

Attachment E - Vision, principles, objectives, and recommendations put forward in the report *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*.

Vision

The future income security system is based on the following vision:

All individuals are treated with respect and dignity and are inspired and equipped to reach their potential. People have equitable access to a comprehensive and accountable system of income and in-kind support that provides an adequate level of financial assistance and promotes economic and social inclusion, with particular attention to the needs and experience of Indigenous people.

Guiding Principles

The following principles guide the recommendations made in the Roadmap:

Adequacy

The combination of social assistance and other income supports, in the absence of earnings and private income, should provide enough resources to cover essential living costs such as housing, nutritious food, transportation, disability-related costs and other necessities, so people can avoid poverty, protect wellbeing and focus on employment goals and social inclusion.

Rights

The income security system respects people's rights as reflected in First Nations' inherent right to self-government and treaty rights, Daniels Decision, Jordan's Principle, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Reconciliation

The income security system aligns with, and responds to, the spirit and intent of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, including the provincial government's specific commitments made in The Journey Together framework to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Recognizing the intrinsic connection between supporting improved social and economic outcomes for Indigenous people and the goal of reconciliation, all aspects of system transformation follow this principle.

Access to services

The income security system is accessible and easy to understand. Front line workers are able to provide effective, integrated, modern service delivery that recognizes the realities of providing services in all communities and to diverse populations, using culturally safe and trauma-informed techniques.

Promoting economic and social inclusion

The income security system helps people to reach their full potential for economic and social inclusion. Programs are designed to support a sense of belonging and the opportunity to fully and equally participate in the community. Employment and training supports are individualized and responsive to the labour market to most effectively support those seeking participation in the job market.

Equity and fairness

The income security system recognizes that people do not start from a level playing field and seeks to address current and historical systemic disadvantage and structural racism to ensure equitable outcomes for everyone. This includes a commitment to procedural fairness through adequate policies, procedures, practices, and appeal mechanisms.

Sustainability

The income security system is premised on sustainable government investment, a commitment to efficiency and effectiveness, and a respectful approach to accountability. All people are treated with respect and dignity to promote inclusion in the economy and society.

Objectives

The report's actions and recommendations are designed to advance five overarching objectives, namely:

Achieving Income Adequacy

Adopt a definition of income adequacy and make a public commitment to achieve that goal over 10 years.

Engaging the Whole Income Security System

Leverage the whole income security system, current and future, so that programs work together to help all low-income people to achieve social and economic inclusion.

Transforming Social Assistance

Make social assistance simpler and eliminate coercive rules and policies.

Helping those in Deepest Poverty

Take early and concrete action to increase the level of income support available to people living in deepest poverty.

First Nations Communities

Take steps to ensure that social services are controlled by, determined by and specific to First Nations.

Recommendations The report contains 18 recommendations for how to achieve the objectives listed above, and 2 additional recommendations focused on implementation, measures, and monitoring. Each recommendation is accompanied by a set of specific actions. Sub-themes help to highlight the focus of each set of recommendations and actions.

Objective 1. Achieving Income Adequacy

1. Adopt a Minimum Income Standard in Ontario to be achieved over the next 10 years through a combination of supports across the income security system.

1.1 The Province should publicly commit to a Minimum Income Standard that will be achieved over a 10-year period (by 2027–28).

The Minimum Income Standard should initially be established at the Low-Income Measure currently used by Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (LIM-50 linked to a base year of 2012), plus an additional 30% for persons with a disability, in recognition of the additional cost of living with a disability.

1.2 Begin work immediately to define a made-in-Ontario Market Basket Measure that would include a modern basket of goods, with prices reflecting true costs, and adjusted for all regions in the province, including the remote north. The measure will be used in evaluating progress towards the Minimum Income Standard, and potentially revising or replacing the PRS LIM as the measure used to set the standard. The made-in-Ontario Market Basket Measure could also be used to guide and evaluate investment decisions over the long term.

1.3 Implement the recommendations in the Roadmap to move toward adequacy in the income security system by 2027-28.

Objective 2. Engaging the Whole Income Security System

Ontario Housing Benefit

2. Introduce a housing benefit to assist all low-income people with the high cost of housing, whether or not they receive social assistance, so they are not forced to choose between a home and other necessities.

