



Report To:	Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board
From:	Donna Moroso, Director of Integrated Social Services and Gilles Plouffe, Ontario Works Supervisor
Date:	February 26, 2015
Re:	Employment Related Benefits (ERB) – Issue Report

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to provide the DSB Board Members with an update on the postponed implementation of the Employment-Related Benefit (ERB).

### **Background:**

In the 2014 Ontario Budget, as part of ongoing efforts to reform social assistance, the province announced that it would be replacing seven existing Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) employment benefits with a simple discretionary benefit in each program.

### **Implementation:**

At the present time, social assistance recipients may qualify for a variety of Employment Related Benefits (ERB) which allow them to participate in the local labour market or return to school. All seven employment related benefits differ in eligibility and amounts.

Replacing seven different employment benefits is a complex process and represents a major change for social assistance clients.

The benefits being replaced are:

1. Employment-Related Expenses (Ontario Works)
  - o Employment-related expenses are provided to support participants as they progress toward sustainable employment.
  - o Employment-related expenses are also available for ODSP recipients who are participating in Ontario Works employment assistance activities.

- The maximum average that is provided for each eligible participant is \$175 per month, with a maximum advance of \$500.
2. Other Employment and Employment Assistance Activities Benefit (Ontario Works)
- The Other Employment and Employment Assistance Activities Benefit is provided to a recipient, a spouse in the benefit unit, a dependent adult not attending secondary school full-time or a training program, or a dependent child who has graduated from secondary school. This benefit is provided to assist with costs associated with beginning or changing employment or an employment assistance activity.
  - The maximum amount that may be provided for each eligible recipient of this benefit is up to \$253 in a 12-month period.
3. Full-Time Employment Benefit (Ontario Works)
- The Full-time Employment Benefit (FTEB) is provided to a recipient, a spouse included in the benefit unit or a dependent adult to help with expenses associated with beginning full-time employment. The benefit may be paid in one or more installments, up to the maximum in any 12-month period.
  - The maximum amount that may be provided through the FTEB is up to \$500 in a 12-month period for each eligible recipient.
4. Vocational Training (Ontario Works)
- Vocational training refers to costs related to instruction in the skills and knowledge required to obtain employment in a prescribed vocation, such as courses offered through private career colleges. Any training approved for assistance through vocational training must be job specific and connected to a job available in the local labour market.
5. Work-Related Benefit (ODSP)
- A monthly amount of \$100 for work-related expenses is provided to each member in months they have income from employment or a training program, or positive net income from the operation of a business.
6. Employment Training and Start-Up benefit (ODSP)
- Eligible members of the benefit unit may receive up to \$500 in any 12-month period in order to assist them with the startup costs to:
    - Begin or change employment;
    - Begin an employment assistance activity under the Ontario Works Act, or;
    - Begin any other activity intended to assist the person to become and stay employed that is approved by the Director.

## 7. Employment Transition Benefit (ODSP)

- Recipients who exit Income Support due to income which includes earnings from employment, a training program, or net positive income from the operation of a business are eligible to receive the Employment Transition Benefit.
- The Employment Transition Benefit is a lump-sum payment of \$500, available once in any 12-month period.

Instead of having to navigate through different benefits with differing eligibility and amounts, clients will now have access to a simple benefit tailored to their unique needs and employment goals. This new benefit will help with things such as training fees, tools, uniforms and other out-of-pocket expenses.

Ontario Works clients and ODSP recipients without disabilities could receive up to \$1,200 annually and ODSP clients with disabilities could receive up to \$1,800 annually based on their employment-related needs and costs.

ODSP clients with disabilities would generally access the employment benefit by enrolling into employment supports. The provision of the benefit would align with the client's employment plan.

The ministry recognizes that front-line staff are continuing to make significant efforts to support our transition to Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) and wants to take a balanced approach as they continue to improve the delivery of our programs. They also recognize the feedback that they have received from front-line staff and their municipal delivery partners regarding the difficulty in implementing changes.

To give everyone involved the time needed to be ready for these important changes, the Ministry has made the decision to postpone the implementation of the ERB from April to October 2015. All of the current employment-related benefits will continue to be available until the ERB is implemented.

The Ministry will provide further information regarding the ERB in the near future, including decisions around the allocation model in Ontario Works as well as changes to service planning and budgeting.

To support the October 2015 implementation, the ministry will be sharing standard communication and orientation products for Ontario Works Administrators; issuing new guidelines for ERB and providing staff with training and support tools. Regional sessions may also be organized with ODSP partners to share information, establish clear referral processes and solidify working relationships between Ontario Works and ODSP offices.

### **Conclusion:**

Further information regarding implementation of the ERB in both Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works will be provided in the near future.