

ISC - Income Assistance

Frequently Asked Questions for Clients/Applicants

June 2020

Table of Contents

1. Policy – Income Assistance Program On-Reserve	2
2. 10 Year Grants	3
3. Eligibility	5
4. Family Composition	8
5. Shelter	9
6. Hardship Assistance	13
7. Earnings	14
8. Fraud	15
9. Special Needs Allowance	16
10. Persons With Disabilities: Annual Earnings Exemptions	17
11. Overpayments, Recoveries and Repayment Agreements	19
12. Cell Phone – Equivalent to Landline	20



1. Policy – Income Assistance Program On-Reserve

Q: What is the Income Assistance Program?

A: Income Assistance is a Program of last resort: Recipients are expected to exhaust all other financial resources before accessing the program

Q: Who creates the income assistance policy?

A: The Income Assistance policy is developed and issued by **Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)**, and is aligned with the IA program offered by the Province of BC.

BSDWs administer ISC's IA program on-reserve.

Q: Is my Band Social Development Worker (BSDW) just making up policy?

A: Your Band Social Development Worker does not make up policy.

The BSDW's follow the policy that is issued by ISC, and they are unable to make any changes.

Q: What happens if the BSDW or band does not follow policy?

A: Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) reviews client files on a regular basis to ensure eligibility requirements are met.

If the Band Social Development Worker does not follow policy, ISC may recover the money that was incorrectly paid.

Q: What is covered under Income Assistance?

A: Funding is provided to eligible clients on-reserve for:

- Basic needs (food, clothing, rent, utilities)
- Special Needs
- Pre-Employment and Employment Supports (to move individuals toward self-sufficiency – life skills/job training)



2. 10 Year Grants

Q: What about First Nations under the 10 Year Grants?

A: We have the following information:

First Nations are still able to use ISC's Income Assistance policy handbook and guidelines

However to clarify some important points prior to answering any questions about our department's policy handbook (see below).

This information should not be considered advice or formal recommendations about your First Nation's funding arrangement under this new initiative.

We are only able to provide clarification on how our department would respond to IA and AL related policy questions to First Nations that administer these two programs outside of 10 Year Grant agreements.

If you have further questions about how this will impact your program, I would encourage you to speak with your band manager or your Funding Services Officer.

Under 10 Year Grants, your First Nation:

Program Administration/Delivery

- ✓ Has the freedom to move funding between all program budgets that are under the 10 year grant
- ✓ Can deliver the Income Assistance & Assisted Living programs as it determines best supports its members

Compliance

- ✓ Is no longer subject to compliance reviews

Reporting

- ✓ Is no longer be required to complete the Income Assistance or Assisted Living reports
- ✓ Will submit one annual report for all of your programs to the department (there is minimal data required for the IA/AL programs)



Additional general facts/info we can share from the HQ/FAQ document:

What are the benefits of the 10-Year Grant?

A grant funding approach, supported by funding arrangements of up to ten years, provides First Nations with greater predictability of funding to support innovation in service delivery and longer-term partnerships, and enhanced flexibility in the design and delivery of services.

The 10-Year Grant should provide important benefits to First Nations including:

- ✓ Greater predictability to support long-term goals (most contribution agreements have terms of less than 10 years);
- ✓ Greater flexibility compared to block or other mechanisms to design and deliver services to better accommodate local needs (First Nations will not be restricted to individual program terms and conditions in how they deliver their services for those programs included in the grant);
- ✓ Greater flexibility in allocating funding to better accommodate local needs, including the possibility of up-front single annual installments,
- ✓ No stacking restrictions, and no claw-backs if First Nations obtain funds from other government sources;
- ✓ Unrestricted ability to retain unexpended funds at year-end;
- ✓ First Nations moving to a 10-Year Grant April 2019 from Block Funding would have that funding escalator rolled into grant for the term of the grant agreement;
- ✓ No recipient audits initiated by the department for programs funded through a 10-Year Grant; and,
- ✓ Reduced administrative reporting burden (90% reduction in required data elements).



3. Eligibility

Q: What documentation is required when applying for Income Assistance?

