



What We Heard Report

Proposed Amendments to *Income Assistance*
Regulations
and
Proposed *Income Assistance for Seniors and*
Persons with Disabilities Regulations

If you would like this information in another official language, call us.

English

Si vous voulez ces informations dans une autre langue officielle, contactez-nous.

French

Kīspin ki nitawihtīn ē nīhīyawihk ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsinān.

Cree

Tlıchö yatı k'èè. Dı wegodi newo dè, gots'o gonede.

Tłicho

Periht'ís Dëne Sułiné yati t'a huts'elkér xa beyáyatı theqa ɬat'e, nuwe ts'ën yólti.

Chipewyan

Edi gondı dehgáh got'je zhatié k'ée edat'eh enahddhe nide naxets'é edahfí.

South Slavey

K'áhshó got'jne xədə k'é hederi ɬedjhtl'é yeriniwé nídé dúle.

North Slavey

Jii gwandak izhii ginii>k vat'atr'iiyahch'uu zhit yinohthan ii'. diits'at ginohkhii.

Gwich'in

Uyanittuaq ilitchurisukpuk Inyyialuktun, ququaqluta.

Inuvialuktun

Institut

Hapkuat titigat piiumagupkit Inuinnagtun, uyaptinnut hivaiarlutit.

Inuinnactun

Indigenous Languages:

French:

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Executive Summary

Enabling seniors to age in place with dignity is a priority for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). Part of the Mandate of the 19th Legislative Assembly was to create a separate Income Assistance program tailored to seniors and persons with disabilities.

To accomplish this work, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment committed to reviewing the Income Assistance (IA) program to ensure its benefits and delivery support the social and economic aspirations of NWT residents. The objectives of the IA program review were to develop a separate Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities (IASPD) program, and to improve the existing IA program by ensuring the types and levels of benefits and income exemptions are meeting their basic needs.

The IA program changes and creation of the new IASPD program are based on feedback received through an engagement process with various stakeholders and the public as well as aligning the programs with the *Truth and Reconciliation of Canada Calls to Action*, the *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report and Calls for Justice*, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

The department made the following changes to the Income Assistance program:

- Aligning benefit levels with the Northern Market Basket Measure;
- Increasing income exemptions;
- Removing the productive choice requirement;
- Removing the attachment to the labour market, such as the requirement to seek and maintain employment; and
- Reducing refusal periods.

Highlights of the new Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities program include:

- Intended for seniors (60+) or individuals with a permanent or long-term disability who are in financial need;
- Has moved from a monthly application to an annual application;
- Annual income is based on the Canada Revenue Agency's Notice of Assessment; and
- Benefit levels are aligned with the Northern Market Basket Measure.

To support these enhancements, amendments were required to the *Income Assistance Regulations* and new *Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities* were developed. From June 30 to July 21, the department invited the public to provide input on both proposed regulations. This report summarizes the findings from responses.

The department would like to thank those who provided feedback through this engagement process. Your contributions are valued and appreciated.



Background

The Income Assistance program is designed to support NWT residents by providing financial assistance for their basic living needs. The amount of support that is available to each person is based on their overall needs, the community in which they live, and their ability to provide their own financial resources. All individuals must demonstrate a financial need to qualify for benefits to ensure accountability for public funds and to ensure everyone is being treated fairly and consistently.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment underwent a review of the Income Assistance program to ensure its objectives, benefits and delivery support the social and economic aspirations of the people of the NWT. The department also committed to creating a separate Income Assistance program tailored to seniors and persons with disabilities to help advance the [Mandate of the 19th Legislative Assembly](#) to enable seniors to age in place with dignity.

The department committed to conducting an Income Assistance program review as part of its 2020-2024 Business Plan to:

- Develop a new Income Assistance program for seniors and persons living with disabilities;
- Improve the existing Income Assistance program to ensure that the types and levels of benefits as well as income exemptions are meeting the basic needs of NWT residents, and to re-profile the program to target those clients who do not qualify as seniors or persons living with disabilities; and
- Develop a performance measurement plan for the new and re-profiled programs.

The review included an evaluation to determine whether the Income Assistance program was in alignment with the recommendations of the *Truth and Reconciliation of Canada Calls to Action*, the *Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women*, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Methodology

Information on the engagement opportunity and how to provide feedback on the proposed regulations was publicly posted on the [GNWT's public engagement website](#). Additional tactics used to inform the public of the engagement included a [news release](#), social media content, and social media advertising.

The GNWT website featured supporting materials to help inform interested participants, including:

- A copy of the proposed *Income Assistance Regulations*;
- A copy of the proposed *Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Regulations*;
- A plain language summary outlining the significant proposed changes; and
- Summary information on the Income Assistance program



Feedback could be provided by emailing ECE_Income_Security@gov.nt.ca or calling ECE. The department also provided an information session for stakeholder groups of seniors and persons with disabilities to get feedback on the proposed new program.

When the engagement period ended, staff reviewed the feedback to determine if there were significant concerns with the proposed regulations. Multiple staff reviewed and discussed interpretations of responses for quality assurance and then analyzed the feedback. All findings are presented in this report so that no one person can be identified.

What We Heard

The department received responses from six individuals/organizations and had seven individuals attend the information session.

Income Assistance

With respect to the program changes specifically for the Income Assistance program, overall most respondents were appreciative of the proposed changes. During the engagement process, more clarity was provided to explain that the income counted would be solely for the applicant and co-applicant, not for other adults residing in the same household.

It was also noted that refusals in some communities with no other resources (such as a food bank) have a bigger impact. The department has proposed to reduce the refusal periods in the regulations to reduce the financial hardship this may cause.

Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

The department heard that most respondents were appreciative of the proposed program for seniors and persons with disabilities. It was suggested that this program be based on individual income, rather than family income, as it would allow individuals with disabilities to have their own financial means rather than relying on support through their spouse.

A respondent noted that having an annual application would be more efficient and less administrative for seniors and people with disabilities. It will also allow the individual to know the level of assistance they will receive every month.

General Findings

Some feedback provided did not relate directly to the proposed regulations. Additional feedback included the following recommendations:

- Staff be trained on disability awareness;
- Provide easy-to-understand materials (such as large print or braille);



- Harmonize the proposed Canada Disability Benefit with the Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities program;
- Ensure all legislation in GNWT includes the *Accessible Canada Act* definition of disability; and
- Implement a case management approach.

While the department will take this feedback into consideration as it moves forward with the implementation of the programs, the recommendations were out of scope for the engagement on the proposed regulations.

One respondent also encouraged the program to be regularly reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of people. The department is developing a performance measurement plan to better evaluate both Income Assistance programs.

In addition to the feedback given above, a respondent noted the importance of engaging and consulting with disability organizations and advocacy groups to create a tailored program that meets the unique needs of people with disabilities. The department invited senior and disability stakeholder groups to participate in the engagement of the Income Assistance program review and are thankful for the insight and feedback provided, as it was instrumental in the development of the new Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities program.

Next Steps

The department would like to express its gratitude for the participation and perspectives shared during this engagement. The feedback was valuable and will assist the department as it continues to review its programs to assist NWT residents.

While the feedback provided was valuable, it did not result in immediate changes to the regulations due to either being out of scope or requiring additional financial investment.

The information in this report will help contribute to future work as the department evaluates the implementation of changes to the Income Assistance program and the new Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities program. The department is developing a performance measurement plan for both programs and will be sharing information on the results of the changes in an annual report.

