



## BACKGROUND and FAQs | Income Security Programs

As a response to the Covid-19 outbreak, the **Income Security Programs** (ISP) at the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has modified processes and increased benefits to the NWT's most vulnerable residents and their families.

These programs include Income Assistance (IA), the Seniors Home Heating Subsidy (SHHS), and [Student Financial Assistance \(SFA\)](#). Other programs include the NWT Child Benefit (NWTCB) and the Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit (SCSB), which are included through and combined with federal payments.

**Income Assistance** (IA) provides a set amount for food, shelter, and utilities, and enhanced needs such as incidentals, clothing, child care, furniture, educational assistance as well as allowances for seniors and persons with disabilities. The program is designed for Northerners 19 or older; that have a need greater than their income; and to encourage IA clients to participate in one productive choice, to take care of themselves and their families, unless they are exempt.

To support residents, families and seniors, we are:

- Providing a one-time emergency allowance for IA clients registered in March to help them with a 14-day supply of food and cleaning products as the stores have them available. Individuals received \$500 and families received \$1,000.
- Directing that all clients will engage in only one Productive Choice: taking care of themselves and their families. They will not be required to report on this productive choice.
- Requesting that all current IA clients update their statements and authorizations. This will help streamline administrative processes so Client Services Officers (CSOs) can focus on working with clients.
- Exempting monetary donations from being counted as income, beginning in April. These may be in the form of gifts from friends, family, benevolent organizations or Indigenous governments.
- "Payrolling" all clients so that they do not have to report each month. This will ensure they receive their payments consistently, and will avoid in-person reporting.
- Modifying the intake approach for new clients. Over the coming months, new clients will work with CSOs over the phone or by appointment as necessary, requiring minimal verification to ensure they are registered as quickly as possible. They will be automatically assessed for both basic needs and enhanced benefits.



The **Seniors Home Heating Subsidy (SHHS)** provides financial assistance to low-to-modest income seniors to help with the cost of heating their homes.

This program is intended for Northerners who are NWT residents and must apply for the subsidy each year; are 60 years of age or older; own and occupy their own home, or if renting, be the leasee of a unit with heating costs outside of the rent; meet a household income test; and are not receiving IA.

ECE is ensuring Seniors remain protected in their homes while still receiving their subsidy consistently.

Planned approaches include:

1. All 2019-20 subsidy applications will be carried over for two years rather than one, to ensure Seniors do not have to leave their homes unnecessarily.
2. Assistance by phone for seniors registering for the first time.
3. Modest increase in subsidy amount, beginning April 1, 2020.
4. Continued support available by phone.

### **ECE Service Centres and Building Closures**

In an effort to protect the health and safety of our staff and the clients we serve, effective Monday, March 23, 2020, ECE directed the majority of Department staff to work from home.

Our Service Centres and Headquarters have closed all of the buildings with information posted at each door letting the public know how to contact both the Client Services Officers and Student Case Officers and arrange for appointments if required.

When clients are having a face to face meeting, ECE has put processes in place to ensure that there will be at least 6 feet between both the client and the staff member so that proper physical distancing is maintained.

For more information on Income Assistance or Seniors benefits, contact one of our regional [service centres](#).

For any questions about Student Financial Assistance, please visit our [information page](#), email [nwtsfa@gov.nt.ca](mailto:nwtsfa@gov.nt.ca) or call toll free 1-800-661-0793 or (867) 767-9355 in Yellowknife.



## FAQs

### 1. Am I eligible for the emergency payment?

- If you received Income Assistance in the month of March 2020 you are considered a current Income Assistance Client and you automatically qualify for a one-time only emergency assistance benefit. The Department will be issuing \$500 for single applicants and \$1000 for families. This emergency assistance is a one-time benefit and is intended to assist individuals and families in purchasing the cleaning and food supplies required to support physical distancing and self-isolation as necessary.
- Client Services Officers (CSO) are doing their best to contact all clients who will be receiving the emergency assistance payment. Please ensure you have provided up to date contact information to your CSO.
- The emergency assistance payment will be paid out to all March applicants by early April.

### 2. Why is ECE only providing this one-time emergency allowance to March IA clients?

- The intent behind the emergency payment was to provide support for existing clients that may not have had enough money to buy a 14-day supply of food and cleaning products during the original rush across the territory in response to the Covid-19 outbreak.
- IA clients receive their payments at the beginning of every month.

### 3. I am not a current client, can I get emergency assistance?

- The Emergency Assistance is provided to current Income Assistance clients as of March 2020. If you require assistance, please submit an Income Assistance application or contact [Service Canada](#) regarding the supports they have in place.

### 4. How do I apply for April benefits?

- All current Income Assistance applicants will be payrolled.
- If you are new to applying for Income Assistance, please complete an intake application and contact your local ECE Service Center to schedule an intake appointment.

### 5. What does being on payroll mean?



- All current Income Assistant applicants will be pre-approved for benefits during the months of April 2020 through to June 2020. This means that you will not be required to report each month. You may still be required to submit documents such as utility invoices in order to pay actual costs and request fuel, wood, or pellets, on a monthly basis or as needed to your Client Services Officer.

## **6. What if I can't get all my documentation together?**

- The Department understands that many of our clients may have difficulty collecting and submitting documents during this time and has attempted to minimize the requirement for reporting. If you are asked to provide additional documents your Client Services Officer will work with you to determine how we can best support you at this time.

## **7. What kinds of donations can be exempted?**

- The Department recognizes that during this time of need many applicants may be receiving monetary donations from family, friends, Indigenous Governments and Community Organizations and would like to assure you that this income will not be counted.
- The Department will continue to exempt all income intended for children such as Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative.

## **8. Are these new changes permanent?**

- The Department is making these changes to address the current situation with Covid-19 and will continue to monitor the situation closely in order to ensure our residents are provided with the long term supports they require to meet their most basic needs.

## **9. How do I report on my Productive Choice?**

- The Department is encouraging all Income Assistance clients to take the necessary preventative measures to keep themselves and their families healthy and safe by practicing physical distancing. All clients will be moved into the only Productive Choice required; focusing on self-care and care for your family. You will not be required to report on this new Productive Choice.

## **10. How do I apply for the Senior Home Heating Subsidy (SHHS)?**



- If you received the SHHS during the 2019-2020 fiscal year, you do not need to reapply, the Department has approved SHHS benefits for the 2020-2021 fiscal based on your previous application.
- If you are new to the SHHS program, please contact your Local ECE Service Center to apply for benefits.

**11. Have there been any new Income Assistance clients in the past two weeks?**

- While we have received a number of queries, there has been no increase to the number of IA clients to date.

**12. Where can I get in touch with the ECE Regional Centres?**

- Contact information for all regional service centres can be found [here](#).