

May 18, 2012

Regional Councillor John Taylor, Co-Chair
Susan LaRosa, Co-Chair
Human Services Planning Board
Region of York
17250 Yonge Street
Newmarket, ON L3Y 6Z1

Dear Co-Chairs:

**Re: York Region Submission to the
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario –
Discussion Paper 2**

Regional Council, at its meeting held on Thursday, May 17, 2012, adopted the following recommendation of the Community and Health Services Committee regarding the report entitled "York Region Submission to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario – Discussion Paper 2":

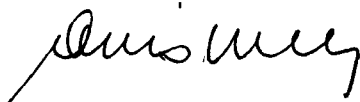
1. Council endorse the following key principles identified in this report to guide provincial reform of social assistance in Ontario:
 - Benefit rates should help people meet the actual costs of basic needs, transportation and housing.
 - Refocus social assistance on workforce development, where resources are allocated to help people become job ready and secure sustainable employment.
 - Integrate the delivery of social assistance at the local level.
 - Provide a supportive policy and funding framework to implement local service integration.
 - Work in partnership with municipal service managers to further assess reform options.
2. The Regional Chairman write the Minister of Community and Social Services asking the Province to fully engage municipal partners in the design and implementation of any reforms to social assistance.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Human Services Planning Board of York Region, Social Planning Council of York Region, York Region Food Network, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association.

/2...

A copy of Clause No. 6, Report No. 5 of the Community and Health Services Committee is enclosed for your information.

For more information on this report, or if you have any questions with respect to this matter, please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Acting General Manager, Social Services at 905-830-4444, Ext. 2150 or Lisa Gonsalves, Acting Managing Director, Strategic Service Integration and Policy at 905-830-4444, Ext. 2090.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Denis Kelly", written in a cursive style.

Denis Kelly
Regional Clerk

/C. Clark
Attachments (2)

Clause No. 6 in Report No. 5 of the Community and Health Services Committee was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting on May 17, 2012.

6

**YORK REGION SUBMISSION TO THE
COMMISSION FOR THE REVIEW OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN ONTARIO -
DISCUSSION PAPER 2**

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated April 24, 2012, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council endorse the following key principles identified in this report to guide provincial reform of social assistance in Ontario:
 - Benefit rates should help people meet the actual costs of basic needs, transportation and housing.
 - Refocus social assistance on workforce development, where resources are allocated to help people become job ready and secure sustainable employment.
 - Integrate the delivery of social assistance at the local level.
 - Provide a supportive policy and funding framework to implement local service integration.
 - Work in partnership with municipal service managers to further assess reform options.
2. The Regional Chairman write the Minister of Community and Social Services asking the Province to fully engage municipal partners in the design and implementation of any reforms to social assistance.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Human Services Planning Board of York Region, Social Planning Council of York Region, York Region Food Network, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides Council with York Region's response to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario (the Commission) *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches to Reform*.

3. BACKGROUND

Province is undertaking a review of Ontario's social assistance system including engagement with stakeholders

The Province has appointed a Commission, led by Frances Lankin and Munir A. Sheikh, to undertake a comprehensive review of social assistance in Ontario, with the goal to develop specific recommendations and a concrete action plan for reforming the social assistance system. The review was a key commitment of the 2008 Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and responds to growing pressures to remove barriers in the system and increase opportunities for people to work. The Commission is expected to submit a final report to the Province by June 30, 2012.

As part of their work, the Commission has released two discussion papers to engage stakeholders. The first was released in June 2011 and highlighted broad issues and ideas. York Region's submission to the first discussion paper was presented to Council on October 20, 2011 through adoption of Clause 3 of Report No. 8 of the Community and Health Services Committee.

The Commission released a second discussion paper in early February 2012 entitled *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*. This paper seeks more specific and technical input on reform options that will help shape the Commission's recommendations to the Province.

Consultations were organized with staff and the community through the Human Services Planning Board of York Region, to develop a response to the Commission's second discussion paper

As a Consolidated Municipal Service Manager, the Community and Health Services Department (C&HS) plays a critical role in the administration of Ontario Works (OW) financial and employment assistance. It also plans and delivers other human services that support people receiving social assistance (e.g. child care fee assistance, affordable and social housing, and homelessness services).

The social assistance system is comprised of two main programs: OW and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). ODSP is funded and delivered through the Province. OW is cost-shared by the Region with the Province. Through the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review, the Province has committed to a gradual upload of the full cost of OW benefits by 2018. OW administration costs will continue to be cost-shared at 50/50.

To provide comprehensive feedback to the Commission, C&HS engaged its own staff through a consultation session on February 21, 2012 which reflected expertise from OW, child care, housing and homelessness, public health, emergency medical services, business operations and quality assurance. Economic development staff also participated. The Human Services Planning Board of York Region (HSPB-YR) hosted a session with community stakeholders on March 7, 2012 in partnership with Social Planning Council of York Region and York Region Food Network. The consultation brought together people with lived experience on social assistance, municipal officials, human services agencies and community groups. The executive lead from the Commission, Leah Myers, also attended.

To meet the Commission's timelines, the results of both consultations were compiled and summarized by C&HS staff, reviewed by HSPB-YR and included in a submission accompanied by a letter from the Regional Chairman (see *Council Attachment 1*).

C&HS staff also participated in providing input to the Commission through the Central East Region Senior Management Group, a group of OW service managers. The Commissioner of Community and Health Services also participated in discussions with the Commission through the Urban Commissioners Group and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

4. ANALYSIS

YORK REGION RESPONSE TO THE COMMISSION AND KEY PRINCIPLES

Commission is focused on service delivery and benefit rate issues in second discussion paper

The Commission is mandated by the Province to focus on five key outcomes:

1. Place reasonable expectations on, and provide supports for, people who rely on social assistance with respect to active engagement in the labour market and participation in treatment and rehabilitation.
2. Establish an appropriate benefit structure that reduces barriers and supports people's transition into, and attachment within, the labour market.
3. Simplify income and asset rules to improve equity and make it easier to understand and administer social assistance.
4. Ensure the long-term viability of the social assistance system.
5. Define Ontario's position vis-à-vis the federal and municipal governments as it relates to income security for Ontarians.

While the second discussion paper raises questions in each of these areas, the major focus is on approaches to better integrate the delivery of income and employment assistance locally, as well as how to create a more transparent and fair rate setting structure for social assistance benefits.

York Region response highlights need for greater integration of social assistance at the service manager local level and outlines principles for system reform

The following principles were identified by both community and service manager consultations that should guide the Province's approach to social assistance reform. It is recommended that the Council endorse these principles.

Benefit rates should help people meet the actual costs of basic needs, transportation and housing.

The overall principle guiding rate restructuring should be adequacy in helping people stabilize after a crisis situation, find and keep employment, and sustain good health. In order to mitigate recidivism, this could be achieved through a mix of benefits – some provided directly through social assistance and others through income-tested programs provided to all low income residents, including those on or leaving social assistance (e.g. health and housing benefits). However, there is an immediate priority for the Province to provide relief for people struggling to meet basic needs under current benefit levels that do not reflect local costs. People living in high growth and high cost areas, such as York Region, are particularly disadvantaged by a uniform rate structure across the province. As a short-term measure, Council has already endorsed in principle the development of a provincially funded \$100 Healthy Food Supplement for OW and ODSP clients as recommended by the York Region Social Audit.

