

Community Voices

A Report on the Income Security Consultations in the NWT

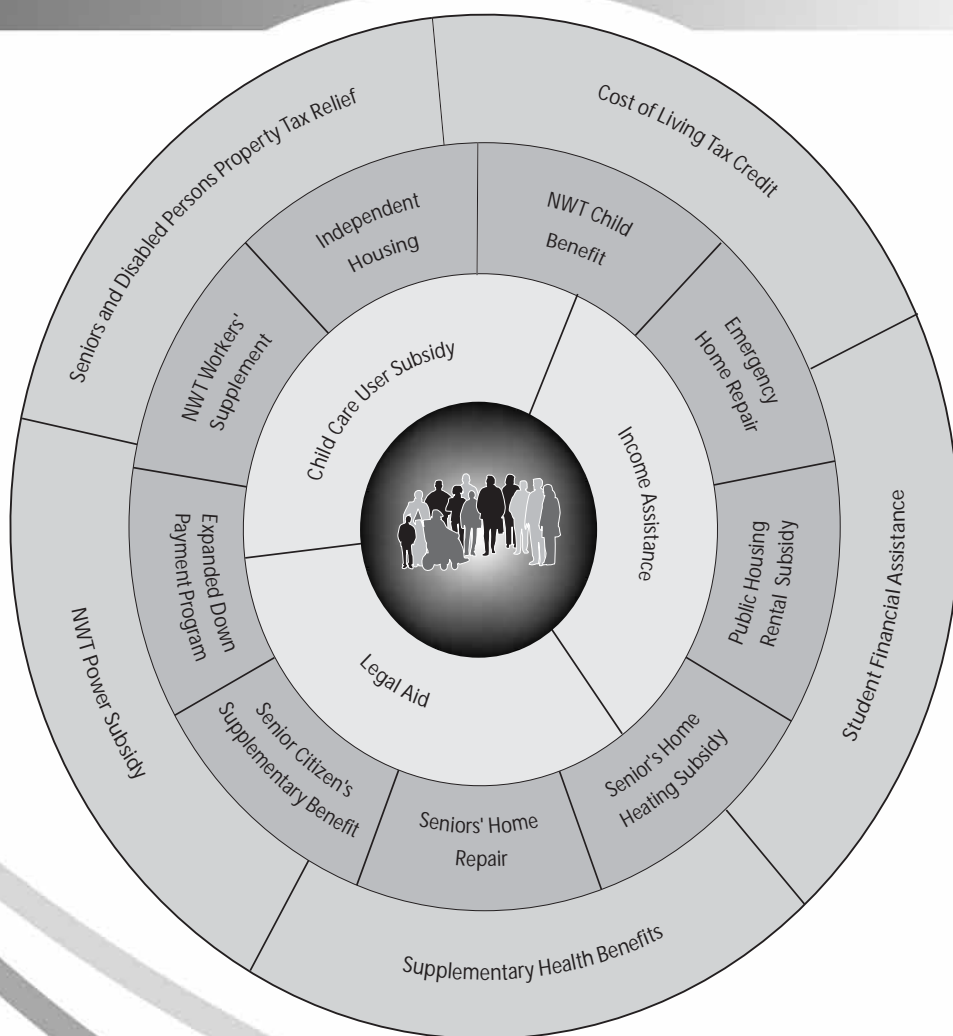


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Note:

Appendix A: Income Security Policy Framework

Appendix B: Catalogue of Income Security Programs

Appendix C: Income Security Guide and Survey

Copies of these appendix documents can be found at:

- Website: www.ece.gov.nt.ca
- Toll-free: 1-866-973-7252
- Email: IncomeSecurity_review@gov.nt.ca





Minister's Message

Community Voices, is a report on the Income Security Consultations that were held over the past three months across the NWT. *Community Voices* is intended to capture what people said in the meetings, workshops, how they responded to the brochure/survey guide, what they said in letters or in comments over the phone. People provided a wealth of comments on how these programs should work and what the programs should achieve.

I want to thank everyone who contributed their time, thoughts and experiences regarding income security programs.

The Northwest Territories is experiencing rapid change. We must be prepared for the impact of change on our communities, families and economy. Income Security programs are intended to help people participate in the changing north and to support full participation in community life. We began the consultation with the understanding that Income Security Programs sometimes don't fully meet the needs of those they were intended to serve. Through Phase One of the consultation, we have begun to determine how these programs can be organized to provide effective support for people in the greatest need. Phase Two will build the consensus of how we adjust to develop the right mix of targeted programs, to help those most in need achieve self-reliance.

I would like to thank all of those who spoke with us on how to improve the income support programs. We will continue to work in collaboration with the people of the NWT to develop targeted programs that support full participation in community life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Dent". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles Dent
Minister



Summary

Community Voices: A Report on the Income Security Consultation in the NWT, represents phase one of the Income Security consultation process. This report:

- provides feedback to participants to let them know they were heard;
- provides a public view on what the Income Security programs and subsidies should be achieving; and
- creates the starting point for phase two of the process, building consensus for change.

