Section 1 – Community Analysis

In this section, SA delivery sites provide a summary of the community context in which Ontario Works person-centered supports and services and employment assistance is delivered over the service planning period.

1.1 Key Caseload Demographics (500 words max recommended)

Enter a **focused overview of the key findings** from the current demographic composition of the caseload and anticipated changes over the service plan cycle:

1.1.1 Ontario Works Caseload

Unless otherwise noted, the statistical data referenced in this section is from the *Ontario Works at a Glance*, version dated November 15, 2024.

OW Beneficiaries: The number of Ontario Works (OW) beneficiaries in Nipissing District is 2714. Similar to previous years, most (1747 or 64.4%) of the beneficiaries are primary applicants. The remaining beneficiaries are dependent children (873 or 32.2%), spouses (59 or 2.2%) and dependent adults (35 or 1.3%).

OW Caseload: The Caseload in Nipissing is 1747 which is up 2.4% (11) from last year. While the caseload also increased in 2022 and 2023, 7.8% and 2.5% respectively, the caseload size remains below pre-pandemic levels.   Provincially, the caseload size appears to be growing at a much faster rate during the same timeframe; 11.9% in 2022, 12.2% in 2023 and 14.5% in 2024.

Family Household Type: The following table displays the distribution of the caseload by family household type, with Ontario serving as a benchmark for comparison. Single recipients continue to account for the majority (71%) of the caseload in Nipissing, with the number of single cases increasing by 5.7% (67) from 2023. In contrast, the number of cases for all other household types decreased from last year. Provincially, the largest growth in the number of cases is also among single recipient households. However, unlike Nipissing, the province has seen an increase in the number of cases across all household types, not just single recipient households.

Household Type	Nipissing District			Ontario	
	Number of Cases	Percentage of Caseload	Change since 2023 (%)	Percentage of Caseload	Change since 2023 (%)
Singles without children	1238	71%	5.7%	69%	19.0%
Singles with children	449	26%	-3.9%	23%	2.2%
Couples without children	21	1%	-16.0%	2%	18.0%
Couples with children	38	2%	-9.5%	6%	17.3%

OW Family Household Type and General Population: The table below compares the family household composition of the OW caseload to the general population in Nipissing
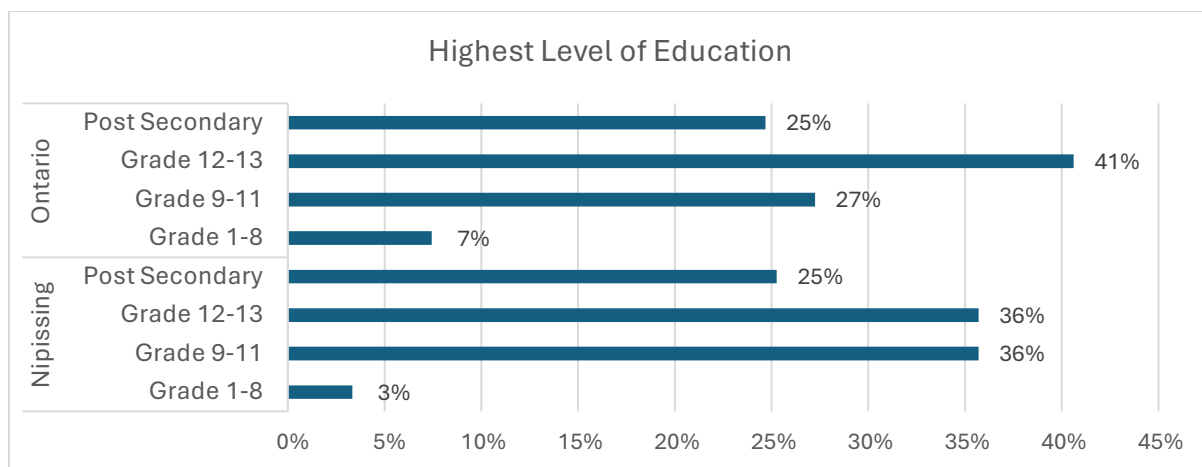
based on 2021 Census data. As noted in previous service plans, the OW caseload is very unrepresentative of the general population. The local caseload is significantly overrepresented by single households with and without children and under-represented with couples with or without children. The odds of a single household, with or without children, needing OW assistance in Nipissing are about 34 times more likely than couples, with or without children.

Household Type	Nipissing OW (%)	Nipissing Population (%)
Singles without children	70.9%	31.5%
Singles with children	25.7%	9.3%
Couples without children	1.2%	19.8%
Couples with children	2.2%	29.1%
Other non-family households	N/A	10.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

OW Age of Head of Household: The table below looks at the percentage of the OW caseload in Nipissing by age of head of household. The majority of the OW caseload in Nipissing (62%) and the province (58%) are 25-44 years of age. Under 18 and over 64 years of age remain statistical outliers due to eligibility rules associated to these age groups. There is a small variation between the remaining age groups, 18-21, 22-24, 45-54 and 55-64, between Nipissing and the province.

Age of Head of Family (2024)	Nipissing	Ontario
Under 18 years old	1%	0%
18-21 years old	6%	5%
22-24 years old	8%	7%
25-34 years old	34%	31%
35-44 years old	28%	27%
45-54 years old	14%	17%
55-64 years old	9%	12%
Over 64 years old	0%	1%

Education: The graph below compares the highest levels of educational attainment between Nipissing and Ontario. In Nipissing, 3% of the caseload completed Grade 1-8, and 36% completed Grades 9-11, compared to 7% and 27% respectively in Ontario. For Grades 12-13, 36% of the caseload in Nipissing completed this level, compared to 41% provincially. A quarter of the caseload (25%) completed post-secondary education in both Nipissing and Ontario.

Highest Level of Education

	Education Level	Percentage
Ontario	Post Secondary	25%
	Grade 12-13	41%
	Grade 9-11	27%
	Grade 1-8	7%
Nipissing	Post Secondary	25%
	Grade 12-13	36%
	Grade 9-11	36%
	Grade 1-8	3%

No Fixed Address: The percentage of cases with no fixed address in Nipissing has increased to a staggering 14.2% (248 cases in Nipissing) in 2024 with the most significant growth in these cases occurring between 2022 and 2023 (increase of 87 cases). While the percentage of the cases with no fixed address has increased provincially over the last few years, the provincial average remains lower than Nipissing at 8.6%. It is also notable that until 2021, the percentage of the caseload with no fixed address in Nipissing remained below the provincial average.

		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	YTD 2024
Nipissing	No Fixed Address (homeless, transient, emergency hostels)	73	77	73	126	213	248
	Percentage of Caseload	3.6%	4.1%	4.7%	7.6%	12.5%	14.2%
Ontario	No Fixed Address (homeless, transient, emergency hostels)	10,455	9,882	8,117	12,023	19,072	23,391
	Percentage of Caseload	4.3%	4.3%	4.3%	5.7%	8.0%	8.6%

Low social assistance rates compared to the cost of living, including food and shelter, often result in recipients having to choose between paying rent and purchasing food and other necessities. Food insecurity and housing instability are interconnected and contribute to the increase in cases with no fixed address. When mental health, physical health, and addiction issues are also present, the situation becomes even more dire, as recipients struggle to manage their health needs while facing the constant threat of losing their housing and access to essential resources. This creates a vicious cycle where the lack of stability exacerbates health issues, making it even harder for recipients to regain their footing and secure stable housing.

Months on Assistance: Since 2019, the average time on assistance in Nipissing has varied each year, starting at a low of 30 months in 2019, peaking at 39 months in 2021, and plateauing at 35 months in 2023 and 2024. Provincially, the average time on assistance increased from 2019 to 2021 to a high of 48 months but has since steadily decreased year over year. Both Nipissing and the provincial average time on assistance are currently at 35 months.

Year	Nipissing		Ontario	
	Average Time on Assistance (months)	Year over Year Change (%)	Average Time on Assistance (months)	Year over Year Change (%)
2019	30	N/A	37	N/A
2020	34	13.3%	41	10.8%
2021	39	14.7%	48	17.1%
2022	36	-7.7%	42	-12.5%
2023	35	-2.8%	39	-4.1%
2024	35	0.0%	35	-10.3%

1.1.2 Employment Database Participants

As noted in previous service plans, DNSSAB's OW department uses a locally developed employment database that assists with determining a participant's level of job readiness based on an assessment of the participants skills, experience, barriers to employment and other relevant information. The database also collects key information in relation to social determinants of health. Unless otherwise noted, the data from this section is a snapshot taken from the Employment Database on December 27, 2024. The data is for the 1793 OW and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) participating adults that have completed an employment assessment in the database.

Service Category and Employment Readiness: The chart below shows the percentage of OW and ODSP participating adults by service category or level of employment readiness. As illustrated, the percentage of participants that are distanced from the labour market has shifted. Currently, a little over a third (35%) of the participants are considered job ready. A small percentage (6%) are preparing for employment, and another 6% are pending an employment assessment. More than half (54%) of the participants fall into the life stabilization category and lack the necessary skills, qualifications and experience as well as face any number of barriers to employment. Prior to the pandemic in 2019, the distribution of participants was more

evenly split among the three service categories. However, there was a noticeable shift in 2021. The percentage of participants in the life stabilization category increased, while those preparing for employment and job ready decreased. Over the last three years, the percentage of the caseload that are job ready has returned to 2019 levels however the percentage of cases in preparing for employment has declined and the percentage of cases that are life stabilization have continued to make up over half the caseload.

