



Ontario Works  
Service Plan

2017

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County of  
Wellington

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## Introduction

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The County of Wellington is one of the 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) in the Province of Ontario. The County manages and delivers the Ontario Works (OW) programme on behalf of the Province of Ontario to the residents of both the County of Wellington and the City of Guelph. The Ontario Works programme is joined by Children’s Early Years and Housing Services to form the County of Wellington Social Services Department.

Ontario Works (OW) service planning follows a two-year planning cycle and 2017 marks the beginning of a new cycle. While the last planning cycle focused on re-gaining stability and getting back to business as usual following the launch of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS), this two year period will be about moving forward in a number of key areas. Priorities central to our work over the next two-year period include a focus on outcome achievement, service modernization, client and staff engagement as well as programme integrity. This will require us to manage through significant change and transition and we will need to rely upon our core values of quality service to clients and providing a positive workplace for our team to guide our efforts.

The 2017 Service Plan includes important information about our current caseload, how we are structured to deliver services to residents and the strategies we use to achieve our annual outcome targets. The Service Plan also includes a number of important priority actions for 2017 and these have been organized below under five themes.

Priority Area	Key Actions
Business Process Improvement and Modernization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the roll out of the Social Assistance Client Portal and mobile app</li> <li>• Make continued improvements to the intake process, including streamlining re-application and reinstatement processes</li> </ul>
Client Service Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging clients through focus groups to seek feedback and evaluate satisfaction</li> <li>• Support Social Services integration efforts in the area of client help and intake services</li> </ul>

<p>Outcome Achievement and Programme Integrity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resumption of the full Eligibility Verification Process (EVP)</li> <li>• Further work with local Employment Ontario partners to better integrate local employment services, including use of common assessment at a community level</li> <li>• Defining clear outcome pathways to assist staff in their work with clients</li> </ul>
<p>Supporting and Engaging Staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide important training and learning opportunities to staff in areas such as cultural competency, de-escalation, and motivational interviewing</li> <li>• Providing staff with structured, ongoing opportunities to provide input and contribute to ongoing improvement</li> </ul>
<p>Partnerships and Community Engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be an active leader in the 20,000 Homes campaign to end homelessness locally</li> <li>• Work in partnership with key community collaborators to help address the broader needs of OW clients. Examples of these groups include: the Poverty Elimination Task Force, Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy, and Local Immigration Partnership.</li> <li>• Expand the child support service to other social services and ODSP clients</li> </ul>

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has also requested that the 2017 Service Plan address important provincial priorities and these are included in the document.

Finally, I would like to commend the continued effort and high quality work of our team. They consistently provide excellent client service and this is a testament to their commitment and competence. We are excited that 2017 will be about moving forward, and we look forward to working with the Province and our community partners to improve and modernize the services and supports we are providing to our clients.



Stuart Beumer, Director of Ontario Works

May 2017

# 1 Ontario Works Vision and Mandate

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## County of Wellington

The County of Wellington Ontario Works division has a vision and a service mandate that builds upon the vision and mandate for the Ontario Works programme that has been established by the Province.

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### Vision

*To inspire and support every client in achieving their goals.*

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### Service Mandate

We strive to effectively serve people needing assistance by delivering high quality programmes and services in collaboration with our community partners, in accordance with the provincial Ontario Works programme.

## Province of Ontario

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### Vision

*To achieve improved employment outcomes for Ontario Works participants by increasing individual employability with the goal of sustainable employment and increased financial independence.*

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### Mandate

To provide employment assistance and financial assistance to people in financial need. The Ontario Works programme:

- Recognizes individual responsibility and promotes self-reliance through employment;
- Provides financial assistance to those most in need while they meet obligations to become and stay employed;
- Effectively serves people needing assistance; and
- Is accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario

## MCSS Priorities

In addition to delivering on the core expectations of the OW programme, the Province has identified three additional priorities that they require OW delivery partners to address. The specific activities and strategies to address these priorities are outlined below:

### **1. Improved service coordination and communication between Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) delivery offices**

- The continuation of regularly scheduled meetings between our offices at both staff and management levels to discuss issues of common interest and improve business processes
- Planning of a joint all-staff networking and learning event between the two offices to occur in early 2018 and build on the event held in 2016
- The OW office continues to ensure internally delivered employment programmes are open and accessible to all ODSP clients. On average in 2016, 43 ODSP clients were formally accessing employment case management services through our office. ODSP clients accessing OW Employment Assistance are assigned a caseworker to develop an outcome plan and work towards finding employment

### **2. Strengthened collaboration with local economic development organizations**

- Continued collaborative work between our Employment Team as well as the Settlement Services Team and the Economic Development offices at the County and City of Guelph. This includes industry tours, job fairs, targeted job placements, sharing of data and participation on working groups
- The OW Employment Services team worked closely with economic development offices in 2016 to build awareness of OW Employment Services for employers through regular meetings with economic development managers from across the County, including in Mapleton, Centre Wellington and Minto in support of the County-wide Live and Work Wellington initiative.
- The OW Employment Services team has developed an integrated online Job Board for OW clients seeking employment, which links to the Live and Work Wellington employment listings
- Continued involvement and collaboration with the local Workforce Planning Board (WFPBD). For example, we worked together with the WFPBD to attract approximately 500 people to a job fair hosted by the WFPBD in the fall of 2016. We also continued our work with the WFPBD to develop, promote and host a Manufacturing Day, which brings hundreds of job seekers to employers throughout the County and the region on an organized bus tour.

- Participation on the newly created workforce development committees of the City of Guelph and County of Wellington.
  - Continued work by the OW Employment team will include working with other organizations in the City and County to nurture relationships with employers in the region. The initiatives will build on current successes such as the annual Employer Recognition Awards, which recognize employers for their leadership in providing opportunities for clients with barriers to employment.
- 3. Establishing local partnerships with community organizations in order to better support OW clients**
- The OW office is heavily involved and is a leader in supporting community collaborations that support the needs of Ontario Works clients and other marginalized or disadvantaged groups. The local Poverty Elimination Task Force, 20,000 Homes Campaign and Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy are examples of initiatives that the County supports and is involved with that address issues of income security, homelessness, health equity, and substance mis-use that impact many OW clients.
  - The County will continue to be involved in violence against women prevention through funding and close involvement with Women in Crisis, Victim Services and other partners through the Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence committee and new initiatives such as portable housing allowances and efforts to address issues of human trafficking

The OW office also continues to play a lead role in bringing together local Employment Ontario agencies to better integrate employment services and ensure that services are in place to meet the needs of those facing multiple barriers to employment and education. This is detailed further in Section 4: Action Steps and Resources.

## 2 Environmental Scan

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### Analysis

This section of the OW Service Plan provides an analysis of 2016 outcomes, the current political climate, a description of the 2016 OW caseload, a summary of the local labour market, and information regarding community engagement activities.

The priority for 2016 had been placed on employment-related outcomes as staff became more comfortable with a stabilized technology platform, SAMS. The province also placed a high priority on validating the integrity of the SAMS data and the associated reports, and this has been helpful in managing programme outcomes. There are still some issues and questions



related to the timing of the data capture of certain measures as well as whether subsequent modifications to the data after the report run date are credited towards outcome achievement.

With the stabilization of SAMS in 2016, there have been increased efforts in the area of file auditing and review to ensure the integrity of benefits delivery. Increased focus on employment and outcomes, as well as accuracy and quality are positioning us well to have a strong focus on outcome achievement in 2017.

In 2016, we established two outcome targets through our Service Contract with MCSS. We were successful in exceeding the target related to the percentage of the caseload with employment income, achieving 13.52%. In the category of average amount of employment earnings reported by clients on a monthly basis, we came just under our target at \$719. The category of the percentage of terminations exiting to employment was not used in 2016 due to concerns about the availability and accuracy of the data at the time of establishing the Service Contract. Over the course of 2016, data integrity and reporting on this measure have improved and we can report that 25.00% of those exiting OW did so due to employment.

**2016 Outcome Funding Results and 2017 Baseline Forecasts**

Measure	2016 Target	2016 Average	2017 Baseline	2017 Target
1 - Average Employment Earnings	\$736	\$ 719	\$ 719	\$ 730
2 - Percent of Caseload with Employment Income	9.49%	13.52%	13.52%	13.73%
3 – Percent of Terminations exiting to employment	N/A	25.00%	25.0%	25.38%

Narrative

**1: Average Amount of Employment Earnings for Participants with Earnings**

The County of Wellington did not meet last year’s target of \$736. The 2016 average will be used as the baseline for 2017, and a 1.5% improvement is forecast. This target was selected in consideration of the significant needs that OW clients on average experience in achieving increased and sustained employment earnings. Unemployment is low in Guelph and Wellington and the small number of individuals and families that receive Ontario Works (approximately 1.6% of the total population) tend to have more profound barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment.

