

Income Support

2024–2027 Business Plan
and 2024 Budget

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Executive Summary

Mission: To provide income and stability supports to Peel residents to enable self-sufficiency and improved quality of life.

Services we provide:

- Helping Peel residents navigate and access income and community support and services
- Application and assessment services for Ontario Works social assistance, Child Care Fee Subsidy and Housing Services programs
- Delivering the provincial Ontario Works social assistance program by providing ongoing case management and stability support services to help clients move toward employment
- Ontario Works program oversight, and accountability

Interesting facts about this service:

- Approximately 25,000 Peel residents (1.7% of our population) receive Ontario Works assistance for an average of 3 years as they are impacted by complex barriers resulting in the need for intensive case management and stability support
- 100% of Ontario Works benefit costs are paid by the province and rates have not increased since 2018
- In 2023, the maximum monthly Ontario Works benefit for basic needs and shelter for a single person is \$733, less than a third of Peel’s Living Wage (the wage a worker needs to cover their basic needs and community participation)
- Ontario Works benefits paid to Peel clients is projected to increase to more than \$164.9M in 2024
- Peel is the largest Ontario Works administrator to implement the province’s new social assistance model, reinvesting in addressing client barriers while also successfully transferring employment services to Employment Ontario

Highlights of the Business Plan:

- Sharp increase in applications and demand for Income Support services is continuing due to the ending of federal pandemic benefits, the increase in refugee and asylum seekers and the addition of Ontario Disability Support Program non-disabled adult clients to stability support services
- Increasingly complex client barriers to employment such as mental health challenges and addictions
- Realigning the service delivery model and staff roles to improve efficiency and service experience
- Creating more equitable opportunities for clients through inclusive, modernized services and better access to digital solutions
- Ensuring Peel’s needs are well represented as the province designs a new Social Assistance Renewal Plan (also known as Social Assistance Transformation) by participating in client, employee, and community partner engagement
- Greater program accountability by doing audits to ensure program rules and requirements are being followed
- Equipping staff with training and supports to provide services that achieve successful client outcomes

Net Investment (\$000s)	2024	2025	2026	2027
Operating	27,511	28,976	30,444	31,952
Capital	-	-	-	-
Full Time Equivalents	371.4	371.4	371.4	371.4

Core Service

Vision, Mission, Goals of Service and Service Delivery Model

Vision

To help lift Peel residents out of poverty by supporting them to take steps towards employment, greater independence, and an improved quality of life.

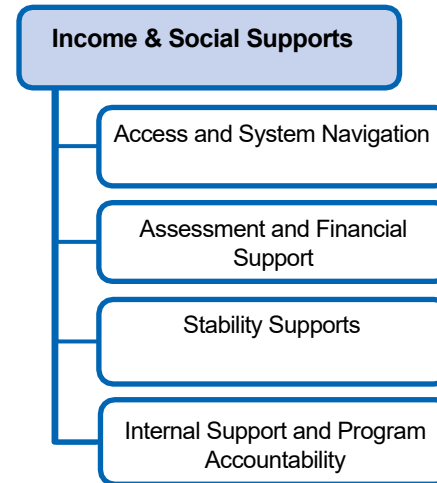
Mission

To provide income and stability supports to Peel residents to enable self-sufficiency and improved quality of life.

Goals of Service

1. Modernize our services to meet evolving community needs and system changes
2. Provide responsive, efficient, and inclusive services to Peel residents
3. Strengthen system planning through increased partnerships and influencing system change
4. Promote and maintain an engaged and enabled workforce

Service Delivery Model



Service Levels and Trends

Service Levels

Income Support provides centralized application assessment services for Human Services programs and is the delivery agent for the provincial Ontario Works social assistance program in Peel, providing client centred, case management support. The 2022 service levels and trends are summarized below.

Access and System Navigation: We are the first point of contact to provide service system navigation to Peel residents. Client visits to the reception increased in 2022 as in person appointments resumed after pandemic restrictions were lifted. Approximately 6,500 Peel residents visited the reception area for supports and services in 2022 and visits are projected to double by the end of 2023.

Assessment and Financial Support: We triage and assess applications for Child Care Fee Subsidy, Housing Services, and Income Support programs such as emergency assistance, funeral support, Ontario Works, and discretionary benefits for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). In 2022, over 30,000 applications and calls were completed for Human Services programs.

