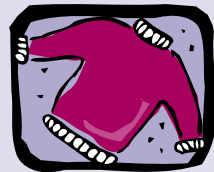


Need welfare?

How to apply to
Ontario Works
for assistance



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-related government services in French.

If you are appealing a decision about your right to social assistance from OW, 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. Information about appealing a decision starts on page 21.

Social assistance in Ontario

If you have a low income or no income and you live in Ontario, you may qualify for help from one of these social assistance programs:

1. **Ontario Works (OW)**, which some people call welfare. This program is delivered by municipal governments. In other words, it is run by the local government of the town, city, county, district, or region you live in.
2. **The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)**, which some people call disability benefits. This program is for people with serious health problems. It is run by the Ontario government's Ministry of Community and Social Services. When we say "the Ministry" in this pamphlet, that is who we are talking about.

OW and ODSP both provide income support and employment support.

When you get **income support**, you get money to help with living expenses, such as food and housing. You also get help

to pay for prescription drugs and dental services. You may also be eligible for benefits such as the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit. If you own your home, you might be eligible for help with necessary home repairs.

When you get **employment support**, you get help to find a job or upgrade your skills.

To get income support from OW or ODSP, you must qualify financially. This means that you must be in financial need and meet other rules about income and assets.

The rest of this pamphlet is for people who are applying for social assistance from OW.

You can find information about applying for ODSP benefits in the CLEO pamphlet called **Disability benefits in Ontario: Who can get them, How to apply**. To find out how to order it, turn to the back cover of this pamphlet. It is also available on CLEO's web site at **<www.cleo.on.ca>**.

Who can get OW assistance?

OW assistance is for people who need money because:

- they cannot find work,
- they are temporarily unable to work,
- they are earning so little that they qualify for assistance, or
- they are applying to ODSP and they need assistance while waiting for disability benefits to begin.

OW assistance is meant to help you with your day-to-day needs. It helps pay for things like rent, food, clothing, and prescription drugs.

There are rules about who can get OW assistance and what you must do to keep getting it.



How do I apply to Ontario Works for assistance?

Contact your local OW office to apply.
To find the contact information for the

nearest OW 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**

Tell ServiceOntario what your postal code is and ask them for the phone number and address of the Ontario Works office closest to where you live.

You may also find the address and telephone number of OW offices in the government section of your phone book or on the web site of your municipality. The Ministry's web site also has a list of OW offices around Ontario. Go to www.mcsc.gov.on.ca and look for "Ontario Works".

To complete your application, you will need to have an interview. This interview is usually at the local OW office. If going to the local OW office is difficult for you, you can ask to have the interview at your home or at another place that is better for you.

An OW worker will ask you for information to show that you qualify for assistance. You will also have to complete and sign the forms that OW requires.



What information will I have to give when I apply for assistance?

You will have to provide information about yourself, each member of your family, and anyone else who lives with you. This information includes:

- Family size and ages of family members.
- Income—including pensions and allowances.
- Assets—including money in bank accounts, registered retirement savings plans (RRSPs), registered education savings plans (RESPs), and vehicles.

Note: Some income and assets are **exempt**. This means that OW does not count them when they calculate your income and assets. For example, your home, car, and most household items do not count as assets.

- Debts—including money you owe on credit cards, to the bank, and to other people.
- Housing arrangements.
- Expenses for basic needs.
- Education, employment status, and employment history.




You will be asked to provide documents that relate to yourself or the other people in your household who are included in your application, such as:

- Personal identification—for example, birth certificates or passports, health cards, and Social Insurance Number (SIN) cards.
- Immigration papers.
- Separation or divorce papers.
- Custody documents.
- Proof of school attendance.
- Bank statements or bank records.
- Proof of income from any source—including employment, Ontario Child Benefit, support payments, workers’

compensation, and payments from tenants, roomers, and boarders.

- Information about assets—including RRSP statements, car ownership papers, and bonds.
- Life insurance policies.
- Leases or tenancy agreements, and rent receipts.
- Mortgage agreements and statements.
- Other bills related to housing costs—such as bills for hydro, water, gas, property tax, and home or apartment insurance.
- Proof of debts—including credit card bills or advances, student loans such as from the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), and other loans, even if the loan is from a relative or friend.

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- Keep copies of all the documents that you give to the OW worker. You can ask the worker to make a copy of any **original** documents that you submit.

You should not be asked for information that is not relevant to your eligibility for financial assistance.

If you think the OW office is being unreasonable or asking you for information that has nothing to do with your eligibility, contact your community legal clinic. They may be able to help you. See page 25 for information about finding a community legal clinic.

