

Clause 15 in Report No. 7 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on April 23, 2015.

15

## Short and Long-Term Impact of the Social Assistance Management System Implementation

Committee of the Whole recommends adoption of the following recommendations contained in the report dated March 26, 2015 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

### 1. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Council support the requests made by the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, including requests for funding and administrative relief associated with implementation of the Social Assistance Management System.
2. This report be circulated by the Regional Clerk to the Honourable Helena Jaczek, Minister, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

### 2. Purpose

This report provides an update to Council on the impact of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) on municipalities generally and York Region in particular; plans to maintain client services; advocacy efforts; and the provincial response to date.

SAMS is a province-wide technology used across Ontario to administer both Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). SAMS replaces the former outdated provincial technology and plays a major role in the ability of municipalities to effectively administer Ontario Works.

### 3. Background

On November 11–12, 2014 the Social Assistance Management System was launched across the Province

As outlined in the memorandum *Initial Impact of the Social Assistance Management System Implementation*, January 22, 2015 (see *Attachment 1*), the provincial strategy of a simultaneous province-wide roll-out of SAMS has been challenging. Municipalities, including York Region, have experienced significant losses in productivity, and have had to curtail various functions including employment programs and investigations. In order to focus on ensuring clients received their Ontario Works benefits, manual processes for application taking and a heightened level of checks and balances were needed.

As of October 2014, the York Region Ontario Works caseload was a caseload of just under 5,600 which represented approximately 10,000 residents in receipt of Ontario Works. York Region had anticipated a difficult launch and developed an extensive contingency plan which assumed that in the short-term, staff would have to use manual processes to serve clients.

Staff dedication and relationships with Ontario Works clients, vendors, agencies and businesses has been invaluable in mitigating negative impacts on the corporation and clients.

In addition to working in business continuity mode, the Region directly and in partnership with other municipalities advocated for and secured some temporary resources, administrative, and financial relief from the Province and has been working closely with internal and external partners to find solutions to implementation issues.

To date, the Region has received \$333,600 in mitigation funding from the Province to help with the administrative costs of SAMS.

### 4. Analysis and Options

Technical system issues are ongoing and are expected to be long-term, impacting capacity for case management

As of March 6, 2015, approximately 22,465 technical issues have been reported by municipalities to the Province and as of March 2, 2015, approximately 11,182 or 50% have been confirmed resolved. Approximately 800 – 1,000 have been added every week since SAMS was launched.

## Short and Long-Term Impact of the SAMS Implementation

As a commercial and off-the-shelf solution SAMS is not handling the myriad of rules and exceptions that govern Ontario Works. Subsidy claim submissions to the Province have been suspended because of the lack of reliable reports. However, while new issues continue to be discovered, technical issues are slowly being rectified and 'work-arounds' are provided daily by the Province to help staff cope. There is growing urgency for current identified system defects and inefficiencies to be resolved as working in business continuity mode indefinitely is not feasible.

Longer-term concerns with the complexity and malfunction of the system include, but are not limited to, system generated errors causing overpayments and incorrect payments that will need to be reconciled. Also, the length of time required to complete most tasks has more than doubled and is taking away important time to work with clients to help them become employed. With less support provided to clients to access services and find and keep employment, people will remain on Ontario Works for longer than the current 14-month average.

The challenges associated with SAMS means program planning, ability to assess performance and reconciliation continue to be affected

The last reliable Ontario Works data available, including caseload data, is as of October 2014. Since SAMS implementation, reports and data extracts used for case management, performance measurement, and financial processes have not been readily or consistently available. Also, the accuracy and integrity of available data is unreliable.

The service slowdowns and inability to extract reliable and accurate data impacts other Regional programs for social assistance clients. Among programs impacted include those that provide: employment services, housing supports for clients that are homeless or at risk of homelessness, verification of the accuracy of payments and eligibility, assistance for clients pursuing child and spousal support, and health benefits such as dental treatment for adults.

The Region's ability to monitor service levels, program use, and make program planning decisions is limited. As a result, the Region is unable to fully monitor the performance of these programs or if clients are benefiting from programs. Planned program evaluation and improvements has been halted and there will be effort required to reconcile and correct data in the future.

Strategies have been employed, with the support of Finance, to maintain basic financial reporting. However, reports for the above programs and other updates for Council scheduled for 2015 such as the Transit Subsidy update may not be possible to generate or may be delayed and limited in detail.

The Region continues to work closely with the Province and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association to advocate for administrative and financial relief and find solutions

There is no doubt the Province now recognizes there is extensive work to be done and that municipalities are essential partners. Municipalities have collectively provided the Province a list of the top technical fixes needed.

In addition, supported by municipalities across Ontario, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario have put forward a number of recommendations, solutions and requests to the Province (see *Attachments 2 and 3*). A key request is full reimbursement of municipal costs. The Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario have supported these requests. The Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union have also been very vocal in outlining their concerns regarding the impact on staff as well as clients.

