

CUTS HURT US ALL



AT RISK: INCOME SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Lobby Kit, ODSP Campaign January – March 2012

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.
~Margaret Mead*

PURPOSE OF LOBBY

- To make MPPs aware of the threats to ODSP from privatization and downloading.
- To ensure MPPs raise our concerns in Caucus and Cabinet, specifically with Premier Dalton McGuinty, Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, and Community and Social Services Minister John Milloy.

THE ISSUE

The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is faced with two threats as a result of the government's drive to make deep cuts in order to pay off the deficit.

The first threat is that social assistance will be delivered in the future by a privatized ServiceOntario.

ServiceOntario is part of the Ministry of Government Services. However, more than 200 of its public counters are operated by private contractors.

The government is considering a new operating model for ServiceOntario. Options on the table include a public-private partnership and full privatization.

The provincial government is also looking to partner with other levels of government to deliver their services through ServiceOntario. The union has been told that social assistance, social housing and the Family Responsibility Office could go to ServiceOntario.

The second threat is that the delivery of ODSP will be downloaded to municipalities.

OPSEU members who work in ODSP met with the government-appointed Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in October, 2011.

The Commission will make recommendations on: employment supports, the adequacy of benefits, simplifying income and asset rules, the long-term financial viability of social assistance, and "an integrated Ontario position on income security."

Commissioner Frances Lankin told the union that the Commission may recommend the delivery of ODSP be downloaded to municipalities in its Options paper.

This interim report was to be submitted to the government in December and made public for stakeholders to comment on in January or February.

MAIN MESSAGING TO MPP

Sample Introduction:

Thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me. My name is _____ and I work at _____.

I asked for this meeting to update you on the concerns of members who serve the approximately 400,000 Ontarians who rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program each month. Our office serves approximately _____ people with disabilities in this area.

As you know, ODSP is one of two programs that make up Ontario's social assistance system.

We support people with disabilities so they can live with dignity in their communities. We help ensure individuals and families have a roof over their heads and food on the table. We do all we can to help with basic living supports and to maximize people's potential for inclusion in their communities.

Sample Issue points to include:

- OPSEU represents between 1,600 and 1,800 caseworkers and office administration staff in 45 ODSP offices across the province.
- Our work has a direct impact on the quality of life of people living with disabilities.
- We are very disappointed with the government's decision to pay off the deficit with deep and painful cuts to public services.
- Approximately **400,000 Ontarians rely on ODSP** each month.
- This is obviously a very vital program.
- According to the government's social assistance review, the number of ODSP cases has increased steadily over the past 10 years and is currently growing at about five per cent a year.
- We are very concerned about government plans to change how ODSP is delivered.
- The key thing to know is that the provincial government has a **legislated "shared responsibility"** to provide income and employment supports for people with disabilities.
- What will happen to this important principle of "shared responsibility" if the delivery of ODSP is downloaded to municipalities or privatized through ServiceOntario?
- We are concerned that **the unique and progressive elements of ODSP** are at risk:
 - the more generous income and asset exemptions;
 - the more generous income and asset rules; and

- the more generous benefits, including the possible loss of the special-purpose benefits, health-related benefits (for medical travel, etc.) and community start-up and maintenance benefits.
- We are concerned that **ODSP's flexible definition of disability, that looks at the whole person and not just their mental or physical impairments, could be weakened.**
- We are concerned that privatization and downloading will increase costs, harm quality and reduce accountability of public services.
- Part of the social assistance review's mandate is to examine the financial sustainability of social assistance and to ensure programs are being delivered "efficiently" and effectively".
- ODSP is extremely efficiently-run as it is, thanks to the **hard work and high case loads** that OPSEU members are required to carry.
- According to the government's financial statements published in Public Accounts, **only 3.6 per cent of the province's spending on social assistance went to administration in 2010-11!**
- **A big part of the reason why** administration costs are so low is that ODSP staff– our members – **are responsible for between 230-380 cases.**

