



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DEPARTMENT:	ONTARIO WORKS
PREPARED BY:	Stacey Mullen, Manager
REVIEWED BY:	Melissa Fitzpatrick, General Manager Stéphane Thiffeault, Chief Administrative Officer
MEETING DATE:	November 19, 2025
INFORMATION ITEM:	Ontario Works Update Report

BACKGROUND

Ontario Works (“OW”) is a mandatory program that provides legislated income and person-centered support ensuring people have access to the financial, stability, and employment supports they need to build their independence and an enhanced quality of life.

In 2023, as part of Phase 2 of employment services transformation, the County of Lambton was chosen as an Employment Ontario provider by the City of Windsor, the newly appointed Service System Manager for Windsor-Lambton catchment area. Within the OW Department, this led to the establishment of a new Integrated Employment Services (“IES”) team, which began delivery of services on January 1, 2024.

This report seeks to provide Council with an update on caseload trends for the second and third quarter of 2025 as well as to highlight some key activities within the OW Department, including the IES team.

DISCUSSION

Caseload Statistics

The OW average monthly caseload from April 1, 2025, to September 30, 2025, was 3,050 households per month, including temporary care assistance cases. The OW caseload for the same period in 2024 was 3039. This represents a slight increase compared to 2024.

A caseload increase is consistent with provincial experience and is primarily due to the continued high cost of living, as well as inflation and increasing complex needs of people.

Applications

During the second and third quarters of 2025 there were a total of 1,040 applications for ongoing OW assistance, representing an 8% increase from the same period in 2024. In August 2024, a total of 156 applications were received, compared to 190 applications in August 2025, an increase of 22%. This demonstrates a sustained upward trend in application activity, with notable growth observed toward the end of the summer period.

The number of Emergency Assistance (“EA”) applications increased during the second and third quarters of 2025, averaging 67 applications per month compared to an average of 52 in the first quarter. By comparison, the same period in 2024 recorded a higher monthly average of 79 EA applications. While overall volumes remain below 2024 levels, the recent increase represents an upward trend that will continue to be monitored in the coming months.

Outcomes

For the first quarter of 2025, the percentage of the OW caseload with earnings was 10.25%. For 2024, the average percentage of caseload with earnings was 9.4%, indicating that to date in 2025, a greater portion of the caseload is reporting earnings. In 2024, aligning with Employment Services Transformation, our performance outcome measures were updated. In 2024 Lambton trended on par or slightly better than provincial averages. Outcomes are measured cumulatively, and 2025 outcomes are steadily rising, indicating the department is on track to meet targets.

Performance Outcome	Target	2024 Lambton Actuals	2024 Provincial Actuals	Lambton Q2	Lambton Q3
Members with an Action Plan	100%	79%	77%	96.03%	95.47%
Referred to Employment Ontario	39%	28%	27%	12.47%	16.67%
OW cases that exited to employment	19%	7%	8.6%	4.83%	7.70%
OW cases who exit the program and returned within one year	38%	56%	67%	46.50%	43.53%

Person-Centered Stability Supports

OW staff provide direct, person-centered support to people with a wide range of needs, including those experiencing trauma, homelessness, mental health and addiction challenges. People need longer term more intense support to reach their goals and to increase their independence and quality of life.

Family Counselling Centre Sarnia Counselling Program

In 2025, OW continues its partnership with the Family Counselling Centre Sarnia to offer brief, short-term counselling for clients seeking stability and support in achieving their goals, including employment. In quarter 2 of 2025, 55 clients participated in the program, and in quarter three of 2025, 57 clients participated in the program, with most reporting improved mental health, hopefulness, and a stronger commitment to their personal goals.

Pathway to Early Childhood Education Pilot Program

The Pathway to Early Childhood Education Pilot Program, a collaborative initiative with our OW staff, IES staff, and Lambton College, is an eight-week program for OW clients who are interested in pursuing early childhood education as a career. This program includes learning in a classroom setting and a 50-hour placement in a licensed childcare centre or EarlyON site. This initiative helps open doors to meaningful employment while supporting local childcare providers and strengthening our community's workforce.

Integrated Employment Supports

In the second and third quarters of 2025, the IES team continued to strengthen local marketing initiatives, enhanced the staffing model, expanded administrative support, and aligned internal procedures with updated Employment Ontario guidelines to enhance service delivery. Job Developers were added to the team, increasing their physical presence within the community and establishing connections with 38 employers to date. This enhanced engagement is expected to strengthen employer relationships and support improved employment outcomes for participants.

The team continues to provide flexible, mobile services, engaging directly with the community through on-site support at local libraries and, most recently, by bringing services to the Petrolia Library, extending access to an area that previously did not have local employment support.

To expand access to community resources, the team hosts Community Corners at the Lambton Shared Services Centre, providing clients and members of the public with information on local supports and government programs. Recent sessions have featured Contact North, offering free education and training opportunities, and Service Canada, providing guidance on Employment Insurance, the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Dental Program, and other key services. Access to a variety of resources ensures that individuals are well supported through information and guidance, while also fostering connections within the community, which remain vital to our program.

In June 2025, the team hosted the Work Local, Live Better Job Fair at the Watford Community Centre. The event featured 45 vendors and welcomed over 100 participants. Its success has positioned it as a potential annual initiative, with consideration being given to hosting the event in different rural communities each year.

IES Outcomes (April 2025 to September 2025)	
Number of Intakes Completed	219
Number of Job Starts	37
Average weekly work hours	26
Average hourly wage	\$21.00
Percentage employed at one month checkpoint	56%
Percentage employed at three-month checkpoint	37%
Percentage employed at six-month checkpoint	28%
Percentage of Satisfied Job Seekers	100%
Performance Based Funding Earned*	\$6,817.00

*Estimated quarterly funding pending final data for the quarter

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial impacts to the budget related to this report.

CONSULTATIONS

Not applicable.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Ontario Works is a legislated program delivered in keeping with the County's Mission County's Mission to promote an enhanced quality of life through the provision of responsive and efficient services accomplished by working with municipal and community partners.

The activities of the Division support the Community Development Area of Effort #3 in the County of Lambton's Strategic Plan, specifically:

- Strengthening the County's advocacy and lobbying efforts with other levels of government to raise the profile of the County and its needs to secure improved senior government supports, funding, grants, and other resources to meet emerging infrastructure and service needs;
- Consulting with the community and stakeholders on ways to increase housing options and affordability, and innovative programs and initiatives that focus on poverty reduction and promote social belonging;
- Supporting the development of a variety of affordable housing to meet demand;
- Implementing, monitoring and updating community health and wellness-related plans and priorities, including, but not limited to, the *Housing and Homelessness Plan*, *Community Safety & Well-Being Plan*, the Long-Term Care division's mission, vision, and values, *Age Friendly Community Planning* framework, Lambton Public Health's strategic priorities, *Lambton Drug & Alcohol Strategy*, *Lambton EMS Master Plan*, and *Child Care and Early Years 5-Year Service System Plan*; and
- Advocating for, and supporting access to, mental health and addiction services.

CONCLUSION

As demand for social assistance grows, staff remain committed to providing integrated, person-centered support. They build meaningful relationships, collaborate with community partners, and connect individuals to stability services. Under the new integrated employment services model, staff help develop personalized action plans and prepare individuals for referrals to employment service providers. By working together, IES and OW staff support individuals in achieving stability, employment readiness, and long-term independence.