2.1 Confirm the design and implementation details for a universal, income-tested portable housing benefit for people who rent their homes.

2.2 Implement the portable housing benefit in 2019–20 at a modest “gap coverage” of 25%, with the gap defined as the difference between the actual cost of housing and a minimum household contribution given household income.

2.3 Increase gap coverage to 35% in 2020–21 and continue to increase gap coverage, reaching 75% by or before 2027–28.

2.4 First Nations need to be meaningfully included in the housing benefit and may need modifications or an alternate benefit to ensure it works in the reserve context.

Income Support for Children

3. Continue to move income support for children outside of social assistance so all low-income families can benefit fully, regardless of income source. Ensure supports are sensitive to the needs of children and youth who are at greater risk.

3.1 Provide bridging child supplements within social assistance to ensure families are not worse off during the transition, as the social assistance structure is transformed to include flat rates.

3.2 Re-brand the Temporary Care Assistance program to focus on child well-being, increase the amount of income support provided to better align with foster care levels, and provide clear flexibility for Ontario Works Administrators to determine where it is best accessed.

3.3 Shift the remaining amounts paid in respect of children's essential needs in social assistance to the Ontario Child Benefit as a supplement targeted to the lowest-income families.

3.4 Require Children's Aid Societies to place Children's Special Allowance payments into a savings program for youth in care 15 years and older so the funds can be disbursed to the youth when transitioning from care.

3.5 Provide support to all low-income people, including those living in First Nations communities, to ensure that benefits paid through the tax system are accessed and equitably received.

Working Income Tax Benefit

4. Work with the federal government to enhance the effectiveness of the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) so that it plays a greater role in contributing to income adequacy for low-income workers in Ontario.

4.1 The federal government enhances the WITB so that it better reflects the realities faced by low-income workers in Ontario. This should include examining:

- The level of earnings at which an individual begins receiving the WITB and how the WITB is adjusted when earnings increase, including the threshold at which the WITB begins to be reduced;
- The overall amount of support provided through the WITB;
- The net income at which individuals are no longer eligible to receive the WITB;
- Outreach, support and any alternative delivery required to ensure that the WITB is accessible to First Nations individuals.

Core Health Benefits

5. Make essential health benefits available to all low-income people, beginning with ensuring those in deepest poverty have access to the services they need.

5.1 Expand access to mandatory core health benefits to all adults receiving Ontario Works and adult children in families receiving ODSP, and add coverage for dentures (including initial and follow-up fittings) for all social assistance recipients.

5.2 Expand existing, and introduce new, core health benefits for all low-income adults over the next 10 years starting with the expansion of prescription drug coverage to adults 25 to 65, followed by:

- Expanding Healthy Smiles Ontario to adults age 18 to 65 and adding dentures as part of the benefit;
- Designing and implementing a new vision and hearing benefit for low-income individuals and families;
- Expanding access to medical transportation benefits.

5.3 Review the Assistive Devices Program to ensure the program is maximizing its reach to low-income people, both in terms of the list of devices that are covered and the maximum coverage.

Access to Justice

6. Procedural fairness should be embedded in all aspects of the income security system through adequate policies, procedures, practices and timely appeal mechanisms.

6.1 Request a research body such as the Law Commission of Ontario or an academic institution to review the existing appeal process for tax-delivered benefits and develop recommendations for enhanced or new mechanisms that support fair, transparent and efficient access to those benefits and appeal processes.

Objective 3: Transforming Social Assistance

Legislative Framework

7. Fundamentally change the legislative framework for social assistance programs to set the foundation for a culture of trust, collaboration and problem-solving.

7.1 Develop and introduce new legislation to govern and re-brand the current Ontario Works program. As a starting point for legislative change, draft and publicly consult on a new purpose statement in the first year of reform that explicitly recognizes and supports:

- Individual choice and well-being;
- Diverse needs and a goal of social and economic inclusion for all.

7.2 Identify and amend regulations under both the Ontario Works Act and the Ontario Disability Support Program Act before new Ontario Works legislation is introduced in order to jump-start and reinforce a positive culture of trust, collaboration and problem-solving.

