

FINAL REPORT – QUEBEC REGION

Regional Consultation Process on the Reform of the Income Assistance Program

Presented To Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) by the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission



*Placing Client Wellness
at the Heart of Services*



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMISSION



Credits

Report presented by the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC)

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Note to the reader:

Please note that this report was originally written in French. In the event of discrepancies between the English and French versions, the French version will take precedence.

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About the design

This illustration represents the vision of a continuum of services. It draws inspiration from the theme chosen by the working group for the consultation process: **placing client wellness at the heart of services**.

The individual, represented by a heart, is at the centre of this vision. The star points to a variety of fields, activities and resources that interact and orbit around the client. These are organized into petals that form a flower, evoking the resurgence of recognition for First Nations and their expectation for a continuum of culturally adapted services. Every petal represents a community and the many interactions involved in accompanying clients throughout their lives. The areas of activity form a continuum of services that orbit around income assistance clients.



List of acronyms

AFN	Assembly of First Nations
AFNQL	Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador
DIAND	Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada
ESD/FNJB	Enhanced Service Delivery / First Nations Job Fund
ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
FNCFS	First Nations Child and Family Services
FNHRDCQ	First Nations Human Resources Development Commission of Quebec
FNQLHSSC	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission
HRBA	Human rights-based approach
INAC	Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (formerly Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)
ISC	Indigenous Services Canada
ISCIAP	Indigenous Services Canada Income Assistance Program
ISSET	Indigenous Skills and Employment Training
MTESS	Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
NCCIH	National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health
PES	Pre-employment support
SIPI	Social inclusion and professional integration
UN	United Nations

Preamble

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) submits this report, entitled “Placing Client Wellness at the Heart of Services,” to the Honourable Seamus O’Regan, Minister of Indigenous Services, so that the vision, needs and recommendations of First Nations in Quebec might be heard and inform the Income Assistance Program reform process.

In making these recommendations, First Nations in Quebec firmly express and reiterate their desire to be actively involved in making decisions affecting them. Backed by the support of First Nations political leaders, these recommendations also address federal and provincial governments. They shed light on the current situation to encourage concerted, concrete political action that respects the needs and cultural diversity of First Nations in Quebec. The FNQLHSSC joins communities and organizations involved in the regional consultation process in calling directly on the Government of Canada to consider and apply all of these proposed recommendations during the reform process.

Before reading this report, it is important to bear in mind the multifaceted nature of income assistance. It is a complex topic that cannot be examined in isolation from any number of social, economic, cultural and demographic factors and areas, such as education and employment, housing, health and social services, lifestyle and intergenerational trauma. In this report, the holistic approach favoured by First Nations treats all of these factors as a collective whole. Improving any one of these determinants in isolation does not necessarily lead to improvements in other areas. For this reason, when discussing the reform of a program that impacts related areas of individual health and wellness, all associated factors that influence the socio-economic environment of First Nations must be taken into account in order to put in place effective holistic measures. A siloed approach is no longer a viable option.

This report presents the context of the national consultation process for the Income Assistance Program reform, the role and mandate of the FNQLHSSC and a description of the organizations involved in the regional consultation process, including the AFNQL, the FNQLHSSC and the First Nations Human Resources Development Commission of Quebec (FNHRDCQ). It also lays out the regional consultation strategy, its steps and methods and the framework for results analysis. Key findings and results emerging from the regional consultation process are presented in the form of recommendations that fall into six categories: the Income Security Framework Policy, support, collaboration and continuum of services, social and professional integration, funding and additional recommendations.

Introduction

In 2015, the Government of Canada began taking steps to transform its relationship with First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Thereafter, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) announced a series of reforms intended by the agency to improve the quality of life of First Nations, Métis and Inuit through better quality services, comparable to those available to the Canadian population. In compliance with a measure announced in the 2018 federal budget, which set aside \$86.9 million over two years for improvements to the Income Assistance Program, the Government of Canada began consulting with First Nations. One objective of this latest reform is to adapt the On-Reserve Income Assistance Program to better suit the needs of clients and organizations responsible for delivering the underlying services.

On October 15, 2018, the Government of Canada launched a national engagement process led by First Nations in every province and territory. The observations gathered during this engagement process will inform ISC policies related to the Income Assistance Program reform. Every region received the resources needed to organize consultation activities, within the scope of which local consultations could also be conducted to accurately gauge the needs of communities and their members.

Overall, national, regional and local engagement activities achieved the following objectives:

- Gathering information needed to assess the effectiveness of the current Income Assistance Program
- Obtaining support regarding the best means to help First Nations members make a seamless transition from income assistance to employment and education
- Identifying the needs of clients and dependents of the Income Assistance Program
- Collecting feedback from care providers on how they feel the Income Assistance Program might be improved
- Setting priorities and formulating recommendations

When the Income Assistance Program reform was announced, First Nations had already been aware for years of the current health and social services system's inadequacy—it is adapted to neither their lives nor their needs. A Quebec First Nations health and social services governance process was begun in 2014 to strengthen and support the independence of First Nations communities and organizations with a view to self-determination and improved wellness¹.

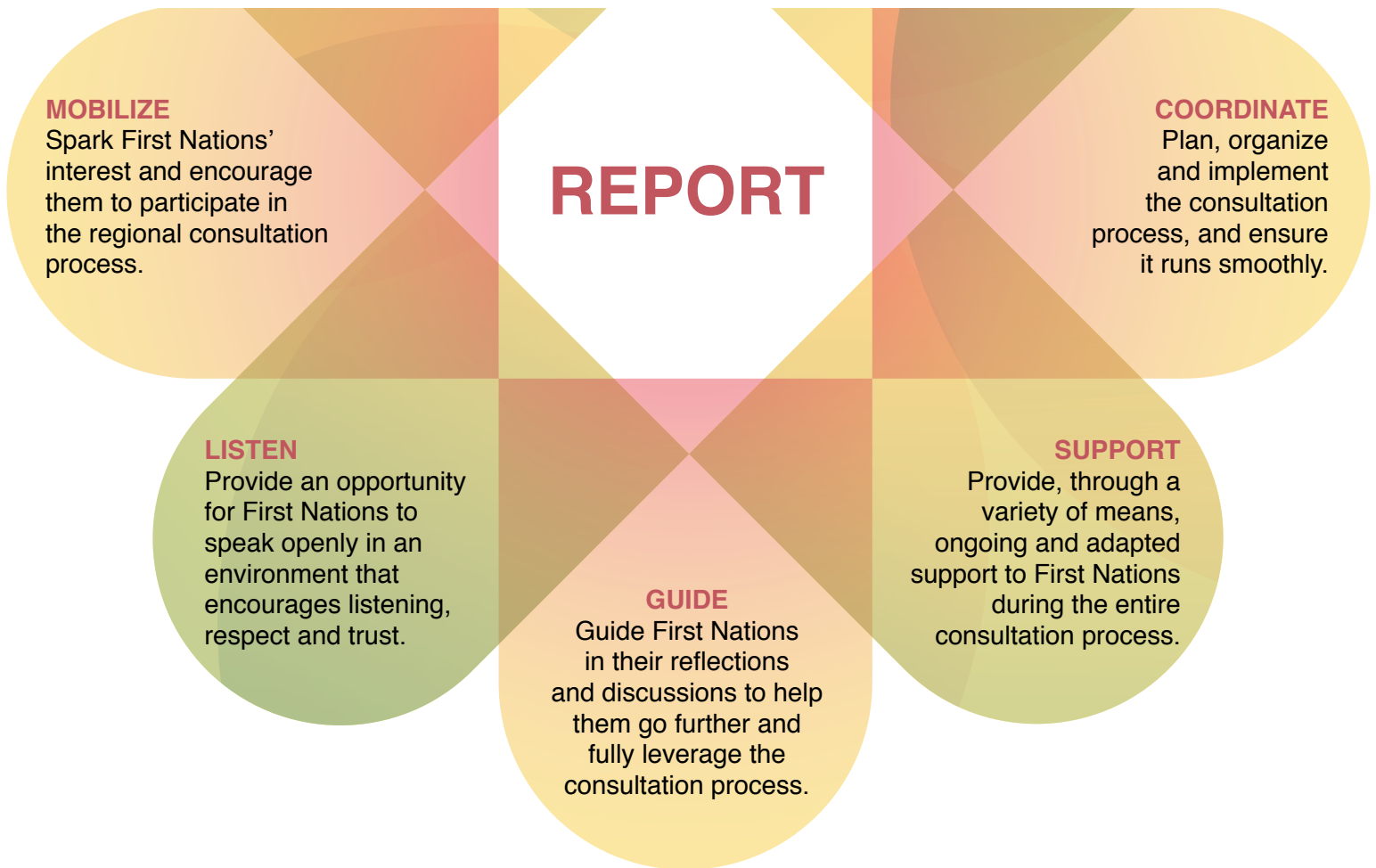
As was the case for the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) reform, participants in the consultation process are largely concerned with governance and culture. To them, governance means recognition of their traditional knowledge and their ability to administer and manage services in their communities. Governance and culture are inseparable priorities and serve as the through line for this report. The consultation process on the reform of the Income Assistance Program directly addresses these concerns by bringing First Nations a step closer to self-determination, independence and greater take-over of services for their populations.

¹ FNQLHSSC, Quebec First Nations Health and Social Services Governance Process, 2019.

Role and mandate of the FNQLHSSC

Within the scope of the duties assigned to it by the AFNQL, the FNQLHSSC led the regional consultation process for First Nations in Quebec.

The FNQLHSSC was mandated to design and carry out a regional consultation strategy to enable participants to express their needs and share their solutions and vision for income assistance in communities. From the information gathered during these consultations, the FNQLHSSC identified priorities and put together concrete recommendations pertaining to the vision, values, desires and needs of First Nations in Quebec, as well as means to improve the current situation in terms of client income, employability and wellness.



Background

The On-Reserve Income Assistance Program (also called income security) was initiated by the federal government in 1964 to provide eligible individuals and families living in communities with financial assistance to meet their basic needs. It is a last resort option for eligible individuals and families living on a reserve. The program provides funding for clients' basic and specific needs, as well as pre-employment and employment assistance measures to support their independence.

In the 1980s, band councils gradually began administering the Income Assistance Program. Communities were required to apply the rates and eligibility criteria set by provincial and territorial programs. In 1997, the Quebec government began reforming its welfare program. As the Income Assistance Program must harmonize with the provincial program, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) informed First Nations councils of its firm intention to apply the provisions of the reformed Quebec welfare program via the financial and administrative terms of the federal program. The changes were thus imposed upon First Nations in Quebec. At the time, the government did not see fit to consult with and obtain consent from First Nations, in flagrant disregard for their rights.

In response, on July 8, 1997, AFNQL chiefs adopted a resolution rejecting the welfare program reform proposed by the Quebec government and proposing that an action plan be developed. In 1998, the AFNQL and the DIAND signed a protocol with a goal of [Translation] "working jointly to develop an income security framework policy and to pursue its various means of implementation" (AFNQL, Agreement-in-Principle – First Nations of Quebec Income Security, 2003). On November 5, 1998, the Assembly of Chiefs approved a proposal for an income security framework policy. In order to implement this policy, an agreement in principle between the AFNQL and the DIAND was necessary. Following numerous joint working meetings and the approval of a number of recommendations issued by the parties, the agreement was finally signed by the AFNQL and the DIAND on July 8, 2003.

In 2006, in the wake of the Socioeconomic Forum held in Mashteuiatsh, the federal and provincial governments agreed to form a tripartite committee to analyze and seek solutions to issues raised. This framework agreement to improve administration and availability of income assistance in First Nations in Quebec was signed in June 2010.

With the exception of case management and pre-employment support services in some designated communities, the program has remained essentially unchanged for the last 50 years².

In its *Evaluation of the Income Assistance Program* report, published in 2007, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (now Indigenous Services Canada) acknowledged that "INAC's IA Program has not kept pace with modern income assistance programming and its program design is outdated. [It] is not designed or set up to deliver active measures ... [C]hanges in programming, capacity building, and linkages to services offered by other provincial and federal departments are required" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, December 2006).

² In 2003, ISC was authorized to deliver active measures, but did not adapt its program to reflect the objectives and anticipated results of this new authorization, nor did it make any changes to the delivery of its program.

Description of the organizations

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS QUEBEC-LABRADOR (AFNQL)

The AFNQL was created in May 1985 and periodically hosts meetings of the Chiefs of the 43 communities of the 10 First Nations in Quebec and Labrador. AFNQL Chiefs meet four times each year to determine the organization's orientations and issue mandates to the regional secretariat and its commissions and regional organizations. The AFNQL is affiliated with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), headquartered in Ottawa.

MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

- Affirmation and respect of the rights of the First Nations
- Recognition of First Nations governments
- Increased financial autonomy for First Nations governments
- Development and training of the public administration of the First Nations
- Coordination of the First Nations decision-making mechanism
- Representation of positions and interests in the public space
- Definition of strategies to advance common positions
- Ensuring recognition of First Nations cultures and languages

FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC AND LABRADOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION (FNQLHSSC)

Created in 1994 by the AFNQL Chiefs, the FNQLHSSC is a non-profit organization dedicated to defending the interests of First Nations in Quebec and supporting the efforts of communities and organizations in order to, among other things, plan and deliver culturally appropriate and preventive health and social services programs. Among the services it provides to support its mission to improve the health and wellness of First Nations of Quebec, the FNQLHSSC acts as a technical advisor and consultant.

VISION

First Nations individuals, families and communities are healthy, have equitable access to quality care and services, and are self-determining and culturally empowered.

MISSION

To accompany Quebec First Nations in achieving their health, wellness, culture and self-determination goals.

FIRST NATIONS HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION OF QUEBEC (FNHRDCQ)

The FNHRDCQ was founded in 1996 and is among the AFNQL's commissions and regional organizations. It is responsible for the administration of employment development measures and training included in AFNQL agreements, issues pertaining to the labour market, and skills development for First Nations members in Quebec. In partnership with employers, the FNHRDCQ administers and provides employment services and programs from 33 points of services in 29 First Nations communities and four urban centres: Montréal, Québec City, Val-d'Or and Sept-Îles.

MISSION

To promote employment for all First Nations of Quebec, including urban Indigenous populations, and to advance their personal and professional development.

First Nations in Quebec

There are 10 First Nations in Quebec: Abenaki, Algonquin, Atikamekw, Cree, Huron-Wendat, Innu, Maliseet, Mi'gmaq, Mohawk and Naskapi. Also in Quebec are the Inuit, an Indigenous people distinct from First Nations. First Nations and Inuit communities are found throughout Quebec, and each is culturally, linguistically and geographically distinct. Socioeconomic, political and socio-sanitary conditions vary from community to community.

In total, there are 41 First Nations communities in Quebec, some near major metropolitan areas and regional hubs, others in remote or isolated areas accessible only by air, water, or trails in the winter. Geographic location has a significant impact on access to and delivery of provincial services for First Nations communities.

According to data provided by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), the First Nations population totalled 89,386 people as at October 2018, or just over 1% of the Quebec population. ISC reported that 64% of the First Nations population reside in communities and 36% reside outside of communities. While the First Nations population is younger than the Quebec population, some communities are aging: the median age rose from 24 in 2002 to 32 in 2015, and it varied among geographic zones, from 23 in Zone 2 (the lowest) to 35 in Zone 1 (the highest). However, population growth remains strong due to an elevated birth rate (FNQLHSSC. Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey, 2018).

INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS

Rates of welfare dependency remain high among First Nations communities in Quebec, sitting at 21% overall in the fall of 2018, according to the ISC data³.

At the community level, this figure varies significantly, between 1% and 53%. Of the communities participating in the ISC Income Assistance Program, only five had a dependency rate below 5%, eight had a rate above 10%, eight more had a rate higher than 20% and seven had a rate that exceeded 30%⁴.

³ This statistic includes clients fit for work, clients with a severely limited capacity for employment and dependants. This is the average rate of welfare dependency for all communities benefiting from the ISC Income Program in Quebec. Of the nine Cree communities, only Waswanipi and Mistissini offer the Income Assistance Program. The following communities and/or tribal councils offer the program: Barriere Lake, Essipit, Gesgapegiag, Kahnawake, Kanehsatake, Kawawachikamach, Kebaowek, Kitcisakik, Kitigan Zibi, Lac-Simon, Listuguj, Mamit Innuat, Manawan, Mashteuiatsh, Matimekoshe-Lac John, Mistissini, Nutashkuan, Odanak, Opitciwan, Pessamit, Pikogan, Timiskaming, Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, Waswanipi, Wemotaci, Wendake, Winneway and Wôlinak.

⁴ Data presented by ISC – Quebec region.

In 2018–2019, ISC disbursed about \$73 million to First Nations communities in Quebec under the Income Assistance Program for program administration and delivery. Of this, over \$63.2 million went to satisfying basic needs and specific needs. Funds also went to preemployability measures: over \$3.2 million was set aside for employment assistance and training, and over \$2.6 million was allocated to fund pre-employment support projects selected by ISC. Lastly, over \$4 million went to administering the program in communities⁵.

Regional consultation strategy

As part of the engagement process, the FNQLHSSC was tasked with designing and carrying out a regional consultation strategy so that First Nations and Quebec could voice their opinions about the Indigenous Services Canada Income Assistance Program (ISCIAP). As significant changes to the program are being called for, the FNQLHSSC wished to go beyond merely identifying needs, shortcomings and challenges. The consultation methods selected gave participants the opportunity to express their vision and their ideas and propose the best avenues for improving the overall wellness of income security clients.

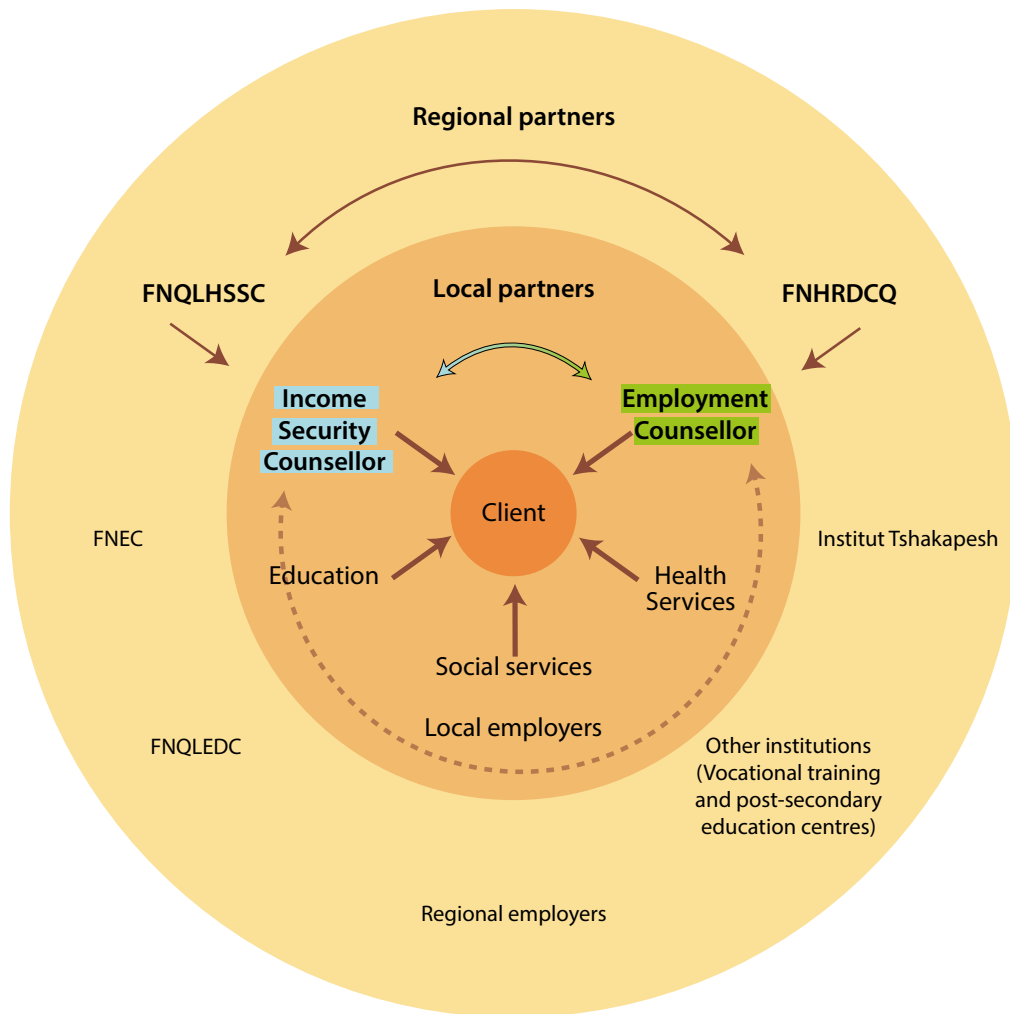
STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

The condensed time frame of the regional consultation and the writing process for this report posed a challenge. The limited time allotted to carry out a mandate of this scale restricted the scope of the regional and local consultations. Some communities did not have sufficient time to appropriately consult their populations. The FNQLHSSC was forced to make decisions and conduct effective, but limited, consultations. In addition, the participation of First Nations in engagement processes of the same type has been in high demand in the last two years; the FNQLHSSC needed to be creative and sensitive in devising its strategy to avoid disrupting the participants' daily routines and encourage the participation of the highest number of key stakeholders possible.

WORKING GROUP

At the request of First Nations communities and organizations in Quebec, a working group of a dozen representatives from communities, the FNHRDCQ and the FNQLHSSC was formed to support and guide the regional engagement process for the Income Assistance Program reform and to guide the consultation activities.

The working group met on five occasions (November 13 and 21, 2018, December 18, 2018, and April 2 and 23, 2019), and was occasionally called upon to guide the process. The group made comments and put forward important considerations that informed the regional consultation strategy. Notably, it approved the central theme of the reform: placing client wellness at the heart of services. This vision was developed by First Nations during a 2014 joint meeting between the FNQLHSSC and the FNHRDCQ. This meeting brought together income security agents and employment and training agents. They agreed on the importance and necessity of [Translation] “adapting programs to effectively meet the needs of clients rather than attempting to shoehorn our clients into existing programs that do not truly suit them” (FNHRDCQ and FNQLHSSC, June 2014). The diagram below illustrates this shared vision.

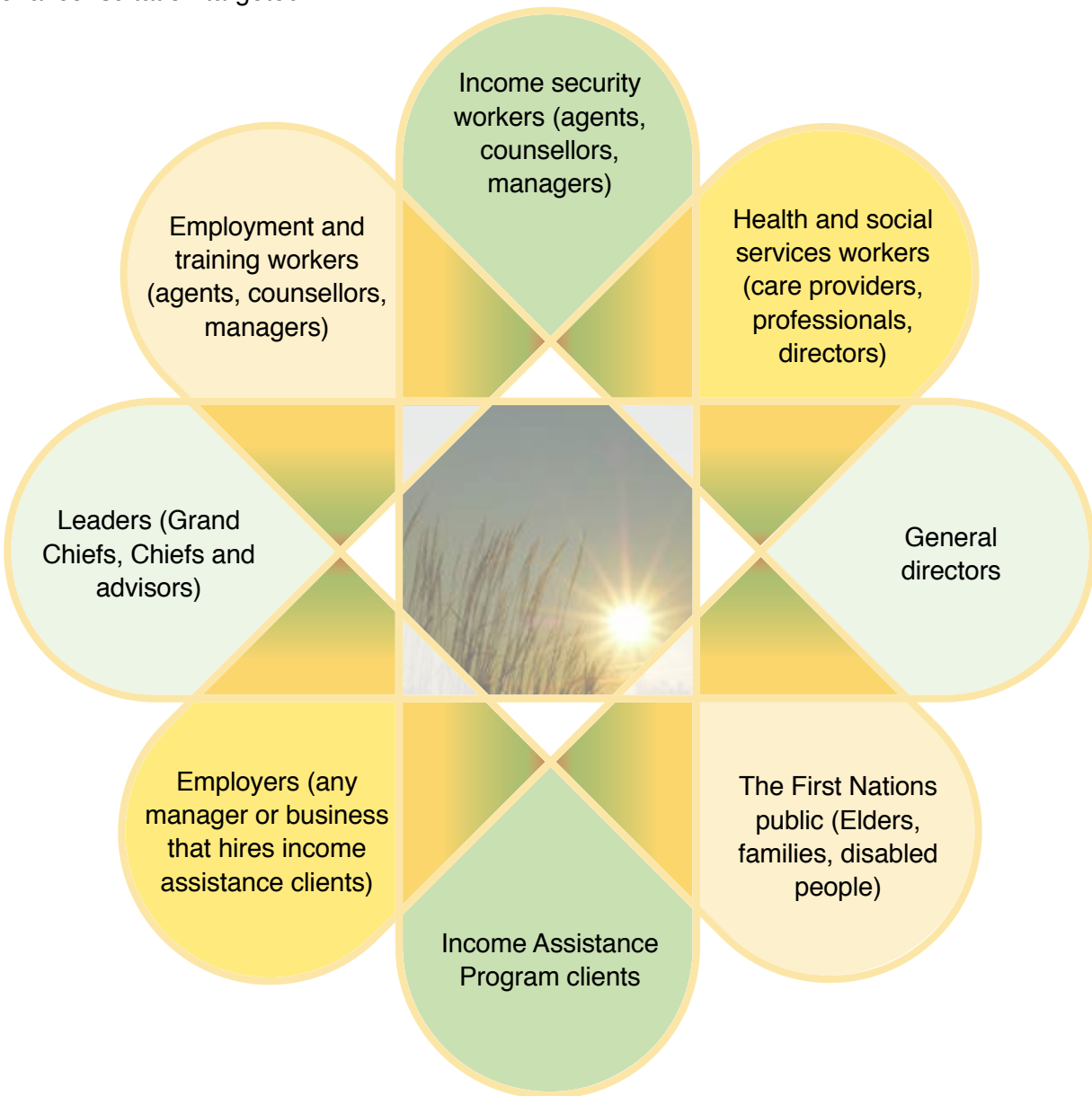


Lastly, to ensure that the process was as inclusive as possible, the working group made sure to reach out to a broad range of people, including clients, Elders and community members.

TARGET AUDIENCES

Rather than limiting the consultations to activity areas explicitly addressed by the reform, i.e. income and employment assistance and training in communities, it was critical that all key stakeholders in communities be able to take part in discussions to add depth to the consultations and make it possible to offer the full continuum of services.

The regional consultation targeted:



CONSULTATION METHODS

Due to the large number of audiences targeted by the regional consultation, a range of collection methods was used. The consultation process was conducted in two stages: regional and local.

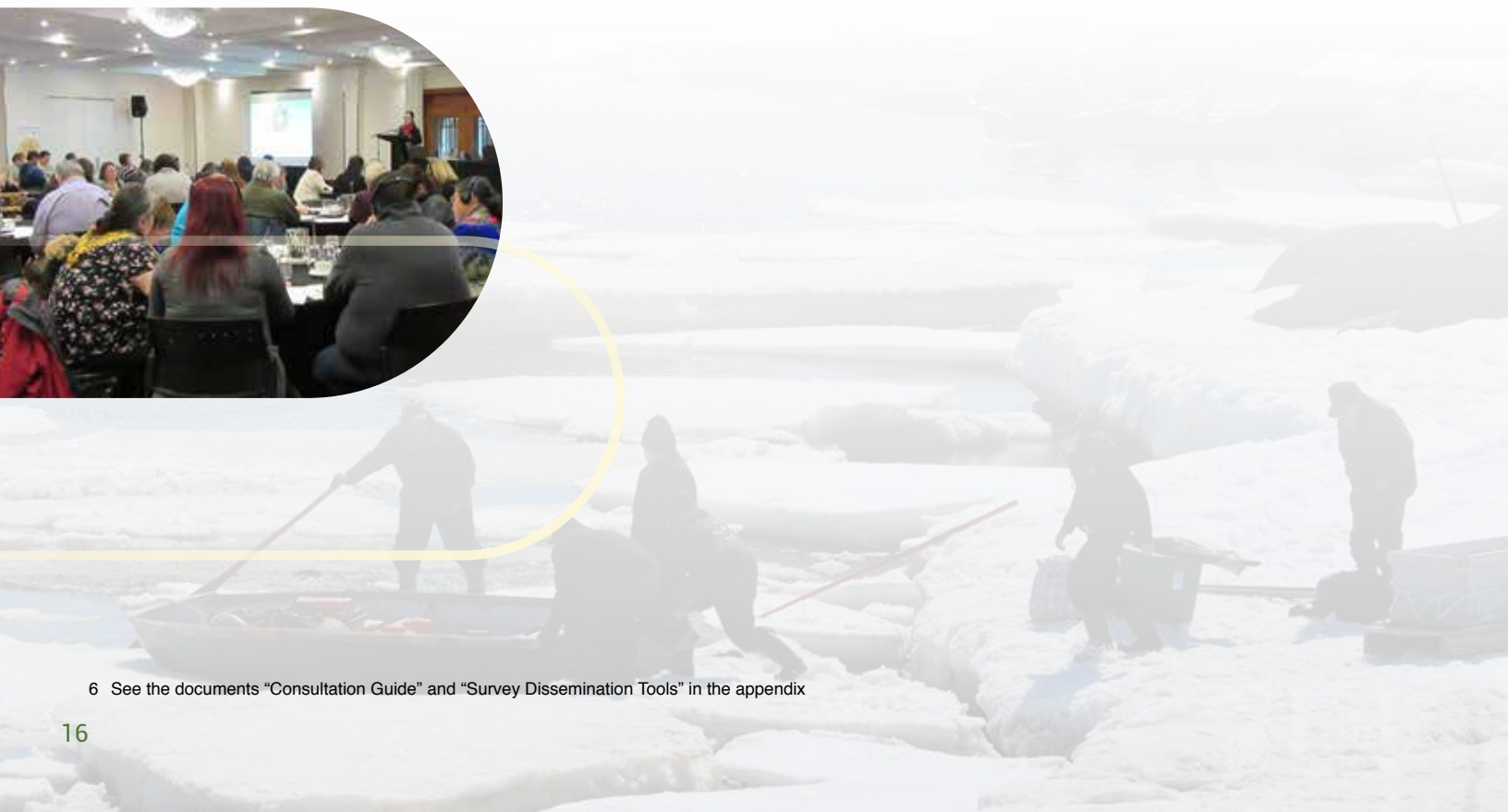
A total of four methods were used:

- Regional meeting
- Discussion circles
- Online survey
- Local consultations

Unlike the regional consultations, local consultations were conducted on a voluntary basis, at the discretion of communities, which had access to support from the FNQLHSSC in the form of tools and guides.⁶ The following table presents each intended audience and its corresponding consultation method.