Stability Support: We provide tailored, client-centred case management support (coaching, goal setting, assessment of barriers) to social assistance clients and help them navigate and access programs and services in the community. This allows residents to take steps towards employment, greater independence, and an improved quality of life.

In 2022, an average of 12,500 Peel households (25,000 individual residents) accessed stability support services monthly and it is expected that this will increase to an average of 14,000 Peel households (28,000 individual residents) by the end of 2023.

The Ontario Works program has undergone significant, provincially directed transformation over the last few years, including social assistance employment supports moving from the Region to Employment Ontario and our focus shifting to stability support services. In 2022, we referred over 4,000 social assistance clients to Employment Ontario for job search assistance.

Internal Support and Accountability: Dedicated Income Support staff provide internal support and ensure program compliance and accountability. Audits are conducted to track program compliance and to support continuous improvement. In 2022, over 2,000 file audits were completed; 17% of the average Ontario Works caseload. This sub-service also provides strategic and operational program management support and develops and delivers training modules for staff.

Trends

The population in Peel is diverse and continues to evolve, requiring varied supports and services to meet unique needs. Below are some current trends in the sector, service delivery and client caseloads.

Sector:

Regional caseworkers help clients get the supports they need, including mental health and addiction counselling, financial literacy, housing, and childcare. However, many services are not readily available, and waitlists can be long. The future success of client goal achievements will rely on sufficient funding for staff and for the community services clients need.

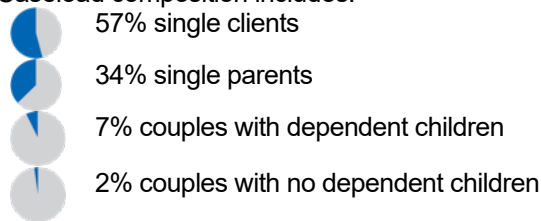
Service Delivery:

Our services continue to be delivered both digitally and in person to increase service options for clients. Hybrid service options will continue to be offered in response to provincial program direction, identified community needs and client preferences. In the first half of 2023 there was a sharp increase in applications which meant higher than desirable cases per caseworker. This has been addressed by hiring more staff and implementing a caseworker trainee program.

Client and Caseload:

The Ontario Works caseload demographics have remained consistent with single clients making up the majority of clients served, and youth clients make up 10% of clients across all case types.

Caseload composition includes:



Clients continue to have complex needs and barriers to gaining employment resulting in an increased need for stability supports.

Top five client barriers include:

1. Affording basic needs with current income
2. Health and Wellness (physical, mental, addictions)
3. Language skills (ESL)
4. Finding and keeping housing
5. Education

In 2023, more and more people are applying for Income Support Services due to the ending of federal benefits and other factors. We have also observed an increase in refugee, asylum seekers and Emergency Assistance applicants. These trends are anticipated to continue given the uncertain and unpredictable economic environment and global instability. As a result, we are continuing to recruit and train staff to keep pace with demand. A wide range of services and support will continue to be required to meet residents' growing and increasingly complex needs.

Another relevant trend impacting Income Support Services is the significant rise in the cost of living. However, the Ontario Works benefit rates have not changed since 2018 which means Ontario Works clients struggle to meet even basic needs (housing, food, clothing). This trend, combined with growing and increasingly complex caseloads may mean that additional funding is required in future years.



Figure 1 Providing ongoing case management and stability supports to social assistance recipients

Performance Measures and Results

The Region of Peel is committed to delivering services economically and efficiently. The Region's performance measures are used to help assess how well we are doing at achieving our goals and where we need to improve operations. The results also inform decision-making and strengthen accountability.

Program Measures: Performance measures determine the effectiveness of our service in providing stability support and moving clients towards employment readiness and self-sufficiency.

Program measurements and local targets for the new Ontario Works service model were finalized by the province in October 2021. Preliminary results were reported at the end of the 2022 calendar year, and we were above target for 80% of our prescribed program measurements.