7.3 Provide First Nations with the opportunity to develop and implement their own community-based models of Income Assistance under provincial legislation.

A Culture of Trust, Collaboration & Problem-Solving

8. Introduce an approach to serving people receiving Ontario Works and ODSP that promotes a culture of trust, collaboration and problem-solving as a priority; one that uses a trauma-informed lens and supports good quality of life outcomes for people in all communities, including Indigenous people.

8.1 Position front-line workers as case collaborators whose primary role is to act as supportive problem-solvers and human services system navigators in a way that allows people to share information without fear of reprisals. This includes working with individuals in both individual and group settings.

8.2 Introduce a comprehensive assessment tool to identify needs for, and barriers to, social and economic inclusion that uses an equity and trauma-informed approach to connect people to appropriate supports.

8.3 Use pilots to test the comprehensive assessment tool and the case collaborator role with an initial focus on people seeking to access ODSP through Ontario Works, long-term social assistance recipients, youth and persons with disabilities.

8.4 Eliminate financial and eligibility penalties related to employment efforts and rigid reporting requirements to support a new person-centred approach, promote trust and respect between front-line workers and people accessing help, and place a firm emphasis on problem-solving and addressing urgent needs first (e.g., risk of homelessness). This includes revising policies that create barriers to safety and well-being (e.g., fleeing an unsafe home).

8.5 Ensure front-line workers have the necessary skills and knowledge to act as case collaborators through:

- Mandatory professional development and learning, including skills in social work (i.e., anti-racism, contemporary professional development and anti-oppressive practice), and Indigenous cultural safety training and awareness;
- Provincially set and governed quality standards and controls tied to staff performance plans.

8.6 Regularly situate Ontario Works and ODSP case collaborators in Indigenous service delivery offices to improve cultural awareness and understanding and support better inter-agency relationships.

8.7 Clearly recognize Indigenous peoples' right to choose service in their preferred location.

8.8 Ensure staffing at all levels reflects the diversity of Ontario, and model truly inclusive offices that are welcoming spaces and reflect the multitude of cultures and communities served across the province, including the diversity within and across Indigenous communities.

8.9 Continuously review and adjust the service approach, professional development and tools and resources based on feedback from partners and people accessing programs.

8.10 Establish a First Nations–developed and implemented program based on self-identification, self-worth and true reconciliation leading to life stabilization.

8.11 Conduct analyses on current and proposed policies and services to ensure they do not increase vulnerability or undermine safety of those receiving support. This should include a culture- and gender-based analysis to ensure safety of Indigenous women.

Supporting People with Disabilities

9. Maintain and strengthen ODSP as a distinct program for people with disabilities. Ensure that both ODSP and Ontario Works are well equipped to support people with disabilities with meeting individual goals for social and economic inclusion.

9.1 Recognize the continued need for a distinct income support program for people with disabilities.

9.2 Retain the current ODSP definition of disability.

9.3 Continue work with the Disability Adjudication Working Group to streamline and improve the ODSP application and adjudication process.

9.4 Provide provincial-level assistance and accommodation for people who need help with the ODSP application process, building on lessons learned from community groups.

9.5 Include specific review with First Nations and urban Indigenous service delivery partners to ensure that the assistance and accommodation reflect the unique experience of Indigenous people.

9.6 Ensure that both ODSP and Ontario Works accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities as part of the person-centred, collaborative approach to support individual goals and aspirations.

Assured Income Approach for Persons with Disabilities

10. Use an inclusive process to design an “assured income” approach for people with disabilities.

10.1 Co-design an “assured income” mechanism for delivering financial support to people who meet the ODSP definition of disability. Consultation with First Nations people is essential.

10.2 Include the following features in the assured income mechanism:

- Income-tested only (i.e., no asset test);
- Stacking of income benefits to reach adequacy;
- Tax-based definition of income (i.e., does not include financial help (gifts) from family or friends);
- Continued responsibility of the provincial government to determine disability, with the right of appeal to the Ontario Social Benefits Tribunal;
- Flexibility to adjust to in-year income changes;
- Safe to move into employment and back to the program.