Helena Jaczek, Minister of Community and Social Services released a SAMS action plan to address ongoing challenges on February 10, 2015 (see *Attachment 4*). On February 12, 2015, Richard Steele, Assistant Deputy Minister responded to OMSSA's letter and reiterated some of the comments made by Minister Jaczek (see *Attachment 5*). OMSSA's recommendations and the provincial responses as of March 4, 2015 are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**OMSSA's Recommendations and Provincial Response**

Recommendation/Next Step	Provincial Response
1. Reimburse municipalities for the extra resources spent to support clients at least at pre-implementation levels.	The Province recognizes that municipalities continue to incur costs and is considering further support options.
2. Commit to a schedule which includes fixes as well as centralized clean-up of data.	The Province established a technical working group (including York Region) with representation of front-line users to identify, prioritize and find solutions to the top priority fixes and will provide a timeline. Centralized clean-up of data has not been confirmed.
3. Work with municipalities on what 2015 reports and data will be required, if any at all, given the inability to get accurate information out of SAMS.	Temporary administrative relief measures are in place, including relief from some performance requirements. The Province will revisit these

## Short and Long-Term Impact of the SAMS Implementation

Recommendation/Next Step	Provincial Response
	measures in late March and confirm extensions and deferrals.
4 No other provincial systems, initiatives or expectations should be placed on municipalities until the system is stabilized.	<p>There is no commitment to defer reforms or systems from other Ministries. The consolidation of Employment Related Benefits planned for April 2015 is postponed until October 2015.</p> <p>Communications, training and other planned Ministry of Community and Social Services activities not related to SAMS are being reviewed and where possible, will be deferred.</p> <p>New components of SAMS will not be added on until technical issues that currently exist are resolved.</p>
5 Reopen and maintain a training environment for future extensive retraining of staff. Staff are currently working around SAMS as opposed to using SAMS.	The Province agrees that an updated training environment is required and is exploring the best approach to support needs. In the short-term, the previous training environment will remain available.
6 Provincial IT and training staff should be available to travel to and support all municipalities until the system is stable.	Some provincial staff may be available to travel but virtual support will be used as provincial support capacity is limited.
7 In the event of provincial labour disruption, municipalities cannot be considered as a contingency plan for Ontario Disability Support Program service delivery.	Municipalities will not provide Ontario Disability Support Program support if there is a provincial labour disruption.

Minister Jaczek has committed to a third-party investigation and will release a final report by April 30, 2015 with comprehensive recommendations for the future of the system.

While the Province is actively engaging municipalities, including Ontario Works Administrators and staff, and these responses are positive steps, municipalities

## Short and Long-Term Impact of the SAMS Implementation

are eager to see more done to fully recover losses and resume normal business before the end of 2015. Municipalities are concerned that 2015 is a lost year and that stabilization and restoring data integrity could take one to two years. Council will be updated on the third-party report and results of further advocacy once more details are available.

York Region is working internally to mitigate and resolve issues associated with SAMS as well as prepare for the “new normal” state

Like all municipalities, York Region has a crucial vested interest in SAMS becoming fully functional so the focus can be once again put toward getting and keeping clients employed.

In addition to working with the Province and other municipalities, internally, the Region has continually upgraded and adjusted contingency plans by working with Corporate IT, Human Resources, Audit Services, and Legal Services to identify and, where possible, implement stop-gap strategies to mitigate resource, administrative, legal and IT impacts in the short and medium term.

Externally, the Region is working directly with OMSSA on a strategic team with the 47 municipal delivery agent leads to advocate for meaningful solutions. The Region has been actively participating on a provincial technical working group that allows for the engagement of front-line staff and provides opportunity to have key technical concerns highlighted and considered. Due to the complexity of issues, this is a slow process. York Region is one of the municipalities visited by the Deputy Minister before he and senior staff embarked on the tour of up to 30 other municipalities. The Region has technical front line staff providing adhoc advice on complex program issues to the Province.

In addition to increasing York Region’s own system performance, the Region’s Corporate IT has shared technical solutions with provincial IT staff for broader use. The provincial IT project team have visited the Region to consult on technical barriers.

The legal, resource, financial, administrative and client implications of a system that does not function efficiently are considerable in the long and short term. York Region is therefore actively working to mitigate its own risk and to be part of the broader provincial solution.

Social assistance reserve funding may be needed to maintain the standard of service delivery and case management support for Ontario Works clients

The Region continues to advocate for 100% reimbursement of municipal costs and solutions to ongoing issues. However, depending on provincial response,

and system fixes, additional staff and administrative support funded through the social assistance reserve may be required to maintain the standard of service delivery and case management support for Ontario Works clients.

In addition, resources may be needed to address backlogs including financial functions, financial reconciliations, data clean-up and to manage increasing workload. Effort will also be needed on communications, training and business process changes until business operations have recovered and the system has stabilized.

The Region continues to focus resources on reducing impact on Ontario Works clients

In York Region, Ontario Works clients continue to receive their benefits but have experienced delays in service including increased wait times, erroneous suspensions of benefits and less face-to-face interaction. The Region tries to manually verify unusual payments and letters generated by SAMS before they are sent to clients as much as resources will allow, and has processes in place to quickly rectify client payment issues. Despite the system errors client complaints have been minimal.

The lasting effects of implementation may negatively impact the employment outcomes of Ontario Works clients as employment and case management support available is now very limited. There is also a concern looking into the future that the design of SAMS will make it difficult to maintain customer service levels and improve outcomes. Toronto, Halton, York Region and Peel have been engaged by the Province to discuss solutions to this in the future once the technical issues are resolved.