**2: % of Caseload with Employment Income**

The County of Wellington surpassed last year’s target of 9.49%. The average percentage of cases reporting employment income in 2016 was 13.52%.The 2016 average will be used to

establish a baseline for 2017 with a 1.5% forecasted improvement. Our performance in this outcome area continues to be strong, exceeding the 2016 provincial average of 12.21%.

### **3: % of Terminations Exiting to Employment**

The County of Wellington has not used this outcome since 2014 because there were concerns with the integrity of the data. This outcome is one that is affected by the timing of the data capture for the report which may not reflect the true outcome for the municipality. As a result, the baseline has been set based on our 2016 performance in this area at 25.0% with a forecasted improvement of 1.5% moving forward. This is an area where Wellington has consistently out-performed the provincial average, which in 2016 was 15.09%. Reasons for our success in this area include diligent work by our Employment team to link clients to jobs; attention to follow-up by caseworkers with clients at the time of file closure and a strong local labour market.

## External Influences

The Ontario government's commitment to increase the minimum wage will continue in October of 2017 when the rate will increase from \$11.40 to \$11.60. While the biggest increase to the minimum wage is proposed for January 2018 when it is slated to increase to \$14.00, we will continue to monitor and respond to the recently announced proposed changes to Ontario's employment and labour laws over the course of 2017. We anticipate that these recent and continued increases will positively impact those on our caseload who are employed in positions paying minimum wage and will strengthen performance in the outcome measures associated with employment earnings.

The Liberal Government's agenda related to social assistance reform and modernization was further advanced in the 2017 provincial budget and has the potential to influence caseload levels, outcomes, and programme administration into the future. Throughout 2017, we will work to implement and monitor the impact of the following key reforms announced in the current and previous budgets:

- A 2% rate increase across the board in Ontario Works and ODSP, effective September 1, 2017. This will also include: Personal Needs Allowance, Institutional Amounts, Special Boarder Allowance, Guide Dog Benefit, budgetary requirements for residents of interval and transition homes, Temporary Care Assistance and Dependants with dependants
- Significant increases to asset limits: \$10,000 from \$2,500 for single individuals and \$15,000 from \$5,000 for couples.
- The increase to the exemption for cash gifts from \$6,000 to \$10,000.

- Anticipated policy changes to make it easier for people to apply for social assistance, or come back onto assistance if they need to, by streamlining processes over 2017-18 for both Ontario Works and ODSP.
- Provincial work to make the disability adjudication process simpler and faster.

## Caseload Description

The following table provides a description of the County of Wellington's OW caseload, including actuals from 2014, 2015, and 2016. A 2.5% increase in our caseload is predicted for 2017 as a result of the continued structural changes in the labour market and the mismatch between employer expectations of prospective employees and the skill level of many of our clients. Provincial changes related to child support, earnings exemptions and asset level changes may also serve to place slight upward pressure on caseload growth as more households will meet and retain programme eligibility criteria.

Caseload	2014 Actual	2015 Actual	2016 Actual	Forecast
Average monthly total caseload	2,011	2,082 <sup>1</sup>	2,106	2,159
Average monthly number of ODSP participants (voluntary)	13	14	43	50
Demographic Variable	Dec 2014	Dec 2015	Dec 2016	% Change
Number of Cases	2,016	2,044 <sup>1</sup>	2,056	0.6%
Total # of People	N/A	3,459 <sup>1</sup>	3,463	0.12%
# of Dependants Aged 0-6	N/A	719 <sup>2</sup>	729	1.39%
Singles <sup>3</sup>	N/A	64%	65%	1.0%
Sole Support Parents <sup>3</sup>	N/A	29%	28%	-1.0%
Couples with Dependants <sup>3</sup>	N/A	6%	5%	-1.0%
Couples without Dependants <sup>3</sup>	N/A	2%	2%	0%
LEAP – Average Monthly Caseload	N/A	11 <sup>4</sup>	34 <sup>5</sup>	209%
Months on Assistance – City of Guelph	N/A	23.3	23.3	0%
Months on Assistance - County of Wellington	N/A	24.3	23.96	-0.34%

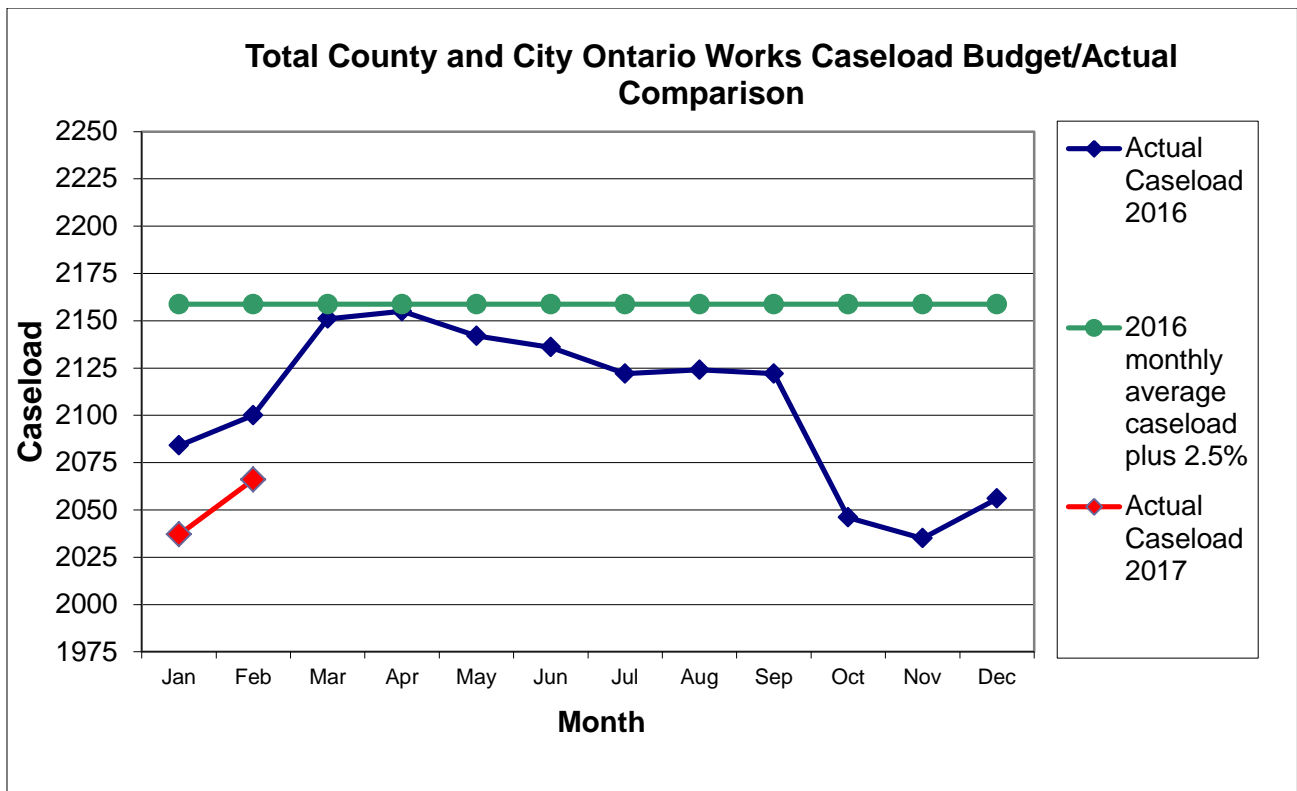
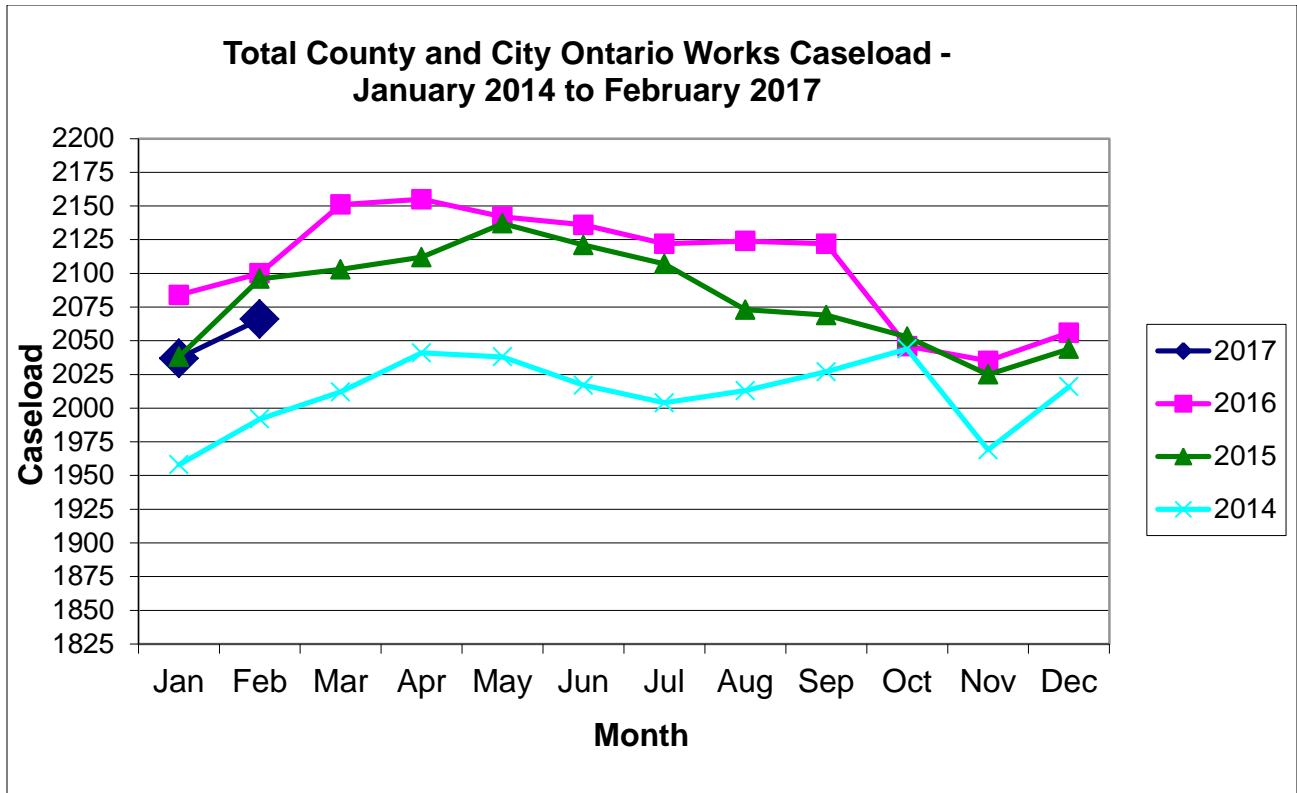
<sup>1</sup> OW SAMS Transition Performance Report (Preliminary Caseload) – March 2016

