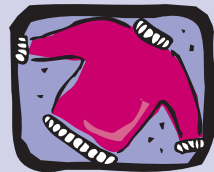


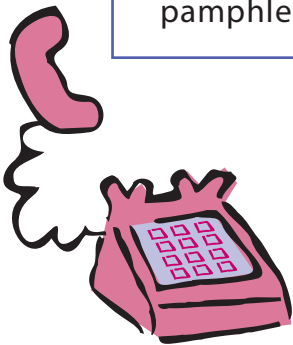
Need welfare?

How to apply to
Ontario Works
for assistance



This pamphlet is for people who are applying to Ontario Works (OW) for financial assistance. This type of assistance is for people who need money because they cannot find work or are temporarily unable to work. Sometimes OW assistance is called “welfare”.

If you are applying for disability benefits under the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), the rules are different. You can find more information in our pamphlet called “**Disability benefits in Ontario: who can get them, how to apply**”. Please [see the back cover](#) of this pamphlet for ordering information.



How do I apply to Ontario Works for financial assistance?

First you have to phone your regional call centre. The official name for the call centre is “Intake Screening Unit”, or “ISU” for short. Your local OW office will give you the number for the call centre in your

area. You can also find it on the web site of the Ministry of Community and Social Services at <www.cfcs.gov.on.ca>. Look in the Income and Employment Supports section for information about Ontario Works.

If you have problems applying through the call centre, contact your local OW office or a community legal clinic for help. To find out how to get help, please [see page 19](#).



What happens when I phone the call centre?

A worker at the call centre will ask you questions to see if you might be financially eligible. Be prepared to spend at least half an hour on the phone giving details of your situation.

During the telephone interview, if the worker thinks that you are not eligible, you might be asked if you still want to continue your application. You do have the right to complete your application. The worker could be wrong in thinking you are not eligible.



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

If you find the telephone interview difficult because of a language barrier or for any other reason, say that you want to apply at a local OW office. You can ask the worker to make an appointment for you at the local office while you wait on the phone. OW workers call this a “warm transfer”.

What if Ontario Works will not accept my application?

OW cannot legally 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 19](#)).



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

You will be asked for information about yourself, each member of your family, and anyone else who lives with you. If you collect all the information before you phone, it will help you answer the questions. This information includes:

- family size and ages of family members,
- income (including pensions and allowances),
- assets (including money in bank accounts, RSPs, and vehicles),
- debts (including money you owe on credit cards, to the bank, and to other people),
- housing arrangements,
- expenses for basic needs, and
- education and employment status.

You will be asked if you have documents that relate to yourself or other members of your household, such as:

- personal identification, for example, birth certificates or passports, health cards, and Social Insurance Number (SIN) cards,
- immigration papers,
- divorce papers,
- proof of school attendance,
- bank statements or bank records,
- proof of income from any source, including employment, Child Tax Benefit, support payments, workers' compensation, and payments from 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 insurance, and
- proof of debts, such as credit card bills, and OSAP or other loans, even if the loan is from a relative or friend.

You should tell the OW worker if your doctor has prescribed a special diet for you. OW may have to take into account the cost of your special diet when they determine your eligibility and calculate the amount of your assistance. To find out which special diets qualify, you can contact your community legal clinic ([see page 19](#)).

Later on, before your application is approved, an OW worker will want to see the documents they consider necessary to prove that you are eligible.

Keep copies of all the documents that you give 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 is not relevant to your eligibility, contact your community legal clinic ([see page 19](#)).

What if the call centre tells me I am not eligible for assistance?

You can appeal. But first you **must** complete your telephone application and then object in writing to their conclusion.

The call centre must send you a letter saying they do not think you are eligible, or they must give you an appointment at the local office to continue your application. If you get a letter that says you are not eligible, you must phone to object within **10 days** of receiving the letter.



Note about mail

The OW rules assume that if a notice 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. Keep the letter and the envelope.