2022 program results show:

- 82% of clients that exit the Ontario Works program, do not return within 12 months
- 84% of clients have created a plan with their Caseworker to help them become employment ready and self sufficient
- Over 4,000 clients were referred to employment services
- An average of 96% of eligibility file audits were completed within the ministry required timelines

Income Support service measures also include an 80% target for the completion of timely reviews to ensure ongoing program eligibility and client participation. In 2022, we maintained an 88% monthly average for eligibility reviews completed within the required 24-month period.

Client Measures: The development of an ongoing client engagement plan supports a collaborative, 'Working with You' culture for program design and delivery.

In 2022, we engaged with social assistance recipients to gather feedback regarding their service experience; a total of 374 responses were received.



81% of respondents prefer digital services due to challenges such as transportation and childcare to attend in-office appointments



81% of respondents who attended an in-office appointment in 2022 were satisfied with their experience

Plans are underway to ensure continued client engagement as it guides which services most effectively support clients. We have implemented a multi-dimensional approach to ensuring that we hear the voice of the client which is demonstrated in our participation in the 2023 Peel Poverty Summit, the distribution of client surveys, and implementation of a client insights focus group.

Employee Measures:

The development of an employee engagement, communication and training plan promotes an engaged and enabled workforce and strengthens divisional culture through inclusivity and a shared vision. It provides opportunities for staff to receive the appropriate training, tools, and resources to effectively support clients and manage their role responsibilities. In 2022, 75% of staff completed numerous training courses which included topics around client service, mental health, anti-human sex trafficking and Indigenous cultural awareness.

In 2022, through the Employee Ambassador Program, staff had the opportunity to participate in over 25 learning and engagement activities and events, sharing information and celebrating our diversity.

Awards and Achievements

Awards

Local Municipal Champion Award: The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) awarded Peel the 2022 Local Municipal Champion Award to our Youth Caseworker teams who provide support to youth 14-29 and to families providing temporary care to children in Peel. This award recognizes the great work done in advancing excellence in human services integration and service system management by teams from municipalities across the province.

Social Assistance Caseworker Award: Aligned with the provincial changes to social assistance, we work collaboratively with Employment Ontario to support client goal achievement towards employment readiness. In 2023, three Income Support staff were awarded the Social Assistance Caseworker Award from the Employment Ontario Service System Manager in Peel (WCG Services). This award highlights the exceptional client service and collaborative efforts made toward successful client outcomes and building partnerships with the employment agency network in Peel.

Achievements

Wellness Response and Assistance Program (WRAP): Income Support introduced a new fund to improve access to mental health services for Ontario Works clients. WRAP will fund new projects or increase existing program capacity for mental health and not-for-profit agencies in Peel. It aims to address addiction, stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues experienced by social assistance clients so that they can take steps toward greater independence and an improved quality of life.

Food Security: Peel's food banks reported a 50-60% increase in visits from 2021 to 2022 due to the rising costs of food and insufficient Ontario Works benefits. A recent Feed Ontario Hunger Report said that *"almost 2 of 3 people who access food banks are social assistance recipients."*¹In 2022, we helped address food insecurity in Peel by partnering with Mississauga Food Bank, Brampton Food Hub and Caledon Community Services to distribute over 30,000 grocery gift cards to food bank users.

Enabling Technology and Digital Solutions: To address the digital divide, we provided digital access support to social assistance clients in Peel. These supports aimed to increase access to technology, affordable internet and digital literacy training. In 2022, we provided over 400 computers to social assistance clients, and partnered with 10 community agencies to deliver digital literacy programming to over 270 Peel residents, helping them stay connected, building capacity for self-sufficiency and improving their employment and educational prospects.

In 2023, we also implemented an affordable internet plan pilot. The pilot aims to increase digital access for Ontario Works clients to support them with their goal achievement.

Business Transformation: In 2022, Income Support Services began an internal service delivery transformation to align our new model under four pillars: Access & System Navigation, Assessment & Financial Support, Stability Support services and Internal Support and Accountability. With the changing social assistance landscape and the increasing applications for Ontario Works, we took the opportunity to recognize the way we deliver our services to improve efficiencies and the client experience. We also worked collaboratively with provincial, community and internal partners to support clients and provincial transformation initiatives aimed at improving the social assistance system.

¹ <https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Hunger-Report-2022-Final.pdf>

The 2024 -2027 Business Plan Outlook

Planning for the Future

Service Delivery

Income Support Services ensure that the lives of Peel residents are improved in their time of need and that they can access appropriate and timely supports and services at every stage of life.

