



# **Developing a First Nations-specific model to Income Assistance**

Assembly of First Nations National Forum on Income Assistance  
Leveraging Regional Variations: Innovating Income Assistance for Future Generations

February 3-5, 2026 | Richmond, BC

## IFSD Advisors Ltd.

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- Research consulting firm with expertise in public finance.
- Since 2018, IFSD has worked alongside First Nations and First Nations organizations since 2018 in First Nations child and family services, Jordan's Principle, housing, early learning and childcare, among many other social policy and economic development areas.



## IFSD's mandate

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- Develop a First Nations-specific funding model for the Income Assistance (IA) Program based on First Nations policy recommendations.
- First Nations contributions are requested through a **questionnaire** and **in-depth collaborations** (20 First Nations).

We need your help to:

- 1) Build a representative data set
- 2) Share perspectives from the front lines
- 3) Define an improved approach to IA

## Project components

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- Define the current state portrait of the IA Program in First Nations.
- Capture practices in First Nations related to training, administration, etc.
- Propose an approach to developing and maintaining IA data systems, implementing a data collection strategy, and undertake analysis to assess program performance and outcomes for First Nations.
- Estimate the cost of First Nations-developed reforms of the IA program (including administration), and the cost of increased funding needed to raise IA payments to a level consistent with a measure of livable income.

## Why is this work happening?

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In 2018, Canada committed to IA Program reform.



IA Program is not working well for everyone.

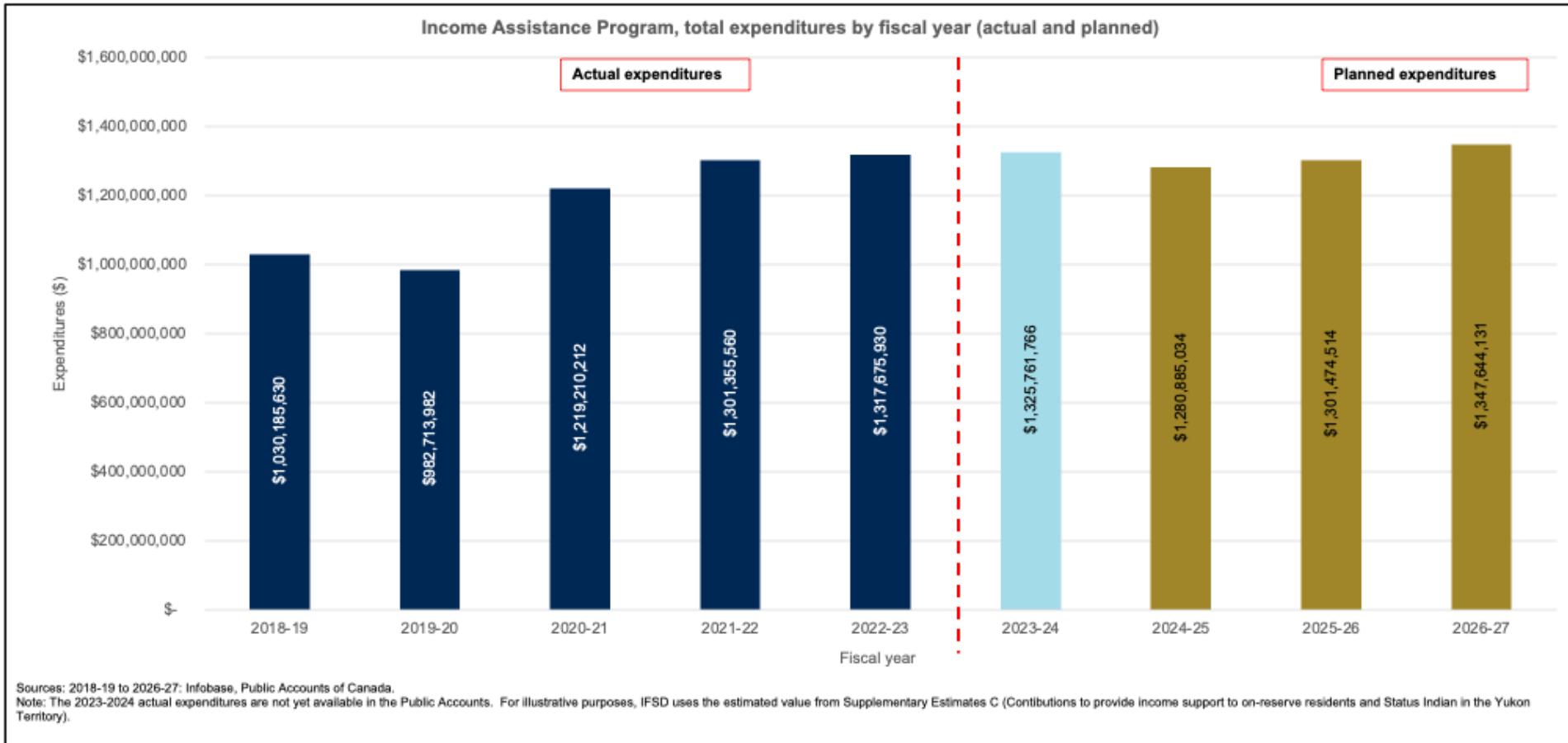


10 audits and evaluations (2009-2024) came to similar conclusions. IA is needed but not working well.



