



ON-RESERVE INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM & ASSISTED LIVING PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

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. Notably, ISC suggested making changes to the Data Collection Instrument (DCI), which is the data and information collection mechanism that First Nations use to track IA and AL client information, and to report that information to ISC.

At the December 2017 Special Chiefs Assembly, in Gatineau, Quebec, 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, and the work to support IA clients access services to help them transition from income assistance to education and employment.

Following this resolution being passed, the federal government announced in the 2018 Federal Budget that it was going to provide \$78.4 million over two years (2018/19-2019/20) to continue supporting PES. The 2018 Budget also announced that it would provide \$8.5 million over two years (2018/19-2019/20) to fund engagement processes to improve the IA Program, and make the program more responsive to the needs of First Nations.

As a result of this announcement, there have been a number of meetings between ISC officials and First Nations social development technical experts, most recently in June 2018. At the last 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 Annual General Assembly in Vancouver, British Columbia, 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 creation of a Technical Working Group on Social Development, and asks AFN regional chiefs to appoint a representative to the Working Group's membership.

UPDATE

After ISC announced that it was going to make changes to the DCI, ISC proceeded to engage First Nations across Canada between October 2017 and April 2018 to receive their input on potential changes to the DCI. Having now completed the engagement processes, ISC has stated they are going to implement the changes to the DCI in light of the feedback and input they received from First Nations.

Beyond the DCI, there are other proposed changes to the IA Program. More specifically, ISC has proposed to change the IA Program to make it more relevant to the needs of First Nations. This includes making the program compatible with regional conditions, local economies, as well as improving support for individuals who are moving from income assistance to education and employment. Before ISC goes through with these changes,

however, ISC will engage First Nations to gather their input on what changes to the program should look like.

The 2018 Budget announced \$8.5 million for the IA Program reform engagement processes over two years (2018/19-2019/20). These engagements are set to begin in September 2018, and run through until April 2019. These engagement processes will be First Nations-led, with ISC providing support when needed.

On September 25-26, 2018, the newly established Technical Working Group on Social Development will meet with ISC officials in Ottawa, Ontario. They will discuss upcoming changes to the IA and AL Programs, as well as address any remaining issues and challenges before the IA Program Reform engagements begin.

NEXT STEPS

The AFN Social Development Secretariat will continue to advocate for improving the social condition of First Nations. This includes helping organize opportunities for the newly established Technical Working Group on Social Development to meet with ISC, as well as providing support to First Nations regions and communities.

The Social Development Sector is currently helping organize the next meeting between the Technical Working Group and ISC officials in Ottawa, Ontario, on September 25 and 26, 2018. At this meeting, in addition to discussing issues and changes to the IA and AL Programs, the Technical Working Group will also help determine the date of their next meeting with

ISC officials. They will also help in determining the setting and date of the next National Forum on Income Assistance, which will take place sometime in 2019.

The first National Forum on Income Assistance was held in February 2018 in Ottawa, Ontario. It brought together government officials, First Nations leaders, income assistance support workers, as well as current and former income assistance clients. The purpose of the National Forum was to have participants listen to guest speakers, share best practices, and network. Participants at the February 2018 National Forum emphasized the success of the Forum, and stated they would like to attend subsequent ones in the future.