<sup>2</sup> SAMS Integrated Case Summary Report

<sup>3</sup> March 2017 CMSM At a Glance Report

<sup>4</sup> This number accounts only for September 2015. Data for the LEAP programme through SAMS was not available or unreliable for other months.

<sup>5</sup> January 2017 CRS 310M Employment Assistance Participant Progress Report



The graphs above indicate caseload trends for the County of Wellington and the City of Guelph (combined) since 2014 (Source: OW SAMS Transition Performance Report, February 2017)<sup>6</sup>. Although the caseload has been slowly increasing year over year, it tends to follow a typical pattern of increasing over the winter to a high point in the spring and then declining through the summer to a low point in the fall. This is most likely attributable to seasonal changes in the employment market.

### Months Receiving Assistance as a Percentage of the Caseload

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2016
0-5 months	45%	40%	39%	41%	36%	30%
6-12 months	23%	20%	20%	19%	20%	17%
13-24 months	18%	20%	17%	16%	18%	20%
25-59 months	11%	16%	19%	19%	19%	22%
60+ months	3%	4%	5%	5%	7%	11%

### Months Receiving Assistance- Total Counts

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2016
0-5 months	867	739	719	792	694	637
6-12 months	443	362	360	363	398	366
13-24 months	338	357	323	312	360	410
25-59 months	207	299	352	362	369	461
60+ months	60	76	90	112	136	224

Historically, the OW caseload has seen shifts in this measurement, with an increasing proportion of OW participants relying on OW assistance for a longer length of time. This year has seen a shift, with a larger proportion (22%) receiving assistance for 25-59 months than people who received assistance for 6-12 months (17%) and 13-24 months (20%). Starting this year, the cases that have been receiving assistance for 1 year or more have increased at the same time that we see a corresponding decrease in cases of less than 1 year. With the caseload tipping towards a lengthier reliance on OW assistance, there may exist a shift in the role of OW as a long-term financial resource rather than a short-term emergency service. For further information, please refer to the complete 2016 OW Caseload Profile which has been attached as a supporting document.

<sup>6</sup> Caseload data for November 2014 lacked integrity due to the transition to SAMS. As a result, data for October 2014 was used for November 2014 as well.

## Local Labour Market

The unemployment rate for the City of Guelph was at 4.9% in April of 2016, falling to 4.5% in April of 2017<sup>7</sup>. The overall employment figure was 92,600 in April 2016 and dropped to 89,200 by April 2017<sup>1</sup>. This statistic includes both full-time and part-time workers. The unemployment rate for the County of Wellington, including the City of Guelph, has remained among the lowest in Canada for 2016 -2017.

As part of the 2016 Wellington Business Retention and Expansion Project, interviews conducted with local business owners have indicated a strong local economy and healthy job growth in the County. Despite a small decrease in the number of jobs in in the City of Guelph in 2016, the unemployment rate fell to 4.5% from 4.9% largely due to a due to a labour force participation rate of 70.9% compared to 75% in 2016<sup>1</sup>.

A significant skills mismatch continues to take place locally in 2017 whereby unemployed workers with low skill sets cannot find work or are caught in the ‘find employment only to lose employment cycle,’ while at the same time there exists a remarkable and unanswered demand for highly skilled workers. This is particularly evident within the County of Wellington where employers have continued to note the difficulty they experience in attracting qualified workers from beyond the County. Therefore, despite a number of available job postings, there has not been an observable decrease in the OW caseload. Some efforts to address this challenge were seen in Q3 & Q4 of 2016 through Q1 of 2017 through the creation of both provincially and federally funded training programmes. In both the County and the City of Guelph, CNC Machinist programmes have been initiated to meet this demand. To complicate the skills mismatch, the lack of public transportation and affordable housing continue to present challenges for both employers and workers in the County. The City of Guelph continues to see industrial areas not fully serviced by public transit to match afternoon or night shifts.

Sectors leading the job growth, by number of hires in Waterloo, Wellington, and Dufferin include Manufacturing & Utilities (1,805), Trades, Transport & Equipment Operators (1,275), Sales & Service (1,069), Business, Finance & Administration (826) and Healthcare (474)<sup>8</sup>. In particular, local labour market growth is expected in the year ahead based on the following 2016 highlights:

- Polycorp Ltd. in Elora is in expansion mode, adding 26 new jobs after a \$14.5 million investment and being awarded an additional \$2.5 million from the province.

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<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada, Labour force characteristics adjusted by census metropolitan area, Q1 2017

<sup>8</sup> Workforce Planning Board Waterloo Wellington Dufferin. (2016 Employer One Survey. Released July 2017).

- Pintar Manufacturing has relocated to Erin from Mississauga with the acquisition of the dormant Guardian plant. Open in August 2016, plans for growth show a demand for upwards of 30-40 new staff.
- A planned proposal was put forward to council in 2015 for a new Lowe's location in Guelph. If zoning changes are approved, Lowe's could bring hundreds of new jobs to the area in the future.
- Construction has been completed on the second Walmart location now open in Guelph and this did attract 50-75 new mostly part time and some full time employment opportunities. However many of those were filled by the exiting Target store employees, which previously held that footprint in the South end of Guelph.
- In contrast, Sears has been showing declining sales and is now restructuring the brand and store fronts across Canada, which could lead to full and part-time position losses in the retail sector locally.
- Guelph's Stone Road Mall is currently under expansion, attracting several large national retailers, such as Marshalls and Forever 21. This growth will potentially have a positive impact on the employment prospects of our caseload. Where possible, our Employment Team within Social Services will work with employers and our economic development colleagues to directly connect and support appropriate OW clients to these opportunities.
- The new site and expansion of the Groves Memorial Hospital in Fergus is attracting employment for local skilled trades during the construction phase. A shortage of skilled construction trades is being felt across the County due to large infrastructure projects such as this hospital expansion.

