



## **OMSSA and Local Leadership in a Time of Transformation**

The signing of the 2008 Provincial Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review Agreement (PMFSDR) was a turning point for social policy and municipal service managers in Ontario. More than a decade on from Local Services Realignment, municipalities, and Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) were being recognized as the key to providing good and responsive services in communities across the province. Most importantly, services for the most vulnerable. After more than eighteen months and hundreds of meetings, through the recommendations in the PMFSDR Agreement, Ontario was preparing to create a service system that was responsive to local need. A system that would be focused on providing the most vulnerable in our communities with access to services in a way that was less concerned with the “why’s and what’s” of problems, than the solutions.

A sound economy and an administration committed to good public policy provided a perfect confluence of events for CMSMs and DSSABs to fully realize their role as leaders and innovators. The PMFSDR set the ground work to revolutionize the role of service managers from that of working around restrictive legislation and regulations to being the key decision makers for human service systems in their communities.

The PMFSDR and the emphasis on an improved provincial-municipal partnership created a framework for social policy development that recognized expertise and innovation was created on the ground, in communities. It also recognized that the best remedy for local need-in addition to appropriate and sufficient funding for services-is a system that understands and is responsive to local conditions, issues, and needs-a system that understands the community, its economy, labour market and the people that live in it.

Only a few years on from that time, in late 2011 and into early 2012, the municipal sector found itself in a period of great anticipation. Suffering the impacts of the ongoing global economic challenges, the provincial government had commissioned Don Drummond to review public services and to devise a plan that would provide a prescription for Ontario’s economic vitality into the future, and also, a way forward for the public sector that would aim to preserve the services that Ontarians rely upon and value.

In early 2012, *the Commission on the Reform of Ontario’s Public Services* (the Drummond Report) was released. With a transformative intent, the fundamental mission of the Report’s recommendations was for strong action on the fiscal and economic future of Ontario. The Commission issued a stern warning, that status quo, within the current economic environment, would have serious consequences. This included analysis based on the 2011 provincial budget estimates, that, if unchanged, the provincial

deficit would more than double from the \$14 billion annually to over \$30 billion and net public debt of over \$400 billion, or 51 per cent of the GDP.

Drummond identified one clear avenue to achieving this mission: through increasing the efficiency in the services and commitments funded through public investments. Germaine to this however, would be preserving the quality of the services Ontarians value and rely upon.

The Drummond report recommended a 0.8 percent in growth in spending to 2017-18 with clear recommendations to shelve a number of cornerstone provincial policies and programs, most notably the Full Day Kindergarten Program. Of additional interest and significance to OMSSA members, and on a more encouraging note, was the recognition that opportunity exists to do better with what we have, most notably, through streamlining, integrating and reducing duplication in the provision of public services, presenting the opportunity for OMSSA to further its human services integration efforts.

Following shortly after the release of the Drummond Report, the provincial budget was tabled in late March. Echoing many of the Drummond Reports key themes on integration, efficiency and transformation, the budget also stressed the need for sustainability. This, it suggested, would be achieved by balancing the budget by 2017-18, by reducing spending by \$17.7 billion in 3 years and, that for every dollar of new spending, there will be four dollars of cuts. Meaning, if new spending was to occur in one area, it would be the result of cuts in spending in other areas.

To the relief of many, the budget also included a restatement of the government's commitment to implementing the Full Day Kindergarten Program. At the same time though, and despite the government's commitment to poverty reduction, as we all dug in deeper to the budget papers it was clear, some significant and troubling cuts were upon us, most notably, the elimination of the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB), the capping of discretionary and non-discretionary health benefits and the elimination of the home repair benefit.

These two events, the release of the Drummond Report and the government's austerity measures budget, in many ways, presented the perfect storm to undue the great progress and optimism of 2008 and the commitments of the PMFSDR. And certainly very real challenges and difficulties emerged from the budget items and cuts in the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Suddenly, CMSMs and DSSABs, and our communities most vulnerable were shouldering the provincial governments cost containment. Service managers were faced with having to come up with solutions to fill the gaps to meet local need or, to turn away people in crisis. Municipal councils already faced with growing infrastructure deficits, policing costs and land ambulance pressures and their own budget restraints were now grappling with fewer resources for those in their communities who need them the most-in an already under resourced system.