The commitment of staff, despite all the challenges, to continue providing customer service, taking on extra duties, working overtime, helping to collaboratively find solutions and supporting each other has been vital to the Region's ability to manage. A number of clients have come forward to acknowledge staff. The attached letter is an example of the comments from clients that illustrate the dedication that staff working with SAMS across the Region continue to show (see *Attachment 6*).

As the Region must focus on the most critical challenges of SAMS implementation, community agencies that are partners in providing employment services and support to Ontario Works clients are experiencing a decline in referrals from York Region staff. This impacts their ability to support clients, meet performance targets and therefore receive funding. The Region has specifically requested that the Province improve the ability of SAMS to complete electronic referrals to agencies.

Once SAMS stabilizes, the Region will be better positioned to assess social assistance program service delivery to identify efficiencies and options to improve outcomes for Ontario Works clients in York Region.

Link to key Council-approved plans

Social assistance reform and the modernization of social assistance technology support the 2015 to 2019 Strategic Plan priority area to strengthen the Region's economy by supporting the development and retention of Region-wide workforce.

## 5. Financial Implications

To date, the Region has received a total of \$333,600 in mitigation funding from the Province. The Province has recognized municipalities continue to incur costs and is considering support options.

Like many municipalities across the Province, projections and estimates based on previous expenditures and caseload statistics were used to complete financial reporting for November and December 2014 expenses. It is not yet known if reporting from SAMS will become reliable in 2015 or if data can be used for reporting during this time. Actual expense details may not be known for several months.

Based on municipal service contracts with the Province, up to 15% of provincial funding can be recovered if negotiated targets are not met. The Province waived recoveries for non-achievement of employment outcome targets in 2014.

The Province will also consider the impact of SAMS when setting outcome targets with municipalities for 2015. Municipalities have requested the Province extend the waiving of funding recovery for non-achievement of employment outcome targets to 2015.

The 2015 Community and Health Services budget includes \$460,000 for temporary resources in support of SAMS, planned to be funded through social assistance reserve. Like other municipalities, the department is in the process of getting an estimate of the true cost of SAMS implementation to the Region.

## 6. Local Municipal Impact

In York Region, residents that are in receipt of Ontario Works are impacted equally in all nine municipalities.



## 7. Conclusion

Given the risk in implementing an off-the-shelf system for a program as complex and multi-faceted as social assistance, complications in launching SAMS were expected. However, neither the Province nor municipalities foresaw that SAMS would struggle to function to the extent it has.

York Region's strong and flexible contingency plan and robust corporate structure has allowed it to continue to deliver basic client services. The ability to continue on without significant SAMS system improvements is becoming increasingly limited. The Region is committed to mitigating its own impacts, delivering client services and will continue to work closely with the Province in partnership with other municipalities to find solutions and troubleshoot problems.

It is anticipated that 2015 will be a challenging year. Additional resources may be needed to continue providing consistent service to residents. The Region will continue to focus on stabilization and business recovery.

As well, the Region will continue to work with OMSSA, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and municipal partners to advocate for reimbursement of expenses, appropriate administrative relief, training resources and strong program technology solutions.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager, Social Services at Extension 72150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

March 26, 2015

Attachments (6)

#6052511

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request



Community and Health Services  
Office of the Commissioner

## Memorandum

TO: Members of Council

FROM: Adelina Urbanski  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

DATE: January 22, 2015

RE: Initial Impact of the Social Assistance Management System Implementation

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The Social Assistance Management System was launched by the provincial government on November 12, 2014 across Ontario; a memorandum sent to Councillors prior to implementation is attached for reference (*Social Assistance Management System Implementation Update and One-Time Provincial Relief Funding, September 4, 2014*). The purpose of this memorandum is to inform Council of the initial impact of implementation on Ontario generally and York Region in particular.

The Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) is a new case management tool for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program. The Ministry of Community and Social Services is responsible for managing the system and municipal use is mandatory. York Region's approximate caseload, as of October 2014, was 5,590 that includes 10,000 individuals (including all household members such as spouses and children).

Since implementation there have been complex system issues that have affected service delivery

Challenges that are common with any complex systems roll-out were expected. While the Region had contingency plans in place to mitigate initial service slowdowns, impact on client services and potential technical problems, the number and complexity of system issues being encountered and the duration of these issues are significant and were unforeseen by the Province.

Issues are ongoing, very complex and beyond the scope of normal business contingency planning. As of January 16, 2015 there were 17,297 issues logged across the Province and 48 percent resolved.

### **Staff have been able to mitigate impacts on Ontario Works clients so far**

York Region has a solid contingency plan, which includes extensive internal staff training, manual processes, redeployment, full utilization of all trained casual staff, and ongoing client communication. For example, to mitigate increased call volume and maintain customer service some staff were redeployed to answer client calls and resolve enquiries. To mitigate cheque errors, staff have been manually verifying client payments and cheques for accuracy prior to release. Also, Corporate IT, Corporate Finance, and Community and Health Services have collaborated to develop workarounds. Despite this, clients and potential clients are experiencing service wait times that are two to six times longer.

York Region's resources and capacity to work without a stable system is diminishing but is not unique to York Region. The focus of limited resources has been on ensuring client service and preventing resident hardship. The dedication of staff has been key to managing resident relations and maintaining basic service and has been possible despite the substantial stress and impact to staff themselves.

