

RECENT CHANGES IN SOCIAL ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION: SPECIAL DIET BENEFITS

What is a Special Diet Benefit?

If you are a recipient of Ontario Works (OW) benefits or if you are covered by the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), you may be eligible for a special diet benefit. This is the case if you are suffering from an allergy or disease and you can therefore only eat certain foods. However, you will have to meet the criteria set out by OW or ODSP. If you are granted special diet benefits, there will be yearly re-assessments to determine if you are still eligible.

How do I apply for it?

You have to ask doctor, a registered nurse, a registered dietician or a registered midwife to fill out an application for you. This health professional would have to verify that you are suffering from a disease or allergy and that you need a certain diet.

What has changed?

On November 4, 2005, new application forms for OW and ODSP special diet benefits were issued. Now, there is a closed list of medical conditions. This means that you can only receive the special diet benefit if you are suffering from one of the listed conditions. Also, the dollar amount for the special diet is indicated on the list. You cannot receive more than this prescribed maximum for each condition.

If you are breast-feeding, you are not eligible for special diet benefits any more. However, the Pregnancy Nutritional Allowance has been extended so you would have to apply for this benefit in order to receive additional funds.

As the provisions have changed, every single case of special diet benefits will be reviewed in time, including all those currently receiving the old allowance.

As there is a closed list of conditions with limited correlating dollar amounts now, many advocates are worried that recipients will receive fewer benefits than in the past. They may not even be covered if their condition is not on the list. Therefore, the Ministry of Community and Social Services has been criticized by many for the changes.

If you have questions about special diet benefits, do not hesitate to call us.



WE DO:

- Landlord/Tenant
- Ontario Works/ Ontario Disability Support Program
- Workplace Safety and Insurance
- Canada Pension Plan
- Criminal Injuries Compensation
- Employment Insurance

Call us: (519) 743-0254

LEGAL AID DOES:

- Family Law
- Criminal Law
- Immigration

Call Legal Aid: (519) 743-4306

LEGAL CLINIC CONTACT:

Kitchener - (519) 743-0254

170 Victoria Street South
Kitchener, ON, N2G 2B9

Fax: 519-743-1588

Hours: 9 am to 5 pm Mon to Fri

Cambridge

At the Cambridge Self Help Food Bank - 54 Ainslie Street South

Hours: Mon 1:30 to 4:30 pm

Fri 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

On our web site, you can find an introduction to the Legal Clinic, the services it offers, its history and staff. The address is:

www.wrcls.ca

We are currently working on our site so visit, while it changes!

For more detailed information about the ODSP changes, visit the web site of the ODSP Action Coalition: www.odspaction.ca

Directives for OW and ODSP can be viewed online on the web site of the Ministry of Community and Social Services: www.cfcs.gov.on.ca

See OW Directive is 31.0 (not yet revised); see ODSP Directives 6.4 and 6.5.

HEATING

What happens if I cannot pay for my heating?

If you are paying for your own heat, the landlord is not involved. You will have to negotiate with your utility company. We can provide advice around this issue, so call us, if necessary.

If your heating is included in the rent and you cannot pay your rent, the landlord cannot simply turn off the hydro or gas used for heat. If he or she does so, call the Legal Clinic immediately. We can tell you how to proceed.

Where can I find assistance regarding heating?

Although your heating cannot be turned off without notice by the utility for non-payment, you will be ultimately responsible for your heating bill. If you are experiencing financial difficulties, there are some resources you can use:

Regional Social Services

Social Services (OW, ODSP) may be able to help whether you regularly receive benefits or not. If you do receive benefits, speak to your caseworker as soon as you cannot pay for your heating. If you do not receive benefits, contact the Application Line at 883-2100 and select option #1. Because Social Services administer funds for different heating assistance programs, they should be the first people you contact.

Share the Warmth

This program is funded by the province and is limited in time and funds. You can apply for a one-time grant to pay for heating (other than by hydro). There are several application centers distributed over the community. If you would like a list of all application centers and their contact information, pick one up at the Legal Clinic, the Rent Bank (at Lutherwood) or the Working Centre.

The Heat Bank

The Heat Bank is funded by local hydro utilities. This program is also limited in time and funds. Call the Social Services number for more information.

Contacts:

Regional Social Services/ The Heat Bank 883-2100, select option # 1.

Share the Warmth Program can be accessed through several application centers, e.g. the Salvation Army, the Working Centre, etc. For more information call: the **Rent Bank** at 743-2460 or the **Working Centre** at 743-1151.

USEFUL LINKS

CLEONET www.cleonet.ca

CLEO stands for Community Legal Education Organization. This web site offers a vast, well-organized collection of links and online-resources about many areas of law. Info includes a contact for the producing organization, the date the resource was produced and often versions in different languages.

OPICCO www.opicco.org

OPICCO stands for Ontario Project for Inter-Clinic Community Organizing (meaning Legal Clinics, of course). Here, you can find a short description of several campaigns and efforts for law reform for which contacts and links are provided. The tools and resources section offers a host of material regarding community activism and you can search for resources in your own community.

HALCO www.halco.org

HALCO stands for HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic of Ontario. This is one of the Specialty Legal Clinics in Ontario. This web site offers a large collection of resources of which the Law Advocates Manual is particularly worth reading.

MORE LINKS IN FUTURE NEWSLETTERS!!