REGIONAL CONSULTATION STRATEGY

LED BY THE FNQLHSSC			
Consultation method	Regional meeting (February 12 and 13, 2019)	Discussion circles March 2019	Online survey (January 28 to March 8, 2019)
Intended audience	Employees from the following sectors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and training (agents, counsellors, managers) • Income assistance (agents, counsellors, managers) • A sector of the community's choice 	Directors or employees from the following sectors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Social Services • Social and economic development • Employability • Education • Housing • General directors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Assistance Program clients
CLED BY COMMUNITIES, WITH SUPPORT FROM THE FNQLHSSC			
Consultation method	Local consultations (January to April 2019)		
Intended audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anyone the community sees fit to consult 		



⁶ See the documents "Consultation Guide" and "Survey Dissemination Tools" in the appendix

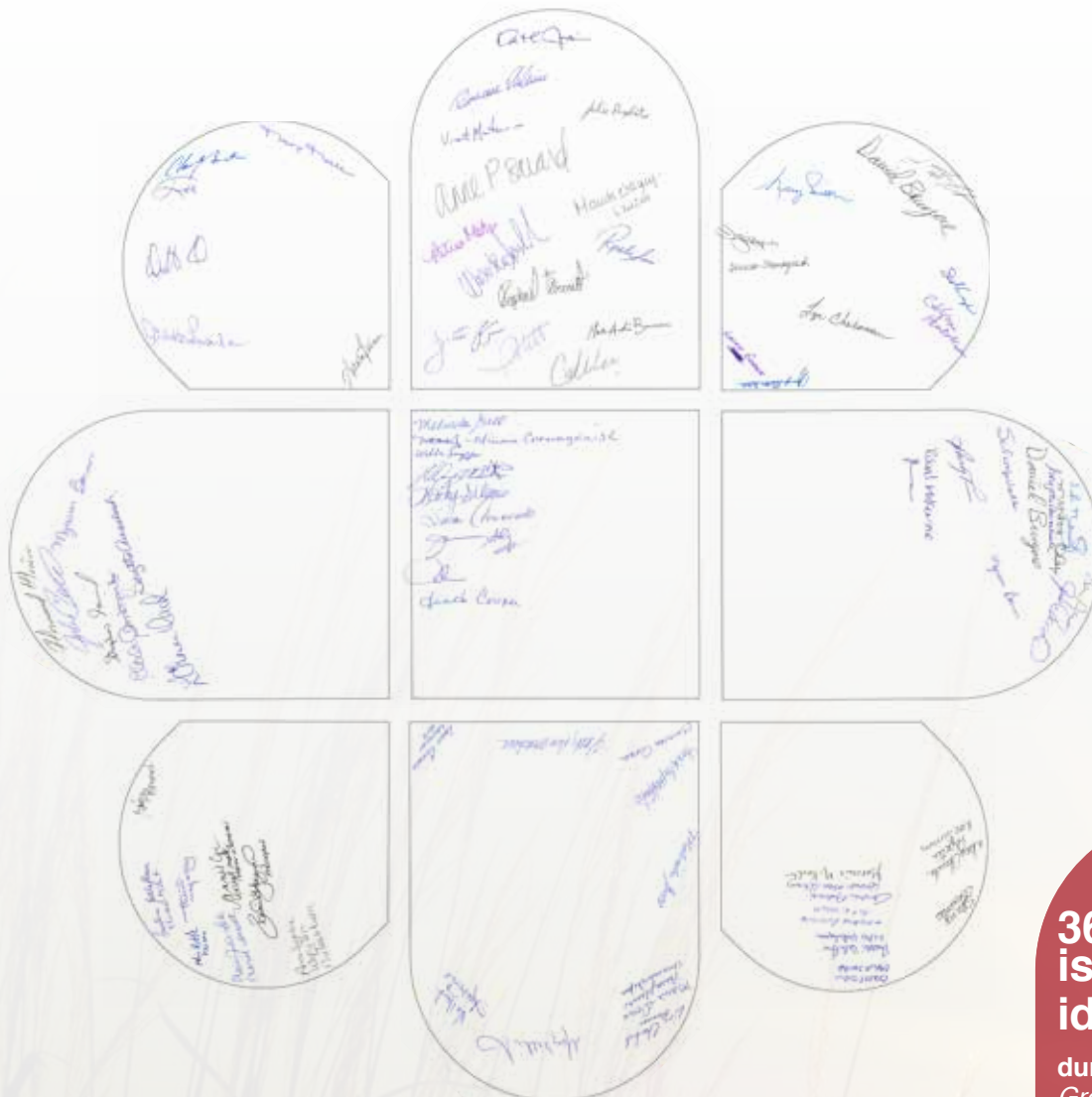
REGIONAL MEETING

The regional meeting was held over two full days at the Hôtel Plaza in Québec City on February 12 and 13, 2019. Three representatives from each community were invited to attend. Given the nature and topic of the consultation, invitations were extended primarily to stakeholders in the income assistance and employment assistance fields.

The goal of the meeting was to gather the knowledge of representatives in order to formulate recommendations that reflect their needs and desires. The meeting was structured around a series of workshops that facilitated discussion and exchange between participants. The first day of workshops centred on pinpointing obstacles, stumbling blocks and barriers to wellness for income assistance clients. On the second day, participants sought potential solutions.

**99
people
participated**

**29 communities or
tribal councils were
represented**



**36
issues were
identified**

during workshop 1
*Grouped into
3 categories:
allowance,
implementation
and governance*

DISCUSSION CIRCLES

As it was impractical to invite representatives from every single relevant sector to the regional meeting, communities had the option of facilitating talking circles, to which managers and directors from other sectors impacted by the reform were invited. The FNQLHSSC offered communities logistical support via video conference. The discussion circles consisted in small group discussions between local stakeholders from various sectors who shared their perspectives on the determinants of wellness for income assistance clients.

The main sectors represented in the discussion circles were:

- Health
- Social services
- Social and economic development
- Employability
- Education
- Housing

ONLINE SURVEY

After recommendations were received from the working group, an online survey was developed to collect feedback from Income Assistance Program clients. The 11-question survey was available online from January 28 to March 8, 2019.⁷

The FNQLHSSC shared the survey link with program agents in First Nations communities and suggested various strategies for completing the survey. Agents could help their clients complete it online or on paper, or clients could do so on their own. Some communities offered incentives, such as an entry in a contest with participation prizes. This strategy proved so successful that some communities are overrepresented in the sample of respondents.

To ensure that the global results were not skewed by any one community, a number of analyses were conducted. As a consequence, even after excluding data from overrepresented communities, the results remained largely unchanged.

Participating communities:

Gesgapegiag,
Kanesatake,
Kitigan Zibi,
Listuguj,
Manawan,
Wemotaci and
Mashteuiatsh

Survey data overview:

- *675 people from 18 communities responded.*
- *95% of respondents were from five communities (of which 53% came from one single community).*
- *60% of respondents were age 18–35 and had no dependent children.*
- *Just over a quarter of respondents were age 36–54.*
- *One tenth of respondents were age 55–64.*
- *40% of respondents had one or more dependent children under the age of 18.*

⁷ See page 18 of the Consultation Guide, in the appendix.

LOCAL CONSULTATIONS

Communities were encouraged to organize their own consultation activities from January to April 2019. The data collected complemented the results of the overall consultation process. These consultations were strongly supported by the working group and gave participating communities the opportunity to paint an accurate portrait of the vision and needs of their members in terms of wellness. In addition, the local consultations gave a wider audience access to the regional consultation process, including clients, Elders and the general public. To assist communities in this endeavour, a guide with sample questions was produced.⁸

Communities could submit their reports to:

- ISC
- The FNQLHSSC:
 - To provide additional data for the regional report
 - For inclusion in the report as an appendix

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In parallel with the consultation process, the FNQLHSSC contracted the firm Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton to perform a comparative analysis of the financial and non-financial criteria of lastresort income assistance programs administered by the Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MTESS) and ISC. With an eye to greater take-over of Income Assistance Program administration and management, this analysis will compare spending by the Quebec government and the Government of Canada and support offered by both. It will also give an overall picture of the services available in communities.



⁸ This document is entitled "Consultation Guide" and is attached as an appendix.

Analysis, writing and validation strategies

ANALYSIS

After the entire consultation process was completed, the project team analyzed the data collected. During pre-analysis, they classified the information into the following categories:

- Income Security Framework Policy
- Support
- Collaboration and continuum of services
- Social inclusion and professional integration
- Funding
- Additional recommendations

During this step, recurring themes emerged along with key concerns of care providers, managers and clients. The project team analyzed the data collected during the consultations and crossreferenced the findings with the information collected while working with the communities. The analytical framework used to formulate recommendations is presented in the next section of this report.

WRITING

The report was drafted by members of the FNQLHSSC project team and was completed during May 2019.

VALIDATION

The recommendations and the final regional report were validated in three stages.

First, a meeting of the working group was held in Montréal on April 22, 2019, to validate the recommendations that would appear in the report.

The recommendations were then presented at a meeting of adhering communities on April 23 and 24 April 2019, also in Montréal. It was confirmed that the recommendations accurately reflect the opinions of First Nations and that no omissions were made during the analysis process.

Lastly, the recommendations were electronically submitted to the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador in May 2019, for final validation.

Analytical framework

In order to analyze the data gathered during the consultation on the Income Assistance Program reform, it was first necessary to build an analytical framework based on the socioeconomic situation of First Nations communities in Quebec. This situation is characterized by significant disparities in terms of social equality and health between the Quebec population and First Nations populations and by a number of violations of their right to self-determination. The framework was developed by combining the legal approach put forward in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and an approach based on human rights and the right of communities to the resources needed to create and offer a high-quality income assistance program and services. This holistic approach, guided by the values and cultures of First Nations, informed the drafting of this report. From this standpoint, the interests of First Nations are not limited to questions and issues directly related to the Income Assistance Program, but encompass all social determinants of health.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on September 13, 2007. At the time, Canada refused to sign and adopt the Declaration. In 2010, after putting pressure on the government, First Nations, Métis and Inuit claimed a victory when the Government of Canada added its signature to the Declaration. However, the Declaration's legal protections have not been fully applied, as the right of First Nations to self-determination goes unrecognized in numerous areas, including income assistance.

The Government of Canada committed to applying the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and calls to action put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada which demand that governments take immediate action to address challenges faced by communities. The Declaration enumerates a number of rights that support the social and economic wellness of First Nations, including:

- The right to self-determination
- The right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development
- The right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions
- The right to improve their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training, housing, sanitation, health and social security
- The right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them

Moreover, the principles of reconciliation dictate that the relationship between the Crown and First Nations should now be founded on the recognition of rights, respect, collaboration and partnership. In its statement, the Government of Canada publicly acknowledged that colonial policies on First Nations negatively impacted living conditions; poverty and socioeconomic marginalization are among the most common manifestations of this damage. In addition, the Government of Canada recognized that these obstacles were more substantial for First Nations than for the rest of Canadians. First Nations do not only contend with the material fallout of poverty—lack of income, employment, education and housing—but also intangible issues amplified by poverty, such as physical and mental illness, drug addiction and other dependences (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018).

A human rights-based approach is often employed by UN agencies in the context of needs analyses and program development. The goal of this type of approach is to give power back to rights holders by analyzing inequalities in order to remedy discrimination and unequal power dynamics (HRBA Portal, 2019). This report was drafted in following key principles of a human rights-based approach (UNFPA, 2019):

- Empowerment
- Participation and inclusion
- Transparency and access to information
- Holistic vision
- Non-discrimination and true equality
- Absence of imposed conditions to ensure that rights are respected
- Reporting mechanism
- Legal framework



Literature reviewed and themes emerging from the consultation:

- Culture
- Language
- Income Security Framework Policy
- Allowance and regulation
- Collaboration and continuum of services
- Social inclusion and professional integration
- Program funding formula
- Studies, reports and surveys on social determinants of health



As legal and political frameworks are essential to the analysis of public services and programs, the following sources of laws and policies were consulted while drafting this report:

International law	First Nations law	Canadian law	Quebec law
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i> • <i>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Agreement-in-Principle – First Nations of Quebec Income Security</i> • <i>Quebec First Nations Income Security Framework Policy</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>S. 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Individual and Family Assistance Act</i>

The analytical framework is thus built on a series of interrelated and interdependent elements that impact the Income Assistance Program, those responsible for managing and delivering its services and, especially, those receiving its services. The framework includes social determinants of health, including governance and culture, calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, sources of law and the Income Security Framework Policy, an essential element on which the data analysis for the consultation process is founded. The recommendations of this report take into account the whole of these elements. Thus, this report was drafted using an interdisciplinary, holistic and concerted approach that relies on the participation and interest of First Nations. It also integrates the governance process of communities while respecting their human rights, cultures and values.

LIMITS OF THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Time constraints limited the scope of the legal framework, which was also confined to the most relevant social security laws and policies. The analysis is concise and leaves room for more indepth research and work. As such, this report does not list every legal element that may have served as a basis for the proposed recommendations. Lastly, this report must not be interpreted as supporting the notion that First Nations agree to be governed by federal and provincial laws that infringe upon their rights.



Culture as integral to the reform of the Income Assistance Program:

Culture—and the respect of its particularities—is one of the most important elements to centre during the Income Assistance Program reform, along with governance.

Every community and every nation has its own distinct culture. Culture is ingrained in the daily lives, values and lifestyles of community members. It is a pillar of the holistic approach and the most important component of the First Nations system of values. It also integrates the concept of cultural safety in programs and services offered to community members. To ensure cultural safety in the delivery of services intended for First Nations, stakeholders must acknowledge the effects of colonization and the intergenerational trauma caused by colonization, as well as the unique characteristics of First Nations identity and values.

According to the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH), the concept of cultural safety moves beyond cultural awareness or cultural sensitivity by questioning “power imbalances, institutional discrimination, colonization and colonial relationships as they apply to health care” (NCCIH, 2019). In other words, cultural safety requires a systematic approach that encompasses an understanding of the power differentials inherent in service and program delivery. It requires care providers to be aware of their own values, beliefs, attitudes and cultural conceptions, which have a considerable influence on their behaviour, whether consciously or unconsciously. Certain behaviours, and attitudes in particular, can cause Income Assistance Program clients to feel safe and accepted or, conversely, rejected. Given that stigmatization is a hurdle to inclusion, social integration and professional integration, this is not an insignificant observation.