Service Category / Employment Readiness

Legend: Needs Assessment | Job Ready | Preparing for Employment | Life Stabilization
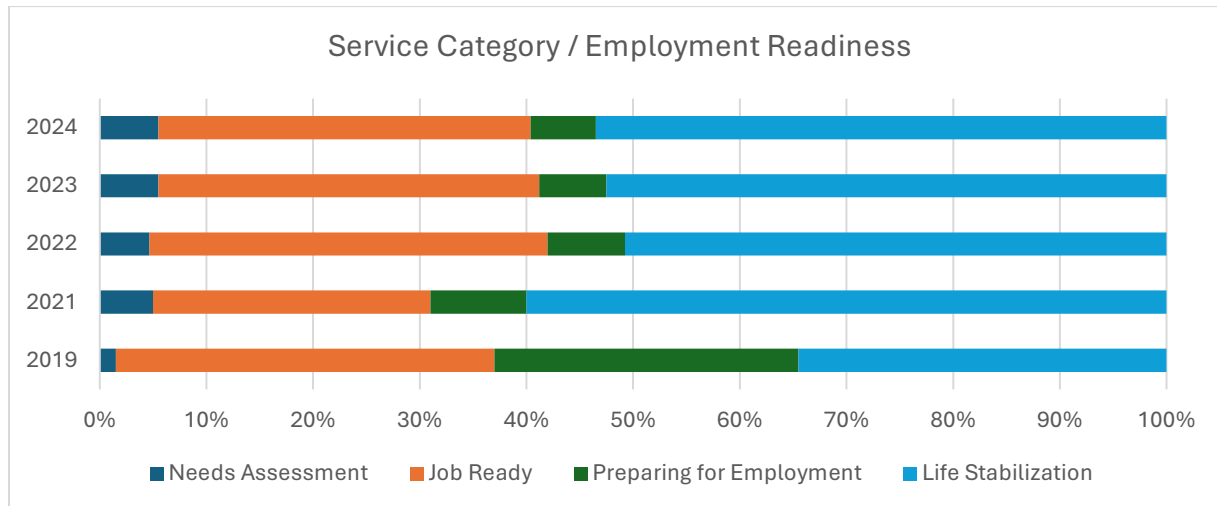
Traditionally, those in the preparing for employment and job-ready service categories have higher participation rates in employment support services, including those delivered through Employment Ontario (EO). In contrast, individuals in the life stabilization category are generally not able to participate in these services and are unlikely to be referral ready. From an Employment Services Transformation perspective (EST), this is concerning given that there are Ministry established EO referral outcome targets that need to be met.

Barriers to Employment: As mentioned above, the employment database assessment captures data related to barriers to employment. Since the data collected is self-declared by participants, it is believed that the actual number of participants struggling with these challenges is much higher. It is also suspected that, given the stigma associated with both mental health and addiction, and the potential link between addiction and criminality, the actual number of participants with addiction and/or mental health issues is likely much higher. A recent snapshot from the employment database identified the following self-declared barriers to employment:

- 18% of participants self-declared addiction as a barrier to employment
- Over half (53%) of participants self-declared mental health as a barrier to employment
- 23% of participants self-declared housing as a barrier to employment
- 7% of participants self-declared personal safety as a barrier to employment
- More than a third (39%) of participants self-declared physical health as a barrier to employment

Self-Declared Barriers to Employment
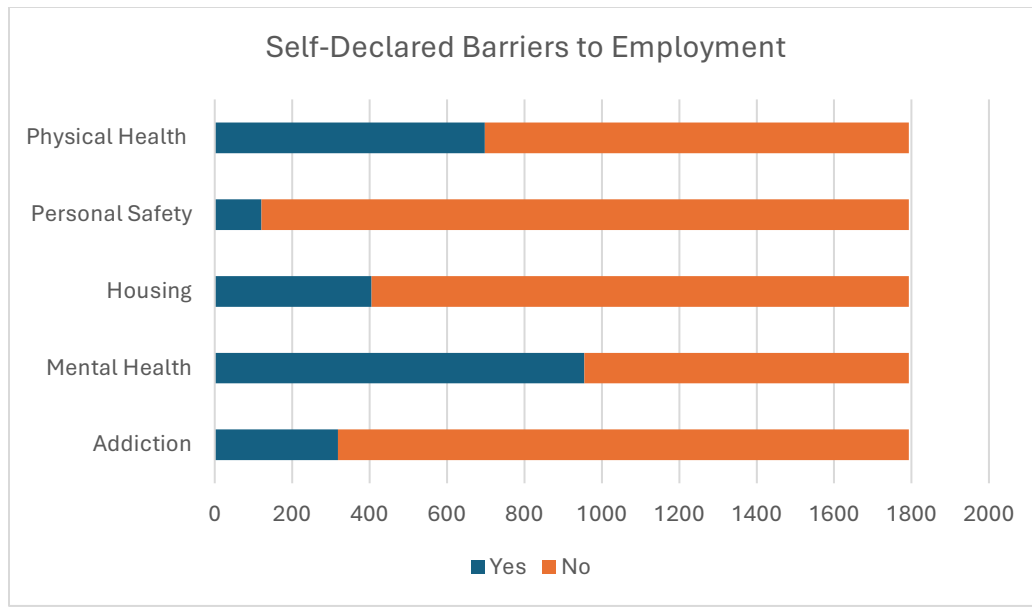
In many cases, barriers to employment are concurrent which increases the complexity of the situation and creates challenges to connecting and maintaining the level of supports and services necessary to position participants to also engage in employment services.

- The participants that self-declared mental health also declared the following:
    - 27% addiction
    - 56% physical health
    - 30% housing
    - 11% personal safety
    - 35% no family doctor
- The participants that self-declared addiction also declared the following:
    - 81% mental health
    - 55% physical health
    - 50% housing
    - 13% personal safety
    - 47% no family doctor
- The participants that declared addiction and mental health also declared the following:
    - 62% physical health
    - 51% housing
    - 15% personal safety
    - 46% no family doctor

Data plays a crucial role in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the caseload. With the full implementation of the EST in March 2025, and the mandatory completion of the Common Assessment Tool (CAT), the employment assessment currently housed in the Employment Database will be phased out. It is regrettable that all the local data collected through the CAT will not be shared, as this information could significantly enhance the ability to make data-driven decisions at the local level.

1.2 Service Needs (not required for Phase 3 sites in 2025)

A **focused assessment of key service needs** (in relation to your caseload) that have linkages to achievement of target(s) relating to the performance measure(s).

1.3 Community Needs Assessment

Perform a community needs assessment to identify impacts to the delivery of social assistance or the achievement of target(s) relating to the performance measure(s). Use the information from your community needs assessment and parts 1-2 of this section to identify the following as it relates to social assistance:

Strengths: Identify existing strengths and resources
Leveraging community partnerships in a strategic way is essential to OW service delivery. By forming strong partnerships with community organizations, Nipissing OW can tap into a wealth of resources and expertise that enhance the quality and scope of services provided to clients. These collaborations enable Nipissing OW to address a broader range of client needs that have the potential to lead to improved client outcomes. Ultimately, these partnerships are crucial for the delivery of social assistance and meeting performance measures. A list of key community partners has been included below. It is important to keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list but has been included as it highlights that there are a range of service providers and pathways within the district. **Housing and Homelessness:** Northern Pines Low Barrier Shelter, Northern Pines Transitional/Supportive Housing, Four Elms Crisis Centre, Women's Shelters across the district, Low Income People Involvement, Low Barrier Shelter, Warming Centre, Suswin Village, Near North Landlords Association, and True Self Debwewedndizwin. **Food security:** Local Food Banks, the Gathering Place (soup kitchen), and Churches with Food Programs. **Violence:** True Self Debwewedndizwin, Victim Services Nipissing District, Amelia Rising, North Bay Police Services, Ontario Provincial Police, and the Nipissing Legal Clinic. **Computer Access:** Public Libraries and Employment Ontario (EO) service providers with resource centres.

Employment: North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre – Apatisiwin Program, Metis Nation of Ontario, True Self Debwewedndizwin, Business Centre Nipissing Parry Sound, YES Employment Services, College Boreal Employment Options, March of Dimes, Agilec, Chambers of Commerce across the District, North Bay Economic Development, North Bay and District Multicultural Centre, Community Living North Bay, and Canadore College.

Disability: Ontario Disability Support Program, Disability Adjudication Unit (DAU), Nipissing Legal Clinic, Legal Aid Ontario, and the Assistive Devices Program.

Mental Health and Addiction: Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Programs, Nurse Practitioner Clinics, Family Physicians, Local Hospitals, Community Counselling Centre of Nipissing, Alliance Centre, North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, True Self Debwewedndizwin, Brain Injury Association of North Bay and Area, North Bay Aids Committee, Amelia Rising, and Community Living North Bay.

Job Specific Skills Training: St. Johns Ambulance, Algonquin Safety and Training, and Community Living North Bay.

Education and Literacy: Canadore College, College Boreal, CTS Canadian Career College, Northern College, Nipissing University, Adult Literacy Providers across the District, Contact North, Local High Schools/Alternative School, and the Community Counselling Centre of Nipissing (Financial Literacy).

Lost Identification: Crisis Centre of North Bay – ID Clinic

Record Suspension: John Howard Society

Newcomers: North Bay and District Multicultural Society and YES Employment Services.

The service network in Nipissing District is robust and is strengthened by the collaborative approach through cross-sectoral committees and tables along with a strong commitment within the community to address service gaps and meet the needs of vulnerable populations. Collectively, these strengths within the community contribute to the effective delivery of social assistance and the achievement of outcomes.

Nipissing has several tables and committees that have cross-sectoral representation which enables participating organizations to leverage each others' strengths and expertise leading to a more comprehensive support network, innovative and local driven solutions, and systemic improvements that are often essential to address the multifaceted needs of service users. The table below illustrates examples of cross sector community tables and/or partnerships that Nipissing OW is actively engaged in.

The Gateway Hub Community Mobilization Table

- Collaboration among human service providers to mobilize existing community resources to mitigate situations of acutely elevated risk.
- Captures de-identified data for each situation brought to the table. This data is analyzed to identify patterns of risk, gaps in service, and inform decision-making.

Mental Health and Addictions System Table
- Enhances the capacity and quality of addictions and mental health services in the Nipissing District through a collaborative and strength-based approach
- Shares best practices, identifies gaps, and develops strategies to improve client service pathways.

Community Action Circle (CAC)
- Provides guidance in carrying out North Bay's Urban Aboriginal Action Plan and follows the principles of the North Bay Urban Aboriginal Community Development Model.
- Engages Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers and community stakeholders.
- Increases levels of Aboriginal participation in all aspects of North Bay.

Food Security Programs Network
- Committee is comprised of food security organizations (churches with food programs, local food banks, post-secondary food programs, soup kitchens, the Salvation Army) and social service agencies involved in responses to food security (OW, Crisis Centre)
- Led by the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit.

Community Advisory Board - Nipissing District Homelessness and Housing Partnership
- Local organizing committee responsible for addressing homelessness as part of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy by the Government of Canada.
- Reviews data and information to inform priority setting and decision-making.
- Shares information with the community about homelessness issues and progress.
- Coordinates community efforts related to homelessness.
- Integrates efforts with provincial or territorial ministries.

Nipissing Human Trafficking Knowledge Network
- Formed in 2020 after a study on sex trafficking in northeastern Ontario.
- Raises awareness through a non-judgmental, client-centered trauma-informed approach.

Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee of Nipissing (VAWCC)
- Comprised of cross-sectoral service providers working together to improve community response to violence against women.
- Identifies and develops plans to address service gaps.

- Raises public awareness through education and training about violence against women and available resources and services.

Ontario Health Team Navigation Services Community of Practice Planning Committee
- Simplifies and reviews existing service pathways for service users, including OW recipients.
- Identifies gaps and recommends improvements.

Human service delivery agents in Nipissing have largely adopted a "no wrong door" approach, ensuring that individuals seeking help are directed to the appropriate services, regardless of where they initially seek assistance. This approach is supported by a strong willingness among service providers to collaborate and find innovative solutions to emerging challenges. For example, the increase in homelessness in Nipissing has required a collaborative approach among service providers including

- True Self Debwewednddizwin. offers homelessness outreach services, providing essential support to those in need.
- Similarly, No More Tears in West Nipissing addresses the needs of the growing homeless population by offering targeted assistance and resources.
- Grassroots organizations like Low Income People Involvement of Nipissing (LIPI) play a crucial role in filling service gaps and addressing local needs in the community.
- DNSSAB Homelessness Prevention Program Navigators help connect people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to financial supports to stabilize housing.
- Coordinated Access Nipissing (CAN**)** is a system that connects homeless individuals and families to housing and related services within the district. It involves multiple agencies working together to address homelessness and provide comprehensive support.
- Emergency Shelter system provides various pathways for individuals and families seeking temporary shelter.

These collaborative efforts and innovative solutions are vital to ensure that vulnerable populations like the homeless receive the comprehensive support they need to improve their quality of life and achieve better outcomes.

Gaps: Determine where there may be gaps in services or required resources

Despite an extensive resource network within the district, several service gaps persist within the community, as outlined below:

Food Security: While there are a range of food security programs available at various locations throughout the district, the hours, eligibility criteria and accessibility of these services vary. Key gaps in service include:
- There are no food banks in North Bay that are open Friday, Saturday or Sunday each week and the local soup kitchen offers one meal per day on weekdays only.
- Some communities do not have a local food bank

- Smaller communities with food banks / food security programs often have very minimal resources, hours of operation are generally limited, and access is also often restricted by eligibility criteria

Criminal Reference Checks: Individuals pursuing employment or volunteer opportunities often require a criminal reference check. While criminal reference checks for these opportunities are often prioritized there is still about a 5 week wait time which can impact ability to accept new opportunities.

Mental Health and Addiction Services: The mental health and addiction service network is complex, difficult to navigate and wait times to access programming varies often impacting a recipients' ability to access the right services at the right time. Wait times are largely unknown, however based on recent frontline experience some wait times for some programs can be up to one year or longer. While many service providers have attempted to alleviate negative impacts by offering peer connection and brief intervention services, the level of support is often not adequate to meet individual needs. Extensive wait times to access appropriate services often add to the complexity of supporting these individuals even after they connect to services.

Emergency Shelters: While there are a range of service pathways for individuals seeking emergency shelter services, the demand for service often outweighs local capacity. To compound this issue, there are communities without an emergency shelter and individuals in these communities must travel to access services. In addition, emergency shelters have different criterial to access a bed. For example:
- The only emergency shelter in West Nipissing and Mattawa is a Women's Shelter. Men seeking emergency shelter services must travel to North Bay. It should also be noted that many of the smaller communities in the outlying areas having no shelter at all.
- The Low Barrier Shelter in North Bay has limited capacity and accepts individuals on a first come first served basis. When this shelter reaches capacity, these individuals are not always able to access other resources due to their complex needs.
- There are some homeless individuals with complex needs are not accepting of the supports and service pathways that exist resulting in chronic homelessness.

Social Housing: The social housing system poses significant service gaps for social assistance recipients. While the bulk of the OW caseload are single recipients under the age of 65, most of the single housing units are designated to seniors. The waitlist for a single unit (not including those designated to seniors) is approximately 10 years. It should also be noted that the percentage of the OW caseload that have subsidized rent is extremely low given that they are among the poorest of the poor.

Trusteeships: Trusteeships are essential to help manage financial affairs for individuals and families who are unable to do so for themselves. While trusteeship programs are available within the community, the demand for services sometime outweighs the availability.

Dental Services: It is often challenging for OW recipients to access dental care based on the MCCSS Dental fee guide rates. For example:
- Some dentists do not take or limit the number of patients connected to Ontario Works
- Some OW recipients are referred to the local hospital emergency department to treat pain or infection without a plan to treat the underlying dental issue

Childcare: Challenges associated with the recruitment and retention of qualified staff, hamper childcare providers from increasing local capacity. As a result, families often face challenges in securing licensed childcare spaces, as all providers maintain waitlists. Shift-working families encounter even more difficulties, due to the lack of center-based overnight care, and the limited availability of overnight home-based licensed childcare spaces.

Employment Services in South Algonquin: The Employment Resource Centre in Whitney is closing in 2025 as OW will no longer be delivering employment services. At present, Agilec in Burks Falls is the closest EO service provider for this area.

Access to a Physician: There are many OW recipients without access to primary care physician. Many of these individuals rely on the Emergency Room, however the continuity of care is impacted. For this reason, many of these recipients remain on OW with self-declared disabilities.

Challenges: Common themes around concerns/challenges that impact SA

Common themes around concerns and challenges that impact social assistance reveal persistent issues that highlight the need for ongoing efforts to address and bridge the gaps within the community. These challenges underscore the importance of continuous improvement and collaboration to ensure that all individuals have access to the support and resources they need to thrive.

Food Insecurity: Social assistance recipients, particularly those on Ontario Works, struggle to afford adequate housing and nutritious food. OW rates are insufficient to cover basic living expenses such as food and shelter, which significantly impacts food security for recipients leading to reliance on food banks.

Release from Incarceration: Individuals being released back into the community face significant challenges, underscoring the need for a more supportive and efficient system to assist with reintegration. Challenges include:
- Individuals incarcerated for longer periods of time, often lose their housing, personal belongings and identification as they have no source of income. This can place a strain on local resources to support these individuals upon release.
- Repeat offenders with more extensive criminal records who have already accessed community resources may not qualify for additional financial supports

- Discharge planning is difficult as there is rarely advance notice prior to release. This results in individuals being released to homelessness without financial supports in place. The additional layer added to access social assistance through Centralized Intake may add additional delays to these individuals accessing timely support.
- Overpayments on OW cases relating to periods of incarceration can add to financial hardship for social assistance recipients. While overpayment recovery rates can be adjusted, efforts to recover overpayments must be made by the local office
- Criminal records complicate reintegration efforts and create challenges for these individuals to secure and maintain employment.

Homelessness: The number of individuals with no fixed address connected to OW has been increasing annually and now exceeds the number of shelter beds within the district. As there is a lack of affordable housing options, particularly for single OW recipients, housing homeless individuals connected to OW is challenging. Additionally, this population often has complex needs that require extensive supports services to retain and maintain stable housing.

Transportation: The City of North Bay is the only area with access to reliable public transportation. Recipients that live in outlying areas, unless they have a personal vehicle in good working condition, are without a reliable means of transportation to access services. Many areas do not even have a taxi service available. This can make it challenging for recipients to access in-person services, even when financial benefits may be issued to assist with the cost.

Access to phone / technology / reliable internet: Many social assistance recipients in Nipissing do not have access to a phone, technology, and reliable internet. These tools enable individuals to connect with essential services, apply for benefits, and communicate with service providers. Without reliable access, recipients face significant barriers in accessing support, staying informed about available resources, and participating in virtual appointments or online programs. This digital divide exacerbates existing challenges, making it harder for recipients to access services.

Opportunities: Current or upcoming opportunities that can be leveraged by SA

Support Centre: The Nipissing OW Career Hub is transitioning to a Support Centre in 2025 as part of the full integration of Employment Services. The space will be re-opened and will provide stability supports to clients. For instance, there are client computers available that can be used by clients to access online supports and services. In addition, a new Support Centre Attendant will be available should assistance be required.

Access to Community Supports: The Support Centre may also be used to host community partners to increase access to person centred supports and services available within the community. For example, preliminary conversations have been

had relating to opportunities to host an on-site ID Clinic among other supports and services.

Use of Space Agreements: DNSSAB already has Use of Space Agreements in place with key partners to offer services in our satellite offices in Sturgeon Falls and Mattawa. As opportunities arise, additional agreements may be considered

Employment Services in South Algonquin: In preparation for the closing of the Employment Resource Centre in Whitney, OW reached out to both EO and Service Canada, to discuss opportunities for an increased physical presence in South Algonquin. Both EO and Service Canada were receptive and willing to partner with OW and the municipality. Through the support of the SSM, Agilec renegotiated service level targets for South Algonquin resulting in an increase in funding to support a new position. This position will be embedded within the community to ensure enhanced access to services. Service Canada will be delivering outreach clinics and information sessions on various federal programs.

Navigator: Nipissing is creating two new Navigator positions to help navigate complex support networks to connect OW and ODSP participants to the supports and services required. The purpose of this position is to be immersed in the community in a more strategic way to increase the visibility of the program and to bring services to those in need meeting them at the right place at the right time.

Co-Location: With the implementation of EST, OW is exploring opportunities for co-location with EO.

Section 2 – Review Targets

Review the ministry prescribed targets in the "Outcome" section in the budget submission in TPON.

Note: SA delivery sites do not need to provide information in this section since it's included in the budget submission in TPON.

Section 3 – Develop Service Strategies

This section establishes the contracted expectations of all SA delivery sites and connects the first two planning components (i.e., community analysis and target(s) relating to the performance measure(s)).

3.1 Outcome Risk Assessment Template

Complete the risk assessment using the **Outcome Risk Assessment template**. For more information refer to the Service Planning Guidelines.

3.2 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Part A: Articulate specific tactics that will consider the needs of equity seeking groups from the initial service planning stages through to delivery.

Enter the local equity, diversity, and inclusion strategy here (500 words max recommended)

Equity Diversity and Inclusion

Social assistance intersects with various equity-seeking groups, including Indigenous people, newcomers, people with disabilities, women, the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community, those with mental health and addiction issues, and individuals impacted by human trafficking. As an Ontario Works (OW) service provider, addressing these groups' unique needs requires a multi-faceted approach, including policy and process, learning and development, partnerships, technology use, and advocacy. A more detailed overview of these tactics and strategies are outlined below.

