

Background - Social Assistance Management System (SAMS)

History with SAMS

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has been working on the project to replace the former Service Delivery Model Technology (SDMT) with the new Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) since 2010.

The original launch date for SAMS was June 2013, which was first postponed to November 2013, and then May 2014. SAMS finally went live on November 11, 2014. The first milestone for the project was the introduction of the Online Application for Social Assistance (OASA) in early 2011, which allows applicants to take the first step of processing an application before they meet with an intake caseworker.

Training on the new software began in January 2014 but was “plagued with performance issues” due to system errors.ⁱ This made the training ineffective. In a March 5, 2014 report to the Brantford Social Services Committee, the General Manager of Public Health Safety and Social Services stated: “Thus far, our experience has been one of missed milestones, unmet timelines, lack of meaningful communication and two delays requiring complete project rescheduling.”ⁱⁱ

The Costs

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has spent a significant amount of money on the development and implementation of SAMS. In a letter to OPSEU and CUPE from August 2014, the Minister of Community and Social Services indicated she expected the cost to develop and implement SAMS would be just under \$250 million. This figure included the costs associated with the Online Application for Social Assistance.ⁱⁱⁱ

Though the ministry has covered costs associated with the design, hardware and overall implementation of SAMS, municipalities have consistently indicated that they require more money for the SAMS roll-out due to the regular delays and botched implementation.

Most recently, municipalities have faced huge administrative costs as a result of the serious implementation issues. Just in the Niagara region, overtime is expected to be over \$75,000. In one week, 50% of staff put in overtime manually verifying payments to ensure they were accurate.^{iv} The manager of Brantford employment and income support told the municipal council he expects the implementation costs to be “in the hundreds of thousands of dollars”.^v

In response to implementation cost complaints, the province committed an additional \$5 million to the SAMS implementation on December 8, 2014, with \$50,000 going to each municipality and the remaining funds being divided based on case loads. This is in addition to the previous \$5 million committed for the initial training and implementation.^{vi}

Municipalities delivering the Ontario Works program had already incurred major additional costs due to training, re-allocation of staff, and project delays. Several municipalities indicated that the additional funding provided by the ministry did not cover all costs resulting from training, staffing

and project delays.^{vii} A report to the Brantford Social Services Committee remarked that the additional funding “does not come near the investment that the municipality must make to implement SAMS.”^{viii} The Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board reported in May 2014 that ministry funding covered less than half of the municipality’s total investment to date.^{ix}

The Technology

SAMS is based on a commercial off-the-shelf platform produced by Cúram, acquired by IBM in December 2011.^x This technology is used to manage social programs such as social assistance, disability management, family services and health care reform.

The same platform, Cúram, is also being used for the Developmental Services Consolidated Information System (DSCIS) database, created in 2011 to combine client data kept by numerous service providers. The Auditor General of Ontario’s most recent report flagged “numerous problems with data integrity” with the new system. Three years after implementation, DSCIS data has not been validated and the system is not entirely functional. This has forced each Developmental Services Office to keep a separate information system.^{xi}

The software was also blamed for serious issues with state health insurance exchanges in Maryland, Minnesota and the District of Columbia that were central to the US Affordable Care Act. In Maryland, Cúram’s “serious software defects” were linked to lost customer applications.^{xii} In the D.C. exchange, the software was getting subsidies wrong 15 per cent of the time for complex family situations, according to the exchange spokesperson.^{xiii}

In a letter to the CEO of IBM about software issues around program eligibility and application withdrawals, Governor Mark Dayton of Minnesota wrote: “Your product has made it impossible to provide Minnesotans with any reasonable customer service. Our Call Centre wait times have averaged over 50 minutes... The cost to address them and make sure consumers will have coverage on January 1, 2014, is excessive and unacceptable.”^{xiv}

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ⁱ <http://www.brantford.ca/pdfs/8.2%20PHSS2014-19%20SAMS%20Report%20to%20SS%20Committee%20final.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.brantford.ca/pdfs/8.2%20PHSS2014-19%20SAMS%20Report%20to%20SS%20Committee%20final.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Letter: Helena Jaczek to Fred Hahn and Warren (Smokey) Thomas, August 13, 2014.

^{iv} <http://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/2014/12/04/ot-at-region-for-province-issue-could-hit-75k>

^v <http://www.brantfordexpositor.ca/2014/12/08/brantford-city-council-live-blog-starts-at-6-pm>

^{vi} <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Information-Alert--Province-Commits--5-million-to-SAMS-Implementation.html?soid=1115209281328&aid=F1YAZnQsHws>

^{vii} Report: Brantford Social Services Committee, March 5, 2014; Board Report: Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board, May 28, 2014.

^{viii} Report: General Manager Public Health, Safety and Social Services to Social Services Committee, March 5, 2014.

^{ix} Report: Social Assistance Management System Implementation, May 28, 2014.

^x <http://www-03.ibm.com/press/us/en/pressrelease/36373.wss>

^{xi} http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/reports_en.htm

^{xii} <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304632204579336802097413212>

^{xiii} <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/28/usa-healthcare-technology-idUSL2N0HL2BK20130928>

^{xiv} <http://www.minnpost.com/sites/default/files/attachments/daytonibmletter.pdf>