
Assembly of First Nations

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Annual General Assembly
July 5, 6, 7, 2022, Vancouver, BC

Resolution no.07/2022

TITLE: Reform of the On-Reserve Income Assistance Program

SUBJECT: Social Development

MOVED BY: Chief Lynda Price, Ulkatcho First Nation, BC

SECONDED BY: Chief Harvey McLeod, Upper Nicola Band, BC

DECISION Approved by the AFN Executive Committee by consensus.

WHEREAS:

- A. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) states:
- i. Article 3: Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.
 - ii. Article 5: Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.
 - iii. Article 20 (1): Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic, and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.
 - iv. Article 23: Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

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- B.** The On-reserve Income Assistance (IA) Program was developed in 1964 to provide financial assistance to First Nations individuals on-reserve and in the Yukon to meet their basic needs, mirroring provincial and territorial income assistance rates and eligibility.
- C.** The IA program has largely remained stagnant and unchanged since its inception, resulting in systemic gaps and insufficient funding to meet the needs of First Nations, leading to a greater dependence on the program instead of supporting transitions to employment or education.
- D.** Case management and pre-employment supports are only available for approximately 29% of First Nations outside of Ontario. These supports are crucial to ensure every individual can reach their full potential and access all services or programs available to them.
- E.** In 2018, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) committed to reforming the IA program with First Nations. First Nations-led engagements on IA Program reform were held between 2018 and 2020 and identified critical areas for program reform including: higher income assistance rates to meet needs, expanding case management and pre-employment supports as well as administrative supports, strengthening wrap around supports for client wellbeing, and encouraging First Nation determination/governance over the program with traditional knowledge embedded to meet First Nations' needs.
- F.** Leveraging the results and outcomes of the First Nations-led engagements, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Technical Working Group on Social Development (TWGSD) developed policy recommendations that further supports IA program reform:
- i.** IA Program rates and eligibility fail to meet the needs of IA clients and their families and does not account for actual costs of living on-reserve as a result of the program mirroring provincial and territorial income assistance programs. The IA Program requires a shift towards a needs-based funding approach that is flexible and culturally appropriate to account for the unique contexts of First Nations and their social-cultural-political development priorities. Recognition of First Nations determination and governance over the IA Program through its administration and delivery provides flexibility for First Nations to determine culturally appropriate approaches to income assistance while also accounting for higher costs of living on-reserve, transportation, high energy costs, reliable childcare, and support for mental health and wellbeing.
 - ii.** IA clients and their families with additional and special needs require wrap-around supports and services that meet their needs and enables their wellbeing. Addressing barriers for IA clients and their families

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with special needs includes providing increased and additional health care access and coverage, reliable childcare and caretaker allowances, enhanced case management supports to navigate social programs, higher cost of living allowances to account for special needs and dietary restrictions. First Nation worldviews and priorities for supporting community members with disabilities is central to ensuring First Nations with special gifts live with dignity.

- iii. Universal access to case management and pre-employment supports, including enhanced First Nations capacity to support increased services, will assist IA clients with getting ready for work or school and transition to further independence. Meeting the human resource needs of IA Administrators includes industry standard wage comparability for case managers and administrative supports, increased office space and client rooms that are accessible, office supplies, consistent specialized training, and networking.
- iv. A robust data strategy and First Nations developed national database that prioritizes data collection needs and priorities to ensure First Nations control over data.
- v. Comprehensive wrap-around programming and services are required to support IA clients through a holistic circle of care model. IA clients face systemic barriers in accessing mental health care, addictions support, reliable childcare, navigating the justice system, etc. A tiered approach to services will assist in meeting service and program needs and help to prioritize individuals away from the IA program by providing early support and prevention services.

G. Policy recommendations developed by the AFN's TWGSD aim to assist in addressing the longstanding shortcomings of the on-reserve IA Program that have been identified during the First Nations-led engagements. Self-governing First Nations will continue to have sole determination and jurisdiction over their agreements with the federal government and its program.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the First Nations-in-Assembly:

1. Support the reform of the On-reserve Income Assistance (IA) Program as directed and determined by First Nations to address longstanding gaps and shortcomings in the IA program, including:
 - a. First Nation governance over the IA Program to meet IA client and family needs;
 - b. A provision of IA rates that account for the true cost of living on-reserve;

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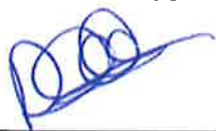


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- c. Wrap-around and comprehensive supports for IA clients and families with special and additional needs;
 - d. Increased resources and resourcing to support administration and case managers;
 - e. First Nations designed data strategies and collection;
 - f. Infrastructure investments to enable First Nations to administer their own IA program; and,
 - g. Strengthening wrap-around programming and services to support clients in a multi-faceted way.
2. Call on Canada to use First Nation-created policy recommendations for their Memorandum to Cabinet in the Fall of 2022 on IA Program reform, including recommendations developed through individual First Nations and their regional decision-making processes.
 3. Call on the Assembly of First Nations Technical Working Group on Social Development to conduct and oversee an assessment of the long-term financial investments required to fill the gaps within the on-reserve IA Program.

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