



Using New Research Partnerships to Answer Public Policy
Challenges: The Ontario Ministry of Community and
Social Services and the Canadian Research Data Centre
Network Data Sharing Pilot

November 30, 2016

Outline

- MCSS Overview and Research Interests
- Ontario's Open Government Mandate
- Overview of MCSS-Statistics Canada Research Data Center (RDC) Pilot Project
- RDC Pilot Project Governance and Accountability
- Ontario Social Assistance Programs and Data
- Dataset Concerns and Solutions
- Current Research Projects
- Questions

MCSS Mandate

Support Low-Income Ontarians to Reach Their Full Potential

- Develop a practical and implementable plan for social assistance reform, in a broader income security context, while moving toward a more simple, holistic, client-centred approach to the delivery of social assistance
- Support the transformation of income-based and other benefit programs focusing on client-focused delivery and information sharing

Promote Inclusion and Improve Support for Persons with Disabilities, Including Developmental Disabilities

- Transform the delivery of developmental services in Ontario to help adults with developmental disabilities and their families live as independently as possible

Support Survivors of Human Trafficking, Sexual and Domestic Violence

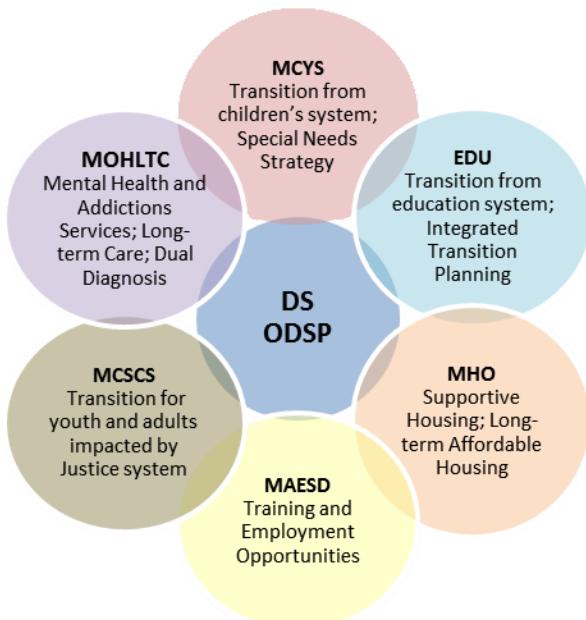
- Review existing programs and services and create an updated domestic violence action plan and lead the implementation of Ontario's Strategy to End Human Trafficking

MCSS - Who We Serve

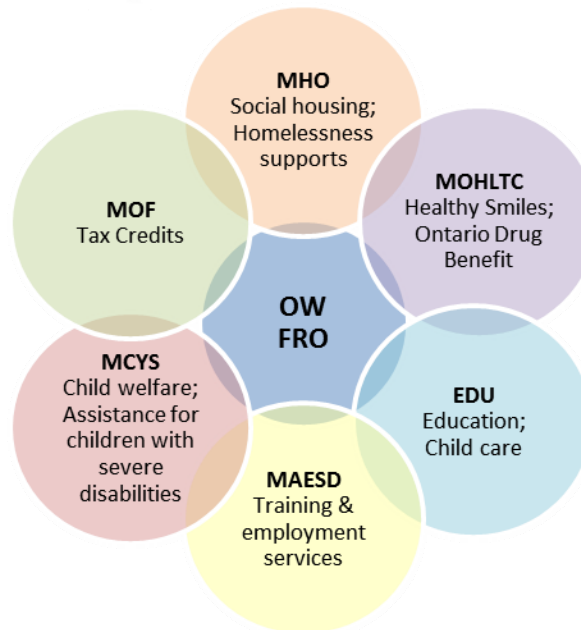
MCSS supports a large and diverse population. Approximately 10 percent of Ontario's population access ministry services including those living in poverty, persons with disabilities, families entitled to child and spousal support, or surviving the impacts of human trafficking or domestic violence - those **most likely to experience or are at risk of experiencing social and economic exclusion.**