We will continue to implement the provincial Social Assistance Renewal Plan, collaborating for improved, sustainable, and inclusive social assistance programs. Income Support will continue to deliver services to Peel residents that are responsive, efficient and client centred. We will also expand our partnership with community agencies and service providers to ensure clients receive the support they need to progress toward employment and independence.

Workforce Enablement

Income Support Services will implement strategies to promote an engaged and enabled workforce. Staff will receive the appropriate tools, training, and resources to enable them to provide stability support services through a diverse, equitable, and inclusive lens.

Community, Client, and Partner Engagement and Integration:

Our service has deep and profound roots in the Peel community developed through years of collaboration and partnerships with organizations across Peel. Income Support has active partnerships with more than 300 community agencies, faith-based organizations, service providers and community leaders and advocates. Our staff also contribute to more than 50 community tables and networks.

We will continue to collaborate with our community, clients and partners to develop and advocate for programs and services to support our clients.

Finding Efficiencies

Continuous Improvement

The objective of Peel's Continuous Improvement Program is to optimize service delivery and maximize value for tax dollars spent. The completion of continuous improvement initiatives positively impacts client experience, employee engagement, cost savings and cost avoidance.

Income Support's Continuous Improvement initiatives include:

- The implementation of the new service delivery model and staff roles to improve service experience and improve operational efficiencies
 - The development of programs and services to support clients to address barriers with mental health and addictions and access to digital services
 - Formalizing a service performance framework to support program compliance and outcome achievement
 - Implementing modern, cost-effective, digital solutions to optimize operational efficiencies, and strengthen program planning, decision making and service improvements
 - Enforcing responsible program stewardship through the administration of ongoing compliance audits and the completion of follow-up items to satisfy compliance requirements
- Engaging with key stakeholders to collaboratively inform and design inclusive client services.
 - The implementation of an employee solutions table comprised of staff from each sub-service within Income Support, aiming to strengthen collaboration and awareness of work across all areas and encourage proactive issue resolution and decision making
 - To meet the rapid increase demand for service, we have implemented a robust staff recruitment strategy which includes a trainee program to help recent graduates gain the experience and training they need to support the diverse needs of our clients
 - The development and implementation of a diversity, equity and inclusion strategy that addresses the support of employee physical and psychological well-being through the promotion of an inclusive work environment where employees experience a sense of belonging

Transforming Our Business with Technology

The availability of modern, digital solutions allows more opportunities to change the way we deliver service. Our service aims to implement and utilize digital solutions to:

- Improve access to timely support and services
- Reinforce service modernization
- Increase operational efficiencies

Scheduling System

A scheduling system was implemented to reduce manual bookings for staff. The system provides operational efficiencies and increased access to appointment related data to support day to day operational needs and service delivery. We are also exploring additional opportunities to leverage the system for client self-serve options.

Online Applications

The province has implemented an online application process for individuals to apply for assistance using a risk-based eligibility methodology. This centralized intake process aims to increase client access to timely supports and services.

Data Management

Our service has implemented the use of the Microsoft data management platforms (Power BI and Power Apps) to improve data collection and availability. These data solutions have led to enhancements in service delivery and improved decision making through readily available program and service evidence and statistics.

Electronic Communication

Our service effectively utilizes the provincial electronic communication platform (MyBenefits). This platform increases communication options for social assistance clients and also provides them with 24 hour access to a secure platform to submit required information.

Document Scanning and Storage

Our service has transitioned to a fully electronic document scanning and storage platform. This modern solution allows for a 100% reduction in paper files and document retention while also increasing ease of access to information for our staff and clients.

Addressing Digital Barriers

To address the digital barriers faced by clients, we have implemented several programs and increased our partnership with community agencies to provide affordable internet plans, digital literacy training, and access to computers.

Proposed Operating Budget

This part of the Business Plan sets out the financial resources required to deliver the proposed 2024-2027 Business Plan. Information is provided by major expenditures and revenue. The costs to maintain existing service levels and operationalize prior decisions are identified in the base budget changes separately from proposed changes. The net cost for the service in 2023 was \$27.2 million and the proposed budget for 2024 is \$27.5 million.

