

Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP)

Increasing Social Assistance Clients' Uptake into OESP

Minister's Office Staff Update

June 20, 2017

DRAFT

CONFIDENTIAL / SENSITIVE INFORMATION

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AGENDA

- Revised strategy to support uptake of the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP) for social assistance clients
- Proposed approach to enable early implementation
- OESP regulatory amendment
- Proposed critical path for implementation

OESP – REVISED STRATEGY

The OEB, ENE and MCSS strategy is organized under three key activities:

1. Raise awareness of OESP through communication to all social assistance clients, with accompanying communications and supports to social assistance staff.
2. Support eligible social assistance clients' enrolment in OESP by:
 - ❑ Incorporating the OESP enrolment process into the social assistance intake process for new grants (OW and ODSP) by capturing information required to apply for OESP and providing it to a dedicated SWAT team to complete the application on behalf of the client.
 - ❑ Establishing the SWAT team to:
 - conduct outreach to existing clients (OW and ODSP) and complete OESP applications on their behalf;
 - complete OESP applications for new grants using the information captured at intake.
 - ❑ Design a multiplier that can be used to estimate annual income of current / future SA clients in line with OESP eligibility criteria (this approach is used by intake agencies already supporting OESP delivery). applies only to those social assistance clients that are utility account holders.
3. Enable a SAMS data exchange with OEB to automatically enroll eligible social assistance clients into OESP.

OESP – PROPOSED APPROACH

Step 1	Raise awareness of OESP: • Communication to all social assistance clients • Communications and supports to social assistance staff
Approach & Deliverables	• Communication outreach to social assistance clients (broadly to all SA clients and targeted to clients that pay hydro) • Aligned with broader announcements about the Fair Hydro Plan • Letters/mailings, without the need for social assistance or OEB/ICF field staff involvement (ODSP). OW will do their client mailings based on ad hoc reports provided • Foster social assistance staff awareness of OESP through memos, Qs and As, business processes, swim lanes, additional training on OESP for front line staff • Updates to SAMN, DARG and other MCSS tables • Social media and MCSS web content
Timing	• Engagement with stakeholders - ongoing • Disclosure to bargaining agents re SWAT team – mid to late June • Initial communication to staff - late June/early July • Cheque insert to SA clients - August/September • Targeted letters to clients who pay hydro - September

OESP – PROPOSED APPROACH

Step 2	Support SA client enrolment in the OESP by: • Capturing information required to enrol in OESP during the SA intake process for new grants • Establishing a SWAT team to enrol existing clients and new grants
Approach & Deliverables	• Implement Step 2 in 3 phases starting August 21, 2017 • Phase 1: Hire first wave of SWAT team staff to conduct outreach for existing clients using existing infrastructure. Continue recruitment for full SWAT team. • Phase 2: Implement 1-800 # to initiate MCSS contact centre. Hire additional recruits and set up office space • Phase 3: Implement full MCSS SWAT team in North Bay. SWAT team will capture SA client enrolments in a database to support moving to automated data exchange. Integrate OESP enrolment into the SA intake process*. ○ Training to support onboarding of staff at each wave of recruitment (training on processes, system, technology including telephone system). * Intake caseworkers to complete a form to email to SWAT team for completion of client enrolment into OEB/ICF system starting in October
Timing	• Phase 1: August • Phase 2: September • Phase 3: October

OESP – PROPOSED APPROACH

Step 3	Enabling automated enrolment to OESP through a data exchange from SAMS
Approach & Deliverables	• Implement SAMS changes to support OESP enrolment at intake • Implement an automated data exchange between SAMS and OEB ICF system
Timing	• Business requirements finalized – September • Completion of detailed business design- October • System Testing Start- Dec 2017 / Jan 2018 • To be implemented in Q1 2018/19

OESP – REGULATORY AMENDMENTS

- As part of the Ontario Fair Hydro Plan (OFHP), recent amendments to Section 79.2.2 of the *Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998* gave MCSS and the OEB authority to share information. This authority is required to enrol social assistance (SA) recipients into the OESP and meet privacy requirements under FIPPA.
- Amendments are required to the OESP regulation to:
 - Ensure that all persons deemed eligible for social assistance under Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) are also eligible for the OESP (if they receive an electricity bill); and
 - Include new definitions in the regulation that will allow for MCSS social assistance program administration to be used for completing OESP applications on behalf of social assistance clients.
- The amendments specify that the provisions will apply pursuant to an agreement between ENERGY and MCSS. The regulation is scheduled for Cabinet on June 27, with an effective date of July 1, 2017.