## Community Engagement

At every level of the organization, OW staff continue to be involved in the community through collaborative work and meaningful partnerships. Investing in these activities strengthens our connection to the local community, region and province, enabling us to stay informed on issues that impact the delivery of our services. These efforts also lead to client service improvements as we plan, coordinate and integrate human services at a community level. A few collaborative efforts are highlighted below.

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### Housing

The OW programme is highly integrated with the delivery of homelessness related programmes and supports, which have proven highly beneficial in helping OW and ODSP clients maintain or obtain housing. In 2015, the County of Wellington conducted the second annual Point in Time (PIT) Count to understand the extent of homelessness in the community with particular

attention paid to relative homelessness. Data from the PIT Count helped to inform a number of programmes that came into development over the past year. In partnership with the Welcome In Drop In Centre, the Housing First programme began in 2015 with 15 participants over the year, assisting in life stabilization and overall skill building. At the beginning of 2016, the Diversion and Rapid Re-Housing programme was launched to support shelter operators and clients in coming to appropriate interventions. Finally, the County, in partnership with the local Poverty Task Force (PTF), has committed to join and co-lead the 20,000 Homes Campaign, a national effort to end homelessness. This will include a comprehensive PIT Count to identify the community's most vulnerable and acute homeless population with a commitment to housing a targeted number at year's end. The campaign involves a complete community effort to improve our service systems and responses so that homelessness can be eliminated locally.

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## Income

With the understanding that many individuals and families in Guelph Wellington, including those working full time, face challenges related to inadequate income, our staff have been supporting the living wage movement through involvement with the Income Security Action Group of the local PTF. By supporting the living wage, we can ensure that working individuals and families can meet their basic living expenses, support the healthy development of their children, and move towards financial independence. In 2017, the OW office will be working with the Housing Services and Children's Early Years divisions as well as the local ODSP office to offer support to those clients in accessing child support. It is hoped that this will increase the number of families benefitting from the provincial changes announced in 2016.

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## Food Security

In partnership with the PTF, local townships, and Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health, the OW Department in Fergus took part in a Market Bucks Pilot Project where OW clients in Wellington North were provided farmer's market vouchers. These vouchers had monetary equivalents and were also available to the public for purchase. This allowed OW clients the ability to purchase fresh and healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity and builds community. The pilot project showed positive results in participant abilities to purchase healthier food (particularly fresh produce) as well as connectedness to the community. With the success of this pilot, the County looks towards participating in an expanded Market Bucks programme for Ontario Works recipients across all areas of north Wellington County.



## Health

In early 2015, three oral health programmes for low income children were integrated into one rebranded public oral health programme to simplify and streamline access. This integration included the social assistance dental programs for children. The OW office continues to be involved with the local Oral Health Action Committee in order to ensure the needs of our clients are understood and continue to be met through this transition period.

The OW office is also an active partner with the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy. The Drug Strategy is a multi-stakeholder group that addresses issues related to substance misuse; in 2016 key priorities of the Drug Strategy include:

- Moving forward the recommendations of the “We Can Do Better” youth addictions report
- Advancing the need for a rapid response addiction medicine clinic locally
- Supporting the community response to crystal meth
- Continuing to support the work of the local Drug Treatment Court
- Connectivity Table

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## Integrated Service Planning

The County Social Services Department supports coordinated service planning at a community level. A key initiative in this area is the Toward Common Ground project. This Trillium-funded project has brought together 12 key human and social service organizations in the community to build a sustainable model for integrated human service planning. This will include improvements to how we share and use data, identify key needs in the community and evaluate the impact of our work.

# 3 Programme Management

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## Analysis of Resources + Service Delivery Rationale:

The organizational chart on page 18 provides an overview of the staffing resource allocations within Ontario Works. Major functions are described below with attention given to identifying potential risks, priority actions, and improvements.

The total number of full-time employees dedicated to Ontario Works functions was 65.3 FTEs as of January 1, 2017, with a staff to manager ratio of 7.18 including all levels of management. As of January 1, 2017, our case to caseworker ratio was approximately 100.

In early 2017, the Ontario Works division undertook a management realignment in order to increase efficiency, strengthen lines of accountability and integrate functions for more streamlined support to OW clients as well as staff.

Managers and staff continue to respond effectively to provincial policy changes through ongoing work to update and modify business processes and service delivery approaches. More specifically we plan to complete the following actions in 2017:

- Support the full resumption of EVP
- Engage staff through an Innovation Lab (I-LAB) process to redesign key areas of work in the interest of improving client service and gaining administrative efficiencies (e.g. documentation and filing standards, reapplication processes)
- Complete an update with IT services for our secondary CAAPS technology system to support case management, especially in the area of outcome plans
- Support the implementation of policy changes related to the 2016 provincial budget

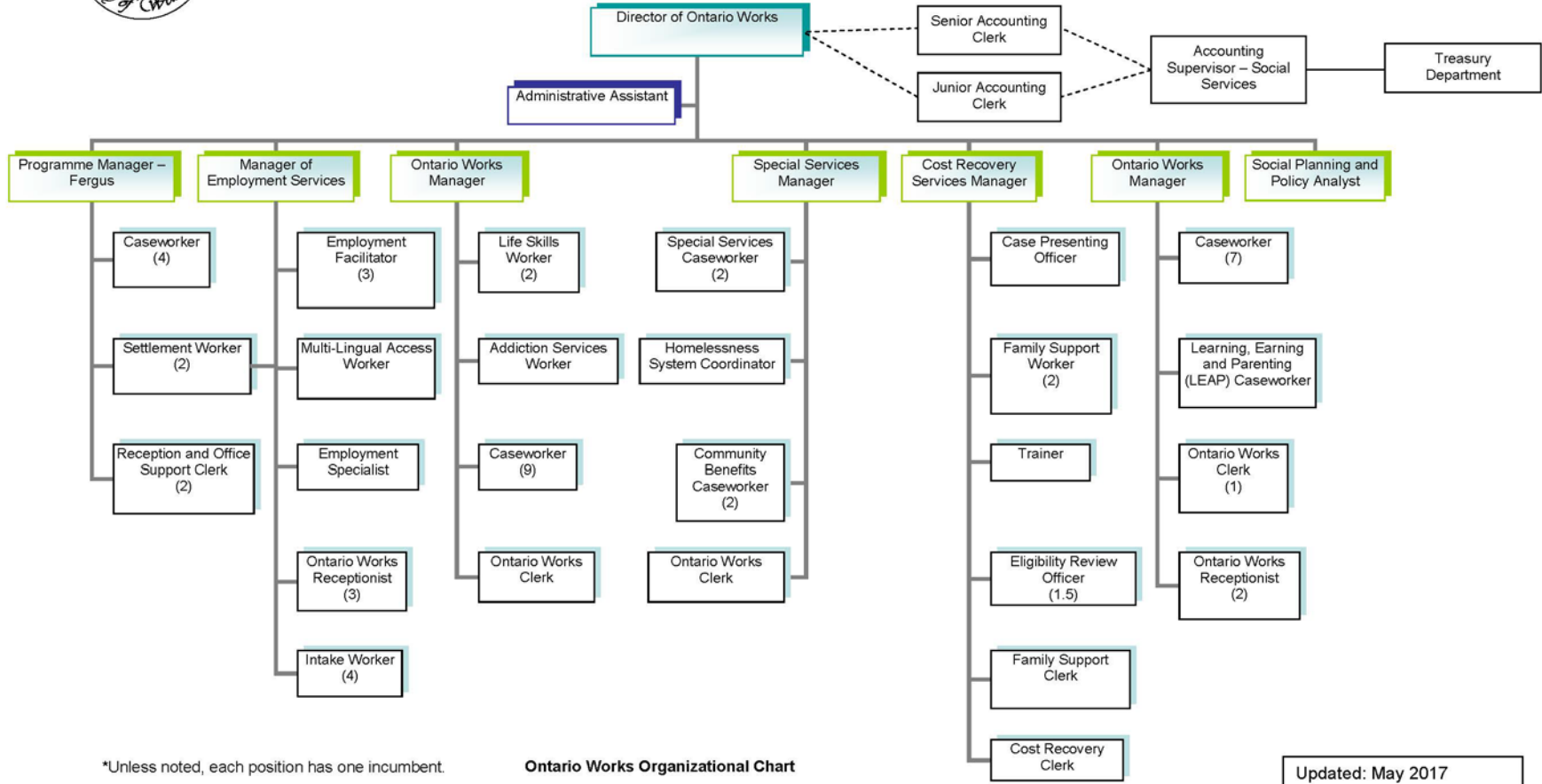
Currently, our Trainer and other expert staff continue to deliver SAMS training to both new and returning staff. Refresher sessions are also offered, with the goal of ensuring all staff are well-equipped and comfortable working in SAMS while we continue to meet the established service standards. In 2017, this training will become increasingly targeted to key areas where staff are requiring additional support. Additionally, the development of clearer client outcome pathways and supporting staff in adopting this case management approach is currently underway.