Wrap it up:

- We consider our work to be more than a job. Our members put in a lot of hours of unpaid overtime to help the people we serve.
- We are deeply concerned that the government will cut services for people in need while at the same time cutting taxes for wealthy corporations.
- 25 per cent of job cuts in the OPS have happened to the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Our staff and programs have been hit hard at a time when our services are needed more than ever.
- We are disappointed that the government which pledged to rebuild public services when it was first elected in 2003 is now attacking them.
- We ask that you raise our concerns with fellow members of your caucus and Premier Dalton McGuinty, Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, and Community and Social Services Minister John Milloy.
- Get a follow-up commitment from the MPP to report back to you.

BACKGROUND

- Ontario's social assistance system is made up of two programs: Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program.
- OW is intended to be used as a last resort when people have no other financial assistance and is premised on the concept of individual responsibility.

- ODSP is intended to help people with disabilities live as independently as possible and to reduce or eliminate barriers to employment .
- The government shares in the responsibility of providing support for people with disabilities, as per the *Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997*:
 - Provide income and employment supports to eligible persons with disabilities;
 - Recognizes that government, communities, families and individuals share responsibility for providing such supports;
 - Effectively services persons with disabilities who need assistance, and
 - Is accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario

http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_97o25b_e.htm

- The principle of shared responsibility was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Tranchemontagne v Ministry of Community and Social Services*
- The Commission of the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario began its review in January 2011 and is scheduled to wrap up by June 2012. <http://www.socialassistancereview.ca/home>
- On October 12, 2011, the OPSEU Ministry of Community and Social Services Enforcement and Renewal Committee (MERC) met with Commissioners Frances Lankin and Munir A. Sheik.
- Frances Lankin told the union that the Commission may recommend downloading the delivery of ODSP to municipalities in its Options Paper. This paper was to be submitted to the government in December with release for public comment in January or February 2012.
- Lankin also told the union she has had discussions with Don Drummond, the banker hired by the government to recommend ways to cut and eliminate public services in order to pay off the deficit.
- Drummond made it clear in his meeting with the union on December 1, 2011, that he will follow whatever recommendations Lankin submits.
- A close reading of the social assistance review's: *A Discussion Paper: Issues and Ideas* contains many warning bells for ODSP. <http://www.socialassistancereview.ca/uploads/File/A-Discussion-Paper--Issues-and-Ideas---English.pdf>
- The discussion paper talks about the need to “better integrate services” between the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government, (p. 32), to simplify income and asset rules (p. 28), to consider delivering special-purpose benefits outside the social assistance system (p. 30), and states flat-out that “the growth of costs must be in line with available resources” (p.31).
- How will the pressures to integrate and streamline ODSP and OW while containing costs impact ODSP? This is of particular concern because ODSP's caseload has been increasing steadily over the past 10 years and is currently growing by about five per cent a year (p. 10).
- In the 2011 Ontario Budget, the government announced its intention to fundamentally change how public services are delivered.

