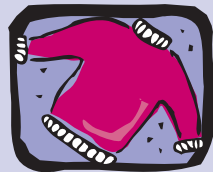


Need welfare?

How to apply to
Ontario Works
for assistance



This pamphlet is for people who are applying to Ontario Works (OW) for financial assistance. Sometimes OW assistance is called “welfare”.

This type of assistance is for people who need money because:

- they cannot find work,
- they are temporarily unable to work,
- they are earning so little that they qualify for assistance, or
- they are applying to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and they need assistance while waiting for disability benefits to begin.

You can find information about applying for ODSP benefits in our pamphlet called “**Disability benefits in Ontario: who can get them, how to apply**”. To find out how to order it, turn to the back cover. Our pamphlets are also available on our web site at <www.cleo.on.ca>.

How do I apply to Ontario Works for financial assistance?

Contact your local OW office to apply. To find the contact information for the OW office, call Service Ontario:

Toll-free **1-800-267-8097**

Toll-free TTY **1-800-268-7095**

In Toronto **416-326-1234**

TTY in Toronto..... **416-325-3408**

Tell Service Ontario what your postal code is and ask them for the phone number and address of the Ontario Works office closest to where you live.

[Contact information for Ontario Works offices](#) is also available on the web site of the Ministry of Community and Social Services at <www.cfcs.gov.on.ca>.

To complete your application, you will need to have an interview. This interview is usually at the local OW office. If going to the local OW office is difficult for you, you can ask to have the interview at your home or at another place that is better for you.



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

You will have to provide information about yourself, each member of your family, and anyone else who lives with you. This information includes:

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



You will be asked to provide documents that relate to yourself or the other people in your household who are included in your application, such as:

- personal identification—for example, birth certificates or passports, health cards, and Social Insurance Number (SIN) cards,
- immigration papers,
- divorce papers,
- proof of school attendance,
- bank statements or bank records,
- proof of income from any source—including employment, Child Tax Benefit, support payments, workers' compensation, and payments from tenants, roomers, and boarders,
- information about assets—including RRSP statements, car ownership papers, and bonds,
- life insurance policies,
- leases or tenancy agreements, and rent receipts,
- mortgage agreements and statements,

- other bills related to housing costs—such as bills for hydro, water, gas, property tax, and home or apartment insurance, and
- proof of debts—including credit card bills, student loans such as OSAP, and other loans, even if the loan is from a relative or friend.



Keep copies of all the documents that you give to the OW worker. You can ask the worker to make a copy of any **original** documents that you submit.

You should not be asked for information that is not relevant to your eligibility for financial assistance.

If you think the OW office is being unreasonable or asking you for information that has nothing to do with your eligibility, [contact your community legal clinic](#) (see page 20).

What if I have trouble getting the documents OW asks for?

You should not have to provide a document that you cannot get or that you cannot afford to get. If you are asked to do this, ask the OW office to check the information some other way. Or ask them to pay for the cost of getting the documents.

If you have trouble getting documents, [contact a community legal clinic](#) (see page 20). They may be able to help you.



What if someone in my household needs a special diet?

If you or other members of your household need a special diet because of a particular medical condition, OW may have to take the cost of the diets into account:

- when they decide whether you are eligible for income assistance, and
- when they calculate the amount of your assistance. The amount depends on the medical condition.

To apply for a special diet, you must use a form provided by the OW office. Ask the OW worker for the special diet application form.

This form must be completed by one of the following health professionals who is licensed to practice in Ontario:

- a doctor,
- a dietitian,
- a registered nurse in the extended class. This kind of nurse is sometimes called a nurse practitioner.

A midwife can complete the form for:

- a woman who is pregnant or breast-feeding, or
- an infant.

The health professional must name the medical condition and say how long the special diet will be needed.

To find out which medical conditions qualify or for other information on this topic, [contact your community legal clinic](#) (see page 20).



What if Ontario Works will not accept my application?

OW cannot legally refuse to take your application. If this happens, ask to speak to a supervisor and insist that they take your application. If there is still a problem, [contact your community legal clinic](#) immediately (see page 20).

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



What if I do not have a permanent address?

You should not be refused assistance just because you do not have a permanent address. Go ahead and apply.

If you know you can get a certain room or apartment when you have the rent money, get a note signed by the landlord and take it to OW. The note should say:

- the address of the place you want to rent,
- how much the rent is,
- if you have to pay for heat or other utilities,
- if you have to pay the last month's rent up front,
- the landlord's name and phone number, and
- that the landlord is prepared to rent the room or apartment to you.

The OW office might have a form that you can give to the landlord to fill out instead of asking for a signed a note.



Can I bring someone with me when I am dealing with Ontario Works?

Yes. You have the right to bring a person of your choice with you. For example, you could choose to bring a relative, a friend, or someone from a community group or legal clinic.

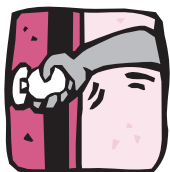
Keep in mind that you will be asked to sign documents and to provide information that will determine whether you are eligible for financial assistance. It is important that you understand clearly what you are signing and what the worker tells you. If you need more time or help to understand the documents, ask for copies to take away and read before you sign.

If you need an interpreter, ask the OW office. Some OW offices provide interpreters. Otherwise you should make arrangements to bring one. Contact your local community information centre for help to find a qualified interpreter.