Refocus social assistance on workforce development, where resources are allocated to help people become job ready and secure sustainable employment.

The current system uses too many resources in the administration of complex and often punitive rules. A reformed system should enable case workers to focus on the individual capacities of clients and help them access the supports they need. These include a range of employment services, but also ancillary supports (e.g. mental health and addictions, housing, child care, counselling) that help people stabilize and focus on employment. The system should be built on the belief that people inherently want to have meaningful work. This is best achieved by a system that provides clients with dignity, respect and opportunity, and with compliance requirements that are less intrusive and more effective to administer.

Integrate the delivery of social assistance at the local level.

The current system of income and employment supports is fragmented between different programs delivered at both the municipal and provincial levels. While the range of supports provided is not always the same, there are clear benefits to integrate OW and ODSP into one municipally delivered program, with enhanced partnerships with provincial agencies (i.e. Employment Ontario) where appropriate. This will create a "one-stop" approach for clients, streamline administration for both the Province and service managers, and allow for more integrated local planning and case management of employment and income supports. This is particularly important given current economic challenges and fiscal concerns provincially. Social assistance reform also needs to focus resources on strategies that contribute to local economic innovation and sustainable employment.

Provide a supportive policy and funding framework to implement local service integration.

Municipal service managers already play a central role in planning and delivering human services related to social assistance. A reformed system should build on this infrastructure. However, a larger role for municipal service managers will require a supportive provincial policy and funding model that does not create additional pressures on the municipal property tax base.

Social assistance reform will require on-going partnerships between the municipal service managers and the Province to further assess reform options. There are many technical issues to address in approaching social assistance reform. Many of these issues will require much more consultation, exploration and analysis to identify potential alternatives, impacts and costs. It is important that any transitions to a reformed system are carefully planned with municipal service managers and implemented by municipalities based on their local needs and capacities.

NEXT STEPS

C&HS will review the Commission's recommendations to the Province

The Commission is expected to report back to the Province with its final report, specific recommendations and a concrete action plan in June 2012.

C&HS staff will monitor the Commission's progress, review the final report and report back to Council as required on the Commission's recommendations and Provincial response.

The transformation of the social assistance system in Ontario aligns very closely with the HSPB-YR's work of supporting low and moderate income families and individuals in York Region struggling to make ends meet. The HSPB-YR will also review the Commission's final report to identify any further opportunities for collaboration.

2012 Provincial Budget signals the importance of social assistance reform to the long term viability of the system.

The 2012 Provincial Budget was released on March 28, 2012 and reinforced the role of the Commission to recommend changes to social assistance and an intention to:

- Improve access to supports that help clients to find work and meet employer's needs for skilled workers
- Explore opportunities to integrate OW and ODSP employment services with Employment Ontario to avoid overlap and gaps in services, and reduce administrative inefficiencies
- Transform delivery of income-based programs to reduce duplication between levels of government, improve program administration efficiencies and simplify access by clients

The Provincial Budget also re-affirms the scheduled upload of social assistance costs from municipalities to the Province by 2018.

The Provincial Budget raised concern about the sustainability of the current rate of growth in social assistance expenditures, and proposed immediate measures to moderate this growth:

- Staggering promised increases to the Ontario Child Benefit to July 2013 and July 2014. The Ontario Child Benefit provides low income families, including those receiving social assistance, with support to meet basic needs.
- Capping OW discretionary health and non-health related benefits and restructuring benefits currently provided to OW and ODSP clients to help with finding or retaining housing.

Given the budget announcements and the importance of social assistance reform to low income residents and municipal service managers, York Region's submission is timely and will support further analysis of the Commission's final report and the provincial response.

Link to key Council-approved plans

Reforming social assistance has the potential to contribute to Regional economic vitality by helping low and moderate income residents with access to basic needs and employment opportunities (2011 to 2015 Strategic Plan objectives under Improving Social and Health Supports and Increasing the Economic Vitality of the Region).

York Region's submission also reflects the Community and Health Services Department Multi-Year Plan principle of playing a leadership role as a service manager in supporting broader advocacy on York Region specific issues.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Employment and Financial Services gross budget in 2012 for OW benefits and administration is \$84 million, with net cost of \$23 million. Any potential costs of social assistance reform will depend on the Commission's recommendations and how the Province will respond.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Residents participating in OW and ODSP live in all local municipalities. Social assistance reform has the potential to improve their quality of life and access to supports to help find and keep work.

7. CONCLUSION

The Province has appointed a Commission to review Ontario's social assistance programs with a goal of reducing barriers and increasing opportunities for people to work. The Commission has been working since early 2011 to consult stakeholders and review research and best practices. The Commission has recently released a second discussion paper seeking specific feedback on reform options and technical issues. The Commission is expected to report back to the Province in June 2012.

This report provides Council with York Region's submission to the Commission's second discussion paper highlighting input from both OW service manager and broader community perspectives.

Reforming Ontario's social assistance system is an important step in helping low income residents meet their basic needs and succeed in the labour market. This will require a more locally integrated program, where employers are better engaged to create sustainable job opportunities and clients are provided with adequate benefit levels and individualized supports to find and keep work.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Acting General Manager, Social Services at Ext. 2150 or Lisa Gonsalves, Acting Managing Director, Strategic Service Integration and Policy at Ext. 2090.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)

Bill Fisch, B.Com., LLB, J.D.
Chairman and CEO



The Regional Municipality of York
17250 Yonge Street, Box 147
Newmarket, Ontario L3Y 6Z1

Tel: 905-895-1231
905-731-0201

email: bill.fisch@york.ca

March 30, 2012

Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario
2 Bloor Street West
4th Floor, Suite 400
Toronto, ON
M4W 3E2

Dear Commissioners Lankin and Sheikh:

Re: York Region Input to Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform

On behalf of The Regional Municipality of York, I welcome the opportunity to contribute once again to the work of the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario (Commission) in its task of recommending reforms to the social assistance system in Ontario.

In September 2011, York Region provided service manager input on the Commission's first discussion paper. The submission highlighted the need to:

- Refocus Ontario Works (OW) into a workforce development program, where understanding local labour market needs are matched to more client-centered, individualized supports to people receiving social assistance
- Develop a benefit structure that meets local costs of basic needs (such as transportation, housing, food) and supports good health
- Provide service managers with the flexibility and resources to plan and deliver a more integrated system of supports locally, including critical ancillary services (such as child care, housing, access to mental health and addiction services) and more simplified administration and accountability arrangements

Our response to the Commission's second discussion paper, *Approaches for Reform*, builds on this approach and includes a broader community perspective.

The attached Table 1 provides input from an internal consultation with service manager staff with expertise from OW, child care, housing and homelessness, public health, economic development and eligibility review and business services. The varied experience represented at this session helped focus on practical issues related to social assistance reform, particularly how best to integrate service delivery and restructure benefits.