Based on broad public consultation, the following themes, describing the current Income Security system from the public's point of view were identified.

Comments from participants are provided under each of these themes.

➤ **Adequacy**

There is consensus subsidies need to accurately reflect the cost of living in each community. This is true for those on a fixed income and those with needs that are greater than the defined set of basic needs. This should cover the quality of programs as well as adequate level of subsidies.

Comments heard:

- people don't mind the benefits reducing but don't like them to drop; and
- seniors can't afford to stay in their own home and remain independent.

➤ **Transparency**

Consultation showed that people need to know and understand the programs and subsidies that exist. Sometimes, people may know that a certain program is there, but they don't know if they are eligible, and they are unclear about subsidies and requirements. We also heard that people want to know if they are effective.

Comments heard:

- if standards are not met is there some reporting / monitoring responsibility to determine effectiveness; and
- I don't think a lot of seniors are aware of what programs are even available to them.

➤ **Accessibility**

Generally people agreed that programs and subsidies need to be well advertised and that the application process needs to be simple. However, those living in small communities without a government presence found access to be very difficult.

Comments heard:

- I have no one in my community to provide services; and
- some (people are) not really educated but need help except they don't really know where to go.

➤ **Dignity / Respect**

How people are treated was seen as a big issue across all programs and subsidies, People felt they should at least be offered a 'compassionate no' and be given options. As well, compassionate client service was a very important issue for those trying to access services from a community outside their home community.

Comments heard:

- reasonable expectation that their disability will not stand in the way of their enjoying a full and happy life; and
- sometimes it is a bit dehumanizing going to welfare - so some people don't go back.

➤ **Self Reliance**

Self-reliance depends on personal life circumstances. To a senior, self-reliance means taking part in community activities and being healthy and safe. To a single person self-reliance means being able to access career counseling and employment or training programs and subsidies.

Comments heard:

- to me self-reliance is knowing that they (my kids) can support themselves when they get older; and
- income assistance deductions keep you poor.

➤ **Fairness**

Programs and subsidies must bring everyone to a level playing field. In the consultation, fairness did not mean the ‘same’, it meant ‘equal’. One person may need increased subsidies to achieve the same result as another person with different needs. Providing different benefits to achieve the same outcome was seen as equal.

Comments heard:

- the situation of families fluctuates but the program is rigid; and
- in a safe house I get no income assistance but to get income assistance I must be out of the shelter, this is a catch 22.

➤ **Control**

People talked about taking personal responsibility for decision-making and communities having greater decision making responsibility.

Comments heard:

- provide program resources to the community so they can make their own decisions; and
- I like to see the Tliche do something different with this income assistance program.

This report provided the Income Security Team with rich and valuable lessons on what the Income Security programs and subsidies should be achieving. The next steps will be to develop options for ‘how do we achieve this’. This work will need to balance many competing needs and values.

Introduction

Income Security programs and subsidies touch all of us at some point in our lives. The Northwest Territories (NWT) has entered a period of great change marked by:

- important changes in population make-up;
- increased expectations;
- addition of Aboriginal self-government arrangements and land claim agreements;
- social and economic problems seen in many families and communities; and
- new economic and employment opportunities.

It will be a challenge for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to respond to these changes because of their scope and because of the fiscal constraints.

Income security programs and subsidies have similar aims, whether individuals receive a cost of living tax rebate, a power subsidy, live in subsidized housing, receive student financial assistance or are income support clients. Income security programs and subsidies:

- try to reduce the high cost of living in the north;
- help people achieve their personal goals; and
- if needed, provide a financial last resort.

Together, the income security programs and subsidies form a web of supports providing some form of financial subsidy and support to all individuals and families in the NWT. In 2004/05, the cost of these programs was approximately 125 million dollars.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) is reviewing all Income Security programs and subsidies on behalf of the GNWT to ensure that they continue to meet public needs.

The review looked at programs and subsidies individually and as a group to make sure that they:

- encourage self-reliance;
- follow a logical policy direction;
- target those most in need of government services;
- meet government initiatives;
- respect diversity; and
- treat people with dignity.

The NWT Income Security consultation wanted to find out if these programs and subsidies actually helped individuals to become self-reliant. The consultation did not focus on what is wrong with individual programs, (even though we heard many comments on this) but on how these programs affect peoples' lives, and how people can become more personally self-reliant.

The following details what people said about the NWT Income Security system. Northerners had the opportunity to comment through survey guides; written submissions, telephone submissions, in person consultation sessions and workshops. The comments have been organized by theme. The statements are taken from the notes of what people said.

This report presents the first phase: *where we need to go* to achieve self-reliance. The next phases will focus on *how we change* existing programs and subsidies to better meet individual needs and overall self-reliance.

The Income Security System

Income security is one part of the complete social security system provided by the GNWT and the Government of Canada. Social security shows the Canadian commitment to a shared, combined responsibility for ensuring a minimum standard of living and care for all its citizens. It refers, as shown below, to the full range of programs that support and protect people.