Your spouse who lives with you should come to the interview because he or she

will have to sign documents to complete your application. Someone of the same or opposite sex can be considered your spouse, whether or not you are legally married to one another.

Living with a spouse can affect your eligibility for assistance. So you may want to get legal advice about whether OW might consider someone in your household to be your spouse. To find out [how to get legal help](#), see page 20.



Can an OW worker come to my home without letting me know ahead of time?

An OW worker can decide to do a home visit with or without giving you notice. Home visits should happen only during the OW office's normal business hours.

The OW worker cannot enter your home without your permission. But if you refuse a home visit without a valid reason, OW will refuse to give you assistance.

If you have a valid reason to refuse a home visit, the visit can be set for another time.

Here are some examples of a valid reason:

- you or someone in your home is ill,
- you have visitors in your home and you want to keep your application for OW private,
- the visit interferes with religious observance or practices, such as religious holidays, prayers, or rituals.

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

Forms to fill out and sign

You, and your spouse who lives with you, will have to fill out and sign the following forms before your application will be considered complete:

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

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



What is the Participation Agreement?

The Participation Agreement lists activities that you have to do to get financial assistance, for example, a job search or workfare placement. You and an OW worker are expected to agree on activities that will help you prepare for and get a job as soon as possible.

Participation Agreements **must** be completed by you and your spouse. Other adult members of your family can also be required to sign a Participation Agreement.

It is very important that you understand what you are agreeing to do before you sign. You are expected to do what you agree to. If you do not, your assistance could be refused, cut off, or reduced.

If you find that you cannot do what you agreed to do, **you can ask to have the Participation Agreement changed.** Changes must be negotiated with OW, and each change should be put down in writing.

We have another pamphlet called "**Participation Agreements and your Ontario Works benefits**" that gives more details. To find out how to order it, turn to the back cover. Our pamphlets are also available on our web site at <www.cleo.on.ca>.

What is the Consent to Disclose and Verify Information?

The Consent to Disclose and Verify Information is a form that allows OW to check the information that you provide.

You should only have to consent to the release of information that is needed for your application. If you are asked to consent to the release of information that you think is not necessary for your application, [contact your community legal clinic](#) (see page 20).

What is the Rights and Responsibilities Form?

This form describes what you can and cannot do while you are getting OW financial assistance. You must sign it. Ask the OW worker to go over this form with you.



What can I do if Ontario Works refuses to give me financial assistance?

You can appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT). The SBT is independent from OW and it has the power to make a different decision.

But first you must **write** to the OW office and ask for an “**internal review**”. An internal review means that a different person in the local OW office reviews the original decision and decides whether or not to change it.

On the next few pages we give basic information about internal reviews, appeals, and the time limits that apply to

them. For more details, see our pamphlet called “[Appeals and Internal Reviews](#)”. In it you will also find a [blank form letter](#) that you can use to request an internal review. Turn to the back cover to find out how to [order the pamphlet](#). It is also available on our web site at <www.cleo.on.ca>.

Ask OW for an internal review

Your request must be made **in writing**. You must ask for an internal review within **10 days** from the date you receive OW’s decision to refuse you assistance. If the decision is mailed to you, you may have less than 10 days.

Note about mail

The OW rules assume that if a letter is mailed to you, you receive it **3 days** after it is mailed. So, if the decision letter that says you are not eligible for financial assistance is mailed to you, you have **13 days from the mailing date** (3 days plus 10 days) to request an internal review.

The mailing date should be stamped on the envelope by Canada Post. It might not be the same as the date on the letter, so keep both the letter and the envelope.

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

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

Appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal

If you get an internal review decision within the 10 days, and it says that you are still refused assistance, you have **30 days** from the date of this decision to file an appeal with the SBT.

If you do not get an internal review decision within the 10 days, you can go

ahead and appeal the original decision to the SBT. Your appeal must be filed within **40 days** of your request for an internal review.

If you miss the time limit for appealing, file an appeal anyway. In the appeal form, ask the SBT for more time and explain why you missed the time limit.

Apply to the SBT for interim assistance

You may be able to get assistance while you wait for your appeal to be decided. This is known as “interim” assistance. The Application for Interim Assistance is part of the SBT appeal form. If the SBT orders it, the OW office will have to pay assistance until your appeal is decided.

If you lose your appeal, or you do not go to your hearing, you will have to pay back the interim assistance.



Getting legal help

For advice or help dealing with OW or filing an appeal, contact your community legal clinic, the local Legal Aid office, or a lawyer.

There are a few ways to find the nearest community legal clinic or local Legal Aid office:

- Try looking in your phone book under “Legal Aid” or “Lawyers”.
- Check Legal Aid Ontario’s web site at <www.legalaid.on.ca/en/locate>.
- Or phone Legal Aid Ontario at:
Toll-free **1-800-668-8258**
Toll-free TTY..... **1-866-641-8867**
In Toronto..... **416-979-1446**
TTY in Toronto **416-598-8867**

The law can change, and policies and practices can also change or vary. This pamphlet contains general information. It is not a substitute for getting legal advice about your particular situation.

Produced by:

CLEO (Community Legal Education Ontario /
Éducation juridique communautaire Ontario)

With funding from:

Legal Aid Ontario
Department of Justice Canada

This pamphlet is part of CLEO's series on Social Assistance. Thanks to the Steering Committee on Social Assistance for their collaboration on this series. CLEO has free publications on other legal topics as well.

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