Table 2 reflects the feedback received at the community consultation hosted by the Human Services Planning Board – York Region (HSPB-YR). The session brought together people with lived experience with social assistance, municipal officials, human service agencies and community groups. The discussion focused on key topics raised by the Commission, particularly benefit rate adequacy. We thank Leah Myers, Executive Lead for the Commission, for her participation in the community consultation.

Although the two sessions provided a range of input, a number of key issues and common themes were raised.

From a **community perspective**, participants in the HSPB-YR session stressed the fundamental and urgent need for adequate benefit rates as part of the reform process, as well as a system that provides people with dignity, respect and opportunity through flexible and individualized supports to find and keep work.

The social assistance transformation needs to be built on the belief that people inherently want to find and retain employment. In light of increasing costs of living, particularly the rising costs of housing in York Region, there is a clear urgency to act now to provide immediate relief to people struggling to meet basic needs on current benefit levels. Support was expressed for a universal housing benefit for everyone earning below a certain income level, irrespective of income source. The housing benefit would need to reflect the community's housing cost realities.

Although a clear model for social assistance program integration did not emerge, the community did identify criteria required for the model as being client centred, holistic and focused on individual supports with links to other supports as required.

There was support for the harmonization of OW and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates as long as the rate was adequate and did not result in any loss of benefits or rate reductions. Support was expressed for an audit based system of verification with some criteria identified to mitigate risk. There was also support for benefits being provided outside the social assistance system, which may assist people with staying off social assistance altogether.

From a **service manager perspective**, there are clear benefits in moving toward an integrated OW and the ODSP program that is municipally delivered, focused on workforce development and provides adequate income to help people meet their basic needs and transition to employment. This will create a "one-stop" approach for clients, streamline administration for both the Province and service managers and allow for more integrated local planning and case management of employment and income supports. Social assistance reform needs to re-direct available resources from "rules enforcement" to strategies that contribute to local economic innovation and sustainable employment. This is particularly critical given current economic challenges and fiscal concerns provincially.

One option proposed by the Commission is that responsibility for the delivery of employment services for OW and ODSP recipients be transferred to provincially-funded Employment Ontario (EO) service providers. York Region is concerned that EO is not fundamentally designed to provide employment services, including the intensive case management supports needed to help individuals with multiple barriers to effectively transition to employment. However, if there is a decision to move employment services to EO, municipal service managers should be provided the opportunity to be designated as full-suite EO service providers.

The road to success in integrating OW and ODSP will require collaboration between the Province and municipalities. This includes a funding model, legislation/policy and resources that are responsive to local needs (e.g. in York Region, rapid growth and changing demographics) and supports service managers to administer new responsibilities and accountability arrangements. It is also critical that social assistance reform is cost-neutral for the municipal property tax base. York Region already invests substantial dollars in provincially-mandated and Regional programs to assist low and moderate income residents to participate in our communities and local economy. The provincial upload of ODSP and OW costs is a key achievement that must be maintained to create a fiscally sustainable social assistance system for municipalities.

Should you have any questions regarding the attached submissions, please contact our Commissioner of Community and Health Services, Adelina Urbanski, at 905-830-4444, ext. 2023.

Thank you for another opportunity to provide input into this critical work and we look forward to your recommendations.

Yours truly,



Bill Fisch
Chairman and CEO

Attachments 1) Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
 2) Table 2: Community Response from session hosted by the Human Services Planning Board - York Region

Copy to: Gary McNamara, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
 Douglas Bartholomew- Saunders, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association



Submission to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario
The Regional Municipality of York Response and Community Response
Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform

March 30, 2012

About The Regional Municipality of York Internal Consultation Session (Table 1)

On February 21, 2012, approximately 40 manager-level staff from the Community and Health Services Department of York Region participated in a consultation to respond to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario's *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*. As the paper raises a number of issues that could impact on the Service Manager role related to the delivery of social assistance and its benefit structure, the session focused on the technical aspects of the approaches raised in the paper.

Participants represented a cross-section of the program areas within the Community and Health Services Department as well as representation from Economic Development. A consultation tool was provided in advance of the session which highlighted the questions in the paper, provided a summary of the issues raised in the second paper and the relevant York Region response to the first paper.

Facilitators guided their table through a summary of the questions from Discussion Paper 2 which were grouped into the themes of Service Delivery and Benefit Structure. Note takers recorded the feedback and posted summary information on flip charts. After two rounds of discussions on each theme, there was a Report Back period where each table highlighted the two or three key issues under each theme. Lastly, there was a discussion of issues not addressed in the Discussion Paper that should be considered in moving forward with social assistance reforms from a Service Manager perspective.

The notes from the session were consolidated and circulated to session attendees and other staff unable to attend the event for their review and input. The Service Manager feedback has been organized to respond to each of the questions in the Discussion Paper in Table 1 of the attached submission.

About the Community Consultation Session (Table 2)

On March 7, 2012, the Human Services Planning Board of York Region (HSPB-YR) hosted a York Region community consultation to discuss and receive the community's feedback on a number of the questions posed by the Commission in *Discussion Paper 2*. The HSPB-YR welcomed Leah Myers, Executive Lead, Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario to present and participate in the community consultation. In hosting the session, the HSPB-YR worked with the York Region Food Network - Do the Math Working Group and the Social Planning Council of York Region.

The consultation brought together people with lived experience with social assistance, municipal officials, human service agencies and community groups. The consultation involved small group discussions on the key themes of Adequacy of Rates, Service Integration and Delivery, and Complexity of Benefits. There was also a discussion of issues not addressed in the *Discussion Paper* that should be considered moving forward. Each group was facilitated by York Region, Community and Health Services Department staff or a member of either the York Region Food Network - Do the Math Working Group or the Social Planning Council of York Region. Facilitators used a summary of the discussion paper questions to guide the discussion while note takers recorded the community's feedback. Each group reported their feedback to the entire audience prior to the end of the consultation.

The feedback received at the consultation was distributed to the HSPB-YR members for their review.

The Community Response shown in Table 2 reflects the messages received at the HSPB-YR hosted community consultation.

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 1: Reasonable Expectations and Necessary Supports to Employment	
Commission Questions: Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
a) How can employment services be made more effective?	The underlying priority is to create a social assistance system focused on workforce development, where resources are allocated to help clients become job ready and find and keep jobs through intensive case management, integrated supports and targeted employer engagement. This is a key shift from the current system that is still overly focused on policing financial eligibility and compliance. The overall goal is to develop a workforce that contributes to local economic development and sustainable jobs. People currently receiving social assistance represent an under-utilized workforce. Maximizing their potential through intensive supports is the key to help foster economic growth and to meet the demands of an aging workforce. From a Municipal Service Manager perspective, the key elements of a successful workforce development model includes: • Establishing an increased focus on serving persons with multiple barriers to employment ○ Intensive case management to build the trusting relationships needed to help people move forward with their action plans and overcome obstacles to labour market success. This needs to include support for life skills and mental health assessments early in the case management process. ○ Greater use of vocational and other assessment tools (psycho-vocational, psycho-social) to uncover severe learning, cognitive, social and psychological barriers ○ Appropriate resourcing to allow Service Managers to provide intensive, dedicated supports to an increasing number of clients with multiple needs • Providing client-centred employment services that are holistic, wrap-around and integrated ○ Individualized supports and interventions to address the unique needs of the individual to help with long term employability ○ Expand internal and community partnerships to leverage cost-effective integrated supports ○ Increased allocations to ancillary services such as child care, housing, mental health, literacy, language and addiction supports to address the needs of rapid population growth in York Region ○ The provision of a full continuum of employment supports from life skills programs and assessments to pre-employment supports (e.g. resume development, job searching and interview skills), job specific skills training (e.g. office skills, equipment repair) and post-employment job retention supports (e.g. on-the job coaching) ○ Offer alternate options to assess capacity to participate in the workforce (e.g. work trials, work simulation) ○ Targeted employer engagement to match recipients to appropriate job opportunities • Addressing employment retention supports ○ On-the-job coaching and issues resolution ○ Employer support throughout matching, hiring and placement processes and extended availability of financial incentives ○ Provision of dental, optical and drug coverage for all low-income residents, including individuals and families with children, to help sustain people in the labour market and reduce social assistance recidivism