### **The extent of the impact of the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System is being assessed**

The expectation is that it will take most of 2015 to stabilize the Social Assistance Management System and some period of time after that to normalize. The focus remains on finding ways to keep serving clients while the Province is stabilizing the system. Strategies are being set in place to contain as many system-generated errors as possible. However, considerable additional administrative support will be needed to enter and clean-up corrupted data in the system, retrain staff and ensure financial integrity once the system is fully stabilized. The Province has provided some leniency in regard to timelines to meet administrative and reporting requirements but these relaxed requirements will be very short-term.

The impact on human resources, accuracy of information, ability to meet provincial reporting requirements, ability to perform financial audits; and the financial costs to the Region due to implementation of SAMS are currently being assessed with the involvement of Corporate branches across the Region. There are short- and long-term human resource, financial, technological and legal implications. The Province has provided York Region with \$222,000 to mitigate costs, and has indicated that no other funding will be made available. Discussions with other municipalities commonly reflect an intention to advocate for more funding to manage short- and longer-term impacts.

Regional staff are working closely with the Province and municipal partners to coordinate activities to fix errors within the new system. There have been regular teleconferences with the Province to troubleshoot problems, identifying work-around solutions and doing everything feasible to mitigate impact on clients. The Ontario

Municipal Social Services Association has recently created a Municipal/Provincial Technical Team to further support fixes.

A report to Council will be provided when a fuller assessment has been completed, as well as a better sense of the extent of the impact on program integrity and the Province's plans to address broader issues is known.

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Adelina Urbanski  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

CH/CA/kn

Attachment (1)

#5850024



Community and Health Services Department  
Office of the Commissioner

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of Committee of the Whole

FROM: Adelina Urbanski  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

DATE: September 4, 2014

RE: Social Assistance Management System Implementation Update and One-Time Provincial Relief Funding

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The purpose of this memorandum is to inform Committee that the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System will proceed during the period of November 6 to 11, 2014, and to update Committee on the possible impact of this province-wide initiative.

### **The Province has announced the new implementation timeframe for the Social Assistance Management System**

The new database that will replace the current social assistance system is a case management tool for Ontario Works clients that was originally targeted for implementation in November 2013. Due to the need for further planning and revisions to the technology, the launch was postponed and will now occur in November 2014.

### **One-time provincial funding for the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System will offset some implementation and planning costs**

The Province originally maintained that no funding would be provided to municipalities for the implementation of the new technology. However, due to the additional financial impact of the delays, the Province is allocating \$5 million in one-time funding to municipal service managers.

York Region's total allocation is \$111,200. This will offset some computer lease costs and temporary resources.

### **Plans are in place to mitigate the impact of service slow downs**

Between Thursday, November 6, 2014 to Tuesday, November 11, 2014, neither the current or the new technology will be available while the Province migrates the information from the current database to the new one. There may be service slowdowns initially and unforeseen

technology problems due to the transition between databases. Contingency plans are being put in place to mitigate the impact of technological disruptions on client service. Clients will not be financially impacted by the changeover.

Regional staff will continue to work closely with the Province to coordinate activities to prepare for implementation, including communications, training, technology, operations and business practice changes. As well, Regional staff will also work with the Province after implementation to identify and resolve issues that arise.

Inquiries should be directed to Maria Smith, Manager, Social Assistance and Lead SSSMP Project at [maria.smith@york.ca](mailto:maria.smith@york.ca) or 905-895-5166 Extension 72206.

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Adelina Urbanski  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

MS/CA/tb/kn

#5615114



January 29, 2015

Sent via email: Richard.Steele@ontario.ca

Richard Steele  
 Assistant Deputy Minister, Social Assistance Operations  
 Ministry of Community and Social Services  
 80 Grosvenor St  
 Toronto ON M7A1E9

Dear Richard,

Thank you for attending the meeting of the OMSSA 47 Leads. Our members appreciated the opportunity to discuss with you and your staff the ongoing challenges with the implementation of the province's Social Assistance Management System (SAMS).

OMSSA recognizes the important first steps that have been made in examining and beginning to address the difficulties of SAMS implementation, most notably through the MCSS-OMSSA SAMS Subgroup and the SAMS Implementation Technical Working Group.

However, as you heard from the OMSSA 47 Leads, SAMS implementation is having far reaching, and by all accounts, will have long term impacts and implications for Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). Impacts that will affect the well-being of clients, staff and their organizations.

Our members are in agreement: the provincially mandated critical infrastructure (SAMS) has created a crisis for CMSMs and DSSABs.

What our members need is a plan and critical timeframes by which SAMS will operate more effectively and efficiently than SDMT.

OMSSA is ready to work with you and your Ministry on a remediation plan that in both the near and over the long term will alleviate growing capacity constraints.

Our members have identified the following as immediate considerations and first steps:

1. SAMS is a rule based off the shelf solution that may have the ability to support a social assistance system that has fewer rules. It is not managing the over 800 complex rules and myriad sub-rules and exceptions to rules that the current social assistance program has.

CMSMs and DSSABs must be reimbursed 100% for the extra staff (including corporate administrative staff and resources) that have and will be needed to support clients at levels they were previously supported.

