A scenic landscape of snow-capped mountains in the background, a winding river in the foreground, and a forested valley. Overlaid on the landscape are several graphic elements: a large yellow pine tree on the left, a group of yellow stick figures holding hands in the center, and a yellow deer silhouette on the right.

Poverty Reduction in Lil'wat Nation

February 4th, 2026
Assembly of First Nations
6th Annual Income Assistance Reform Forum



Opening Our Heart

Gratitude

Land
Waters
&
Ancestors

Strength

Ancestors
Intergenerational
&
Spirit

Understanding

Wisdom
Guidance
&
Openness



protocol introduction



P-3685 Courtesy of the Bulkley Valley Historical & Museum Society

Witsuwit'en children learned to conserve fish and animals by listening to their Elders and parents' stories, by watching adults harvest and prepare food, and by following the rules to properly dispose of remains. This photo was taken in 1924.⁹⁶



Collected by: Jean Nikal

Though blankets became common contributions, these *indimenik* (Estelle Michell, Mary Tom and Emma Michell) from Moricetown were photographed in the 1930s draped with moose hides.



Framing the Conversation

- *Redress* that's needed
- *Colonialism* and *capitalism*
- *Endemic* proportions
- **Legislated Poverty**

How have legislated and policy changes in Income Assistance services impacted human rights on reserves?



"Poverty"

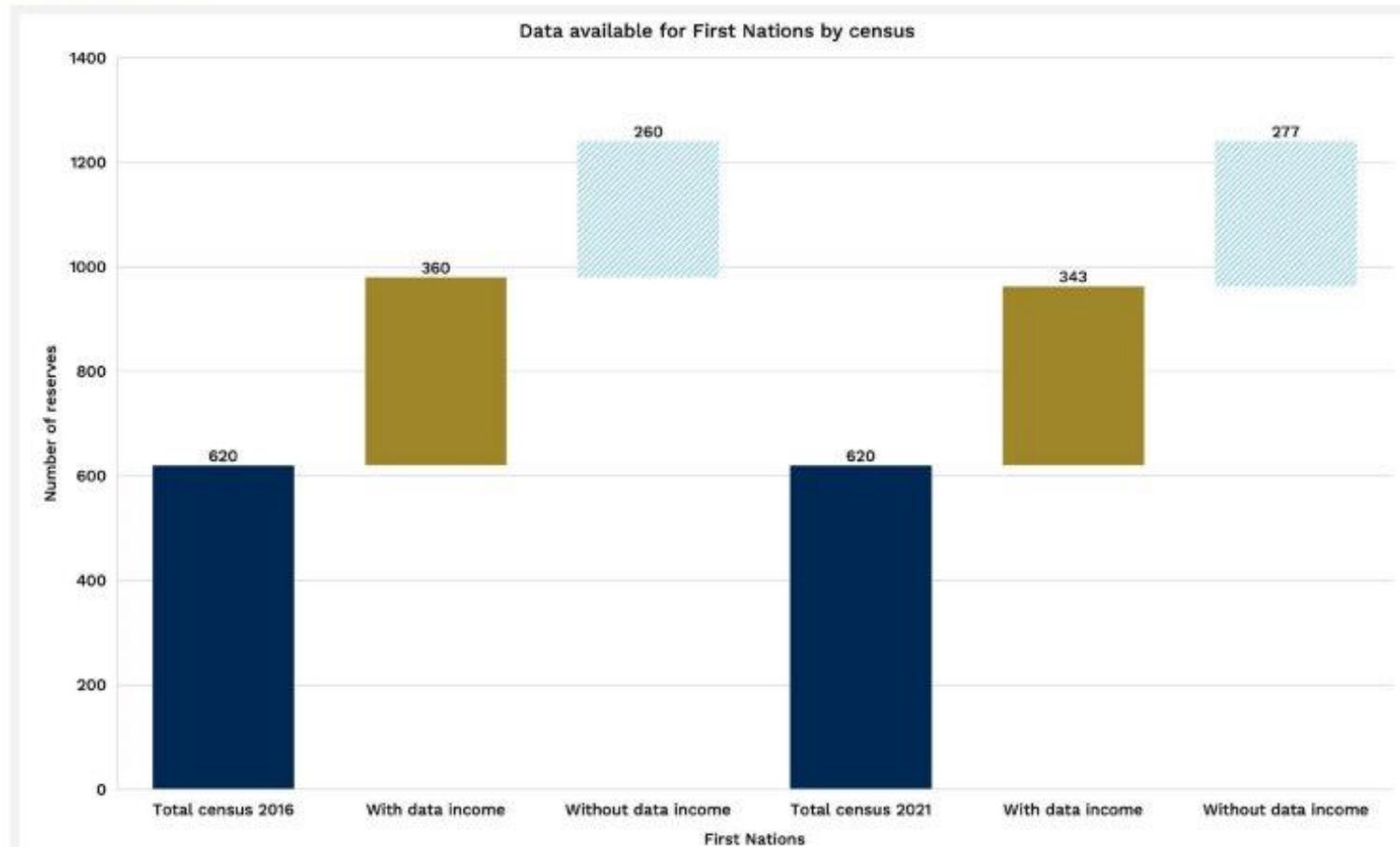
Can be experienced in multi-dimensional ways, including:

