

# Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit



If you qualify for social assistance from Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) you might be able to get money to help you when:

- you need to move to a new home,
- you are leaving a shelter, a hospital, or other institution,
- you are facing an eviction, or
- your supply of heat, hydro, or water is being cut off.

### **If you speak French**

Ask a lawyer or a community legal clinic about your language rights. You may have the right to get your OW- and ODSP-related government services in French.

If you are appealing a decision about your right to social assistance from OW or ODSP, this could mean that you have the right to a hearing before a French-speaking member of the Social Benefits Tribunal, as well as other French-language services. [See pages 7 to 10 for more information about appealing a decision.](#)



## What is the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit?

This benefit is money to help pay for things you need to set up a new home, such as:

- deposits for telephone service or utilities, such as heat, hydro, or water,
- advance payment of the last month's rent,
- clothing, furniture, and other household goods,
- storage costs for up to 3 months,
- transportation and moving costs, and
- help with your move if you are a person with a disability.



This benefit can also help you to stay in the home you live in now by giving you money for such things as:

- rent you owe, which is also known as “arrears”, so that you will not be evicted,
- payments to keep your utilities from being cut off, and
- payments to get your utilities back if they have been cut off.

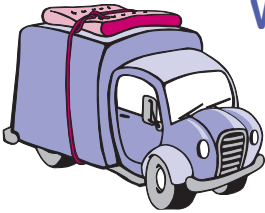
If you owe rent or utility payments, you might be able to get help from other programs as well. These programs are separate from the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit. [See pages 12 to 13 for more information.](#)

## **Who can get the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit?**

You must qualify for social assistance from Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). And you must show that you are in one of the following situations:

- You are leaving an institution that provides for your basic needs and shelter.
- You have been evicted.
- Your landlord has begun the process to evict you, but you can stay if you make a payment.
- You have received a final demand for payment of your mortgage, but you can stay if you make a payment.

- One of your utilities, such as your hydro, water, or heat, is about to be cut off, but will not be cut off if you make a payment.
- One of your utilities has been cut off, but you will get it back if you make a payment.
- You need to move because it would be harmful to your health or well-being to stay where you are.



## **When will my health and well-being be considered a good reason for me to move?**

If you are moving because staying where you are is harmful to your health or well-being, you might be eligible for a Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit. Here are some examples of reasons for this kind of move:

- You need to get away from family violence or abuse.
- You are homeless.
- Your new rent will be more affordable.

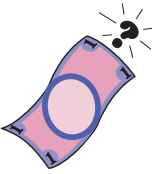
- You live in housing that is overcrowded or so unfit to live in that it could be called “uninhabitable”.
- You are being harassed in the place where you live.
- You are a single parent who needs independent housing.
- You are a person with a disability moving out of your family home because your caregiver can no longer look after you.
- You are a person with a disability and you are moving into supportive housing.
- You need to move for work or training.

## **What if I am leaving an institution?**

You can also get a Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit if you are leaving an institution that provides for your basic needs and shelter. Some examples of these institutions are:

- hostels or emergency shelters,
- group homes for people with developmental disabilities,

- hospitals,
- chronic care facilities,
- nursing homes or homes for the aged,
- special care homes,
- transition houses, and
- prisons.



## How much money can I get?

If you have one or more dependent children below age 18, you can get **up to \$1500 in addition to** the regular amount of your OW financial assistance or your ODSP income support. Otherwise, you can get up to \$799 in addition to your regular OW or ODSP amount. This is the usual maximum amount you can get in a 24-month period. But not everyone gets the maximum.

If you need it, you can get the benefit more than once in 24 months as long as you have not already received the 24-month maximum amount.

In exceptional circumstances—such as domestic violence, fire, flood, or if you

need to move because of a disability that you have—you might be able to get more than the maximum in a 24-month period.



## How do I apply?

Contact your OW or ODSP office to apply. If you need the contact information for your local office, call ServiceOntario:

- Toll-free .....1-800-267-8097
- Toll-free TTY.....1-800-268-7095
- In Toronto .....416-326-1234
- TTY in Toronto.....416-325-3408

Contact information for OW and ODSP offices is also available on the web site of the Ministry of Community and Social Services at <[www.cfcs.gov.on.ca](http://www.cfcs.gov.on.ca)>.

You should apply as soon as you know you need the money. If you have already moved, you are expected to apply within one month of the date you moved into your new home.