Cultural safety consists in:

“Building trust with the First Nation clientele by acknowledging the importance of socio-economic conditions, history as well as employment, education, training and health policies. It is different from cultural competence, which aims at creating an environment free of racism and stereotypes where employment, training and health services are provided to Indigenous people and where they are treated them with empathy, dignity and respect”
(First Nations and Inuit Labour Market Advisory Committee , 2017). [Translation]

The stakeholders and First Nations members who participated in the consultation process and survey unanimously agreed: The Income Assistance Program must make more space for culture and traditional activities in the delivery of its services. Merely taking cues from culture or borrowing certain cultural elements will not suffice. To respect the rights of First Nations, the program must adapt to the culture, not the other way around.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* accords great importance to culture. In its preamble, the Declaration enunciates, “the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources. . .” (United Nations, 2019). In addition to recognizing their right to lands, territories and resources they have traditionally occupied or possessed, the Declaration asserts that Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize their cultures.

There are existing models for both social security and social inclusion and professional integration (SIPI) programs that accommodate culture and traditional activities. One such program is the Income Security Program for Cree Hunters and Trappers, created by the Cree of Eeyou Itschee, in Quebec. It is a family program that provides a guaranteed annual income, benefits and other incentives to Cree who choose hunting, trapping and fishing as a way of life, in order to encourage program clients to pursue their traditional activities. (Cree Hunters and Trappers Income Security Board, 2019) Clients maintain the freedom to participate in economic activities while having their values and customs respected. Activities eligible under the program are not limited to hunting, trapping, gathering and fishing, but extend to crafts and wildlife management.

The Income Assistance Program must be reformed to accommodate culture and traditional activities that were central to the social and economic spheres of First Nations communities before the imposition of governmental policies. The program must be more flexible and better funded so that incentives and allocations may be offered for First Nations social and economic activities.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

We cannot follow the example set by the province, as our mentalities and realities are different.
(Regional meeting)

1. GOVERNANCE AND SELF-DETERMINATION: FOUNDATIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE REFORM OF THE INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The right to self-determination underpins First Nations' recommendations and historical demands concerning income security. This right must also become the foundation on which the Income Assistance Program is built.

The Income Assistance Program is currently governed based on guidelines developed by ISC. The ministry requires that communities apply standards in force in Quebec as defined in the *Individual and Family Assistance Act* and related administrative guidelines. Consequently, First Nations are forced to harmonize their eligibility criteria with those of the province of Quebec or be penalized for non-compliance. As a result, income assistance policies remain drastically out of alignment with First Nations' needs and concerns.

ISC needs to trust communities. It needs to let us administer the program. We know our communities and the challenges we're facing. We are in a better position to make decisions. We don't need to be constantly monitored.
(Regional meeting)

Consultation participants stated that the reformed Income Assistance Program should allow First Nations to develop and apply their own regulations, set eligibility criteria and determine benefit rates. They also noted that SIPI measures provided for in the current program were not adapted to the realities and cultures of their nations and communities. As for funding, current conditions did not provide adequate leeway or flexibility for budgets. In short, First Nations don't make the rules—the Government of Canada does.

To thoroughly understand the issues related to program governance, it bears revisiting the events mentioned in the background section of this report, which led to the creation of a framework policy for First Nations in Quebec.

“The Quebec First Nations Income Security Framework Policy also meets the expectations of First Nations, namely establishing an income security framework administered by First Nations and directly involving First Nations in designing a program appropriate for their cultural and socioeconomic contexts.” (FNQLHSSC, Quebec First Nations Income Security Framework Policy, May 2005)

As per the terms of the agreement-in-principle, the Income Security Framework Policy was developed in such a way that First Nations can implement their own regulatory framework in place of provincial regulations. The policy was intended to guarantee the take-over of the program by First Nations. A summary of the objectives of the framework policy:

- Develop an income security program entirely under the direction of First Nations communities in Quebec
- Reduce dependence on income security and address unemployment in communities
- Allow communities to transform conventional activity funding measures into active measures adapted to the particularities of First Nations
- Help families with children achieve an acceptable income level
- Create a program funding mechanism that aligns with the objectives of the framework policy
- Establish the framework policy as an actionable regulatory alternative to the Quebec income security framework (FNQLHSSC, Quebec First Nations Income Security Framework Policy, May 2005)

In spite of the agreement-in-principle between the AFNQL and the DIAND (now ISC), First Nations have never been able to attain the goals set in the Income Security Framework Policy. To date, ISC still requires communities to harmonize the program with provincial regulations, so First Nations have never been able to fully exercise their right to self-determination in the area of income security. This situation was the topic of numerous discussions during the consultation. Throughout the entire process leading up to the production of this report, participants emphasized the importance of overhauling the program’s governance. Regulatory and delivery powers should be transferred to First Nations.

It’s important to have a program that reflects who we are, to have a grid that’s adapted to us instead of the Quebec grid, there needs to be a greater focus on meeting our needs.
(Regional meeting)

The Government of Canada promised to rebuild its relationships with First Nations. In light of the foregoing information, the government must support the exercise of First Nations' right to self-determination and ensure that they have adequate access to human resources, material resources and financial resources to offer their populations an income assistance program and income security services of superior quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The First Nations assert their right to self-determination. This right particularly gives them the power and legitimacy to develop and manage their own Income Assistance Program. This right must allow them to be able to develop a program and regulations that consider their realities, needs and cultures. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to respect this right by:**
 - a) Respecting the legality and authority of the Income Security Framework Policy, which is fundamental to enabling them to develop their own regulations. This legal recognition is necessary to enable them to substitute for provincial regulations.**
 - b) Jointly developing with First Nations a federal bill that will recognize their right to develop and manage their own Income Assistance Program, with their own unique regulations that will reflect their specific realities and needs.**
- 2. The First Nations request to define, with the collaboration of the federal government, the accountability processes and mechanisms as well as the rules for assessing sound financial management.**

2. SUPPORT

2.1 Infrastructure and tools

Income assistance agents and counsellors work with occasionally difficult and potentially aggressive clients who are dealing with multiple challenges. These professionals are expected to collect confidential personal information from these clients to determine their eligibility for income assistance, in addition to providing individualized support to help them reach their goals and improve their lives. Thus, they have many client meetings, which often touch on sensitive private topics. The agent's or counsellor's office is a very important space—a space for meetings, sharing and trust-building with clients. In inadequate work environments (no guarantee of confidentiality, frequent interruptions, unsafe environments, etc.), it becomes difficult for care providers to perform optimally.

Yet, consultation participants mentioned facing imposing challenges due to a lack of infrastructure and/or inadequate infrastructure that does not ensure the confidentiality of client communications. As agents must contend with potentially aggressive clients in difficult situations and meet with these clients to obtain confidential personal information, they must have access to a consistently safe and confidential work environment. They identified shortcomings in infrastructure that compromise the safety of their teams. To remedy these shortcomings, agents would like, for example, to have access to panic buttons, enough space to arrange their offices for safety in case of a client in crisis, and better access to windows and emergency exits.

Clients in the throes of toxic psychosis come to pick up their cheques. Some are extremely violent.

(Income assistance counsellors from one community)

Security measures need to be put in place (panic button, locked doors, etc.), but there's no funding to do so.
(Regional meeting)

Participants expressed a need for better access to material resources and tools used to support their clients. They would like, for example, to have a computer, reliable internet connection and printer available to help their clients look for work, print their resumés and find local resources. In general, agents and counsellors would benefit from dedicated funds to purchase this type of equipment for SIPI support.

In a broader sense, consultation participants criticized the lack of housing for professionals hired from outside the community who commute to and from work. There is a pressing need for these types of professionals (psychologists, guidance counsellors, social workers, etc.) in a number of communities, particularly those with income assistance program clients facing multiple challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. **The First Nations are calling on the federal government to invest more and immediately in the construction and maintenance of infrastructure by developing a capital fund associated with the Income Assistance Program and by allocating the necessary resources to:**
 - a) **Build, repair and preserve the infrastructures dedicated to the program.**
 - b) **Meet the needs in terms of space and equipment to better support the clientele.**
 - c) **Add office space and build housing to welcome and accommodate professionals who come from outside the community to work with clients.**
 - d) **Design workspaces and premises to ensure confidentiality and the protection of the personal information of clients.**
 - e) **Provide premises that will make it possible to ensure the safety and physical integrity of employees and teams.**
 - f) **Purchase and maintain measures to ensure the security of employees and teams.**

2.2 Training and support

Program agents and counsellors work with dedication, perseverance and drive to serve their clientele. They are united in their desire to guide their clients and refer them to the right resources and assistance for their needs. However, participants noted that in order to meet these often complex needs, agents and counsellors need access to support, training and tools. The vast majority of participants recognized that while the training and support they already have access to is extremely beneficial, given the scope of their duties and the gravity and complexity of the issues they confront on a day-to-day basis, particularly when accompanying clients with past and multiple issues, additional training and tools are necessary.

One of the most critical needs is access to psychosocial support. In their work, agents and counsellors are continually confronted with a plethora of serious and difficult situations and have limited or no access to the support needed to address them.

For example, some reported being victim to psychological harassment—and even intimidation and threats—from clients. They feel powerless and at the end of their ropes, and live with a sense of insecurity or fear. Agents noted that to properly support their clients, it is important for them to feel safe and secure and to take care of themselves. If care providers had access to support and assistance geared to their needs, they could improve and optimize their own support of income assistance clients.

We (agents) would like to have more training to better support our clients, draft action plans, follow-up plans, integration plans, launch projects, etc.
(Regional meeting)

Agents need to be trained in how to react to difficult clients (e.g. with mental health problems, in the midst of a suicidal crisis, violent).

(Regional meeting)

Participants also explained that the workload is much too heavy for most agents and counsellors. This makes it difficult for them to follow up with clients and provide them the personalized support they need. The participants noted that a lack of human resources only exacerbates the issue. The intense workload also cuts into time for skills development.

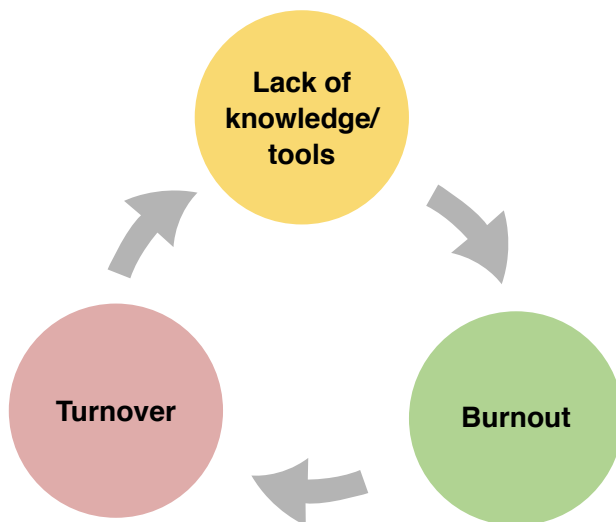
The consultation participants also criticized the red tape that further limits their time and availability to meet with clients. They specifically named overly strict reporting requirements, classification of client cases as well as a surplus of form requests. They have their clients' needs at heart and want to focus on the client, the human element of their work, instead of getting tangled up in a web of paperwork, documentation and bureaucracy.

The number of files per office is too high. (...) at the table, someone has 200 cases.

Another person has 100 cases. (...)

(Regional meeting)

All of these factors, combined with the inadequate infrastructure mentioned earlier, result in staff burnout and, subsequently, a high turnover rate on teams, which disrupts service continuity for clients and affects staff morale and wellness. The information collected demonstrates that it is critical to provide organizations, teams and agents with all the support they need to perform their duties efficiently.



We're getting tangled up in paperwork and losing touch with the human element of the job. There's too much bureaucracy, we're forgetting about the client... These people are very vulnerable and need encouragement...

(Regional meeting)

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to consider the issues related to the recruitment and retention of staff and to commit to financially supporting capacity-building to:
 - e) Hire additional advisors to reduce the ratio of number of files per advisor and thus promote the provision of sustained accompaniment to the clients.
 - f) Financially support the training of advisors and managers so that they can develop the knowledge and qualifications required for their position.
 - g) Fund the development of the tools needed to support the work of the advisors.

3. COLLABORATION AND CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

Collaboration is a concept that was brought up frequently by nearly every stakeholder during the consultation process. Participants see it as one of the best measures of success. This partnership must involve the other sectors of the community as well as organizations and businesses in the region.

In regard to collaborative practices in communities, concertation between local stakeholders is often an indicator of longevity for projects implemented in the community, as projects are not reliant on a single actor (the coordinator). When a project involves

multiple sectors, it garners increased visibility with the local population, and concertation between multiple local actors on a single project can soften the impact of one actor withdrawing their support.

Examples of successful projects: A community has an agreement with a psychologist that can make referrals.

(Regional meeting)

Collaboration is an opportunity for agents to create a dynamic of cooperation and to take ownership of a common vision and work methods. They hope to develop or improve “single window” structures, hire qualified resources for new positions and improve the condition of their facilities.

Collaboration is even more important considering that the geographic isolation of some communities and their lack of resources require them to get creative when it comes to developing partnerships. In terms of collaborative practices, the communities recognize the need to put even more emphasis on sharing skills. They would like to build partnerships and exchange practices.

Several agents would like to take advantage of strategies, tools and approaches developed in the other communities involved. Some neighbouring communities and communities in the same nation are already doing so informally.

Participants named several hurdles to intersectoral collaboration, which by its very nature complicates the development of a continuum of services. Among these hurdles were the logic of funders whose funding is determined and distributed by programs and the lack of complementarity between programs, which are challenges faced by all communities. Participants also noted that rules concerning privacy and the protection of confidential information make it difficult to share information between agents and professionals. They believe it is necessary to continue improving collaborative practices, both at a local level and within regional organizations and governments.

Contact with other sectors (housing, employment...) is neither frequent enough nor effective. Yet it is critical to work together to provide a continuum of services and care for the wellness of our clients and the general population.

Programs, actions and measures must be cohesive.

(Regional meeting)

People need a great deal of support and services to transition off income security.

(Discussion circle)

(...) we need to put the client in the centre and the professionals around them, not the other way around.

(Discussion circle)

Lastly, staff turnover in communities, a lack of human resources and exhaustion and burnout affecting these resources are additional obstacles to developing a continuum of services. A continually rotating staff amplifies an organization's unfamiliarity with services offered in other sectors, leading to redundancy, which does not optimize resources.

The quality of the collaborative practices between the different stakeholders can be seen as critical to their success. Given current socioeconomic issues, collaborative practices are considered necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. **The First Nations request that funding agreements provide financial resources that will enable them to consolidate or develop their collaborations and partnerships with local and regional players. For example:**
 - f) **The hiring of liaison officers to foster cross-sector collaboration and ensure a continuum of services for clients.**
 - g) **The development of cross-sector collaboration agreements associated with protocols for information-sharing.**
 - h) **The development of single windows.**
 - i) **The establishment of issue tables.**
6. **The First Nations are calling on the federal government to financially support collaborative activities among First Nations partners and establish a consultation mechanism for the departments involved in service delivery and program management.**

4. SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION (SIPI)

4.1 Obstacles and challenges

The consultation participants shared their concerns about the high rates of dependency on income security, and a significant portion of the consultations was given over to the question of social inclusion and professional integration. This is particularly pertinent, as social determinants paint a worrisome picture of quality of life in First Nations.