The social security system includes income security programs as well as health care, social housing, child protection and child day care services, early childhood education, home care and other community services. Canadians think of social security as a system that modern democratic societies should have.

Social Security in Canada



Income Security Structure

The GNWT administers 17 different income security programs and subsidies through 7 departments. Different governments have introduced various programs and subsidies over time to serve many purposes. This has resulted in conflict within:

- policies;
- eligibility and tests;
- definitions;
- cut-off levels; and
- reporting and accountability requirements.

There are inconsistencies even though:

- subsidies dealing with need in low and moderate income families have been developed; and
- there is an overlap in the different programs' client groups.

This results in a complex web of programs with many entry points for clients who may be required to:

- visit several government offices; and
- complete separate application forms, giving the same information time and again, for similar subsidies.

Because these programs and subsidies were developed at different times for different purposes, little thought was given to:

- program coordination;
- development of common eligibility; or
- selection of the most efficient way to deliver the programs.

The complex and inconsistent nature of existing programs makes it hard to determine how effective they really are. Important questions regarding transparency and accountability are also raised. The GNWT needs to establish clear and consistent objectives and outcomes for providing subsidies and programs. They must also target these programs to those individuals, families and communities that are in need.

Income Security system reform supports the vision and goals of the 15th Legislative Assembly that focuses on self-reliance and shared responsibility. For most persons self-reliance is not achieved through a cash payment at the end of an application process. Self-reliance is built on the programs and subsidies offered across departments that support and improve a person's life. Income security programs are valuable to individuals if they help them to achieve self-reliance through subsidies and programs. If educational and social support programs and services are linked to subsidies, individuals will be provided with a more holistic basket of supports. They can then achieve self-reliance within their individual capacity.

By clearly stating the program vision, goals and principles, the Income Security system will:

- create consistency across GNWT subsidy programs;
- align program efforts with the government's fiscal situation; and
- help the GNWT to accommodate Aboriginal land claims.

The Income Security policy framework provides the vision, principles and goals of the Income Security programs.

Vision

Individuals and their families, regardless of differences in needs and circumstance, will be treated with respect and dignity, have opportunities to become as self-reliant as individual capacity allows, to fully participate in community life and to share in the opportunities available in their communities.

Goal

The goal of the Income Security system is to provide a system of income support programs within the GNWT that work together effectively to make the vision a reality. Within this system, programs will be fair, equitable, fiscally responsible, transparent and effective.

Together, the programs and subsidies ensure that territorial residents have enough income to:

- help meet their basic needs;
- allow participation in community life; and

Current Income Security Programs and Subsidies

- Public Housing
- Student Financial Assistance
- Income Assistance
- Cost of Living Tax Credit
- Independent Housing
- Supplementary Health Benefits
- Territorial Power Subsidy
- Rent Supplement
- Legal Aid
- NWT Child Benefit
- Senior Supplementary Benefit
- Expanded Down Payment Assistance
- Senior Citizen Home Repair
- Emergency Repair, Childcare Subsidy
- Senior Home Heating Subsidy
- Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons Property Tax Relief

The Consultation Process

The consultation process was a collaborative effort with the GNWT and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It took place early 2006 and used various methods to ensure many public opportunities to provide feedback.

The early and active participation of NGOs was important to the consultation process. They helped develop the communications tools including the survey brochure. Together the team designed the consultation process and participated in both the face-to-face consultation with interest groups and the two-day workshops.

Phase 1

Public Consultation

- Brochure and Survey Guide
- Interest group meetings
- Workshops

Phase 2

Building Consensus Workshops

- Seniors
- Persons with Disabilities
- Families
- Overall Income Security System

