

Questions & Answers: Access to Basic Needs in Waterloo Region

Housing:

1. **Is interpretation assistance provided at your organization for newcomers who require help communicating to access your programs?**

Community Legal Services WR- We provide our services in numerous languages and offer complimentary interpretation services, available via telephone, in-person, or through Zoom, to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for all our clients.

Food Banks Waterloo Region: While we don't have a dedicated interpretation service, we strive to have a diverse team of volunteers who speak various languages. This ensures that newcomers accessing our programs can receive assistance in their preferred language. In situations where language barriers persist, we utilize tools like Google Translate, where individuals can speak into their phones, enabling us to communicate effectively back and forth.

Homelessness And Shelter Services- Region of Waterloo: While we don't offer direct interpretation services, we've established regular connections between our shelter, outreach, supportive housing partners, and organizations like the Multicultural Center and other agencies serving new Canadians. Through these partnerships, we facilitate warm transfers of services and foster relationships behind the scenes. This collaboration provides the most direct avenue for interpretation and translation services for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Housing Programs- Region of Waterloo: For housing programs, especially during the review process, we arrange for professional interpreters to ensure effective communication. These interpreters assist with appeals and work closely with our housing providers and tenants to maintain positive relationships and facilitate clear communication throughout the process.

Client Services & Region of Waterloo Housing: We provide interpreter services through the Multilingual Community Interpreter Services (MCIS) for the phone or in person consultations. We encourage staff to use professional services so that we're not relying on family or children to do interpreting when it comes to translating documents.

Income Assistance & Welcome Spaces-Region of Waterloo: We also provide interpreter services through the Multilingual Community Interpreters Services (MCIS). Whenever an applicant indicates the need for an interpreter, we promptly arrange for one in their required language. Additionally, we offer immediate interpreter services through our intake line. If an applicant requires assistance during the intake process, we can quickly connect them with an interpreter to support them through the application process.

Childcare Subsidy- Region of Waterloo: The Childcare Subsidy department also uses MCIS services for programs or for appointments, phone calls going over emails anything needed.

2. **How to refer to Portable Rent Assistance Program and its eligibility/immigration status?**

This program is community-led and currently limited to 200 units, all of which have been allocated. Referrals for the program are made through associated agencies, which work within their own communities to offer the benefit. If the program expands in the future, we will reach out to additional agencies interested in participating. To be eligible, individuals must have been on the waitlist for at least two years, demonstrating their immigration status and commitment. Once offered the benefit, which is \$800 per month and ongoing, recipients must remove themselves from the waitlist as they are considered housed with this financial support. Income thresholds for waitlist eligibility range from \$31,000 to \$50,000 per year, depending on family size. Additionally, being on the housing waitlist automatically includes eligibility for the housing subsidy.

3. **If someone moves from another city and the family were on the housing wait list, would the wait time in another city for housing be counted or not to apply for community housing?**

No, every region has their own housing waitlist, and they are not shared. Time on another region's waitlist would not transition with their application to Waterloo.

4. **We often hear from people in need of affordable housing is the public perception that "I will never get in" or it takes years to be placed, they don't want to apply. In your opinion, does this add to the issue of housing insecurity?**

Housing insecurity is in relationship to housing stock. The waitlist is more about need/demand. If households are discouraged, from applying due to the length of time it takes to receive an offer then the region does not have a good indicator of need/demand.

5. **Is there a rental subsidy available for private markets?**

Yes. We have contracts with private landlords to offer subsidies in private buildings and we also have programs where households can use a portable subsidy on a unit they choose.

6. **Can small landlords access the accessibility modification funds? We have found there is a lack of accessible rental units in the market.**

The program, funded by federal-provincial sources, is currently limited to homeowners. Ontario Renovates, as it stands, exclusively caters to homeownership needs. While future adjustments are possible, at present, only homeowners are eligible to access this program.

7. **How long is the wait period for housing?**

Currently, there are over 9000 applications on the wait list for housing. Annually, the CHAC team receives around 2600 applications and assesses eligibility. Below are the details on who gets priority and respective wait time.

- a. Seniors unit: Approximately six years
- b. Longer for those on the chronological list without priority status
- c. Priority statuses include:
 - i. Escaping domestic violence
 - ii. Escaping human trafficking
 - iii. Terminal illness
 - iv. Separated families
 - v. Fire

Victims of Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking: These individuals have top priority for housing.