Structural, design, and delivery challenges need First Nation-led solutions.

# IA Program (Public) Expenditures



## Information gaps

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- Number and type of organization delivering the IA Program, e.g., First Nation, Tribal Council, First Nation-delegated organization, etc.
- Uptake and root causes of contact with the IA Program, e.g., limited job opportunities, hard time, etc.
- Results for IA clients, e.g., duration on IA, additional needs, goals, etc.
- Rate sufficiency for different places.

# Themes in regional approaches to social assistance

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## Benefit adequacy and rate setting

- Benefit adequacy is unclear and not systematically tied to actual cost of living.
- Methods for calculating rates are often arbitrary or not publicly explained.
- Adequacy protocols—such as inflation indexation—are rarely applied.

## Philosophical orientation of programs

- Most regional programs share a common liberal philosophy: Social assistance is positioned as a mechanism to promote self-sufficiency through employment.
- Notable exceptions: Quebec and Newfoundland & Labrador explicitly reference reducing social exclusion and poverty alleviation.

## Performance measurement and reporting

- Performance measurement frameworks rarely align with stated program objectives.
- Reporting practices exist but are often limited, inconsistent, or poorly linked to program goals.
- Program reviews highlight design, structural, and delivery challenges, noting benefits likely do not support a basic standard of living.

## Assessing regional approaches and performance reporting

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- The following table summarizes the adequacy of regional social assistance performance frameworks against the objectives set in the provincial/territorial policy documents.
- A comprehensive framework uses metrics that adequately measure the relevant objective with more regular reporting.
- The analysis indicates a significant discrepancy between the objectives regional governments have set for social assistance and the assessment of the program.
- More than half of the regions do not measure the performance of their respective social assistance programs or do not publish their performance assessments.

Province/ Territory	Independence	Self-sufficiency or Self-reliance	Personal Responsibility	Self-empowerment	Employment	Education or Training	Social Integration	Poverty alleviation	Consolidated assessment
Alberta	○	○			○				○
British Columbia	○		○		○				○
Manitoba		○		○	○	○			○
New Brunswick									○
Newfoundland and Labrador		○					○	○	○
Northwest Territories		○			○				○
Nova Scotia	○	○							○
Nunavut	○	○							○
Ontario		○			○				○
Prince Edward Island									○
Quebec		○			○		○		○
Saskatchewan									○
Yukon									○

○ Performance framework unavailable or misaligned with strategic goals

○ Outcome(s) and/or indicator(s) related to strategic goals identified without regular reporting

● Comprehensive performance framework identified with regular reporting and aligned with strategic goals

## What information is being gathered? How?

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Tool	Target population	Intent	Delivery platform(s)
Questionnaire	All First Nations or Tribal Councils administering IA  First Nation-mandated or other organizations delivering IA will be invited to share their work but will be analyzed separately	Build a national understanding of who is delivering IA and how, e.g., rates, rules, etc.  Identify successes and challenges in operations and funding that impact IA	SimpleSurvey Online survey platform  (Servers resident in Canada. Data is held securely in Microsoft-based cloud platform.)
Case study collaborations	20 First Nations with characteristics reflecting the general population, e.g., regional variance population size, geography, etc.	Develop detailed portraits of IA delivery uptake with consideration of contextual realities  Collaborate with the group to build a common performance framework and to test findings throughout the project	In-person collaborations (IFSD will visit First Nation with invitation)  In-person workshops with collaborating group  Virtual follow-ups as required

## Why participate?

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In 2018, Canada committed to IA Program reform.



First Nation data and contributions are needed to shape options for reform.



Good data = tool for analysis



Tool for analysis = foundation for business case (policy, advocacy, accountability)



You need data to get answers on how IA is working, how much it costs, what needs to change, to empower your First Nation and leadership for decision-making.

## How will my information be used?

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- Engagement with OCAP® Principles requires constant attention and effort.
- Any information shared is used solely for the project. Participants can withdraw at any time and their contributions will be destroyed.
- IFSD's data safeguards include: Microsoft's Canadian resident cloud-based storage; multi-factor authentication access (exclusively to staff engaged in the project); physical data stored in locked cabinets, in locked offices, in a locked facility.
- For more information on how IFSD is engaging with OCAP® Principles and handling data visit the [Research Ethics section](#) of our [Project Website](#).

## Join us!

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Collaboration with IFSD is **voluntary**.



IFSD wants to balance regions and characteristics (e.g., remoteness, small/large population, etc.), to ensure representation.



Contributions on a differentiated basis, e.g., case study (without full participation), are possible.