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 1: Reasonable Expectations and Necessary Supports to Employment	
Commission Questions: Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
b) What should the Commission recommend to encourage greater consistency in effective employment services and supports for social assistance recipients, while still allowing for local flexibility and innovation?	- There is a need for overall policy direction at the provincial level which supports a client-centric case management approach to meeting the unique employment needs of individuals, including: - Integrated one-stop service that addresses obstacles to the client's long term employability (e.g. child care, housing, addictions, financial literacy, victims of violence, criminal records) - Human service focus at the provincial level including establishing a common language, policy framework and accountability arrangements to help with integration between social assistance, Child Care, Housing and other programs - This will need to include a funding model that allows Service Managers the flexibility to develop the right mix of employment supports that meet local priorities. A key starting point is to broaden the employment outcomes funding model to include other success points along the continuum of employability (e.g. volunteering, literacy upgrading etc.).
c) Should standard assessment tools be used to identify people's needs and match them to appropriate services and supports?	- Service delivery agents would benefit from the use of a standardized, province-wide assessment tool to assist in determining an individual's general readiness for employment early in the case management process. It is essential that any standard assessment tool: - Is complemented by a range of clinical assessments (e.g. psycho-vocational, psycho-social, vocational) - Helps to uncover the complex range of obstacles facing persons with disabilities and individuals with multiple barriers to employment (i.e. mental health, addictions, cognition, learning and literacy/numeracy) - Identifies human service supports needed in the short, medium and long term (e.g. income, housing, child care, literacy, addictions) - Provides opportunities for individuals and case managers to collaborate to establish priorities and solutions together - Any singular assessment tool would be unable to adequately identify the full range of client needs and barriers that are obstacles to long-term sustainable employment, particularly for clients with significant and multiple barriers to employment. The assessment tool is only one part of the overall assessment. The case manager plays a critical role in assessing and continuing to assess a participant's overall readiness for employment.
d) What should be considered appropriate employment-related activity participation requirements for people with disabilities? Should participation requirements for people with disabilities be different from those for other people receiving social assistance?	- Persons with disabilities should be given the opportunity to fully participate in the labour market. Ability to participate may vary from one individual to the next depending on the nature of the disability and their overall readiness to participate in employment-related activities (e.g. volunteering, training and employment). In any case, an individual's participation should be client-centered and not based solely on mandatory participation requirements. - In an integrated OW/ODSP model, service managers can continue to build inclusive workforce development strategies through partnering with community service providers, offering appropriate education, training and volunteer opportunities, and working with employers to address the stigma associated with hiring persons with disabilities. These efforts would complement implementation of the <i>Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)</i>.
e) Should a tool be developed to assess the work capacity of people with disabilities? If so, how should the tool be developed and how should it be used?	Assessments can be useful to help determine employment readiness for persons with disabilities, though this would need to be complemented by other practical assessment opportunities (e.g. work trials and samples) to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the client's abilities.

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 1: Reasonable Expectations and Necessary Supports to Employment	
Commission Questions, Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
f) What kinds of engagement strategies and incentives would be most effective in encouraging and supporting employers to hire more social assistance recipients?	• Service Managers need flexibility in developing appropriate engagement strategies to connect with employers and link into the local labour market setting. Additional staff resources are necessary to educate employers, encourage hiring of individuals receiving social assistance and ensure effective job placement and on-the-job coaching supports. • Broader employer incentives that extend beyond social assistance are needed in York Region to support workforce development. Funds that are provided by the province through regional economic development agencies should be available to York Region businesses to address the training and employment needs of newcomers, older workers, youth and others who face challenges in the labour market. • Employer engagement is just one component of the overall employment service delivery approach and, to be successful, must be complemented by a full range of services including intensive case management, wraparound supports, assessments, pre-employment training, job-specific skills training, job placement and job-retention supports. • Employer Networking and Engagement ○ Focused employer networking and engagement initiatives (e.g. Employment Community Roundtable) are needed to foster the development of innovative, community-based workforce development strategies that promote improved local labour market opportunities for social assistance recipients ○ Connect with employers to better understand employer needs (i.e. through Employer Outreach role) and the way Ontario Works delivery agents can assist in meeting these needs (e.g. screening, on-the-job coaching) ○ Employer education and marketing to dispel myths about recruiting people with disabilities and individuals receiving income assistance ○ Strengthen linkages with local economic development programs to support improved understanding of labour market needs and opportunities to engage prospective employers ○ Engage in targeted job development to ensure an appropriate match between employer needs and participants skill sets • Recruitment Assistance, Incentives and Job Retention Supports ○ Ensure job-specific skills training is responsive to the needs of employers and the local labour market ○ Offer pre-screening, resume review and job matching for employment ready candidates ○ Provide improved employer incentives including enhanced training subsidy (i.e., EPI-Employment Placement with Incentives) and assistance with the cost of workplace accommodation ○ Introduce a targeted wage subsidy program and other incentives such as WSIB coverage ○ Provide assistance with job placement and programs that offer work experience (e.g. volunteer placements, work trials and work simulation) ○ Provide on-the-job coaching to ease the transition to employment and address workplace challenges as they arise