So, if the notice that says you are not eligible for financial assistance is mailed to you, you have **13 days** (10 days plus 3 days) from the day it was mailed to object.

Even if you have not yet received a letter 3 days after your telephone application, you can phone the call centre again to tell them that you object. Say that you disagree with their conclusion and you want an appointment at the local office.

If you miss the 10-day time limit to object, you will not be able to appeal, but you still have the right to make a new application.



What happens after the call centre has interviewed me?

After the telephone interview, the call centre should give you an appointment at your local OW office. If the call centre said they thought you were not eligible for assistance, then you must hand in a **written** objection before the appointment. You must do this even if you have already objected by phone.



It is very important to go to your appointment, and to hand in a written objection before the appointment. Otherwise, you will not be able to appeal if OW refuses to give you financial assistance.

At the local OW office, a worker will interview you and review the information you gave the call centre. Bring with you all the documents that relate to your application. Examples of documents that you might need to bring are listed on [pages 5 and 6](#).

If getting to the local OW office is difficult for you, you can ask to have the interview held at your home or at another place that is better for you.



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. The worker cannot enter your home without your permission. However, if you refuse a home visit without a valid reason, you will be denied assistance.

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

Home visits should only happen during “normal business hours” which OW considers to be between 8 o’clock in the morning and 6 o’clock in the evening.



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 choose to bring a relative, a friend, or someone from a community group or legal clinic.

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 an interpreter, you should make arrangements to bring one. Contact your local community information centre for help to find a qualified interpreter.

A spouse or same-sex partner who lives with you should come to the interview because he or she will have to sign documents to complete your application.



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 have trouble getting documents, contact a community legal clinic (see [page 19](#)). They may be able to help you.

Forms to fill out and sign

You, and your spouse or same-sex partner who lives with you, will have to complete and sign the following forms before your application will be considered complete:

1. **Application for Financial Assistance**
2. **Participation Agreement**
3. **Consent to Disclose and Verify Information**
4. **Rights and Responsibilities Form**

Other adult family members who live with you can also be required to sign these forms in order to complete your application.



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 workfare 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 **must** be completed by you and your spouse or same-sex partner. Other adult members of your family can also be required 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.

We have another pamphlet called **“Participation Agreements and your Ontario Works benefits”** that gives more details. Please [see the back cover](#) of this pamphlet for ordering information.



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 19](#)).

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 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. This 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.

Take this note from the landlord to OW.



What can I do if I am refused Ontario Works financial assistance?

You can appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal, but only after an internal review by the OW office.

Internal review

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

You will automatically get an internal review if the OW worker in the local office agrees that you are not eligible for the same reasons given by the call centre.

If the worker thinks you are not eligible, but for different reasons than those given by the call centre, you will get a written notice of the worker’s decision. If you want to appeal this decision, you must first request an internal review. Your request must be made **in writing within 10 days** of the date you receive the worker’s decision. (Please see the [note about mail](#) on page 7.)

It is important to try to meet the time limit. If you miss it, you should still ask for an internal review. But make sure you ask for an extension of time in your written request for an internal review.

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

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 assistance, you have **30 days** from the date of this decision to appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal (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.

When you appeal, you can ask the SBT to order “interim assistance”. If the SBT orders it, the local OW office will have to pay you interim assistance while you wait for your appeal to be decided. If the SBT denies your request for interim assistance, you can write and ask them to reconsider.

If you do get interim assistance but you lose your appeal, or you do not go to your hearing, OW will consider the interim assistance to be an overpayment and you will have to pay it back.

For advice or help with an objection, a request for an internal review, or an appeal, contact a community legal clinic, your local Legal Aid office, or a lawyer.



Getting legal help

You can usually find the community legal clinic nearest you by looking under “Legal Aid” or “Lawyers” in your phone book. You can also call Legal Aid Ontario at **1-800-668-8258** or **416-979-1446**, or go to their web site at <www.legalaid.on.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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