Over housed Individuals: After victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, over housed individuals are prioritized. "Over housed" refers to individuals who are currently occupying more bedrooms than necessary based on their household size. When their household composition changes, such as children moving out, they are considered over housed and must be relocated to a more appropriately sized unit.

8. In some cases clients own joint property overseas and are unable to sell it, what is their option?

The province mandates that housing authorities assess assets held by applicants, considering them as part of the overall eligibility determination process. These assets include various forms of property ownership, which are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Factors such as property type, joint ownership, and value influence this assessment. Housing authorities work closely with families to verify these assets and determine their impact on housing eligibility. Each situation is unique, and solutions are tailored to individual circumstances, ensuring fairness and appropriate consideration of available resources.

9. The Rental Assistance Program BBFP was rolled in 2022, and since then rent went up. Are you thinking to review that amount and add some more?

At this time, The region of Waterloo Housing department is not considering an increase to the \$800/month allocation.

10. How can I help those experiencing homelessness find housing?

Supportive Housing of Waterloo operates several buildings and programs tailored to different populations, including seniors and individuals transitioning from chronic homelessness. Specifically, their supportive housing building on ERB St is dedicated to those with a history of chronic homelessness and significant health challenges such as mental health issues, addictions, or physical disabilities. To be eligible for this housing, individuals need to be connected with the coordinated access system or the PATHS (Prioritized Access to Housing Support) team at Lutherwood. Vacancies are filled from a waitlist of over 550 households deemed to have the greatest need, based on the severity

and duration of their homelessness and associated health issues. It's important to note that "supportive housing" is a broad term used in various contexts within the community. Other organizations like Thresholds and Camino may also offer supportive housing with different eligibility criteria and referral processes. For Supportive Housing of Waterloo, the referral mechanism is through PATHS2Home at Luther wood (paths2home at lutherwood.ca). Feel free to reach out for further information on the supportive housing system in the region.

11. Can the GAR (Government Assisted Refugees) apply to the Community Housing? Are they eligible?

To be eligible, you require your Refugee Claimant documentation.

12. Can newcomers access the rent bank, or is there a requirement to have been a resident in the region for at least one year before qualifying?

Yes they can, and there is no residency requirement or length of time lived in Waterloo Region for accessing the rent bank.

Food Security Programs:

1. Can you provide information about the availability of culturally appropriate food options at the food banks and within the Food Network, especially considering the significant demographic changes driven by immigration in our community?

The Food Bank of Waterloo and the Cambridge Food Banks prioritize offering culturally diverse food to the best of their ability. However, they face challenges due to capacity restrictions at their programs and storage limitations at their facilities. While efforts are made to expand offerings, including providing gift cards when necessary, capacity constraints sometimes limit their ability to meet all demands. Both food banks strive to engage in further discussions to explore opportunities for expansion. Additionally, Dianne McLeod, Executive Director Cambridge Foodbank highlighted that they stock essentials like dried peas, lentils, and rice, along with maintaining a freezer for halal meat. However, meeting the demand for oil remains a challenge. Clients have the freedom to choose their food items, ensuring that they receive culturally appropriate options and do not feel obligated to take items like Kraft Dinner if it does not suit their preferences

2. Could you provide information about your wellness services and partnership with Camino? We occasionally encounter individuals who access food bank services inappropriately due to past experiences with food insecurity. Are there specific programs available to support individuals who have faced this type of trauma, or can you refer them to Camino for assistance?

At the Food Bank of Barlow Region and the Cambridge Food Bank, ongoing education is a priority. We're committed to understanding the unique circumstances that lead individuals to seek support from a food bank and providing continuous education

accordingly. Each person's situation is different, so every conversation is tailored to their specific needs. We also ensure that individuals can be referred to additional resources, such as Comino, when necessary. Education remains a crucial and ongoing component of our efforts to support our community members.

3. Are there any existing programs or initiatives similar to a special MasterCard system that allows individuals to purchase food directly from grocery stores, thereby eliminating the need to wait in lines at food banks?

The Food bank Waterloo and Cambridge Food Bank explored collaborating with retailers to create a system that offers specialized gift cards specifically for purchasing food from grocery stores. However, there are current limitations in place, particularly regarding the inability to restrict these gift cards solely for food purchases due to restrictions on their computer systems. While there is hope for future modifications, no timeline has been provided yet. Currently, both food banks offer grocery gift cards to certain programs that require less food from the Food Bank. These programs can then use the cards for shopping and utilize the food obtained to support their initiatives. Additionally, we provide gift cards to individuals in situations where we may not have enough culturally appropriate food available or at the end of a program when supplies run low.