The participants criticized the fact that program measures are not adapted to their lives or needs, which hinders their progress toward social and professional reintegration of their clients. The following paragraphs examine this issue in the context of the participants' observations. It should be recalled that, in 2007, ISC (formerly Indian and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC]) undertook an evaluation of the Income Assistance Program, and one of the key recommendations of the evaluation was that the Department should move toward an "active measures approach" to ensure that the program is relevant to clients' needs and to keep pace with provincial and territorial changes to Income Assistance (IA). (FNQLHSSC, Initiatives d'insertion sociale et d'intégration professionnelle adaptées aux Premières Nations : un levier pour lutter contre la pauvreté et réduire les inégalités sociales, 2017)

One of the main challenges faced by income security agents and counsellors derives from the fact that a significant number of income security clients are considered very isolated from the job market and require specific pre-employability support.

Agents and counsellors reiterated the psychosocial challenges experienced by ISCIAP clients, providing further justification for the need for personalized support of a great number of clients. Among the most frequent challenges were addiction, mental health issues, learning disabilities, low self-confidence and self-esteem, physical disabilities, social isolation and exclusion, trauma, reluctance to seek help, high school dropout and possession of a criminal record.

School dropout and low academic success rates were also identified as some of the most significant obstacles faced by ISCIAP clients and, consequently, major barriers to social inclusion and professional integration. In fact, the 2015

Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey found that over a third of adults (37%) had not graduated from high school.

Agents and counsellors are deeply concerned by this situation. They identified several contributing factors, including a limited number of adult education

centres and vocational centres in communities. This means that it is difficult for many young people to continue their education without leaving their community. It is also important to note that schools in Indigenous communities offer lower quality instruction than schools elsewhere in Quebec, notably due to chronic underfunding, staff turnover and programs that are not adapted to the culture and way of life of many nations. (FNQLHSSC, Initiatives d'insertion sociale et d'intégration professionnelle adaptées aux Premières Nations : un levier pour lutter contre la pauvreté et réduire les inégalités sociales, 2017). This situation, combined with a lack of accessible jobs in communities and limited opportunities for economic development, is yet more concerning for the agents.

A few months ago, there were 10 homeless people (clients). Every time I met with them, they had a different address...
(Regional meeting)

CLIENT SURVEY

44% of respondents said they had received assistance from the ISCIAP in the past.

50% reported receiving assistance to go back to school.

63% said they had never received assistance for vocational training.

We're seeing more mental health problems in young people: schizophrenia, anxiety. One guy who came in to see us the other day was hearing voices.
(Regional meeting)

There's a fear of losing your language, becoming assimilated if you leave your community.

(Regional meeting)

It's also hard to find a job when you can't speak the language at the required level.

(Regional meeting)

When clients go to school or look for work, they experience racism, and they end up getting discouraged.

(Regional meeting)

...clients often need more than we can provide to them, they need support, training and encouragement.

(Regional meeting)

“Very often, young people must move away to pursue higher education. In addition, the painful legacy of residential schools very certainly contributes to disinterest in education. Moreover, schools in Indigenous communities are underfunded. (...) Furthermore, criteria for accessing certain jobs, notably the requirement of holding a high school diploma or vocational studies diploma for positions related to projects in the Far North, are problematic. However, these projects are being carried out in Indigenous communities and should benefit local populations first and foremost.”

“Members of Indigenous communities have the greatest difficulty integrating into the job market. In these areas, a lack of economic development drivers is often recognized as a hurdle to job creation.”

(Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, 2015)

Consultation participants also mentioned clients' reluctance to leave their communities for classes, vocational training or work, increasing the urgency of the situation and further restricting their options for transitioning off income assistance. In addition, community members living in isolated areas are uncomfortable holding jobs in cities, as the environment does not suit them. Given the lack of jobs and training in these communities, counsellors face a significant challenge—promoting and encouraging a culture of work and training in a context where both are not readily accessible.

Clients also often face a linguistic barrier, particularly for Anglophone communities whose members find it difficult to find work in regions where French is the majority language. It is also important to recall that in many communities, members' first language is neither French nor English. In this context, it is challenging for individuals to take and complete a training course or earn a degree and find work. Many participants brought up the fact that there are nearly no jobs available that allow members to speak their first language.

Lastly, the majority of participants mentioned issues related to racism and discrimination experienced by First Nations. Persistent racism, prejudice and systemic discrimination against First Nations are obstacles that must be surmounted. These often arise from ignorance about Indigenous values and cultures, as much on the part of employers as the general public in Quebec. The persistence of prejudice and stereotypes targeting First Nations can be seen in both education and employment. Preconceived ideas and other racist acts that many First Nations members are subjected to on a daily basis, no matter where they live, only reinforce their socioeconomic isolation and marginalization.

In regard to employment and training incentives, participants noted that certain measures are achieving positive results—for example, measures included in the Enhanced Service Delivery / First Nations Job Fund (ESD/FNJF)⁹ program (2013–2017) and now anticipated in the pre-employment support program (PSP). Agents and counsellors also discussed hiring a case manager as a potentially helpful and viable option. For agents and counsellors, incentives (monetary bonuses) offered in these programs open up promising avenues and constitute relevant levers to social inclusion and professional integration. Nonetheless, a number of consultation participants stated that they would like to have more incentives to offer their clients.

While communities recognized that some measures are beneficial, they also noted that incentives offered under the ISCIAP are insufficient and inadequate. First, participants agreed that the criteria for these programs are too numerous and stringent, which hinders access for clients in need of assistance. They also lamented the fact that funding cannot be locked in over the long term and is not accessible to all communities. Moving clients to action is often a long and arduous process, and communities reiterated that it is crucial to support the durability of initiatives in order to reap the maximum benefit. Consultation participants would like to have the flexibility and financial means to propose SIPI measures with beneficial incentives to motivate clients.

In addition, these measures must enable clients to truly strengthen their skills and abilities at their own pace. The vast majority of participants spoke to the importance of their clients taking small steps forward and avoiding unrealistic expectations that risk ending in failure and further undermine clients' self esteem, which may be fragile already. An incremental approach also gives clients an opportunity to celebrate after each success, big or small, which bolsters their selfconfidence, a critical factor for developing their skills. This relates back to the importance of programs and measures that give clients enough flexibility and time to progress at their own pace and avoid falling into a “yo-yo” cycle—a phenomenon that is altogether too common in the ISCIAP.

Moreover, all communities are calling for respect and consideration of culture. For example, some communities specifically requested cultural and traditional activities to support mobilization, the development of self-esteem, and identity building for clients who are isolated from the job market—a significant proportion of them. As far as empowerment and fighting poverty are concerned, culture should be the point of departure for the creation of programs and measures to improve the quality of life of First Nations.

There are too many program requirements, which complicates access to incentives for clients who need them.
(Regional meeting)

We're not thoroughly embracing the cultural aspect: going into the woods or fishing, doing traditional crafts, etc.
(Regional meeting)

It's important for us to help our youth rediscover their identity.
(Regional meeting)

Employment integration measures are not flexible enough.
(Regional meeting)

⁹ The purpose of these initiatives was to create a continuum of services to help First Nations youth aged 18 to 24 and welfare beneficiaries improve their ability to gain employment through pre-employment training, education upgrading and the acquisition of new skills. (FNQLHSSC, Initiatives d'insertion sociale et d'intégration professionnelle adaptées aux Premières Nations : un levier pour lutter contre la pauvreté et réduire les inégalités sociales, 2017)

Just for one ride to go to the nearest village, it costs 20\$. (...)

(Discussion circle)

I had students who wanted to take a class but had a transportation problem: public transportation to go to Montreal was costing them \$350-\$360 per month!

(Discussion circle)

24% of respondents said that the ISCIAP helped them fully meet their transportation needs.

(Client survey)

I do not own a vehicle so I have no transportation to commute daily and I only speak English so my options are limited

(Online survey)

When I think about it, the number one problem is transportation. When employers [in the city] want to keep them on, they [the client] will have a transportation problem. We don't have many businesses [in the community]. I wanted to do this to integrate more people into the workforce. It will help clients meet more people and learn about different positions that interest them.

(Regional meeting)

In short, communities and organizations complained that they were not consulted prior to or during the creation of SIPI measures and programs. They did not have the opportunity to participate in preliminary reflections and development processes, during which they could have expressed the challenges of their realities and their needs and expectations with regard to these initiatives. In retrospect, the members of these communities noted that these initiatives were not well adapted to their context in several regards and that they were therefore less effective.

Transportation

Transportation is another significant obstacle for communities, many of which are far from major urban centres and have no public transportation. Access to training, work or resources, particularly psychosocial support resources, is compromised by the fact that a significant portion of income security clients do not have a driver's licences or access to a mode of transportation. Not to mention the barriers to obtaining a driver's licence for many low-income individuals.

Based on the results of an online client survey, the transportation problem is not limited to remote areas. In fact, 76% of respondents reported that the ISCIAP did not fully meet their transportation needs. Some communities are geographically very isolated from the job market, while others have no road access. This was a recurring theme during the conversations with communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to be involved in the development and implementation of social inclusion and professional integration measures so that they are consistent with their realities and cultures. This implies:
 - h) Respecting their holistic vision.
 - i) Taking into account their history and culture.
8. The First Nations request that social inclusion and professional integration measures make it possible to further promote the incentive approach by valuing not only work but also social inclusion and participation.
9. The First Nations are calling on the federal government, in consultation with First Nations and provincial authorities, to resolve jurisdictional issues in order to facilitate the transition for clients between the First Nations Income Assistance Program and the provincial program.
10. The First Nations request that the federal government eliminate the prescribed time limit for the social inclusion and professional integration measures to extend assistance to those who are further removed from the labour market.
11. In order to ensure access to justice, the First Nations are calling on the federal government to ensure that everyone who wants a lawyer can access one through means such as the following:
 - a) Allocating additional resources to remote and isolated communities where access to a lawyer is limited to cover the cost of transportation and accommodations for lawyers from outside these communities.
 - b) Increasing, in consultation with the Barreau du Québec and the Ministère de la Justice, access to legal aid lawyers.
12. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to establish a funding program to cover the costs associated with the pardon application process for clients enrolled in a social inclusion and professional integration measure to encourage rehabilitation and social reintegration.

4.2 Prevention

One of the strongest desires of the consultation participants was for more effective action to combat high rates of income security dependence in their communities. They are particularly concerned with the normalization of living on income security. Agents and counsellors said they were shocked to see young people come to their offices at age 18 to collect their first cheque, or when the teenagers' parents showed up to find out how to expedite their child's cheque. They are deeply concerned with the prevalence of this mindset, where income security becomes a comfort zone, a way of life. They decry the fact that for some, ISCIAP benefits are seen as something they are entitled to and owed by the government.

To understand this mentality, one must recall that the concept of last-resort assistance for First Nations is closely tied to the idea of compensation for the loss of identity in terms of territory and culture. This is addressed in a brief submitted to the Committee on Social Affairs entitled "Problèmes d'harmonisation des nouvelles orientations amenées par le livre vert sur la réforme de la sécurité du revenu dans les communautés des Premières Nations" (FNQLHSSC, Problèmes d'harmonisation des nouvelles orientations amenées par le livre vert sur la réforme de la sécurité du revenu dans les communautés des Premières Nations, 1997). The document explains how the shift to a sedentary lifestyle weakened Indigenous nations as they

They've been on welfare so long, they're sort of afraid of living without last-resort assistance.
(Regional meeting)

Income assistance has become normalized.
(Regional meeting)

Step by step! It's important to organize activities to support and encourage our clients to take action. It's important to encourage them to take action, and to do that, we need to create opportunities. It's a long-haul effort to change mindsets, and we don't have the resources to do it.

(Regional meeting)

We notice a generational "dependence," as if it's a normal way of life.

(Regional meeting)

We need to pinpoint the causes of early school dropout and act collectively to address them...

(Regional meeting)

The whole community needs to contribute if we want to implement prevention measures that impact people's lives before they arrive at the income security office.

(Regional meeting)

struggled to adapt, leading to great difficulty with survival and to social hardship. A series of events related to the dispossession of land and the marginalization of their traditional lifestyles eventually led communities to dependence and poverty. Today, perceptions of social assistance continue to be filtered through a lens of expectation for reparations for past wrongs and cultural, economic, social and psychological damage inflicted upon community members.

Prevention strategies for combatting income assistance dependence must account for this historical context, and First Nations must be given the means they truly need to rebuild a lastresort assistance program in alignment with their needs, culture, vision and values.

Consultation participants agreed on the importance of prevention and awareness activities to minimize the number of people on income assistance. They were nearly unanimous in observing that "once they (the client) are on income assistance, it's easier to stay on it," which is why prevention is so critical. To achieve this goal, participants said that communities must inspire young people and rely on measures and projects that combat school dropout and raise awareness of the challenges of living on income assistance. Last but not least, any measures developed must be culturally safe, as this is a primary key to success. Participants recognized the importance of collaborating with other sectors of the community to develop these measures.

Best practices in communities

In our community, we visit high schools to explain what welfare really is, in order to fight the perception that welfare guarantees cheques for life.
(Regional meeting)

One prevention strategy would be to educate young people about the many professions out there, so they can find a field that inspires them and excites them, and that is worth the effort.
(Regional meeting)

It's important to celebrate successes! It sends a message to other people in the community, and the successes become models and sources of inspiration.
(Regional meeting)

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. The First Nations request that the funding of the Income Assistance Program be enhanced to allow for the development of preventive measures for youth. This funding should make it possible to invest, in collaboration with the various partners, in awareness-raising and prevention activities such as:

- n) Youth leadership camps.
- o) Mentorship programs.
- p) Conference workshops with role models.
- q) Career days and workplace internships.
- r) Entrepreneurship projects for young people in schools.
- s) Social and community involvement projects.
- t) Knowledge and tradition transfer activities.

14. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to increase levels of community action investments to stimulate the creation of resources dedicated to improving living conditions in the communities most affected by poverty.

5. INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FUNDING

Exercising the right to self-determination requires First Nations to be sufficiently financially independent to develop an income assistance program that aligns not only with their needs, but also their vision and values. Much like the program, the current terms for program funding are outdated and obsolete. The structure and terms of funding must be reviewed from top to bottom.

There are four main priorities for funding:

- Program funding needs to be increased to support the development of social inclusion and professional integration measures that align with First Nations' needs, values and cultures.
- Program funding needs to be increased to meet clients' basic needs.
- Funding must be global, decompartmentalized and flexible.
- Funding must be contingent on the program being governed by First Nations, without minimizing the Crown's financial obligations. There must be a planning mechanism, decision-making and accountability to ensure the take-over of the program by communities.

Currently, the funding structures for income assistance and employability are determined by two distinct ministries: the ISC handles the Income Assistance Program, and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) administers the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program. This siloed funding method negatively impacts communities and complicates the development of pre-employability and employability services, as communities are accountable to two separate ministries. It goes without saying that both ministries have their own reporting mechanisms and requirements, which places a heavy administrative burden on communities.

The FN program needs to be designed by and for FN.

