



## **ON-RESERVE INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM & ASSISTED LIVING PROGRAM**

### **OVERVIEW**

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The On-Reserve Income Assistance (IA) and Assisted Living (AL) Programs are social programs funded by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). The IA Program provides income assistance to eligible persons living on a First Nation to meet their basic needs. The IA Program also employs an active measures approach, known as Pre-Employment Supports (PES), which provides programming to help individuals move from income assistance to education and employment. The AL Program provides non-medical social support services to help eligible First Nations persons maintain their independence.

In 2017, ISC announced that it was going to be making changes to the IA and AL Programs. ISC conducted engagement on these changes with First Nations between October 2017 and April 2018. The results of this engagement informed the changes made to the Data Collection Instrument (DCI), which are now being implemented in First Nations.

At the December 2017 Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Special Chiefs Assembly, in Gatineau, Quebec, the AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 108/2017, *Case Management Services for Income Assistance Recipients*. This resolution speaks to the PES component of the IA Program, directing the AFN to urge ISC to extend funding for IA case management services. It also urges ISC to engage First Nations to understand best

practices, and hear more about how the IA program should be reformed to better meet the needs of First Nations clients.

Following Resolution 108/2017 being passed, Canada announced in Budget 2018 that it was going to provide \$78.4 million over two years (2018/19 and 2019/20) to continue supporting PES. In Budget 2018 Canada also announced that it would provide \$8.5 million over two years (2018/19 and 2019/20) to fund engagement processes to improve the IA Program and make it more responsive to the needs of First Nations. These engagements began in October 2018 and are ongoing until April 2019.

As a result of this announcement, there have been a number of meetings between ISC officials and First Nations social development technical experts. At the most recent meeting in June 2018, ISC officials and First Nations social development technical experts discussed changes and developments to the IA and AL Programs. They also discussed the need to firmly establish a Technical Working Group on Social Development.

At the July 2018 AFN Annual General Assembly in Vancouver, British Columbia, the AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 28/2018, *Support for the Establishment of a Technical Working Group on Social Development*. This resolution calls upon the AFN to support the

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creation of a Technical Working Group on Social Development (SDTWG), and asks the AFN Regional Chiefs to appoint a representative to the Working Group's membership. The Working Group met for the

first time in September 2017 to speak to the proposed changes to the DCI, and continues to meet regularly to discuss issues pertaining to Social Development policies and programs.

### UPDATE

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In addition to the DCI, other proposed changes to the IA Program to make it more relevant to the needs of First Nations have been proposed, including making the program compatible with regional conditions, local economies, and improving support for individuals who are moving from income assistance to education and employment. Engagement processes on the proposed changes began in September 2018 and are ongoing until April 2019. These engagement processes are First Nations-led, with ISC providing support when needed. They will lead to a series of recommendations to

reform and improve the IA program so that the program can better respond to the needs of First Nations IA recipients.

In November 2018, the SDTWG met with ISC officials in Gatineau, Quebec. They discussed changes to the IA and AL Programs, addressed remaining issues and challenges regarding the IA Program Reform engagements, and prepared to organize the next National Forum on Income Assistance in March 2019, in the Enoch Cree Nation, Alberta.

### NEXT STEPS

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The AFN Social Development Sector will continue to advocate for improving the social condition of First Nations. This includes helping organize opportunities for the SDTWG to meet with ISC, as well as providing support to First Nations regions and communities.

The Social Development Sector is currently supporting the SDTWG to provide input as ISC is engaging First Nations (between October 2018 and April 2019) as part of its mandate to review and reform the IA Program.

The Social Development Sector is currently organizing the Second Annual National Forum on First Nations Income Assistance, following the success of the first National Forum on Income Assistance, held in February 2018, in Ottawa, Ontario. The purpose of the National Forum is to have participants gather to share best practices and network. The next National Forum is scheduled for March 2019, and is going to be held in Treaty 6 territory, in the Enoch Cree Nation, Alberta.