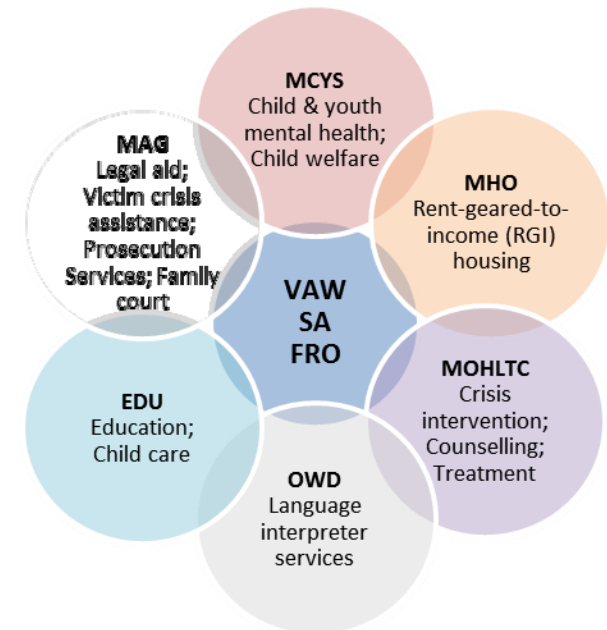
Adult with a Developmental Disability



Single Parent In Receipt of Ontario Works



Woman Experiencing Family Violence



Key cross-ministry initiatives including: Long-term Affordable Housing Strategy, Special Needs Strategy, Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, Community Hubs Strategy and the Provincial Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

