



**City of Kingston  
Information Report to Council  
Report Number 15-189**

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<b>To:</b>	<b>Mayor and Members of Council</b>
<b>From:</b>	<b>Lanie Hurdle, Commissioner, Community Services</b>
<b>Resource Staff:</b>	<b>Sheldon Laidman, Director, Housing and Social Services</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>March 24, 2014</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) - Update on Implementation of New Provincial Ontario Works Technology</b>

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**Executive Summary:**

On November 11, 2014 the new provincially-mandated Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) software was implemented across the province to administer social assistance, including providing benefits and determining eligibility. SAMS is the new case management tool for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. The Ministry of Community and Social Services is responsible for managing the system and municipal use by the 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) is mandatory to administer Ontario Works. The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an understanding of the significant local and operational impacts of this new system.

Challenges that are common with any complex system roll-out were expected. While the Housing and Social Services Department had contingency plans in place to mitigate initial service slowdowns, impact on clients' services and potential technical problems, the number and complexity of system issues encountered and the duration of these issues have been significant and were unforeseen by the Province. Issues are ongoing, very complex and beyond the scope of normal business contingency planning. As of February 13, 2015 there were 20,303 system issues (tickets) logged across the Province with only 51% estimated to be resolved by the Province. Furthermore, confirmation of closed tickets has to be done at the local level as many closed tickets that were closed by the Province in bulk have needed to be re-opened.

There have been significant impacts to staff, clients, community partners and internal operations as a result of the implementation. Operations are still in a state of recovery management nearly 4 months after the introduction of the new software. It would be estimated that the entire Ontario Works function is currently operating at less than 50% of pre-SAMS capacity.

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Through it all staff have been a model of commitment, determination and perseverance. They have held together a dysfunctional system and have focused on ensuring that clients experience the least amount of disruption possible, do not suffer financially and their critical needs are met. The Department's caseload of 3,000 households in both the City and the County of Frontenac represent the most vulnerable segment of the population and have remained the Department's priority throughout this implementation.

In addition to the immediate short-term issues, there is concern with the long-term implications of using SAMS. Senior Department Managers along with Municipal Service Manager colleagues, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO), and various other municipal associations have been lobbying for a recognition of the full depth of the problem from the Province, additional funding to cover additional costs incurred, prioritization of issues to be addressed by the Province, and detailed plans as to when the system will be fully functional.

**Recommendation:**

This report is for information purposes only.

**Authorizing Signatures:**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Lanie Hurdle, Commissioner, Community Services**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**Gerard Hunt, Chief Administrative Officer**

**Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:**

Cynthia Beach, Corporate & Strategic Initiatives	Not required
Denis Leger, Transportation, Facilities & Emergency Services	Not required
Jim Keech, President and CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Desiree Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer	Not required

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**Options/Discussion:****Background**

In February 2010, the Social Services Solutions Modernization Project (SSSMP) was introduced by the Ministry of Community and Social Services as a multi-year project to enhance the delivery of social assistance through technology and business renewal by replacing the former Service Delivery Model Technology (SDMT) with a modern, commercial off-the-shelf solution – Social Assistance Management System (SAMS). Specifically, the objectives of the SSSMP included improving customer service, creating flexible and adaptable solutions, improving management of information and increasing audit and accountability capacity. It was based upon the premise that SDMT was no longer able to meet the needs of staff or clients.

The first phase was the implementation of the Online Application Social Assistance (OASA) in the spring of 2011. It allows applicants to apply for social assistance from any computer with internet access. The second phase was to be the implementation of SAMS. The Ministry of Community and Social Services decided to utilize the Curam software platform, and promoted it as a proven case management solution that integrates best practices in human services delivery from many jurisdictions in Canada, US and internationally. The Ministry assured Consolidated Municipal Services Managers (CMSMs) that SAMS would establish a foundational case management application that could be built upon to support the evolution of human services delivery in Ontario.

The launch date for SAMS was initially scheduled for June 2013, then delayed to November 2013, then to May 2014 and finally set for November 11, 2014 when it was implemented. The delays were attributed to:

- Ensuring delivery of a high quality solution;
- Providing enough time for all Service Managers to prepare for successful implementation;
- Incorporating longer term social assistance transformation requirements of the system; and
- Data conversion cleanup and testing.

There were a significant number of site readiness activities completed by the Department in preparation including:

- Development of revised business procedures;
- Assessing technical capability;
- Training for the 80 staff involved in the Ontario Works program; and
- Data clean up initiatives mandated by MCSS.

