introduce private, for-profit, and non-profit entities into the mix of employment and training service management. While CMSMs/DSSABs may win an RFP bid to be a SSM, the introduction of for-profit and private entities will mean that there will be different types of employers, some unionized and some not, for the same work. This could create conditions where employees of SSMs have similar work requirements, but under very different work conditions. This is a significant change that the government will have to manage. If the model was proven to improve outcomes, there might be a case for such a change. However, on balance, the risks associated with the human resources

implications seem to be greater than the outcomes that are likely to be realized under the proposed structure.

Clarify fiscal and governance implications

It's not clear whether the proposed changes will yield the cost-savings the government is looking for. If one of the goals is to better support caseworkers (by decreasing their caseload) and enabling them to provide life stabilization supports, the government may be better served by funding CMSMs/DSSABs to hire more caseworkers, and introducing stronger performance and accountability measures at the same time.

In Toronto, for example, employment and training service delivery for Ontario Works recipients makes up 6 per cent of Toronto Employment and Social Services' (TESS) operational budget (Toronto Employment and Social Services, 2019). Although Toronto may win an RFP to deliver employment and training services in Toronto, the risk to TESS of not winning a future RFP is not insignificant in terms of funding implications. Along with the other costs that municipalities are increasingly responsible for (e.g., greater share of public health costs), the impacts on municipal bottom lines may be substantial.

On a policy development and provincial governance side, further clarity is needed on how multiple ministries (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, and the Ministry of Health) will manage the funding, legislation, and policy direction of the reform. One of the more promising parts of the reform is that the changes necessitate the active involvement of multiple ministries and orders of government. However, to be successful, the accountability and governance model, at the provincial level, must be clearly delineated.

Regionally, effective integration of human services and effective wrap-around supports programming will require strengthened and/or new governance structures that can help support the development and delivery of the transformation. These governance structures could act as an important feedback mechanism to various levels of government for addressing program and policy silos.

Clarify the potential impact on non-profit organizations over the long term

During the pilot phase of the employment and training services transformation, SSMs will not be allowed to change front-line service providers, many of whom are non-profit organizations. At maturity, however, the government envisions SSMs across all catchment areas undertaking their own competitive process for hiring service providers. While the intent behind this might be to improve the performance outcomes of service providers, there is a significant risk that such a process will crowd out smaller organizations from the system. It is unclear whether this change will actually produce the types of improvements the government is looking for. But in the process, this could put the jobs of many across the non-profit sector at risk, many of whom have direct and local expertise in the communities that they serve.

Reassure people that this transformation is not meant to reduce the amount of income support provided through social assistance and that people with lived experience of poverty will be meaningfully consulted

To assuage concerns that Ontario is introducing a system like Australia's, where non-compliance with an employment plan impacts the amount of income support received, the government should clearly state that we are not moving towards such a system.

Advocates and people with lived experience of poverty often focus on the income support challenges that they face because the level of income support is low, but this does not mean that there is no interest in how programs are delivered. Current and past social assistance recipients have a huge stake in the success of the system and can offer government direct knowledge of what is and what is not working.

It is important that the Ontario government consult with those who will be impacted by such changes. If the primary objectives of the proposed changes are to improve the outcomes for social assistance recipients, the government will need to meaningfully engage everyone who will be impacted by these reforms—recipients and caseworkers alike. Without consultation, the government will be setting itself up for failure.

Harmonize internal social assistance policies and directives to help improve outcomes for recipients

Although the Ontario government has been clear that its goals for social assistance reform are primarily to help social assistance recipients get back into the workforce, the proposed service delivery changes will not be enough. There are a number of changes within social assistance that the government can implement to help better support recipients.

Harmonize adult health benefits between Ontario Works and ODSP, and move towards creating a low-income health benefit

To address the impacts of non-standard employment in the labour market, and to address inconsistencies between Ontario Works and ODSP, the government should harmonize dental benefits between Ontario Works and ODSP (i.e., make dental benefits a mandatory and not discretionary benefit for adults on Ontario Works) (Burry, Cohen, & Quinonez, 2019). This will better support Ontario Works recipients, and could increase their likelihood of exiting social assistance (Singhal, 2015).