A: Essential documentation:

- One piece of Photo ID (Primary)
 - Driver's License or BC Driver's License and Services Card (Combined Card)
 - BC Services Card
 - Status Card
 - Passport
 - BCID
- One piece of Non-Photo ID (Secondary)
 - Birth Certificate
 - Bank Card
 - Credit Card
 - Health Card
 - SIN
 - 1 Secondary ID for every Dependent
- Income Verification
 - Bank Statement
 - Tax Assessment
 - EI
 - Cheque stub
- Asset Verification
 - Vehicle Registration
 - Bank/Stock Profile
- Shelter Documentation
 - Utility bills
 - Hydro
 - Residential Phone
 - Gas
 - Wood
 - Homeowner's Insurance
 - Garbage Pickup
 - Band/Private Rental Documentation
 - Ownership Documents: CP, Custom Holdings, Cardex Holding, Mortgage Documents
- Consent to provide verification of EI and Income Assistance
- Additional documentation (if applicable):
 - Any Medical documents: related to ability to work
 - Doctor note for Special Diet, Natal Supplements
 - Any other Financial documents: Loan information, Inheritance, Family Support
 - Job Search Documentation: Resume, Work Search print out
 - Record of Employment



Q: Why are Bank Statements required?

A: As per the Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) policy on Income Assistance, it is the responsibility of the applicants

- to provide shelter, financial, identification, and any other required documents to verify their information and ensure that they continue to be financially eligible for assistance.
- All information obtained by the First Nation will be treated as private and confidential on their file.
- Recipients of *income assistance, disability assistance and hardship assistance* are required to report changes in their circumstances such as address, shelter/utility costs, number of dependents, changes in employability status, whether they are attending school, and any changes in assets. They are also required to report all employment income and any other earned or unearned money they received.

1. Under section 1.3 Program Administration:

Program Administration

General Principle

The Social Development Program provides financial benefits and services to individuals and families, resident on reserve, who are in need. Need is determined by the application of a means-test, and other applicable eligibility requirements.

Applicant Rights:

- to have all personal information treated as private and confidential
- to have their eligibility determined on the basis of objective evidence as required by program policy

Applicant Responsibilities:

- to complete all required eligibility forms in a proper manner

2. Under section 3.1 Application Process

The purpose of income assistance is to ensure that recipients receive the necessary support to become independent. To assist in this, applicants' or recipients' circumstances may be reviewed at any time to ensure that:

- all eligibility requirements are met
- when required, applicants or recipients seek alternative sources of income

Information provided by the applicant or recipient will be subject to a verification process as set out by the BSDW.

Until the information has been verified by the BSDW, applicants have not been determined eligible for income assistance and are not entitled to income assistance,



3. If an applicant/recipient has a bank account, he/she may be required to provide the statement for financial assessment and verification.

A Bank Statement is to show the full month not just a “total”

A bank statement is an official summary of financial transactions which have occurred within a given period on each bank account held by a person or business with a financial institution. Normally, bank statements are numbered and indicate the period covered by the statement, and may contain other important information for the account type, such as how much is payable by a certain date. The start date of the statement period is usually the day after the end of the previous statement period.

To determine eligibility, the BSDW's may request further information/documentation.

If the individual does not provide accurate documentation or information, then their eligibility for the program cannot be determined.



4. Family Composition

Q: What is a Family Unit?

A: When determining eligibility for Income Assistance, Disability Assistance or Hardship Assistance, a family unit is defined as an applicant or a recipient and his or her dependents. A dependent is a person who resides with the applicant or recipient and who is one of the following:

- A spouse of the applicant or recipient
- A dependent child of the applicant or recipient
- A person who indicates a parental role for the applicant's or recipient's dependent child

Q: How does the BSDW determine whether two persons residing together are “spouses”, including persons of the same gender?

A: The following criteria must be considered:

- They are married to each other, or
- They reside together and acknowledge they are residing together in a marriage-like relationship.

Q: How does the BSDW assess for a Marriage-like Dependency Relationship?

A: The following 3 factors are applied to determine whether a marriage-like relationship exists:

- Length of time the parties have resided together is greater than 3 months
- Financial inter-dependence is consistent with “marriage-like”
- Social / familial aspects are consistent with “marriage-like”

Q: What about people that share accommodation and are not a family unit?