The Social Services Department, comprised of Children's Early Years, Housing Services and Ontario Works divisions, began the process of integrating client reception and help services at our 129 Wyndham Street office in the fall of 2016. The first phase of the project is targeted to be completed by December 2017. The intention is to move towards the integration of these services in the interest of improving service to clients. In 2017 staff will be supported through the development of tools and training. The development of these tools as well as the service integration that is underway are significant undertakings that will take a phased approach. Consultation and communication at all levels of the organization, along with clients and the community is occurring throughout the process.

# County of Wellington Ontario Works Organizational Chart



## COUNTY OF WELLINGTON ONTARIO WORKS



## Intake Services

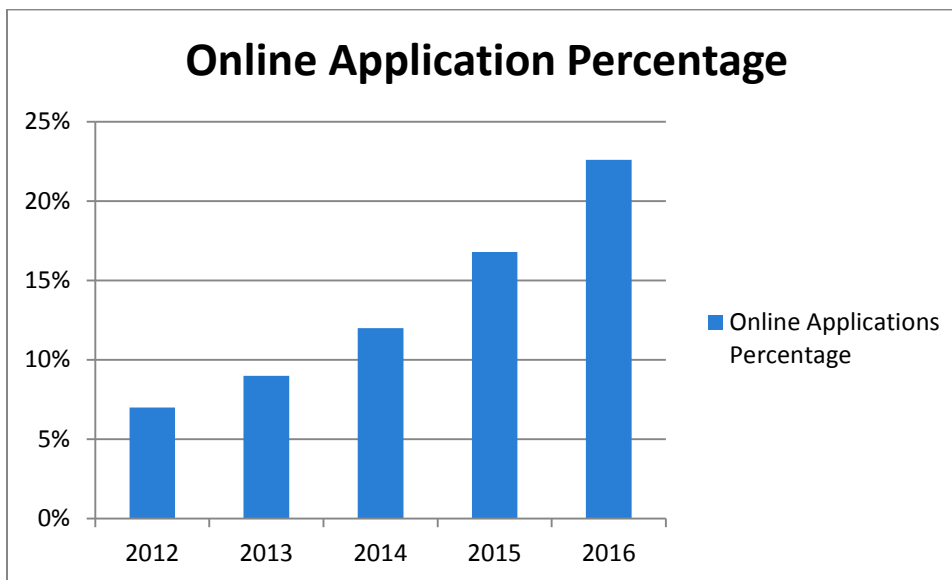
Applicants for Ontario Works have three options to apply for assistance:

**Call:** 1.800.265.7294 x 3390 or 519.837.2670 x 3390

**Click:** [www.ontario.ca/socialassistance](http://www.ontario.ca/socialassistance)

**Visit:** Our main office at 138 Wyndham St N. Guelph ON

We continue to promote the online application for Ontario Works through various channels including our website, voice message system, and through community partners. It is worth noting that 2016 was the first year that the Social Assistance Operations Performance Report was used to obtain the number of Online Applications and the corresponding percentages. For the years prior to 2016 a manual internal tracking method was used.



The majority of intakes continue to be completed over the telephone. Additionally, clients who have completed an online application are also contacted by telephone to confirm information and to schedule a Verification Interview as appropriate. In an effort to streamline access, enhance customer service, and provide efficient responses to callers, we are exploring changes to the phone system that would see an increase in the percentage of calls answered directly by our intake unit.

Our intake unit makes arrangements for interpretation services where needed for clients attending Verification Interviews. Caseworkers continue to have access to interpretation supports for their clients in the delivery of services.

Our intake team also has primary responsibility for identifying cases where emergency assistance might be appropriate. The team works through their manager to refer these clients to either our Special Services team or directly to a caseworker for assistance. According to the Social Assistance Operations Performance Report for 2016, the Intake Team responded to 2421 requests for assistance. Of the total number of requests received, 67.2% of the applications were found to be eligible. The remaining requests were either deemed ineligible, or the client voluntarily withdrew their application. These numbers do not include general inquiries or situations where an application for assistance was not initiated after a brief initial screening.

In reviewing the Social Assistance Operations Performance Reports for Wellington County as well as the Province, the local average number of business days from screening to a decision is 5.3 days, compared to 6 days for the provincial average. Online applications represent 22.6% of the total number of applications compared to 26% for the provincial average. We continue to strive to make decisions on applications within 4 business days whenever possible; currently we meet this target 60% of the time versus the provincial average of 56%.

## Case Management Services

While there continue to be challenges, we are seeing that efforts to restore normalcy to case management have been successful. We have continued to place more emphasis on assisting participants with employment supports. Caseworkers have worked hard throughout 2016 to ensure that Outcome Plans and Two Year File Reviews are up to date, and managers have returned to regular file auditing. In 2017 our focus will be on developing clear client pathways and supporting caseworkers in utilizing these intervention tools.

Caseworkers continue to benefit from utilizing the Comprehensive Assessment and Action Plan System (CAAPS) to capture and monitor employment activities for OW clients. Caseworkers have identified some additional functionality that would enhance abilities to capture relevant data and monitor caseloads. In addition to the current administrative functions of the CAAPS system, we have added functionality to identify participants who may benefit from employment interventions such as workshops, job fairs, and assessments. To ensure that this additional case management tool will be able to provide effective support to caseworkers, we are currently working with our IT department to make the necessary revisions. Working with the current extracts from SAMS has been a challenge, however we continue to move forward and hope to complete the revisions by the end of 2017.

To support a more participant-focused LEAP programme, we have purchased the required technology to allow us to complete Verification Interviews from remote locations. We have been establishing secure locations, where our technology is able to function, to allow us to meet participants. We have also been consulting other CMSMs to learn their successes with the LEAP programme and are hopeful that some of these interventions will have the same positive effect. We also continue to look towards increasing our direct involvement with schools and service delivery partners who support clients in this programme. In 2016, we were successful in significantly increasing the number of clients supported through the LEAP program and we hope to build on this success in 2017.

## Life Skills Programmes

The Addictions Services Initiative (ASI) is an intensive case management programme for clients struggling with substance misuse issues that prevent them from obtaining and maintaining employment. Clients who are interested in working on their addiction issues are referred to the ASI Life Skills Worker, who, in collaboration with Community Addiction Services (CADS), Stonehenge, and other addiction service providers, assists clients to get the treatment and support they need throughout their recovery journey. Once the client reaches the maintenance stage and has not relapsed for a substantial period, they are ready to be referred back to a general OW Caseworker to seek employment.

The Mental Health Life Skills programme also utilizes an intensive case management model for clients. Referrals to the Mental Health Life Skills programme are made by caseworkers when a client identifies that they are struggling with significant mental health issues that prevent them from gaining financial independence. Clients receive assistance with appropriate referrals to community mental health resources or for medical and psychiatric assessments that may assist the person in stabilizing their situation. Assistance is also provided to clients for completing ODSP applications where appropriate.

In an effort to standardize the referral process as well as track the progress of clients within each of these programmes, the County is exploring various tools and strategies to measure client needs and development. One part of this strategy includes an evaluation of the larger OW caseload to determine the level of need/functioning of clients and develop appropriate interventions to respond to these needs through ASI, Life Skills, or employment supports programming. The second part of this strategy includes implementing an ongoing evaluation tool to capture relative progress of clients within the ASI and Mental Health Life Skills

programmes. Both parts of this programme will assist the County in better understanding the level of need of our clients, and stream our caseloads to appropriate, evidence-based interventions.

An annual ASI Service Plan is completed and submitted to the ministry. The service planning process gives us an opportunity to outline our service strategies, programme management functions, outcome monitoring, and partner linkages.

## Fergus Social Services Office

The Social Services office in Fergus has been open since April 2012, providing County residents access to a variety of social services, including OW and Settlement as a primary focus. The office continues to house other social services including child care, social housing, and ODSP supports. Specialized workers who complete functions such as family support, eligibility review, addiction and mental health services, and LEAP travel to the Fergus office to meet with their clients that reside in the office catchment area. The addition of this office location has made a significant improvement to our ability to provide excellent customer service, making our services far more accessible to those living in the central and northern areas of Wellington County.