What if I have trouble getting the documents OW asks for?

You should not have to provide a document that you cannot get or that you cannot afford to get. If you are asked to do this, ask the OW office to check the information some other way. Or ask them to pay for the cost of getting the documents.

If you need extra time to get the documents, you can ask the OW office for an extension of time.

If you have trouble getting documents, contact a community legal clinic. They may be able to help you. See page 25 for information about finding a community legal clinic.



What if someone in my household needs a special diet?

People who have certain medical conditions might qualify for a **special diet allowance**. The amount of the allowance depends on the medical condition.

If you or other members of your household qualify for a special diet, OW must take this into account when they decide:

- whether you qualify for income support, and
- how much income support you should get.

To apply for a special diet allowance, you must use the **special diet allowance application form**. You can ask an OW worker for this form.

The form must be completed by one of the following health professionals who is licensed to practise in Ontario:

- a doctor,
- a dietitian, or
- a registered nurse in the extended class. This kind of nurse is sometimes called a nurse practitioner.

A midwife can complete the form when the medical condition is related to pregnancy or breast-feeding.



A woman who is pregnant or breast-feeding can get a **nutritional allowance**. This is not the same as a special diet allowance.

All medical conditions that qualify for a special diet allowance are listed on the application form. If a medical condition is not listed, you cannot get an allowance for it.

For each medical condition on the special diet application form, there is a maximum amount of money you can receive.

If you get a special diet allowance, OW will check from time to time to see if you still qualify for a special diet. This will happen even if your doctor says your condition is not going to improve.

If your medical condition changes or you develop other medical problems, you should get a new special diet allowance application form filled out. You can get the form from your worker.

If OW refuses your application for a special diet allowance, you can appeal the decision. See pages 21 to 24 for more information about how to appeal and the time limits.

To find out more about special diets and which medical conditions qualify, contact your community legal clinic. See page 25 for information about how to find the legal clinic nearest you.

What if Ontario Works will not accept my application?

By law, OW cannot refuse to take your application. If this happens, ask to speak to a supervisor and insist that they take your application. If there is still a problem, contact your community legal clinic immediately. See page 25 for information about how to find the legal clinic nearest you.

It is important to complete your application so that you can get OW's decision in writing. Then you can go on to appeal the decision.



What if I do not have a permanent address?

You should not be refused assistance just because you do not have a permanent address. Go ahead and apply.

If you know you can get a certain room or apartment when you have the rent money, get a note signed by the landlord and take it to OW. The note should say:

- the address of the place you want to rent,
- how much the rent is,
- if you have to pay for heat or other utilities,
- if you have to pay the last month's rent up front,
- the landlord's name and phone number, and
- that the landlord is prepared to rent the room or apartment to you.

The OW office might have a form that you can give to the landlord to fill out instead of asking for a signed note.



Can I bring someone with me when I am dealing with Ontario Works?

Yes. You have the right to bring a person of your choice with you. For example, you could bring a relative, a friend, or someone from a community group or agency.

Keep in mind that you will be asked to sign documents and to provide information that will determine whether you are eligible for financial assistance. It is important that you understand clearly what you are signing and what the worker tells you. If you need more time or help to understand the documents, ask for copies to take away and read before you sign.

If you need an interpreter, tell the OW office. You may need to make arrangements to bring your own interpreter to your OW appointment. Contact your local community information centre for help to find an interpreter.

Your spouse who lives with you should come to the interview because he or she will have to sign documents to complete your application. Someone of the same or opposite sex can be considered your spouse. You could be married to one another or not.

Living with a spouse can affect your eligibility for assistance. So you may want to get legal advice about whether

OW might consider someone in your household to be your spouse. To find out how to get legal help, see page 25.



Can an OW worker come to my home without letting me know ahead of time?

An OW worker can decide to do a home visit with or without giving you notice. Home visits should happen only during the OW office's normal business hours.

The OW worker cannot enter your home without your permission. But if you refuse a home visit without a valid reason, OW can refuse to give you assistance.

If you have a valid reason to refuse a home visit, the visit can be set for another time. Here are some examples of a valid reason:

- you or someone in your home is ill,
- you have visitors in your home and you want to keep your application for OW private,

- the visit interferes with religious observance or practices, such as religious holidays, prayers, or rituals.

An OW worker who visits your home can look only at things that are in plain view. This means that they cannot look into drawers or cupboards.

Forms to fill out and sign

For your application to be considered complete, you and your spouse who lives with you will have to fill out and sign the following forms:

- 1. Application for Assistance**
- 2. Participation Agreement**
- 3. Consent to Disclose and Verify Information**
- 4. Canada Revenue Agency Consent**
- 5. Rights and Responsibilities Form**

Other adult family members who live with you might also have to sign these forms in order to complete your application.

