Changes coming to ODSP Employment Benefits in 2015:
What you need to know and what you can do

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What this webinar will cover

• Basics
  – Who are we? And what’s happening?
• Context
  – Why this change?
• Current: Three employment benefits
  – How they currently work
• Change: One new employment benefit
  – What we know from MCSS about how it will work
• Implications of this change
  – Several concerns
• Opportunities to express concerns
  – ODSP Action Coalition advocacy and activities
Who we are

• We are not part of government

• Income Security Advocacy Centre
  – Legal clinic that works to improve law and policy in OW, ODSP and other income support programs through advocacy, organizing, and litigation
  – Also have a mandate to do public education

• ODSP Action Coalition
  – Advocacy organization made up of people receiving ODSP, legal clinics, patient support organizations, and other agencies
What’s happening?

• Three current ODSP employment-related benefits will end
• One new ODSP employment-related benefit will start
• No other ODSP employment-related benefits or deductions are changing
• OW – similar change as four benefits end, new benefit starts
Context

• Social assistance reform
  – Long process of advocacy to have government reform social assistance programs
  – Focus from advocates was on bigger picture
    • Wanted review of all benefits / programs / ways government can help ensure income security
    • Identified OW as the biggest problem in social assistance
  – But government’s review was only on OW/ODSP
    • Focus on getting more people on ODSP working
    • Reduction in / streamlining of benefits

• Budget 2014
  – Elimination of three benefits and creation of new one
1. Employment Training and Start-Up Benefit (ESUB)
   • Help people start working by helping with expenses related to starting a training program or a job, changing jobs, etc.
   • Person with disability, spouse and/or dependent adult children
   • Maximum $500 in any 12-month period.
   • Examples of expenses: clothing for job interview, license fees, post-secondary application fees, grooming costs, tools and equipment associated with training or a job, transportation costs to prepare for, find, or start a job, etc.
   • Mandatory (i.e., appealable)
...current benefits

2. Employment Transition Benefit (ETB)
   • Help people get into work by helping with associated costs
   • For those no longer eligible for ODSP because income from work, training, self-employment is too high
   • One lump-sum payment of $500 in any 12-month period
   • Mandatory

3. Work-Related Benefit (WRB)
   • Encourage people on ODSP to get into work and stay employed by helping with costs associated with work.
   • Person with disability, spouse and/or dependent adult children
   • $100 in each month that there is income from training, work, or self-employment
   • Mandatory
Important aspects of these benefits

• Fairly straightforward to access
  – Apply through regular ODSP caseworker, declare earned income on Monthly Income Report, etc.
• Appeal rights to Social Benefits Tribunal
• Support people getting into the work world
  – Training, self-employment, paid job
• Also support people while they are working
  – Work-Related Benefit – regular monthly income support, helps with employment expenses
New benefit: What the Ministry of Community and Social Services has told us...

• Called “Employment-Related Benefit”
• Focus: Supports for people getting into work
  – I.e., not those who are already working
• Amounts:
  – Up to $1,800 / 12 mos for person with disability
  – Up to $1,200 / 12 mos for non-disabled spouse and/or dependent adult children (same as for people on OW)
• Starts April 2015
  – The three current benefits will no longer exist
  – Extra transition period for Work-Related Benefit only for people with disabilities (i.e., not family members)
...what we’ve been told re: new benefit

- Eligibility / Access: Will depend on how expenses align with an “employment plan”
  - This means that, in most cases, people will need to work with an employment service agency
  - An employment plan has to be made with an employment counselor
  - The plan outlines the supports or training the person needs to get a job, and what that will cost
  - The plan goes to the ODSP caseworker, who makes a decision on how much money will be allowed
Accessing current benefits

Employment Start-Up Benefit (ESUB):

Person on ODSP or family member → Request → ODSP Caseworker → If approved → Benefit amount is paid

Employment Transition Benefit (ETB):

Person on ODSP or family member → Monthly Income Report → Benefit amount is paid
Accessing current benefits

Work-Related Benefit (WTB):

Person on ODSP or family member

Monthly Income Report

$100 added to regular monthly cheque
Accessing the new benefit:
Person with a disability on ODSP

Person with disability → Employment Counselor (at agency) → Plan includes recommendation for how much money is needed → ODSP Caseworker - has final decision

OR

Person with disability → Finds job on their own. Needs funds to pay for things related to starting the job – uniform, tools, etc. Can approach ODSP caseworker directly “in limited circumstances” → ODSP Caseworker - has final decision
Accessing the **new** benefit: Non-disabled family member

**OR**

Family member waived from participation agreement

ODSP Caseworker - has final decision
...new benefit - FAQ

• What if my request for the ERB is denied?
  – New benefit is discretionary, not mandatory
  – No appeal to independent Social Benefits Tribunal
  – Can only request internal review – done by people within the Ministry

• What if my employment-related expenses are more than $1,800?
  – The Ministry says some flexibility will be allowed
...new benefit - FAQ

• What if I’m already working?
  – Can apply, but ERB will not cover costs of working
  – Will only cover costs in employment plan that will help increase hours of work or amount earned

• What if I’m volunteering?
  – Can apply, but will only cover costs in employment plan for volunteering if it will lead to paid work
...new benefit - FAQ

• What if I don’t work with an employment service agency?
  – The Ministry says people who are not part of an employment supports program will be able to request the benefit from their ODSP caseworker
  – They say the caseworker will have the ability to approve benefits this way, but only in limited circumstances
  – The preference will be for people to develop an employment plan with an employment counselor
Work-Related Benefit - transition

• Work-Related Benefit ends April 2015
  – For family members - non-disabled spouses and dependent adult children

• “Transition period” April 1 to Sept 30, 2015
  – Person with disability will continue to get $100
  – Must have already been receiving WRB
  – Must have employment income in each month to continue to be eligible – i.e., can’t miss a month or won’t be able to get WRB again
  – Any WRB received in six-month transition period will be deducted from new benefit eligibility
How can I replace the money that I will lose?