All applications for social assistance are received and processed centrally via the Intake Team at the Guelph office. Verification Interviews and on-going case management for clients, who reside in one of the four townships of Centre Wellington, Mapleton, Minto and Wellington North, take place out of the Fergus office. In 2017, the Fergus office will be piloting the delivery of outreach services to clients through the use of space at the Arthur library on a monthly basis. We will be monitoring the success of this pilot to determine if it meets the needs of clients and if it is an efficient use of resources.

In addition, the Fergus office is also the primary location of the Settlement Services programme. Funded through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the mandate of this programme includes assisting newcomers to Canada to access community services and adjust to life in their new communities. The federal resettlement of thousands of refugees, namely from Syria, to Canada as Permanent Residents, have greatly increased the need for Settlement Services and supports in the County of Wellington.

These refugees are entering Canada through sponsorship via the Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) programme, Private Sponsorships, or Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR)

programmes. Although the County of Wellington is not one of the six designated GAR destinations, secondary migration occurs from bordering GARs. Our Ontario Works programme has also witnessed a slight increase of in-land claims via the United States. No active sponsorship exists in these cases, and applications have been taken for Ontario Works and Housing subsidies. The County of Wellington has also witnessed a great increase in Privately Sponsored refugees, and worked with sponsorship groups to provide information on supports available to refugees in the County. As refugees move into month thirteen of their sponsorship periods, they transition out of federal assistance and the provincial system becomes the social safety net. The County of Wellington has been providing support and information to refugees applying for social assistance, as well as presentations to sponsorship groups on benefits and the OW process.

Settlement Services supports are available at no cost to those with Permanent Resident, Convention Refugee, or Live-In Caregiver status in the County of Wellington and City of Guelph. Experienced Settlement Workers help newcomers in the areas of accessing interpreters/translators, finding housing and affordable child care, registering children in school, enrolling in language training, finding a family physician, seeking employment and navigating government and community services. Information sessions are provided to educate newcomers about labour laws in Canada, their rights, responsibilities, and safety in the Canadian workplace, and how to navigate the numerous options with Canadian banking institutions. Collaboration with Economic Development has also ensured the movement towards growing local rural communities by successfully integrating newcomers.

## Cost Recovery Unit

The Cost Recovery Unit (CRU) is responsible for four primary programmes: Eligibility Review, Case Presenting, Family Support, and the Eligibility Verification Programme (EVP).

The Eligibility Review programme continues to operate in an efficient manner by addressing allegations and complaints early. We have a team of two Eligibility Review Officers (EROs) and one clerical support that manage complaints and referrals from various sources inside and outside of Ontario Works. The EROs continue to work with intake staff, who advise of an open allegation in SAMS when scheduling a verification interview in anticipation of resolving the outstanding issue.



The Eligibility Verification Programme (EVP) team communicates with caseworkers each month when cases are being reviewed following monthly download reports, as well as maintaining regular communication to ensure changes are flagged and all cases are followed up on as required. Since the resumption of EVP in April of 2017, the EVP team has completed 22 cases.

Our Case Presenting officer (CPO) works with members of the cost recovery team in completing internal reviews. The CPO completes and defends subsequent submissions to the Social Benefits Tribunal. There is an open communication between the local legal clinic and the CPO in an effort to resolve outstanding issues for clients. The CPO manages assignments and reviews overpayments in accordance with policy and uses system-generated reports to ensure that established overpayments are accurate.

The County of Wellington sees a very limited number of cases that require sponsorship debt recovery. For these cases, the CRU meets the service standards for notifying IRCC of sponsorship breakdown when a client applies for Ontario Works.

The Family Support Programme assists clients in obtaining child and spousal support orders through the Ontario Court of Justice at which time a court order for custody, access, and support is resolved. Family Support Workers (FSW) will assist clients in setting up private agreements if an application in court is not necessary. The FSWs will assign court orders or agreements that are not in pay. Accordingly, they continue to defend municipal arrears that are owed to the County of Wellington or other municipalities when a variation has been filed by the support payer residing in this jurisdiction. Following the Provincial budget announcements, child support payments are now fully exempt as income and do not impact eligibility for OW. We are working with the province, staff, clients, and community to implement these changes.

## Special Services Unit

The Special Services Unit delivers homelessness prevention and support programmes, as well as discretionary benefits. Below is a list of special services programmes:

- Housing with Related Supports
- Homelessness Services and Supports (supported through community grants)
- Emergency Shelter Solutions
- Municipal Discretionary Benefits
- ODSP Discretionary Benefits
- Public Funerals and Burials

- Housing Stability Programme
- Emergency Energy Fund
- Homelessness Partnering Strategy (Federal homelessness funding)

In relation to OW case management, Special Services staff work directly with individuals and families residing in both supportive housing environments and Emergency Shelters. Staff dedicated to clients at these sites facilitate OW applications, assess eligibility, and provide support in transitioning out of shelter and support programmes and into longer term housing solutions.

The Municipal Discretionary Benefits Programme is exclusively funded by the municipality. This programme assists individuals and families on low and fixed incomes with various needs ranging from urgent dental care to assistive devices and medical needs. This programme also assists individuals and families with health related needs while they are staying in emergency shelter as well as start-up costs in some instances to secure housing and utilities when leaving a shelter.

OW clients needing to access provincially cost-shared discretionary benefits do so through their caseworker. ODSP clients in need of discretionary benefits access this service through the Special Services Unit. Staff determine eligibility and provide assistance in a timely manner. In 2016, total provincial cost-shared discretionary spending was \$913,303, exceeding the maximum cost-shareable amount by \$107,253. This shortfall in provincial funding was covered entirely through municipal funding. The most requested and costly benefits in 2016 included dental services for OW adults; denture services; vision care; funerals and incontinence supplies. The Housing First programme (HF) continues to be funded and managed through Special Services and underwent significant expansion in 2016. A second adult HF worker has been added at the Welcome In Drop In Centre and a youth-focused HF worker has been funded through Wyndham House. This brings permanent housing and wrap-around supports to 45 individuals experiencing chronic/complex issues as a barrier to securing and maintaining housing. The results of these investments continue to be very promising, and are helping us meet our community goals in relation to the 20,000 Homes Campaign and our intention to end chronic homelessness locally.

Public funeral and burial requests continue at a constant level and show signs of continuing to increase. The combination of an increasing population in the City of Guelph and the County of Wellington, an aging population, and rising social assistance caseloads will likely result in a

continued increase in the number of publically funded funerals and burials for the foreseeable future.

Administration of the Emergency Energy Fund (EEF) and the Low Income Energy Assistance Programmes (LEAP) as well as the Housing Stability Programme (HSP) by the Special Services Unit continues and provides a streamlined access point for all low income applicants requiring assistance with obtaining or retaining housing. This unit also added the administration of the Ontario Electricity Support Programme (OESP) in 2016 and is looking to better integrate with the Rent Bank service in 2017 which is currently administered through the County's Housing Services Division.

## Oversight Strategy

Programme integrity and risk management are high priority areas for the delivery of Ontario Works and play a significant role in our oversight strategy. By ensuring that decision making occurs in a consultative and proactive manner, possible areas of risk are identified and mitigated to promote effective operations and prevent any negative outcomes. Improvements to the SAMS system in 2016 should allow us to make continued improvements to our ability to track and monitor our work in relation to back-end financial management, overpayment management and file auditing.

Our oversight strategy consists of a number of on-going activities wherein programme risks and areas for improvement are identified. Key activities are listed below:

- Comprehensive file reviews by managers of all caseworkers, ensuring that they are properly utilizing the SAMS technology and meeting service expectations
- Reintroduction of the EVP, monitoring of results and use as a training and learning opportunity
- Regular team and all staff meetings to discuss issues and seek staff input
- Bi-weekly management meetings to discuss issues, approve policy, review outcome performance and suggest ideas for improvement
- Daily review by staff of all payments
- Quarterly meetings between the local office and the Provincial Programme Supervisor to review programme expenditures, performance, emerging issues, and outcomes

The Trainer and Policy Analyst will take the lead on interpretation, communication, and tracking of legislative changes, policies and procedures. All provincial legislation is forwarded through to this department to be reviewed and disseminated to staff in a timely manner. All local business practices are uploaded to our intranet for easy access by all staff. More complex questions related to policy interpretation are resolved through the Provincial Clearinghouse process.