A: An individual who normally resides with the person at the same address, but in separate living area (such as a self-contained suite) is not considered as “residing with” the individual.

In addition to a self-contained suite, a separate living space may also include:

- A finished basement with a separate living and/or sleeping quarters with no separate kitchen, but the person intends to maintain a separate living space
- A separate structure on the same property that the person intends to maintain a separate living space



5. Shelter

Q: Why don't I get my full shelter amount?

A: Shelter allowance is based on **actual costs**.

This means that you are not entitled to get the full amount each month, unless your documented shelter expenses are equal or higher than the maximum for your family unit.

For example, if your monthly shelter expense is \$60 in hydro. You will only receive \$60 in shelter to pay hydro, even if your shelter maximum is \$375.

In some cases, the band may pay your shelter costs directly, so you only receive your basic needs support.

Q: What are considered eligible shelter expenses (shelter expenses that can be covered)?

A: Possible expenses are rent (sometimes), hydro, utilities, wood, propane, and a landline phone.

You must bring in your bills and documents showing actual costs each month. This can include receipts, hydro bills, invoices for wood, etc., documents that show the costs.

There are some cases where not everything can be covered.

For example, rent cannot be covered if you are sharing the same living spaces as the homeowner (i.e. kitchen and bathroom).

You need to talk to your Band Social Development Worker to determine which of your shelter expenses are eligible.

Q: Why do I need to bring in my shelter bills each month?

A: Shelter is based on **actual costs**.

In order to cover your shelter expenses, there has to be proof of these costs, which is why you need to bring in your bills every single month.



Q: If a client lives in the same home as the homeowner, can rent be paid?

A: No rent is not an eligible IA shelter expense in this situation.

In alignment with provincial standards, when a client is sharing a home with their landlord (i.e. sharing living spaces like bathroom and kitchen), then rent is **not** an eligible IA shelter expense.

Under Chapter 5.1 – Shelter Allowances Overview – Shared Shelter – it states:

In situations where two or more people (neither of who is the spouse nor dependent of the other), or two or more families share a common dwelling, the administering authority will divide the documented allowable shelter costs by the number of people occupying the common dwelling.

When calculating a recipient's shelter costs for two or more families who occupy the same place of residence, the allowable documented shelter costs of any one of them will be accepted.

The smaller of the following amounts will determine shelter costs:

- the allowable documented shelter amount calculated by:
 - dividing the actual costs for all the families by the number of persons occupying the place of residence
 - multiplying the result by the number of persons in each family
- the amount declared by that family as the shelter costs for that family

In short, this means that the only eligible IA shelter expenditures are actual **shared shelter costs** (i.e. hydro bill with the IA program only covering the client's portion of costs).

Please note as well that in order for rent to be paid on a privately owned home, all of the following would be needed:

- There would need to be proof of private home ownership via Certificate of Possession with homeowner's name
- Homeowner could not be sharing living spaces with tenant – **tenant should have a self-contained suite with separate entrance.**
- Rental agreement needed on file as well



Q: When can rent be paid for private homes?

A: Rent payment may be considered where all of the following apply:

- The community has established and maintains a registry of private home ownership identifying homes which are privately owned, the name of owner, and records transfers of ownership
- The privately owned home is rented from the registered owner, and proper documentation in the form of a rental or tenancy agreement is provided
- Rent is customarily charged for the accommodation and is not being charged simply because the occupant is in receipt of social assistance
- The amount of rent is reasonable in terms of family needs, size and condition of housing, and prevailing rental practices in the community

Q: How do I know if I own my home or not?

A: Home Ownership Chart

Is there a Certificate of Possession (CP), Custom or Cardex Holding naming the IA client as the owner of the lot where the home is located?	Who Owns the Home
Yes	The client owns the home (structures go with the land)
No	The band owns the home (client does not). Bands sometimes issue Band Council Resolutions granting the right to <i>occupy</i> (but not own) the home.



Q: Who pays for home repairs or maintenance?