2. As indicated above, our members need a plan. In an effort to work towards a more stable state, the province work with OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs on its plan forward and commit to a schedule which includes dates for fixes as well as centralized clean-up of data. Achieving this in the first quarter is important.

CMSMs and DSSABs need a realistic understanding of the expectations and demands on their staff and organizations of ongoing SAMS implementation in order to budget and allocate resources effectively for 2016.

3. Requirements to meet service plans and employment targets for 2015 at this time are not achievable.

The province must work with CMSMs and DSSABs on what 2015 reports and data will be required, if any at all, until SAMS is fully stabilized.

If this is not possible, we ask that provisions be made for training including the cost of new staff and overtime that are needed to meet provincial reporting requirements and obligations.

4. No other provincial systems, initiatives or expectations should be placed on CMSMs and DSSABs until SAMS is stabilized.

We encourage the Ministry of Community and Social Services to work with other ministries to ensure that the current pressures and capacity limitations on CMSMs and DSSABs are understood.

5. The release of SAMS was preceded by a number of years of training for CMSM and DSSAB staff. The training provided leading up to and in anticipation of SAMS implementation did not prepare staff for the system of SAMS they are now required to work with.

To remedy this, we ask the province to reopen and maintain a training environment for the retraining of current staff and new staff.

6. In order for CMSMs and DSSABs to improve and expand their current business delivery capacity, program, IT and training staff working on SAMS should be available to travel to all CMSMs and DSSABs until the system is stable.

7. In the event of provincial labour disruption, given the current state of SAMS implementation, CMSMs and DSSABs cannot be considered as a contingency plan for Ontario Disability Support Program service delivery.

The above represent immediate considerations and actions that OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs recommend to bring some stability to the current situation.



As you know, there are significant longer term concerns regarding SAMS including client impacts and what achieving "stability" will mean to the Ontario Works system and the business recovery of CMSMs and DSSABs. This includes but is not limited to the fallout of overpayments, incorrect payments and the very real concern that working with SAMS has taken away important time with clients.

A key principle of Ontario Works is that clients are assisted to help find sustainable employment and achieve self-reliance. Another key principle is the importance of "System integrity". Currently CMSMs and DSSABs are providing only income assistance and doing so at a significant cost to staff and clients alike.

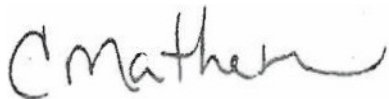
There is ongoing and increasing concern with the well-being of staff. The erosion of confidence in SAMS is impacting the health and well-being of many and resulting in increasing frustration and labour relations tensions.

This current state is counterintuitive not only to the requirements of CMSMs and DSSABs under legislation, regulations and directives, but fundamentally, to the province's poverty reduction commitments.

OMSSA and its members, like you, look forward to system stability beginning with what has been outlined above, and for the long term.

We look forward to working together on resolving and addressing the impact of SAMS implementation.

Sincerely,



Catherine Matheson  
President, OMSSA

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Bohodar Rubashewsky, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Laurie LeBlanc, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Pat Vanini, Executive Director, Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Gary Scripnick, Chair, Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association  
Kira Heineck, Executive Director, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

## Office of the President

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Sent via e-mail: [hjaczek.mpp@liberal.ola.org](mailto:hjaczek.mpp@liberal.ola.org)  
[Helena.jaczek@ontario.ca](mailto:Helena.jaczek@ontario.ca)

February 5, 2015

The Honourable Dr. Helena Jaczek  
Minister of Community and Social Services  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Hepburn Block – 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

Dear Minister Jaczek:

In the spirit of our initial conversation when you became Minister, we know your door is open to us. As you know, there are deep concerns with the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS). The AMO Board at its meeting last Friday was quite anxious about the situation. I know you are better briefed – that the implementation so far has proven almost impossible for both clients and administrators. Welfare operations are still in a state of crisis management three months after the introduction of the new software. It is clear to us that the system still has serious flaws, requiring both short and long-term resolutions. It is not just a matter of an IT implementation situation any longer. Our clients need front line case management supportive work, including employment services, not administrative work-arounds. We have a number of suggestions and are seeking further assurances from the Ministry that a resolution to the immediate crisis is in sight.

While the Ministry's efforts to address the initial problems are acknowledged, it is clearly not enough. More effort, activity, and resource expenditure is needed in light of the current situation. Front-line municipal staff is reverting to Business Recovery protocols and are performing a number of essential functions manually just to ensure that the system produces reliable, accurate, and timely payments to social assistance recipients. This is in our collective interests. However, this situation is clearly not sustainable. Municipalities and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) are facing mounting overtime costs to ensure that payment runs are successful. It is not acceptable that municipalities and DSSABs are incurring more ongoing costs associated with SAMS implementation. These costs cannot be considered part of the 50:50 administration formula. While the Province has provided some initial mitigation funding, the Province needs to step up immediately and assume 100% responsibility for all the short and long-term costs associated with the implementation of the government's new software system.

In addition to the immediate short-term issues, we are concerned with the long-term implications of using SAMS. It is not evident that SAMS is providing the intended service benefits as promised. As we understand it, SAMS is not handling well the myriad of rules and exceptions that govern Ontario Works. Basic functions such as client intake and

address changes take much longer to perform than the previous Social Delivery Model Technology (SDMT) system. There are also a number of accountability features not yet functioning in SAMS. This is affecting the ability to perform financial reconciliations. Again, manual work will be necessary to do what SAMS fails to do. All this will have long-term cost and service impacts which have yet to be assessed, let alone addressed by the Ministry.

