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This webinar is presented by:



**Income Security Advocacy Centre
Centre d'action pour la sécurité du revenu**

**Tel: 416-597-5820
Toll free: 1-866-245-4072
Fax: 416-597-5821**

**425 Adelaide St. W, 5th Floor
Toronto ON M5V 3C1
www.incomesecurity.org**



About our presenters...

Jennefer Laidley is Policy and Research Analyst with the Income Security Advocacy Centre. She also coordinates ISAC's government relations, media work and online communications – including ISAC's website on the Social Assistance Review: www.sareview.ca. She holds a Masters degree from York University.





About our presenters...

Dana Milne is ISAC's Provincial Organizer. She works closely with community groups, legal clinics, and people on low incomes across Ontario to push for changes to government legislation and rules, including improvements to social assistance. She has a Bachelor's degree in journalism and social work and more than a decade of community organizing experience.



Purpose of these webinars

- Provide technical background information on some of the options we expect to see in the Commission's Options Paper.
- Provide a series of tools you can use to assess these options (and others) and organize with people in your community, in preparation for responding to the Options Paper and meeting with MPPs.

Agenda

- Update on Social Assistance Review process
- Overview of the second option we're looking at: Moving Benefits Out of OW/ODSP
 - Discussion
- Overview of Assessing and Organizing Toolkit
 - Overview of 7 key tools
 - Discussion
- Wrap-up

ISAC's Partners on the Social Assistance Review

- Campaign 2000
- Colour of Poverty - Colour of Change
- The Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants
- The ODSP Action Coalition
- Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
- The community legal clinic system's Steering Committee on Social Assistance
- YWCA Toronto

Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario

- Social Assistance Review promised in 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- Commission appointed by Minister of Community and Social Services in January 2011.
- Discussion Paper released June 9, 2011.
 - Reflected government's focus on "removing barriers and increasing opportunity with a particular focus on people trying to move into employment from social assistance" (from poverty reduction strategy)
 - Consultation period June through end August
 - 700+ submissions from across Ontario
- Options Paper to be released in February.
 - Will identify various options for reform that could be part of final recommendations
 - Consultation process will be limited - 5 or 6 weeks to respond
- Final Report and Recommendations due June 2012.

Moving Benefits Out

- What does it mean?
 - Most often discussed re: extended medical benefits (drug, dental, and vision), which people on OW / ODSP receive.
 - Extending benefits – other than income – to low-income Ontarians beyond those on OW or ODSP.
 - Could mean creating a new benefit program for all low-income people, whether working or on social assistance.
 - E.g., the Trillium Drug Program or the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) could be changed to deliver a drug and dental benefit for all people with low incomes.
 - Would make social assistance primarily about income, with other kinds of benefits (like extended medical) delivered in other ways.

Advantages of moving benefits out

1. Governments step in where the labour market is failing.

- Job quality is getting worse – e.g., no benefits.
- Fear of losing drug / dental / vision benefits can prevent people from looking for work (esp. for lone moms and people with disabilities).
- When jobs don't provide benefits – i.e., when the labour market has failed – government should step in.

... advantages

2. You don't have to be on social assistance to get them.

- Eligibility would depend on level of income, not where that income comes from.
 - The level of income would be low, but the asset requirements of OW and ODSP would not apply.
- More low-income people would get these benefits.
- This includes people who are losing OW / ODSP eligibility due to increasing amounts of income coming through the tax system.

... advantages

- 3. It supports people who don't apply for social assistance because of the stigma.**
 - This can be especially true for low-income people from newcomer communities.

- 4. It's a smart strategy for reducing poverty and reducing health care costs.**

Problems with moving benefits out

1. The current political / economic context

- The main risk comes from whether or not government is willing to invest in what would be a costly system of supports.
- Given the current economy / state of government revenues, this option is unlikely – at least in the near future.
- If they did go ahead now, quality could be sacrificed for quantity.
 - the amount and level of services would get worse if more people were eligible but there wasn't any more government money.
 - people on social assistance would get a poorer quality benefit than they currently get
 - other low-income people wouldn't get the amount and level of services they are entitled to.

Any Questions?

- On what moving benefits out of social assistance refers to?
- I.e., technical questions about the option itself?
- Note: We'll move to discussion questions about benefits and problems next.

Possible Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of other benefits / drawbacks to moving some benefits out of social assistance?
2. How would doing this impact (either positively or negatively) on particular groups of people in your community?
 - e.g., women, lone mothers, people in racialized communities, people with disabilities, newcomers, First Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Metis).

more possible discussion questions

3. For you to support moving benefits out, how would it have to be implemented? E.g.:
 - Who should benefit?
 - What kinds of benefits would absolutely need to be covered in a new drug and dental program?
 - What level of coverage should there be?
 - Should implementation happen over a period of time?
 - What should happen to social assistance recipients in the meantime? Should their coverage stay the same?

4. How might the current political / economic situation have an impact on the government's implementation of this option?
 - Is the government likely to implement this option?
 - How quickly are they likely to move forward?
 - How much money would they be likely to put into it?
 - How narrow will eligibility requirements likely be (financial or other kinds of eligibility)?
 - Will certain groups be left out?
 - Are there alternative options that would be more effective?

Why Organize?