A: Major home repairs or maintenance can only be covered by income assistance if you own your own home, verified through a Certificate of Possession, custom, or Cardex holdings.

If you are renting a home from someone, then it is the homeowner’s responsibility to cover repairs and maintenance.

If you live in a band-owned home, then the band is responsible for repairs and maintenance.

Who owns the home?	Is there a Certificate of Possession (CP), Custom or Cardex Holding stating the homeowner?	Who is responsible for home maintenance and repairs	Who is living in the home?
The band	Not applicable for band-owned homes	The band	For home maintenance and repairs, it depends on who owns the home, NOT who is living in it.
A band member	Yes	The homeowner	
A band member	No	The band, since without proof of ownership means the home is band-owned	



6. Hardship Assistance

Q: Why do I need to repay hardship if I'm awaiting other benefits?

A: Income assistance is a program of last resort.

This means that if you have other sources of income, or are waiting for other sources of income, you may not be eligible for regular income assistance.

If you are awaiting other benefits, you will **need to repay the hardship assistance** once you get that income.

Q: In what circumstances is hardship repayable or non-repayable?

A: Hardship Assistance Chart

Hardship Category	Repayable
Awaiting Employment Insurance (EI)	Yes
Awaiting Other Income	Yes
Assets in excess	Yes
Income in excess	Yes
Strikes or lockouts	Yes
Immediate Needs – work search not met	No
Sponsorship verification or Breakdown	No
Identity Not Established	No



7. Earnings

Q: Why do I need to submit my paystubs if I am working?

A: You need to demonstrate that you are in need of income assistance each month.

This is done by identifying any income you have had in the past month.

This allows your Band Social Development Worker to see if you are still eligible for income assistance.

Q: What happens if I don't submit my paystubs?

A: If you are working and do not to submit your paystubs, your income assistance may be cut off.

It is your responsibility as an Income Assistance client/applicant to advise the BSDW of any changes in your circumstances that might affect your eligibility for IA.

Q: Can I work and still be eligible for income assistance?

A: Yes – while on income assistance, you can work and continue to build job skills.

Depending on your family unit, you can earn some money without affecting your income assistance.

Please talk to your Band Social Development Worker to determine your earnings exemptions.



8. Fraud

Q: What happens if I don't tell the truth about my income and family situation?

A: If you **knowingly** give false information (commit fraud) to receive income assistance, there may be consequences, including being cut off IA or being criminally charged.

This may happen if:

- You fail to report your income to your BSDW
- You collect income assistance from two places (e.g. on and off-reserve)
- You identify as a single person when in fact you have a partner/spouse
- You collect unemployment insurance and social assistance and don't tell your BSDW

Q: What happens to someone if fraud is suspected?

A: Fraud is a serious offence, and you may be liable to prosecution under the *Criminal Code of Canada*.

If fraud is suspected, the BSDW will contact you to get more information.

You may be required to provide documents or proof that your actions are not fraudulent.

If the BSDW believes that fraud has occurred, you can be cut off income assistance.

Q: What rights do I have if I am cut off from Income Assistance, or I don't receive benefits I believe I am entitled to?

A: You have the right to appeal.

Ask your BSDW for the appeals form (SA 140), they are required to give it to you.

You will fill out a portion explaining the reason you appeal the decision to cut off your income assistance. The BSDW will also need to complete their portion of the form.

You and the BSDW can attach any supporting documents (e.g. bills, emails, etc.), then it must be sent to Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) where a Funding/Field Services Officer will review the information provided.



9. Special Needs Allowance

Q: What is a Special Needs Allowance?

A: Subject to budget limitations each band has an amount for “Special Needs”.

A special needs allowance may be available to provide clients, who face unexpected **emergency needs**, with a one-time payment to prevent imminent danger to their physical health or the immediate protection of a child.

Clients must exhaust all resources including liquid assets and the assistance of community agencies before eligibility can be determined.

There should be supporting documentation on file.

Where eligibility is determined, the most cost efficient way to meet the need “may” be authorized.

Q: What are the Requirements for a Special Needs Allowance?

