

SAR report and municipal responses to CSUMB

From Jennefer Laidley (ISAC), October 18, 2012

As you know, the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) was cut from social assistance in Budget 2012. People on OW or ODSP can still apply for CSUMB, but the benefit will end as of December 31, 2012. This change is intended to save government approximately \$150 million over three years.

Starting January 2013, half of the funding for Community Start-Up will be transferred to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The Ministry is bundling it with funding from five other housing-related programs and transferring that money to the municipalities (i.e., the DSSABs and CMSMs) under a new program, the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI), which was created July 24. CHPI is intended to provide more flexibility for municipalities to respond to housing and homelessness needs in their local areas.

For people on social assistance, the loss of CSUMB will mean they will have no guarantee of receiving a benefit that 16,000 people rely on each month. They will have to compete with all other low-income people in their area for a piece of a smaller funding pie. In most areas, they will also have no appeal rights to decisions to deny funding for housing-related benefits, as they do currently under CSUMB.

See this backgrounder we prepared for clinics and communities to use in advocacy efforts, for more information on the importance of CSUMB, the changes that are being made, and who will be impacted in local communities – including women escaping violence, people leaving the shelter system, and others:

- English: <http://sareview.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Backgrounder-for-General-Distribution.doc>
- French: <http://sareview.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Backgrounder-for-General-Distribution-FRENCH.doc>

Municipalities are finding that the cut and change in funding administration means they will have significantly fewer funds to assist low income people in their communities. This is not only because only half of the CSUMB money is being allocated for the CHPI program, but also because it is being allocated to municipalities dependent on their share of households in deep core housing need, determined in 2006.

Because the new CHPI is intended to provide greater flexibility, each municipality is responding in a different way. This means that the impact on people on OW and ODSP will be different depending on where in the province they live.

Preliminary funding allocation information from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing was given to municipalities in late September, with final information to be presented later this fall. As such, municipalities are in the process right now of

determining the impact of the changes on their budgets and services and their responses.

Finding out what each of the 47 municipalities is doing to respond to the loss of CSUMB has been difficult. While there have been many media reports lately about what is happening in various regions of the province, we are relying on official records like Council meeting minutes to make sure that our information is correct – and many of those official records are not yet available publicly. However, we are sharing information from ten selected municipalities to give legal clinic staff and community members a sense of the range of possible responses. This may be helpful to you in your advocacy efforts with your local municipality.

The City of Kingston has proposed the creation of a new "Discretionary Residency Benefit" dedicated for social assistance recipients. The amount of money people will be eligible to receive is lower than it was in CSUMB (up to \$500 for singles and couples with no children; \$1000 for families) and it will be available less often (once every 36 months). Eligible expenses are limited to essential residency-related expenses only, with a provision for other related expenses in exceptional circumstances only with manager approval.

- https://www.cityofkingston.ca/pdf/cityhall/committees/hhc/agenda/2012/HHC_A1112-12244.pdf

A City of Toronto staff report will be going forward to Council on October 30. The report proposes creating a new Housing Stabilization Fund (HSF) that would be targeted to people on social assistance. The proposed HSF has slight differences from CSUMB in terms of the amounts available and eligibility criteria, but it will be accompanied by an appeal process that will allow for secondary reviews of eligibility and issuance decisions – thereby retaining an important accountability aspect of the formerly mandatory CSUMB. In addition, eligibility criteria for the HSF specifically indicates the inclusion of people in situations of particular precarity (e.g., those leaving institutions, leaving the shelter system, and fleeing situations of domestic violence).

- <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.EX23.15>

At its meeting of September 5, Lambton County passed a motion "That the Warden of Lambton County be asked to write to the Premier to outline the effect of the budget cuts and the impact they will have on our most vulnerable citizen and to strongly urge the Premier and Government to negate these cuts for 2013 and beyond as they will actually have a negative impact on the economy, and on the people returning to the workforce and contributing to the building of Ontario". In addition, a staff report for a meeting of October 17 notes that "stakeholder meetings are planned for October 2012 to obtain input regarding priorities for homelessness programming and social investment from community agencies and Circle Leaders". Staff are to report back at a future meeting with recommendations for implementation of CHPI.

- <https://lambton.civicweb.net/FileStorage/D4674838319943C8B80C36804FEFEF66-LCC%20%280S%29%20-%20September%205,%202012.pdf>
- <https://lambton.civicweb.net/FileStorage/0740215226684373B89F7FFA01F2941A-Mike%20Bradley%27s%20Notice%20of%20Motion.pdf>
- <https://lambton.civicweb.net/FileStorage/5F416C577D224635B5F0E4FE84DAAA8-Community%20Homelessness%20Prevention%20Initiative%20Repor.pdf>

In York Region, "the full range of existing homelessness prevention programs will be maintained" according to a September 12 memo that was received as part of committee minutes at Regional Council on September 20. That memo, prepared by the Commissioner of Community and Health Services, indicates that "CSUMB has been a critical support for OW and ODSP clients who face severe housing instability" and that "An immediate priority for 2013 will be to develop alternative service delivery models under CHPI, to ensure the continuation of timely and responsive support to prevent homelessness and help people living in emergency shelters find new housing." A strategy to replace CSUMB is to be prepared in 2013.

