

**Income Security Benefits Across the Northwest Territories**

Mr. Speaker, we are continually reviewing and updating our income security programs to make sure they respond to the needs and realities of Northwest Territories residents. All program changes are made based on research and analysis, to ensure these programs are well managed and help residents across the North.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment increased the Northwest Territories Child Benefit in July 2017, and we raised the Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit in September 2017.

Mr. Speaker, we will soon implement additional improvements that will benefit seniors, income assistance clients and students.

Starting April 1, 2018, the Department will implement enhancements to the Senior Home Heating Subsidy. This subsidy provides financial assistance to low to modest income residents aged 60 and older to help meet the costs of heating their homes.

With the planned enhancements, more seniors will be eligible for more support to assist with their home heating costs. We are increasing income thresholds, adjusting eligible income limits and subsidy amounts, and moving to a monetary based subsidy. Additionally, we are extending the program to include seniors who rent their homes.

By increasing the income thresholds, extending the program to renters and ensuring all eligible seniors receive the full subsidy, we believe that more than 300 seniors will be positively impacted.

Mr. Speaker, we have been working hard to make sure all of our programs are fairly applied to put more money in the hands of those who need it most.

Currently, under the Income Assistance program, single clients are eligible to receive up to \$900 per month for rental assistance, while clients with dependents are eligible to receive assistance at market rent.

Starting April 1<sup>st</sup>, we will be extending market rent eligibility to all income assistance clients.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, our Student Financial Assistance program is one of the best in Canada. It provides students with financial assistance to pursue postsecondary education, leading to improved career options.

Starting in the fall semester, students with dependents will receive an additional return trip each academic year from their home community to the nearest approved education institution that offers their program.

We are also changing the Student Financial Assistance application deadlines so that we can process applications sooner. Students will receive an earlier response to their applications, allowing them to plan their academic year. The deadlines for applications will change from July 15 to June 30 and from November 15 to October 31, effective this year.

We will promote these changes to make sure students are well informed. Student Case Officers will also be available to assist in this transition.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is making these changes to income security benefits in accordance with principles of responsible governance, public accountability, and fiscal responsibility. But our main objective, as always, is to do everything we can to support our students, seniors, and our most vulnerable residents.

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.