In 2016 the County worked closely with the Province as part of the provincial pilot project to initiate the automated subsidy claims process through SAMS. This work proved helpful and in 2016 we successfully began submitting electronic monthly payment claims. The County is recognized as a leader in this area and continues to work with the Province to streamline subsidy claim processes as well as offer advice and guidance to other municipalities in this area. Additionally, the County continues to rely heavily on the Social Assistance Operations Performance Report as well as other reports generated through the COGNOS module of SAMS. In certain areas we continue to ask questions and raise concerns about the integrity of the data; in some cases this has led to corrections and in other cases it has led to further explanation that has improved our understanding of how the system operates in processing and reporting information. In 2017 we will continue to work closely with our internal Treasury colleagues as well as the Province to ensure that both our financial and outcome performance is accurately tracked and reported.

## Overview of Learning Supports

Our organization remains committed to facilitating professional development and lifelong learning experiences for all of its employees. The provincial training curriculum, Supportive Approaches through Innovative Learning (SAIL), continues to form the foundation upon which other experiences are built. SAIL training is provided to all new staff that join the OW division. In 2017 we are also using elements of SAIL to assist with the training being provided across our Social Services reception and intake staff groups.

In addition to offering SAIL modules, we take concrete action to ensure that the principles of the SAIL training are lived out by our staff throughout the organization. SAIL principles are applied through various initiatives and means, including self-care groups, lunch and learn sessions, job shadowing, a resource library, an intranet, and staff learning events. A further support for staff is the Trainer, who is a resource regularly used by staff in an advice and guidance capacity to assist them with policy interpretation and decision making.

Important priorities for training and development in 2017 will be strengthening the cultural competency of our staff as well as offering training in the area of de-escalation and conflict management. Additionally we will be looking to pilot some motivational interviewing training with some of our caseworker staff to determine if it helps them with employment and outcome planning and achievement with clients.

Our Trainer and other expert staff will continue to deliver core programme delivery (legislation and work process) and SAMS technology training to both new and returning staff, and will offer refresher or specialized sessions with the goal of ensuring all staff are well-equipped and comfortable working in SAMS while we continue to meet the established service standards.

Staff are provided with a variety of training opportunities appropriate to their roles during the course of the year. The County's Performance Appraisal process allows staff, with the support of their manager, to identify their own learning and personal development goals. Throughout the year, the training unit provides 'refresher' sessions based on feedback received from staff and management as well as information received from the Province related to programme updates and changes. In addition, staff are supported in attending conferences and courses throughout the year through the Association for Municipal Employment Services (AMES); Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA); as well as local workshops related to issues such as addictions, mental health, youth services, employment and other inter-agency learning events.

Additionally, Ontario Works managers are offered a variety of learning opportunities, and over the past year, including a Certificate in Leadership offered through the University of Waterloo. This programme aims to build the capacity of managers by offering training in leadership skills such as coaching for success, how to lead people, team building, and managing opportunities for conflict.

## 4 Outcome Strategies

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### Outcome Funding Targets for 2017

The outcome projections for 2017 remain conservative due to continued labour market uncertainty and the employment barriers experienced by OW clients (e.g. skills mismatch), both of which point to continued, gradual OW caseload growth.

Our office continues to utilize a single caseworker model in assisting clients. This means that our ongoing clients have one point of contact to support them with both receiving their financial assistance as well as developing their participation agreement and outcome plans. Caseworkers are able to utilize the full range of benefits and supports to support their clients in achieving their life stabilization or employment goals. In addition, the caseworker serves as the central referral point for the client, directing them toward internal and external supports as appropriate and then following up after the fact. Clients have responded positively to this case management model as they have one clear person to work with and that person has a clear understanding of their situation.

Strategies to address the employment needs and challenges of clients in 2017 will represent a continuation and expansion of efforts started in 2016, including:

- An increased focus on life stabilization and life skills interventions with clients
- Planning and goal-setting activities with clients, e.g. the Getting Ahead programme
- Targeted job placement efforts by our Employment Specialist
- Increased integration with Employment Ontario in the interests of better supporting clients (e.g. targeted referrals to Youth Job Connect, shared delivery of services)
- Work with Economic Development partners to connect OW clients to emerging employment opportunities
- Work to develop clear outcome pathways that caseworkers can use with clients in helping them achieve their desired outcomes

The chart below outlines our 2017 outcome targets which are reflective of a 1.5% improvement over 2016 actuals that have been used as the baselines.

Measure	2017 Baseline	2017 Target
Average amount of employment earnings for participants with earnings	\$719	\$730
Percentage of the caseload with employment income	13.52%	13.73%
Percentage of terminations exiting to employment	25.0%	25.38%

## Action Steps and Resources

Labour market trends locally continue to indicate a significant and unanswered demand for highly skilled and educated employees, countered by a significant number of unemployed individuals with lower skill sets. Additionally, those who are unemployed with a low skill set may require upgrading that requires a significant investment in time before they are able to successfully compete for sustainable employment opportunities.

The chart on the following page identifies the array of employment activities available for a client pertaining to basic education or training.

### Basic Education

Organization	Programme
<b>Wellington Centre for Continuing Education</b>	Grade 12 General Educational Development (GED) Give Yourself Credit Business Essentials Training
<b>St. George's Centre for Adult ESL</b>	English as a Second Language Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) Writing Classes Conversation Classes
<b>Conestoga College</b>	General Diploma Academic Upgrading Self-Management Strategies (currently under development)
<b>Action Read</b>	Literacy and Writing Math GED Preparation

### Training

Organization	Programme
<b>Conestoga College</b>	OSAP-supported Post-secondary Training
<b>Wellington Centre for Continuing Education</b>	Individual Computer Training Computer Skills for the Workplace Skills Upgrading

<b>Action Read</b>	Computer Training Cash Register Training Soft Skills Training Receptionist Training
<b>St Louis Adult Learning and Continuing Education</b>	Personal Support Workers Hairstyling Chef Training
<b>Workforce Planning Board</b>	Skills Link Labour Market Info Training
<b>Second Chance Employment/Lutherwood/Agilec/Anishnabeg Outreach</b>	Youth Job Connection Ways to Work RISE (Second Chance Employment) ACE Second Career

## Ontario Works Internal Programmes

Organization	Programmes/Services
<b>County of Wellington Ontario Works</b>	Employment Workshops Employment Placement Self-Employment Community Placement Addiction Services (ASI) Life Skills/Mental Health Learning Earning and Parenting (LEAP) Getting Ahead

The County of Wellington continues to operate an Employment Resource Centre (ERC) in Guelph with resources also available at the Fergus office location. The ERC provides clients with an opportunity to access the internet to perform career /labour market research and to view and apply to available job postings. Clients also have the ability to update their resume and cover letters, make photocopies, and obtain assistance from facilitation and reception staff where required.

The Employment Services Team also includes three Employment Facilitators and the Employment Specialist who lead monthly workshops on employment topics, and meet with clients one on one to offer more in-depth assistance related to resumes, job searching, interview skills, and more. A preliminary OW participant workshop, Employment Services Orientation (ESO), has been created to provide an overview of the resources available to assist clients in moving forward and getting the help that may be needed to find employment. The



ESO includes completion of an Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS) that will inform participants of the kind of help that will be most useful to prepare for future employment. An increasing amount of time is being dedicated to more in-depth life skills and goal setting programmes for our clients, such as Getting Ahead.

The County of Wellington Social Services (COW Social Services) remains the holder of the Circles® contract on behalf of the Guelph Wellington community. COW Employment Services also continues to run Getting Ahead workshops as part of the Circles® programme. This ensures programme stability and sustainability going forward. Circles® Guelph-Wellington is a community-based initiative which began in 2014, with a focus on building relationships across socio-economic boundaries as a means of assisting low-income individuals and families to access skills, networks, and resources necessary to move them out of poverty and towards financial self-sufficiency. Getting Ahead is a three-week intensive program, where participants think of a sustainable and self-sufficient future and create an action plan on how to take steps towards their dreams. It is a prerequisite for future participation in the Circles® programme. COW Social Services is the recipient of a Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF) grant, and over the 2016-2018 period we are completing a comprehensive evaluation of our Circles® initiative.

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## Employment Placement

The Employment Specialist (ES) works with both the client and the employer to ensure the success of the placement and subsequent employment retention. Although there is some discrepancy between internal tracking and provincial data; in 2016 the Operations Performance Report shows that 1764 Ontario Works participants exited from assistance, 456 of which had secured full or part-time employment, which equates to approximately a 26% employment success rate.