Phase 3

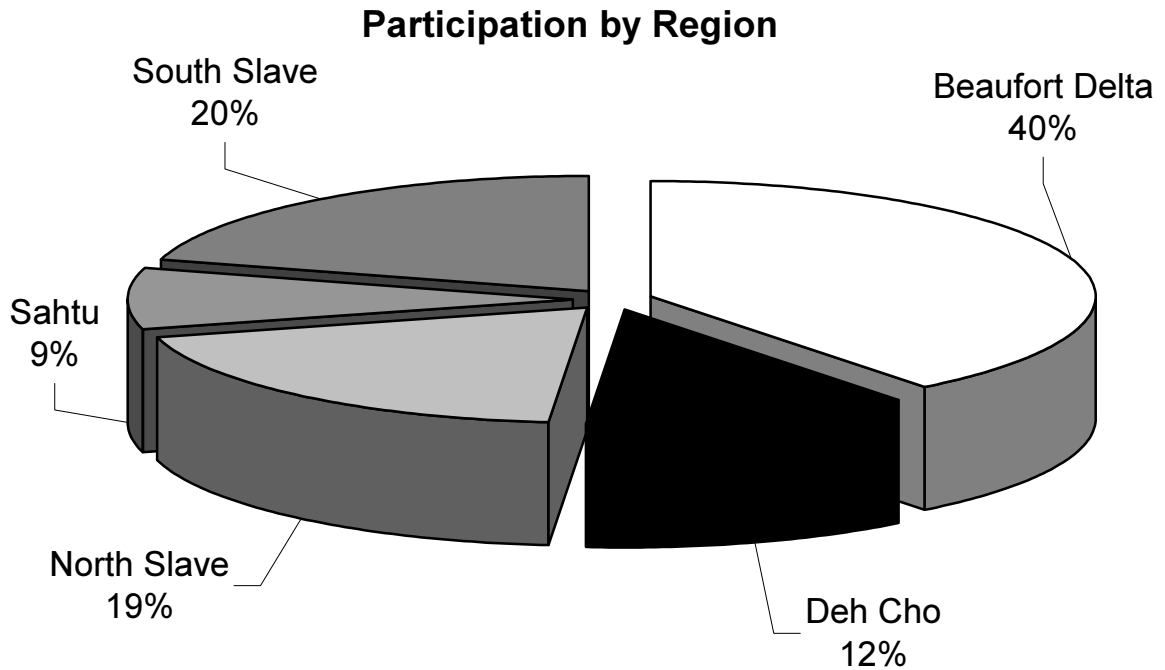
Final Report

The consultation used mail-out and on-line brochures and survey guides to reach a broad audience of northerners. The brochure informed the public about the review and described the various income security programs. The survey guide provided opportunities to share comments, personal thoughts and experiences about income security programs. The brochures / survey guides were mailed to interest groups, bands, hamlet councils and Métis offices. The NGO group distributed the brochures/survey guides to their clients. The public was told about the consultation through newspaper inserts of the brochure, newspaper, television and radio advertising and reminder postcards. The public was given the opportunity to provide input in their own language by telephone, mail or on-line.

In addition to the brochure campaign, meetings were held with communities and interest groups. Thirty-eight of these meetings were held throughout the territories. Communities were also invited to send representatives to a two-day regional workshop that examined in greater detail the various income security programs.

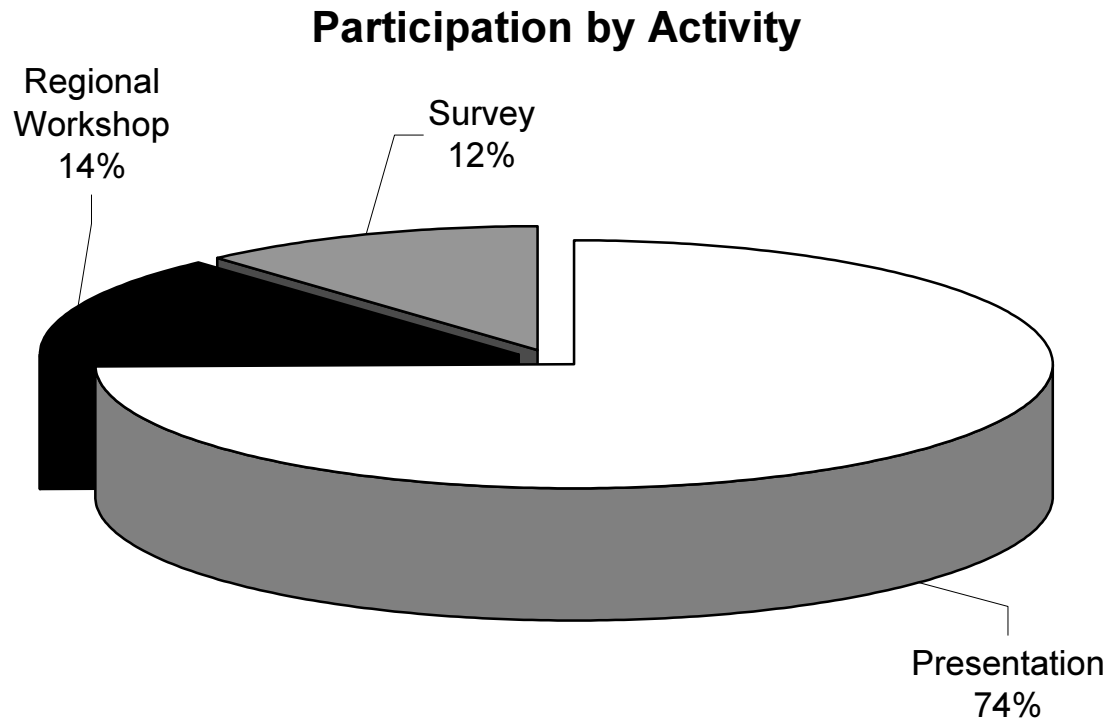
In total, 444 persons took part in the consultations by way of meetings, 2-day workshops or by making written or verbal submission.

The following chart reflects the percentage of participation by region:



Most of the participation was by presentation meetings. There were 38 meetings, ranging in size up to 45 people.

