



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
Special Chiefs Assembly

December 5-7, 2023

Shaw Centre – Ottawa, Ontario

Ottawa is located on the unceded unsundered Territory of the Algonquin People.

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS
Assemblée extraordinaire des Chefs

Du 5 au 7 décembre 2023 - Centre Shaw - Ottawa (Ontario)

Ottawa est située sur le territoire non cédé et non abandonné du peuple algonquin.



Income Assistance

History

The On-Reserve Income Assistance (IA) Program is funded by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and provides income assistance to eligible persons living on-reserve and in the Yukon to help meet basic needs. The IA Program's rates for First Nations mirrors those of the province or territory, which fails 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, which support individuals to move from income assistance to education and employment. Despite receiving strong positive feedback, these supports are only available in approximately 29% of First Nations outside of Ontario.

AFN's recent advocacy

For over a decade, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has advocated to ISC to extend funding to reform the IA Program and for extended funding and expanded access to Case Management and Pre-employment Supports. From 2018 to 2020, ISC funded First Nations-led engagements on the IA Program that identified several aspects of the program that do not meet the needs of First Nations clients, case managers, and communities. This included issues with rates that fail to meet client needs, insufficient resourcing to administer the program and supports, and failure to incorporate First Nations knowledge and governance over the IA Program.

The AFN co-developed policy recommendations to reform the IA Program with ISC and the Technical Working Group on Social Development (TWGSD), ensuring that reform leverages the First Nations-led engagements. First Nations-in-Assembly supported the policy recommendations via Resolution 07/2022, *Reform of the On-Reserve Income Assistance Program*. The recommendations included themes of First Nations governance, increased IA rates that account for the actual cost of living on-reserve, strengthening wrap-around supports, increased resources and resourcing to support administration and case managers, First Nations-designed data strategies and collection, and infrastructure investments. ISC used the co-developed policy recommendations to inform their Memorandum to Cabinet in early 2023. In May 2023, the AFN was notified that Cabinet supported the First Nations-developed policy recommendations; however, Budget 2023 did not include financial investments for implementation nor implementation of First Nations-developed policy recommendations remaining outstanding.

The 2022 Fall Economic Statement invested \$309 million in 2023-24 for the IA Program to continue providing status quo services to First Nations while reform continues. Further, in April 2023, the Government of Canada announced \$192.6 million to provide an inflation relief benefit of approximately \$300 per month per IA client for six months. In October 2023, ISC confirmed the continuation of the inflation relief benefit for an additional two months. The AFN will continue to advocate for long-term inflation relief until the IA Program rates are reflective of the cost of living on-reserve.



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Next Steps

The AFN remains committed to reforming the IA Program through a First Nations-led approach that shifts First Nations from surviving to thriving. The next steps for the AFN and the TWGSD on IA Program reform involve costing the reformed IA Program using the First Nations-developed policy recommendations, including a First Nations needs-based funding model, social safety net, and recommendations for building First Nations capacity for self-determination and data sovereignty.

The AFN will continue to monitor the progression of Bill S-233, *An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income*. Currently, Bill S-233 does not consider the socioeconomic realities of First Nations, nor does it consider how a guaranteed livable basic income would interact with existing social supports, including the IA Program. Further, the AFN will continue to monitor the progress and implementation of Bill C-22, *An Act to reduce poverty and to support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit and making a consequential amendment to the Income Tax Act*. The AFN will continue to seek opportunities to advocate for the meaningful inclusion of First Nations priorities and considerations in the legislation and implementation.