Net Expenditures: \$27.5 million (Total Expenditures: \$221.7 million)

Description	2022 Actuals	2023 Approved Budget	2024 Proposed Budget	\$ Change Over 2023	% Change Over 2023
Operating Costs	2,005	2,415	2,448	32	1.3%
Labour Costs	32,134	39,841	40,616	775	1.9%
Reserve Contributions	-	-	-	-	-
Debt Charges	-	-	-	-	-
Grant Payments	127,584	158,910	167,851	8,941	5.6%
Facility, IT, HR and other support costs	21,781	20,891	19,728	(1,162)	(5.6)%
Recoveries	(9,792)	(9,130)	(8,981)	149	(1.6)%
Total Expenditures	173,711	212,927	221,662	8,735	4.1%
Grants and Subsidies	(153,001)	(185,678)	(194,151)	(8,473)	4.6%
Supplementary Taxes	-	-	-	-	-
Fees and Services Charges	(60)	-	-	-	-
Transfer from Development Charges	-	-	-	-	-
Contributions from Reserves	-	-	-	-	-
Total Revenues	(153,060)	(185,678)	(194,151)	(8,473)	4.6%
Total Net Expenditure	\$20,651	\$27,249	\$27,511	\$262	1.0%

Note: May not add up due to rounding.

2024 Operating Budget Pressures

\$'000	Total Expenditures	Total Revenue	Net Cost 2024 vs 2023	
2023 Revised Cost of Service	212,927	185,678	27,249	%
Cost of Living/Inflation¹				
Labour costs and Goods and services	517	-	517	
Base Subsidy Recovery²	32	-	32	
Cost Mitigation³				
Savings due to departmental realignment	(286)	-	(286)	
Base Budget Changes Subtotal	263	-	263	
Service Level Demand⁴				
Legislated Ontario Works Benefit increase due to change in monthly caseload (increase from 14,837 to 15,918)	8,942	8,942	-	
Reduction based on Budgeted caseload for Advance Child Care and Support to Employment Program (STEP)	(469)	(469)	-	
Service Level Changes Subtotal	8,473	8,473	-	
Total 2024 Budget Change	8,736	8,473	263	
2024 Proposed Budget	\$221,662	\$194,151	\$27,511	1.0%

Note: May not add up due to rounding

Operating budget pressure notes:

Cost of Living/Inflation¹

- Cost of Living increase for staffing costs

Base Subsidy/Recoveries²

- Reallocation of \$0.03M within existing funds to offset the reduction of Learn, Earn, and Parenting (LEAP) based on caseload

Cost Mitigation³

- Savings due to departmental realignment that resulted in 2 FTEs (Full Time Equivalent) reduction. This reduction will not impact service levels.