- material deprivation - the “lack of access to, or the skills to acquire, sufficient material and financial resources to thrive;”
- social isolation - lack of access to formal and informal supports that support resiliency in times of crisis; and
- spiritual poverty - the loss of meaning or purpose in one’s life

As defined by the *Canadian Poverty Institute (2019)* & the *National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health*.

Beginning with Data

FIGURE 11



“Consider for instance, that there are 634 First Nations in Canada, with 620 reserves (based on Statistics Canada’s data) (*Figure 11*). Of the 620 reserves, there is only data on income in Census 2021 for First Nations on 343 reserves and in Census 2016 for 360.”



Indigenous Data

what the data tells us:

- Data weaponized against FNs
- FNs experience significantly higher poverty levels than other marginalized groups
- Poverty is a core *social determinant of health*
- Impacts are intergenerational

what ISC data doesn't tell us:

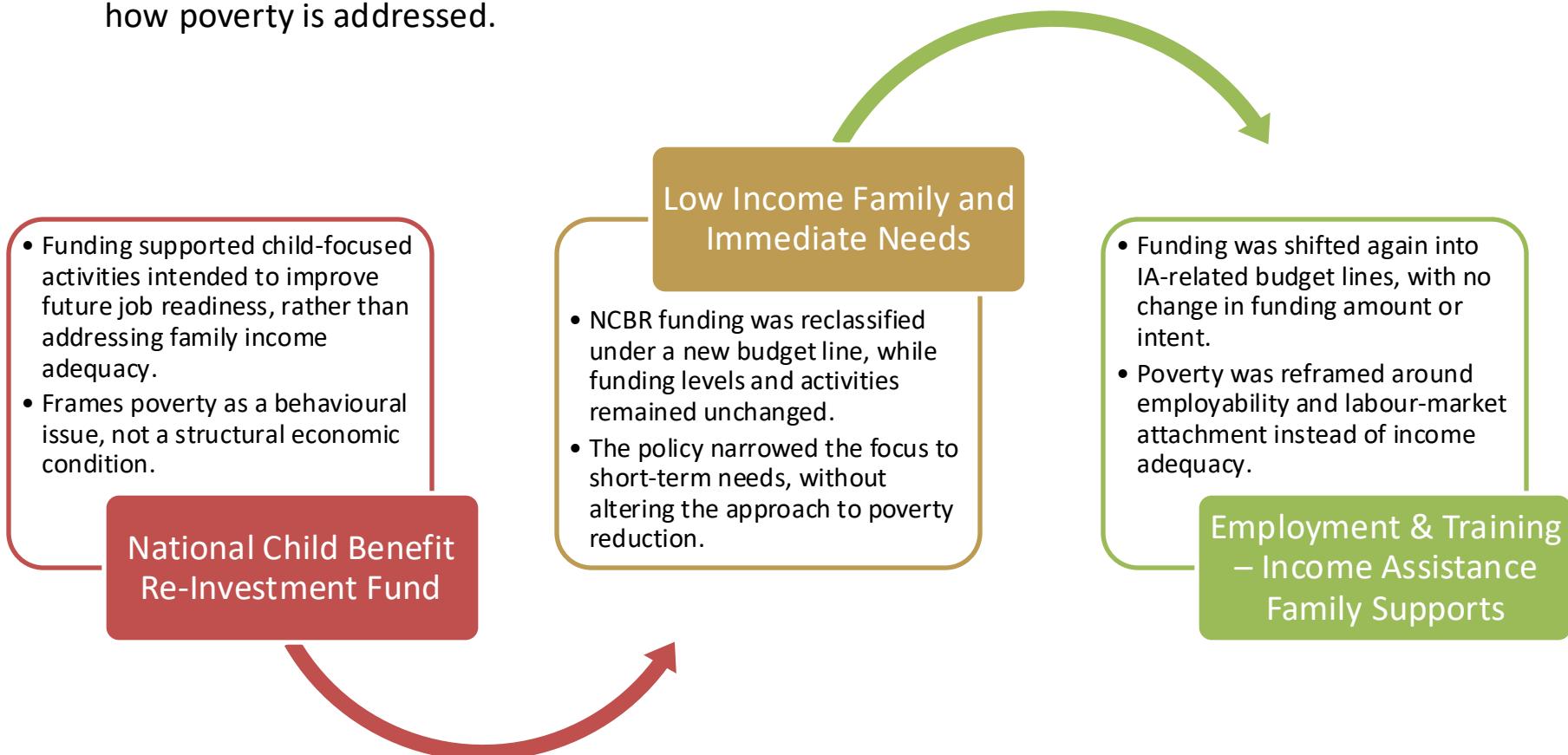
- The lived impact of poverty on individuals
- Changes in policies that enforced the conditions people lived/live
- Transparency about how it is used and why
- Inclusion in the analysis and interpretation of data

We don't need more data to prove that poverty exists.