In addition, the new operating reality is extremely stressful for front-line staff and is affecting relationships with clients. Caseworkers have less time to spend with clients, not more as was the promised benefit of SAMS. This appears to run counter to efforts the government is taking to transform social assistance delivery into a more client-focused system.

AMO is therefore calling upon the government to immediately:

**1. Use all available means and resources to address the short and long-term implementation problems with SAMS.**

We are seeking assurances that the Ministry and the IT software vendor are investing the necessary resources to address the issues. Also, we would like to see a provincial commitment to maintain the current levels of technical support until both the Ministry and the municipal sector are in agreement that the system is stabilized. There is also a need for the Ministry to reinstate its training program both for new staff and in some cases, the retraining of existing staff.

**2. Reimburse municipalities and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) for the additional ongoing costs associated with SAMS until such time as the short and long-term implementation problems are resolved.**

The Province needs to reimburse municipalities and DSSABs 100% of the additional costs associated with the implementation of SAMS. This includes both staff overtime and corporate administrative resources. While appreciated, the infusion of \$5 million to municipalities and DSSABs in December 2014 is insufficient to cover the costs incurred to date. A critical first step is for the Ministry to survey municipalities and DSSABs to track the additional resources that they are expending. The assessment should also include projections of the long-term costs of implementation.

Further, the Ministry needs to consider that municipalities and DSSABs will have serious challenges meeting their service plans and employment targets for 2015. It is recommended that the Ministry work with the municipal sector to determine what is reasonable in terms of 2015 reporting.



The Ministry is also requested to advise your sister ministries of the challenges faced by municipalities and DSSABs with the implementation of SAMS. We feel strongly that until SAMS is stabilized, municipal service managers are not in a position to take on any new workloads or reporting requirements for any provincially mandated human service program. All available resources are needed at present just to ensure that social assistance recipients receive reliable, accurate, and timely payments.

**3. Work with AMO, municipalities, District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) and the Ontario Municipal Social Service Association (OMSSA) to continue to identify the ongoing issues with SAMS implementation.**

The municipal sector is committed to working with the Ministry to bring stability to the situation. A team approach is needed as the platform fix is worked on. At this point, there is a critical need for the municipal sector to have a well-constructed and realistic plan for 2015 and 2016 to address the immediate SAMS fixes as well as a centralized data clean-up. Our municipal service managers require clear timelines on when SAMS will operate effectively and efficiently so that they may plan and budget accordingly.

Lastly, we are concerned about the possibility of a provincial strike by members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). We are seeking assurances that the same levels of support to the municipal sector will be available in the event of a strike. Further, we would emphasize that the municipal sector cannot be considered as an alternative to help out with Ontario Disability Support Program service delivery in the event of a strike.

Minister, I hope we can sit down soon to discuss the way forward. Staff can contact Lorna Ruder in our office to organize a meeting. In the meantime, I would hope that we receive your written assurance that these matters are indeed within your focus.

Yours sincerely,



Gary McNamara  
AMO President

cc: The Honourable Ted McMeekin, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Catherine Matheson, President, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association  
Gary Scripnick, Chair, Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association  
Bohodar Rubashewsky, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Kristen Munro, Chief of Staff, Ministry of Community and Social Services

**Ministry of Community  
and Social Services**

Minister's Office  
 Hepburn Block  
 Queen's Park  
 Toronto ON M7A 1E9  
 Tel.: (416) 325-5225

**Ministère des Services  
sociaux et communautaires**

Bureau du Ministre  
 Édifice Hepburn  
 Queen's Park  
 Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1E9  
 Tél.: (416) 325-5225



February 10, 2015

**To:** All front-line staff in Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program offices

**From:** Dr. Helena Jaczek  
Minister

Three months ago, the Ministry of Community and Social Services began implementing the Social Assistance Management Systems (SAMS) to administer Ontario Works, the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities.

SAMS will deliver social assistance programs more efficiently and consistently. It's a key component of the transformation of Ontario's social assistance system. I want to thank all of you – the staff who are implementing this important change – for your dedication and commitment to excellence in serving your clients through this transition. I know the implementation thus far has been challenging and I want to assure you that we are doing everything we can to eliminate barriers or problems that may be causing you frustration. I am also keenly aware that a better, quicker and more responsive system is a common goal that we're working towards.

Over the past several weeks, I have visited a number of ODSP and Ontario Works offices across the province. I have experienced first-hand, alongside workers the challenges with SAMS and listened to your experiences during the transition. I have also had dozens of conversations with mayors and other municipal officials clearly expressing their concerns and the concerns of their staff.

Your voices have been heard. The implementation of SAMS must be improved.

In the coming weeks and months, my ministry will be taking specific actions to deal with immediate issues and improve the implementation of SAMS.

We will select an independent, third-party advisor who will provide further advice and assistance, evaluate our progress and recommend actions to help us reach our goals. Municipal partners and staff delivering services to clients will be fully engaged in this review.

I have asked my Deputy Minister and other ministry officials to increase engagement with front-line staff and initiate widespread face-to-face discussions with staff at 30 locations across the province for their insights and understanding of SAMS. This will help us in resolving implementation issues to ensure SAMS meets the needs of you and your clients.

