

# 2005

## The Matthews' Report

As Deb Matthews undertakes a review of OW and ODSP employment supports, ISAC works with groups across the province to prepare for and host community conversations.

The report, issued in December 2004, says "the system relies far too much on sanctions and prohibitions as its guiding principles and, in many ways, actually inhibits people from moving toward social and economic independence."

In response, ISAC issues a detailed analysis of the report's recommendations in 2005, noting that "our long-term goal is not just social assistance reform, but rather, the eradication of poverty".



December 1, 2004

### Matthews' Report Says Workfare Fails Families Removing Barriers And Disincentives To Employment Is A "Must Do"

TORONTO – A new provincial government report on Ontario's welfare system says that current social assistance programs are not doing enough to help people get back in to the workforce.

Minister of Community and Social Services Sandra Pupatello released the report today that summarizes the findings of discussions Parliamentary Assistant Deb Matthews held with clients, community organizations and municipalities in the spring and summer of 2004. The results call for the removal of barriers and disincentives to employment and greater emphasis on meeting the individual needs of clients to help them find and keep meaningful jobs.

"The previous government's much touted program doesn't help families get back into the workforce," said Pupatello. "What we really need is an ongoing, individualized approach to helping people access training and find jobs, so that they can leave welfare for good."

Matthews' discussions looked at what kind of supports people on social assistance need to permanently move back into the workforce, and where things are not working currently. Overall, the findings demonstrate that clients need a wider range of individual supports as they transition to employment and that program rules need to be simplified and punitive policies eliminated.

"The bottom line is that a one-size-fits-all approach to getting people working simply doesn't cut it anymore," said Matthews. "We cannot continue to invest taxpayer dollars in programs and services that don't deliver the kind of results we want to see. It's time we all admit that the system needs to change and we need to find new, innovative ways to helping people on social assistance fulfil their potential."



## Hands Off! Campaign

ISAC launches the campaign that puts it on the political map. The Hands Off! Campaign targets the Premier for taking the National Child Benefit Supplement from children on social assistance.

Over two years, 80,000 postcards come into the Premier's Office from across the province and regular media coverage keeps the issue in the news. Hundreds of clinics and organizations lobby their MPPs while ISAC meets with the Premier's Office and ministry officials.

Public support grows and political pressure mounts - eventually resulting in the creation of a new Ontario Child Benefit for low income families with children.

## Special Diet Allowance

ISAC works with the ODSP Action Coalition and clinics across the province to let people on OW and ODSP know about the Special Diet Allowance program.

After government makes changes to the program that restrict eligibility, ISAC works with the Coalition and communities to respond.

Public education materials are created and circulated to inform people of the changes and what they can do to fight back.

Special Diet dominates  
ISAC's work for the  
next six years.



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### What you need to know: Special Diets Allowance



#### What is the Special Diets Allowance?

The Special Diets Allowance is an entitlement which any adult or child on social assistance can receive if an approved health professional submits a form or letter outlining their special dietary needs. Only a doctor, registered nurse (extended class) or registered dietitian can certify and sign the form. For pregnancy, breastfeeding and infant formula diets a registered midwife can also provide the certification and signature required.

Eligible applicants could receive a maximum of \$250 per month (with an additional \$40-\$50 for pregnancy diets). For information on how to apply, see the ODSP Action Coalition's Special Diet pamphlet included in this package or available at [www.odspaction.ca](http://www.odspaction.ca).

#### Why don't more people get the Special Diets Allowance?

Many people on OW and ODSP are not aware of the Special Diets Allowance or that they may be eligible. The benefit is not publicized in most local OW and ODSP offices and some workers appear to be unaware of it. Sometimes workers also tell clients special diet is only for those with serious medical conditions. However it is up to health professionals, not workers, to decide when a person needs to have a special diet.

Even when people are aware of their eligibility, it is often difficult to find a health professional to fill out the form adequately. In rural areas, many people may not have a family doctor or see a medical practitioner often enough to accurately assess their medical needs. In other instances, doctors are not aware of the range of dietary items that can be covered and so people get less than the amount they may be entitled to.

#### What's being done?

##### ODSP Action Coalition

The ODSP Action Coalition is a province-wide advocacy group that works with people on ODSP to push for changes to ODSP policies so that people with disabilities can live with respect and dignity. The Coalition has created a comprehensive special diets package to assist medical practitioners, legal clinics and community groups to organize special diet clinics or work with people on OW/ODSP to complete the Special Diets Application. The package, as well as additional information on the ODSP Action Coalition, can be downloaded at [www.odspaction.ca](http://www.odspaction.ca).

##### Legal Clinics

Over the last several years, legal clinics across the province have helped as many people on OW and ODSP as possible to apply for the Special Diets Allowance. Legal clinics have also successfully challenged cases where people have been refused or did not get the amount they were eligible for. In almost every case, people received the additional money. To find the legal clinic nearest you: [www.legallaid.on.ca/en/area.asp](http://www.legallaid.on.ca/en/area.asp) or call toll-free: 1-800-668-8258.