

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Centralized Intake Expansion for Ontario Works

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Acting Director of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. That County Council receive Report HS 2025-01, entitled “Provincial Centralized Intake Expansion for Ontario Works”, as information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Centralized Intake was launched in a phased approach with prototype sites established across the province in Fall 2020. The County was onboarded in November 2022, with full implementation of Centralized Intake (CI) Expansion in December 2024.
- CI is designed to simplify the Ontario Works (OW) application process by automating the application process for clients and reducing the administrative process for staff, thereby ensuring greater focus on person centred supports and appropriate referrals.
- OW recipients will continue to work with County staff to develop an individualized Action Plan, which involves community referrals and support across the employment continuum.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Staff will continue to monitor the implementation of CI and potential impacts on local service delivery. In addition, staff continue to work closely with community partners to ensure a ‘no wrong door approach’ for clients wishing to access social services and community supports.

Financial Impact

At this time, there are no financial impacts as a result of CI implementation. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) has indicated that there are no changes to the cost sharing relationships or funding levels that currently exist as a result of implementation.

Communications

CI was first announced by the Province in 2020. Following this, numerous electronic and printed communications were made available to community partners, detailing the transition to a CI process for OW. Existing OW clients were also advised of changes to the application process through a mail out.




Prior to the full implementation of CI in December 2024, staff met with various neighbouring municipalities to explore best practices and ensure a smooth transition for both staff and OW clients. As CI implementation continues, staff continue to monitor challenges and potential improvements, to ensure both staff and recipients feel supported through the transition.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council’s vision of “Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future.” These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendation in this report supports the following strategic goals.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
<p>Goal 1.3 – Community health, safety and well-being</p> <p>Goal 1.4 – Connected people and places</p>		<p>Goal 3.1 – Continuous improvement and results-driven solutions</p> <p>Goal 3.2 – Collaborate with our partners and communities</p>

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

In the fall of 2020, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) shared details of the provincial Social Assistance Renewal plan, including the roll out of an automated, CI process. CI seeks to improve the client experience when applying or reapplying for OW by leveraging an online application and automating initial eligibility determination. It is also intended to reduce application administration, providing staff with more time to support clients through crisis and employment goals.

CI was launched by the province in a phased approach through the implementation of prototype sites in select municipalities. The CI prototype included the introduction of Social Assistance Digital Application (SADA), which allowed applicants to apply for OW services online, or over the phone. Prior to the implementation, the OW application process (in-person, online or by phone) was entirely managed by the County.

The County was onboarded to the CI prototype in November 2022. At this time, low and medium risk files that were determined to be eligible for OW were granted by the Province, then transferred to the County for ongoing case management. High-risk files were directed to the County, and an appointment was scheduled with staff to determine the client's eligibility for OW. The County was also responsible for issuing ineligible decision letters as well as appeals relating to all eligibility decisions on file.

As a result of the transition, applicants were able to apply for OW through the following methods:

- In-person at the County;
- Over the phone with County staff assistance;
- Online using the Social Assistance Digital Application (SADA); or
- Over the phone with Service Ontario (with the application being submitted through SADA).

In February 2021, the *Ontario Works Act* was also amended to reflect the designation of the Province as the Delivery Agent for OW, and to appoint municipalities as Delivery Partners. This change supported the implementation of the CI prototype, with the understanding the full implementation of CI would come at a later date. Under the revised legislation, the Province is responsible for the delivery of OW, with the County responsible for providing person-centred support activities that connect recipients to a broader system of supports. With this change in legislation, municipal Delivery Partners no longer have delegated authority to determine initial eligibility for OW, except for applicants under the age of 18, applications for Temporary Care Assistance and applications for Emergency Assistance.

In November of 2024, following two years of using the CI prototype, the County received notification from the MCCSS indicating that our office would be fully onboarded to CI on December 16, 2024. On this date, the Oxford County office became a Delivery Partner of the OW program.

Comments

Purpose of Centralized Intake Expansion

CI is focused on realigning functions between the province and municipalities to provide more efficient, person-centered supports for clients. Overall, the key purpose and features of CI include:

- A new online application for social assistance — Social Assistance Digital Application (SADA) — which allows real-time, electronic verification of client ID and electronic signatures;
- A new Risk-Based Eligibility Determination approach that determines the risk level associated with an application and the timeline for verification based on the extent of the applicant's information. Third party checks identify cases with inconsistent information that require a more detailed assessment; and
- Municipal responsibility for completing post OW approval activities, including greater focus on supporting clients through crisis and employment goals.

Centralized Intake Expansion Impacts

On December 16, 2024, the MCCSS became responsible for all initial eligibility decisions for County OW applicants. The County no longer has delegated authority to determine initial eligibility for OW applicants, with the exception of applicants under the age of 18, applications for Temporary Care Assistance and applications for Emergency Assistance. Furthermore, the Ministry is now responsible for reviewing appeals regarding initial eligibility decisions, which was previously a function of the County.

With the shift to full implementation, applicants (with the exception of applicants under the age of 18, Temporary Care Assistance and Emergency Assistance) will continue to apply for OW assistance through SADA. Applicants can access the OW application online or by calling a number that is managed by Service Ontario staff. The Ministry does not encourage applicants to meet with County staff until their application has been granted by the Province.

That said, staff continue to provide information and assistance to ensure applicants feel supported through the transition, and to ensure there are no systemic gaps as a result of implementation. While staff are not able to submit applications through SADA, they will continue to support applicants with the online application if they attend the office in-person. Staff are also committed to providing assistance at the Day Space to ensure assistance is available for all applicants, including those with limited access to technology.

While CI has impacted the OW intake process, there is now greater focus on case management and providing high-impact person-centred support activities that connect recipients to employment and a broader system of supports. Overall, staff will continue to work with OW recipients to evaluate ongoing eligibility and ensure outcomes related to employment.

CONCLUSIONS

CI is intended to shift the functional focus for municipal delivery partners from eligibility determination to the provision of stability and employment supports, and service navigation for social assistance recipients.

While the County is in the early stages of full implementation, staff will continue to monitor CI, with particular focus on the extent to which the application process is operating as anticipated, as well as specific impacts on both client experiences and staff functions. At this early stage of implementation, the administrative roles and processes have been working as intended and staff and client service experiences are being monitored.

SIGNATURES

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