The Technical Working Group, which we have already established with our municipal partners to help us identify and prioritize the challenges with SAMS implementation, will use a front-line users working group to increase the direct engagement of Ontario Works and ODSP front-line staff on system improvements.

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All of this will take place at the same time as the project team is continuing to put into place the solutions to issues already identified.

In the coming days, the senior leadership of my ministry and the SAMS initiative will be following up with you about the steps I have just outlined.

Moving from a system like SDMT to an advanced one like SAMS is a challenging yet important change. It will allow us to improve service for the people we are working to help, streamline business processes, enhance program integrity and respond more quickly to policy and program changes at a reduced cost. I hope that through this letter and our actions in the coming weeks and months that you will see both an improvement and our unwavering commitment to implementing the best system for you and your clients. The lessons we are learning through this implementation will also help us inform similar government projects in the future.

With your help, we will continue to deliver quality service, and provide the support social assistance clients need to become more independent and improve their lives.

Sincerely,

Dr. Helena Jaczek  
Minister

Attachment: SAMS Implementation Action Plan



## **Social Assistance Management Systems (SAMS) Action Plan**

In the coming weeks and months, the Ministry of Community and Social Services will be taking specific actions as outlined below to deal with immediate issues and improve the implementation of the Social Assistance Management Systems (SAMS).

### 1) Appointment of third-party advisor

The ministry will be bringing in a third-party advisor to conduct an independent assessment of SAMS implementation up to this point, as well as the ministry's plan to improve system functionality and associated business processes as the implementation proceeds. The advisor will be consulting with municipal partners and front-line ODSP staff. The advisor will provide the Minister with an interim report by March 31, 2015, which will include short-term priorities to address the most urgent issues with the system and recommendations for further redesign and possible future improvements. A final report is due by April 30, 2015, with more comprehensive recommendations for the future of the system.

### 2) Staff and engagement

In addition to engagement already undertaken, the Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services and other ministry officials will be conducting extensive face-to-face engagement with Ontario Works and ODSP front-line staff at over 30 locations across the province over the next two months. This will help to solicit input about system issues and ensure SAMS meets the needs of social assistance delivery partners and clients.

### 3) Front-line Users Working Group

A Technical Working Group, made up of municipal and provincial front-line staff, managers and technical staff, will continue to help the ministry identify and prioritize challenges transitioning to SAMS. This group will be supported by the creation of a front-line users working group to get further input on system improvements from Ontario Works and ODSP front-line staff.

### 4) System improvements

The ministry will be implementing a number of additional prioritized system improvements over the next two months. These include:

- Improving the way the system calculates outcomes using converted data.
- Reducing the complexity of re-granting cases that have already been in the system.
- Improving the accuracy of some letters.

Issues being addressed have been prioritized based on frontline ODSP and Ontario Works' staff input as well as technical support teams, which were deployed to all sites to identify performance issues. It is anticipated that cumulatively, and in addition to changes already implemented, these improvements will have a significant positive impact on user experience. The improvements will also address performance issues with specific screens and functions identified through on-site testing in December.

### 5) Training support

The ministry will be working with delivery agents to provide further supports including training and troubleshooting assistance.

Ministry of  
Community and  
Social Services  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Hepburn Block, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

Social Assistance Operations  
Division  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Tel: 416 325-5374  
Fax: 416 325-5432

Ministère des Services  
sociaux et communautaires

80, rue Grosvenor  
Édifice Hepburn, 6<sup>e</sup> étage  
Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1E9

Division des opérations relatives à l'aide  
sociale  
Sous-ministre adjointe  
Tél : (416) 325-5374  
Télec. : (416) 325-5432



February 12, 2015

Catherine Matheson  
President  
Ontario Municipal Social Services Association  
1 Dundas Street West, Suite 2500  
Toronto ON M5G 1Z3

Dear Catherine,

Thank you for your letter of January 29, 2015 regarding the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS). I have appreciated the opportunity to engage with you and the other 46 OMSSA leads on addressing the challenges we have experienced with the implementation of SAMS.

As outlined in the Minister's letter dated February 10<sup>th</sup> regarding SAMS, we think it is vitally important that we continue to work together with all of our municipal partners on how to move forward with SAMS. We need to engage with front line users of the system to get a real sense of the challenges and focus on the solutions. Despite the implementation challenges, SAMS will make service delivery better for clients. It will allow us to improve customer service, streamline business processes, enhance program integrity and respond more quickly to policy and program changes.

The third party review announced by the Minister will help ensure that SAMS fulfills the goal of a system that provides our staff and delivery partners with the tools they need to do their jobs effectively in delivering social assistance to people in need. An independent assessment will help ensure that our collective efforts are appropriately focused and that we are taking all practical steps to complete the transition to SAMS. We anticipate that procurement of the third party advisor will be completed by about February 24, at which point we will quickly confirm a workplan, including an approach to engaging CMSMs and DSSABs in the work of the advisor.

Over the last few weeks, we have made significant progress with the identification of priority technology changes that will help support improvements to day-to-day functionality and streamline work for our front line staff. With the assistance of the technical working group, we have a confirmed list of the priority issues including data conversion, payments, intake, letters, tasks, reports and slow pages. We have already made significant progress on the priorities identified and in partnership with you, we are working to resolve all of these issues by the end of March.