Policy and Process: DNSSAB and the OW department have a range of policies and processes in place to better serve equity-seeking groups and promote an inclusive, equitable environment. These include policies and processes that address barriers. Examples include:

- Disabled applicants and members of the benefit unit in receipt of ODSP may apply for discretionary benefits through OW. Joint protocols and an ODSP Discretionary Benefits policy and process are in place to promote good customer service and consistent decisions.
- Local processes and job aids are available for referring recipients who declare a disability to the Disability Adjudication Unit (DAU) and supporting clients through the appeal process if necessary. This includes initial referrals, explaining the process, assisting recipients with the self-assessment portion of the DAU package, assisting with requests for internal reviews if applications are denied, and completing referrals to the Nipissing Legal Clinic for appeals to the Social Benefits Tribunal.

Service Delivery: The OW service delivery model is designed to streamline processes, making services accessible and easy to navigate while delivering good customer service efficiently and effectively. Given the diverse needs of OW recipients, the model offers multiple pathways to ensure all clients receive the support they require. This approach includes tailored services, personalized assistance, and feedback mechanisms to adapt and improve service delivery. Examples include:

- The Client Advisory Committee was re-established in 2024 to gather client feedback on the service delivery model. OW hosted two sessions in 2024, focusing on client experience, program understanding, as well as person-centric supports and services.
- Transitional Support Case Managers carry a caseload and have the same responsibilities as a regular Case Manager but come to the position with the

education, experience, and expertise to work with individuals struggling with mental health and addiction.
- Nipissing is currently exploring the opportunity to develop an indigenous frontline position to work collaboratively with indigenous led organization to better support the needs of this population.

Learning and Development: Community Partners are scheduled to present information throughout the year to keep staff informed and up to date on community resources, including those accessed by or directly serving equity-seeking groups. For instance, several OW in-service presentations were delivered to OW staff in 2024 including one from True Self Debwewedndizwin, an organization that provides services to victims of domestic violence and delivers an outreach program for the homeless. In addition, guests are often invited to share information with all DNSSAB staff at monthly All Staff Meetings. For example, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit Mental Health Coordinator and True Self Debwewedndizwin presented information on homelessness services. It should also be noted that OW Staff also participate in community events that provide learning and networking opportunities, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Day event that was hosted by the local Indigenous Friendship Centre and the Anti-Human Trafficking Symposium coordinated though several community partners this past year.

Technology: The employment database tracks information about OW participants, including basic demographic information, employment readiness, and social determinants of health. This database will be discontinued in 2025. It tracks individuals who self-identify as Indigenous to inform case planning and ensure referrals to culturally appropriate resources. An OW referral tool will be implemented in 2025 to track and monitor referrals to community resources, capturing basic demographic information and tracking individuals who self-identify as Indigenous to inform case and service planning.

Committees and Working Groups: The OW Department is represented on several committees and working groups that seek to increase awareness, improve service pathways, and address issues related to equity-seeking groups. These include the Community Action Circle, which promotes cross-cultural learning and respect for Indigenous culture; the Ontario Health Team Navigational Services Community of Practice group, which keeps service providers updated on local programming and services; the Nipissing Human Trafficking Knowledge Network, which raises awareness of sex trafficking; the Nipissing District Homelessness and Housing Partnership, which advises on homelessness policies and supports Housing First initiatives; the Food Security Programs Network, which includes local churches, food banks, and community service providers; the Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee, which improves community response to violence against women; and the Mental Health and Addictions Systems table, that brings healthcare and social assistance to one table to share information and increase collaboration.

Strategic Partnerships: There are several referral protocols, partnerships, service agreements, and joint protocols in place to support equity-seeking groups. Examples include:

- Referrals to agencies that support equity seeking groups like the following:
    - Indigenous services such as the North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, Suswin, True Self Debwewedndizwin, and Metis Nation of Ontario.
    - Services for women that have experienced violence such as the Transition House and Amelia Rising Sexual Violence Support Centre.
    - Disability related services including MentorAbility Canada connects disabled job seekers with short-term mentoring opportunities.
- Service Agreements with local providers. For instance, Nipissing has a service agreement with a local psychologist for psycho-vocational testing to help participants struggling to connect to employment.
- Use of Space Agreements in satellite offices improve access to services. For example, ODSP accesses space in the OW office located in Sturgeon Falls and Mattawa to deliver in-person services.
- Joint protocols with key partners to coordinate approaches to service delivery. One example is the OW / ODSP Joint protocol designed to ensure seamless access to relevant OW services, including discretionary benefits.

Advocacy: Advocacy is crucial for equity-seeking groups as it helps address systemic barriers and inequalities, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Examples include:

- Local advocacy efforts urge the provincial government to increase social assistance rates in line with the cost of living and index OW rates to inflation.
- Nipissing OW generated a series of poverty reports analyzing income and poverty in the district, covering topics such as income and poverty, housing and homelessness, food insecurity, and advocacy recommendations.
- OW continues to build connections within the healthcare sector to promote collaborative planning on common issues and provide holistic services, recognizing the link between poverty, health, and well-being.

Education and Public Awareness: OW continues to seek opportunities to educate the public, increase awareness of the Ontario Works program, and decrease stigma.

Physical Space: OW reception areas are welcoming and accessible is a priority. Indigenous art is displayed in OW offices in North Bay, Sturgeon Falls, and Mattawa, and all office locations are wheelchair accessible.

French Language Services

The French Language Service Delivery strategy in Nipissing is designed to ensure that citizens receive services in the official language of their choice. The strategy emphasizes the proactive delivery of French Language Services to effectively communicate with and optimally serve French-speaking clients and the public. It

promotes high-quality services delivered in a culturally sensitive manner, encouraging active participation by the French-speaking community in the development and delivery of programs.

The table below shows the number and percentage of OW, Temporary Care, and ODSP cases in Nipissing from 2020 to 2025 where French is the preferred language. The data was captured from the CRS100 – Consolidated Integrated Case Summary Report. The number of cases range from a low of 5 to a high of 7. The percentage of the caseload has hovered at 0.4% for the last three years.

	Jan-20	Jan-21	Jan-22	Jan-23	Jan-24	Jan-25
OW, Temporary Care and ODSP Participating in OW Cases (# of cases)	6	5	7	8	7	7
OW, Temporary Care and ODSP Participating in OW Cases (% of caseload)	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%

Similar to last year, Nipissing continues to face challenges to recruit qualified bilingual candidates to fill bilingual positions which remains a concern. Bilingual postings often remain vacant for several posting periods resulting in workload pressure and lack of service continuity. With the shift in the service delivery model in relation to EST, minor changes are underway with respect to the compliment of frontline positions that directly deliver OW services as outlined in the table below. Positions without front line client service responsibilities are not included in the numbers. Temporary positions for 2025 have been included. It is also important to note that currently both the Mattawa and Sturgeon Falls sites have bilingual compliments of 100% due to the high numbers of French speaking residents in these communities. In addition, while only the positions noted below are "designated" bilingual, a much higher proportion of front-line staff with client service responsibilities are fluent in both official languages as bilingualism is taken into consideration as being an asset through the recruitment process.

OW Frontline Direct Delivery Positions	2024		2025	
	Bilingual	Bilingual Compliment (%)	Bilingual	Bilingual Compliment (%)
Case Managers	8 of 26	31%	8 of 26	31%
Transitional Support Case Managers	1 of 5	20%	1 of 5	20%
Client Support Worker	5 of 10	50%	5 of 10	50%
Staff Trainers	0 of 1	0%	0 of 2	0%
Program Compliance Specialist	1 of 1	100%	1 of 2	50%

Employment Marketing Specialist	1 of 1	100%	N/A		
Employment Services Trainer	0 of 1	0%			
Employment Support Workers	1 of 4	25%			
OW System Navigator and Community Liaison	N/A			1 of 2	50%
OW Support Centre Attendant				0 of 1	0%

As a designated transfer payment agency under the French Languages Services Act, DNSSAB is required to conduct a review every three years to ensure compliance with the designation criteria. Additionally, Nipissing OW completes an annual FLS Quality Improvement Plan. DNSSAB is committed to upholding this designation and ensuring that services and communications adhere to the following guiding principles:

- French Language Services are a right according to the French Language Services Act.
- The District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board advocates for the proactive delivery of French Language Services to effectively communicate with and optimally serve French-speaking clients and the public.
- The Board is dedicated to providing high-quality French Language Services in a culturally sensitive manner.
- The Board promotes the equivalency and specificity of services provided.
- Services and corresponding supports (advertisements, documents, brochures, etc.) are preferably produced in both official languages or can be made available in both official languages upon request.
- Signage is in both official languages.
- Active offers of French language services are made through signage stating "je parle français" posted in the reception areas of all office locations.
- Active offers of French language services are also made through signage stating "je parle français" posted at the workstations of all bilingually designated OW staff to further promote French language services.
- French language services have been added to the standing OW Team Meeting agendas at both the management and front-line levels.
- The District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board offers educational incentives to staff for French language upgrading courses.

The DNSSAB management team is responsible for ensuring that the guiding principles outlined above are implemented, monitored, and maintained throughout all business activities. To achieve these requirements, DNSSAB has partnered with College Boreal to conduct mandatory testing on all candidates applying to bilingual job bulletins, ensuring that their proficiency levels meet the needs of the program areas, ranging from level 1 to Superior level 4. DNSSAB has also maintained its internal French Language Committee, comprised of members of the management team, to increase ownership with respect to monitoring DNSSAB's compliance with the Act.

Part B: Complete the French Language Services strategy using the ministry provided templates. For more information refer to the Guidelines.

3.3 Logic Model

A logic model maps the linkages between services delivered and outcomes. It is a tool to support how service strategies will help to achieve target(s) and is included as part of the Service Planning template.

Describe how the service strategies will help to achieve the target(s) relating to the performance measure(s) and make linkages based on the Community Needs Assessment completed in section 1.

Complete one logic model for each of the 4 outcomes. Add or remove rows, as needed. Refer to the Service Planning Guidelines, Appendix H for completed example.

Definitions:

    a. **Inputs:** Describe the organizational, community and/or external inputs within your organization used to coordinate services to meet the prescribed target(s) (e.g., staffing, internal processes, training, relationship with community organizations, gaps in services, etc.).

    b. **Activities:** Operational and strategic activities (e.g., processes, tools, events, actions, etc.) that will be carried out as part of the strategy (e.g., staff training, recruitment, staff supports, community relationships, retention strategies, workshops, etc.).

    c. **Expected outputs linked to outcome:** What are your expected results given the planned activities and what changes do you expect to realize?

