

**Ministry of Children,
Community and Social
Services**

**Ministère des Services à
l'enfance et des Services
sociaux et communautaires**



Assistant Deputy Minister
Social Assistance Programs
Division

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March 25, 2020

TO: Consolidated Municipal Service Managers
District Social Service Boards
Ontario Works Delivery Partners

COPY: AMO
City of Toronto
OMSSA
NOSDA

FROM: Susan Erwin
Assistant Deputy Minister
Social Assistance Programs Division

SUBJECT: Enhanced Discretionary Benefits – Questions about Across the Board payments

On March 23rd, I wrote to you about a \$200M investment in social services relief funding including changes to expand Ontario Works emergency assistance and the expansion of discretionary benefits to support vulnerable Ontarians as the COVID-19 public health crisis evolves globally and locally. As indicated, \$148M is allocated for organizational support and the remaining \$52M is allocated for individuals through discretionary benefits and emergency assistance.

The government is adding these resources to enable delivery partners to provide funding to individuals and agencies that need it most while federal funding is coming online. The funding of discretionary benefit expenditures was based on the previous year's actual expenditures and recognizing that Ontario Works administrators are best positioned to provide broad support to their communities.

Our intention is that delivery partners implement this time-limited increase in discretionary benefits to provide additional support to Ontario Works and ODSP recipients who are facing one-time exceptional costs related to COVID-19 — in line with the existing policy framework for discretionary benefits.

Administrators have discretion to pay or provide benefits listed in the regulation, or as authorized by the Director of Ontario Works in the Discretionary Benefits policy directive. Funding is intended to cover exceptional one-time costs on a case-by-case basis based on need; and is not intended to offset general costs or income support.

Since my earlier memo went out, we have heard that some of you are exploring ways to provide one-time, across-the-board-type payments to your full Ontario Works caseloads—recognizing that some recipients in your communities may be facing additional costs and/or have restricted access to other vital community supports such as food banks to help meet their basic living expenses.

We acknowledge that there are challenges as we work to deliver support to people in need quickly and efficiently. However, the intent of this funding was to enable you to meet the unique needs of individuals in line with how we currently administer discretionary benefits not to provide an across the board benefit to all clients.

Our estimates were based on those assumptions and we want to clarify that you should not be issuing one-time, across-the-board payments to your Ontario Works caseloads. This ensures that support remains in line with the spirit of the announcement and our policy.

To support you in this, our ODSP caseworkers will provide case-by-case discretionary support to their ODSP clients to reduce the demand on OW administrators as you administer discretionary benefits and emergency assistance.

Administrators have the flexibility to spend across discretionary benefit categories and the ministry will reimburse 100% of all eligible, discretionary benefit expenditures for the months of March and April.

As I wrote in my earlier memo, I share the belief no one should have to worry about how they are going to provide for themselves and their families. It is my sincere hope that, working together as partners, we will help Ontario's most vulnerable get through this difficult and challenging time.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Susan Erwin
Assistant Deputy Minister
Social Assistance Programs Division