A: The BSDW follows ISC policies and can help when:

- An unexpected expense
- No resources are available to help the family unit
- Without the item, there is a risk of imminent threat to them (i.e. health and safety; child protection etc)
- It is not a health supplement
- It is provided only for the calendar month in which the application or request for the allowance is made

Q: What is the new Identification Supplement?

A: Under the Special Needs budget, the policy was updated July 1, 2019 to allow a family unit in Receipt of Income Assistance, Disability or Hardship Assistance, to be eligible for the Identification Supplement. Previously, only Hardship Assistance clients could access this.

This is eligible, when the identification is required:

- to be eligible for Income or Disability Assistance
- for a dependent child
- to renew the client’s ID
- to replace lost ID
- to get a driver’s license to be able to access jobs or apply for jobs
- when the client gets married or divorced and needs to change their name
- when a client needs ID to open a bank account



10. Persons With Disabilities: Annual Earnings Exemptions

Q: What are Annual Earnings Exemptions (AEE)?

A: Persons with disabilities recipients are eligible for an annual earnings exemption (AEE).

The AEE allows individuals on disability assistance to use their earnings exemption **on an annual, instead of monthly basis** and without a monthly maximum.

The intent of AEE is to better assist PWD recipients whose ability to earn fluctuates during the year, for example, due to medical conditions.

A family unit's annual exemption limit is based on family unit size, composition and number of qualifying months in the calendar year.

The annual earnings exemption can only be applied to *qualifying* income.

Qualifying income is either of the following:

- Earned income, meaning:
 - Any money or value received in exchange for work or the provision of a service,
 - Pension plan contributions that are refunded because of insufficient contributions to create a pension,
 - Money or value received from providing room and board at a person's place of residence,
 - Money or value received from renting rooms that are common to and part of a person's place of residence; and
- Unearned income that is compensation paid under section 29 or 30 of the Workers Compensation Act (WCB temporary wage loss replacement benefits)

Each calendar year, AEE covers qualifying income received from January 1st to December 31st.

First time disability assistance recipients are required to serve a one month waiting period before being eligible for the exemption unless they received income assistance in the previous month.

Family units who were in receipt of either income assistance or disability assistance for the previous month or returning PWD designated clients who have previously received disability assistance, have no wait period.



Q: What are AEE Limits?

A: Please refer to the table below.

Disability Assistance – Annual Earnings Exemption (AEE) Limits		
Eligible Clients	Base amount (multiplied by the # of qualifying months in the calendar year)	Maximum Annual Earnings Exemption (full calendar year)
A family unit with one adult recipient who has the PWD designation	\$1,000	\$12,000
A family unit with two adult recipients where only one recipient has the PWD designation	\$1,200	\$14,400
family unit where both individuals have the PWD designation	\$2,000	\$24,000

Q: What happens when the family reaches the AEE limit?

A: Once the family unit is eligible for earnings exemptions, the amount of a family unit's disability assistance is not impacted by earnings received up to the family unit's AEE limit.

Once a family unit's AEE limit is reached, any additional earnings received will be deducted dollar for dollar from their disability assistance.

Each calendar year is a new exemption year. (January 1st to December 31st)

Any remaining exemption from the previous year does not carry over into the new exemption year.

In a family unit containing two recipients, both recipients do not have to be employed to be eligible for the maximum exemption. As long as there are two recipients in the family unit, they are eligible for the full exemption, regardless of who earns the income.



11. Overpayments, Recoveries and Repayment Agreements

Q: What happens if an Overpayment has happened?

A: Recovery of benefits is required where benefits are issued that the client is not entitled to, or while the client is awaiting other income or benefits.

Q: What is the process for overpayments?

A: Overpayments must be recorded on the client file and recovered by completing a repayment agreement.

The BSDW will discuss a suitable plan to recovery the funds with the client.

The BSDW must record the amount of a reimbursement payment and the date of the payment on the client file.

Q: What is a Repayment Agreement?

A: A repayment agreement is a contract between the First Nation and the client, where the client acknowledges the debt and agrees to commence to repay that debt, and the deduction amount is included in the agreement.

A repayment agreement is in effect, and recovery will continue until such time as the funds are repaid in full.