The following chart reflects the percentage of participation by consultation activity:



Participation in all sessions was active and passionate. The review team heard many heartfelt stories of how these programs affect people beyond the financial subsidy. The team heard stories of families making decisions to make sure that the programs and subsidies continue. People said these programs encouraged cheating and deceptive behavior. The team heard from seniors who could not meet the cost of living in their communities without moving into public housing. Also that persons living with a disability who couldn't afford minimal supports to enable them to go to work. The stories are endless but best summarized by a person in Hay River who said, 'these programs destroy the soul.'

The consultation involved all the communities identified in the following map.



Themes

Adequacy

- for the purposes of this report adequacy means not enough money and help while on the programs and subsidies.

Here is a sampling of comments made by people:

- my grandmother will not babysit because she doesn't want it to effect her fuel subsidy
- I could go on forever about how an unhealthy diet contributes to the cycle of poverty, the research is there - let's do something about it
- child tax benefit does not reflect costs in the NWT
- the costs of a student in Inuvik are much higher than those of a student in Yellowknife, yet both students get the same benefit
- I dropped out of college two years ago because I was falling behind on bills and I was getting evicted because I had no money for rent or groceries. I had absolutely no choice but to drop out and move back home
- some seniors in public housing say they would like to pay some rent
- seniors can't afford to stay in their own home and remain independent
- most of the single parents are mothers and they don't get enough to raise their children - it bankrupts them
- benefit level and ignoring needs are driving people into poverty
- there needs to be good services provided to needy people and this must be done as efficiently as possible
- provide a separate benefit program for people with disabilities, separate from income support programs
- the whole claw-back thing is a major problem - we're trying to arrange for our daughter when we're gone - the government needs to look at and find ways to address this problem to the benefit of parents of children (including adults) with disabilities

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- people don't mind the benefits reducing but don't like them to drop
 - provide graduated loss of benefits to encourage people to try employment
 - people expect too much for nothing
 - lack of training and not understanding the system
 - should receive enough assistance to go on the land
 - seniors who have money in the bank are not penalized when they apply for a program however poor people with money in the bank have to spend it first before they qualify for a program
 - people do not have enough money to live. Many will lie and cheat to get their basic needs met
 - very supportive to families
 - once you fall into extreme poverty it is almost impossible to dig your way out
 - food money goes for everything not just food i.e. diapers, cleaning items, personal items, transportation, etc
 - a mom who went to school but could not make ends meet so she had to quit school
 - no incentive to go to work the subsidy is not realistic, people need to feel worthy i.e. housing, why would I want to go to work and pay \$1110.00 for rent when I only have to pay \$32.00 to stay home and the same for subsidized power
 - help is basically provided when you have no other place to go. I found my self with out a job and no money, when things were needed eg: clothing, groceries, bills paid and so on. I believe that the amount distributed is not enough
 - my experience working with families all across the territory leads to the conclusion that income security does not provide adequate funds for people to eat nutritious food. Unfortunately, a person's food budget is the most flexible - rent, electricity
 - must have basic phone, transportation, personal items, recreation built into benefits
 - how can a person (with a disability) on a fixed income afford the cost of transportation

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- seniors heating subsidy is backwards on the senior's side
 - if you haven't worked for a long time the first cheque goes to paying your debts
 - when you earn a dollar and the benefits take back a dollar there is not incentive to work
 - why is telephone not part of needs
 - providing food clothing, health care, education, shelter and a decent quality of life for all residents should be a primary concern of government. This government has enough money to do this adequately without being punitive in it's approach
 - crazy to deduct family allowance and pensions

Transparency

- for the purposes of this report transparency means program and subsidy details need to be communicated simply or in a language understood by clients. Also, transparency would include awareness and understanding of the purpose and effectiveness of the programs and subsidies.

Here is a sampling of comments made by people:

- the value for a wealthy person is not the same as for a poor person
- I don't think a lot of seniors are aware of what programs are even available to them
- how to define the working poor, low income
- people don't know about all the benefits available
- he told me - as long as government has money than I have money
- need to have advocates for clients with language barriers
- this is a waste of government money he may go rent a house and not live there so he can qualify for income assistance to get the meds he needs
- make government accountable for what they are supposed to be delivering
- that's scary - it just reaffirms our own thoughts of departmental overlaps and program effects on each other
- any employer has a difficult time hiring a low income person, now I know why
- if standards are not met is there some reporting / monitoring responsibility to determine effectiveness
- where does the average NWT citizen start to get assistance, we need to realize that people with low literacy levels in the NWT would have a big problem getting income assistance, it's so overwhelming to them and it stigmatizes them
- lack of knowledge they even exist
- if you're in public housing your electric bill is a lot less than in private housing
- people are better off staying home than working in the mines