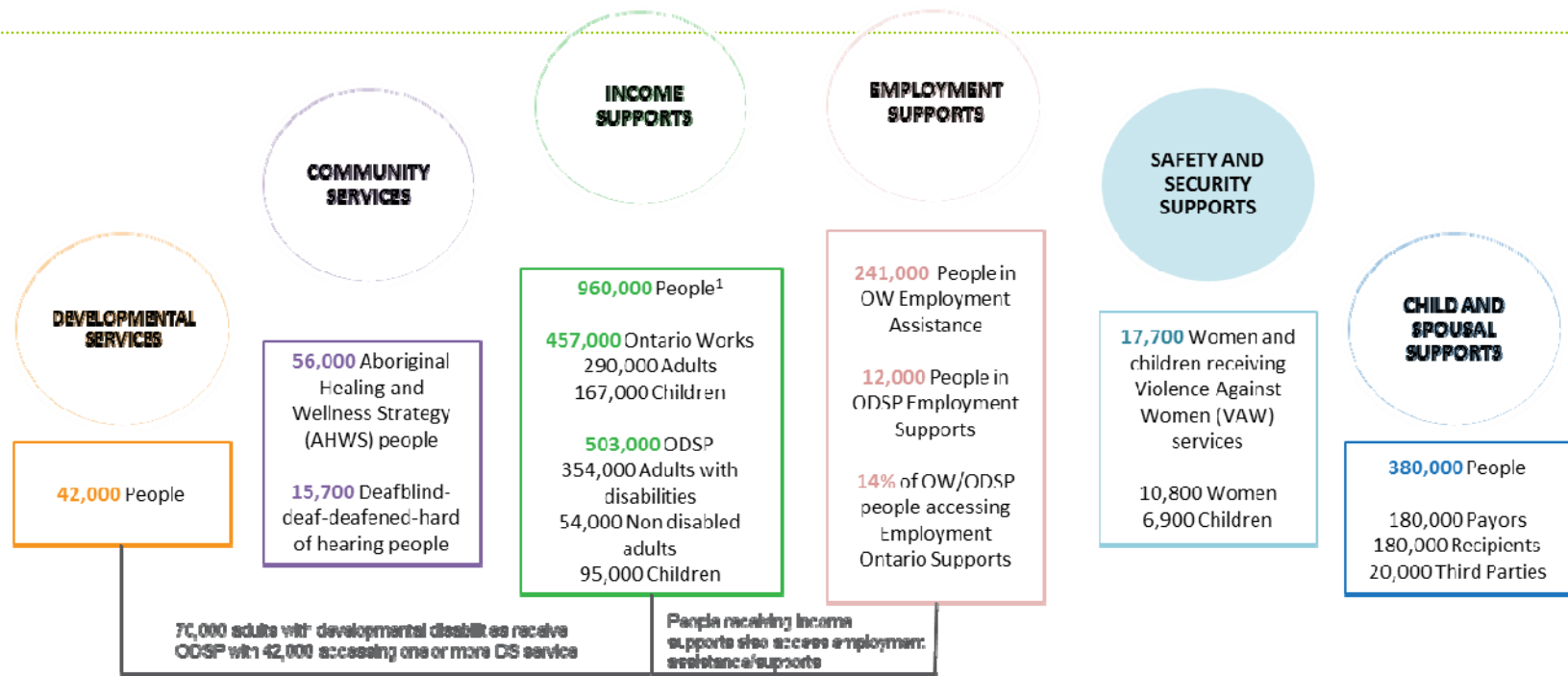
LEGEND

DS – Developmental Services
ODSP – Ontario Disability Supports Program
OW – Ontario Works

FRO – Family Responsibility Office (Child/Spousal Support)
VAW – Violence Against Women
SA – Social Assistance



MCSS Service System



Delivered By ↓ or Provided Through ↘

- 45 ODSP Local Offices (1,575 front line MCSS staff)
- FRO MCSS (400 front line FRO staff)
- 47 Municipalities / District Social Service Administration Boards (OW)
- 207 Violence Against Women Transfer Payment Agencies
- 370 Transfer Payment Agencies
- 47 AHWS Partners and Providers (460 projects)
- Direct Funding
- 150 Employment Supports Service Providers
- 101 First Nations (OW)
- 21 Intervenor and Interpreter Service Providers
- NPO Range of Community Agencies
- CHS Canadian Hearing Society: Interpreter Services



THE MISSION:
Leading-edge data analytics and business intelligence that improve outcomes through better use of actionable data and information



THE ENVIRONMENT:
Individuals and Families, Operations and Regions, Service Delivery, Policy and Programs



STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

PILLARS	PROJECTS	RESULTS
<p>STRATEGY A MCSS-wide strategy, working with OPS partners, that sets and delivers on data and analytics priorities</p>	<p>1 Performance Measurement Framework</p>	<p>June 2015 to March 2018+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance measurement framework, developed for each MCSS program area
	<p>2 Interim Governance and First Wave Projects</p>	<p>July 2016 to March 2017</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defined MCSS-wide Data and Analytics Strategy and Governance
<p>PROCESS Data analytics and business intelligence are delivered effectively and efficiently across MCSS</p>	<p>3 Analytics Operating Model Design and Implementation</p>	<p>July 2016 to April 2017+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An analytics operating model designed and implemented, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities
<p>DATA Data governance provides structures and processes to enable improved data quality, accessibility and integration</p>	<p>4 Data Governance Framework</p>	<p>July 2016 to July 2017+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased data accessibility, integration, accountability with ongoing quality improvement
	<p>5 Data Sharing Strategy</p>	
<p>TECHNOLOGY Accessible and sustainable technology solutions that fit current and future business needs</p>	<p>6 Integrated Data Warehouse and Dashboard</p>	<p>July 2016 to March 2019+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated, responsive, scalable data warehousing and reporting platforms that serve all MCSS staff
<p>PEOPLE A data-driven organization with staff at all levels that have the right data and analytics skills and knowledge</p>	<p>7 Culture Change and New Skills Strategy</p>	<p>July 2016 to August 2017+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ready, capable staff with the right data skills Project objectives and achievements are communicated and understood by staff at all levels

- **A Data-Driven Organization:**
Data is an asset that helps tackle the complex challenges facing MCSS and the OPS today and tomorrow
- **Delivering on Priorities:**
Annualized planning cycle addresses data analytics issues and priorities, and supports broader OPS open data, digital and data integration activities
- **High-Quality, Accessible Data and Analytics:** Improved, customized user experiences to trustworthy data are available on demand – tailored to meet strategic, policy development and operational needs
- **Ready and Capable Workforce:**
All staff have the right skills and expertise to use data in their day-to-day work
- **Effective and Efficient Operations:**
Smart and transparent processes govern data and analytics with clear roles and responsibilities
- **Cross-Program Insights:**
Greater strategic access and linking of MCSS, OPS and external data show a more holistic picture of the people and families using our programs

