

Explanation of the CSUMB and Government Cuts

What Is The Community Start-Up Maintenance Benefit?

The Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) is a homelessness prevention benefit provided through either Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). It is a mandatory benefit in that people who are denied are able to appeal the decision. This process provides oversight, ensures fairness and protection from arbitrary decisions. It is a targeted benefit to help people on assistance. CSUMB is a last resort for people on assistance – who couldn't otherwise afford to pay for big expenses that will keep them housed – because the amount of benefits they receive each month is so dangerously low.

CSUMB is intended to pay for expenses that will help people on OW or ODSP:

- Establish a new place to live
- Prevent their eviction
- Prevent them from having their heat, electricity or other utilities shut off
- Maintain their existing residence

CSUMB can be used to pay for large lump-sum expenses like:

- First and last month's rent deposit
- Buying or replacing furniture
- Deposits on utilities
- Paying overdue rent or utility bills

Single people on OW or ODSP have been able to receive up to \$799 and families up to \$1500, **once every two years.**

Why Is This Crucial Funding In Danger?

The provincial government announced in its 2012 budget that the CSUMB for people on OW and ODSP will end as of December 31, 2012. Beginning in January, 2013, the government will combine half the funds allocated to CSUMB with funding from other housing related programs to create a new integrated fund. This new fund will be administered by municipalities who will allocate it as they see fit. With control given to the municipalities, the mandatory aspect of this benefit is eliminated. The targeted aspect is also lost as there is no guarantee that the money will be paid directly to the people who need it. Further, this budget cut was proposed before the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance published its recommendations for OW and ODSP reform.

By disabling this program, the government of Ontario will be disabling the last resort for these vulnerable and marginalized citizens who rely on this funding as a vital bridge to ease their transition into mainstream society.

Mission Services of London Statement of Corporate Position

Since 1951, Mission Services of London has provided support for people in our community who are without shelter, without food, without the basic necessities which are so often taken for granted. Throughout our five branches, we have offered not only support but guidance, training and counselling in an effort to empower those individuals to move into a better place, financially, physically, spiritually and emotionally.

Mission Services of London relies on funding from the federal and the provincial government to provide such support and care. In 2008, the provincial government created The Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (*CSUMB*) to help individuals on Ontario Works (*OW*) and Ontario Disability Support Program. (*ODSP*). Many of the recipients of this funding, who are supported by Mission Services of London, use this mandatory benefit to relieve the stress associated with leaving emergency shelter: rental deposits, acquisition of furniture and basic needs and deposits on utilities. This unique funding is a vital bridge for the individuals we serve, providing a smooth transition into mainstream society. Over 16,000 Ontarians rely on this benefit every month including former residents of the Men's Mission & Rehabilitation Centre, Rotholme Women's & Family Shelter and Quintin Warner House as well as participants in our Community Mental Health Programs and the recipients of the Voucher Program at the Mission Store. As a direct result of this start up fund, men, women and children are able to move from homelessness into safe and secure shelter. Families are able to purchase furniture and other necessities. Graduates of our addiction program are able to transition into mainstream society without the threat of relapse. This mandatory benefit provides a cash payment that keeps people on assistance in their homes.

The provincial government announced in its 2012 budget that the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit will be cut. The effect this decision has on the community we serve is disastrous. *CSUMB* was targeted to help people on assistance. These are among the most vulnerable and excluded in our communities. By disabling this program, the government of Ontario will be disabling the last resort for these vulnerable and of often excluded citizens. It is the belief of Mission Services of London that the success of our many clients will be greatly compromised. Residents of our emergency shelters and our substance abuse program will be unable to provide rental and utility deposits forcing them to remain homeless and at risk. Without the lump sum this benefit provides, they will be unable to purchase the bare necessities which are essential for maintaining a comfortable home. Graduates from Quintin Warner House, our substance abuse program will be forced to re enter the community without the start up funds they desperately need. The added stress of securing immediate employment and securing the funds to survive increases their chances of relapsing.

Beginning in January, 2013, the government will combine half the funds usually spent on the *CSUMB* with funding from other housing related programs to create a new integrated fund. This new fund will be administered by municipalities who will allocate it as they see fit.

Mission Services of London anticipates further problems as a result of the re-allocation of this money. With control given to the municipalities, the mandatory aspect of this benefit is eliminated. People on assistance will be competing with other low-income individuals for eligibility and may not receive this crucial funding. The sense of security for those venturing out of shelter is decreased. In addition to this, there is no guarantee that the money will be paid directly to the people who need it. Municipalities may decide that their own local needs are different and may allocate the money to other equally important programs rather than direct payments.

Mission Services of London is keenly aware of the implications these cuts will have on other reform processes that are currently underway. In January, 2011, The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance began a comprehensive review of OW and the ODSP in order to initiate recommendations to the government for reform. This is the first opportunity in over two decades for real improvements to be made to these programs. The cuts pre-empt and undermine the important process of reform which will arise out of the work of the Commission. We consider it an oversight to initiate these budget cuts just as the Commission is about to issue its final report and recommendations.

It is the position of Mission Services of London that these cuts will negatively impact the clients we so diligently serve. If our at-risk community members remain homeless without the necessary funds to start anew, the burden on society will increase.

We respectfully urge the Ontario government to reverse this cut and restore full funding to these critical programs.