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response

Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 1: Reasonable Expectations and Necessary Supports to Employment	
Commission Questions, Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
g) Which approach would be most effective in improving the delivery of employment services?	• It is strongly believed that Municipal Service Managers are best positioned to deliver integrated OW and ODSP employment services. Municipalities have developed considerable expertise providing employment services to social assistance recipients, from those who are job-ready to those with significant and multiple barriers to employment: ◦ Most municipalities offer a full continuum of employment supports that would be well suited to addressing the needs of ODSP as well as OW recipients ◦ The current Employment Ontario (EO) full suite model is not equipped to provide intensive, client-centred case management supports. It would take substantial time and significant resources for EO to completely reconfigure its service approach to effectively meet the complex needs of recipients and persons with disabilities ◦ Municipalities have developed a network of community relationships with providers that support the pre-employment (addictions, mental health, criminal records, financial literacy) and employment (EO providers, Welcome Centres, private sector training providers) in supporting multi-barriered participants to become job ready and employed ◦ Municipalities benefit from strong internal partnerships with housing services, childcare services, planning and economic development services, public health and transportation services in supporting an integrated approach to client service ◦ Municipal employment staff work in close partnership with financial assistance workers to collaborate in the development effective employment action plans ◦ Many municipalities have strong experience in identifying and designing innovative programs that are relevant to changing client demographics and emerging local labour market needs (e.g. green economy, hospitality) • However, the development of an integrated OW and ODSP employment program will require appropriate funding and resources for Service Managers, particularly in supporting the increased cost of administration and a broader range of program options needed to meet the needs of a more diverse caseload. Any transfer of responsibilities from the Province to Service Managers must have a cost-neutral impact on the municipal property tax base and should not reverse the benefits of uploading provided through the Provincial Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review. • It is critical that the Province and Service Managers work together in planning implementation of employment services ◦ Currently, ODSP employment services are delivered through a different funding model than OW. Service Managers will need an integrated funding model capable of supporting the new responsibility of providing employment services and intensive case management to ODSP recipients. ◦ If there is a decision to shift all employment services to EO, Municipal Service Managers should be provided the opportunity to be designated as full suite EO service providers. Municipalities are well-equipped to provide the full suite of employment services to both job-ready and multi-barriered recipients.

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 2: Appropriate Benefit Structure	
Commission Questions: Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
a) Which adequacy and wage benchmarks should be used to set rates? Are there other measures that should be considered?	• The underlying policy priority is to reduce poverty. The Ontario Government has already established measures for tracking results in reducing poverty among Ontario children and families. The task for the Commission is to build on these measures where appropriate to create a transparent approach to setting social assistance rates that help people meet their basic needs, housing costs, supports their transition to employment, and promotes good health. • The federal Market Basket Measure provides a useful starting point as it considers regional costs of a basket of goods and services that includes a nutritious diet, clothing and footwear, shelter, transportation and other necessary items (such as personal care and household supplies). However, there will need to be some local flexibility to account for the actual costs of some items in local markets (e.g. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) average market rent for shelter costs; local costs of the Nutritious Food Basket and transit). • The Market Basket Measure also has the capacity to adjust for family size. Reference wages such as minimum wage are not adjusted for family size. This will need to be considered if there is a move to link the withdrawal rate of social assistance benefits to a reference wage as income from earnings increases.
b) In a methodology for setting rates, what proportions would balance adequacy, fairness and incentives?	• The Commission's concern about balancing adequacy, fairness and work incentives in setting social assistance rates are complex issues of program design. The priority needs to be adequacy in setting social assistance rates, followed by the creation of other benefits outside of social assistance to help all low income families and individuals, including those on social assistance, transition to and sustain employment. • As an immediate priority, adjustments to OW rates are needed to close the gaps between benefit levels and the actual local costs of basic needs and housing. Rates should also be adjusted regularly to address inflation. • However, a more fundamental shift is needed. Rather than vary OW benefit levels based on the length of time on assistance, a longer-term vision is to create a stream-lined approach to income support. This would include two basic levels of income support programs: ◦ An integrated OW and ODSP program to support people who face immediate financial need due to short-term disruptions in work or barriers to employment. The focus would be to help people who are job ready find work quickly, while helping others who may require more intensive supports to build the skills needed to re-enter the labour market through the provision of pre-employment, job-specific skills training and ancillary supports (e.g. child care, housing, mental health and addictions). ◦ A longer-term pension style of support for people whose prospects of earning livable income from employment are limited by disability or other circumstances • Eligibility for the two levels of support would be income-tested and verified through the income tax system and other third party sources. This would free case managers to focus on providing individualized, client centered service and to help access ancillary supports. • The two levels of support would need to be supplemented with additional benefits provided outside of social assistance to reduce the disincentive in transitioning to employment and help people sustain themselves in lower paid work. • Designing this system will require collaboration between federal, provincial and municipal levels of government. • A number of issues need to be considered with income-tested benefits provided outside of social assistance. These benefits should: ◦ Provide a net benefit to social assistance recipients ◦ Include a mechanism to respond to sudden changes in circumstances or emergency needs at the service delivery level ◦ Offer more streamlined and consistent level of service (e.g. for dental benefits consider establishing the same level of service for all potential dental clients across the province, consolidate dental treatments into one Fee Schedule and centralize claims submission for dental providers) ◦ Include supports to help people with access to benefits (e.g. filing income tax returns)
c) Should health benefits be provided to all eligible low-income Ontarians? If so, how should the cost be covered?	
d) Should Ontario use a two-rate approach, based on how long someone requires social assistance? If so, should there be exemptions from starting at the lower short-term rate?	
e) Would an earned income supplement be a good mechanism to increase the incentive to work? If so, how should it be designed?	
f) Would a housing benefit improve fairness and the incentive to work? If so, how should it be designed?	

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 2: Appropriate Benefit Structure	
Commission Questions: Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
	• Priorities for new benefits outside of social assistance are: ◦ Low income health benefit program (including drug and dental benefits for children and adults) – this will reduce a major disincentive in transitioning off social assistance and fill a key gap in labour market. ◦ A new housing benefit – this will help leverage other opportunities in the context of local housing plans and priorities (e.g. how to address housing affordability in high cost areas such as York Region). • Current job retention benefits provided by social assistance (e.g. Extended Employment Health Benefit) should continue until appropriate benefits are in place through other programs.
g) How should income supplements for low-income people with disabilities be designed and delivered? Should such supplements be provided outside the social assistance system?	• If there is a move to integrate OW and ODSP income support programs, rates should be harmonized based on a level that provides an adequate income for both client groups. Specific disability related costs can be addressed through additional income supplements to all low income people with disabilities. • As noted above, people with disabilities with significant limits to employment should be provided with a longer-term pension-style basic income program.
h) Should there be a separate basic income program for people with severe disabilities who are unlikely to generate significant earnings?	
i) How should the current rate structure be changed to reduce complexity?	• To help reduce complexity in the current rate structure, there is support to: ◦ Eliminate the category of "dependent adult" so individuals can receive payments if they qualify for social assistance in their own right ◦ Combine the basic needs and shelter allowances into one benefit • However, special benefits should continue to be issued separately based on individual need. These benefits are responsive to a diversity of need and to unexpected, periodic or emergency costs. • Developing a common income test for all provincial income support program administered by Service Managers (i.e. child care, RGI, OW, and ODSP if integrated with OW) will help streamline administration and reduce complexity for clients.
j) Should some special benefits be rolled into a standard rate? If so, which ones?	
k) Should the special dietary needs for all low-income people, including those receiving social assistance, be addressed through the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care?	• People on social assistance may still require assistance with the additional costs of special dietary needs. However, shifting the benefit to all low income people through the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care merits further investigation. More information is needed around the MOHLTC policy framework to assess viable options.
l) How should the different rates for different family types be established?	• A Market Basket Measure approach can provide equivalency scales to reflect the number of people in a household. (See response to Chapter 2 (a), page 6)

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 3: Easier to Understand	
Commission Questions: Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
a) Should the social assistance system move from a surveillance approach towards an audit-based system of verification and monitoring?	- The fundamental issue is that the current social assistance system has an excessive number of rules required to assess eligibility and monitor compliance making the program punitive, costly to administer and stressful for clients. - A simplified, less rules-based system focused on prevention and addressing high-risk cases will permit Municipalities to redirect resources to support clients in their employment efforts while maintaining overall fiscal accountability. - Any move towards an audit-based system must give consideration to the potential for higher overpayments which would place increased pressure on social assistance recipients already lacking the financial means to repay. The move to an audit-based system should incorporate quarterly or semi-annual reviews in order to mitigate any extraordinary costs to the Service Manager.
b) What penalties would be required and feasible in an audit-based system?	
c) What is the right level of risk tolerance in either the current system or an audit-based system?	
d) Should asset limits be changed? If so, how?	- Financial eligibility for social assistance should be streamlined with other benefits where appropriate through an income test. Depleting assets that help people transition back to employment and save for future needs is counter-productive if the overall vision for social assistance is to help people return to self sufficiency. - However, if asset testing remains part of financial eligibility, it is recommended that RRSP and life insurance policies with a cash value should be exempt. OW asset levels should move toward ODSP levels, particularly if the programs are integrated.

