

STREET LAW SMARTS #4

Ontario Works & ODSP

In Ontario there are two basic types of social assistance (welfare): Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). OW provides income and employment assistance to people in temporary financial need while ODSP provides income and employment assistance to eligible people with disabilities.

There are two parts to welfare: shelter allowance and personal needs (or living) allowance. If you are living in a shelter, you will only get the personal needs allowance.

OW and ODSP

For OW, you can apply by telephone. In Toronto, the number is 1-888-465-4478.

For ODSP, you can apply at your local Ministry of Community and Social Services office. To apply online or find your office, go to:

<http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/social/odsp/>

OW and ODSP when 18 year olds and older

If you are 18 or older, you have a right to apply for social assistance, and should insist on proceeding with the application process even if the intake worker says you will not qualify. If they will not let you apply, tell them right away that you do not agree.

OW workers are not allowed to refuse to take your application. If you do not apply, then you cannot appeal the decision to say that you were wrongfully denied social assistance.

If a person applying recently held employment and quit their job without reasonable grounds, or was fired with cause, they may still apply for social assistance but may be subject to a three month or six month waiting period penalty.

You may qualify for ODSP if:

- you have physical or mental health problems which affect your ability to work or function within the community; **OR**
- you have physical or mental health problems which affect your ability to care for yourself; **AND**
- this problem will likely last longer than one year.

You may also qualify if you live in a psychiatric or developmental institution or housing. In the short term, if you need funds, you can apply for OW while you undergo the ODSP application process.

OW and ODSP for 16 and 17 year olds

OW

If you are 16 or 17 you may qualify for OW if you have special circumstances. For example, if you did not leave home voluntarily because you were told to leave without a good reason or were abused, then you may qualify for assistance. You must be registered in school full-time and follow other rules in order to be eligible. You may also qualify if you have a child living with you.

You should ask a school counsellor or social worker to write a letter to the welfare worker explaining that you are on your own and in need of assistance and that despite what your parents say, it is not appropriate for you to return home. You should insist on making the application even if the intake worker says that you are not eligible or do not qualify. Get the help of a housing worker or counsellor, or call JFCY for assistance.

Your OW case manager may phone your parents and ask them if you can return home. Just because your parent says that you can return home does not mean that you must do so, or that you will not be eligible for OW. If you are in danger if your parents found out where you were, the OW worker may use discretion to not contact your parents.

ODSP

You are only eligible for employment support through ODSP (not income support).

What to do if your application is denied

If you are turned down for either OW or ODSP, you should receive written notification within 30 days of your request. You have **30 days** from the date of getting the notification to tell them in writing that you disagree. The office will then conduct an internal review. If they turn you down again, they must notify you in writing. You then have **30 days** to ask for an appeal. If you are turned down, **contact your local community legal clinic immediately.**

Working while on OW or ODSP

You may be able to work while you are on OW or ODSP subject to strict rules. You should speak to your worker or a legal clinic to find out how much you can make and what effect working will have on your eligibility.