Dianne McLeod Executive Director Cambridge Food Banks also mentioned about the mobile food market, which operates on a sliding scale pricing model. Various agencies, including churches, House of Friendship, and community centers, purchase gift certificates for this program. The cost to the Food Bank for providing food through this program is approximately \$10 per person, but individuals living on low incomes are charged a subsidized rate of \$5. Moreover, some agencies offer vouchers for individuals to try the mobile food market for free, and attendees of our adult wellness programs often receive gift certificates to experience the market, along with access to cooking classes like "Cooking with the Market. Food bank of Waterloo is also working with the House of Friendship, providing vouchers for the Kitchener market, where folks who are eligible can receive a voucher that they can use for food specifically at the Kitchener Market.

Legal Support Services

1. Are there any supports available for parents looking for support with custody arrangements?

Child custody and access issues are managed directly by Legal Aid Ontario through their various services. Individuals can access support through Legal Aid Ontario's certificate program by calling their toll-free number, 1-800-668-8258 and additional details can be found on their website <https://www.legalaid.on.ca/>. This connects them with resources for obtaining legal representation or assistance from Duty Counsel at the courthouse or the Family Law Information Center. It's important to note that Waterloo Region Community Legal Service clinic does not handle family law or child custody matters; these are exclusively within the purview of Legal Aid Ontario. However, even if Waterloo Region

Community Legal Service cannot provide services, people can still contact us and we'll provide some summary advice and the appropriate referrals to another agency or an outside lawyer.

2. Are there laws to protect both landlord and tenants or how can we make it safer for landlords to rent out their properties?

The Residential Tenancies Act and related laws in Ontario aim to balance the rights and responsibilities of both landlords and tenants. While tenants are protected, landlords also have remedies available to address issues such as property damage or rent non-payment through the tribunal system. Recognizing the importance of effective communication, resources have been developed to guide landlords in fostering positive tenant relationships. These resources include translated information sheets and advice for landlords on communicating with tenants, especially newcomers to Canada, to promote cooperative interactions and prevent legal disputes. Additionally, community organizations like Community Justice Initiatives offer services for landlords and tenants in conflict, providing opportunities for resolution through restorative justice approaches rather than adversarial processes. This collaborative approach aims to achieve mutually satisfactory outcomes and minimize dissatisfaction among involved parties.

3. Do the Community Legal Aid clinics help newcomers with immigration legal issues?

Waterloo Region Community Legal Service clinic offers assistance with various immigration services. This includes supporting migrant workers in obtaining open work permits if they encounter issues with their current employer or face harassment. We also provide assistance to refugee claimants, help with permanent residency applications, and offer guidance on humanitarian and compassionate applications. Additionally, our services cover a wide range of other immigration-related matters, ensuring comprehensive support for individuals navigating the immigration system.

4. What specific programs and services are available for seniors, particularly focusing on assistance with power of attorney documents or writing wills?

The community legal clinic Waterloo region offers public legal education sessions on wills and power of attorney documents. Community organizations interested in these presentations can reach out to us, and we'll be happy to provide them. Additionally, we provide information on accessing online services, such as Steps to Justice, which offers guided pathways for creating power of attorney and will documents. We're available to assist individuals in accessing these online services and navigating the process.

Income Assistance and Transportation Programs

1. Are newcomers with PR (family sponsorships, privately-sponsored refugees and others) eligible for GRT Affordable Program the first year they come to Canada?

When it comes to document submission requirements, typically individuals are asked to provide an assessment to verify their income. However, we understand that not

everyone may have access to this documentation. In such cases, a landing document, which shows when someone entered Canada, would suffice. This is particularly helpful for those who haven't been able to file their taxes yet. Expanding on this topic, regarding temporary residents such as those on work permits or study permits, eligibility varies. Individuals with work permits are eligible for certain programs, but students, including those with study permits, are not eligible. This is because each school has its own transportation programs; there is no eligibility for Grand River Transit (GRT) services. However, Conestoga College is in the process of establishing a new program in collaboration with GRT. This initiative aims to provide more affordable transportation options for students. The decision to create this program was influenced by a significant increase in student applications for the Affordable Transportation Program (ATP), which offered more affordability compared to existing school programs.