10.3 Provide an initial Assured Income benefit at least as high as the ODSP Standard Flat Rate at the time of transition. Provide continued increases until the Minimum Income Standard is achieved in combination with other income security components.

10.4 Ensure that people receiving the Assured Income have full access to ODSP caseworker services and support.

10.5 Provide First Nations with the ability to administer and deliver ODSP in their own communities in the same manner as Ontario Works.

A Transformed Social Assistance Structure: Rate Structure

11. Transform the social assistance rate structure so that all adults have access to a consistent level of support regardless of living situation (i.e., rental, ownership, board and lodge, no fixed address, rent-geared-to-income housing, government-funded facility).

11.1 Transform the SA rate structure so that:

- Single adults receive a Standard Flat Rate that does not distinguish between basic needs & shelter;
- Couples receive a Standard Couple Flat Rate equal to 1.5 of the Standard Flat Rate;
- In recognition of the additional cost of living with a disability, single adults with a disability receive a higher Standard Flat Rate – Disability and couples receive a Standard Couple Rate – Disability of 1.5 the Standard Flat Rate – Disability. Adult children aged 18–24 (without a disability) who live with their parent(s) on social assistance receive a Dependent Rate (75% of the Standard Flat Rate for the first dependent and 35% for each additional dependent). Non-disabled adult children over age 24 who live with their parent(s) receive the full Standard Flat Rate. People with disabilities will continue to qualify in their own right for ODSP at the age of 18.

11.2 Align the definition of spouse under social assistance with the *Family Law Act* (i.e., deemed a spouse after 3 years).

11.3 In moving to a Standard Flat Rate structure, eliminate the rent scales currently used for those receiving social assistance. Require municipal housing services managers to invest the increased revenues resulting from the elimination of rent-geared-to-income rent scales (due to the transformed rate structure) into local housing and homelessness priorities.

Supporting Employment Goals

12. Improve social assistance rules and redesign benefits to make it easier for people to pursue their employment goals and realize the benefits of working.

12.1 Redesign, using a co-design process, existing employment-related benefits (except the ODSP Work-Related Benefit) into one benefit with consideration given to whether the new benefit should be mandatory or discretionary, the level of prescription in the activities the benefit can support, and the level of support that is provided to meet a broad range of needs; and test the new benefit before province-wide roll out.

12.2 Reduce the wait period for exempting employment earnings to one month (from three months) in Ontario Works.

12.3 Designate First Nations Ontario Works delivery agents to deliver and administer the Employment Ontario employment assistance program. This will better assist their community members in becoming employable through the array of programming and benefits that are not available to them for a variety of reasons. These may include, but are not limited to, vast distances from municipalities or urban centres where Employment Ontario programs are placed, lack of services focussed on developing employability skills available through the Ontario Works program, and the recent removal of assisting programs (e.g., First Nations Job Fund).

12.4 Support case collaboration in both individual and group settings.

Income & Assets

13. Modernize income and asset rules so people can maximize the income sources available to them and save for the future.

13.1 Exempt as assets funds held in Tax Free Savings Accounts and all forms of Registered Retirement Savings Plans so people do not have to deplete resources meant for their senior years.

13.2 Initially exempt 25% of Canada Pension Plan - Disability, Employment Insurance, and Workplace Safety and Insurance Board payments from social assistance (i.e., social assistance would be reduced by 75 cents for every dollar of income from these sources rather than dollar for dollar).

13.3 Increase the income exemption for Canada Pension Plan Disability, Employment Insurance, and Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to the same level as the existing earnings exemption by 2022-23.

Allowances & Benefits

14. Ensure ongoing access to targeted allowances and benefits until such a time as adequacy is achieved. Determine which extraordinary costs remain beyond the means of individuals even when adequacy is achieved and maintain those benefits.

14.1 Retain the following special purpose allowances/benefits and review as progress towards adequacy is made and people's outcomes are better understood:

- Special Diet Allowance
- Mandatory Special Necessities / Medical Transportation
- Pregnancy and Breast-Feeding Nutritional Allowance
- ODSP Work-Related Benefit

14.2 Revise medical transportation rules to include and support improved access to traditional healers.

14.3 Review and introduce expanded eligibility criteria for the Remote Communities Allowance to better address the needs of northern and remote communities.