Policy Research & Analysis Branch | Ministry of Community and Social Services

Data Analytics and Evaluation Strategy - Outcomes

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- **Delivering on Priorities:** Annualized planning cycle addresses key business intelligence and data analytics issues and priorities
- **High-Quality, Accessible Data and Analytics:** Data is relevant, trustworthy and available on demand to meet strategic and operational needs
- **Ready and Capable Workforce:** All staff have the right skills and expertise to use data in their day-to-day work
- **Effective and Efficient Operations:** Smart and transparent processes govern data and analytics with clear roles and responsibilities
- **Cross-Program Insights:** Greater strategic access and linking of MCSS, OPS and external data show a more holistic picture of the people and families using our programs

MCSS Research Interests

- To deliver on its mandate, MCSS is interested in the following research areas:
 - Understanding disability (including financial and human impacts)
 - Understanding impacts/effects of social assistance on demographic sub-groups (e.g. urban/rural clients, Aboriginal/First Nations, immigrants/newcomers, etc.)
 - Understanding effective, sustainable employment outcomes and motivating people to work
 - Examining social assistance caseloads and long-term attachment/dependency, including impacts/influence of policy instruments and external factors (i.e. socio-economic and labour market conditions)
 - Conducting inter-jurisdictional comparisons
 - Service delivery modernization
- MCSS is also currently undertaking research with various partners including university academics, community partners, and multiple levels of government

Ontario's Open Government Mandate

- Ontario is adopting best practices that have been working in other jurisdictions to inform its approach to Open Government to improve **transparency, effectiveness and accountability**
- As part of its Open Government initiative, Ontario is committed to:
 - Increasing the opportunity for the public to have better access to, learn about and participate in government
 - Sharing more data and strengthening partnerships to support innovation and stronger public policy

Purpose of the MCSS-Statistics Canada RDC Pilot Project

- To explore opportunities to improve access to the ministry's social assistance data by the research and academic community, consistent with Open Government objectives
- To obtain relevant social policy research to support evidence-based policy decisions and program development in MCSS
- To improve engagement and collaboration with the academic community
- To pilot the process and procedures for bringing provincial ministry data into the Statistics Canada RDC Program for research purposes
- To build a foundation for developing new social policy/program researchers and professionals

RDC Pilot Project Overview

- MCSS is participating in a two-year pilot project to make de-identified social assistance administrative data available to the research and academic community through the Statistics Canada (StatsCan) Research Data Centres (RDCs) hosted by universities across Canada
- MCSS and StatsCan jointly developed and implemented the Information Sharing Agreement in December 2014
- The project has been supported from the development phase through to implementation by the Treasury Board Secretariat's Open Government Office
- The project was made possible by the strong partnerships developed with CRDCN and Statistics Canada, as well as mutual interest to improve government data access and engagement with the research and academic community

Pilot Project Governance and Accountability

- The MCSS-RDC Pilot Project Advisory Committee is co-chaired by the ADM, Social Policy Development Division, MCSS and the Assistant Chief Statistician of Social, Health, and Labour Statistics within StatsCan; its responsibilities include:
 - Providing advice as well as overseeing all activities undertaken as part of the Pilot Monitoring, reporting on the progress and evaluate the pilot project
 - Reviewing and endorsing research proposals submitted by researchers
 - Assisting researchers in understanding MCSS social assistance programs and data, as well as supporting with relationship building
 - Facilitating dissemination of research findings through knowledge mobilization activities at MCSS, annual CRDCN conferences and CRDCN website articles, as appropriate