Outcome 1:		
Ontario Works adult and ODSP non-disabled adults with participation requirements have an Action Plan		
Inputs (e.g., organization, community, external)	Operational and Strategic Activities	Expected Outputs
1. Staffing	A sufficient staff complement ensures that each OW participant receives the attention and support needed to develop a collaborative and holistic Action Plan in a timely manner. The OW department has been making changes to the staffing compliment to adjust to the changing needs of the department in relation to Centralized Intake Enhancements and Employment Services Transformation. Changes include: • In the fall of 2024, 2 Case Manager positions were posted temporary up to 12 months to prepare for additional budget cuts in 2026. • At the end of 2024, one non-union data position was eliminated from the OW department and has been transferred to a vacant position with corporate services. • In 2025, 6.5 frontline employment position are being eliminated, and 3 new positions that are better aligned with the ministry's vision are in the process of being created. In addition, 2 more temporary positions will also be created to assist with workload during the transition period. For the majority of 2025, OW will have 58 positions, 4 of which are temporary in preparation for 2026. It should also be noted that OW has experienced significant staff turnover, with 20% of frontline OW staff hired in 2024 and 60% of Case Managers and Transitional Support Case Managers having less than 3 years experience with OW. Given the time and resources needed to recruit, hire and train new staff, it is crucial to implement retention strategies to reduce staff turnover.	• Ensure Action Plans are completed with all participating adults in a timely manner • Client expectations are communicated clearly so that clients understand that the completion of an action plan is linked to eligibility • Ensure staff have the skills, resources and tools to effectively engage clients in the action planning process and develop a holistic plan that meets individual needs. • Minimize the number of missed appointments through appointment reminders to improve the timeliness of appointments, including those to complete or update an Action Plan

2. Service Delivery Model	- Recipients with significant mental health and addiction issues are often transferred to a Transitional Support Case Manager who carry a smaller caseload and possess specialized expertise in mental health and addiction, allowing them to dedicate more time and knowledge to developing effective Action Plans. - Division of duties that allows for Case Managers who have ongoing caseloads to meet expectations of the role including the completion of action plan. For example, EVP reviews are completed by a dedicated team of Case Managers. When managing a case that involves a complex fraud allegation or overpayment, Nipissing has a Program Compliance Specialist position to provide support.	
3. Learning and Development	- Learning and development opportunities for new and seasoned staff are essential for enhancing skill sets, preparing staff to adapt to changes, improving performance, and ensuring desired outcomes. This includes negotiating quality and individualized Action Plans within established timelines. Nipissing OW strategies include: - OW Staff Trainer: Due to the high turnover in staffing, the OW trainer has primarily focused their time on training and supporting new hires. - A second temporary OW Staff Trainer position was created in the latter half of 2024 to update and develop local processes, and deliver EST training, including Action Plan training to OW staff. This position is anticipated to continue into 2025 to support staff through the transition to EST. - Range of person-centric staff training was delivered to staff in 2024 to help enhance skill sets to develop holistic Action Plans. A brief description of the training has been included below: - Bridges out of Poverty is a framework by Dr. Ruby Payne for understanding poverty and the hidden	

		rules of economic class. It helps develop programs and strategies to improve relationships at the front-line level, outcomes at the organizational level, and systems at the community level. The goal is to reduce social costs, strengthen the workforce, and build a more prosperous and sustainable community by addressing and reducing poverty comprehensively.	
		▪ Heart Centred Approach covered 7 practical points that can be easily integrated into daily life to reduce mental stress and anxiety, decrease psychosomatic illness, increase well-being, improve concentration, filter out distractions, and promote original and creative thought.	
		▪ OMSSA Directives Training focused on life stabilization factors, quality of life indicators, enhancing knowledge of the Ontario Works Act, Regulations, Directives, and Clearinghouses, assessing initial and ongoing eligibility for Ontario Works and Temporary Care Assistance, understanding case management best practices and resources, and validating/correcting overpayments.	
		▪ SafeTALK participants learned how to identify and respond to situations where suicidal thoughts may be present, recognize invitations for help, and move beyond the tendency to miss, dismiss, and avoid suicide. They also learn to apply the TALK steps (Tell, Ask, Listen, Keep Safe) and about community resources to connect individuals with suicidal thoughts to the appropriate help.	
		▪ De-escalation Strategies to Manage High Stress Interactions provided the foundational tools to de-	

	escalate situations while also supporting staff to reduce the intensity and length of negative interactions across population demographics. The workshop also touched on the importance of self-care post de-escalation and helpful tips for staff to regulate their emotions during negative interactions.
4. Business Practices / Process	In Nipissing, the Action Plan is complete at the initial appointment for auto-granted cases through Centralized Intake. It is standard practice to book the initial appointment within 10 business days. For ongoing cases, the Action Plan will be updated on a touch the file basis for both OW and ODSP participants. Given that Outcome plan review periods range from 3-6 months, we anticipate that all active cases, except auto-granted cases pending the initial review, will have an Action Plan completed by fall. It is important to note that missed and rescheduled appointments may impact timelines, causing delays in some areas. As EST full integration will take effect March 1, 2025, it is anticipated that local processes and business practices will continue to evolve over time.
5. Leveraging Technology	• A new scheduling system is currently being soft launched before being rolled out to the broader group. The new scheduling tool will allow for email/text reminders of upcoming appointments. We are hoping this will help reduce the number appointments clients fail to attend, including the initial appointment on auto-granted cases and Action Plan update appointments. • A new Referral Tool in Nipissing is being rolled out that will allow for referrals to be monitored to confirm how many participants are active or pending services due to waitlists. The tool also includes a case management component, with dashboards that track due dates including when Action Plan updates are required.
6. Client Understanding of Program Expectations	Ensure that client messaging regarding program expectations is clear and actively engage them in the action planning process to

	foster commitment and participation. Nipissing is in the process of updating the local Employment Information Session to include more information regarding person-centred supports and services.
7. Track and Monitor Data	• Monitor outcome data monthly to track progress and identify when it appears that targeted outcomes may be off track, so that mitigation strategies can be put in place. Outcome data often lags making it challenging to effectively monitor outcomes. • Local data from the Referral Tool can be monitored and used as a Case Management tool by frontline staff. This data will also be used by the OW Supervisor team to monitor and address performance issues.
8. Access to Resources	Ensure staff have easy access to the resources and tools required to complete Action Plans with clients in a timely manner. This includes ensuring that reports that track and monitor participation are accessible, available and used appropriately.
9. Quality Assurance	An OW Supervisor completes regular file reviews, which includes ensuring that the CAT and Action Plan have been completed.

Outcome 2:

Ontario Works adults and ODSP non-disabled adults with participation requirements are referred to EO

Inputs (e.g., organization, community, external)	Operational and Strategic Activities	Expected Outputs
1. Staffing	A sufficient staff complement ensures that each OW and ODSP participant receives the attention and support needed to have a fulsome conversation to determine Employment Ontario referral readiness and to negotiate a collaborative and holistic Action Plan in a timely manner.	• Ensure the CAT is complete and updated with participating adults in a timely manner and those that are referral ready are referred to EO • Client expectations are communicated clearly so that clients understand that active participation in activities, which may include a referral to EO, are linked to eligibility for financial assistance • Ensure staff have the skills, resources and tools to effectively engage clients in the completion of the CAT screener and the development of a holistic Action Plan that meets individual needs • Ensure staff are referring participants that are referral ready to EO and not just participants that are employment ready.
2. Learning and Development	Learning and development strategies for new and seasoned staff are essential for enhancing skill sets, preparing staff to adapt to changes, improving performance, and ensuring desired outcomes are met. This includes ensuring that staff understand the difference between employment ready and referral ready. Participants with barriers may be able to participate in both employment and stability support activities. Those participants who are not referral ready and need to focus solely on stability support activities should be encouraged to think about their long-term goals so that when it is appropriate employment enhancing activities can be added to the plan. In Nipissing Action Plan and CAT training has already been delivered to prepare staff for full integration in March of 2025.	
3. Business Practices / Process	• As Nipissing is in the process moving towards the full integration of employment services, business practices and process continue to be revised and developed. • The Service System Manager (SSM) has developed a referral matrix tool to support both EO and Social Assistance providers with an understanding of when participants should be referred to EO. • Nipissing is in the process of developing joint protocols with EO providers to ensure there is a mutual understanding of referral readiness. In addition, there is a commitment to ongoing	

	conversations to ensure that these practices and protocols continue to evolve. • Nipissing has joint protocols with ODSP to ensure a smooth transition and continuous support for ODSP participating adults, ultimately helping participants connect to the services they need and move toward their employment goals.
4. Leveraging Technology	Nipissing has a new Referral Tool that is replacing the Employment Database. The referral tool will help OW monitor and track OW and ODSP participating referrals, including referrals to Employment Ontario. The tool also generates reports so that referral data can be tracked and monitored.
5. Client Understanding of Program Expectations	Ensure that client messaging regarding program expectations is clear and actively engage them in the action planning process to foster commitment and participation. Nipissing is in the process of updating the local Employment Information Session to include more information regarding person-centred supports and services.
6. Track and Monitor Data	• Monitor outcome data monthly to track progress and identify when it appears the target outcomes may be off track, so that mitigation strategies can be put in place. • Local data from the Referral Tool can be monitored and used as a Case Management tool by frontline staff. This data will also be used by the OW Supervisor team to monitor and address performance issues as well as track and monitor agency referrals, including referrals to EO.
7. Access to Resources	Ensure staff have easy access to the resources and tools required to effectively engage clients when completing the CAT and Action Plan. This includes ensuring that guidelines, processes and business practices are clearly communicated and that written resources are easily accessible in SharePoint.
8. System Navigator and Community Liaison	The Ontario Works System Navigator and Community Liaison will assist participants with complex needs who struggle with tasks, self-navigation, and self-management. By providing support to connect

	them to internal and external services, this role uses a person-centered, strengths-based holistic model in collaboration with community partners to help achieve outcomes. While these participants may not initially be ready to participate in employment activities, through additional supports the goal will be that these participants will eventually be EO referral ready.	
9. Ontario Works Support Centre Attendant	This position plays a crucial role in preparing participants to be ready for employment services. It delivers life stabilization workshops as needed, helping clients build the skills and confidence necessary for employment. The position also assists clients with completing applications, forms, and documentation to explore potential additional supports and financial resources. Furthermore, it supports the Ontario Works Support Centre and acts as the host for various community partners visiting the Centre to provide supports, services, and information sessions to Ontario Works Clients. This comprehensive support system helps participants become better prepared to engage with employment services.	

