



Saskatchewan
Community Resources

Saskatchewan's Long-Term Social Assistance Caseload

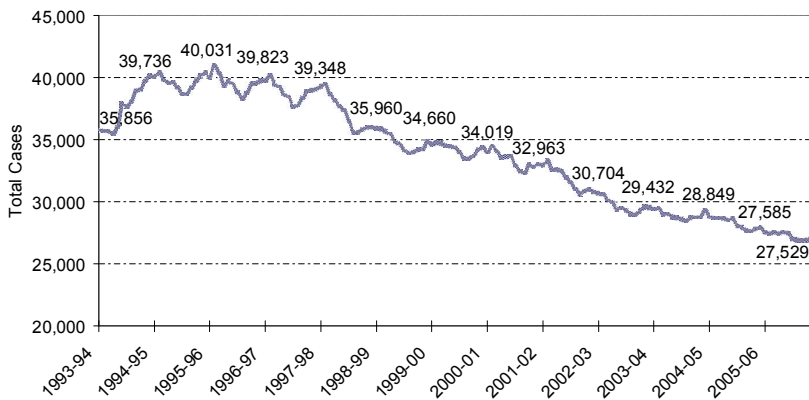
*A review by
Saskatchewan Community Resources*

2007

INTRODUCTION

In 1997, Saskatchewan introduced an anti-poverty strategy called *Building Independence*. The *Building Independence* strategy has brought new programs for low-income working people and people without jobs. The result has been a more comprehensive income support system that combines social assistance with a range of new supplements for low-income people.

The chart below illustrates a steady reduction in the number of households that rely on provincial social assistance since 1994.¹ Much of this change is the result of *Building Independence* and a strong provincial economy. The number of households that enroll on social assistance each month has also declined (by about 25 per cent over the last ten years).



The total social assistance caseload (SAP and TEA) has been decreasing steadily since reaching an all-time high in 1994. Decreases in the size of the caseload were accelerated following the introduction of *Building Independence* in 1997.

Building Independence has helped Saskatchewan to remain a leader in social programs in Canada. More importantly, *Building Independence* has helped reduce poverty by enabling more people to get the support they need in order to work. The strategy has helped people move quickly from welfare back to independence, and helped others avoid falling onto welfare.

Most people rely on provincial social assistance for very short periods of time. The chart on the following page shows what happened to households that

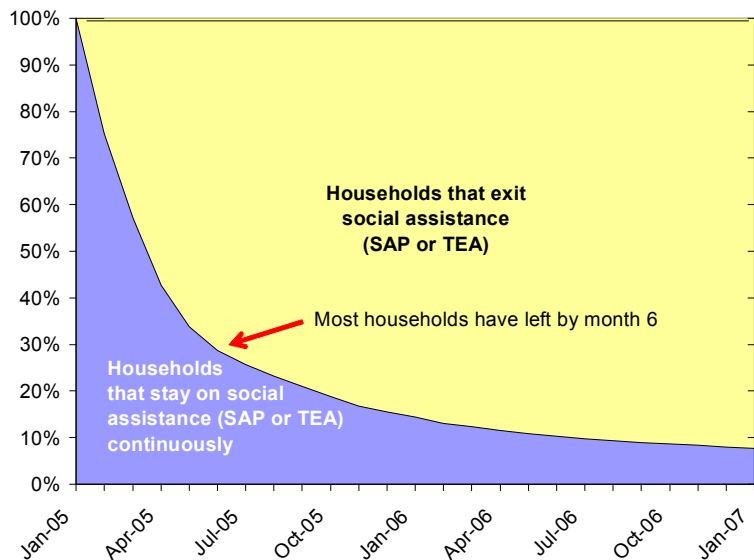
enrolled on social assistance in January 2005 over the next two years. These households received either the Saskatchewan Assistance Program (SAP) or the Transitional Employment Allowance (TEA). The bottom area shows the proportion of households that remained on SAP or TEA continuously, while the area at the top shows the proportion that left. The overall trend for this group is typical for the social assistance caseload today. The

¹ Federal income support programs for people living on reserve are not discussed here.

majority of households rely on social assistance for less than six months, and almost all leave social assistance within two years.

Even though there is strong demand for workers across Saskatchewan, the chart shows that some people seem trapped on social assistance. The bottom area of the chart shows that about 1 in 10 households that enroll on social assistance will stay on social assistance continuously for two years or more. This group of clients illustrates what is meant by the phrase “long-term caseload.”

In 2006, Community Resources started to look more carefully at households that depend on social assistance the most, particularly the long-term caseload. The review was designed to help tailor future *Building Independence* programs and services to the needs of these clients.



In January 2005, about 2,000 households enrolled on social assistance. More than 60% had left by month six, and more than 90% left by month 24.