To help prevent low-income people from seeking support from Ontario Works in the first place, the government could also introduce a working-age, low-income health benefit. By providing some of the workplace benefits that are less common in non-standard or precarious work, such a benefit would respond directly to the changes in the labour market.

There are of course costs and considerations associated with the above recommendations. The introduction of a low-income health benefit would require discussions about what services are covered (e.g., routine dental services like cleanings, or intensive services like dental crowns and bridges), the costs of such services, and ensuring that billing rates are high enough that dentists actually take low-income patients.

On balance, the potential costs associated with harmonizing adult health benefits between Ontario Works and ODSP, or the creation of a low-income health benefit, may seem counter to the government's overall fiscal policy goals. But this would be a myopic perspective on the issue. By making important supports available to the broader low-income population, there is the potential of decreasing the number of people reliant on social assistance. There are some

made-in-Ontario examples of this, such as the Ontario Child Benefit. When the Ontario government introduced the Ontario Child Benefit, it moved most of the child benefits available through social assistance outside of the system, provided the benefit to the broader low-income population, and reduced the number of families with children seeking support from social assistance.

Harmonize the social assistance rate structure and move to a standard rate, and keep the current definition of disability for ODSP

As discussed earlier, the maximum income support available through Ontario Works is woefully inadequate, especially for the majority of recipients who are living in market-rental housing. In addition to considering how best to increase rates, harmonizing the rate structure (so that Basic Needs and Shelter Allowance are integrated) would at the very least increase income support for those who are amongst the most vulnerable—people who are homeless. While this would increase costs in social assistance, it could reduce costs in housing and enable CMSMs/DSSABs to invest savings in other housing programs.

As the government explores possible changes to the definition of disability used in ODSP, it is important to note that its actions could be counterintuitive. In trying to change the definition so that only those with “severe and prolonged disabilities” receive ODSP, the government will simply be moving people with higher living costs and disability-related employment barriers on to Ontario Works—a program that pays lower rates and is not designed for those disability-specific barriers. This will only increase the Ontario Works caseload, and will not support positive outcomes for recipients.

Conclusion

While the inadequacies of income support available through social assistance often end up being the focus of debate, it is also important to look at the effectiveness of the service delivery side of social assistance.

At the beginning of this paper, the government's goals for social assistance reform were outlined, along with the contextual factors that require low-income people to access social assistance in the first place, in advance of a discussion of the employment and training support changes the government is implementing. This was intended to facilitate a discussion of the complex ways in which the government is changing the system, and whether those changes respond to the problems at hand.

While the government is currently working to establish three pilot sites to test its proposed employment and training services model, it is not clear that these changes will lead to the types of outcomes the province is looking for. Theoretically, the introduction of an RFP model may seem to be the best way—in terms of administrative and cost efficiencies of delivering employment and training services. However, this does not appear to be the case in jurisdictions that have implemented similar reforms. In addition, there are a number of fiscal, human resources, policy, and administrative considerations that the government will need to take into account. Hopefully, the government uses the lessons from the three pilot sites to inform its broader transformation agenda.

It may be that on balance, when all of the trade-offs are taken into account, the proposed path is the best way of generating better outcomes amongst recipients. However, until better outcomes are precisely defined, funding mechanisms developed to facilitate a more integrated system, and policy goals and purposes outlined that put people at the centre of reform, a strong case has not yet been made for the government's proposed reforms.