Make a list of the things you need, showing how much each thing costs, and give it to the OW or ODSP office where

you apply. Include everything you need, even if the total cost is more than the maximum benefit, because some things might not be approved.

Also include proof of the costs. For example, as proof of the amount you have to pay for the last month's rent, you could attach a copy of your lease or a letter from your landlord.

If you need help with your application, [contact your community legal clinic](#) (see page 11).



## What if I do not get the benefit I applied for?

Ask for the reasons in writing immediately.

You can appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT) if you are refused the benefit or if the amount you get is less than you requested. The SBT is independent from OW and ODSP. It has the power to make a different decision.

But first you must **write** to the office that made the decision and ask for an

“**internal review**”. An internal review means that a different person reviews the original decision and decides whether or not to change it.

On the next few pages we give basic information about internal reviews, appeals, and the time limits that apply to them. For more details, see our pamphlet called “**Appeals and Internal Reviews**”. In it you will also find a [blank form letter](#) that you can use to request an internal review. Turn to the back cover to find out how to order the pamphlet. It is also available on our web site at [www.cleo.on.ca](http://www.cleo.on.ca).

### **Ask for an internal review**

Your request must be made in **writing**. You must ask for an internal review within **10 days** from the date you receive the decision letter. If the decision is mailed to you, you may have less than 10 days.



## Note about mail

The rules assume that if a letter is mailed to you, you receive it **3 days** after it is mailed. So, if the decision letter that says you are refused or will get less than you requested is mailed to you, you have **13 days from the mailing date** (3 days plus 10 days) to request an internal review.

The mailing date should be stamped on the envelope by Canada Post. It might not be the same as the date on the letter, so keep both the letter and the envelope.

It is important to try to get your request for an internal review to the correct office within the time limit. But if you send in your request after the time limit, it may still be considered. Make sure you ask for an extension of time in your written request and explain why your request is late.

A decision on your internal review is supposed to be made within **10 days** from the date your request is received.

### **Appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal**

If you get an internal review decision within the 10 days, and it says that you are still refused or getting less than you requested, you have **30 days** from the date of this decision to appeal to the SBT.

If you do not get an internal review decision within the 10 days, you can go ahead and appeal the original decision to the SBT. Your appeal must be filed within **40 days** of your request for an internal review.

If you miss the time limit for appealing, you can ask the SBT for more time. You will have to explain why you missed the time limit.



## How do I get legal help?

For advice or help with the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit, an internal review, or an appeal, contact a community legal clinic, the local Legal Aid office, or a lawyer.

There are a few ways to find the nearest community legal clinic or local Legal Aid office:

- Look in CLEO’s booklet called **“Getting legal help: Community Legal Clinics in Ontario”**. See the back cover to find out how to order it. It is also available on our web site at [www.cleo.on.ca](http://www.cleo.on.ca).
- Try looking in your phone book under “Legal Aid” or “Lawyers”.
- Check Legal Aid Ontario’s web site at [www.legalaid.on.ca](http://www.legalaid.on.ca).
- Or phone Legal Aid Ontario:  
Toll-free ..... **1-800-668-8258**  
Toll-free TTY..... **1-866-641-8867**  
In Toronto ..... **416-979-2352**  
TTY in Toronto .... **416-598-8867**



## Where else can I get help with my housing costs?

If you owe rent or utility payments, you might be able to get help from a rent bank, an emergency energy fund, or another program.

### If you owe rent

Many places in Ontario have a **rent bank**. This is a program to help tenants with low incomes who could be evicted because their rent is “in arrears”—in other words, because they owe rent.

If you are eligible, the rent bank can pay your landlord up to 2 months’ rent that you owe.

Each rent bank has its own rules about who is eligible and whether you have to pay the money back.

To find out if there is a rent bank in your area, go to the web site of the Ontario Rent Bank Network at [www.ontariorentbank.net](http://www.ontariorentbank.net).

## **If you owe utility payments**

If you owe money for utilities, such as hydro, oil, or gas, you might be able to get help from an **emergency energy fund** or another program.

For more information, go to the web site of the Low Income Energy Network at [www.lowincomeenergy.ca](http://www.lowincomeenergy.ca).

The law can change, and policies and practices can also change or vary. This pamphlet contains general information. It is not a substitute for getting legal advice about your particular situation.

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