The review will be used to improve services and supports for long-term clients and to create better public awareness about the people who depend on social assistance the most. This information will help people and policy makers to make more informed choices, opinions and decisions about social assistance and related services.

This report comes nearly ten years after Saskatchewan first introduced its *Building Independence* strategy to address poverty. What follows is a brief description of the first ten years of *Building Independence* including its impact on the social assistance caseload. Following that section is a profile of long-term social assistance clients, and next steps for the Department of Community Resources.

BUILDING INDEPENDENCE

Building Independence began with a focus on parents, because having children creates extra costs. In 1998, the province

moved child benefits outside of social assistance. Starting in 1998, low-income people had access to new child benefits and Family Health Benefits. For parents on social assistance, the change meant that they wouldn't lose child benefits if they got a job. For other parents, the change meant they didn't have to go on welfare to get help with the extra costs of raising children.

In 2000, *Building Independence* introduced new services for people applying for social assistance. The idea was to get help to people even faster so they could get back to independence more quickly. The change meant two things:

1. Faster access to service

A new phone-based Contact Centre meant people could be scheduled for a service appointment during their very first phone call. Some people were scheduled for employment services so they could get back to work quickly. Other people were scheduled for planning services to help them with their barriers to getting a job.

2. Better access to consistent income support

The Contact Centre also meant people could access support that was consistent across the province. This was important because it meant that people in cities, towns, rural and remote areas could access the same help as everyone else in the province.

By 2003, the province recognized that social assistance was too complicated. Staff had to spend a lot of time gathering receipts and paperwork and talking with clients about welfare payments, instead of helping them get out of poverty. In 2003, the province introduced the Transitional Employment Allowance (TEA), as a simplified income assistance program for people who were ready to work. Unlike the Saskatchewan Assistance Program (SAP), people on TEA don't bring-in receipts each month to their worker, for example. This means staff can spend more time helping.

Other income support programs that were created or significantly enhanced since 1997 include:

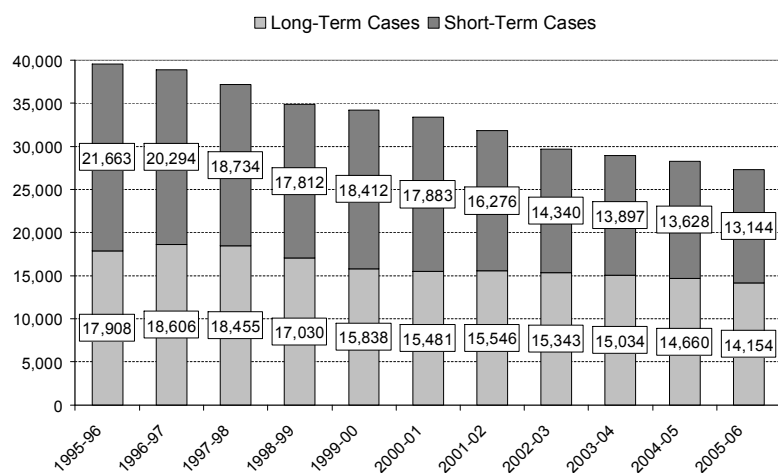
- The **Provincial Training Allowance** – a monthly allowance for adults who are in upgrading programs or programs to build basic or life skills.

- The **Child Care Subsidy** – a program to reduce the cost of licensed childcare for low-income parents who are working or going to school.
- The **Saskatchewan Employment Supplement** – a program to encourage low-income parents to work. The Supplement can provide higher benefits as a person increases their earnings.
- **Employment Supports for People with Disabilities** – to provide workplace accommodations, productivity supports and job coaches so that more people have the opportunity to work.
- The **Family Health Benefits Program** – to provide low-income families with additional health coverage so they don't need to turn to welfare just because of high health costs.
- The **Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement** – to improve access to quality, affordable rental accommodations for families and people with disabilities.

THE LONG-TERM CASELOAD

Up until now, *Building Independence* has focused mainly on two things: helping people to get jobs, and supporting families with children. Most new programs and services were designed to give people a better chance of working, so they didn't have to rely on welfare. This focus has helped people with fewer barriers to employment, but more needs to be done to help people with significant barriers, including those for whom employment is not a realistic option.

In the fall of 2006, Community Resources began to look more carefully at long-term social assistance clients. The plan was to identify which clients are unable to leave social assistance even with the new supports. The review describes the long-term caseload (i.e., those who rely on social assistance for two straight years or more).



Long-term and short-term cases from 1995-96 to 2005-06.

