

Fostering Relationships in Income Security

Mr. Speaker, Income Security programs are a vital piece of the societal safety network that together help address the needs of NWT residents.

Those who access programs within this complex network are often at a point of vulnerability in their lives. It is good government practice to continually review and evaluate programs, especially social ones, to ensure that those in need are being provided appropriate supports and services.

Over the past three years, the Department has implemented a number of enhancements to its suite of Income Security programs to better support NWT residents. By seeking input through fostering positive partnerships and having solutions-based conversations with important stakeholders, we continue to gain valuable insight for further improvements.

I am pleased to advise that in December, I met with people who have accessed programs along with Non-Government Social Organizations to hear their priorities and solutions for the Income Assistance program. People accessing services and those working directly with people accessing income assistance have the experience and knowledge to know what's working and what is not as well as provide invaluable solution-based recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I am accountable for ensuring that the programs and services offered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment are helpful to the populations they are intended to serve. I have heard from our stakeholders that the Income Assistance program can be difficult to understand and navigate. As a result, the Department is working on improved communication products and ensuring staff have the right tools to help clients understand available programs and their requirements.

I have also conducted a survey of frontline staff and invited Indigenous Governments and Members of the Legislative Assembly to provide their input and views on suggested changes to the Income Assistance program. All of the suggestions and solutions I hear will inform our approach to any future program changes.

I remain committed to ensuring that the priorities and suggestions that have been identified by program recipients, and those who work closely with them, will be considered. Department staff have already begun to identify potential changes that can be made immediately and develop a plan to consider the more complex medium and long-term priorities. In the spirit of transparency, the Department has shared a *What We Heard* report from our meeting in December with the public on the ECE website.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have started this conversation with staff, partners and stakeholders. It is my intention to incorporate what we have heard when making changes to the Income Assistance Program so that NWT residents receive the highest quality service when accessing Income Security programs and services.

Masi, Mr. Speaker.