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 4: Viable over the Long Term	
Commission Questions: Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
a) What are the strengths and weakness of these three approaches for the delivery of Ontario Works and ODSP? Do you suggest other approaches?	Approach 1: - Integrating OW and ODSP employment services and delivering OW and ODSP income support separately would result in inefficient and unsustainable programs which may be confusing to clients. To achieve success in employment-related services, a holistic approach and intensive case management is necessary to address a person's full spectrum of human service needs. With pre-employment needs being part of possibly many supports a person would need in a wrap-around approach, it would be difficult to separate employment services from other issues a client is addressing. Approach 2: - It is recommended that the Province and Municipal Service Managers work toward full integration of OW and ODSP income and employment support. This reinforces/promotes a "one-stop" service approach, streamlined administration for both the Province and Service Managers and a more integrated approach to local planning. This focus is particularly critical given current economic uncertainty in Ontario and fiscal concerns provincially. Social assistance reform needs to redirect available resources from "rules enforcement" to local economic innovation and workforce development. - However, a phased-in approach is necessary in implementing an integrated model to ensure all staff (OW and ODSP) are fully trained in delivering intensive case management services and the full range of workforce development supports. Program eligibility requirements should be aligned where possible to simplify the process for clients and shift away from an administrative focus for staff. It is critical that service managers are better resourced to support clients in overcoming barriers to employment through intensive, client focused case management and collaborative planning. - This approach will also require developing a pension-style basic income program for ODSP clients who face severe disabilities or limited prospect of employment. This pension would be more appropriate to access through a federal/provincial program. Approach 3: - If there is a decision to deliver social assistance cheques provincially, municipalities will require mechanisms to address emergency situations and payment delays at the provincial level. - In both Approaches 2 and 3, the use of automated systems for income support administration should be explored, where possible, to allow for efficiencies in service delivery. Recognition of Additional Resource Pressures on Municipalities - Additional resource pressures on municipalities should be recognized as part of social assistance reform, particularly if OW and ODSP are integrated locally, through new outcomes-based accountability arrangements. These pressures include staff training, data collection and tracking, information technology tools, program evaluation, service coordination, local service plan development and community engagement. - Integrating OW and ODSP into one program at the municipal level should not result in increased pressures on the municipal property tax base.
b) What do you think of the idea of transferring full responsibility for Temporary Care Allowance or Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services?	- If social assistance reform is moving towards a workforce development program, the Temporary Care Allowance would no longer fit within this approach. - The transfer of the Temporary Care Allowance program to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services should be explored further to assess whether the program is a better fit within the child welfare system. This would allow for an integrated policy approach to address the safety of children in temporary care situations.

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 5: An Integrated Ontario Position on Income Security	
Commission Questions: Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
a) Are there major and problematic program interactions that we have not mentioned here?	- Information sharing is critical between programs – Service Managers need a supportive legislative framework to help with greater service integration across child care, housing and other supports. - Municipal Service Managers will require new allocations to match additional roles and responsibilities including training and the costs of administration. - As social assistance clients often require support from a number of human services, any program interactions should be addressed at the provincial level to ensure that they do not penalize the client, particularly if there is a move toward income testing across programs administered by Service Managers (e.g. rent-gated to income, child care, social assistance) and potentially new provincial benefits (e.g. housing benefits). - It is also critical that local service plans be accompanied by the required funding to support positive outcomes for clients. In York Region, this is particularly a concern given the high rates of population growth and changing demographics. Ancillary supports important to help clients stabilize and find employment are often under-resourced to meet the demand and result in long wait lists for service (e.g. mental health and addictions, child care, housing, support services).
b) What position should the Commission recommend that Ontario consider taking on specific inter-governmental issues related to income security, including First Nations issues?	- A broad review of income security is needed to break down the current fragmented approach between federal, provincial and municipal programs and between the income tax, employment, disability support and social assistance systems. This needs to start with an overall vision to provide adequate income, employment, housing, child care supports and health benefits to prevent people from falling into deep poverty and help people to participate in their local communities. - Programs need to fit within the vision, with appropriate roles and responsibilities assigned to each part. For Municipal Service Managers, the priority is to plan and deliver a locally integrated OW and ODSP employment and income support program focused on workforce development. To be successful, this will require changes to federal policy to reduce current gaps in support that create pressures on social assistance programs and limits positive outcomes for clients. Key federal actions that are needed include: - Employment Insurance reform - Improved immigrant and settlement supports with appropriate funding - Development of a national basic income program for people with severe disabilities - National strategies for early learning, child care and housing - Enhanced federal funding for the Working Income Tax Benefit - Minimize any pressures on social assistance with any changes to the Old Age Security pension

Table 1: The Regional Municipality of York Response
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*

Chapter 6: First Nations and Social Assistance	
Commission Questions: Discussion Paper 2	The Regional Municipality of York Response
a) How well do the various approaches set out in the previous chapters align with the First Nation desire for greater control and flexibility with respect to Social Assistance reform? What other approaches are required to meet the needs of First Nations?	• Municipal Service Managers and First Nations administrators should work more closely together on shared challenges and opportunities in their local communities. • First Nations leaders and administrators should be engaged in discussions regarding approaches to reform to ensure programs and services reflect the unique cultural needs and priorities of First Nations communities.
b) What position should the Commission recommend that Ontario take with the federal government on issues related to First Nations and social assistance?	