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- my uncle always told the story on how the government paid people to be lazy and taught the people to hold their hands in a begging manner
 - is this where front line workers should have the knowledge of all the programs
 - living on SFA means living at a level below people on income assistance. We need to have more information out there especially on income assistance for elders - maybe a yearly workshop
 - nobody tells you about the programs
 - I never looked at it as a benefit until I came to this workshop
 - needs to be more awareness of all the programs - maybe an advocate who can explain and speak for clients
 - some things cannot be done by government
 - even with all the name changes people still call it welfare
 - public housing impacts on the private housing market, this effects us
 - develop and distribute a plain language resource explaining the various income security programs and services including access
 - get the facts out to the public. I would suggest sending a speaker and info pkgs. to the Baker Centre so that seniors can see them and hear of what is available. Every Friday they have a gathering called Lunch with a Bunch at noon
 - I think public awareness is a big issue
 - this is so confusing - therefore you really have to know how to access these programs - there should be someone to help us (clients) understand and access these programs
 - the disability community has said again and again what supports they need but the government doesn't seem to be listening
 - they (programs) all seem to come down to quantitative rather than qualitative results
 - we have been through all this before with the Social Agenda
 - I think that income assistance is not being policed enough in the NWT you always hear stories about people on income

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- I think that income assistance is not being policed enough in the NWT you always hear stories about people on income assistance not reporting the correct information, this is about compliance, there would be significant savings to the government
 - I didn't realize it was a benefit
 - address the issue of differing definitions among the various programs and services
 - how many years since an increase in IA
 - make government accountable for what they are suppose to be delivering
 - no gender analysis of policies & feminization of poverty – women in abusive relationships, elderly women, single mothers, aboriginal; women on reserve, immigrant women – programs do not reflect the realities of life circumstances
 - as a single person , I wasn't even aware that there were programs for single people

Accessibility

- for the purposes of this report accessibility means that clients, after knowing about the programs and subsidies are able to successfully benefit from them.

Here is a sampling of comments made by people:

Advocate

- there needs to be an advocate for people on these programs so they can get answers and know what's available
- everyone should be treated like they are human when they apply for these programs
- address the need to coordinate and collaborate on the differing application processes for income security programs and services
- the programs are spread out over so many programs that a person has difficulty finding them. One place to get information on all available programs would be helpful
- a lot of those in need may not be as well educated and assertive in finding out what benefits are available. They find all the paperwork and bureaucracy frustrating
- you almost have to have a strategy to access these programs - one that tells you what not to say and what not to show to the IA worker

- streamline (simplify) all programs
- recognize the system has many barriers preventing client from moving forward of off assistance
- use plain language for all program documents
- there needs to be enough support to clients with low English literacy

Child Care

- how can they go back to school without access to daycare
- when child care is an issue it's not just about accessing the subsidy but also about availability of child care, low wages, levels and training
- the childcare subsidy is too hard to access. The criteria are set to rigidly and not enough people qualify for it. It does not work for day care centres either because it is taken away if child is sick or away for time but day care can't staff
- no daycare subsidy leaves people in the hole for childcare. Can't use grandmother for childcare because it affects the fuel subsidy

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- if a parent in a community has no access to a daycare or licensed day home, their rate is less. Parents should not be penalized for not having access to facilities and having to use a babysitter when there is no other option
 - process for child care subsidy to difficult, too much red tape

Delivery

- need to say no with alternatives
- one time an elder went to the housing person and he was told you want me to jump every time you want something - it's worse than having no program
- income support workers don't have the people skills necessary to deliver these programs
- get frustrated filling out all the forms and then told you don't qualify
- bridge between programs and the cheque. Not enough to give the cheque. People come to poverty in individual crisis. Not capable of managing the crisis. Lives become open to scrutiny, life choices open to judgment and scrutiny. Embarrassed, type cast, too many barriers. Give up, no longer care. Longer you stay on the more difficult it is to move off. Physical deterioration, mental deterioration. Fear of losing home, children. (Case management)

- focus on person and not bottom line
- case modeling is the approach necessary to work with clients and their needs
- instead of assisting people to get help with programs, they (IA staff) set up barriers
- if you're on OAS you can't apply for IA - we've been told, don't bother one stop window equipped with qualified staff who can assess client and situation

Seniors

- should have something separate for Seniors, use public housing for others

Cost of Living

- have SFA reflect cost of living and not be a disincentive
- living in northern communities - fruit and vegetables very expensive, it's cheaper to buy my kids chips instead of something healthy

Gap

- 16 - 18 year age gap falling through the cracks
- address the issue of programming and services for the sixteen to nineteen age group

Poverty

- how many people living in poverty that can't access the program at all
- it's really a punitive system, if I'm poor I have no power
- poverty is still a problem in the NWT

Programs

- there is a big picture problem because these programs are punitive
- this program is set up as a catch 22. If you make any money, you have the gov't clawing back, causing you to stay on Income Support. If you don't make any money you have to stay on Income Support. There is no leeway for anyone to get ahead so they can

- gov't programs and benefits should encourage young people to go to work

- people who make a lot of money should not get benefits

Others

- the food bank has become another gov't agency

- support choice of staying home and raising children

- need a bridge transition to work

Dignity / Respect

- for the purposes of this report dignity / respect means all people are treated compassionately as individuals.

