



October 31, 2018

The Honourable Lisa MacLeod,
Minister of Children, Community & Social Services
14 floor - 56 Wellesley Street,
Toronto, ON, M7A 1E9

Subject: Input to Social Assistance Review

Dear Minister MacLeod,

We are writing to provide input to your review of the social assistance system. We agree that the current system needs to work better to support people to escape the cycle of poverty and move forward in their lives. Ontario needs a reformed social assistance system for the twenty first century with less government red tape, adequate financial assistance, and more effective workforce inclusion supports that will help people who can work to get and keep jobs.

We understand that your Ministry is particularly interested in learning about successful approaches, programs and supports that help people move into the workforce.

The Alliance for Healthier Communities is a network of 104 community-governed primary health care organizations who serve diverse communities across the province. Community Health Centres (CHCs) and Aboriginal Health Access Centres (AHACs) have a specific mandate to serve people who often experience barriers to health care, including people living on low incomes, recent immigrants, people with disabilities and people with mental health and addictions challenges. About twenty-five per cent of the people served by Community Health Centres are on social assistance programs.

Based on the frontline work of our member centres and the research done by partner organizations we offer the following recommendations:

- Provide **wrap-around supports** that help people address the challenges that led to their need for social assistance. The main reasons that people turn to welfare during times of crisis and trauma are: loss of a job; physical and mental illness; and marital breakdown, fleeing domestic violence. A “one size fits all” program response does not succeed.
 - Instead caseworkers should provide a personalized assessment when a person/family enters the social assistance system, and then connect them with appropriate wrap-around and trauma-informed supports and services to help stabilize their lives before they seek training and employment. Transform caseworkers from ‘welfare police’ to system navigators who help people access the supports they need.
 - Case studies from Hamilton and Peel confirm that when wrap around supports, such as health promotion, recreational, employment retraining, are provided people are far more likely to move off Ontario Works.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S027795360000455X>

<http://www.peelregion.ca/council/agendas/pdf/rc-20120705/report-hs-a1.pdf>

- Successful programs for skills building and training all feature **group work and team building**, unlike the typical welfare system approach of isolation and personal responsibility where you have a caseworker and do independent job search.
 - Successful programs feature mentoring, team formation, volunteering, apprenticeship, work activity and guaranteed advancement when requirements are met. Examples in Toronto include: Ve’ahavta Street Academy; Women Speak Out; Women Moving Forward; WoodGreen’s Homeward Bound; Sketch; Daily Bread Food Bank’s Food Services Training Program – all are graduating welfare recipients into jobs with wage progression. In the US examples include the Year Up model which brings together 18-24 year olds into classes where they go through a process of training and placement together.

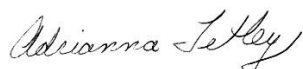
- To avoid cycling on and off social assistance people need to be connected to good jobs with **decent wages and benefits**. Ongoing support from caseworkers to ease the transition to the workforce is helpful. Most jobs require appropriate training, transportation, child care, health benefits and other work supports in order to continue in the job. A strong Ontario jobs market and effective employment legislation ensures that there are good full time permanent jobs with decent wages, drug and dental benefits, paid sick days and job protections so that people can move permanently off social assistance.

- A reformed social assistance system for the twenty-first century should provide **adequate levels of financial assistance** so that people are not trapped in poverty. People cannot start training programs or look for work when they cannot afford food, rent, phone/computer access, transportation and other basic costs of daily life.

- People need adequate and **stable incomes** on social assistance. Get rid of rules and automated systems that arbitrarily cut people off assistance when their income increases slightly one month, or they are late reporting a change in their life circumstances.
 - The benefits of ensuring a consistent, secure level of income support are evident in the declining poverty rate for single parents on social assistance. The Child Benefit program (Ontario Child Benefit and Canada Child Benefit) provide a dependable monthly income source to help parents meet daily living costs while they pursue training, education or work.

We would appreciate your active consideration of these recommendations. If you or your staff have any questions, we would be pleased to meet with you.

Sincerely,



Adrianna Tetley,
Chief Executive Officer
Alliance for Healthier Communities

cc. Susan Truppe Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, Minister’s Office Susan.Truppe@ontario.ca