

Before you Sign

Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works

Welcome to the Before You Sign podcast. This podcast was made to help you better know your legal rights in the province of Ontario. If you know your rights and responsibilities, you will be able to make choices that impact your life in Canada. It is important to know these podcasts are not legal advice for your situation, they give information about general legal topics that apply to your situation.

If you still have questions about this topic please consider going back to the service or agency who told you about these podcasts. If you have access to a computer, you can also go to stepstojustice.ca or settlement.org for more information. If you already know you need legal advice, support or representation please call Legal Aid Ontario at [1-800-668-8258](tel:1-800-668-8258) Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (EST) for help in over 300 languages. This podcast is financially supported by The Law Foundation of Ontario, the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin is solely responsible for the content.

Today we will be talking about two different government social programs offered in Ontario. We will discuss the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works.

We will start with Ontario Works, also called OW, which helps you if you are in financial need and offers both financial and employment support. In most cases, you must agree to join in employment assistance activities in order to receive financial help. Emergency help is also available if you are in a difficult situation. For example, you have lost your home, are leaving an abusive relationship, or are worried about your safety.

To get Ontario Works you must live in Ontario and be in financial need. This means your household doesn't have enough money to meet your basic living expenses. You must also try to find and keep a job unless you have reasons that temporarily stop you from doing so such as an illness or caregiving responsibilities. If there is more than one unemployed adult in your household, they too must agree to join in employment support activities.

You can start the application process either online, by phone, or in person. You can visit www.mcass.gov.on.ca to find the Ontario Works office in your area. Once you've started the process, an Ontario Works caseworker will contact you to schedule an in-person meeting. You will be asked to bring specific documents to this meeting so the caseworker can confirm your personal information, information about members of your household, your household's financial needs, your household's income, and what assets you own. An example of some of the information you will need to bring for all those living in your household would be name and dates of birth, address, immigration status, income, assets like cars or savings accounts, and housing costs. You can get this information to Ontario Works by coming to your meeting with documents like your birth

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certificate or passport, your last income tax return, pay stubs from your employer, receipts from your landlord if you rent your housing, and bank statements that show your accounts.

During your meeting, you will be asked to sign several forms, including a consent form. Signing this form means you are giving the Ontario Works office permission to gather information about you from other government programs or organizations like the Ministry of Transportation, Employment Insurance, or credit agencies like Equifax Canada.

The Ontario Works office will use the information you provide, along with the information from other organizations, to see if you qualify for assistance. If you completed the application and provided all the information they requested, a decision will be made within four business days from when you first contacted the office. If you are turned down, there is the right to appeal the decision and you should contact your local Community Legal Clinic for help.

The next topic is the Ontario Disability Support Program, also known as ODSP, which provides financial support to people with disabilities. To get support from ODSP you must qualify financially and medically; therefore, you do not make enough income and have little in the way of assets, and a medical professional has deemed you to have a qualifying disability. If you meet these two areas, you can receive ODSP funding to help you and your family with basic living expenses. When you are part of this program you may also get help finding and keeping a job if appropriate. You will get medical benefits for you and your family that includes some prescription drugs, dental benefits and eyeglasses.

To start the application process you must contact the local ODSP office in your area or apply online at www.mcass.gov.on.ca. If you are receiving Ontario Works, your OW caseworker will help you to get the application. If you are not receiving OW, after you start your application, an ODSP office will contact you within 5 days to set an appointment to help with your application. If ODSP decides that you qualify financially, you'll get a Disability Determination Package from them. This package includes four forms: Health Status Report, Activities of Daily Living Index, Consent to Release Medical Information, and a Self-Report. To prove you are a person with a disability, you must complete and submit copies of these forms. To meet the ODSP definition of a "person with a disability", you need a health professional, such as a doctor, to confirm that you have a substantial physical or mental health problem that is expected to last a year or more. The doctor will also confirm the fact that your health problem substantially affects your ability to work, care for yourself, or do daily activities at home or in the community. It can be a health problem that you have all the time or one that sometimes goes away but then comes back. It can be one health problem, or it can be many different problems that together limit your abilities.

The Disability Adjudication Unit looks at your application and forms you submitted in the Disability Determination Package. The Adjudication Unit decides if you meet the ODSP definition of a person with a disability using the information they received from you and your health professional's submitted forms; they do not interview you or give you a medical examination.

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The application and review process can take months to complete. If you are turned down, there is the right to appeal the decision and you should contact your local Community Legal Clinic for help. If you have financial problems you need help with right away, reach out to your local Ontario Works office for Social Assistance funding.

We hope you have found this podcast a good source of some basic information as it relates to the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works.