Appendix 1: Social assistance caseload, relative to number of RGI units by municipality (estimate)²¹

Social Assistance Caseload Relative to Number of Available RGI Units - By CSM and DSSAB					
	March 2017 Ontario Works Caseload	March 2017 ODSP Caseload	March 2017 Total Caseload	Minimum Number of Housing Subsidies	Caseload/ Minimum Number of Housing Subsidies
City of Brantford	2,041	5,307	7,348	1,645	4.47
City of Cornwall	2,095	4,869	6,964	1,843	3.78
City of Greater Sudbury	3,484	6,345	9,829	3,603	2.73
City of Hamilton	12,642	19,835	32,477	9,257	3.51
City of Kawartha Lakes	1,570	2,817	4,387	871	5.04
City of Kingston	2,670	6,986	9,656	2,003	4.82
City of London	12,320	14,101	26,421	5,939	4.45
City of Ottawa	19,838	23,758	43,596	16,502	2.64
City of Peterborough	3,682	5,201	8,883	1,569	5.66
City of St. Thomas	1,486	2,592	4,078	946	4.31
City of Stratford	662	1,621	2,283	993	2.30
City of Toronto	75,587	77,513	153,100	73,346	2.09
City of Windsor	8,284	12,723	21,007	5,726	3.67

21 This table uses data from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2019) and Government of Ontario (2011).

Counties (U/C) of Leeds & Grenville	1,668	3,572	5,240	987	5.31
Counties (U/C) of Prescott & Russell	1,023	2,716	3,739	682	5.48
County of Bruce	566	1,575	2,141	601	3.56
County of Dufferin	511	986	1,497	456	3.28
County of Grey	1,354	3,110	4,464	1,210	3.69
County of Hastings	2,615	7,768	10,383	1,980	5.24
County of Huron	447	1,751	2,198	529	4.16
County of Lambton	2,972	3,525	6,497	1,075	6.04
County of Lanark	1,084	2,390	3,474	771	4.51
County of Norfolk	1,305	2,836	4,141	656	6.31
County of Northumberland	785	2,485	3,270	677	4.83
County of Oxford	1,295	2,622	3,917	1,020	3.84
County of Renfrew	1,332	3,378	4,710	1,275	3.69
County of Simcoe	5,743	12,735	18,478	2,801	6.60
County of Wellington	2,083	4,308	6,391	2,342	2.73
District of Algoma	715	1,515	2,230	464	4.81
District of Cochrane	1,431	3,091	4,522	1,959	2.31
District of Kenora	626	1,184	1,810	867	2.09
District of Manitoulin-Sudbury	521	968	1,489	323	4.61
District of Muskoka	915	1,708	2,623	476	5.51

District of Nipissing	2,365	4,230	6,595	1,522	4.33
District of Parry Sound	774	1,456	2,230	278	8.02
District of Rainy River	214	491	705	438	1.61
District of Sault Ste. Marie	2,168	4,022	6,190	1,869	3.31
District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board	2,951	5,880	8,831	3,601	2.45
District of Timiskaming	676	1,456	2,132	589	3.62
Municipality of Chatham-Kent	2,688	4,298	6,986	1,365	5.12
Prince Edward-Lennox and Addington Social Services	851	2,449	3,300	497	6.64
Regional Municipality of Durham	8,561	13,192	21,753	4,446	4.89
Regional Municipality of Halton	2,013	5,719	7,732	2,953	2.62
Regional Municipality of Niagara	10,110	15,869	25,979	5,471	4.75
Regional Municipality of Peel	18,682	19,140	37,822	8,424	4.49
Regional Municipality of Waterloo	9,055	11,858	20,913	5,882	3.56
Regional Municipality of York	5,778	12,287	18,065	3,988	4.53
TOTAL (excluding First Nations and Specialty Offices)	242,238	350,238	592,476	186,717	3.17

Appendix 2: Social assistance beneficiaries, as a proportion of total population, by municipality (estimate)²²

	2017 Population	March 2017 Ontario Works Beneficiaries	March 2017 ODSP Beneficiaries	Ontario Works Recipients as a Proportion of Population	ODSP Recipients as a Proportion of Population	Total Social Assistance Population	Social Assistance Beneficiaries as a Proportion of Population
City of Brantford	111,383	3,602	7,613	3.23%	6.83%	11,215	10.07%
City of Cornwall	110,778	3,974	7,419	3.59%	6.70%	11,393	10.28%
City of Greater Sudbury	160,274	5,604	8,347	3.50%	5.21%	13,951	8.70%
City of Hamilton	519,949	23,657	28,478	4.55%	5.48%	52,135	10.03%
City of Kawartha Lakes	89,295	2,534	3,795	2.84%	4.25%	6,329	7.09%
City of Kingston	149,999	4,225	9,499	2.82%	6.33%	13,724	9.15%

²² This table uses data from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2019) and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (2019).