14.4 Redesign Ontario Works discretionary benefits as other recommendations are implemented (e.g., making core health benefits and help with funeral and burial costs mandatory) and consider making them available to the broader low income population.

Objective 4: Helping Those in Deepest Poverty

The Need for Urgent Action

15. Help those in deepest poverty by immediately increasing the income support available through social assistance as a readily available means for early and absolutely critical progress towards adequacy.

15.1 Implement changes that make meaningful progress in improving the incomes of those furthest from the Minimum Income Standard through social assistance as the most readily available and easily adjusted means by (in Fall 2018):

- Setting the Standard Flat Rate at \$794/month (a 10% increase over Fall 2017 Ontario Works maximum basic needs and shelter rates);
- Setting the Standard Flat Rate – Disability at \$1,209/month (a 5% increase over Fall 2017 ODSP maximum basic needs and shelter rates).

15.2 Implement increases to the Standard Flat Rate and Standard Flat Rate - Disability in Fall 2019:

- Increase the Standard Flat Rate to \$850/month (7% increase over Year 1);
- Increase the Standard Flat Rate -Disability to \$1,270/month (5% increase over Year 1).

15.3 Implement increases to the Standard Flat Rate and Standard Flat Rate - Disability in Fall 2020:

- Increase the Standard Flat Rate to \$893/month (5% increase over Year 2);
- Increase the Standard Flat Rate - Disability to \$1,334/month (5% increase over Year 2).

15.4 Continue to raise the level of income support available through (a rebranded) Ontario Works program until the Minimum Income Standard is achieved in combination with other income security components by 2027-28.

Objective 5: First Nation Communities

Self-Governance & Respect for First Nation Jurisdiction

16. Take steps to ensure that social services are ultimately controlled by, determined by and specific to First Nations.

16.1 Based on First Nations' inherent right, First Nations should have the opportunity to develop and control their own social service programs.

16.2 Recognize First Nations authority to create and implement their own model of Income Assistance.

16.3 Engage with federal government and First Nations in a tripartite arrangement to ensure ongoing financial support for the new flexible, responsive approaches.

16.4 Respect First Nations' autonomy and work with First Nations to develop an opt-out clause that explicitly recognizes their right to opt out of provisions in the Ontario Works legislative framework in favour of their own models. Establish communication processes for informing First Nations of the opt-out provisions and opportunities for piloting direct program delivery.

16.5 Identify more flexible, responsive service approaches or models that First Nations could adapt, such as:

- Living with Parent rule;
- Qualifying period for earnings exemptions;
- Non-compliance rules;
- Rental Income for Ontario Works recipients;
- Spousal definition to be defined under the Family Law Act;
- Participation requirements (voluntary);
- Shelter cost maximums, to be based on actuals.

16.6 Establish and communicate clear guidelines to provincial staff in accessing First Nations-owned data reflecting the principles of the Ownership, Control, Access and Possession protocol endorsed by the Assembly of First Nations.

16.7 Commit to working with First Nations to design and launch pilots for the direct delivery of programs including the Ontario Disability Support Program, Employment Ontario, Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities, and Special Services at Home within their communities, with the long term goal of First Nations delivery as they choose.

16.8 Support the development of administrative forms and processes and training of First Nation social services staff to support the new flexible, responsive approach.

16.9 Commit to working with First Nations (through Provincial Territorial Organizations, Tribal Councils or individual First Nations) to establish an implementation plan for First Nations to accept the responsibility for the design and delivery of programs to First Nation communities, such as: Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities, Special Services at Home, and Temporary Care Assistance.

16.10 Take steps to ensure that First Nations will still be eligible for any new program dollars for any new programs that the Ontario government might develop after a First Nation has taken on self-governance in social assistance.

First Nations Based Approach

17. Broaden program outcomes to encompass social inclusion. Simplify processes and provide tools for a more holistic, individualized approach that offers wrap-around services.

17.1 The diverse goals, needs and paths of individuals should be recognized to encourage and promote personal success. This includes broadening program outcomes to include community engagement and social inclusion, as well as supporting individuals in increasing their employability.

