



What is the history of this issue and how does it impact First Nations?

The Income Assistance Program (IA Program) is funded by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and provides income assistance to eligible persons living on First Nations reserves and in the Yukon to meet their basic needs. The IA Program's rates for First Nations mirror those of the province or territory, failing to account for the higher cost of living and unique circumstances in First Nations, particularly for rural, remote, and northern communities. The IA Program also offers Case Management and Pre-Employment Supports in some First Nations. These supports provide programming to help individuals move from income assistance to education and employment and have received strong positive feedback, but they are only available in about 29% of First Nations outside of Ontario.

How has the AFN's recent advocacy affected this area?

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has advocated to ISC to reform the IA Program and to extend funding and expand access to Case Management and Pre-employment Supports. From 2018 to 2020, ISC supported First Nations-led engagements on the IA Program, which identified several aspects of the program that do not meet the needs of First Nations clients, case managers, and communities. This includes inadequate rates that do not address unique circumstances and barriers, gaps in capacity and resourcing for the administration of the program including staffing and office space, failing to take a holistic approach to understanding and meeting client needs, and not incorporating First Nations self-determination, self-governance and traditional knowledge and culture.

The AFN's Technical Working Group on Social Development (TWGSD) has played an integral role, providing communications from and within their regions while also sharing valuable insights from their regional perspectives. The AFN has contracted INDsight Consulting to fulfill AFN Resolution 89/2019, *Continuing First Nations Income Assistance Program Reform*, to complete a study on the gaps in services and data within the IA Program. Using both the TWGSD guidance and INDsight's study, the AFN is collaborating with ISC on policy recommendations for a Fall 2022 Memorandum to Cabinet to address the concerns and implement changes identified by First Nations. The policy options support First Nations jurisdiction over the program and propose a shift towards flexible, needs-based, and results-based funding to allow for a holistic approach to the IA Program. The vision for the IA Program sees First Nations IA clients moving from surviving to thriving, supported by culturally specific, First Nations-led, wrap-around supports that meet their needs and support community growth and development.



SECTOR UPDATE

SOCIAL BRANCH: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

ISSUE: INCOME ASSISTANCE

July 2022

Where do we hope to go in the future?

The AFN will be holding a dialogue session on the policy recommendations and research on IA reform at the July 2022 Annual General Assembly and will be seeking validation on the policy recommendations to create a path forward for the IA Program.