WHAT WE LEARNED

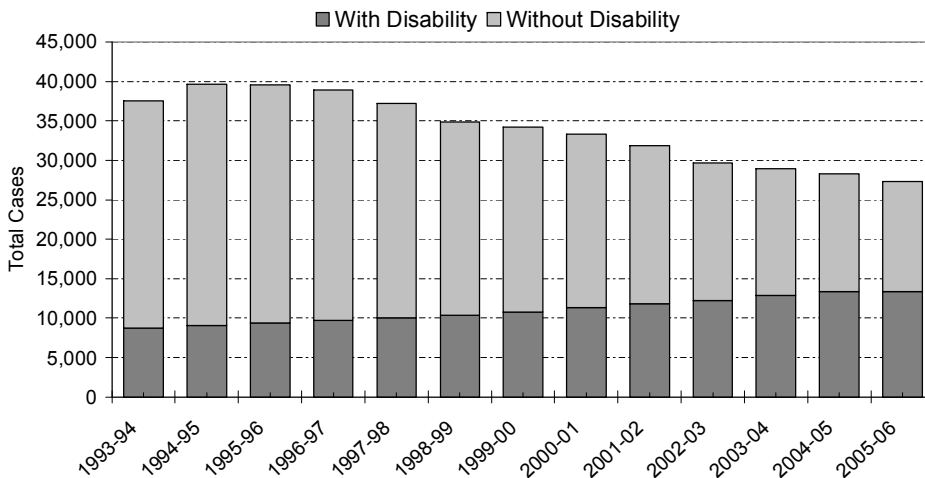
Over a ten-year period between 1995-96 and 2005-06, both short-term and long-term cases fell, but the decline was greater for short-term cases than long-term cases. As a result, long-term cases now represent a significantly higher proportion of the total caseload than they did a decade ago.

The review of the long-term caseload relied on the basic information that is reported by people who receive social assistance. The review looked at the similarities and differences between long-term clients and both:

1. New social assistance clients, and
2. Short-term clients (clients on assistance for less than two years).

Long-term clients are significantly different than short-term clients and new entrants. Long-term clients:

- are older
- are less likely to be Aboriginal
- have considerably lower levels of education
- are more likely to be single and without children
- are four times more likely to be assessed as “not fully employable”
- are more than twice as likely to be in supported living, such as a group home, even though 86 percent live independently
- exit social assistance more slowly (about 1 in 50 long-term clients leave each month, compared to 1 in 10 short-term clients)
- are far more likely to report a disability
- have higher costs than other social assistance cases (monthly welfare cheques are 30 to 70 per cent higher for long-term cases than for short-term cases, mainly due to disability-related needs)

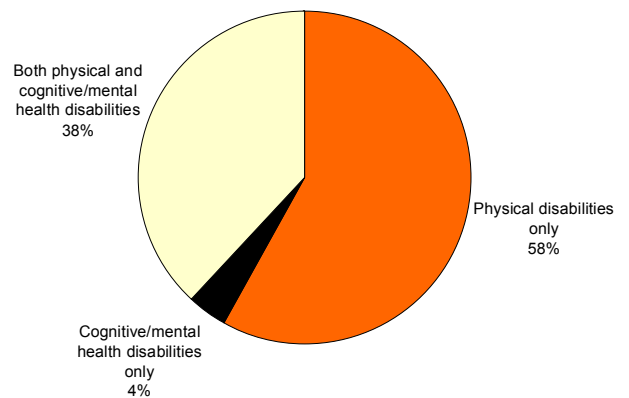


There is a growing number and proportion of clients with disabilities even among long-term welfare cases (2 years +).

Today people with disabilities make up 1 in 10 new social assistance cases, but they represent about 7 out of 10 long-term cases. In fact, disability is the one thing that most long-term clients have in common, and it is becoming more prevalent among long-term cases.

Information about the types of disabilities present among long-term cases is not documented in electronic records. However, a 2001 survey of social assistance clients suggests that most have physical limitations, either alone or in combination with cognitive or mental health disabilities. Roughly three out of five have physical disabilities only, with another two out of five reporting both physical *and* cognitive/mental health disabilities simultaneously. Only a very small proportion (4%) reported cognitive/mental health disabilities only.

Type of Disabilities Prevalent Among SAP Clients With Disabilities



Source: 2001 SAP Disability Survey

NEXT STEPS

Social assistance data has revealed that *Building Independence* has helped certain types of clients more than others. The evidence demonstrates that disability is emerging as the most common characteristic of those who remain on social assistance. Even with our strong economy, it remains difficult for some people with disabilities to escape the welfare system without additional assistance.

This review has demonstrated key changes in the social assistance caseload. The review and others like it will help the Department of Community Resources to improve its programs and services for low-income people.

For more information on the Department of Community Resources, Building Independence programs or this report, please visit our website at www.cr.gov.sk.ca.