Ontario Social Assistance Programs

- In Ontario, income and employment supports are provided to single adults and families who are in financial need through two social assistance (SA) programs:
 - **Ontario Works** provides financial and employment assistance to help people move towards paid employment and independence
 - **Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)** provides financial assistance and employment support to enable people with disabilities and their families to live as independently as possible in their communities

Ontario Social Assistance Data

- Researchers have access to de-identified microdata for the two social assistance programs for the period 2003 to 2013 which was provided through 5 separate files:
 - **benefit unit (family) information**
 - **member information**
 - **pay detail (benefit) information**
 - **income/deduction information**
 - **skills information**
- Researchers will also have access to monthly time-series data on the Ontario Works and ODSP provincial caseloads from 1990 to 2013
- This data was updated in June 2016 to include OW and ODSP monthly data ending in October 2014.
- Data transferred using the electronic file transfer system per data transfer protocol outlined in the Information Sharing Agreement

Social Assistance Dataset Details

	Benefit Unit (Family)	Member (Individual)	Pay Detail (Benefit)	Income/ Deduction	Member Skills
Years covered	2003-2014[October] (12 years)				
Number of months covered	142				
Total number of records	66M (+5M)	107M (+9M)	215M (+18M)	33M (+2M)	213M (+2M)
(M: million)	(1.5M distinct benefit units)	(2.3M distinct individuals)			
Total number of variables/data fields	29 (+6)	47(+6)	7	7	6
Number of files	12	12	12	12	12
Approximate total file size (unzipped)	8.5 GB	16.2 GB	10.8 GB	1.8 GB	8.3 GB

Additional Documentation Provided

- Data dictionary
- Data field/variable names, definitions, formats
- Code tables
- Links among data fields/data files
- Data limitations
- High level descriptive statistics for each of the data files
- Historical SA policy changes
- Questions & Answers document that addresses questions raised during User Group Meetings

Opportunities

- 132 months of information
- Documentation on historical policy changes
- Ability to track individuals, benefit units over time
- Ability to determine dependence (time) on social assistance

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- Time series-type analysis
- Panel data-type analysis
- Geographical analysis
- Controlled experiment

Limitations

Data files do not include:

- individuals who apply for SA but are found to be ineligible for SA or who chose to discontinue their application
- asset types and levels
- benefits provided in kind
- information on Emergency Assistance, Temporary Care Assistance and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities

Data fields on recipient characteristics that are related to eligibility determination are relatively more reliable/accurate

Dataset Concerns and Solutions

Area of Concern	Solution
Size of data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual data files (*.txt) have been created<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alleviates (computing) capacity issues• Facilitates subsequent data updates
Missing values	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Missing values have been properly coded (e.g., 999=not available, 996=not applicable)• Data dictionary was updated to include new codes
Data format challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Date fields (currently a single text string) were separated into three numeric variables (year, month, day)• Data layout was provided• Detailed descriptive stats were provided
Interpretation of variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Q&A document will continue to be updated as questions arise• More detailed documentation (including program overview and implied data record/use) was provided

Current Research Projects

- MCSS and Statistics Canada developed and released a “Request for Proposals” in August 2014
- Nineteen proposals were endorsed and fifteen are currently active

University	Proposals	University	Proposals
University of Toronto	2	University of Calgary	1
University of Manitoba	2	Queens University	1
York University	1	McMaster University	5
University of Waterloo	2	Western University	1

- Areas of research covered by the research projects include:
 - Long-term attachment to social assistance, recycling behaviour and employment outcomes
 - Geography of mental health and social assistance in Ontario
 - Does “Ontario Work” for people with disabilities?

Moving Forward

- The RDC Pilot Project is building relationships and leveraging data to help expand research in order to support evidence-based policy decisions and program development
- Future opportunities will include:
 - Implementing an evaluation process for the pilot project to determine its value and any changes necessary to make Social Assistance data permanently available to researchers.
 - Exploring opportunities to leverage RDCs and data linking with MCSS priorities (e.g. basic income pilot, income security reform, PRS)
 - Encourage and collaborate with other Ontario ministries to share data with RDCs
 - Expanding the agreement to allow linkage with third party data, including census and program data from provincial and other levels governments

Thank You