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It was widely known that staff across the province, both municipally and provincially, questioned whether or not SAMS was in a state of readiness for implementation. These concerns were addressed with the Province with an assurance from them that successful milestones such as User Acceptance Testing and data conversion targets had been reached and the system was ready for implementation.

While the Housing and Social Services Department had a Site Readiness Plan in place, approved by MCSS, to assist with Go-Live as well as Post Go-Live potential issues, the number and complexity of system issues encountered as well as the duration of these issues have been significant and were unforeseen by the Province. Issues are ongoing throughout the province, very complex and beyond the scope of normal business contingency planning. There have been significant impacts to staff, clients, community partners and the Department's internal operations as a result of this implementation.

### **Impact to Business Processes**

The implementation of SAMS has impacted every business process in the operation of Ontario Works which is a large operation with 80 staff, a caseload of 3,000 households and annual expenditures of nearly \$50 million dollars. A detailed description of impacts to clients, program integrity and staff follows; however, some of the more significant impacts to actual business processes continue to be:

- Difficulty in training and updating staff on the hundreds of system workarounds that are continually being released by the Province.
- Redeployment of staff from other responsibilities to assist in troubleshooting, submitting tickets to MCSS on system defects, training for the new system as well as management and coordination of daily issues.
- Continual revision of business processes as previously trained SAMS processes do not function as initially intended. Significant reduction in client case management activities such as assisting clients with their employment and self-sufficiency goals.
- Significant increase in application times and inputting of information into the system. To date, provincially mandated application processing targets of four days have been maintained but only because of the redeployment of most staff resources to this function.
- Significant issues with conversion of data from SDMT to SAMS. Staff are spending inordinate amounts of time investigating issues for individual cases and attempting to identify solutions. Data conversion has caused clients to receive payments in error as well as suspension of payments without reason.
- A significant backlog of work is accumulating as more workarounds are introduced and more focus is placed on ensuring payments are processed.

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**Impacts to Clients**

Since implementation, staff have been limited in what regular case management duties they have been able to perform. Their primary focus has been to ensure that clients receive their financial entitlements (i.e. monthly payments, arrears, etc.). Due to the unforeseen implementation issues with SAMS, MCSS introduced workload reductions which include removing the requirement for staff to update client participation agreements. Pre-SAMS, clients would have been receiving regular contact from staff and discussing planning options regarding employment-related activities. This workload reduction has resulted in the following:

- Significantly fewer regular meetings to discuss Participation Agreements (employment plans) or follow-up.
- Significantly fewer referrals or follow-up regarding employment opportunities, school activities, workshops or other employment readiness activities. Furthermore, staff have not been able to support clients in building self-reliance and employability to the extent that was possible with the previous technology.
- Significantly longer application interview times. While the length of time it currently takes to process information may be somewhat influenced by staff experiencing a “learning curve”, it still remains that this is a more complex system requiring additional data fields to be filled in when completing various case management tasks. As well, the Department has experienced many system degradation issues while trying to process applications and some areas of the new technology are still not working correctly, such as client letters. It is expected there will be ongoing workload issues for staff as well as the service the client receives.
- Client T5's have risk of error for the 2014 year due to payments made in error that were caught prior to mailing payment to the client but may not yet be reconciled in SAMS.

**Impacts to Program Integrity**

There has been difficulty in receiving systems reports from SAMS which are relied upon for financial reconciliation and effective program review. The Province has recently issued some reports which will address this in a limited manner, but the majority of regular reports are still unavailable or inaccurate. This has had an impact on staff's ability to budget effectively, calculate our caseload count, report accurately, submit quarterly reports to MCSS, close year end accounts and will affect the Department's year end audit requirements.

Due to issues with data conversion and provincial overnight system fixes that trigger unforeseen events, a number of payments have been issued in error or intended payments have not been produced. The result is that staff are having to manually verify payments being issued. In addition, there has been a significant increase in Direct Bank Deposit (DBD) recalls, cheque cancellations and manual payments. This has been necessary to ensure clients receive the correct entitlement in a timely manner. This has significantly increased time spent on payment processes and ensuring that payments are as accurate as possible. Since many payments are produced overnight and are system generated, it has not been feasible to verify every payment

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since implementation but a risk based model is being used to ensure that all significant payments are verified.

