



Request for Proposals
Research Data Centre Program
Statistics Canada
Ontario Social Assistance Data -- Pilot Project
Fall, 2014

To increase the accessibility of Ontario Social Assistance Data, the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (Ministry), in conjunction with Statistics Canada's Research Data Centres (RDCs), is conducting a 24-month pilot project. Researchers with approved projects will be able to access the data, via the RDCs, for the Ontario Works Program or the Ontario Disability Support Program beginning in November 2014. While offering academic researchers greater access to the Ontario Income Support data, this pilot project will also help Statistics Canada and the Ministry evaluate whether the RDC program is a viable model for accessing ministry data for academic researchers, which will in turn provide the ministry with relevant research for evidence based policy decisions.

The Ontario Social Assistance programs provide income and employment support to single adults and families who are in financial need. There are two social assistance programs:

- Ontario Works provides financial and employment assistance to help people move towards paid employment and independence
- Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) provides financial assistance and employment support to enable people with disabilities and their families to live as independently as possible in their communities

Both programs are legislated entitlement programs; everyone who meets the eligibility criteria is entitled to a prescribed amount of assistance. To qualify for Ontario Works or ODSP, an applicant must meet the financial and asset tests of either respective program, reside in Ontario, live in the geographic area where they apply for assistance, and are legally residing in Canada. In addition, an Ontario Works applicant must agree to participate in employment and employment assistance activities, while an ODSP applicant must meet the definition of a person with a disability as defined by the ODSP Act, 1998, (ODSP Act) or be a member of a "prescribed class".¹ Unless the requirement is deferred or waived, spouses and dependent adults on Ontario Works as well as non-disabled spouses and dependent adults on ODSP must also agree to participate in employment and employment assistance activities as a condition of ongoing eligibility.

In both Ontario Works and ODSP, monthly financial assistance is paid to family units or households, known as "benefit units". A benefit unit consists of an applicant and all of their dependents that reside

¹ Individuals in a "prescribed class" do not have to undergo disability adjudication. Prescribed classes include:

- i. People in receipt of disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan and the Quebec Pension Plan;
- ii. People who are 65 years old and not eligible for Old Age Security;
- iii. People who reside in a psychiatric hospital, facility under the Developmental Services Act or in a home under the Homes for Special Care Act;
- iv. People who were receiving Family Benefits and were grand-parented into ODSP when the Act was proclaimed on June 1, 1998;
- v. Residents of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in the City of Toronto and the Homewood Health Centre in the City of Guelph; and,
- vi. Former residents of a facility that is designated under the Developmental Services Act who ceased to be residents of that facility on or after June 1, 1998.

with them (i.e., everyone is a “member” of the benefit unit). Generally speaking, family types include single persons, with or without children; and, couples, with or without children. In ODSP, a “double disabled” couple refers to a household where the applicant and his/her spouse is a person with a disability as defined by the ODSP Act or a member of a prescribed class.

In addition to monthly payments, both programs provide a range of supplementary cash and in-kind benefits (e.g., prescription drug coverage).

The Ontario social assistance policy directives can be accessed through the following link:

<http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/programs/social/directives/index.aspx>

The data provided by the Ministry as part of this pilot project will include de-identified Ontario income support microdata for the period 2003 to 2013. Researchers will have access to this information through 5 separate files:

- benefit unit (family) information
- member information
- pay detail (benefit) information
- income/deduction information
- skills information

Researchers will also have access to monthly time-series data on Ontario Works and ODSP provincial caseloads from 1990 to 2013.

The Ministry is primarily interested in research whose results and findings would enhance its understanding of disability, incentives to work and employment outcomes, thereby enabling it to make better informed and more evidence-based policy and program decisions.

Research papers/studies that include the following types of analyses or results presentation are of particular interest:

- studies involving the production of basic tabular outputs (e.g., frequencies, means, ratios), including supplemental tables (to produce graphical outputs or support covariance matrices)
- studies that incorporate one or more of the following:
 - low level geographical analysis
 - analysis using specific ages or age groups
 - analysis of benefit unit composition
 - analysis of type of income (other than earned income)
 - analysis of duration on social assistance
 - analysis using particular variables, for example:; immigration status, mental health, education, housing/accommodation, gender, marital status, addiction/substance abuse

Researchers will also be welcome to share their feedback regarding the quality of the data and the level of documentation provided.

Researchers are invited to submit proposals for consideration by **September 25, 2014**. The submitted research proposals will be assessed based on the research areas of interest as well as the proposed types of analysis and results presentation, including the viability of the proposed research. The proposals that are better aligned with the above described research areas of interest, types of analysis and results presentation will receive more favorable consideration.

All researchers will be notified by **November 7, 2014**. The researchers whose proposals have been accepted will be able to access the data by late November. Researchers will be welcome to present their results to the Ministry through the Ministry's knowledge mobilization activities.

Because this is a pilot project, we will be testing the robustness of the vetting rules. Therefore, vetting could be delayed. Researchers should bear this in mind when considering the appropriateness of this pilot project and any potential impact on the timely completion of their own work.

Proposals should be submitted by September 25, 2014 to:

Donna Dosman, Chief

Research Data Centre Program

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