Outcome 3:
Ontario Works cases exit to employment

Inputs (e.g., organization, community, external)	Operational and Strategic Activities	Expected Outputs
1. Staffing	A sufficient staff complement ensures that each OW participant receives the attention and support needed to develop a collaborative and holistic Action Plan that will help the participant move forward along a pathway towards employment.	• Engage clients in the Action Plan process to develop holistic and individualized plans on the pathway towards employment with the goal of assisting recipients to exit to employment
2. Learning and Development	Learning and development strategies for new and seasoned staff are essential for enhancing skill sets, preparing staff to adapt to changes, improving performance, and ensuring desired outcomes are met. This includes ensuring staff understand and are following local policies and processes put in place to encourage and capture exits to employment. As mentioned above, Nipissing has processes in place and has one permanent and one temporary Staff Trainer to support learning and development needs of new and seasoned staff.	• Effectively capture all outcomes related to exits to employment • Effective strategies are in place around integrated case management for participants working concurrently with EO and OW.
3. Business Practices and Processes	Business practices to capture exits to employment include: • Note templates when files terminate that trigger frontline staff to review to ensure that exits to employment are captured. • An exit package is sent to clients when a case terminates. The exit package currently includes information about benefits available to start employment as well as Extended Health Benefits and a locally developed Self-Declaration Regarding Employment form. The exit package is currently under review and an information sheet regarding who to contact should supports be required to maintain employment will be added. • The termination report is reviewed monthly to ensure that employment outcomes are captured and the termination reason in SAMS is correct. Business practices to improve exits to employment include: • Ensure that there are a range of services available to support participants on their pathway towards employment. • Continue to work to support individuals who have employment to connect to the services and resources they need to move toward	

	exiting social assistance. Examples may include connecting a sole support parent with earnings to licenced childcare or referring a participant employed part-time to EO for additional employment supports. • Integrated case management practices are in place when participants are working concurrently with EO and OW.
4. Client Understanding of Program Expectations	Ensure clients understand the requirement to declare all sources of income, including employment earnings, to the office. Additionally, make sure clients know how to access benefits to start employment, OW earnings exemptions, and Employment Extended Health Benefits (EEHB).
5. Track and Monitor Data	Monitor outcome data monthly to track progress and identify when it appears the target outcomes may be off track, so that mitigation strategies can be put in place.
6. Access to Resources	Ensure staff have easy access to the resources and tools required to effectively engage participants in the development of a holistic action plan that meets individual needs. This includes ensuring that guidelines, processes and business practices are clearly communicated and that written resources are easily accessible.
7. Joint Protocols	Nipissing is in the process of developing joint protocols with local EO service providers. The joint protocols will speak to referral protocols, integrated Case Management as well as capturing exits to employment.

Outcome 4:
Ontario Works cases do not return to the program within one year

Inputs (e.g., organization, community, external)	Operational and Strategic Activities	Expected Outputs
1. Staffing	A sufficient staff complement ensures that each OW participant receives the attention and support needed to develop a collaborative and holistic Action Plan and help participant move forward along a pathway towards employment.	• Development of holistic and individualized Action Plans that ensure participants are connected to the supports and services they need to maintain financial independence once they exit Ontario Works • Ensure effective strategies are in place around integrated case management practices to ensure that participants working concurrently with OW and EO have a high-quality Employment Action Plan and Action Plan in place that promote long-term stability and independence from social assistance.
2. Learning and Development	Learning and development strategies for new and seasoned staff to ensure they have the knowledge and skills sets necessary to complete the CAT screener and engage the client to develop an Action Plan and actively participate in activities to address barriers to employment, create stability, improve employability and promote long-term independence once they exit Ontario Works.	
3. Business Practices	• Action plans are designed to address barriers to employment and ensure that participants have access to the necessary supports and services they need to succeed. When participants have a solid support network in place, they are better positioned to achieve long-term financial independence. • An exit package is sent to clients when a case terminates. The exit package currently includes information about benefits available to start employment as well as Extended Health Benefits and a locally developed Self-Declaration Regarding Employment form. The exit package is under review and an information sheet regarding who to contact should supports be required to maintain employment will be added. • Ensure that there are effective integrated case management strategies in place when participants are working with OW and EO to wrap services around the participant that will promote a successful transition to sustainable employment.	

4. Track and Monitor Data	Monitor outcome data monthly to track progress and identify when it appears the target outcomes may be off track, so that mitigation strategies can be put in place.	
5. Leveraging Technology	New Referral Tool in Nipissing that is used to track and monitor referrals made to community resources. The tool houses information regarding community resources to help frontline staff navigate the service network, make appropriate referrals and track participant progress. Connecting participants to the supports and services they need to promote stability will help recipients that exit OW to maintain financial independence.	

Section 4 – Manage Program Delivery

In this section, SA delivery sites will identify key program management activities to ensure the program supports program integrity and is delivered in accordance with legislative and policy requirements.

4.1 Service Delivery Expectations

Develop an outline of how service delivery expectations will be managed to ensure the program is delivered in accordance with legislative and policy requirements and that financial assistance expenditures are accurate and meet ministry expectations (refer to Service Planning Guidelines).

Enter outline for each area of focus below (suggest 250 words max recommended per area)
Essential information reviewed and verified by Third Party Checks prior to transferring to ODSP (within the last 12 months)
There are a solid processes and job aids relating to ODSP file transfers in place that are stored together in a SharePoint folder for ease of access. Some relevant resources in the folder that are available to staff to ensure that all necessary information is complete prior to transfer as well as to promote accuracy and consistency include: • *ODSP File Transfer Checklist* which includes a section about third party checks completed within the last 12 months, along with the dates reviewed. This checklist also reminds users that the Provincial Support Unit (PSU) cannot see the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) tab in the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) • *ODSP File Transfer Checklist Job Aid* provides further information about each section of the checklist, including mandatory third-party checks. • *ODSP File Transfer Job Aid* primarily covers how to use the wizard to complete the note transfer and offers tips and tricks, including a reminder about third-party checks within 12 months. From a learning and development perspective, ODSP file transfers and third-party checks are part of the initial training package for new staff. With a Trainer position included in the staffing model, on-going learning and development occurs throughout the year on various topics and ODSP file transfer refresher training was delivered in the latter part of 2024.
24-month Reassessment (including Third Party Checks) on all OW cases
To ensure that a 24-month reassessment, including third-party checks, is complete on all Ontario Works cases in Nipissing several strategies have been established including:

- File review processes and job aids are in place to ensure that the necessary steps are complete to reassess files every 24-months including ensuring that tasks are created, and third-party checks are completed, reviewed and noted.
- Third-Party check process and job aids that ensure that third party checks are complete to verify eligibility throughout the client lifecycle. For instance, the processes and job aids outline mandatory third-party checks (Equifax and CRA) required at time of application and file updates and additional third-party checks (Ministry of Transportation (MTO), Family Responsibility Office (FRO), Employment Insurance (EI) and Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)) that may be completed on a case-by case basis. There are also numerous processes, job aids and note templates to ensure consent evidence has been captured in SAMS.
- Quality Assurance Mechanisms include:
  - Random File reviews are complete by the OW Supervisor team on EVP files, recent applications and ongoing cases each month. The OW supervisor team uses a template to ensure consistency. The template covers third party checks, ensures that there is a 24-month review task on file and that 24-month reviews have been completed as required.
  - All applications and eligibility-related decisions being made by new hires are reviewed by an OW Supervisor until the end of the probation period (90 days) or trial period (4 months) to ensure file integrity standards are met.

It should also be noted that staff are encouraged to access additional resources available on the Social Assistance (SA) Extranet.

As mentioned previously, Nipissing has a staff trainer position. Case Manager training includes 24-month file updates, completing note templates to document reviews, assessing eligibility, creating and managing tasks and other duties associated to effectively and efficiently managing a caseload.

For the past several years, Case Managers in Nipissing have tracked review dates including when a file update was last completed and due. This will change in 2025 when Nipissing implements a new referral tool which is in part a Case Management tool that includes functionality to track 24-month file reviews.

Deferrals from participation in employment related activities are still current and are short-term (6 months or less is considered short-term). Deferrals from participation in employment related activities are less than 6 months and not expired

Deferrals within the Ontario Works program are designed to accommodate clients who face specific challenges that hinder their ability to actively participate in employment related activities. OW and ODSP participating adults may be deferred for the following reasons:
- Sole-support parent and publicly funded education is not available
- Caregiver responsibilities
- 65+ years of age

- Experiencing exceptional circumstances – temporary illness or injury
- Experiencing exceptional circumstances – other

It should be noted that while the same deferral reasons apply to ODSP participating adults, they are generally not applicable on recently referred participants as the ODSP Caseworker has already determined the appropriateness of the referral. There are situations in which circumstances change after the referral that need to be considered. In these cases, the OW Case Manager will generally consult with the ODSP Caseworker.

Even in circumstances where a participant qualifies for a deferral, voluntary participation is encouraged. Person-centered supports are crucial to help participants engage in activities that address barriers and prepare them to participate in employment activities.

Deferrals from participation are short-term and do not exceed a six-month timeframe and are reviewed on a regular basis. To achieve this, SAMS generated tasks are used to monitor expiring deferrals and Action Plan due dates, allowing staff to book appointments in a timely manner. Staff also currently track these dates as per local process on a spreadsheet. Once the new Referral tool is launched, Action Plan and deferral due dates will be tracked through the tools case management features. It should also be noted that OW is in the process of transitioning to a new scheduling tool that has advanced features, including appointment reminders to help reduced missed appointments which will help ensure that reviews are complete in a timely manner.

Action Plan training has been delivered to OW staff and ongoing support from our internal Trainer ensures that staff are well-equipped to manage these tasks. Although there is no local policy in place yet, a local job aid that reviews common questions and answers related to Action Plans and the Common Assessment tool is being developed, which will eventually lead to the creation of comprehensive processes. Additionally, a range of training and learning opportunities in relation to person-centered supports were offered in 2024 including Bridges out of Poverty, Heart Centred Approach, OMSSA Directives with a focus on life stabilization, SafeTALK, De-escalation Strategies to Manage High Stress Interactions, along with a few in-service presentations from local agencies that deliver human services. Additional supports and training will be offered in 2025 based on identified need.