OESP – DETAILS OF AMENDMENTS

Definitions:

- MCSS has a process to determine household size (“benefit unit”, which only includes family members) and total income to determine OW and ODSP eligibility. These processes are different from those used to determine eligibility for OESP.
- Since the basic methodology for OESP eligibility is already in the regulation, definitions are needed to ensure that MCSS processes are also sufficient to determine OESP eligibility. MCSS policy and legal are supporting on drafting this language.

Eligibility for all Social Assistance (SA) Clients:

- Section 5 of the OESP regulation provides the different OESP credit amounts. Schedule 1 provides the eligibility criteria for each of those credits amounts, which are based on:
 - Total after-tax household income,
 - Number of household residents, and
 - Conditions that would enable enhanced credit amounts (Indigenous, electric heating, medical devices).
- MCSS has a process to determine household size (“benefit unit”, which only includes family members) and total income to determine OW and ODSP eligibility. These processes are different from those used to determine eligibility for OESP.
- There are a small set of ODSP eligibility categories that fall outside of OESP eligibility. These amendments will build these ODSP eligibility categories into Schedule 1 to ensure that all SA clients with electricity bills can receive OESP (all OW eligibility categories are already compatible with OESP).

Exceeding the \$52,000 OESP Income Threshold:

- There are some ODSP eligibility categories that will fall outside of OESP the next time social assistance is adjusted.
- To address this issue, **a provision** ~~general rule~~ will be included in the regulation to ensure that **all** ~~these~~ SA clients continue to be eligible, but at the lowest OESP credit amount.

OESP – PROPOSED CREDIT AMOUNTS

Household Income (After Tax)	Household Size (Number of people living in household)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7+
< \$28,000	\$45	\$45	\$51	\$57	\$63	\$75	\$75
\$28,001 - \$39,000	\$40	\$40	\$45	\$51	\$57	\$63	\$75
\$39,001 - \$48,000	\$35	\$35	\$35	\$40	\$45	\$51	\$57
\$48,001 - \$52,000	\$35	\$35	\$35	\$35	\$35	\$40	\$45
Over \$52,001	\$35	\$35	\$35	\$35	\$35	\$35	\$35
Household Income (After Tax)	Household Size (Number of people living in household)						
	Energy Intensive						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7+
< \$28,000	\$68	\$68	\$75	\$83	\$90	\$113	\$113
\$28,001 - \$39,000	\$60	\$60	\$68	\$75	\$83	\$90	\$113
\$39,001 - \$48,000	\$52	\$52	\$52	\$60	\$68	\$75	\$83
\$48,000 - \$52,000	\$52	\$52	\$52	\$52	\$52	\$60	\$68
Over \$52, 001	\$52	\$52	\$52	\$52	\$52	\$52	\$52

Orange cells – SA eligibility categories that currently fall outside OESP. These new OESP eligibility categories will align with the nearest credit amount within the same income band.

Purple cells – the base amount for SA clients that exceed the current income threshold.

Red cells – The red credit amounts are the new OESP eligibility categories, as part of OFHP.

OESP – RISKS

1) Risk – Lower OESP Credit Amount

- There are complaints by SA clients that they are enrolled into OESP for a credit amount that does not reflect the actual household size.

Mitigation

- The goal is get SA clients enrolled quickly so they can get the relief they need ASAP. By going through MCSS, they could start receiving credits in as little as XX weeks.
- Training for caseworkers / SWAT team would include script on providing information and resources to these SA clients so they know how to re-apply for the enhanced amount (e.g. webpage, local OESP intake agency information).

2) Risk – Regulation Effective Date v. MCSS Implementation

- The regulatory changes will come into effect July 1 (Cabinet date of June 27). However, MCSS implementation would likely not begin until late August / September, potentially creating expectations.

Mitigation

- The currently proposed amendments do not create a new entitlement for SA clients. It is only when MCSS is ready to implement that SA clients can have OESP applications processed for them.
- SA clients can be instructed where to find resources on applying for OESP, including locations for local intake agencies.

OESP – RISKS, CONTINUED

3) Risk – Labour Relations

- Bargaining agents could raise concerns over SA staff collecting information to administer a non-SA program and/or the provincial team is doing the work of local municipal staff.

Mitigation

- Engagement/communication with staff and bargaining agents to reinforce messaging that OESP is a provincial program, administered by OEB, and that the Dedicated Team is temporary until SAMS data exchange is established. Ontario Works staff will continue to make referrals and the processing of the applications will be done provincially.

