**Income Security Reform Changes**

On April 20, 2018, the Ontario government approved and filed amendments to the Ontario Works and ODSP regulations and other policy changes. These changes support the implementation of the first phase of a multi-year Income Security Reform Plan that includes an immediate focus on social assistance transformation.

Changes are being made to begin to transform, streamline and simplify social assistance, reduce the poverty gap for people in deepest need, improve health, employment and social inclusion outcomes, and help provide a better quality of life for Ontarians, including Indigenous peoples.

**Changes effective April 20, 2018**

**1.     Exemption of orphan’s and disabled contributor’s child benefit payments from other jurisdictions**

Payments similar to a surviving child (“orphan”) or a disabled contributor’s child under programs from other jurisdictions (e.g. United States Social Security) are exempt as income. This change aligns with the treatment of these payments under the Canada Pension Plan or Quebec Pension Plan.

**2.     Maintain dependent children attending school away from primary residences**

The requirement for dependent children who attend a school outside of their home community to return home on weekends and holidays in order to be maintained in the parental benefit unit is removed.

In addition, the amount to be maintained is to be equal to the full incremental shelter amount (and sole support parent amount where applicable) in respect of the child.

**3.     Maintain dependent adults and dependent children in the parental benefit unit while in full time post-secondary education away from home**

Dependent adults and children living away from home to attend post-secondary school full-time will be maintained in their parental benefit unit.

 Under this change, the relevant incremental shelter and basic needs amount with respect to the dependent adult or dependent child will be maintained in the parents’ social assistance payments.

4.     **Changes to eligibility requirements for Refugee Claimants**

Individuals making a refugee claim will now be eligible for social assistance effective the date they make a claim for refugee protection. This change includes individuals who have made a claim and are awaiting a future appointment to have their claim assessed by an Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC) officer for eligibility for referral to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB).

**5.     Exemption from the cap on the provincial contribution to Ontario Works Discretionary Benefits expenditures  (First Nation Ontario Works Delivery Partners only)**

The $10/case per month cap on the provincial contribution to discretionary benefit expenditures for First Nation delivery partners has been removed and housing related expenditures have been added as an eligible expense. This means that 100% of discretionary benefits expenditures will covered by the province.

Discretionary funding continues to be intended to assist with exceptional costs not otherwise covered under social assistance and not regular, ongoing payments. The only exception remains the provision of the Remote Communities Allowance (RCA) as a discretionary benefit per policy direction provided in the memo dated December 20, 2017.

**6.     Exempt income paid under an employment training program for up to 12 months (residents of First Nation Communities only)**

Training allowances and cash reimbursements of child care and transportation costs for individuals residing in a First Nations community are now fully exempt for up to 12 months. Reimbursements of child care and transportation costs are also not to be considered income.

Training for this purpose includes short-term employment specific skills development (up to 12 months) for which a participant may receive a training allowance and other cash reimbursements.

In addition, individuals who are required to relocate to undergo their training will be able to maintain social assistance payments in their home communities for the duration of their training for up to 12 months.

**7.     Further technical amendments to support the Ministry of Health and Long- Term Care’s (MOHLTC) Community Homes for Opportunity (CHO) prescribed class and former Homes for Special Care (HSC) residents prescribed class (ODSP only)**

The change makes individuals in these two prescribed classes eligible for the double disabled rate and the second residence provision.

**Additional Changes: For Implementation July – December 2018**

**July 2018**

       A new prescribed class for persons in receipt of an award under the English and Wabigoon River Systems Mercury Contamination Settlement Agreement Act, 1986.

**September 1, 2018**

       ODSP rates (basic needs and shelter) will be increased by 3% for all family types, to be added to the basic needs amount only, with a 2% increase to miscellaneous allowances (e.g. Remote Communities Allowance);

       The Board and Lodge rate category will be eliminated – individuals receiving  board and lodging or lodging rates will be eligible for  Basic Needs and Shelter amounts;

       Tax Free Savings Accounts and Registered Retirement Savings Plans will be exempt as assets; and

       Mandatory participation in Learning, Earning and Parenting Program (LEAP) will be removed.

**October 1, 2018**

       Ontario Works rates (basic needs and shelter) will be increased by 3% for all family types, to be added to the basic needs amount only, with a 2% increase to various miscellaneous allowances (e.g. Temporary Care Assistance, Remote Communities Allowance); and

       The Board and Lodge rate category will be eliminated – individuals receiving board and lodging or lodging rates will be eligible for Basic Needs and Shelter amounts.

**November 1, 2018**

       The minimum board and lodger and lodger only income charge ($100) will be eliminated and the board and lodger income charge and lodger only income rental charge will be reduced from 40% or 60% respectively to 25%;

       The time period for unapproved absences from Ontario will be increased from 7 days to 30 days;

       The definition of spouse will be changed from the current co-habitation period of 3 months to 3 years to align with the Family Law Act;

       The income charge for persons involved in labour disputes will be eliminated and  strike-pay will be exempt as income;

       Gifts and other voluntary payments will be fully exempt as income;

       Access to the Remote Communities Allowance will be expanded:

  to communities north of the 47th parallel without year round road access

  for First Nation communities north of the 47th parallel with or without year round road access; and

  for First Nation communities south of the 47th parallel without year round road access;

       Dependent adults in First Nation communities will be permitted to elect to be considered financially independent and receive assistance on their own behalf when living with parents;

       The medical travel and transportation policy will be clarified regarding travel to Indigenous Healing;

       Access to the Special Diet Allowance will be extended to eligible individuals with disabilities residing in MCSS funded Developmental Services intensive support and supported group living residences; and

       The requirement that individuals return to their local or regional office to update their file before commencing each academic year of study for out of province post-secondary education will be removed.

**December 1, 2018**

       The flat rate Earnings Exemption will be increased from $200 to $400; and

       The “waiting period” for earnings exemptions and access to the Full-Time Employment Benefit (FTEB) will be reduced from 3 months to 1 month.

If you would like any further information, please feel free to contact Laura Belfie at 416-212-9167.