Here is a sampling of comments made by people:

- my uncle told me this support made people lazy
- respect the choice of the person rather than force them to do something they don't want to do
- people should not be set up to fail
- elders place in raising the kids (traditional ways) needs to be reflected in the regulations not just the mom and dad
- traditional system has worked for years- why can't it work now
- money is not the only motivation
- even today the elders think they have to take their government cheque and cash it at the Bay, they think they owe it to the Bay to cash it there
- reasonable expectation that their disability will not stand in the way of their enjoying a full and happy life
- people need to recover from colonization then they can adapt to the new reality
- sometimes it is a bit dehumanizing going to welfare - so some people don't go back
- income assistance breaks families because adult children can't look after aging parents without seniors being penalized
- system gets in the way of the traditional way of life - what can I do
- better educated people, and more accountability. These programs need to be accountable for the funds they give out and they funds they are expected to receive. Money cannot be handed out at will, with no consequences for non-repayment
- need to say no with alternatives
- programs spoiled the community - this takes away health and a way of life

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- acknowledges that society/government has a responsibility to help those less fortunate
 - eligibility criteria are not applied equally. Fraudulent applicants i.e. living common-law, but reporting single parent leads to less money for the targeted clientele
 - support them on their choices
 - everyone should be treated like they are human when they apply for these programs
 - clients want someone to come with them to help them understand, they don't want to be confused, don't want to sign something they don't understand
 - treats everyone with dignity and fairness
 - difficult to understand, especially those elders that do not speak English
 - it's really a punitive system, if I'm poor I have no power
 - difficult to understand too much paperwork and rules
 - these programs make liars out of everyone
 - living in your own home feeds the spirit, some of these programs feed your pocket book but not the spirit
 - continue changes in family size and the cost of living is too high in the NWT making it difficult to leave to receive further training or education
 - having to justify for an income support worker every cent they make. Having to ask for a handout is sometimes extremely embarrassing and painful for someone who has never had to depend on a social agency for existence
 - can you make the system kinder
 - why is it not set up to treat people with dignity and really help them
 - the frontline worker has to be so sympathetic they almost have to be a social worker, they need to be supportive and have local flexibility
 - insensitivity to individuals and their unique needs. Claw backs result in disincentives to improve family conditions

➤ some people would rather have their children looked after by elders

➤ deserving poor and the undeserving poor, this has got to stop

Self-Reliance

- for the purposes of this report self-reliance means people are able to and want to look after themselves.

Here is a sampling of comments made by people:

- to me self reliance is knowing that they (my kids) can support themselves when they get older
- these programs are an erosion of the spirit
- when you're on income assistance someone else pays your bills when you go to work now you have to pay your own bills but you never learned how to do it
- it's a dignity thing coming to income assistance the first time - there is a lot of stigma attached
- I'm trying to help myself and support my family but I get denied income assistance however I see these other people sit around doing nothing but get income assistance
- balancing raising your children with raising your level in a short period of time
- don't want the next generation to grow up dependant on government
- as a single person, I know I should look after myself to the best of my ability. Don't make it easy for people like me to work the system
- if the dignity of severely mentally disabled is to be respected income support is not a temporary support but a life long thing
- spend time on determining outcomes and a poverty reduction strategy
- get your own home, that's independence, we should be helping those people more than the guy who only pays \$32 rent
- making people dependent rather than self-reliant
- does promote 'productive choices' so more people can achieve individual success
- people who have been paying \$32/month for rent and fuel/gas and heavily subsidized power will have difficulty transitioning to mortgage /water/fuel/power

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- we can be doing things without more money
 - disabled people should be under a different program, so they aren't stereotyped. This would probably be better because then the funding would be reassessed to fit disabled people and their families
 - pay their bills directly rather than giving them the money to 'blow'
 - consider the limitations on an individual basis. Have workshops for personnel that administer these programs on how to deal with people with disabilities
 - public housing encourages dependence. Tenants are discouraged when working because the more you work the more you pay. It becomes cheaper and easier to stay home and pay \$32 a month
 - no consideration for the community and environments that residents live in. Colonialism- many aboriginal people are very self reliant- fish trap, hunt, participate in the well being of their community. Need money to live off the land- to harvest off the land- labelled as welfare bums. Insulting to their way of life. We have to accept in some communities, the government will have to provide basic level of support to meet cost of living. In effect the government is saying if you produce and you consume what you produce, then you are not contributing. You are poor if you consume what you harvest (food, clothing, shelter). Sustenance living is perceived as poverty and not valued. You are not worthy unless you have a job in the wage economy
 - claw-backs of most earned income for IS recipients reduces incentive to work and takes away any flexibility/breathing room
 - the staff need to suggest / provide alternatives to their clients not just turn them away
 - programs spoiled the community, this takes away health and a way of life
 - encourage the individual to become their true self
 - difficult to understand, especially those elders that do not speak English

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- poverty is still a problem in the NWT
 - focus on person and not bottom line
 - need transporting services to allow seniors to participate in all aspects of the community
 - one time an elder went to the housing person and he was told you want me to jump every time you want something – it's worse than having no program

Fairness

- for the purposes of this report fairness means giving different benefits to people with different needs.