- The Ministry has said the six month transition period is to give people time to work on how they can increase the amount of money they can earn.
- The Ministry has also said people should use the money they get through the new $200 earnings exemption to make up the difference.
- The Ministry has no plan to help people make up the money that will be lost.
... new benefit - FAQ

• Why is this happening?
  – The Ministry says the new benefit will:
    • Encourage more people to prepare for employment, look for a job, increase the amount of money they earn
    • Make the system simpler
    • Make the benefit more individually-tailored and flexible

  – The Ministry says:
    • The Work-Related Benefit was not giving enough of an incentive to work
Implications / Concerns: Loss of Work-Related Benefit

• Loss of $100 in each month
  – Up to $1,200 per year in lost income
  – Incomes from ODSP are already inadequate
  – Many will be unable to work more to make up the difference

• Impact on employment
  – People will no longer be supported while they are working
  – May result in inability to stay working
  – May result in fewer people working
... concerns re: work-related benefit

• Purpose of earnings exemption
  – $200 earnings exemption implemented in 2013
  – Intended to encourage work, but also helped with income adequacy
  – Requiring use for expenses covered by WRB means losing income benefit of earnings exemption

• Loss of appeal rights
  – Benefits were mandatory but now discretionary
  – Means loss of ability to have an independent body review the decision
  – Loss of legal rights to fair appeal process
... concerns re: work-related benefit

• Lack of support for social inclusion
  – Work is often about community as much as or more than income
  – Not supporting people in work means potential loss of that community
  – No support for those who can only volunteer
... concerns

• Treatment of ODSP families
  – Family members increasingly treated as separate from people with disabilities
    • But well-being of family members is related to well-being of the person with the disability
    • E.g., family members will lose $100 six months earlier than person with disability - but loss of money will also hurt person with disability
Implications / Concerns: Other

• Loss of rapid response to need
  – ESUB is simple and flexible
  – New benefit focuses on planning process; more lengthy re: approvals

• Consistency across Ontario
  – Differences in referrals from caseworkers, available employment service providers, etc.

• Implications for caseworkers / employment counsellors
  – Workload / capacity issues
Advocacy and Action

• ODSP Action Coalition
  – Made up of ODSP recipients and agency allies
    • Legal clinics, patient groups, service agencies, etc.
  – Primary focus is lack of income adequacy
    • Loss of $100 Work-Related Benefit is primary concern with employment benefit changes

• Coalition activities:
  – Now: Questionnaire for future report on impact
  – New year: Advocacy
Questionnaire

• We want to produce a short report on the impact of losing the Work-Related Benefit
  – Report will be used to support direct advocacy with the government to demonstrate impact

• We need your help:
  – If you get the Work-Related Benefit - OR
  – If you are an agency that works with people who get the Work-Related Benefit
...questionnaire

• Simple questions:
  – What kind of work do people do?
  – What are the challenges they face in working?
  – What do people use the Work-Related Benefit for?
  – What will they do when they can no longer get it?

• Questions about age, gender, where you live

• Responses will help paint a picture of people’s experience and the impact of the loss
Please help us get responses!

• Questionnaire available at:
  – Please use this online link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WPTQXHH
  – If you cannot use the online survey:
    • Download paper version here: http://www.odspaction.ca/resource/odsp-recipients-who-work-lose-100-month
    • OR, we can send it to you by email or fax.
    • Please return by email or fax.

  – Contact:
    • Chris Ramsaroop at ramsarc@lao.on.ca
    • Phone: 416-597-5820 x5151
Deadline for responses – January 30!

• If you are on ODSP and get the Work-Related Benefit, please respond!

• If you are staff, please help your members / clients respond!
  – Circulate questionnaire to clients / members ?
  – Hold a group online questionnaire workshop ?

• Send responses by January 30 to:
  – Chris Ramsaroop at ramsarc@lao.on.ca
  – Fax: 416-597-5821
Advocacy in the New Year

• After questionnaire responses received:
  – Many activities under consideration
    • e.g., lobbying, petition, letters
  – Want to engage people receiving WRB
    • and their supporters / allies
  – Watch for further contact and information!
    • January / February
Questions and Resources

- ODSP Action Coalition Work-Related Benefit Questionnaire
  - [https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WPTQXHH](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WPTQXHH)

- ODSP Action Coalition Position Paper

- ISAC Issue Backgrounder
  - [http://www.incomesecurity.org/ODSPEmploymentBenefitsarechangingin2015.htm](http://www.incomesecurity.org/ODSPEmploymentBenefitsarechangingin2015.htm)

- This Webinar
  - [http://yourlegalrights.on.ca/webinar/odsp-employment-benefits](http://yourlegalrights.on.ca/webinar/odsp-employment-benefits)

- 2014 Ontario Budget