

Social Assistance

Under 18 and on your own:

Getting social assistance



Are you...

- 16 or 17 years old?
- not living at home?

If you need money to live on, you may be able to get social assistance from the Ontario Works program.

This type of assistance is meant to help you with your day-to-day needs. It helps pay for things like rent, food, clothing, and prescription drugs. Some people call it “welfare”.

There are rules about who can get it and what you must do to keep getting it.





Can I get social assistance if I am under 18?

If you are under 16 years old, single, and not supporting any children, you are not eligible for social assistance.

If you are 16 or 17 years old, you can get assistance from Ontario Works (OW) only “under special circumstances”.

You might have to show that your parents will not let you live at home, or that it is harmful for you to live there. For example, you might be able to get assistance if your parents are abusing you physically or emotionally.

However, the OW worker must be sure that your parents cannot or will not support you financially.

Your living arrangements must allow you to meet OW rules. Some OW offices may say that you must be living in a room and board situation, which means that you have a room in someone’s house and that person provides your meals. But this is not what the law requires in order for you to get benefits. So, if the OW office says

they will give you benefits only if you are living in a room and board situation, contact a community legal clinic for help. See [page 16](#) to find out how to get help.

OW can require you to go to family counselling if your parents agree to participate.

You must go to school or a training program approved by OW, unless a serious medical condition or other problem makes this impossible.

These rules apply to you even if you are a 16- or 17-year-old single parent. If you are a parent, you will have to participate in a program approved by OW that will help you complete high school, develop job skills, or increase your parenting skills.



How do I get social assistance?

Contact your local OW office to apply. To find the location and phone number, look in the government section of the phone book under “Ontario Works” or “Social Services”.

You can also check the Ministry of Community and Social Services’ web site at <www.cfcs.gov.on.ca>.

You will have to go to the local OW office for an interview with a worker. If it is difficult for you to get to the OW office, you can ask to have the interview where you live or at another place that is better for you.

An OW worker will ask you for information to show that you qualify for assistance. You will also have to complete and sign the forms that OW requires.

- ! It is important to complete your application so that you can get OW’s decision in writing. Only then can you go on to appeal if OW refuses you assistance.

When you go to the OW office, bring:

- any documents that relate to your application,
- at least one piece of identification, if possible, and
- a document that proves you are in school or a training program.

You should tell the OW worker if you need a special diet because of a medical condition. OW may have to take this into account when they decide if you are eligible and calculate the amount of your assistance.

To find out which medical conditions qualify or to get more information on special diets, you can contact your community legal clinic ([see page 16](#)).

The OW worker might want to see where you live. If you do not allow the visit, OW could refuse to give you assistance.



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 16](#)).

Will my parents have to be involved?

The OW worker will probably contact your parents. If your parents have physically abused you or are a threat to your safety, they should not be contacted. If you have any reason to fear your parents, tell the worker.

If your parents say they are willing to let you live with them, you have to show why this is not a good idea. If you can, get a letter from a social worker, a counsellor, or another adult (like a friend's parent) explaining why you should not live at home.

The OW worker might insist on a family assessment before deciding whether you can get assistance. If you are afraid that contact with your parents will place you in danger, tell the worker. If you have reason to be afraid, you and your parents can be seen separately.



What kind of assistance will I get?

If you **do** qualify for assistance, you will get a monthly allowance. The amount you get is supposed to pay for housing, food, clothing, and other basic expenses. If you need prescription drugs you will only have to pay \$2 for each prescription. Some drug stores do not ask you to pay this fee.

- ! OW will not pay any money to you directly. They will pay your assistance to a "trustee" that they appoint. The trustee could be an adult or a community agency. If you do not have an adult who could act as your trustee, ask the OW worker about other options.

You might also be able to get a Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit, to help you with the cost of setting up a new place to live. You can spend this money on a last month's rent deposit, or on furniture or clothes. Ask an OW worker for details.

Even if you do not have a permanent address — for example, if you live in a hostel — you might be able to get money for personal needs.

Will I be expected to get money from my parents?

Maybe. Parents are usually expected to support their children until they turn 18. The OW worker might ask you to go to court to get financial help from your parents.

If you are asked to take your parents to court, contact Legal Aid Ontario, a community legal clinic, or a lawyer for advice ([see page 16](#)).

If you have a child of your own, you might also be expected to ask your child's other parent for support. Contact a community legal clinic or a lawyer for information or advice about your situation.



Can OW cut off my assistance?

Yes. OW can cut off your assistance if you do not attend school or a training program. But your assistance should **not** be cut off if you did not attend because:

- you need medical treatment that makes it impossible for you to attend school or the training program, and you have a doctor's note stating this,
- you are denied admission for reasons beyond your control, or
- you have a child you are looking after and there is no child care available.

Each absence from your school or training program has to be justified. Absence due to illness is justified only if the school or training program excuses you from attendance because of illness. If the school

or training program is closed for the day, your absence is beyond your control, so it is justified. But if you are suspended or expelled, you will probably be cut off.

- ! If you think the decision to suspend or expel you was unfair, get legal advice. You may be able to appeal the decision. [See page 16](#) to find out how to get legal help.

OW can require you to look for a job or to participate in a community placement if:

- you are waiting to get into a school or training program, or
- you are out of school for summer vacation.

If you do not, they could cut off your assistance.

OW may also cut off your assistance if the worker decides you have to go for family counselling and you refuse.

OW can also require you to stay in contact with an agency or a responsible adult who has agreed to help you meet the OW rules and to report you if you do not. They

might even expect you to live with this person. Again, if you refuse, they could cut off your assistance. But, they should not refuse or cut off assistance just because there is **no** responsible adult in your life.

If you are living with someone of the same or opposite sex, and this person is your spouse, you will not be eligible for assistance on your own. But the two of you might be eligible as a couple. Contact a community legal clinic or a lawyer for information or advice about your situation ([see page 16](#)).



What can I do if Ontario Works refuses to give me assistance or cuts me off?

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 or cut off 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 refused or cut off 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.

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

Appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal

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

If you do not get an internal review decision within the 10 days, you can go ahead and appeal the original decision to the SBT. Your appeal must be filed within **40 days** of your request for an internal review.

If you miss the time limit for appealing, you can ask the SBT for more time. You will have to explain why you missed the time limit.

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 a community legal clinic, your local Legal Aid office, or a lawyer.

You can usually find the community legal clinic nearest you by looking under “Legal Aid” or “Lawyers” in your phone book. You can also check Legal Aid Ontario’s web site at <www.legalaid.on.ca> or phone them:

Outside Toronto..... **1-800-668-8258**

In Toronto **416-979-1446**

TTY outside Toronto **1-866-641-8867**

TTY in Toronto..... **416-598-8867**

Justice for Children and Youth is a legal clinic that specializes in issues faced by young people who are aged 17 and under. They are located at:

415 Yonge Street, Suite 1203
just south of College Street, in Toronto.

You can phone them at **1-866-999-5329**.
In Toronto call **416-920-1633**.

Their web site is at <www.jfcy.org>.

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

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