EVP is assigned and completed in established timeframes

In Nipissing, EVP case audits are managed by two designated Case Managers, with the Program Compliance Specialist serving as a backup when needed. This model has proven effective, enabling Nipissing to consistently meet the 60-day turnaround time from identification to completion of audit cases, as illustrated in the chart below. Nipissing slightly exceeded the 60-day timeframe in 2020, this was due to pandemic restrictions, including the provincial lockdown, which made it challenging for clients to access services and submit the necessary documents for the EVP review in a timely manner.

Average Calendar Days from Identification to Completion

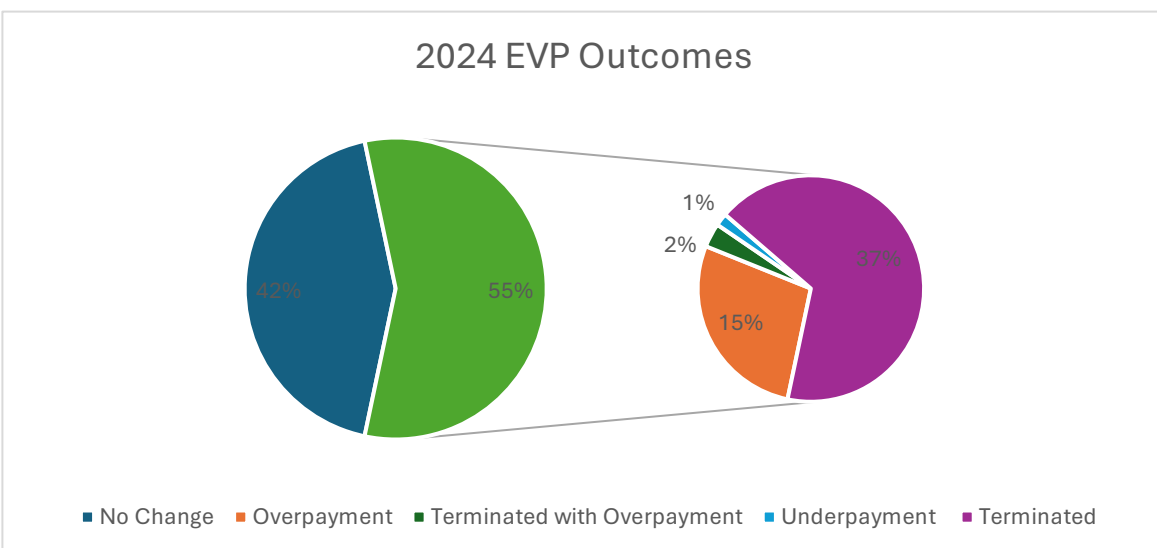| 2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
41	63	54	52	54	49
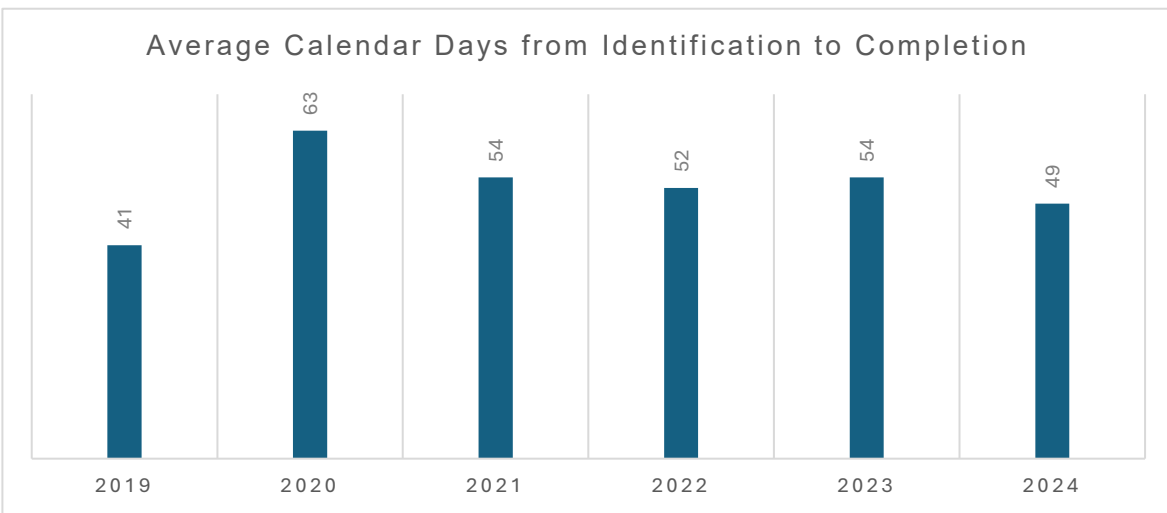
OW EVP Monthly Performance Summary Report, Nipissing District, version dated January 10, 2025

As illustrated in the chart below, the EVP outcomes in Nipissing in 2024 were as follows:
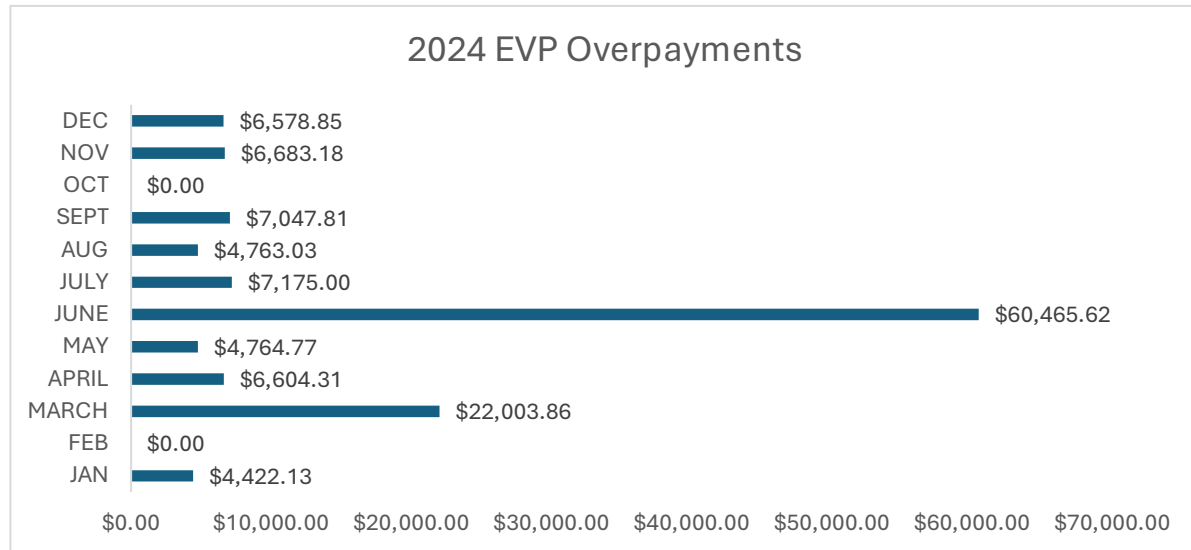
- 42% no change
- 15% overpayment
- 1% underpayment
- 37% termination
- 2% termination with an overpayment

It should be noted that there are three additional outcome measures, percentage of terminations due to voluntary withdrawal, decrease in monthly entitlement and increase to monthly entitlement. As Nipissing did not have any outcomes in 2024 related to these measures this data was not captured in the figure below.

2024 EVP Outcomes

42% · 55% · 1% · 2% · 15% · 37%

■ No Change ■ Overpayment ■ Terminated with Overpayment ■ Underpayment ■ Terminated

CRS-440M – EVP Performance Report, Nipissing District, January to December 2024

While 39% of the EVP cases terminated with or without an overpayment, many of these cases were reinstated within 30-60 days. The amount of the overpayment generated through EVP month over month varied from a low of $0 in February and October to a high of $60,465.62 in June. The average overpayment amount generated through EVP in 2024 was $10,876.

2024 EVP Overpayments

Month	Amount
DEC	$6,578.85
NOV	$6,683.18
OCT	$0.00
SEPT	$7,047.81
AUG	$4,763.03
JULY	$7,175.00
JUNE	$60,465.62
MAY	$4,764.77
APRIL	$6,604.31
MARCH	$22,003.86
FEB	$0.00
JAN	$4,422.13

Application of up to 10% recovery rate for all overpayments

The creation and recovery of overpayments to reclaim funds mistakenly or erroneously issued to a client is a key component of OW administration to ensure financial accountability. As such, Nipissing has several local processes in place to supplement provincial directives around the creation, validation, notification and recovery of overpayments. Overpayment training is also included in Case Manager training. Staff can also access support in relation to overpayments through the Trainer or Program Compliance Specialist as needed.

The chart below illustrates the proportion of cases by overpayment recovery rate in Nipissing versus the provincial average for the month of September 2024. While there are small variations, the proportion of cases in Nipissing versus the Province are relatively similar.

	Less than 5%	Exactly 5%	More than 5% but less than 10%	Exactly 10%	More than 10%
Nipissing	5%	75%	0.5%	19%	0.2%
Province	4%	74%	1%	21%	0.3%

It should also be recognized that a 10% recovery rate often results in undue hardship for OW clients especially for single households. As such, Nipissing will continue to assess the recovery rate on overpayments on a case-by-case basis. This process will

continue to be monitored through the file review process and by reviewing relevant reports like the Detailed Exceptions Reports to ensure compliance.

Financial assistance expenditures (subsidy claims submissions) are accurate and meet ministry expectations (list all Ontario Works benefits managed outside of SAMS and identify supporting documentation that will be provided with adjustments to subsidy claims and describe business practices for Ontario Works benefits managed outside of SAMS)

Nipissing has several program oversight strategies in place to ensure compliance, accountability, integrity, and transparency as outlined below. Since the last service planning cycle, the only change to note is that the OW department no longer has a dedicated Data Coordinator. This change was made effective January 1, 2025. Instead, OW will access support from the corporate Planning, Outcomes, and Analytics team.