Policy Evolution & Structural Shifts

Illustration of ISC defined administrative policy and budget shifts without substantive change in how poverty is addressed.





Underspending ⇌ Underfunding

Table 3: Income Assistance Beneficiaries / Dependency Rate

		2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
BC	Beneficiaries	19,954	18,432	16,586	6,799	16,604	17,520	15,991	19,052
	Rate (%)	23.7	23.4	20.4	24.6	21.9	19.2	20.4	23.9

- For What purpose does ISC want the dependency rate?
- How many of the beneficiaries received what they were entitled to? For example, full shelter allowance issued to each beneficiary.
- Should ISC calculate funding according to numbers reported, like above?
- Compliance policy harm, how many were denied?

2014 Income Assistance Key Facts: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1369766807521/1533307648913>



Innovative Solutions to IA Program Reform

Policy Innovation

- Reframing IA from compliance to self-determination
- Addressing legislative barriers

Community Governance

- Community Services Committee local authority in decision-making
- Inclusion and participatory exercises, feedback loops

Income Stability

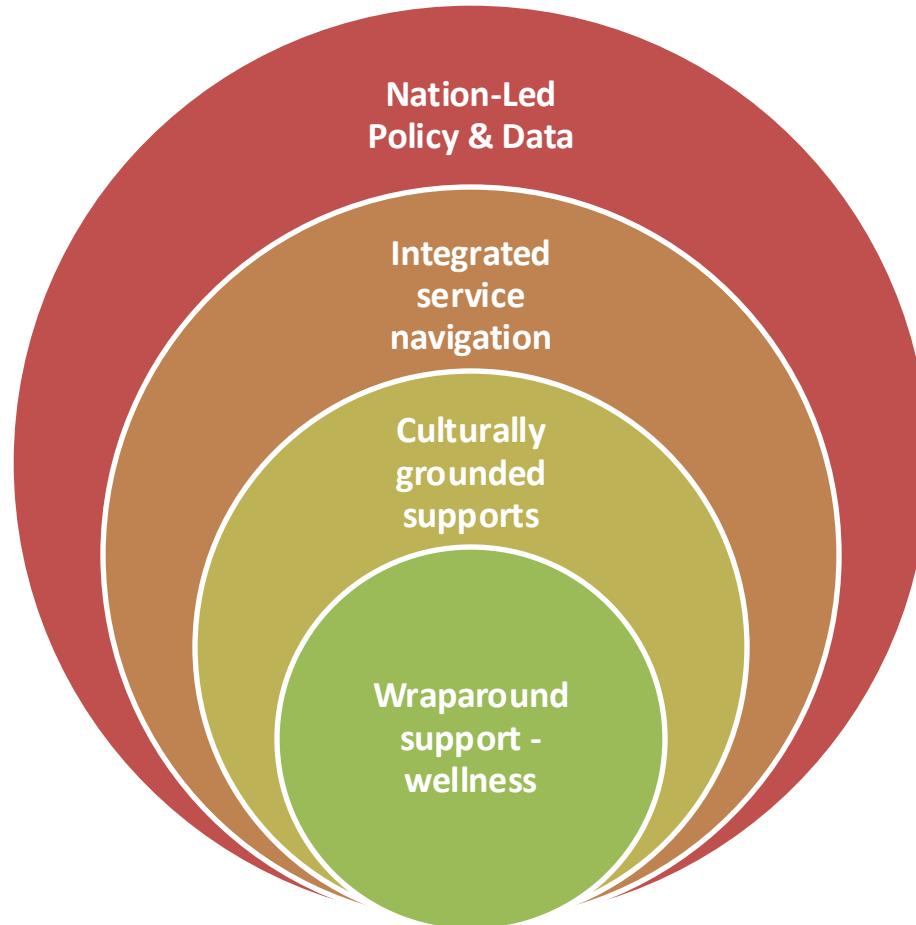
- Review Renewal and denial processes to eliminate gaps
- Increasing Fresh Food Access and emergency food measures

Indigenous Data Sovereignty

- Nation-led data to inform program decision and planning
- Include lived experience (not ISC's aggregate data)



Building a Social Safety Net





Impact on Poverty Reduction

- Shifting Income Assistance from crisis to stability-based
- Community capacity and governance
- Allows for long-term, self-determined poverty reduction approaches



Thank you!

Questions?