

Changes to the Income Assistance Program

Mr. Speaker, over the past year, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has been making significant changes to the way it provides critical support for the territory's most vulnerable residents through its Income Assistance Program.

In 2016, the Federal Government announced the Canada Child Benefit. This new benefit had significant implications for our Income Assistance Program, and we revised our program so that the new Canada Child Benefit was not counted as income under the Income Assistance program. This change was intended to ensure all NWT residents with families received the full benefit of this new federal program.

Mr. Speaker, through a joint initiative with our colleagues at the Department of Finance we will be increasing the Northwest Territories Child Benefit to provide additional financial support to more low to modest income families with children, and not only those accessing Income Assistance.

For example, a family with three children under six whose annual income is \$45,000 would have received \$136.05 per year before the changes. With the enhanced benefit, that same family will now receive \$1,397.90, an increase of \$1,261.85.

The enhanced NWT Child Benefit will also now reach more Northwest Territories families as we have increased the income threshold to receive this benefit to \$80,000. We estimate that more than 2,200 families will benefit from these changes.

The enhanced Northwest Territories Child Benefit will continue to be non-taxable, and will not be counted as income in the calculation of income assistance benefits. The improved NWT Child Benefit will take effect in July.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the amendments to the *Income Tax Act* made earlier in this sitting will allow us to move forward with our plan to help families provide a better quality of life for their children, support their well-being, and give children opportunities to reach their potential.

The Government of the Northwest Territories continues to review and update its Income Security Programs so they respond to the needs and realities of our residents, including the rising cost of living in our territory. This is a critical step toward the health and well-being of families across the North. These changes, and all of the revisions we have undertaken, support the 18th Legislative Assembly's mandate to reduce the cost of living, foster healthy families, improve the affordability of childcare, and reduce poverty by increasing the benefits to low and modest income families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.