Program Monitoring:
- Social Assistance Operations Performance Reports
- Cognos Reports
- Client Surveys
- Manual trackers
- Social Assistance Extranet data
- Zoom Phone System and related reports
- Alignment of Strategic Plan with Program Mandates
- Subsidy Claim Guide

Staff Competency:
- Annual Competency Based Performance Reviews
- Ongoing staff training on both financial and employment assistance
- Continuous Learning and Professional Development Opportunities
- Talent Management Plan
- Succession Planning to ensure transfer of knowledge
- Employment Suitability Testing as part of interview process

Risk Management:
- Dedicated EVP Team effective April 2017
- Third Party Checks to verify eligibility through client lifecycle
- Strategic Plan/Mission/Vision
- Clear Local OW, HR and Board Policies
- Standardized Operational Procedures
- Monthly File Reviews by Supervisors
- Review of detailed monthly financial expenditure reports
- Document Management Protocols
- Board engagement for direction on high level decisions
- Approval Escalation Processes
- Strong Contract Management processes including multiple sign offs by DNSSAB authorities
- Contracts and Purchasing Specialist position
- Separation of Duty Processes

- Detailed HR Policies to clarify expectations
- Internal Whistleblower Policy
- Internal Purchasing Policy
- Internal Reviews and Social Benefit Tribunals completed by Supervisor
- Strict adherence to third party request and MFIPPA processes
- Program Compliance Specialist position
- Planning, Outcomes and Analytics team
- Risk Management Specialist position

Program Reporting and Accountability:
- MCCSS Reporting
- Board Reports posted on DNSSAB website to ensure transparency
- Case Managers and the Program Compliance Specialist continue to pursue all potential sources of income (spousal support, EI, WSIB etc.)
- Policy and Process on Pay Direct to Landlords
- Monitoring to ensure fraud allegation investigations have been completed and outcomes are documented
- Monitoring Overpayment recovery rates
- Monitoring Eligibility Verification Process timeframes and outcomes
- Monitoring to ensure Ad Hoc reports are complete

Technology:
- Use of Tableau (business intelligence software)
- Creation of dashboards that highlight trends, decreases, increases
- Use of Zoho Project Management Software
- eScribe

Although it is the responsibility of the OW Director to ensure program expenditures are within budget, the finance department carries much of the responsibility and workload in ensuring the integrity of the financial information presented to the Ministry through subsidy claims, submissions, and quarterly reports. Additional information regarding accuracy of submissions is included in section 4.2 - *Submission of Actual Expenditures.*

DNSSAB's Contract Management Specialist is responsible for developing and maintaining the contract management system, ensuring all contracts are properly executed, compliant with contract terms and conditions, and remain current. These contracts include property, capital and operating leases, and purchase of service agreements. The specialist liaises with legal counsel for contract development, negotiation, and management, and is directly involved in resolving contract disputes. In addition to contract management, the specialist works closely with the DNSSAB management team, providing support and expertise in the formal bid/purchasing processes for goods and services. This position also develops, implements, and oversees a contract management system and associated policies and procedures to ensure regulatory compliance.

Effective program oversight includes risk management practices to identify, assess, and mitigate risks. DNSSAB has extensive risk management strategies in place, with

the Risk Management Specialist providing guidance and support to identify areas of risk and make recommendations to reduce or eliminate them.

All Ontario Works expenditures continue to be managed within SAMS, except for funds expensed to third parties through purchase of service agreements, primarily for employment services. The initiatives funded outside of SAMS during the previous cycle or anticipated for the current cycle include:

- Clark Communications - Get Trained Workers Employment Database - Discontinued
- Canadore College's Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education Program (NPREP) - Discontinued
- Clark Communications - Asset Management System (AMS) Referral Tool

4.2 Monitoring Activities

Demonstrate how SA delivery sites will be prepared to support the monitoring activities by documenting its approach to readiness from combination of resource, awareness and understanding perspectives.

For example, the SA Delivery sites will be ready to support by reviewing and becoming familiar with all relevant materials provided by the ministry to understand the monitoring activities and OW's roles and responsibilities.

Enter the approach for monitoring here (suggested 250 words max recommended per area)

Overall Readiness (i.e., how your site will be ready to continuously support the monitoring activities)

Nipissing has numerous mechanisms in place to effectively monitor key areas that support outcomes and service delivery expectations that are designed to ensure file integrity standards are met and to minimize errors. Mechanisms include:

- Staff learning new roles within the OW department are provided with orientation and training through the Staff Trainer. Job shadowing opportunities with seasoned staff in the role are also offered to provide hands-on experience in the role.
- Ongoing learning opportunities for OW staff to ensure they are following local policy and procedures and are complying with provincial regulations. For example, in response to a high turnover in staff in recent years, OMSSA Directives training with a focus on life stabilization was offered to a group of OW frontline staff with the core group being Case Managers with less than 2 years experience in the role.
- Nipissing has developed and maintains a range of program specific policies, processes, business practices and job aids which provide additional guidance, promote consistent practices and in turn help to improve file integrity.

Nipissing has a staff trainer who supports initial and ongoing learning as well as creates and revises local processes, business practices and job aids. All policies and processes are accessible through SharePoint, changes are communicated through various pathways including a designated Zoom channel, email, team meetings and all staff meetings.

- File Reviews are completed by the OW Supervisor team. All applications and eligibility decisions being made by new hires are reviewed until the end of the probation (90 days) or trial (4 months) period. Random file reviews for all Case Managers continue to be completed month over month and include recent applications for assistance (both granted and denied cases), as well as ongoing and EVP cases
- The OW Supervisor team handles client requests for Internal Reviews. Follow-up with staff is conducted as there are often learning opportunities that arise through this process. These situations may also result in process revisions or the offer of additional training.
- Ad Hoc file reviews are also completed on a range of more specific file integrity standards. For instance, in 2024, a random selection of cases on assistance 10 + years or more was reviewed.
- Various reports are used to monitor a range of program related activities that may impact overall file integrity. For example, the Case Closure Details Report is monitored monthly to ensure exits to employment are captured and recorded appropriately to ensure outcomes are met.
- The Program Support position manages and tracks several reports to ensure that workload is distributed and actioned. This position also maintains some tracking sheets that are used as Case Management tools and / or to inform local decision making. For example, this position reviews and follows up with Case Managers on pending applications that have been open for 4 days or more to ensure that necessary action is taken.
- Mandatory and optional third-party checks are used throughout the client journey to confirm eligibility related information.
- A dedicated EVP team completes case audits within prescribed timelines to identify and ensure that changes in client circumstances accurately reflected in the calculation of assistance.
- Case Managers are responsible for completing fraud investigations and managing overpayments on active cases which includes the creation, validation, and collection of overpayments. Case Managers also set the overpayment recovery rate based on a case-by-case basis based on legislation and client circumstances.
- The Program Compliance Specialist position supports Case Managers in the investigation of more complex fraud allegations as well as the creation and validation of complex overpayments. This position also manages the following:
  - Overpayment collection on terminated cases including the negotiation of repayment plans. This process will change when the Ministry begins managing debt collection on terminated cases.

- o Supports Case Managers and the Supervisor team by recommending which cases should be referred to the police for criminal investigation.
  - o Restitution orders
  - o Monitors the Eligibility Review Activity report to ensure that allegations are being actioned in a timely manner
  - o Monitors the New Overpayments Details report to ensure overpayments are being validated and to flag cases with new overpayments over $5,000.
  - o Provides peer support and guidance as part of the orientation and training of staff new to the Case Management role.
- The OW Supervisor team reviews cases that have been recommended to be referred to the police for investigation.
- The Program Support position downloads and distributes the weekly Welfare Fraud Hotline tool each week along with any supplementary evidence sent to the local office. This position also manages a tracking sheet of new overpayments created over $5,000.

Submission of actual expenditures (i.e., how to ensure your site will be able to submit the actual expenditures in a timely manner and engage in discussion when varied from budget)

In Nipissing, the finance department uses various detailed spreadsheets to assist with the reconciliation process to ensure the integrity and accuracy of expenditure submissions. Finance prepares monthly financial reports for program Directors to ensure that program spending is within budget and to explain anomalies and exceptions. Areas of concern are flagged for review and a plan is discussed to ensure expenditures are align with the budget. All financial information is presented in accordance to generally accepted accounting principles issued by the Financial Accounting Standards Board.

Submission of targets related to performance measures (i.e., how to ensure your site will be able to engage in discussions on strategies to achieve outcomes)

The Director of Ontario Works inputs the outcome data submitted by the finance department through TPON quarterly. To ensure Nipissing is prepared to engage in discussions about strategies to achieve outcomes, the following measures have been put in place.
- Performance outcome data is monitored monthly to quickly identify when targets are not being met.
- Local tools to track and monitor monthly progress are in place to help inform discussions and decision making.
- The leadership team meets to discuss strategies to improve outcomes as required.
- Various mechanisms are in place to ensure staff have the necessary resources, training, skills and knowledge to effectively deliver services in accordance with relevant legislation.

- Outcome metrics are shared with frontline staff on a regular basis during monthly OW Staff meetings to engage them in the process and align team efforts to achieve desired outcomes.

Performance reports (i.e., how to ensure your site will be ready to leverage ministry provided reports in monitoring targets related to performance measure(s) and key service delivery expectations)

The OW management team in Nipissing monitors performance reports monthly. This practice helps to identify areas of concern and allows for strategic planning and timely adjustments to service delivery to be made to achieve desired outcomes. The OW department is also supported by the Planning, Outcomes, and Analytics team who assist with compiling and analysing reports and data as required. Cognos reports, Ministry Power BI dashboard and local Tableau dashboards are utilized monthly to track and monitor targets related to related to performance measures and key service delivery expectations.

Quality Assurance (QA) reviews (i.e., how to ensure your site will be ready to leverage the results from the ministry performed QA reviews to determine possible course corrections, related monitoring and need for service plan amendments)

The OW Supervisor team conducts file reviews to ensure file integrity standards are met and decisions comply with relevant legislation, policy and process. Completed file reviews assist in identifying opportunities to
- improve local policy, process and practice.
- inform training curriculum.
- identify performance issues.
- improve service delivery.
- identify opportunities to create efficiencies.

The file review process has historically and will continue to evolve and adjust to Ministry objectives.

Risk Mitigation Testing (i.e., how to ensure your site will be ready to use ministry provided testing scripts to carry out testing of mitigation for the highest risks impacting outcomes as well as how the results of the testing will be used by your site)

Due to the robust program compliance measures developed locally, as described throughout this service plan, Nipissing is well positioned to respond to Ministry inquiries related to identified risks impacting outcomes. The close monitoring and measurement of overall program performance helps Nipissing to identify when strategies need to be put in place to manage emerging areas of risk. Proactive communication with the Ministry is also utilized with respect to matters that require clarification.

4.3 Privacy

Conduct a Privacy Risk Assessment using the **Privacy Risk Assessment Template and Privacy Maturity Self-Reporting Tool**. Instructions are included within the templates, but for more information refer to the Service Planning Guidelines.