City of London	443,097	22,240	19,374	5.02%	4.37%	41,614	9.39%
City of Ottawa	870,254	36,617	32,118	4.21%	3.69%	68,735	7.90%
City of Peterborough	132,960	6,034	7,157	4.54%	5.38%	13,191	9.92%
City of St. Thomas	87,843	2,637	3,598	3.00%	4.10%	6,235	7.10%
City of Stratford	76,039	1,106	2,086	1.45%	2.74%	3,192	4.20%
City of Toronto	2,773,000	135,373	106,269	4.88%	3.83%	241,642	8.71%
City of Windsor	365,263	16,261	18,300	4.45%	5.01%	34,561	9.46%
Counties (U/C) of Leeds & Grenville	98,099	2,888	4,956	2.94%	5.05%	7,844	8.00%
Counties (U/C) of Prescott & Russell	83,450	1,858	3,717	2.23%	4.45%	5,575	6.68%
County of Bruce	63,316	1,003	2,185	1.58%	3.45%	3,188	5.04%
County of Dufferin	57,854	913	1,268	1.58%	2.19%	2,181	3.77%
County of Grey	91,809	2,301	4,177	2.51%	4.55%	6,478	7.06%

County of Hastings	128,966	4,492	11,610	3.48%	9.00%	16,102	12.49%
County of Huron	57,840	803	2,464	1.39%	4.26%	3,267	5.65%
County of Lambton	124,961	4,904	4,737	3.92%	3.79%	9,641	7.72%
County of Lanark	67,181	1,893	3,344	2.82%	4.98%	5,237	7.80%
County of Norfolk	106,876	2,184	3,779	2.04%	3.54%	5,963	5.58%
County of Northumberland	80,698	1,287	3,444	1.59%	4.27%	4,731	5.86%
County of Oxford	105,780	2,163	3,505	2.04%	3.31%	5,668	5.36%
County of Renfrew	98,005	2,328	4,563	2.38%	4.66%	6,891	7.03%
County of Simcoe	455,898	9,543	17,044	2.09%	3.74%	26,587	5.83%
County of Wellington	211,732	3,564	5,577	1.68%	2.63%	9,141	4.32%
District of Algoma	31,523	1,202	2,197	3.81%	6.97%	3,399	10.78%
District of Cochrane	76,605	2,662	4,230	3.47%	5.52%	6,892	9.00%

District of Kenora	37,928	1,283	1,529	3.38%	4.03%	2,812	7.41%
District of Manitoulin-Sudbury	25,166	877	1,341	3.48%	5.33%	2,218	8.81%
District of Muskoka	57,167	1,482	2,336	2.59%	4.09%	3,818	6.68%
District of Nipissing	83,822	3,818	5,792	4.55%	6.91%	9,610	11.46%
District of Parry Sound	33,104	1,314	2,021	3.97%	6.11%	3,335	10.07%
District of Rainy River	16,456	399	656	2.42%	3.99%	1,055	6.41%
District of Sault Ste. Marie	76,171	3,498	5,629	4.59%	7.39%	9,127	11.98%
District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board	137,164	5,328	7,856	3.88%	5.73%	13,184	9.61%
District of Timiskaming	31,318	1,131	1,967	3.61%	6.28%	3,098	9.89%
Municipality of Chatham-Kent	102,910	4,917	6,117	4.78%	5.94%	11,034	10.72%