Due to the issues with data conversion and the necessity for staff to enter inaccurate data into SAMS in order for it to work the way they need it to, there will be an extraordinary amount of cleanup to complete in the future. The length of time that it will take is unknown at this time, but it has been conservatively estimated at taking a year or more.

### **Impact on Ontario Works Staff**

Staff have been greatly impacted during this implementation in a variety of ways. In the final analysis, staff bears the brunt of all aspects of the impact on business processes: clients, lack of ongoing and updated training, data conversion, program integrity and work backlog. Once satisfied and fulfilled in a job that provided them with regular and meaningful client contact, this has been replaced by daily feelings of frustration.

Through it all staff have been a model of commitment, determination and perseverance. They have held together a dysfunctional system and have focused on ensuring that clients experience the least amount of disruption possible, do not suffer financially and their critical needs are met.

Supports have been and continue to be put in place to address the challenges they have been facing, however, staff are feeling overwhelmed knowing that an extensive amount of work awaits them that they feel incapable of addressing at this time. Due to the additional time and continual workarounds required to do their job in SAMS, they are having a difficult time envisioning a time in the near future when they will once again be current in their workload.

Staff and management have requested additional training on the new system but MCSS has not yet developed new training modules or training that incorporates all of the necessary workarounds. Until the system is stable, the Department does not anticipate having proper training resources for staff. Similar to other Service Managers throughout Ontario, the Department has experienced an increase in reported injuries relating to the new system and illnesses since the implementation of SAMS. Accessibility of the new system and its compatibility with voice recognition software used by staff has also been substandard. For staff who are committed to meeting and maintaining service standards, SAMS has become a continuous source of stress. Staff want to be able to return to doing the full complement of job duties rather than simply issuing payments.

### **Provincial Commitments**

The Province has been steadfast in their commitment to continuing with the implementation of SAMS despite its problems. Over the past two months there has been an increasing realization by the Province that significant problems exist and they have begun to work with municipalities on some of these issues. Some concessions and improvements made by the Province include:

- Various technical working groups have been set up with Service Manager representation through OMSSA;
- A small amount of funding was made available to cover additional expenses incurred

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(\$80,300 for Kingston which was included in the 2015 operating budget);

- Commitment to delay planned program and employment benefit changes until SAMS stabilizes;
- Extension of deferrals from Participation Agreement activities for up to a 6 month period for those that meet the deferral criteria until March 31, 2015;
- Waiving of the requirement to update expired participation agreements/outcome plans until May 1, 2015;
- Suspension of the Eligibility Verification Process (risk based file audits) until March 31, 2015;
- Service Manager outcome targets have been waived for 2015;
- Pursuit of child and spousal support waived until SAMS stabilizes; and
- Commitment to have a third party review of SAMS and its implementation.

While these are important steps made by the Province to begin to address the issues related to SAMS, there are concerns that they are not adequate in addressing the impacts. Exhibits A and B provide additional background of expectations of OMSSA and AMO that have been forwarded to the Province.

**Existing Policy/By-Law:**

Not applicable

**Notice Provisions:**

Not applicable

**Accessibility Considerations:**

Not applicable

**Financial Considerations:**

Housing and Social Services staff are continuing to determine the overall financial impact of SAMS. The City received funding in 2014 to prepare for the implementation and received an additional \$80,300 in December 2014 to be used towards additional Q1 2015 expenses caused by issues around the SAMS implementation.

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**Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:**

Katie Clarke, Manager, Ontario Works Program

Kathy Cabral, Ontario Works Supervisor

Sharon Smith, Ontario Works Supervisor

Ontario Works Case Managers

**Exhibits Attached:**

Exhibit A January 29, 2015 Letter from OMSSA to MCSS

Exhibit B February 5, 2015 Letter from AMO to MCSS



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Services Association

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January 29, 2015

Sent via email: [Richard.Steele@ontario.ca](mailto:Richard.Steele@ontario.ca)

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

Dear Richard,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Exhibit A

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Exhibit A

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

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

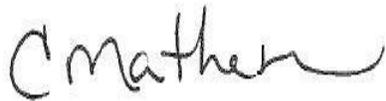
There is ongoing and increasing concern with the well-being of staff. The erosion of confidence in SAMS is impacting the health and well-being of many and resulting in increasing frustration and labour relation tensions.

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

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

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

Sincerely,



Catherine Matheson  
President, OMSSA

C

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

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February 5, 2015

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

Dear Minister Jaczek:

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

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

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

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

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

AMO is therefore calling upon the government to immediately:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Gary McNamara  
AMO President

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