With the formation of a front line user group to complement the technical working group, we will gain even more valuable insight into key areas of focus in order to improve the user experience and supports required to reach the full potential of SAMS. I think we saw the potential benefit of this type of engagement at our recent discussion with CUPE members. We look forward to discussing our proposed approach with OMSSA in the near future.

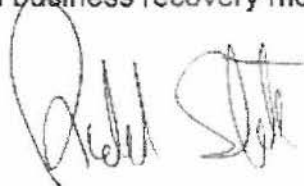
In your letter you raised a number of immediate considerations and first steps, many of which are being addressed through the various efforts I have outlined above, but I would like to specifically respond to each:

1. There is no question that the complexity of current social assistance program rules has presented a formidable challenge in the implementation of modernized social assistance technology. We acknowledge that further changes need to be implemented in SAMS, however it is a system that can indeed support Ontario's social assistance system as it exists today and one that will enable and support longer term reform far more effectively than would have been possible with SDMT. SAMS is indeed designed to deliver the program as it is currently defined, in a manner that treats clients fairly and consistently across the Province. It will also provide both municipal partners and the ministry with much better information to measure this goal. On the issue of funding, the ministry has provided \$10M in 100% funding to municipalities to support the implementation of SAMS to date as well as bearing 100% of the costs of system development (\$240 million). Nevertheless, the Ministry recognizes that many CMSMs and DSSABs are continuing to incur additional costs and we are considering further support options.
2. With the assistance of the technical working group, we have an agreed-upon list of improvements and fixes and have specified timing for implementation. We released this to all CMSMs and DSSABs on Friday February 6<sup>th</sup>. As noted above, we will continue to engage with CMSMs and DSSABs on building out the various elements of a business recovery plan. The independent third party review will potentially add to our plan as it identifies further areas of focus and strategies to improve the functionality of SAMS. The user group of front line staff will also ensure that the plan is comprehensive. In addition to improvements and fixes, we also expect that these various processes and discussions will identify promising best practises across the province that would benefit other users. All of these efforts combined will provide CMSMs and DSSABs with the understanding of expectations to budget resources effectively.
3. The ministry recognizes that delivery agents have taken measures to support SAMS implementation, including the redeployment of specialized staff to assist with Ontario Works intakes. The additional temporary workload reduction measures announced in December 2014 aim to provide greater flexibility for delivery agents to manage SAMS post-implementation and support stabilization. We will revisit these measures in late March and determine what measures might need to continue or be modified. We are mindful of the operating environment and the necessity to support the transition to SAMS, and we will work with CMSMs and DSSABs on a realistic approach to reporting requirements. In the near term, a key focus will be on performance measures that will assist us all in assessing progress towards regular business operations. When we last met, a number of you rightly highlighted the importance of establishing such measures. In our initial discussions with a number of CMSMs and DSSABs regarding business recovery, we have discussed the potential performance reporting that can be achieved through SAMS as well as some areas that we may wish to measure through other approaches. I look forward to our ongoing discussions on this through the business recovery working group.



4. The Ministry is aware of the impact that new initiatives have on service delivery and has taken specific measures to recognize that front line staff are continuing to make significant efforts to support our transition to SAMS. Therefore, the implementation of the new Employment-Related Benefit, originally planned for April 1, 2015, has been postponed to October 1, 2015. For ASI Renewal monitoring, we provided participating CMSMs and DSSABs the option to delay the start date of February 2, 2015 to June 1, 2015 (or earlier if feasible) as we recognized that some sites were able to proceed while others were not. We have also reached out to other provincial ministries to ask that they take into consideration the impact of the transition to SAMS when considering initiatives that have a service delivery impact on CMSMs and DSSABs. For any other potential program changes, we will consult with CMSMs and DSSABs around implementation timing and options with a view to minimizing workload impact.
5. We fully agree that SAMS users will continue to need a training environment for new staff and those requiring additional support. We are currently exploring the best approach to support these needs. In the short-term, the site readiness environment continues to be available. We would propose focused discussions by the business recovery working group around both immediate and longer term training needs.
6. While some IT and SAMS staff may be able to travel to a particular location to deal with a critical issue, we believe that virtual support is generally the most effective and efficient approach to maximizing the impact of the inevitably finite support capacity we have. We would nevertheless welcome further discussion around opportunities to continue to improve the support model.
7. I trust our discussion regarding Ministry contingency plans and the delivery of ODSP in the event of a labour disruption provided the necessary clarity on this issue.

In conclusion, I continue to look forward to our ongoing partnership in the transition to SAMS, including our focus on business recovery moving forward.



Richard Steele  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Social Assistance Operations Division

C: Bohodar Rubashewsky, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Laurie LeBlanc, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Pat Vanini, Executive Director, Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Gary Scripnick, Chair, Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association  
Kira Heineck, Executive Director, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

Dear Manager of Newmarket  
O.W. office,

This is to provide some  
feedback on your wonderful,  
humane, and respectful  
service that you offer to all  
O.W. clients who come in here for  
various services. I love coming  
in here because it is a very  
positive experience for me always.  
I am with another O.W. office but  
I like traveling here because I  
feel welcome here. Thank you  
for the kind service.