12. Cell Phone – Equivalent to Landline

Q: What is the process for cell phones?

A: Under Section 5.2 – Utilities, ISC has an update to the policy.

Effective December 1, 2019, coverage of Telephone Service includes:

- Monthly rental of basic residential single line service and monthly rental of a basic telephone through the telephone company, **or**,
- **The equivalent to the cost** of a monthly rental of a basic residential single line service and monthly rental of a basic telephone through the telephone company

Please note these shelter expenses are all subject to the family unit shelter allowance limitations, and must be based on **actual documented costs**.

What does this mean?

This means that if a client does not have a basic residential line/landline but is able to provide proof of their alternate phone costs, they may be eligible through their shelter allowance for the equivalent cost of a basic residential line.

This may include a client's cell phone bills or calling card (if they utilize this instead).

Example:

- Client John is a single employable.
- He doesn't have a landline, but he has a cell phone.
- In his area, the rate for a basic residential line is \$35/month.
- He brings in a cell phone bill for \$50 to the BSDW.

Application:

- Although he doesn't have a landline, he has demonstrate actual telephone costs (i.e. the cell phone bill).
- ***If there is room in his shelter allowance***, then John may receive \$35 for his cell phone bill.
- Please note that his total shelter costs (including hydro, allowable rent, etc.) still cannot exceed \$375.



What does the client need to provide/have on file?

- Their telephone bills each month, similar to how they must provide hydro bills.
- It may also help BSDWs to have documentation confirming the comparable rate in the area for a basic residential line.

What if the client brings in a \$50 cell phone bill, but the cost of the basic line in the area is only \$35?

- He can only receive \$35 (depending if there is availability in his shelter allowance).
- ***This is regardless if there is more room in his shelter allowance.***

Can I pay the full bill of \$50 if there is room in the client's shelter?

- No, the costs must be equivalent to the cost of a monthly rental of basic residential single line service and monthly rental of a basic telephone through the telephone company



Q: How does a BSDW find out what the comparable rate for a basic residential line (landline) is for their area?

A: Under Telus web site there is a way to “look up” the cost of a “monthly landline” for an address. Follow the steps below.

LINK FOR TELUS – Home Phone Plans Cost:

1. Go to Telus web site: www.telus.com
2. In search option enter: landline phone
3. Click on BC

Sorry, the content you are trying to view is not available in your province.

This content is only available to the following provinces:

Alberta

British Columbia





4. Home Phone plans – click on Order Home Phone Lite to get the quote for your area

Whether you're working at home or connecting with loved ones, feel confident in your home phone connection. Experience reliable service with customizable plans.

Home Phone Lite

A basic Home Phone plan to enjoy a reliable landline connection.

\$20 /month
for 24 months, and then pay \$30 per month. ¹

Bundle and save: \$10 per month for the first 24 months when you bundle a Home Phone service with Internet or Internet and TV.

- 1 Calling Feature of your choice ²
- Unlimited local calling
- Call Control - Basic ³

[Order Home Phone Lite](#)





5. Enter the client home address in the Street Address, City and click on Check Address

I'm new to TELUS Home Services

Where would you like to connect
your services?



Street address, city



Unit # (if applicable)

Check address





6. The possible addresses will come up for you to check, choose the correct option the click on CONTINUE or if incorrect click on Try Another Address:

We found more than one possible match.
Please select the right address.

- 817 REED RD GIBSONS BC
- BSMT 817 REED RD GIBSONS BC
- None of the above

Continue



[Try another address >](#)



7. The result is displayed.


We do not look at the “Plan” / “Discount” - look at what the Basic Rate per month is:


“CURRENT REGULAR PRICE IS \$30 PER MONTH”

This is the amount you would use in your calculations for the client’s cell phone basic cost per month.

Home Phone Lite

Our basic plan provides reliable landline service and includes 1 calling feature¹ of your choice, plus unlimited local calling. Once you've completed your order, in your online account, you can swap Call Display for any other calling feature.

 **1 calling feature**
of your choice

 **Unlimited**
local calling

No term

\$20 /month

for 24 months with a 2 year Internet plan.²
Current regular price is \$30 per month.

Add to cart