Here is a sampling of comments made by people:

- programs that are not administered consistently and equitably are open to abuse. They lead clients to provide fraudulent information to access funding. They also lead to clients becoming dependent on government for assistance
- all NWT residents not treated the same
- yes they should be treated differently
- you work hard for 20 years and you're not rich
- gov't cuts corporate taxes, they should make sure Northerners get breaks too
- why don't they charge seniors rent, I can afford it in private housing therefore I can afford it in public housing
- and you never get ahead
- it's hard for native people (seniors) to refuse their children to come and stay with them
- unreasonable expectation i.e. have anybody look after her kids so she can do a productive choice
- scholarship money is deducted as income from students on IA
- they cater to the senior who is in their own home
- IA deductions keep you poor
- clients not fully understanding
- the situation of families fluctuate but the program is rigid
- seems to be unfair there is no means test, some of this money spent on seniors gov't pension could be spent on other areas of greater need
- a lot of concern in respect to this area, everything going up nothing going down even the cost of living, how can we satisfy the elders they have so very little
- the current incentive encourages people to stay at home and do nothing however

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- we need to grow and government needs to reach out to these people
- is the system built for the person or vice versa
 - public housing rent considered income, this is not right
 - people need to be paying for services on a sliding scale including for seniors
 - in a shelter house I get no income assistance but to get income assistance I must be out of the shelter, this is a catch 22
 - it's not fun living on income assistance
 - child tax benefit does not reflect costs in the NWT
 - if a person is capable of working they should be doing something, if a supplement is needed to cover basic needs then this should be the focus not attending to all the needs of a single capable person, there are plenty of jobs available
- students come with high hopes in September and they are on income assistance but by Christmas they are in huge debt and very disillusioned
 - politicians & bureaucracies perpetuate the stigma
 - I hear about people coming to Fort Simpson and getting more money from these programs than I make in my job, is there some residency requirement
 - throwing money at people (from out of the territory) who haven't contributed does not seem right
 - income assistance deductions keep you poor
 - assumes all single people should hold down a job. Some income support recipients are people with undiagnosed disabilities or do not have skill set required to get and keep a job. In smaller communities, there are not enough jobs.

Control

- for the purposes of this report control means individuals gaining more say over their own life as well as communities having decision making control.

Here is a sampling of comments made by people:

- provide program resources to the community so they can make their own decisions
- I like to see as a Tlicho do something different with this income assistance program, giving out money to people does not work but maybe there is a way, maybe work for IA instead of it being used for bingo, drugs and alcohol
- child care should be delivered locally
- the value of raising children at home
- everyone likes to feel they have control of their own lives
- responsibilities pushed on other organizations who can't deal with the clients (productive choices)
- flexibility to reflect community
- income assistance reschedules your life for you
- not every community is the same, policies should reflect community values
- you might need flexibility community by community
- have a group of community people advise government on how to change programs
- different way of doing things from region to region
- we should have a Dene program just to work on ourselves since we now have our own council
- give staff some discretion in determining cut off points
- pass knowledge / culture onto youth and children
- people want to be independent but because of the system they become dependent
- decision making on applications be in the Sahtu
- why do we want self government (reference to the complication of the income security programs and having to deliver them)

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- makes you dependent – someone else does it for you
 - communities could come up with a plan in relation to potential economic development and then determine what skills are needed and how many qualified people are needed, then they can use training and educational programs to get people qualified
 - people need to make rules for their communities
 - some day we want to take over income assistance
 - one of the concerns I have is that we need good counselors based in the community to help people
 - make governments accountable for what they are suppose to be delivering
 - to give them the best quality of life as judged by them not the government
 - cost of fuel in each community needs to be taken into account
 - people want to get educated to help their children
 - the whole dependence thing, the government owes me this – it's mine – it shouldn't be like that
 - the balance between what a doctor thinks is best vs what the senior thinks is best
 - this is income assistance for the whole territories, it should be looked at by region and community
Tlicho government needs to sit down and this program (income assistance) work for all communities
 - communities are caring for each other

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Community Voices report is presented without coming to conclusions. The report attempts to faithfully report the voices of the individuals and organizations that offered feedback during the consultations.

The next steps will again draw on community participants and the NGO group to build consensus for change. Developing consensus for change will not be easy. Balancing competing interests, needs and values as well as fiscal realities, will be a challenge to the participants. Although a complicated task, the work is worthwhile and will result in a healthy, strong, self-reliant north.

We offer our sincere thanks to all the people who generously gave of their time and shared their personal and moving stories.

