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Date December 2, 2020 **Report No.** 2020-496

To Chair and Members
Social Services Committee

From Aaron Wallace, Acting General Manager
Community Services and Social Development

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Item For Consideration	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.0 Topic Discretionary Benefits [Financial Impact - None]

3.0 Recommendation

THAT Report 2020-496 Discretionary Benefits Update BE RECEIVED.

4.0 Purpose and Overview

This report provides an update on the criteria and use of provincially funded mandatory benefits, provincially funded discretionary benefits, and municipally funded discretionary benefits.

5.0 Background

The City of Brantford is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for Ontario Works, Housing and Homelessness and Children's Services. These programs are jointly funded by the Province of Ontario, City of Brantford and County of Brant. The City fulfills the joint roles of Service System Manager (planning, oversight) and Service Delivery Partner (assessing recipient eligibility,

direct delivery of programs and services). As a Service Delivery Partner, all provincial programs are delivered subject to provincial guidelines and governed by Accountability Agreements. As such, how services are delivered is influenced significantly by the direction set by the Province.

In 2019, Council approved the KPMG City of Brantford Service Review Report (Report No. [2019-750](#)) which identified discretionary benefits as an opportunity for review, and staff committed to bringing a summary report outlining the parameters for the criteria and use of discretionary benefits (Report No. [2020-34](#)).

6.0 Corporate Policy Context

6.1 High Quality of Life and Caring for All Citizens

Brantford will be recognized as a safe and healthy community – one that promotes and enables the well-being of its citizens and supports access for all citizens to a full range of health and community services.

7.0 Input from Other Sources

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

8.0 Analysis

8.1 Provincially Funded Benefits

8.1.1 Mandatory Benefits

The City of Brantford oversees the delivery of the Ontario Works (OW) program for residents of Brantford and the County of Brant. OW is a provincially funded program that provides financial assistance to eligible clients. To be eligible for OW, a person must:

- Be a resident of Ontario,
- Have budgetary requirements that exceed their income and have assets that do not exceed the limits prescribed in the regulations,
- Provide information which is verified according to the regulations,
- Agree to participate in employment assistance activities that will help lead to sustainable employment,

- And meet any other conditions prescribed in the regulations.

Under *Ontario Works Directives 7.1*, the basic financial assistance provided under OW includes mandatory benefits, which are 100% funded by the province with no cap, meaning that they do not impact municipal legislated cost sharing, budgets, or expenses. Issuance of these benefits by the municipality is required by Ontario Works legislation (The Ontario Works Act, 1997 and O.Reg 134/98).

Provincially funded mandatory benefits are provided to all eligible OW recipients and/or members of their benefit unit and include items such as:

- Drug coverage,
- Dental and vision care,
- Eye examinations,
- Employment-related supports
- Other as approved by the Director of Ontario Works.

8.1.2 Discretionary Benefits

MCCSS has also provided 100% funding to pay for items on a case-by-case basis for persons receiving Ontario Works and ODSP.

Discretionary benefits are 100% provincially funded to a maximum cost sharable amount. In 2019, the provincial allocation to the City of Brantford for discretionary benefit expenditures, net of recoveries, totalled \$796,912.

Although Ontario Works legislation provides a list of items that may be funded through discretionary benefits, the local Ontario Works office has considerably more flexibility in which items to cover as compared with mandatory benefits. However, since any spending within the annual cap is 100% provincially funded, there is no municipal benefit to reducing or eliminating the discretionary benefit program. Staff works diligently with vendors to ensure the cost of services and benefits are as low as possible, so as to maximize the benefits available to clients.

Ontario Works discretionary benefits provide important health and quality of life supports to residents that are living on extremely low social assistance rates. For example, there are currently no universal federal or provincial programs for essential dental work and dentures.

In 2019, the following discretionary benefits, net of recoveries were allocated using 100% provincial funds:

- Dental Services – 37.42% \$298,236
- Funerals – 35.86% \$285,794
- Other Health Related Benefits – 23.58% \$187,906
- Prosthetic Appliances – 2.71% \$21,588
- Other – 0.43% \$3,388

Staff recently undertook an analysis of selected municipalities to identify how Brantford's current discretionary program compares.¹ Excluding funerals, for which a review was completed in 2019, the individual items which comprise the highest spend in the discretionary category were reviewed. The results of this analysis in Table 1 identify areas for further review for cost savings related to orthotics and prosthesis as well as potential service improvements for clients seeking assistance with dentures and emergency dental care. Emergency dental in particular requires urgent review as 20-year-old rates are still being used.

Municipal Comparator of Discretionary Benefit Items

Item	Low \$	Average \$	High \$
Dentures (complete set)	<i>Maximum up to \$1,000</i>	<i>Maximum between \$1,001-\$1,500</i>	<i>Maximum between \$1,501-\$3,000</i>
	<div>Brantford</div> <div>Lanark</div> <div>Dufferin</div> <div>Simcoe</div> <div>Chatham-Kent</div> <div>Timiskaming</div> <div>Kawartha Lakes</div> <div>Timiskaming</div> <div>London</div> <div>Peterborough</div> <div>St. Thomas</div>	<div>County of Grey</div> <div>Northumberland</div> <div>Wellington</div> <div>Windsor</div>	<div>Leeds & Grenville</div>

¹ Due to the variability in items funded, not all municipalities will appear in each chart.