You may also be asked to sign other forms that apply to you, for example, the **Questionnaire for Applicants and Recipients who are Living with Another Adult**.



What is the Participation Agreement?

The Participation Agreement lists activities that you have to do to get financial assistance, for example, a job search or volunteer placement. You and an OW worker are expected to agree on activities that will help you prepare for and get a job as soon as possible. Participation Agreements are reviewed regularly.

Participation Agreements **must** be completed by you and your spouse. Other adult members of your family might also have to sign a Participation Agreement.

It is very important that you understand what you are agreeing to do before you sign. You are expected to do what you agree to. If you do not, your assistance could be refused, cut off, or reduced.

If you find that you cannot do what you agreed to do, **you can ask to have the Participation Agreement changed.** Changes must be negotiated with OW, and each change should be put down in writing.

If you have restrictions that limit your participation in activities, they must be supported by documentation.

You can find more detailed information in the CLEO pamphlet called **Participation Agreements and your Ontario Works assistance**. To find out how to order it, turn to the back cover of this pamphlet. It is also available on CLEO's web site at www.cleo.on.ca.

What is the Consent to Disclose and Verify Information?

The Consent to Disclose and Verify Information is a form that allows OW to check the information that you provide.

You should only have to consent to the release of information that is needed for your application. If you are asked to consent to the release of information that you think is not necessary for your application, contact your community legal

clinic. See page 25 for information about how to find the legal clinic nearest you.

What is the Canada Revenue Agency Consent?

The Canada Revenue Agency Consent is a form that allows OW to check whether the information you provide matches information that the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has about you. This includes information related to your yearly income tax returns, as well as government benefits paid to you. In the past the CRA was called Revenue Canada.

What is the Rights and Responsibilities Form?

This form describes what you can and cannot do while you are getting OW financial assistance. You must sign it. Ask the OW worker to go over this form with you.



What can I do if Ontario Works refuses to give me financial assistance?

Ask for the decision in writing immediately.

You can appeal to the **Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT)**. The SBT is independent from OW and 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 you will find basic information about internal reviews, appeals, and the time limits that apply to them. For more details and a blank form-letter that you can use to request an internal review, see CLEO's pamphlet called **Appeals and Internal Reviews**. Turn to the back cover of this pamphlet to find out how to order it. It is also available on CLEO's web site at <www.cleo.on.ca>.

Ask for an internal review

Your request must be made **in writing**. You must ask for an internal review within **30 days** from the date you receive the decision to refuse you assistance.



Note about mail

OW rules assume that if a letter is mailed to you, you receive it **3 days** after it is mailed. 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 meet the time limit. If you miss it, you should still ask for an internal review. Make sure you ask for an extension of time in your request for an internal review and explain why your request is late.

The OW office is supposed to make a decision on your internal review within **10 days** from the date they receive your request.

Appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal

If you get an internal review decision, and it says that you are still refused assistance, 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. You must appeal within **40 days** from the date of your request for an internal review.

To make your appeal, you must use the SBT's Appeal Form. You can get one from your OW or ODSP office, from a community legal clinic, or by calling the Social Benefits Tribunal at:

Toll-free **1-800-753-3895**

Toll-free TTY **1-800-268-7095**

The Appeal Form is also available on the SBT's web site at <www.sbt.gov.on.ca>. Look in the "Forms" section.

If you miss the time limit for appealing, you can still file an appeal. In the Appeal Form, ask the SBT for more time and explain why you missed the time limit.

Apply to the SBT for interim assistance

You may be able to get assistance while you wait for your appeal to be decided. This is known as **interim assistance**. The Application for Interim Assistance is part of the Appeal Form. If the SBT orders it, the OW office will have to pay you assistance until your appeal is decided.

If you lose your appeal, or you do not go to your hearing, you will have to pay back any interim assistance you get.



Getting legal help

For advice or help dealing with OW, contact your community legal clinic, the local Legal Aid office, or a lawyer.

Here 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**. Turn to the back cover of this pamphlet to find out how to order it. It is also available on CLEO's web site at <www.cleo.on.ca>.
- Check Legal Aid Ontario's web site at <www.legalaid.on.ca>.
- Phone Legal Aid Ontario at:
 - Toll-free **1-800-668-8258**
 - Toll-free TTY **1-866-641-8867**
 - In Toronto **416-979-1446**
 - TTY in Toronto.... **416-598-8867**
- Try looking in your phone book under "Legal Aid" or "Lawyers".

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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