Service Level Demand⁴

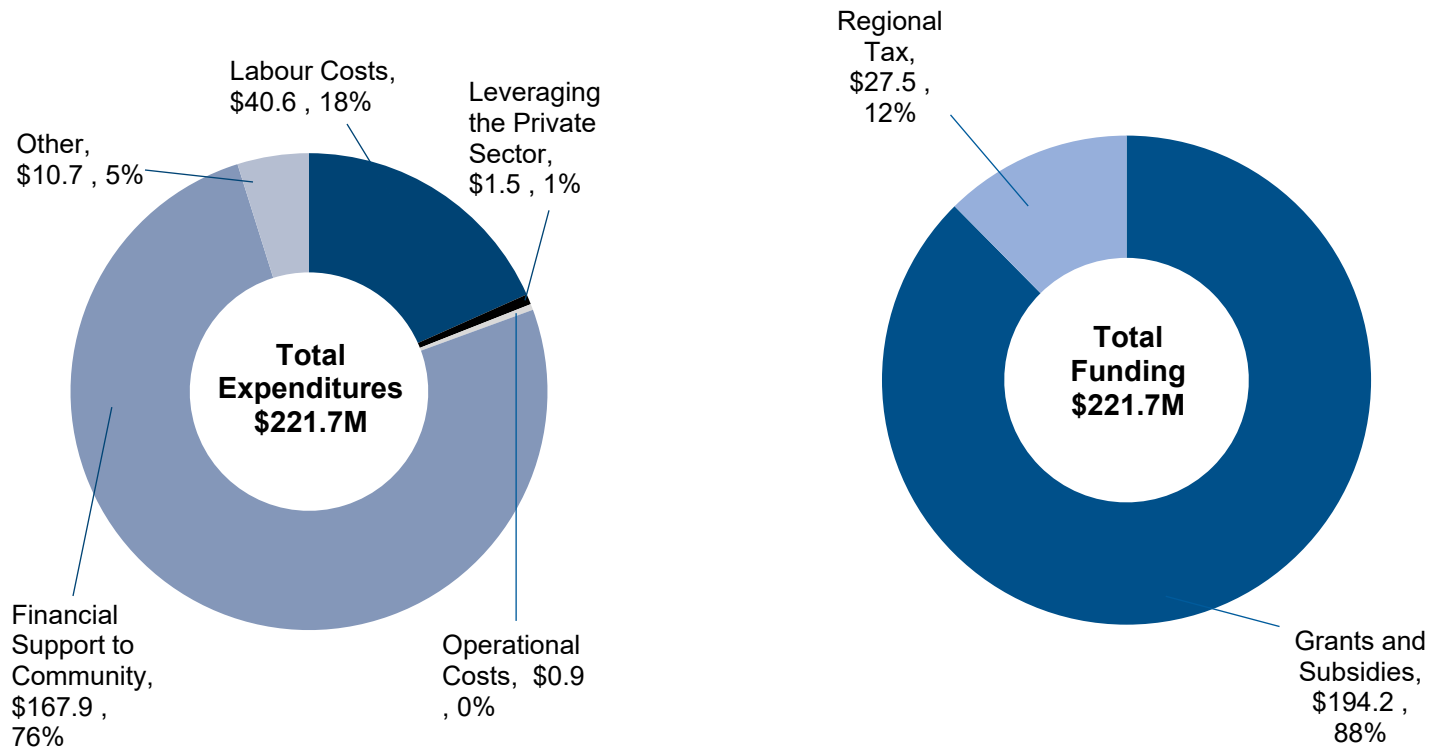
- 2024 average monthly budgeted caseload increased from the 2023 budget of 14,837 to 15,918. Benefit costs are fully funded by the province so no net impact on the budget due to the caseload change.
- Cost per caseload rates reflects no change. Province has not increased the rates since 2018
- 2024 budget assumes no funding changes

Staffing Resources to Achieve Level of Service

Sub Service	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Access and System Navigation	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8
Assessment and Financial Support	75.1	75.1	75.1	75.1	75.1
Stability Support	213.9	213.9	213.9	213.9	213.9
Internal Support and Program Accountability	60.5	58.6	58.6	58.6	58.6
Total	373.3	371.4	371.4	371.4	371.4

Note: Staffing resources are regular positions (Full Time Equivalent, FTE)

2024 Total Expenditures & Funding Source (In \$M)



2024 Budget Risks

- 2024 funding will remain at the 2023 levels. The province is currently reviewing the existing funding formula.
- Uncertainty in caseload numbers due to economic uncertainty

2025 - 2027 Operating Forecast

	Budget			Forecast					
	2023	2024		2025		2026		2027	
	\$'000	\$'000	%	\$'000	%	\$'000	%	\$'000	%
Total Expenditure	212,927	221,662	4.1%	229,296	3.4%	239,259	4.3%	249,687	4.4%
Total Revenue	(185,678)	(194,151)	4.6%	(200,320)	3.2%	(208,815)	4.2%	(217,734)	4.3%
Net Expenditure	27,249	27,511	1.0%	28,976	5.3%	30,444	5.1%	31,952	5.0%

Note: May not add up due to rounding

- In 2025
 - Caseload is increased to 16,517, no net impact
 - The net increase is driven by cost-of-living increase 2.9%
- In 2026
 - Caseload is increased to 17,343, no net impact
 - The net increase is driven by cost-of-living increase 2.8%
- In 2027
 - Caseload is increased to 18,210, no net impact
 - The net increase is driven by cost-of-living increase 2.8%
- Cost per case remains unchanged in the forecast
- Ontario Works administration funding and stabilization supports are held at the 2023 actual funding amount for the next four years
- Staffing will keep flat for forecast years, but if the caseload increases as projected, additional staff may be required to maintain service quality