- The government announced it was exploring “alternative service delivery models” for ServiceOntario including “leveraging private sector opportunities through a competition.” This likely means a public-private sector partnership.
- The union was told subsequently that social assistance, social housing and the Family Responsibility Office could be transferred to ServiceOntario.
- ServiceOntario is part of the Ministry of Government Services but many of its services are delivered by the private sector.
- ServiceOntario operates four call centres, 54 Land registry offices and 87 counters in the Ontario Public Service (OPS).
- There are a further 200 counters operated by private contractors. As well, the government contracts with IBM to manage 71 ServiceOntario kiosks in malls.
- ServiceOntario has been in expansion mode since 2008 swallowing up programs that used to be delivered by line ministries. In this way, the **government has de-facto privatized** the delivery of many programs.
- To date, ServiceOntario has delivered services related to registration, certifications and licensing, including drivers licenses, health cards, and birth certificates. It has not been responsible for delivering a social program.
- The government is to decide by this spring’s provincial budget on whether to keep ServiceOntario in the OPS, make it an agency outside the OPS, enter into a public-private partnership with a private, for-profit company, or fully privatize the organization.
- ServiceOntario annually collects revenue of \$2.7 billion which funds Ontario government programs and services. A public-private partnership would almost certainly result in having to share this revenue with the private sector partner.
- ODSP is delivered directly by the province through the Ministry of Community and Social Services in nine regional offices and 45 offices.
- OPSEU represents approximately 1,600-1,800 members, caseworkers and office administration staff, who work in ODSP.
- As of March 2011, 391,443 people, or 281,946 cases, accessed ODSP, according to the social assistance review. (Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario, *A Discussion Paper: Issues and Ideas*, p.43.)
- The current caseload range **per ODSP caseworker is 230-380 cases.**
- The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) represents approximately 5,000 members who deliver a range of municipal services, including OW. (*CUPE Submission to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario*, p. 2.)
- As of March 2011, 465,871 people, or 258,425 cases, accessed OW according to the social assistance review. (*A Discussion Paper: Issues and Ideas*, p. 41)

- Provincial social assistances expenditures totaled \$7.1 billion in 2010-11. (*Public Accounts of Ontario 2010 -11, Ministry Statements and Schedules, Volume 1*, p. 2-93.)
<http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/budget/paccts/2011/11vol1eng.pdf>
- \$6.6 billion or 93 per cent of costs went to income support paid to OW and ODSP recipients and to cover the costs of prescription drugs.
- \$255 million or 3.6 per cent of costs went to administration.
- These included costs for delivering ODSP and for the Social Benefits Tribunal and the information technology that support both ODSP and OW.
- The province covers 100 per cent of the costs of ODSP.
- The cost of OW financial and employment assistance is currently shared by the province and municipalities: 81.2 per cent and 18.8 per cent, respectively.
- The government plans to upload these costs incrementally so that the province will cover 100 per cent of these costs by 2018. Administration costs of OW are shared on a 50-50 basis between the province and municipalities.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Call your local constituency office to set up an appointment between now and March 20, 2012. The Legislature doesn't resume sitting until February 21 so MPPs should be more freely available to meet with constituents. For MPP contact information, visit:
http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/go2.jsp?Page=/members/members_main&menulitem=mpps_header&locale=en
- Tell the MPP's staff that you want to meet the MPP to discuss the Ontario Disability Support Program and that you are members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union. Be polite but be persistent.
- Pick your lobby lead(s) from your local to help support members and collect feedback. Get together before your appointment to practice.
- Meet after the appointment to debrief and complete the Feedback Form (included in this package).

Forget your fears.

People often feel intimidated the first time they meet politicians. Don't be. You know more about ODSP than they do. If you don't know the answer to a question, say you will get back to them with the information. Make sure you get back to them. Expect them to do the same if they can't answer one of your questions!

Lobbyists will tell you that once you start a meeting with a politician the "mystery" that surrounds them quickly disappears. They are just ordinary people doing their job. They are often very responsive to the voters—the people that can affect their future.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

Thank you for taking the important step of meeting with your MPP.

Please contact Roxanne Barnes, OPSEU Chair, Ministry of Community and Social Services Enforcement and Renewal Committee, roxbarnes@gmail.com to let us know how it went.

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MPP LOBBY FEEDBACK

MPP:

Riding:

Date of meeting:

Meeting Length:

Who attended meeting:

The group's impression of the MPP's support for your issue:

What comments and/or commitments did the MPP make:

(ie. Raise your concern with caucus, get you information, question in legislature, private members bill)

What information did you promise to get to the MPP:

Who is going to follow up with the MP, how and when:

Other comments:

Return this form to the MCSS MERC Chair Roxanne Barnes, roxbarnes@gmail.com