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# Assembly of First Nations

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# Assemblée des Premières Nations

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## SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY

December 5,6,7, 2023, Ottawa, ON

Resolution no.85/2023

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**TITLE:** Support for the Technical Working Group on Social Development to Continue Income Assistance Program Reform

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**SUBJECT:** Social Development

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**MOVED BY:** Chief Brian Perrault, Couchiching First Nation, ON

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**SECONDED BY:** Chief Mark McCoy, Ojibways of Batchewana First Nation, ON

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**DECISION** Carried by Consensus

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## 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 21 (1): Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing sanitation, health and social security.
- 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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Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 7th day of December 2023 in Ottawa, Ontario

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CINDY WOODHOUSE, NATIONAL CHIEF

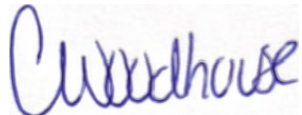
- B. The On-Reserve Income Assistance (IA) Program was developed in 1964 to provide financial assistance to First Nations individuals on-reserve and in the Yukon to meet their basic needs, mirroring provincial and territorial income assistance rates and eligibility.
- C. The IA Program has largely remained 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. In 2018, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) invested \$8.5 million over two years to engage with First Nations on the reform of the IA Program. The First Nations-led engagements held between 2018 and 2020 identified critical areas for IA Program reform. Since 2021, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Technical Working Group on Social Development (TWGSD) and ISC have been co-developing reform of the IA Program, taking a bottom-up approach that leverages the First Nations-led engagements.
- E. The TWGSD developed policy recommendations to reform the IA Program including income assistance rates that are needs-based, expanding case management, pre-employment and administrative supports, strengthening wrap around supports for client wellbeing, and supporting First Nation determination and governance with traditional knowledge embedded in the IA Program.
- F. AFN Resolution 07/2022, *Reform of the On-Reserve Income Assistance Program*, supported the First Nations-developed policy recommendations and called upon Canada to use the policy recommendations for their Memorandum to Cabinet on IA Program reform. The resolution also directed the TWGSD to conduct and oversee an assessment of the long-term financial investments required to fill the gaps in the on-reserve IA Program.
- G. In May 2023, the AFN was informed of Cabinet's support of the First Nations-developed policy recommendations; however, a formal record of decision has not been provided. Further, Budget 2023 did not provide funding for reform of the IA Program. ISC is seeking to continue IA Program reform through a co-developed phased implementation plan for the reformed IA Program.

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

1. Direct the Technical Working Group on Social Development to conduct and oversee costing and transition of reform of the Income Assistance Program (IA Program) using the First Nations-developed policy recommendations that outline considerations for a First Nations-specific, needs-based funding model, key elements for a First Nations-determined social safety net and recommendations for building First Nations capacity for self-determination and data sovereignty within the IA Program.
2. Call upon Canada to fund the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to conduct costing of the long-term financial investments required to fully implement the First Nations-developed policy recommendations for the reform of the on-reserve IA Program.
3. Direct the AFN to report back to First Nations-in-Assembly on the progress and findings of the costing and transition of IA Program reform by July 2024.

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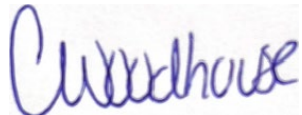
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**CINDY WOODHOUSE, NATIONAL CHIEF**

4. Call on Canada to provide a formal record of decision on the First Nations-developed policy recommendations to reaffirm their commitment to co-develop IA program reform.
5. Call on Canada to co-develop future budget requests for the IA Program with First Nations that include regional priorities.
6. Call on Canada to continue to provide ongoing inflation relief benefits for IA clients, until the IA Program rates are reflective of the cost of living in northern and remote areas.

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