



Community and Health Services Department
Office of the Commissioner

Memorandum

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Adelina Urbanski
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Date: February 2, 2017

Re: **Update on Discretionary Benefits**

On June 27, 2013, Council approved adjustments to York Region's Ontario Works discretionary benefits policy [Ontario Works Discretionary Benefits – Response to Provincial Funding Changes](#) in response to the Province's cost share changes and to support client employability and health.

After consultation with frontline staff, service providers and clients, policy changes were introduced by the Social Service Branch that continued to support residents' health and employability, while managing costs and improving administrative cost-effectiveness. Policy changes included:

- Adult Dental Services – The Region, in consultation with dental experts, implemented minor service restrictions (e.g. only silver amalgam fillings are funded due to their safety and durability, and the Region now restricts root canals on molars). These and other policy changes allowed clients to get services they need to remain healthy and also have the dental care needed to professionally present themselves to employers.
- Bed Allowance – The Region maintained funding amounts but reduced the frequency of the allowance from once per year to once every five years.
- Foot Orthotics – The Region now focuses on providing orthotics for medically verified needs and has eliminated the funding of off-the-shelf shoes.

Savings resulting from these changes have been reinvested back into the program to offset caseload growth costs that would otherwise have been funded temporarily through the Social Assistance Reserve, until fully uploaded by the Province in 2018.

Under the *Ontario Works Act*, the Community and Health Services Department acts as the Administrator for the Ontario Works program. Ontario Works, in addition to basic financial assistance, includes both mandatory and discretionary benefits. Ontario Works Administrators have the flexibility to make their own policies to determine which discretionary benefits they provide to Ontario Works clients, Ontario Disability Support Program clients, and non-social assistance recipients including the amounts and frequency.

Discretionary benefits include a range of both health and non-health related items, including but not limited to:

Health:

- Dental care for adults
- Vision care for adults
- Prosthetics (including orthopaedic shoes and foot orthotics)
- Beds and cribs
- Mobility/medical devices (if not covered by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care)

Non-Health:

- Funerals and burials
- Baby supplies

In 2012, the Province capped the cost-share funding for both health and non-health discretionary benefits at \$10 per case. At the time, the average cost per case in York Region was \$17 - \$21 which translated into approximately \$3 - \$4 million annually. Council approved a top-up to the provincial cap to \$15 – \$19 per case because reducing funding of discretionary benefits to the provincial cap would have meant there would have been a severe reduction in services resulting in a negative impact on client employability and health. Through ongoing reviews and consultation, Social Services has continued to improve efficiencies and processes each year. The cost per case is \$11 as of September 30, 2016.

These local policy changes ensure clients continue to receive services to support their health and employability that are not otherwise provided through other programs or community resources. Minor changes to key cost drivers successfully mitigated the impact of provincial funding changes. Staff will continue to look for ways to improve the administrative cost-effectiveness of discretionary benefits without impacting client services. Future policy changes may include alternative methods to provide financial assistance to non-social assistance recipients.

Adelina Urbanski/
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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