Table 2: Community Response from session hosted by the Human Services Planning Board – York Region
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform

Adequacy of Rates (Chapter 2: Appropriate Benefit Structure)	
Developing a New Rate Structure	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
1. Which adequacy and wage benchmarks should be used to set rates? 2. How can the benefit rate be set to balance adequacy, fairness and incentives?	Adequacy of Rates: • Current social assistance rates are not adequate and need to be increased. ◦ Recipients need enough income to meet cost of living realities. ◦ There is a need for new rates that are fair and equitable. • Urgent need to establish new rates that are reflective of the real costs of living (i.e. adequate housing, healthy food, transportation, health, etc.). ◦ There is a disconnect between existing rates and the reality of increasing costs of living. ◦ Immediate action is needed to address single person rates, the inclusion of a \$100 healthy food supplement, and the consideration of social inclusion in setting rates (i.e. recreation costs). • Rates need to be flexible: ◦ Need to reflect individual needs as recipients are not equal in terms of need. ◦ Should reflect natural cycles of cost of living (i.e. increased school expenses in September). • Rates need to reflect regional cost of living realities: ◦ Cost of living in York Region is increasing. ◦ Cost of shelter in York Region is continuing to increase and is much higher than other regions in Ontario. Adequacy and Wage Benchmarks: • There was a varied response regarding the benchmark measure to be used in defining a new rate: ◦ Support expressed for Low Income Measure, particularly as this measure is used by the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy. ◦ Interest also expressed in the Market Basket Measure or a combination of measures. • The benchmark needs to reflect the following: ◦ Cost of living in the community. ◦ Those with disabilities who are impeded from employment. ◦ Don't lower benchmark to reflect low wage worker incomes that are also inadequate (i.e. minimum wage). Benefit Rate: • Avoid creating a hierarchy between those on social assistance and low income earners. ◦ Do not want to set up both groups for failure ◦ Dignity for everyone – social assistance recipients and low income earners should receive health benefits. ◦ Retaining benefits when entering workforce is further incentive to leave the social assistance system (i.e. extended health care benefits). • Housing and medical costs are two major factors needing to be considered. • Benefit needs to be location based and requires regional flexibility to reflect equitability (i.e. in Elliot Lake housing costs are low, but cost of staple groceries are high whereas in York Region housing affordability is a major issue).

**Table 2: Community Response from session hosted by the Human Services Planning Board – York Region
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform**

Adequacy of Rates (Chapter 2: Appropriate Benefit Structure)	
Addressing Tradeoffs	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
What are the pros and cons to the following approaches presented in the Discussion Paper? - Benefits outside the social assistance system? For example: - Extended Health Benefits (drug, dental, vision) - Earned Income Supplement (working Income Tax Benefit) - Housing Benefit - Special Dietary Needs – should this benefit be income tested and addressed through MOHLTC? - Two-Rate Approach - Other Approaches	Concerns over Trade-offs: - People inherently want to work and see the benefits of working. - There were objections to the concept of tradeoffs in comparing people receiving social assistance with low wage earners. - There cannot be a large reduction in income or benefits when moving from social assistance to employment. - Adequacy cannot be thought of in the same context as minimum wage. - Minimum wage, most likely without employer benefits, is not enough to be adequate. Benefits outside the social assistance system: - There is support for benefits outside the social assistance system: - Helps to provide further incentive to leave the system to seek and retain employment. - Not needing to seek social assistance to receive benefits would be a preventative measure that supports retaining employment. - Universal access would improve overall health while supporting fairness and equality among social assistance recipients and low income workers. - Options for employment are greater as job seekers don't need to search for jobs with benefits. - Could keep some residents off the system altogether. - Would assist people in transitioning from social assistance to employment. - There is some concern over the cost of these benefits and who would bear that cost (i.e. government or employer). Housing Benefit: - Housing affordability is a major issue in York Region. - If a housing benefit was the option chosen, it would be necessary for everyone below a certain income level irrespective of income source. - A housing benefit alone does not address housing affordability issues (i.e. high cost of housing in York Region and the lack of affordable housing stock in York Region). - Provincial Housing Strategy needs to address broad housing affordability issues. - People can be forced into a mortgage they cannot afford because there is nowhere else for them to go. - Take a community approach towards the housing benefit (i.e. rates should be based on local housing costs). Special Dietary Needs: - If social assistance rates are increased to an adequate level a special diets allowance may not be needed. - Would help people pay rent and afford a healthy diet, which would result in improved health. - Low income residents with diabetes do not receive enough support. Two-Rate Approach: - An overall lack of support was expressed for the Two-Rate Approach. - May not reflect financial needs (i.e. recipient may need more money at the beginning of assistance while seeking employment). - Administratively complex

**Table 2: Community Response from session hosted by the Human Services Planning Board – York Region
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform***

Adequacy of Rates (Chapter 2: Appropriate Benefit Structure)	
Addressing Tradeoffs	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
	Self Employment. • There is a need to encourage self employment and business start-up yet there are many challenges that are made worse with the current earnings exemptions. • When new businesses start-up they lose 100% of supports and some new businesses are seasonal so income levels vary throughout the year. • Might be better to phase in exemptions over time.
Designing Benefits for People with Disabilities	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
Should income supports for people receiving ODSP be changed? If yes, which approach should be used? 1. Income supplements 2. Separate income program for people with severe disabilities 3. Other approaches	• There was support for harmonizing Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates based on adequacy: ◦ Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates are too low; therefore, harmonization needs to be at a rate that is higher. ◦ There is fear of Ontario Disability Support Program rates being reduced through harmonization. Income Supports: • There was support for income supplements for those working and as a way to address disability costs. ◦ Allow for flexibility so supplements can reflect needs of the individual. ◦ Needs to more accurately reflect expenses faced by those with a disability, such as medication, walkers, transportation, dental, and vision. • There was also support for a separate pension program for those with a severe disability recognizing additional barriers to income earning potential. ◦ The pension program should reflect lower income potential. • There should be no additional rules or verification processes for the income supplement. ◦ Don't add to complexity. ◦ The need for an individual to tell their story too many times can make them feel as though they are asking for pity. • Consultation is needed regarding design of income supplements both within and outside the system. ◦ There is a concern that income supports will not reflect housing costs and not assist those who are unable to work. Other: • Make the transition from the child tax benefit system to ODSP seamless as disability has already been assessed.

Table 2: Community Response from session hosted by the Human Services Planning Board – York Region
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform

Service Integration & Delivery (Chapter 1: Reasonable Expectations and Necessary Supports to Employment & Chapter 4: Viable Over the Long Term)	
Effective Employment Services	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
How can employment services be made more effective? 1. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages to having a standard assessment tool to identify needs and match to services and support? 2. What are appropriate employment related activities and participation requirements for people with disabilities? How would you assess capacity? 3. How might we encourage and support employers to hire more social assistance recipients?	• There is a need for an employment focus in the Social Assistance system that reflects the belief that people want to work. ◦ To reflect this belief it was commented that the name should be changed from Social Assistance to Workforce Development. ◦ It was also commented that any name change would need to reflect that the system is both Social Assistance and Workforce Development. A name change to Workforce Development does not accurately reflect many people's situation and in effect raises false expectations among the general public when they see people not working and don't understand the circumstances behind what they are seeing. • Could have a common assessment tool, but it would need to be one tool within a larger toolbox. ◦ Tools need to be flexible as one size does not fit all. ◦ Early assessments need to identify barriers. ◦ Cannot assess people's employability. People themselves are the best judges of their own employability. • There should be universal access to supports. ◦ Employment supports need to start early. ◦ Supports should not be limited to those who are already job ready. ◦ Should include those not currently considered for assessment (i.e. sole parent with a child under 6 years old). ◦ Agencies often only cater to the employable. Other groups can be abandoned. Programs need to be developed for those being left behind. ◦ Those on Social Assistance should have the same access to all employment supports that people on Employment Insurance or the general public are able to access. • Individual supports for clients should not be just employment and training focussed, they also need to promote individual choice and take a promotion and prevention approach by linking to other services that can help with: finding health options, health outcomes, nutrition, and financial literacy supports. ◦ Collaboration is key; the system could refer people to existing community programs that offer supports. • For ODSP clients there is a need to support the desire to work. ◦ Agreement for ODSP client participation in the workforce. It is about participation rather than mandatory requirements. ◦ Employment supports for the disabled need to be available in the workplace or a working environment. ▪ This is more important than pre-employment supports. ▪ An individual can get stuck in pre-employment and never get out. • Need to make it easier for employers to hire Social Assistance recipients. ◦ Connections and support for employers are critical. ◦ Job retention support essential. Need for a job retention strategy.