Item	Low \$	Average \$	High \$
Niagara			
Emergency Dental	<i>1990-2000 ODA or Up to \$400 Per Year</i>	<i>2001-2014 ODA or \$401-\$999 Per Year</i>	<i>2015-2020 ODA or +\$1,000 Per Year</i>
	Brantford Niagara Timiskaming Kenora Simcoe Leeds & Grenville	Peel Lanark Dufferin Ottawa	York Chatham Kent Halton Northumberland County of Grey Wellington
Orthotics	<i>Not Issued</i>	<i>Maximum \$500 Every 3-5 Years</i>	<i>Maximum \$500 every 1-2 Years</i>
	Ottawa Leeds & Grenville Peel Timiskaming	London St. Thomas Toronto Lanark (\$250) Simcoe Wellington	Brantford York Niagara County of Grey
Prosthesis	<i>Maximum \$1000 Per Item or Per Year</i>	<i>\$1,000-\$2000 Maximum Per Item or Per Year</i>	<i>No Maximum/Actual Cost Per Item or Per Year</i>
	Peterborough Dufferin County of Grey County of Lanark Simcoe Niagara London	Kenora Halton	Brantford Ottawa Leeds & Grenville County of Northumberland Wellington Ottawa

Table 1-Municipal Comparator of Discretionary Benefit Items

8.2 Municipally Funded Benefits

The City of Brantford provides municipally funded discretionary benefits to support low-income residents who fall outside of the eligibility criteria for the provincially funded social assistance programs, referred to as Non-Social Assistance Recipients (Non-SARS) clients. The intention of this program is to provide for urgent health-related items for members of the community that are low income and not covered by an employer or other benefit plan. The number of items covered is limited to essential health requirements.

The cost of these municipally funded discretionary benefits (called Special Payments) is reviewed annually as part of the municipal budget process, and thus varies year to year. In 2020, \$30,000 in municipal funding, cost shared between the City of Brantford and County of Brant at the established ratio, was allocated to discretionary Special Payments. As of October 2020, at least 50% of the allocated funding for special payments has been issued. The types of benefits issued include:

- Emergency Dental Benefits,
- Dentures Benefits,
- Prescription Medication,
- Vision Care Benefits.

Additionally, discretionary funds for Assisted Funeral and Burial Services for low income (Non-SARS) residents are also reviewed annually as part of the municipal budgeting process. In March 2020, staff provided a report to Council addressing the associated costs with providing these municipally funded funeral services (Report No. 2020-121).

Table 2 summarizes the inclusions within each of the Non-SARS, ODSP and OW discretionary programs.

Discretionary Benefits-Program Inclusions

	Program		
	Non-SARS	ODSP	OW
Annual Funding	\$30,000	\$10 per ODSP Case	\$10 Per OW Case
Funding Source	Municipal	Provincial	Provincial
Inclusions:			
Emergency Dental	✓	✓	✓
Dentures	✓	✓	✓
Emergency Prescription Drugs	✓	✓	✓
Vision Care	✓	✓	✓
Funerals	✓	✓	✓
Air Conditioner		✓	✓
Breast Pump		✓	✓
Car Seat		✓	✓
Crib & Mattress		✓	✓
Prosthesis		✓	✓
Orthotics & Orthopaedic Shoes		✓	✓
Wigs and Mastectomy Bra		✓	✓
Walker		✓	✓
Bathroom Aids (i.e. grab bar, stools, etc.)			✓
Braces (back, knee, wrist)			✓
Canes			✓
Crutches			✓
Casts & Splints			✓
Hearing Aid Repairs			✓
Lice Treatment			✓

Table 2-Discretionary Benefits-Program Inclusions

9.0 Financial Implications

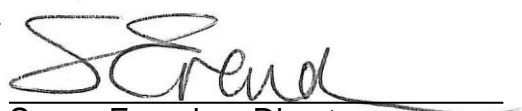
There are no financial implications associated with this report.

10.0 Conclusion


As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the City of Brantford and the County of Brant, the City is responsible for administering financial assistance to eligible recipients. This financial assistance includes the administration of mandatory benefits, funded 100% by the province, and discretionary benefits, 100% of which are funded by the province up to a cost sharable amount of \$10 per case. The City of Brantford also administers 100% municipally funded discretionary benefits to support low-income residents that are not eligible for social assistance (Non-SARS clients). These benefits are not mandated and are reviewed annually as part of the municipal budget process.

With the completion of the Assisted Funeral Review and resulting projected cost savings as outlined in Report 202-544 Assisted Funerals and Burials update, it will be possible to reallocate funding within the discretionary program in 2021.

As a next step, staff will review items covered under the City's current Discretionary program and provide a revision to the program by Quarter 3, 2021.



Susan Evenden, Director
Family and Income Stability



Aaron Wallace, Acting General Manager
Community Services and Social
Development

Attachments (if applicable)

N/A

Copy to:

N/A

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required ☐ yes ☒ no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk ☐ yes ☒ no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? ☐ yes ☒ no