- <http://www.york.ca/NR/rdonlyres/2h56svqqe2gqsbk3yx1333jcxvdtldgwhge6vwgsksgsiv4nu4xhlzx6ns3jdnm24nkifmbodit4hmt5vf4sadm4ef/sep+12+urbanski+comm.pdf>

The Manitoulin-Sudbury District adopted a resolution at its September 27 meeting to "call upon the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to reevaluate the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative funding allocations, specifically the use of the 'Deep Core Housing Need' information, and ask that the Province of Ontario commit to reinvesting 50% of the savings of the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefits into the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative proportionately to the CMSM/DSSAB's expenditures."

- <http://www.msdsb.net/images/ADMIN/board/minutes/2012/Draft%20Minutes%20Sept%2027%202012.pdf>

In Hamilton, staff are to report in December on implementation issues surrounding the new CHPI program. However, at its September 12 meeting, Council directed the Mayor to meet with Minister Milloy "respecting the reinstatement of the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit for the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs". A motion was also passed that "the Fairness to Hamilton Campaign Subcommittee and the Mayor arrange a Hamilton Day at Queen's Park and schedule a press conference in the media gallery to demand emergency funding for the Community Homelessness Initiative".

- http://www.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/59554517-9241-4382-B6CC-1026FA954960/0/Sep12EDRMS_n353545_v1_017_EcopyMinutes.pdf

In June, Chatham-Kent Council voted to direct the Mayor to "write a strongly worded letter to the Minister of Social Services speaking out against these draconian measures that are affecting the weakest members of our society and that Council set up a meeting with the Minister during the upcoming AMO Conference." No further information about Chatham-Kent's response to the new CHPI funding envelope has been found.

- http://www.chatham-kent.ca/Council/CouncilMeetings/Lists/Council%20Meetings/Attachments/83/M.June_25_2012_Minutes.pdf

Durham County Health and Social Services Committee received a report at its September 20 meeting outlining the negative implications of the cuts for County residents who rely on social assistance and for the County as a whole. The Committee's report went to County Council on October 10, but minutes from that meeting are not yet publicly available.

- <http://www.durham.ca/extcontent.asp?nr=div&axion=minagend&listma=minutes&setFooter=/includes/councilFooter.inc>

In Peterborough, tons of work is ongoing by the Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network, but I'm currently uncertain where things stand. County Council has a meeting tonight (October 17), so I look forward to hearing where things land after that meeting.

In Niagara Region, a staff report is going to Budget Review Committee tomorrow night (October 18). The report proposes creating a new Housing Stability Plan that has four associated strategies all targeted to prevent homelessness; none of these strategies excludes people on social assistance. One of the Plan's strategies is a 2013 replacement program for CSUMB, called "Help with Housing Costs". Details of benefit amounts and eligible expenses are not included in the report. The report does indicate that people on OW will be targeted, with a small amount of funding being allocated for people on ODSP. The report also recommends that a review be undertaken in collaboration with community stakeholders to determine a longer term service strategy. Again, this report is going to be debated tomorrow night, so these are only recommendations at this point.

- <http://www.niagararegion.ca/council/subcommittee/SubCommittee%20Documents/OCRBW-COM%2040-20122012-10-11%20103110.pdf>

Please note these quotes from the Niagara Region staff report, which may be helpful to you to use in your own advocacy. These quote relate to the government's previous agreements with municipalities and the impacts of the elimination of CSUMB.

"The provincial decision to terminate CSUMB has essentially downloaded responsibility for a benefit, despite the province's commitment to upload social service costs. While the issue of which level of government should pay for a social service benefit is a crucial point in principle, and deserving of strong advocacy, vulnerable individuals and families will be negatively impacted if municipalities do not implement measures to help mitigate

impacts, at least until such time as the provincial government decides to rescind its decision or provides transitional funding (should that occur). There will also be negative impacts for the local economy including business and social service agencies as other costs may increase (for example, vacancy loss in Niagara Regional Housing units)."

"The reduction in the overall amount of funding means that competition for fewer resources will intensify. In Niagara, an already underfunded homelessness prevention system means that low income households will be further disadvantaged. The impacts to individuals are substantial given that CSUMB was issued to about 11,200 OW and ODSP households in 2011. More than 50% of these funds were provided to households for last month's rent deposits paid directly to clients or landlords, about 23% of CSUMB was provided to households to prevent the loss of utilities because they were not eligible for other supports such as the Niagara Emergency Energy Fund. Approximately 28% of Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) tenants currently receive OW or ODSP; CSUMB has been issued to NRH for last month's rent and rent arrears. If the loss of CSUMB is not mitigated, NRH revenues will also be negatively impacted."

"The province's decision to cancel CSUMB and reinvest only half of its previous commitment puts local governments in the difficult position of either continuing to provide the same level of service by assuming 100% of the shortfall or reduce or eliminate services to people living in poverty."

Help Us Gather and Share Information - if you have up-to-date information about what is happening in your region – especially if you have staff reports or council minutes that you can share – please email me directly at laidleyj@lao.on.ca.