Table 2: Community Response from session hosted by the Human Services Planning Board – York Region
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform

Service Integration & Delivery (Chapter 1: Reasonable Expectations and Necessary Supports to Employment & Chapter 4: Viable Over the Long Term)	
Effective Employment Services	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
	- Employers who hire employees on ODSP should be recognized. - It would help to create a socially responsible employer mindset. - Incentives should be available for employers based on how long the social assistance client stays on the job. - Encourage consumers to support employers that support/hire those from social assistance or disabled. - Wage support. - Tax incentives. - Affirmative action. - Innovative business supports/grants. - Micro-financing.
Improved Access to Employment Services	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
Of the delivery approaches outlined below which would be most effective in the delivery of employment services? - Improved Provincial-Municipal/First Nations collaboration that would better integrate ODSP, Employment Ontario and OW employment services. - Municipalities/First Nations deliver all employment services for people receiving social assistance, whether Ontario Works or ODSP. This would link services to municipalities' expertise in local economic development and workforce planning. - Employment Ontario delivers all employment services and social assistance administrators would retain responsibility for overall case management of people receiving social assistance, including referrals to EO and other services and ensure that people are participating in employment-related programs. - Are there other options the Commission should consider?	Discussion in this area was limited. General comments regarding the proposed models, include: - Municipalities and First Nations deliver all employment services: - Should combine services and house with municipalities - More efficient and keeps bureaucracy to a minimum. - Access to services would be more streamlined and less time consuming for people receiving assistance. - Less cost so savings could be re-directed to people receiving assistance. - Employment Ontario delivers all employment services: - Everything would be under one roof, but may not address individual needs and may not have enough physical locations. - Regardless of the model used the system needs to be holistic.

**Table 2: Community Response from session hosted by the Human Services Planning Board – York Region
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform***

Service Integration & Delivery (Chapter 1: Reasonable Expectations and Necessary Supports to Employment & Chapter 4: Viable Over the Long Term)	
Integrating Programs	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
Which is the preferred approach and what are the pros and cons with each approach? 1. Continue with the current model of separate delivery of Ontario Works and ODSP income support, while integrating employment services and supports for everyone receiving social assistance. 2. Provide employment services and income support through a one-stop delivery model that would integrate Ontario Works and ODSP at the local level. 3. Provide human services components of social assistance, including case management and employment services, through Service Managers, while the Province delivers administrative services, such as issuing social assistance cheques. This could build on Service Ontario's work to transform Ontario's benefit administration. 4. Other?	• No one model emerged as the preferred model, but the following criteria for the integration of programs was identified: ◦ Client centred ◦ Holistic ◦ Focus on individual supports ◦ Fully integrated-case management ◦ Provides linkages to other supports ◦ One stop shop • Integration of OW and ODSP would create greater ease and simplicity and it would cut down on wait time for people transitioning from OW to ODSP. • Access to all employment supports for all groups is important. • Programs are about more than employment training. • Needs to address the broader individual service needs. • Needs to be responsive to changing needs.

**Table 2: Community Response from session hosted by the Human Services Planning Board – York Region
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform**

Complexity of Benefits (Chapter 2: Appropriate Benefit Structure & Chapter 3: Easier to Understand)	
Simplifying the Rate Structure	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
The Commission wants to simplify the rate structure: How can the current rate structure be changed to reduce complexity? 1. Combine basic needs and shelter components into a standard rate for all adults? 2. Remove the category of 'dependent adult'? 3. How should rates reflect family type? 4. Are there special benefits that need to be rolled into the standard rate?	Combined Standard Rate: • Overall there was support for a combined standard rate, but with concerns related to adequacy of rate and additional benefits reflective of clients circumstances: ◦ Must be an adequate rate. ◦ Should be designed to be easier to administer and easier for clients to understand. ◦ Needs to truly cover costs of shelter. ◦ Needs to reflect geographic costs of living, otherwise shelter component may not be effective for those living in regions where the cost of housing is expensive. Designing the system like this may result in recipients moving to communities where cost of housing is less and rates are higher. ◦ Needs to have flexibility in order to address personal circumstances. Remove 'dependent adult': • There was a mixed response to eliminating the category of dependent adult: ◦ May reduce complexity, but may also penalize parents who need to continue supporting their child. ◦ May offer some flexibility by allowing dependent adults more independence, but may also be "throwing the young adults into the woods" who do not have the skills to manage their own finances. ◦ Removing the status of dependent adult and making them ineligible for benefits as an adult in their own right, while staying at home, means they lose benefits, but still cannot afford to move out so families are left to take care of them with less ability than before. Reflection of Family Type: • The response to this question varied and included support for the following: ◦ A flexible rate that responds to individual family circumstances (i.e. a dependent child with a mental illness needs additional support). ◦ A flat rate with additional money for additional family members. Special Benefits that Need to be Rolled into the Standard Rate: • There is a need for special benefits to be available; however, they need to have a clear and transparent application by the caseworker (i.e. common approach). • Support was expressed for special benefits above the combined rate as there is a need to offer individualized benefits based on individual circumstances. ◦ A menu of options may be needed: ◦ Parents need a car or bus pass to transport children ◦ Vehicle insurance and license plate renewal ◦ Post-secondary school/college education or training programs. ◦ Social inclusion costs General Comment: - Need to breakdown barriers for people on ODSP to get OSAP, grants, or scholarships.

**Table 2: Community Response from session hosted by the Human Services Planning Board – York Region
Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform***

Complexity of Benefits (Chapter 2: Appropriate Benefit Structure & Chapter 3: Easier to Understand)	
Asset Limits	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
How should asset limits be changed?	• Overall there was consensus that asset limits should be increased, but there were variations on how high they should be raised, including: ◦ Equivalent to ODSP rates ◦ Higher than ODSP rates ◦ To Quebec's level (\$60,000) • Must be reflective of personal circumstances (i.e. needs to be special consideration for victims of abuse who are made ineligible for assistance due to marital asset levels). • Asset limits are critical to saving for the long term and future financial stability (i.e. should exempt RRSP). • There is a desire to save for future education pursuits (i.e. provide exemption for RESP). • Cannot retain your home without assets.
Compliance & Risk Management	
Questions Presented to the Community	York Region Community Response
1. Should the social assistance system move toward an audit-based system of verification similar to the Income Tax System? 2. What penalties would be required and feasible?	• Support was expressed for an audit based system with some criteria to mitigate risk. • Penalties to be similar to employment insurance and income tax systems. • Needs a simple appeal process.