(Regional meeting)

[The silo mentality] often results from the logic of programs imposed by funders

(Regional meeting)

“Limited infrastructure and resource development opportunities have been important contributors to economic insecurity and marginalization, with subsequent deprivation among community members. In addition, inadequate social resources, in the form of qualified individuals who can develop and/or implement programs, restrict Aboriginal communities’ access to funding. When communities experience fragmented, under-funded programs in which the bureaucracy increases community responsibility without a concomitant increase in power, community-level stress and paralysis can result.”
(Reading & Wien, 2013)

The per-project funding method for pre-employability initiatives also poses its share of challenges to First Nations. Too often, it requires communities to align the needs of their clients with very specific criteria. For lack of resources to design and develop projects that meet these criteria, some communities end up not getting access to funds. In other cases, communities must sink massive amounts of time and energy into administrative tasks to meet project requirements, rather than serving clients. When they do not receive funding, their efforts are in vain. Introducing global funding, instead of per-project funding, with the possibility to make adjustments as needed, would solve this problem. Flexibility must be a main focus of the ISCIAP reform.

On multiple occasions during consultations on the reform, participants mentioned the issues with ISCIAP funding. A lack of funding is a major hurdle standing in the way of delivering quality income assistance and pre-employability services. The reform must therefore solve program funding problems. More specifically, First Nations will need to be involved in the decision-making process concerning the design of the new program funding formula.

Currently, the program does not allow benefit amounts to be adjusted to account for the cost of living in communities that are remote or difficult to access. This is one issue that will need to be addressed during the reform. The Income Assistant Program awards the same amount to a family living in an urban area as it does to a family in a remote and difficult to access area. However, the cost of living increases incrementally the farther you get from urban centres. This situation—which is particularly dire in isolated and difficult-to-access areas—was brought up by many participants and survey respondents during the consultations.

Grocery prices in my region are ridiculously expensive, especially when the closest food market sets their prices higher than other places because they have the monopoly in the area.

Client survey response

Though the cost of living in remote communities has not been the subject of extensive research and analysis for First Nations in Quebec, two reports produced in recent years show that market prices were higher in isolated and difficult-to-access areas (Robitaille, Guénard, & al., 2018). One such report was produced following a study on the cost of living conducted in the region of Schefferville, where two First Nations neighbour each other: the Innu of Matimekush–Lac John and the Naskapi of Kawawachikamach. The report in question found that market prices were clearly higher in Schefferville than in Sept-Îles, while prices recorded in Sept-Îles were comparable to those in Québec City. Compared to prices recorded in Sept-Îles, prices in Schefferville were 64% higher for food products, 84% higher for personal care products, and 106% higher for household cleaning products. (Duhaime & Grenier, *Coût de la vie dans la région de Schefferville*, 2012) A second study, conducted in Opitciwan in 2013 and again in 2016, found that market prices were significantly higher in the community than in the cities of Saint-Félicien and Roberval, two urban centres located within a 250 km radius of the community. In 2016, the study found that food products and personal care products cost 33% more in Opitciwan than in Saint-Félicien and Roberval. Household cleaning products cost 37% more in the community than in the two cities. (Duhaime, Chachai, & Bacon, *Projet de recherche-action sur la pauvreté à Opitciwan, Rapport d'activité 2012-2017*, 2018)

The higher cost of living in isolated and difficult-to-access communities can impact clients' ability to meet their basic needs. During the activities associated with the consultation, a number of program clients reported having gone through periods of food insecurity. They stated that their benefit was not enough for them to buy enough food and eat well. Food insecurity is closely linked to household poverty in First Nations communities. In Quebec, food insecurity affects more than one in five adults living in First Nations communities.

CLIENT SURVEY

39% of respondents reported that the ISCIAP helped them fully meet their need for food.

52% of respondents reported that the ISCIAP helped them fully satisfy their need for housing.

25% of respondents reported that the ISCIAP helped them fully satisfy their need for clothing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to jointly develop the new funding formula for the Income Assistance Program with them.
16. The First Nations request that the funding consider:
 - a) The actual costs of the income assistance and employability programs in the First Nations communities.
 - b) The demographic and economic realities and the migration phenomena.
 - c) The cost of living in isolated and remote areas.
 - d) The actual costs associated with the program management and administration.
17. The First Nations request that the new funding formula as well as the administrative regulations further facilitate the development of social inclusion and professional integration measures for clients. The funding should allow for the development of incentives based on culture and the practice of traditional activities on the land and include language courses to address the language barrier.
18. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to provide additional funds for social inclusion and professional integration measures and that such funding be adequate, predictable and recurrent.
19. The First Nations are calling for pre-employability and employability funding to be decompartmentalized, consolidated and recurrent to enable them to provide better support and ensure a continuum of services for social inclusion and professional integration. This implies that these measures must be integrated and financed in a single program by a single ministry.
20. The First Nations request that the regulations be more flexible to adapt them to their local realities.
21. The First Nations are calling on the Income Assistance Program to allow for providing an additional allowance to cover transportation costs for clients living in remote and isolated communities. The terms and conditions of this allowance will have to be defined with First Nations.
22. The First Nations request that the Income Assistance Program allow for providing an additional allowance for clients living in remote and isolated communities.

6. COMPLEMENTARY MEASURES: LEVERAGING PREVENTION AND REINFORCING SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH TO IMPROVE LIVING CONDITIONS FOR INCOME ASSISTANCE CLIENTS

First Nations have a right to social security (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019), and this security is essential to their health and wellness. Reinforcing social determinants of health is one measure necessary to improving living conditions for income assistance clients. Major and sustained investments, particularly in the areas of health, housing, education and economic development, are needed if we hope to one day reduce First Nations' dependence on the Income Security Program.

Substantial social inequities and inequalities in health persist between First Nations and Canadians.

Substantial social inequities and inequalities in health persist between First Nations and Canadians. To address these issues, the Government of Canada must ramp up investments in First Nations over decades. Colonialism and the 1876 imposition of the *Indian Act* have caused grave damage to First Nations. The legacy of this system continues and major repercussions are still being felt in political, social and economic areas (Reading & Wien, 2013).

Poverty and social exclusion affecting a significant proportion of First Nations members in Quebec block access to education and training. They are a source of anxiety, insecurity, poor self-esteem and a feeling of uselessness. Poverty is closely linked with violence, substance abuse, suicide, mental health problems, parental neglect and a lack of social support (Reading & Wien, 2013). Adults living below the poverty line in First Nations communities in Quebec are less likely to report being in excellent or very good mental health than those above the poverty line. (FNQLHSSC, Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey, 2018)

Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security. (United Nations, 2019)

Through Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Government of Canada intends to reduce the 2015 poverty rate by 20% by 2020 and by 50% by 2030 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). To reach these goals, the Government of Canada will need to focus its attention on First Nations, as they are among those most affected by poverty in Canada. To this end, the strategy contains a series of measures and strategies to narrow the gap between First Nations and the Canadian population. Recently announced investments are a step in the right direction. However, for these investments to achieve the desired effect, they must be both major and sustained. More importantly, the government cannot expect to reduce poverty by 50% by 2030 without completely overhauling the First Nations Income Assistance Program. As it stands, the Income Assistance Program does not lift its clients out of poverty. The reformed program must be structured in such a way that clients are not condemned to a life of poverty, which will require better program funding that not only meets the basic needs of program clients, but provides them with the means to improve their situations, as well as with activities to promote on social inclusion and professional integration.

[Poverty and social exclusion] are a source of anxiety, insecurity, poor self-esteem and a feeling of uselessness.

The Government of Canada intends to reduce the 2015 poverty rate by 20% by 2020 and by 50% by 2030.

Overpopulation makes it difficult to provide a safe and appropriate environment for children. It contributes to the rise in social issues.

(Regional meeting)

In 2015, 10% of adults residing in a First Nations community lived in a crowded home.

During the consultation on the reform, participants discussed the importance of health and social determinants. A number of Income Assistance Program agents and counsellors brought up the challenges faced by their clients. These are not limited to social assistance, under-education, and poverty; many clients also contend with physical and mental health issues and various forms of addiction. In order to address all of these problems, as previously mentioned in this report, a wider-reaching approach is required than simply implementing prevention measures. This approach must be holistic and focused around the continuum of services from all sectors responsible for delivering services within communities.

Housing

During the consultations, participants listed housing as an important element to which the Government of Canada must pay special attention in order to improve the lives of Income Assistance Program clients. Overpopulation, homelessness (visible and hidden) and the associated psychosocial ramifications are a few of the problems that affect program clients and stand in the way of their social inclusion and professional integration.

In 2015, 10% of adults residing in a First Nations community lived in a crowded home. Living situations varied depending on the geographic location of communities.¹⁰ There was a positive correlation between overcrowded home environments and distance from an urban centre: the farther a community was from an urban centre (Zone 1), the more pronounced the phenomenon of crowded housing. The percentage of adults living in an overpopulated home was 21% in rural communities (Zone 2) and 30% in isolated communities (Zone 3) (FNQLHSSC, Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey, 2018).

According to the AFNQL, First Nations are in the midst of a serious housing crisis. Not only are there not enough dwellings to keep up with the high rate of demographic growth in these communities, but a great deal of these homes must be renovated and decontaminated. As housing conditions are a social determinant of health, this crisis has major ramifications for health and constitutes a hindrance to the development of individuals and communities.

¹⁰ Description of geographic zones: Zone 1: A zone located within 50 Km of the nearest service centre to which it has year-round road access. Zone 2: A zone located between 50 and 350 Km from the nearest service centre to which it has year-round road access. Zone 3: A zone located over 350 Km from the nearest service centre with year-round road access. Zone 4: A zone that has no year-round road access to a service centre and, as a result, experiences a higher cost of transportation. (Chan & Dahm, March 2000).

The housing crisis has repercussions on many levels: it speeds up the deterioration of the housing stock, it contributes [to sustained] family tension, it causes learning problems [in] . . . children, it raises concerns [about] the health and security of the occupants, it sends a message of not belonging to the community, it increases the financial burden, indebtedness and financial risks that the community must [contend with]. (AFNQL, The Housing Needs of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, 2016)

First Nations have the right to adequate and sufficient housing. They also have the right to participate in the development of housing policies and strategies. These rights are enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2019) and in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (United Nations, 2019), which Canada has signed and committed to honouring.

Given its interaction with health and education, housing plays a primary role in the development of individuals. Bettering the living conditions of First Nations requires both improved housing conditions and a steadfast commitment to addressing the current crisis. The First Nations National Housing Strategy is a central piece of the puzzle. It constitutes one of the preventive measures that must be put in place by the Government of Canada and that will require long-term funding in order to improve First Nations living conditions.

Education, employment and economic development:

The job market is currently in upheaval. Quebec is in both an enviable and a critical position, as the unemployment rate is very low. Yet, many sectors are experiencing a labour shortage, a problem that may worsen as the Quebec population ages and begins to retire in the coming years. In this context, governments and businesses are turning to immigration and recruiting workers from abroad to fill positions. This situation is paradoxical, to say the least, as First Nations communities have high rates of unemployment and dependence on welfare. First Nations could be a part of the solution to the problems caused by the labour shortage if representatives from businesses and institutions at various levels of government worked together to draw up a plan to make greater space for First Nations on the job market and educate executives and managers in the public and private sectors. A recent study on the forestry industry showed that managers who are educated about the realities and cultures of First Nations are more successful in recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees (Théberge & Beaudoin, 2019).

First Nations could be a part of the solution to the problems caused by the labour shortage

The unemployment rate in communities sat at 42% in 2018. In isolated communities, where the Band Council is the main employer, the unemployment rate was over 50%.

In 2015, nearly four out of ten adults residing in a First Nations community Nations lived in a low-income household (FNQLHSSC, Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey, 2018). This figure is hardly surprising, given the rate of dependence on the Income Assistance Program and considering employability data. According to the most recent numbers from FNHRDCQ, the unemployment rate in communities sat at 42% in 2018. In isolated communities, where the Band Council is the main employer, the unemployment rate was over 50%. Corollary to the unemployment rate, the percentage of members living in a community who benefited from the Income Security Program represented nearly 23% of the active population. Among those under 35, this percentage was close to 28% (FNHRDCQ, 2018).

To improve employability among First Nations, the ISET Program will require better funding and less stringent requirements than its previous iteration. To be effective, measures to develop human resources should also be accompanied by a plan to further involve First Nations in economic development. Past and current measures put forward by the Government of Canada to stimulate the economic development of First Nations, while effective in certain communities, have so far proven ineffective overall and have not done much to help the majority of communities break their economic exclusion.

Measures pertaining to education and to the development of human resources intended to address either pre-employability or employability, as well as community economic development measures, must be administered following an integrated, concerted plan in order to be effective and have a structuring effect within communities. These measures must be not only ambitious, but funded to reflect the needs of First Nations.

Education can play a pivotal role in reducing dependence on welfare. An acceptable level of education can, in most cases, guarantee access to quality, well-paying jobs. In this respect, the education program must be tailored to the needs of First Nations. The same applies to economic development programs.

The Government of Canada will need to respect the principles enunciated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action by making certain that First Nations have equal access to education, training, jobs and professional development programs available in the business sector and by guaranteeing that communities will reap a portion of the benefits generated by economic development projects carried out on their ancestral lands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

23. As part of Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy, the First Nations are calling on the federal government to increase its investments to eliminate persistent social inequities between the Canadian population and First Nations.
24. As part of the National Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy, the First Nations are calling on the federal government to make adequate, predictable and sustainable funding available to the communities so that they can meet the housing needs of First Nations community members.
25. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to provide adequate, predictable and sustainable community health funding to support mental health and addiction control and prevention initiatives.
26. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to provide adequate, predictable and sustainable funding in the area of education to foster the educational success of First Nations youth, which is essential to securing quality employment.
27. The First Nations are calling on the federal government, in collaboration with provincial authorities, to establish a long-term investment plan aiming to ensure the sustainable economic development of the First Nations communities. The funding will need to be increased, recurrent and distributed equitably among communities rather than through calls for proposals. The conditions related to the management of the program and its funding must allow the communities to have the necessary flexibility to develop and implement an economic development plan that meets their realities and needs.
28. The First Nations are calling on the federal government so that the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) finances not only the client-related operations but also the development of a program to raise awareness among the workforce on the realities and cultures of the labour market outside the communities.
29. The First Nations request that the financial support needed to raise awareness among economic development businesses and organizations on First Nations realities and cultural specificities be determined in consultation with their organizations, the federal government and provincial authorities. The objective of this support would namely be to combat racism and discrimination experienced by First Nations on the labour market.

Conclusion

The national engagement process for the reform of the ISC Income Assistance Program provided the basis for clear recommendations to be formulated for the Government of Canada. These recommendations are made in the hope of transforming Indigenous Services Canada's Income Assistance Program to respond to the true needs of First Nations in Quebec, in full respect of their values, vision and culture.

The consultation activities gave participants the opportunity to express themselves at length on a great number of topics and suggest solutions for improving income assistance client wellness. The vision that guided the process is "placing client wellness at the heart of services." Income assistance is a subject with many moving parts that are closely related to determinants of individual health and wellness. Participants consider it critical to centre governance and culture, as well as other complementary and indissociable elements. Thus, culture and the right to selfdetermination underpin all the recommendations put forward in this report. First Nations wish to offer services that are in harmony with their vision, needs and realities and that enable them to improve the living conditions of their populations and of future generations.

Lastly, First Nations in Quebec are determined to act and focused on their priorities and goals. The consultation participants shared their perspectives on a number of challenges they are committed to addressing with concerted, collective action. After this report is submitted, an action plan will be drawn up by First Nations in order to pursue actions and avenues to better satisfy previously identified needs. By submitting this report, First Nations call on the Government of Canada to make the investments and changes needed to undertake a comprehensive reform of the Income Assistance Program and thus support First Nations in achieving their goals and bringing their vision to life.