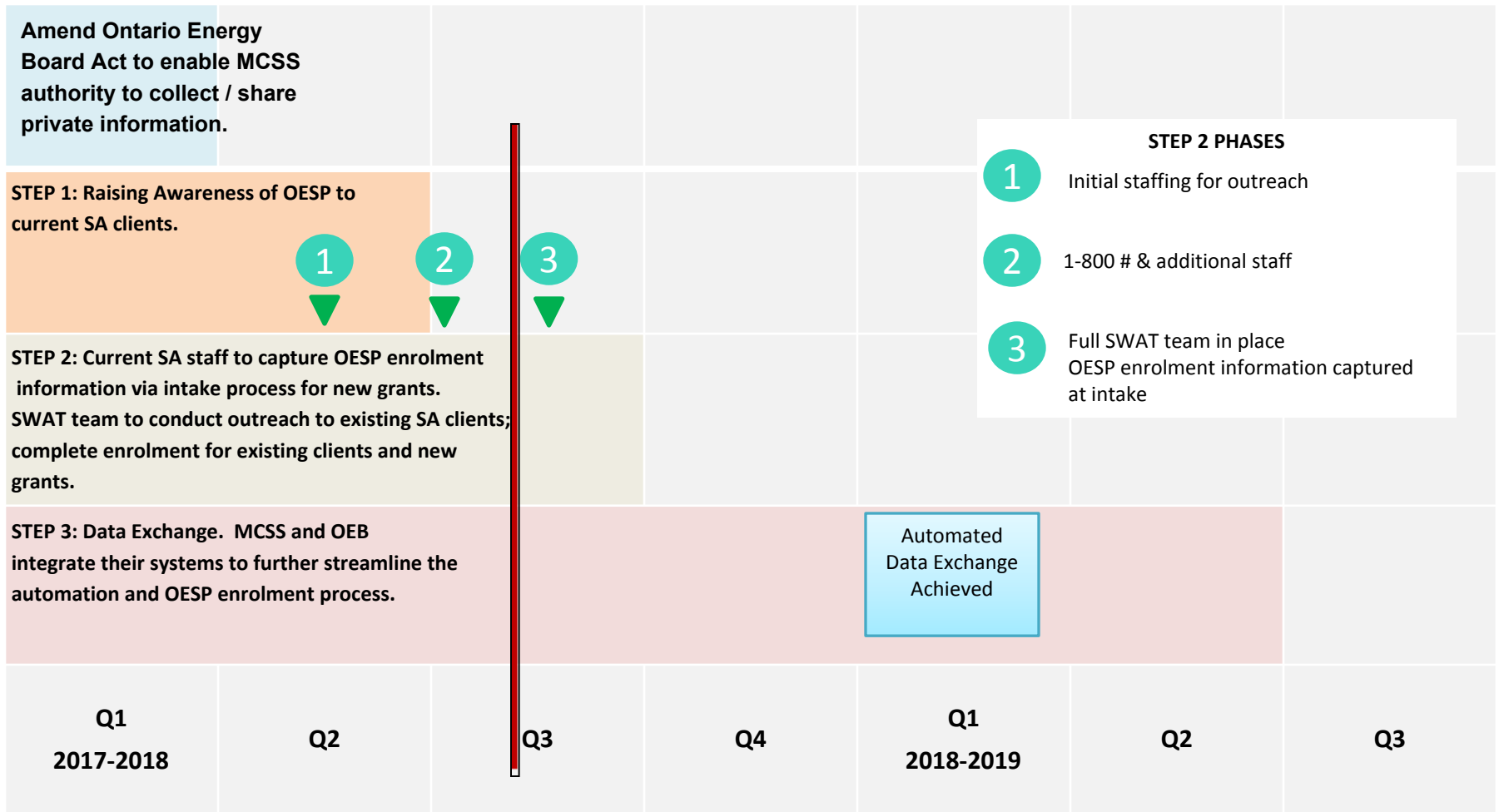
4) Existing OESP intake agencies

- Ontario Works Municipal sites that are already OESP intake agencies may perceive the work of Dedicated Team as siphoning off revenue (e.g. intake agencies receive \$20 per application).

Mitigation

- Municipalities were presented with the concept of a SWAT Team at the March 24 DARG meeting. No concerns were raised with the idea of a temporary team, assuming no funding impacts and little to no impact on their staff.
- Any future engagement and communication to reiterate the shared goal between intake agencies and SWAT Team of actively helping all eligible SA clients access OESP, and that SWAT Team is an additional resource for clients. Clients will still be able to use existing intake agencies if that is more convenient or comfortable.

OESP – HIGH LEVEL CRITICAL PATH



*See appendix A for detailed critical path

OESP – DETAILED CRITICAL PATH