In the middle of struggling with the budget implications, the Community Homelessness Partnership Initiative was released in late July. Certainly pleased that system integration continued and funding

flexibility was coming in to play, the good news of these policy shifts were seriously undermined by the local struggle of having to do more with less.

Through all of this, a clear message OMSSA continues to deliver, is, that policy transformation alone is not enough to address the growing needs in our communities. Whether in housing, child care or social assistance, local responsiveness and increased flexibility must be weighed against a number of considerations, including competing provincial priorities, finite resources and growing pressures at the municipal level and the presence of existing and growing demand.

It is precisely where we find ourselves today that it is so important to build on the momentum and the optimism, arising from the PMFSDR, that policy transformation, human services integration, over time continues to make sense. OMSSA understands the real fiscal and human crisis that is experienced every day in our communities. We understand that good and sound integrated service delivery alone will not address all of the need on our communities. And, we understand that it is precisely at this time of economic crisis, that investing in people and communities makes the most sense. There is need for great caution in letting fear and austerity drive the potential for future growth. We all know, that the effort to rebuild, to dig out from deeper or deepest poverty and greater disengagement from community and the labour market has far greater costs and implications to the health of Ontario in the long term.

It is at this time, that our optimism remains in the commitment, both in the Drummond Report and the provincial budget, to transformation, sustainability and integration of public services over the long term. The Premier's ongoing commitment to the PMFSDR is the momentum OMSSA believes we need to build on. As your voice, as your organization, OMSSA believes there has never been a more significant time to leverage our voice, your expertise and leadership.

We need to remain, as we often have in difficult times like these, when much has been taken away, focused on the opportunities. We have the commitment from the provincial government to build on and strengthen service systems management. OMSSA and its member CMSMs and DSSABs have the solutions for the government's ongoing efforts to transform public services and service delivery.

OMSSA will continue its leadership by harnessing your voices, your expertise and innovative solutions to local planning.

This includes strengthening our partnership with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, by unifying our voice on issues that make sense. Such as, the delivery of services at the local level and the importance of engaging with the experts - OMSSA members - on systems transformation such as employment integration or the integration of social assistance. AMO and OMSSA agree, it is not enough to consult on policy at the final stages, but to have service managers and OMSSA at the table through every step of policy considerations and development.

OMSSA continues to engage its membership in representation on provincial policy development tables. This includes the next steps in implementing the local housing plans and child care modernization. OMSSA also anticipates a significant role in policy development that will arise from the

recommendations of the Social Assistance Review Commissioners, the final recommendations expected to be tabled soon.

It is important to recognize that OMSSA remains committed to working with the government because we recognize now is the time that we must work together to maximize opportunities to align resources to provide the best outcomes for people. Recognizing the significant impacts of the budget decisions, it is critical that we have an eye on and a voice around all future policy development and changes. We need to mitigate any future system wide negative impacts and the way to do that is to inform policy deliberations and development.

In our June submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on Bill 55, the budget bill, we delivered a clear message on the need to seize on the government's commitment to the provincial-municipal partnership. We did so through the reminder that only through ongoing and iterative collaboration at all stages of policy design can we identify and create the best framework for a more integrated and streamlined system of services, And, only through long-term, collective planning can we move beyond today towards a thriving system that responds to the call of the Drummond report, as well as the language of the budget, for a people-centred, integrated system that is aligned across sectors, and works towards the outcomes that enable resiliency in the people and communities of Ontario.

The government's commitment to partnership remains and the principles and outcomes of the PMFSDR are firm at this time. And, OMSSA, through its membership will continue its efforts to build the best system of services for the best outcomes, for Ontario's people.

While we have not been in agreement with all the measures taken by the provincial government, because we understand and live the impacts, we can agree that transformation, integration and sustainability of our resources and our human service system is the opportunity that CMSMs and DSSABs and OMSSA as your association, should seize upon.

There is a great deal of heavy lifting on its way, and OMSSA looks forward to doing this together with its most valued resource, its members.