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APPENDIX



Appendix 1: Consultation Guide

Regional consultation process on the
Reform of the Income Assistance Program

CONSULTATION GUIDE

Regional consultation process on the

Reform of the Income Assistance

Program of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)



*Client wellness at
the heart of our services*

January 2019



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMISSION

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Introduction

A working group, which is made up of representatives of the communities and the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) has been established to guide the regional consultation strategy as part of the reform on the Income Assistance Program of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)¹. The communities will have the opportunity to conduct their own local consultations during the months of January and February 2019.

Strongly encouraged by the working group, these local consultations are in addition to the other regional consultation methods that will be coordinated by the FNQLHSSC in the coming months. Therefore, this gives communities a chance to develop a representative portrait of their population's vision and needs in terms of income assistance-related wellness. In addition, these consultations are an opportunity for broader audiences, such as clients, seniors and community populations, to participate in the regional consultation process.

Communities that wish to do so are therefore invited to organize consultation activities to consult with their members during the months of January and February. The information collected locally will be used to inform the regional consultation process as a whole.

Objectives of the guide

This guide was designed by the FNQLHSSC and validated by the working group to support First Nations communities in Quebec in consulting with their members on the reform of the Income Assistance Program.

It features:

- General information on the context that led to a reform of the Income Assistance Program as well as on the regional consultation strategy coordinated by the FNQLHSSC;
- Avenues for discussion and suggestions for questions aimed at fostering discussions with the various target audiences at the local level;
- Ideas and practical advice to facilitate consultation within communities.

For more information on the consultation process on the reform of the Income Assistance Program, for support for your local consultation, or for any questions regarding the use of this guide, please feel free to contact **Raphaël Tétreault**, Consultation Process Project Manager, at 418-842-1540, ext. 2406, or at raphael.tetreault@csspnl.com.

¹ ISC's Income Assistance Program is for eligible individuals and their families who are ordinarily resident on reserve. Income assistance includes funds for basic needs (such as food, clothing, rent and utilities), special needs (such as essential household items, personal incidentals and doctor-recommended diets), pre-employment and employment supports to move individuals toward self-sufficiency (such as life skills and job training).
Source: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100035256/1533307528663>

Background

The **On-Reserve Income Assistance Program** (also called “Income Security”) was launched by the federal government in 1964 to provide funding to eligible individuals and families living in communities to meet their basic needs. Over the past 50 years, the Program has remained essentially the same.²

In July 2003, the Regional Chief of the AFNQL, Mr. Ghislain Picard, and the Regional Director General of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Mr. André Côté, signed the Agreement-in-Principle – First Nations of Quebec Income Security. The purpose of this agreement is to lay the groundwork needed for the implementation, in partnership, of an income security system under the responsibility of the First Nations in Quebec³. The Income Security Framework Policy, created in 2005, is the main result of this Agreement-in-Principle.

In its 2007 report on the evaluation of the Income Assistance Program, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (now Indigenous Services Canada [ISC]) acknowledged that “the Income Assistance Program has not kept pace with modern income assistance programs and its program design is outdated. The Income Assistance Program is not designed or set up to deliver active measures programming and changes in programming, capacity building and linkages to services offered by other provincial and federal departments are required.”⁴

With the Liberal government taking office in 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his intention to renew ties with Aboriginal peoples and build a “nation-to-nation relationship”. Since then, he has initiated a process of global transformation in a number of areas aiming to improve quality of life of First Nations, Inuit and Métis and support the delivery of high-quality services for Indigenous peoples.

In its 2018 budget, which provides an investment of \$86.9 million over two years to improve the current Income Assistance Program, the federal government granted \$8.5 million for the implementation of a national engagement process and committed to consulting and working with First Nations to improve the **On-Reserve Income Assistance Program** to better meet the needs of clients and communities. This process also aims to identify avenues on how best to help First Nations people move from income assistance to employment and education.

The findings and recommendations resulting from this national engagement process led by the First Nations in each province and territory will guide ISC in reforming and developing policies related to the On-Reserve Income Assistance Program.

2 ISC received authorization to implement active measures in 2003 but did not update its program design based on the objectives and expected results associated with this new authorization and did not change the delivery of its program (source, year).

3 Agreement-in-Principle – First Nations of Quebec Income Security, Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

4 Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Evaluation of the Income Assistance Program, Project 07/06, December 2007, p. 63

Role of the FNQLHSSC

As part of the mandates entrusted to it by the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL), the FNQLHSSC is responsible for coordinating the regional consultation process of the First Nations in Quebec for the reform of the Income Assistance Program in collaboration with the First Nations communities and organizations in Quebec.

Therefore, the mandate of the FNQLHSSC is to develop and implement a strategy and to deploy consultation activities to enable First Nations in Quebec to express their needs, their solutions and their vision regarding income assistance within communities. In this sense, the role of the FNQLHSSC is to mobilize, listen, guide, equip and support First Nations throughout the regional consultation process. In addition, the FNQLHSSC is also responsible for consolidating and analyzing the results obtained through the local and regional consultations in order to formulate recommendations that will be reflected in the final regional report. This report will be validated by the communities as well as by the Chiefs of the AFNQL before being submitted to the Honourable Seamus O'Regan, Minister of ISC, in May 2019.

Note that the mandate of the working group consists of, among other things, supporting and directing the regional engagement process on the reform of the Income Assistance Program and guiding the activities that will be carried out as part of this process.

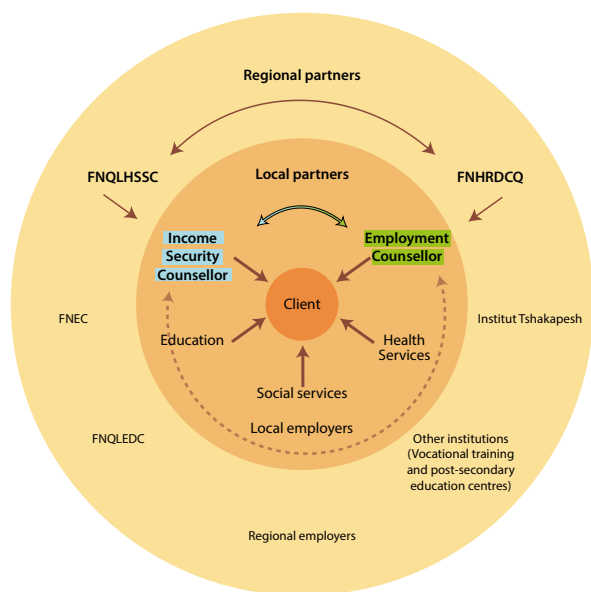


Regional consultation strategy

Theme: Client wellness at the heart of our services!

During a joint meeting, which was organized in 2014 by the FNQLHSSC and the First Nations Human Resources Development Commission of Quebec, and brought together Income Assistance Program and employment and training workers, the communities agreed on the importance and need to adapt programs so that they respond effectively to client needs, rather than trying to integrate our clients into existing programs that are not really suitable for them.

The diagram below was produced to illustrate the vision of a continuum of services for the client that allows for the provision of ongoing, seamless and consistent support for clients who require these services.⁵



While drawing inspiration from the work of this joint meeting, the working group accordingly adopted and defined “client wellness at the heart of our services” as a central vision and theme of the regional consultation strategy.

In order to better focus the discussions during the consultation activities, the working group also requested that the regional strategy be based on the sub-themes proposed by ISC, which are delivery, program implementation and governance. **More specifically, here is a general overview of the topics that will be covered and addressed for each of these three themes:**

DELIVERY: Rates, eligibility criteria, special benefits, etc.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION: Tools and resources necessary for program administration and management, continuum with complementary services, support measures for social inclusion and professional integration, etc.

GOVERNANCE: Income Security Framework Policy, harmonization with the province, grant over ten years, taking on the program’s management (ISC transformation) etc.

⁵ FNQLHSSC and FNHRDCQ, Joint working session: Optimizing client success through creative collaboration to the benefit of our clients–Summary, Quebec City, June 2008.

Target audiences of the consultation process

Due to the field and program targeted by the reform, the income security, employment and training sectors in the communities will be those that will be directly approached to participate in the regional consultation process. That being said, it is hoped that more broadly-based audiences, directly or indirectly affected by the program, will be able to participate in the discussions in order to enrich the consultations and promote the implementation of the continuum of services. Thus, the regional consultation process is intended for:

- Employees in the income security sector (agents, advisors, managers, etc.).
- Employees in the employment and training sectors (agents, advisors, managers, etc.).
- Employees in the health and social services sectors (workers, professionals, directors, etc.).
- Leaders (grand chiefs, chiefs and councillors).
- General Directors.
- Employers (any manager or enterprise that hires income assistance recipients).
- Income security program beneficiaries.
- First Nations population (seniors, families, individuals with disabilities, etc.).



Consultation activities coordinated by the FNQLHSSC

1. REGIONAL MEETING (FEBRUARY 12-13, 2019 IN QUEBEC CITY)

The members of the working group favoured the holding of a single regional consultation meeting, which will allow three representatives per community to participate. Essentially, the following participants are targeted by this regional meeting:

- Employees in the income security sector (agents, advisors, managers, etc.).
- Employees in the employment and training sectors (agents, advisors, managers, etc.).
- Another person per community selected by the community.

2. DISCUSSION CIRCLES

The FNQLHSSC will contact the communities and organizations to organize discussion circles that will be held by videoconference. These discussion circles, which will be facilitated by the FNQLHSSC, will take the form of small-group discussions and will provide an opportunity to bring together local stakeholders working in various sectors. Essentially, the sectors targeted by the discussion circles are:

- Health
- Social services
- Social and economic development
- Employability
- Education

In addition, a discussion circle will be organized specifically to bring together the First Nations commissions and organizations and the various partners involved.

3. ELECTRONIC SURVEY

Surveys will be deployed following the recommendations of the working group since the members wanted to reach as many people as possible. The surveys, which were developed by the FNQLHSSC and validated by the working group, will target clients as well as the participation of various audiences. Survey responses will be compiled by the FNQLHSSC and will be used to draft the regional report.

All the information gathered as part of these consultation activities, in addition to the information collected through local consultations conducted by the communities, will be compiled and analyzed by the FNQLHSSC and will be used to develop recommendations that will be included in the final regional report. It should be noted that the information collected will remain confidential and that the respondents, as well as their respective communities, will not be identified. The data is only being collected to develop a collective and regional portrait and not to establish the state of the services for each community.

4. TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Telephone interviews will be organized for discussions on an individual basis with the leaders. The semi-structured interviews will be conducted by the FNQLHSSC. Some employers in the communities will also be targeted to participate in a telephone interview.

Schedule

	REGIONAL FNQLHSSC				LOCAL COMMUNITIES	
January 2019		Discussion circles	Electronic survey on the clientele's intentions	Telephone interviews	Local consultations Activities to consult different groups in the communities are organized by Income Security Advisors.	
February 2019	February 2019 February 12-13 Québec City	Videoconference meetings with each community				
March 2019	END OF THE REGIONAL CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES				The communities can use the materials developed by the FNQLHSSSC (discussion guide, electronic survey, etc.).	March 1, 2019 Deadline to submit local reports to the FNQLHSSSC so that their contents be analyzed and integrated into the regional report.
	Analysis and writing Collected data is pooled and analyzed Regional report is written					March 31, 2019 Deadline to submit local reports to the FNQLHSSSC so that they may be attached to the final regional report.
April 2019	Regional meeting Recommendations are validated.				END OF THE LOCAL CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES	
	The Assembly of Chiefs of the AFNQL validates the recommendations.					
May 2019	The regional report is edited, translated and formatted.					
May 15, 2019 Final regional report is submitted to ISC						

Local consultations

Communities wishing to do so are invited to organize local consultation activities during the months of January and February that will facilitate addressing concerns or sharing innovative solutions from First Nations people that reflect the contexts and realities of each community. It should be noted that these consultations are optional, but strongly encouraged, as they will provide more information that will inform the regional consultation process.

WHO TO CONSULT?

It is up to each community to identify the audiences to be consulted as part of the local consultation activities. Since the players in the income assistance (income security), employment and training sectors will be much in demand as part of the regional consultation being conducted by the FNQLHSSC, it may be interesting for communities to seek the participation of other audiences, such as:

- Current and former beneficiaries (clients)
- Employers within communities
- Political leaders (grand chiefs, chiefs and councillors)
- General directors
- Employees in other sectors of your community who contribute to the continuum of services
- Seniors
- Families

HOW TO CONSULT?

The various suggested activities in this guide are intended to encourage dialogue and new ideas. Here are some suggestions of activities to organize that can be used and adapted based on your needs:

• Focus groups

Focus groups bring together a small number of people (8 to 10 people or even less) to discuss a specific topic. For support for the facilitation of the discussions, you can refer to the discussion avenues grid in the appendices. This grid can also help you to record the information collected, which you can then use to write your local consultation report or share with the Commission to incorporate this information into the regional report.

• Local survey

In addition to encouraging the local population to respond to the regional questionnaire developed by the FNQLHSSC, it is also possible to develop a questionnaire that is specifically designed for your community. To do this, do not hesitate to build on the questions from the regional survey.

The questionnaire that is adapted to your community can be used for “door-to-door” meetings, focus groups, public assembly consultations, open discussions with program clients, etc. You can choose to keep the paper versions of the surveys for writing your local consultation report or you can send them directly to the FNQLHSSC for inclusion in the final regional report.

- **Other proposed methods:**
 - Individual meetings
 - Community meetings or meals
 - Open public assemblies
 - Suggestion box
 - Targeted phone calls
 - Door-to-door

The different suggested consultation methods can be combined to gather comments and suggestions from as many people as possible. Please note that a checklist is included in the appendices to help you plan the steps of the consultation process.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE COLLECTED INFORMATION?

The information gathered through the various local consultation activities can feed into the regional consultation process in different ways. Therefore, it is up to the communities to determine how the information collected will be shared from the local level to the regional level.

Three options are available to communities:

Option n 1 :

Compile the information collected locally and share it with the FNQLHSSC:

- **In the format of your choice, before March 1, 2019** so that the contents can be analyzed and integrated into the final regional report.
- **In the form of a report, before March 31, 2019** to be appended to the final regional report.