The ES continues to facilitate a structured Job Search Club, with 2 hour sessions two days per week in both Guelph and Fergus. This club was an initiative that began in 2013, and has given the ES the opportunity to develop a rapport with motivated job seekers while advising them of current employment opportunities and offering suggestions on effective job search strategies. The ES is currently working in conjunction with a local Employment Ontario service provider, Agilec, by utilizing their facilities in the central and northern areas of the County. This is done to facilitate access for clients who do not have access to transportation to our offices in Guelph or Fergus. It also allows for a broader base of job developers and local employment postings in regions closer to their homes.

As in 2015 and 2016, we saw an increase in temporary employment contracts and employers working through staffing agencies. As a result of this trend, we initiated and developed working relationships with local temporary employment agencies. We have had success working with Task Force, Express, Liberty, People Store, People Source, Pivotal Staffing and Labour Ready. In 2017, we continue to foster these relationships in an effort to identify more opportunities that are suitable matches for our clients.

In our effort to maintain and create new community partnerships for 2017, the ES continues to work side by side with the County's Economic Development office. We are also reaching out to Wellington County townships to invite Wellington County Economic Development officers to our meetings to share new developments. This will foster greater relationships, along with attracting new employers and people to the County while filling employment opportunities. This collaboration has also led to the implementation of a new online employment posting board that will work in conjunction with the new Live and Work in Wellington initiative. The ES also works closely with Employment teams from other regions including Waterloo Region, Niagara Region, and Dufferin County to share best practices and continue to create supportive programmes that will lead to employment and business opportunities.

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## Self-Employment

The County of Wellington continues to partner with Business Centre Guelph-Wellington on a per client basis to provide a comprehensive self-employment programme to clients who are approved as having an appropriate business plan.

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## Community Placement

We continue to support clients who have identified that volunteering could enhance their overall employability by maintaining a formal partnership with the People and Information Network (formerly the Volunteer Centre of Guelph-Wellington). This coordinated effort continues to enable caseworkers to receive feedback concerning the types of volunteer placements that the participant is seeking. This has supported case management strategies by ensuring that placements match the desired skills and experiences that are connected with the participant's employment goals.

## Increased Earnings

Caseworkers continue to support clients who are in part-time positions while promoting the benefits of full time employment. Caseworkers will continue to promote the use of the Full-Time Employment Benefit (FTEB), informal and formal child care benefits, Ontario Works (OW) earnings exemptions, and the Extended Employment Health Benefits (EEHB) in this effort.

## Integrated Employment Services

Guided by the shared desire to further coordinate the services delivered by Ontario Works and Employment Ontario in Guelph -Wellington, we continue to collaborate with Lutherwood and 2nd Chance Employment agencies to run one-hour information sessions for our clients at our location for the Youth Job Connection Programme. This programme was designed to assist youth in securing long term employment and meaningful careers. The Youth Job Connection Programme is intended to address the gaps in youth employment programming for young people who are not in education, employment or training and are experiencing employment barriers.

In early 2017 COW Employment Services completed an agreement with Lutherwood Employment Services Guelph, Second Chance Employment Counselling Guelph/Wellington and Agilec Employment Services Wellington to jointly use the Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS). The Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS) is an online assessment tool that helps clients identify their strengths and challenges in becoming employment ready, measures their changes over time, and provides organizations with roll-up reports across clients for use in program planning and evaluation. This collaboration will give us better insight as we make planning and programme decisions individually at our agencies and as a community.

Employment Services has also developed an online community employment workshop calendar that community members can use to view and sign up for any Employment Ontario agency workshops in Guelph Wellington. Developing technology to facilitate client enrollment in programs and to manage workshop signups will ensure enhanced, streamlined client service through such collaborative efforts.

## Stakeholder Linkages

In order to maximize the employment attainment potential of our clients, we have linked our services with reputable community stakeholders to connect our clients with their services. As indicated, an integration strategy for the provision of employment related services has been

undertaken collaboratively by Ontario Works and Employment Ontario, and has been a key focus of this area. This work represents our efforts to increase opportunities for employment-ready Ontario Works participants to connect seamlessly with Employment Ontario providers and programs in order to achieve the best possible employment outcomes for those we serve.

The Employment Specialist currently chairs the Employment Coordination Committee (ECC). This is a group of twenty-one service providers from across the regions that share programs, best practices and employment opportunities. For the past 27, years the ECC has also put on an annual Employer Recognition Awards Event. In 2017, a new spin-off from this group was born: a Regional Job Developers committee that will more intensively collaborate and share employer relationships for the benefit of the job seekers that we serve.

The Give Yourself Credit (GYC) programme remains an important part of our employment strategy in assisting youth clients and meeting our programme outcomes. The GYC programme is an accredited alternative high school programme for youth at risk who have demonstrated that they are unable to continue in the regular high school system. Since 2013, when our office completed a new service agreement with GYC, efforts to strengthen the link between the GYC programme and employment outcomes have been a key focus area. Additionally, in 2017 we continue to improve the relationship with the Wellington Centre for Continuing Education, helping our clients access their newly revamped Skills Upgrading Program.

All of the upgrading programs (Literacy and Basic Skills) are contained within the newly named Skills Upgrading Program. This programme allows clients to identify the required skills for specific employment goals and subsequently provides the client the opportunity to obtain the academic skills required to meet those goals.

The chart below lists a number of community partners that we actively work with as part of our employment programming:

Employment Programming Community Partners
2nd Chance Employment - EO
Lutherwood - EO
Anishnabeg Outreach - EO
Onward Willow
Canadian Mental Health Association

Links to Work - EO  
Bridging Employment Supports - EO  
University of Guelph Couple & Family Therapy  
Trellis Mental Health & Development Services  
Community Resource Centre in Fergus & Mt Forest  
Self Help Alliance  
Community Care Access Centre  
The People and Information Network (formerly the Volunteer Centre of Guelph-Wellington)  
Stonehenge Therapeutic Community  
Homewood Health  
Agilec  
Guelph Wellington Business Enterprise Centre  
Women in Crisis

In addition to the partners noted above, Ontario Works staff members have direct links to their colleagues in the Child Care Services division of COW Social Services in order to ensure that participants are supported in accessing a fee subsidy if they require licenced child care. Child Care Subsidy Staff work closely with the client and the OW Caseworker to support the client through this process. The OW Caseworker can also provide a participant with support to cover the cost of informal childcare if this is determined to better meet their needs.

The Ontario Works office also works closely with the local ODSP office to meet the needs of our common clients. These connections include supporting ODSP destined clients through the application period, file transfers, the provision of employment services to non-disabled ODSP adults and supporting ODSP clients with vital discretionary health and housing benefits.

There are two established working groups between the OW and ODSP office; one at a front-line staff level where business processes and operational information and issues are developed and shared, and another at a manager level where issues of a more strategic or broader nature can be discussed. In addition, an all staff networking and learning event took place between the two offices in 2016. This has now facilitated a personal connection between the staff of the two offices and will improve how the OW and ODSP teams work together.

## Monitoring Service Strategies

The Provincial update of target achievements is reviewed with all OW managers as part of bi-weekly Leadership Team meetings. Outcome results and related issues are discussed with the

MCSS Programme Supervisor as part of quarterly review meetings. If outcome targets must be adjusted, a business case with a clear rationale is presented to Provincial staff. As described in other areas of the Service Plan, staff are provided with a number of on-going engagement opportunities which include regular all-staff meetings, working groups, and feedback surveys related to various elements of the County's OW service model. Additional feedback opportunities have been provided to staff recently given the transition to SAMS.

The OW management team also reviews local labour market information to understand our local environment, outcome performance and required action. This information includes local unemployment rates, Workforce Planning Board reports, reports and information from our Economic Development colleagues and local business news.

The Ontario Works division is undertaking a number of programme evaluation initiatives in 2017 including:

- The use and success of newly developed client service pathways
- The child support exemption changes and modifications to service
- Employment Services programme interventions, including Circles®
- The effectiveness of outreach services to Arthur-area clients
- A broad understanding of the barriers our clients experience through an in depth client survey project.

## Acknowledgements

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We would like to express our appreciation to all Ontario Works managers for their contributions and participation in the drafting of this Service Plan. We would also like to extend our thanks to the entire OW team for their sincere commitment to our vision, and to delivering high quality services and supports to our community.

### Contact Information

For additional information on the County of Wellington's OW programme please contact:

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Alternate formats of this document available upon request



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