- Options could have far-reaching implications for people on social assistance and low-wage workers
- Commission's final recommendations will guide government restructuring
- Government's focus appears to be on cost-cutting and administrative efficiencies, not poverty reduction

Organizing Toolkit

- Assess the Options
- Consult with your community
- Write a submission
- Meet with the Commissioners
- Lobby MPPs

7 Useful Tools

- 1) Vision/Framework
- 2) Options Backgrounders
- 3) Using an Equity Lens
- 4) ODSP Action Coalition Position Statements
- 5) Government's Poverty Reduction Commitments
- 6) Political and Economic Overview
- 7) MPP Lobby Kit

1. Vision / Framework

- Assess each option against your vision for OW/ODSP
 - Does it reflect your principles and values?
 - How would it need to be implemented to accomplish what you want to change about OW / ODSP?

ISAC's vision

- OW
 - from punitive and counterproductive
 - to supportive and accessible
- ODSP
 - from punitive and inaccessible
 - to supportive and inclusive
- ISAC's vision / framework available online
 - <http://sareview.ca/isac-resources/submission-to-the-commission-for-the-review-of-social-assistance-in-ontario/>

ODSP Action Coalition's Vision

- Based on a human-rights approach
- Outlines 4 key principles
 - Adequate standard of living
 - Dignity
 - Poverty reduction
 - Accessibility
- ODSP Action Coalition vision available online
 - <http://sareview.ca/isac-resources/dignity-adequacy-inclusion-rethinking-the-ontario-disability-support-program/>

2. Options Backgrounders

- Use ISAC's backgrounders to help people understand the options
 - Tax Delivered Income
 - Moving Benefits out of OW & ODSP
 - Merging OW and ODSP
- Organize a community consultation
 - Discuss the advantages / disadvantages
 - Support? Or Not support?
 - How would each option need to be implemented to address poverty and other barriers in your community?

3. Using an Equity Lens

- Rather than commenting on each option broadly, focus on the impact of various options for particular groups
 - People with disabilities
 - Women
 - Lone mothers
 - Peoples of colour
 - Newcomers
 - First Peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Metis)
- Refer to the Toolkit for examples of submissions that do this

4. Disability Position Statements

- Use the ODSP Action Coalition’s position statements on 5 key issues to understand what is at stake for people with disabilities:
 - Defining people with disabilities based on who “can” and “cannot” work
 - Accommodation and AODA
 - Mandatory participation in work-related activities
 - Mandatory treatment and rehabilitation
 - Special Diet Allowance
- Available online
 - <http://sareview.ca/isac-resources/mpp-lobby-kit/>

Impact for People with Disabilities

- Commission's first discussion paper reflected MCSS concerns about ODSP
 - Increasing caseloads
 - Few ODSP recipients in the paid workforce (11%)
- Troubling indicators of possible changes
 - Narrowing or changing the definition of disability
 - Redefining disability as "can" and "cannot" work
 - Mandatory participation

5. Government Poverty Reduction Commitments

- The Poverty Reduction Act was passed unanimously in 2009 by all provincial parties
- The Social Assistance Review is part of the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy
- ISAC's handout on '*Government Poverty Reduction Principles*' lays out the political commitments
- Refer to these commitments in submissions and meetings with the Commissioners and MPPs
- Remind MPPs that restructuring should be about reducing poverty, not government cost-cutting and administrative efficiencies

6. Political and Economic Overview

- Use ISAC's Political and Economic Overview to assess:
 - Which options will the government likely act on?
 - How quickly are they likely to move forward?
 - How are they likely to implement this option?
 - Who is likely to benefit and who isn't?
 - How much money is likely to be invested?
 - How narrow will the eligibility requirements be?
- Focus feedback on particular options or how each option needs to be implemented to address poverty and other barriers

The Doom and Gloom on Ontario's Economy

- Job losses / tax cuts / slow economic growth = diminishing government revenues and a growing deficit
- Premier promises to eliminate the deficit by 2017/18
- Appoints Don Drummond to lead a Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services
 - Report expected late January – early February
 - Media reports indicate government spending must be limited to 1% for next 6 years to eliminate deficit.
 - Some ministries could face 30% cuts.
 - Radical overhaul of how public services are delivered, including OW and ODSP

What will Government do?

- Fears
 - Poverty reduction will be lost amidst focus on spending cuts, administrative savings and reducing OW/ODSP caseloads
- Possibilities for Optimism?
 - MCSS Minister a key player in government caucus
 - Possible improvements to employment supports and access to training and education
 - Possibility that any administrative savings found would be reinvested in social assistance

7. MPP Lobby Kit

- Use the ODSP Action Coalition's MPP Lobby Kit or adapt it to create your own
 - <http://sareview.ca/isac-resources/mpp-lobby-kit/>
- The kit contains:
 - Key messages
 - Backgrounders and Positions on Key Issues
 - MPP letter templates and tip sheets

Lobby your MPP!

- It doesn't end with the Commission's final report and recommendations. Don't give up!
- It's the government who has the power to restructure OW and ODSP, not the Commission. Lobby Liberal MPPs and ministers.
- Lobby NDP and Tory MPPs - in a minority government, opposition parties have more clout!

Any Questions?



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Thanks! and finally...

- Please take a moment to fill in our feedback survey which will appear on your screen when you leave the webinar.
- The webinar should be available online in the next few days on the Your Legal Rights web site at: www.yourlegalrights.on.ca/training and through ISAC's Social Assistance Review website at: www.sareview.ca
- For a list of upcoming public legal information webinars visit: www.yourlegalrights.on.ca/training or sign up for the [Latest Training Webinars from Your Legal Rights](http://www.yourlegalrights.on.ca/training) email bulletin at: www.yourlegalrights.on.ca/email-bulletin.



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