Prince Edward-Lennox and Addington Social Services	63,743	1,431	3,553	2.24%	5.57%	4,984	7.82%
Regional Municipality of Durham	631,994	14,566	17,817	2.30%	2.82%	32,383	5.12%
Regional Municipality of Halton	514,345	3,698	7,143	0.72%	1.39%	10,841	2.11%
Regional Municipality of Niagara	432,790	16,658	21,769	3.85%	5.03%	38,427	8.88%
Regional Municipality of Peel	1,349,371	35,649	26,750	2.64%	1.98%	62,399	4.62%
Regional Municipality of Waterloo	566,382	16,720	16,179	2.95%	2.86%	32,899	5.81%
Regional Municipality of York	1,116,485	10,065	16,291	0.90%	1.46%	26,356	2.36%

Appendix 3: Proposed “End-State” Program Structure

In the future state, employment services provided to social assistance recipients will be transferred from 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs)/District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) to 15 Employment Ontario catchment areas across the province.

Service Targeting

- CMSMs/DSSABs will continue to be responsible for the administration of income support for Ontario Works recipients, and will use a Common Assessment tool to understand the types of employment services and social supports an Ontario Works client needs.
 - This will allow for client segmentation, which would assess a social assistance recipient’s risk for being unemployed over the long term.
 - Social assistance recipients will be streamed into different groups according to the types and intensity of the supports they need.
 - Those deemed to be at low risk of long-term unemployment would be in stream A, those at medium risk would be in stream B, and those at high risk would be in stream C.
- For those assessed to be able to undertake some employment and training services, CMSMs/DSSABs will be required to refer social assistance recipients to their Service System Managers. Funding made available to SSMs for each client would depend on the assessed employability of the social assistance recipients. Higher funding amounts will be provided for those furthest from the labour market or belonging to specified “inclusion” groups (e.g., people with disabilities), in an effort to ensure that SSMs are incentivized to provide services to those who may have greater challenges in being employed.

- The Common Assessment tool will also be used by SSMs for clients who need broader Employment Ontario supports, but don't receive social assistance.
- Integrated Case Management would enable SSMs and CMSMs/DSSABs to share information about clients, monitor and measure their outcomes, and also track the performance of the system overall. The intensity and duration of Integrated Case Management will depend on the needs of clients.
- SSMs will develop Employment Action Plans (EAPs) for social assistance recipients receiving income support and employment services. The EAP will capture the employment and life stabilization activities that a social assistance recipient requires.
- Life Stabilization “focuses on enabling individuals to gain self-sufficiency, addressing preparatory and/or urgent needs through referrals to health, legal crisis response, social supports, family support and other human services.” Life Stabilization supports could be provided during or before a social assistance recipient receives employment and training services, depending on the needs of the person.
- While CMSMs/DSSABs will be responsible for life stabilization supports (through delivery of supports or through partnerships) for social assistance recipients, SSMs will be responsible for life stabilization support/referral provision for non-recipients.

Performance Measurement and Funding

- The government is establishing a Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) to help outline the system's success against a set of clear measures for SSMs and Service Providers. The PMF is an integral part of the government's goal of creating greater accountability in the system. SSM performance results will be subject to the “Incentive and Consequence Regime,” which will outline the benefits SSMs will receive if they exceed expectations, and the measures that non-performing SSMs will have to take to improve their service quality.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and other metrics will help measure the progress of SSMs. The SSMs will also be required to negotiate measurable

commitments, reflective of ministry priorities (e.g., diverse, local service delivery; integration of local labour market information into service delivery plans).

- While some measures (e.g., the proportion of people with disabilities served, as measured against the total number of clients served) will be used to determine SSMs' annual performance ratings, only some will be used for performance funding purposes (e.g., the actual employment outcomes of clients, according to the "streams" that they are in).
- Performance funding mechanisms will help encourage SSMs to provide services to a range of clients (regardless of where they fall under the Client Segmentation process).
- Monitoring of specific client and system-level outcomes to determine whether the overall structure is responding to the goals of the new employment and training services model.
- At maturity, graduated performance-based funding will be provided to SSMs if a client is employed at one, three, six and 12 months after receiving employment services and finding/starting employment.
- At maturity, performance-based funding will be at least one-quarter of the overall funding envelope provided to SSMs for employment and training services. The remainder will be provided for operations and employment-related financial supports (e.g., transportation, equipment).

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