17.2 First Nations social service programs should have recognition and support for their ability to provide:

- Income assistance to singles, couples, and families.
- Pre-employment activities that include but are not limited to literacy, upgrading, employment experience, job-specific skills training, youth-specific initiatives, social enterprise and self-employment resources.
- Mental health and addictions referrals and early interventions.
- Community-based initiatives specific to language, culture, tradition and the community's economic and educational context.
- All of these services will be delivered in a First Nations holistic approach.

17.3 Community and social development training for First Nations staff.

17.4 Healing and wellness, life stabilization, social inclusion, pre-employment activities and developing essential skills should be recognized as significant achievements along the path to success.

17.5 Ontario Works self-employment rules should be aligned with Ontario Disability Support Program to include those working part-time and seasonally. Self-employment rules, guidelines and eligibility assessments should be simplified and revised.

17.6 Encourage self-employment and social enterprises as viable options for First Nations peoples and communities.

17.7 Work with First Nations to promote information and create opportunities related to micro-loan availability and small business start-up, as well as federal and provincial programming.

17.8 First Nation social service administrators should continue to deliver employment-related services to promote a holistic approach towards supporting community members.

17.9 First Nation social service administrators should deliver and oversee Employment Ontario Employment Services and supports in their communities.

17.10 First Nations youth represent the future of First Nations communities and require access to services and supports earlier in life to achieve success in employment, education and transitioning to adulthood.

- Young people aged 14+ should have access to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program employment supports;
- Provision of funding to support programming, social inclusion, cultural learning and knowledge-sharing between Elders and youth.

17.11 In recognition that ODSP should be delivered by First Nations, reduce barriers to ODSP by:

- Funding support staff to provide intensive case management and secure assessments to help individuals navigate ODSP;
- Supporting better access to health practitioners in First Nation communities to assist with the completion of the Disability Determination Package (DDP) through use of video or telehealth services;
- Increasing and expediting help with medical transportation costs;
- Ongoing supports for ODSP recipients and benefit units;
- Providing a supplementary benefit that is dedicated to individuals with disabilities receiving ODSP;
- Providing longer timelines to complete steps in the adjudication process as required.

17.12 To support ongoing professional development for First Nations, tools, resources, funding and training should be in place.

17.13 Promote/support healing and wellness among social services staff.

17.14 The capabilities, skills and professional development of First Nation social service administrators should be better recognized and celebrated as critical to affecting the lives and outcomes of First Nation individuals receiving social assistance.

Adequate Funding for First Nations

18. The income security system needs to better respond to the local economic and geographic circumstances of First Nation communities to help ensure people get the help they need to maintain an adequate standard of living and be lifted out of poverty.

18.1 Programs, services and supports provided through social assistance should better reflect the realities of living within First Nation communities.

18.2 Discretionary funding should be based on reimbursement of actual expenditures.

18.3 Rates should reflect the additional costs of living in First Nations communities, including remote and isolated communities (e.g. purchasing nutritious food, transportation costs).

18.4 Address price setting practices for food, goods and services in northern communities (e.g., Northern Store).

18.5 Expand eligibility criteria for the Remote Communities Allowance to include a wider area.

18.6 Recognize and apply the concept of using a First Nation-developed Remoteness Quotient that reflects the increased cost of living in remote First Nations.

18.7 Develop a Transitional Support Fund (TSF) funding formula that is based on actual expenditures.

18.8 Provide additional funding to support the Cost of Administration, especially for communities with smaller caseloads.

18.9 Develop a supplementary case load tool and technology that accurately captures the actual case load data and is reflected in the Cost of Administration and discretionary benefits.

18.10 Fund First Nations technology solutions.

Implementing & Measuring Change

Managing the Change Process

19. Income security reform must be accompanied by a robust change management and implementation plan.

Measuring Outcomes & Reporting on Progress

20. The recommendations in this Roadmap should be accompanied by a transparent report on associated outcomes and indicators, to be updated annually and made publicly available by MCSS.

20.1 Establish an annual, publicly available report that will outline progress on the Roadmap recommendations, including progress against outcomes.

20.2 Establish a third-party body that will review and comment on the annual progress report and provide comments to the Cabinet.

20.3 Require that both the annual report and the third-party comments be tabled in the legislature.