2. What is the maximum number of pages the person can print and photocopy in the Welcome Space?

At 150 Main, we do have a limit on photocopying, typically capped at a maximum of 10 copies per day. However, we exercise leniency and understanding, especially if someone has urgent printing needs. While our photocopiers may not support printing entire books for school, we do accommodate requests for printing resumes, applications, or other essential documents, usually within a range of 10 to 25 copies per day. We also make exceptions on a case-by-case basis; individuals can speak with an integrated service navigator if they have specific questions or requirements.

This question may be arising because people might need documents for immigration processes, and indeed, there can be a significant number of documents required for such purposes. We're always open to having conversations and doing our best to assist individuals with their needs.

3. The students of in secondary school 18+ years old live with their low income family. Why are they not eligible for Ontario Works?

For students in post-secondary education who are accessing the OSAP program for financial assistance, they would generally not be eligible for Ontario Works. OSAP usually provides students with more financial support than Ontario Works. However, it's important to note that if a family is already receiving social assistance and has a child in post-secondary education, the budget for the family would still include the amount designated for shelter, which includes the post-secondary student. Additionally, if the student is living at home, their OSAP income would be exempted from the family's income calculation.

Regarding the specific situation of students aged 18 and above in secondary education, it can be a bit complex, especially for refugees who may have been out of education for an extended period. Since Ontario Works considers household income, the student would be considered part of the household, and the entire household would need to be included in the budget assessment. Eligibility for Ontario Works involves meeting various

criteria, and an individual must meet these criteria independently to be considered for assistance.

It is recommended that anyone who has questions about their eligibility call s to have their situation reviewed. The criteria for independence, especially regarding income and other factors, can be quite specific and are determined legislatively. While individuals may still be considered dependents in many cases, there are circumstances where they may be considered independent. Since the screening process is conducted through Intake, the department encourages anyone with questions to reach out and inquire about their specific situation.

4. Refugee claimants often have difficulty completing the ODSP application due to no access to a family doctor and no medical records available from their country of origin. Cost of the application can also be a barrier. Do you have advice on how to best assist these applicants?

Our caseworkers collaborate closely with applicants who wish to apply for ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program), exploring all available community resources to support them. Depending on the location, we may refer individuals to various resources such as Compass and Sanctuary to assess the types of support they can offer. Additionally, we receive monthly updates on available doctors who are accepting new patients, ensuring individuals have access to necessary healthcare services.

For those seeking individualized support when applying for ODSP, this is typically the best pathway, as Ontario Works may not provide sustainable financial support. The amount provided through Ontario Works each month is often insufficient for individuals to cover their basic needs. Therefore, if someone is unable to work, we focus on wrapping services and support around them to strengthen their application for ODSP.

We collaborate with legal clinics and other organizations to access additional resources and support for applicants. For example, we may refer individuals to Project Read for literacy assessments to gather as much documentation as possible to support their ODSP application.

5. Regarding the emergency assistance program you mentioned, it operates during regular business hours, but emergencies can happen outside of these times. What options are available for individuals needing assistance outside of the program's operating hours, such as on weekends or after business hours?

The best option for accessing assistance is through the online application process. Our staff typically work within regular business hours, starting as early as 9:00 AM and ending around 5:00 PM, Monday to Friday. While we don't have staff available beyond these hours, we have protocols in place to handle emergencies such as fires, where local agencies like the Red Cross provide support. However, for non-emergency situations like dental issues, individuals would need to reach out during our office hours, as we collaborate with the regional dental clinic, which also operates on weekdays.

6. Are funds available for seniors who need emergency or extensive dental work that they are not able to afford out of pocket?

Seniors facing utility arrears or potential disconnects are eligible for emergency assistance, and dental issues, particularly those causing pain, are also considered emergencies. Seniors in need of such assistance can contact our intake line for assessment and support.

Regarding transit, while there isn't a specific transit service exclusively for seniors, they can utilize Mobility Plus services if they have mobility issues. Additionally, seniors who are low income may qualify for reduced fares through the Affordable Transportation Program (ATP). Overall, transit eligibility is based on the 180P criteria.

7. Is there transportation support for people who are on OW/ODSP. There are clients and/or their families who need transportation support(taxi) to attend counselling sessions and I learned that they can only get the support if the referral come through a family doctor/nurse practitioner. What about clients who don't have family doctors?

Yes, both programs offer medical transportation under different parameters. All details are provided below. However, it is suggested the clients reach out to their case worker to inquire.

OW offers Medical Travel & Transportation (Med T&T)

This mandatory benefit is provided to clients for travel and transportation for medical treatments where the total cost exceeds \$15.00 in a given month. Travel costs may also include parking, meals, and accommodation, if necessary. If the cost of travel and transportation for medical treatments is less than \$15 in a given month, clients can call their caseworker to request assistance with a bus ticket but this is limited and can not be provided for daily/weekly ongoing appointments.

Clients are required to provide verification from the appropriate health provider confirming the medical treatment.

Medical treatments can include medical appointments, rehabilitation (therapy), a healing lodge, psychological counselling, drug and alcohol recovery groups (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, etc.) or other medical or health-related purposes.

Med T&T can be issued up to a maximum of \$90 in a given month (equivalent to the value of an ATP transit Pass) for verified medical appointments in town. If the client is taking public transit, the payment is calculated based on the actual cost of the bus fare. For clients taking a personal vehicle, the per kilometre rate is 40 cents in Ontario. This rate also applies if a friend or family member is using their personal vehicle to drive the client, or where an agency driver is used and there is no fee set by the agency. Alternative means of transportation such as a taxi, can also be arranged through our office based on exceptional circumstances if public transportation is not available or feasible. Medical T&T can also be provided to Child Care if the reason for child care falls under 'attending for health reasons' often identified by places like KidsAbility.

For out of town medical treatments, 40 cents per km can also be issued for the use of a personal vehicle, or a bus voucher can be provided for public transportation. The maximum rate of \$90 in a given month does not apply for out of town medical appointments. However, out of town medical appointments should only be approved if treatment/therapy is not available in the geographical area in which the person resides. Please see the following link [7.2 Health benefits | Ontario Works policy directives | ontario.ca](#) for additional information for Mandatory benefits- Travel and transportation for medical purposes.

ODSP Transportation

Travel and transportation costs for medical treatments can be issued where the total cost exceeds \$15.00 in a given month, and the travel meets the criteria of one of the three components outlined in directive 9.12 Mandatory special necessities. Please see the following link [9.12 — Mandatory special necessities | Ontario Disability Support Program policy directives for income support | ontario.ca](#) for more information on the three components and other criteria that may be required. In order to receive transportation costs (except in emergencies) an MSN Benefit Request form must be completed. The approved costs should be based on the most economical mode of transportation that the approved health professional indicates a person's condition enables him/her to use.

Child Care Subsidy Programs

- 1. What are the eligibility criteria for newcomers applying for child care subsidy programs, especially those who may be working or studying part-time?**

For childcare subsidy eligibility, we consider someone working 25 hours or more per week as full-time. Individuals meeting this criteria are eligible for five days of licensed childcare. For those working under 25 hours per week, we typically provide three days of childcare per week, according to current policy. However, we can accommodate different combinations of days as needed, especially for those working shorter hours each day, to ensure adequate support.
- 2. Can families in need of respite care, such as those coming from conflict situations, families with multiple children, or families unable to commit to full-time work or study, qualify for childcare subsidy programs?**

Both situations would fall under our criteria for childcare subsidy programs, particularly under the categories of medical need for the parent or special social needs for the child. Forms for these assessments, which can be completed by special needs agencies are readily available in PDF format for families to access. We are fully prepared to interview and assess families facing such challenges to ensure they receive the support they need."
- 3. Is there a waitlist for childcare subsidy programs, and if so, what is the current wait time?**

At the moment, there is no centralized waitlist for childcare subsidy funding. However, individual childcare programs may maintain their own waitlists for available spaces.

Parents are encouraged to register on the One List, which allows them to contact all childcare operators. Additionally, each childcare operator may have its own waitlist for their specific program.

It's important to note that even if families are on the waitlist for One List, it's still beneficial for them to apply for childcare subsidy. If you're eligible for childcare subsidy, we can keep your file open for a year. This means that if you find childcare during that time, you can contact us directly to have your file reopened right away, instead of going through the entire application process again. We can assist with ensuring that families don't have to pay registration fees and can start receiving funding promptly. So, if you're looking for childcare, currently in need of services, and financially eligible, please still apply for childcare subsidy

4. If one of the parent is working and the other is not, is the family eligible for the child care subsidy?

Both parents need to have a “reason for service”. These include working, attending school, self-employment, parent medical need, child special/social need or receiving Social Assistance.

If it is a situation where one parent is living in the Region with their children and receiving child care subsidy and the second parent joins the family, child care subsidy may be able to be approved for up to 16 weeks without the second parent having a reason for service to ensure continuity of care and allow time for the second parent to find employment.