Option n 2 :

Submit your local consultation report directly to the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada, the Honourable Seamus O'Regan.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
10, rue Wellington
Gatineau QC K1A 0H4

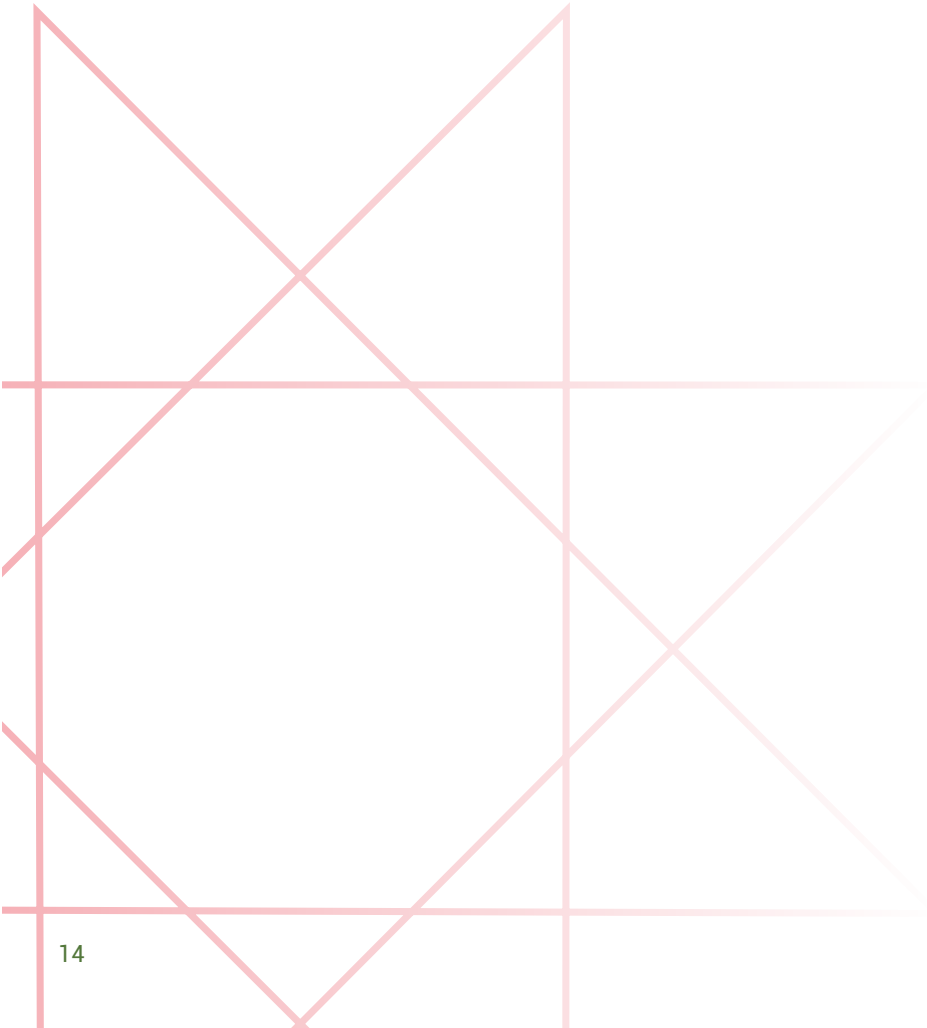
Option n 3 :

Use the information collected locally and share it as part of your participation in the regional consultation activities.

ANNEX

Checklist for the organization of local consultation activities

- Reflect on the different resources of the community that could help me in organizing this process.
- Identify the sectors or individuals to consult.
- Contemplate the best consultation methods to reach as many people as possible.
- Choose the methods I will use to collect and transmit the information that will emerge during the consultations (written report, note, recording, filling out the question grid, etc.).
- Think about what I need to implement the chosen methods (book a room, plan a snack or meal, write and send emails, communicate with radio, television or newspaper, etc.).
- Set a consultation activity schedule.
- Decide whether I will send the information to the FNQLHSSC and how I intend to do so.



Discussion avenues

OBJECTIVE: CLIENT WELLNESS AT THE HEART OF OUR SERVICES		
<i>Delivery</i>		
Discussion avenues		Answer
<p>What acts as a barrier or an obstacle that could be eliminated for client wellness?</p> <p><i>(What does not work?)</i></p>		
<p>What should be created or improved for client wellness?</p> <p><i>(What works?)</i></p>	<p>Regarding the funding formulas?</p> <p>Regarding the rates?</p> <p>Regarding the allowances?</p> <p>Regarding the eligibility criteria?</p> <p>Regarding the special benefits?</p> <p>Etc.</p>	
<p>What should be adjusted for client wellness?</p> <p><i>(What should be done differently?)</i></p>		

Discussion avenues

OBJECTIVE: CLIENT WELLNESS AT THE HEART OF OUR SERVICES

Implementation

Discussion avenues		Answer
<p>What acts as a barrier or an obstacle that could be eliminated for client wellness?</p> <p><i>(What does not work?)</i></p>	<p>Regarding the tools used?</p>	
<p>What should be created or improved for client wellness?</p> <p><i>(What works?)</i></p>	<p>Regarding the resources needed for the administration and management of the program?</p> <p>Regarding the continuum with complementary services?</p> <p>Regarding the support measures for social inclusion and professional integration?</p>	
<p>What should be adjusted for client wellness?</p> <p><i>(What should be done differently?)</i></p>	<p>Etc.</p>	

OBJECTIVE: CLIENT WELLNESS AT THE HEART OF OUR SERVICES

Governance

Discussion avenues		Answer
<p>What acts as a barrier or an obstacle that could be eliminated for client wellness?</p> <p><i>(What does not work?)</i></p>	<p>Regarding 10-year grants?</p> <p>Regarding the establishment and delivery of complete and comprehensive services?</p> <p>Regarding the Income Security Framework Policy?</p> <p>Regarding harmonization with the province?</p> <p>Etc.</p>	
<p>What should be created or improved for client wellness?</p> <p><i>(What works?)</i></p>		
<p>What should be adjusted for client wellness?</p> <p><i>(What should be done differently?)</i></p>		

Client survey

Consultation meeting on the reform of the Income Assistance Program - clients

WE'RE LISTENING TO YOU!

The FNQLHSSC is coordinating a consultation process on the reform of the Income Assistance Program. Its role is to give you the means to enable you to express yourself, talk about your needs and propose solutions to improve the Income Assistance Program.

Your answers are confidential and will be used to write recommendations that will be submitted to the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada, the Honourable Seamus O'Regan, in the spring of 2019.

**You have until March 8th 2019 to return the completed survey by email to the following address :
Roxane.Philippe@csssbnql.com or by Fax : 418-842-7045**

1. In which community do you currently live?

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Barriere Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Lac-Simon | <input type="checkbox"/> Pikogan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ekuanitshit | <input type="checkbox"/> Listuguj | <input type="checkbox"/> Timiskaming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Essipit | <input type="checkbox"/> Long Point | <input type="checkbox"/> Uashat mak Mani-Utenam |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gesgapegiag | <input type="checkbox"/> Manawan | <input type="checkbox"/> Unamen Shipu |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gespeg | <input type="checkbox"/> Mashteuiatsh | <input type="checkbox"/> Wemotaci |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kahnawake | <input type="checkbox"/> Matimekush | <input type="checkbox"/> Wendake |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kawawachikamach | <input type="checkbox"/> Natashkuan | <input type="checkbox"/> Wolf Lake |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kabaowek | <input type="checkbox"/> Odanak | <input type="checkbox"/> Wôlinak |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kipawa | <input type="checkbox"/> Opitciwan | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain) : |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kitcisakik | <input type="checkbox"/> Pakua Shipu | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kitigan Zibi | <input type="checkbox"/> Pessamit | |

2. Are you a member of this community (registered on the band list)?

- Yes
- No

3. In what age group are you?

- 17 years and under
- 18 - 35 years
- 36 - 54 years
- 55 - 64 years
- 65 years and up

4. Do you have one or more dependent children under 18 years of age?

- Yes
- No

5. Does the Income Assistance Program allow you to meet your following needs?

	Absolutely	More or less	Not at all
Food			
Shelter			
Transportation			
Clothing			

Please explain:

6. As part of the Income Assistance Program, have you ever had help with:

	Yes	No
Finding a job		
Going back to school		
Receiving vocational training		

If so, were your needs met? Please explain

If not, please explain:

7. Does the Income Assistance Program give you the means to improve your living conditions?

- Absolutely
- More or less
- Not at all

Please explain:

8. If anything was possible, how could the program be modified to help you improve your situation?

9. Does the Income Assistance Program take into consideration and respect your culture and traditions?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

10. Do the Income Assistance Program and the other services in the community (such as NNADAP, adult education, etc.) work together to meet your needs?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Please explain:

11. Do you have any other comments, challenges or ideas to share?

11. Continued



End, thank you for your participation to this survey



Vision

First Nations individuals, families and communities are healthy, have equitable access to quality care and services, and are self-determining and culturally empowered.

Mission

To accompany Quebec First Nations in achieving their health, wellness, culture and self-determination goals.



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
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Appendix 2: Results from the client survey

Regional consultation process on the Reform of the Income Assistance Program

Regional consultation process on the Reform of the Income Assistance Program of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)



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Results from the client survey

Methodology

In order to reach as many clients of the Income Assistance Program as possible among the First Nations communities in Quebec, the online survey method was chosen. The 11-question survey featuring multiple choice and essay questions was administered from January 14 to March 28, 2019.

The FNQLHSSC shared the hyperlink with all the program advisors in each of the First Nations communities while offering different strategies. They could complete the online survey with their clients at a meeting, ask their clients to complete the online survey themselves or complete it in paper form. Subsequently, each community was free to promote client participation in the survey as they wished. For example, some communities implemented incentives, such as contests with prizes. This resulted in some communities being overrepresented in the sample of respondents.

In total, 675 people from 18 different communities responded to the survey. Of these respondents, 95% are from five communities, and 53% come from the same community.

To ensure that the overall results are not influenced by the context of a single community, various analyses were conducted. This made it possible to observe that, even when removing the results from the community representing half of the participants, the results remain substantially the same.

Respondent profile

Approximately 60% of the clients of the Income Assistance Program who participated in the survey are between the ages of 18 and 35 years and do not have dependent children. Just over one quarter of them are between the ages of 36 and 54 years and one in ten is 55 to 64 years old. Six out of ten respondents have one or more dependent children under 18 years of age.

Almost all respondents are members of the community in which they currently live. According to the results obtained, less than one in ten clients lives in a community for which they are not on the band list.

Results

To the question *Does the Income Assistance Program allow you to meet your food, shelter, transportation and clothing needs*, the majority of the respondents indicated that their food and shelter needs are absolutely or more or less met, while their transportation and clothing needs are more or less or not at all met.

Just under half of the respondents indicated they had received assistance as part of the Income Assistance Program to find a job, and 50% of them reported that they had received help to return

Regional consultation process on the
Reform of the Income Assistance Program
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to school. On the other hand, two out of three respondents said that they had not received any help with vocational training.

Half of the respondents consider that the Income Assistance Program allows them to improve their situation more or less, while one in four believes that the program absolutely enables them to improve their situation and the other quarter consider that the program does not help them to improve their situation at all.

Almost three out of four respondents believe that the Income Assistance Program considers and respects their culture and traditions.

Half of the respondents believe that the Income Assistance Program and other community services work together to meet their needs. More than one third of the respondents do not know if the program and other sectors work together. About one in ten believes that the program and other sectors do not work together to meet their needs.

Appendix 3: Reform of the Income Assistance Program Poster

First Nations consultation process on the

Reform of the Income Assistance Program

of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)



YOUR OPINION IS IMPORTANT!

Income assistance clients in
Quebec First Nations communities
are invited to complete a short online survey
developed by the FNQLHSSC.

ONLINE SURVEY

From February 1 to March 8, 2019

<https://fr.surveymonkey.com/r/5QTHCYD>



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Appendix 4: Recommendations

Income Assistance Program

Regional consultation process on the
Reform of the Income Assistance Program
of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)



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Recommendations

1. Income Security Framework Policy

1.1 Governance and planning

1. The First Nations assert their right to self-determination. This right particularly gives them the power and legitimacy to develop and manage their own Income Assistance Program. This right must allow them to be able to develop a program and regulations that consider their realities, needs and cultures. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to respect this right by:
 - a) Respecting the legality and authority of the Income Security Framework Policy, which is fundamental to enabling them to develop their own regulations. This legal recognition is necessary to enable them to substitute for provincial regulations.
 - b) Jointly developing with First Nations a federal bill that will recognize their right to develop and manage their own Income Assistance Program, with their own unique regulations that will reflect their specific realities and needs.
2. The First Nations request to define, with the collaboration of the federal government, the accountability processes and mechanisms as well as the rules for assessing sound financial management.

2. Support

2.1 Infrastructure and tools

3. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to invest more and immediately in the construction and maintenance of infrastructure by developing a capital fund associated with the Income Assistance Program and by allocating the necessary resources to:
 - a) Build, repair and preserve the infrastructures dedicated to the program.
 - b) Meet the needs in terms of space and equipment to better support the clientele.
 - c) Add office space and build housing to welcome and accommodate professionals who come from outside the community to work with clients.
 - d) Design workspaces and premises to ensure confidentiality and the protection of the personal information of clients.
 - e) Provide premises that will make it possible to ensure the safety and physical integrity of employees and teams.
 - f) Purchase and maintain measures to ensure the security of employees and teams.

2.2 Training and support

Regional consultation process on the
**Reform of the Income Assistance Program
of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)**



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4. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to consider the issues related to the recruitment and retention of staff and to commit to financially supporting capacity-building to:
 - a) Hire additional advisors to reduce the ratio of number of files per advisor and thus promote the provision of sustained accompaniment to the clients.
 - b) Financially support the training of advisors and managers so that they can develop the knowledge and qualifications required for their position.
 - c) Fund the development of the tools needed to support the work of the advisors.

3. Collaboration and continuum of services

5. The First Nations request that funding agreements provide financial resources that will enable them to consolidate or develop their collaborations and partnerships with local and regional players. For example:
 - a) The hiring of liaison officers to foster cross-sector collaboration and ensure a continuum of services for clients.
 - b) The development of cross-sector collaboration agreements associated with protocols for information-sharing.
 - c) The development of single windows.
 - d) The establishment of issue tables.
6. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to financially support collaborative activities among First Nations partners and establish a consultation mechanism for the departments involved in service delivery and program management.

4. Social inclusion and professional integration

4.1 Obstacles and challenges

7. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to be involved in the development and implementation of social inclusion and professional integration measures so that they are consistent with their realities and cultures. This implies:
 - a) Respecting their holistic vision.
 - b) Taking into account their history and culture.
8. The First Nations request that social inclusion and professional integration measures make it possible to further promote the incentive approach by valuing not only work but also social inclusion and participation.
9. The First Nations are calling on the federal government, in consultation with First Nations and provincial authorities, to resolve jurisdictional issues in order to facilitate the

Regional consultation process on the
Reform of the Income Assistance Program
of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)



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transition for clients between the First Nations Income Assistance Program and the provincial program.

10. The First Nations request that the federal government eliminate the prescribed time limit for the social inclusion and professional integration measures to extend assistance to those who are further removed from the labour market.
11. In order to ensure access to justice, the First Nations are calling on the federal government to ensure that everyone who wants a lawyer can access one through means such as the following:
 - a) Allocating additional resources to remote and isolated communities where access to a lawyer is limited to cover the cost of transportation and accommodations for lawyers from outside these communities.
 - b) Increasing, in consultation with the Barreau du Québec and the Ministère de la Justice, access to legal aid lawyers.
12. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to establish a funding program to cover the costs associated with the pardon application process for clients enrolled in a social inclusion and professional integration measure to encourage rehabilitation and social reintegration.

4.2 Prevention

13. The First Nations request that the funding of the Income Assistance Program be enhanced to allow for the development of preventive measures for youth. This funding should make it possible to invest, in collaboration with the various partners, in awareness-raising and prevention activities such as:
 - a) Youth leadership camps.
 - b) Mentorship programs.
 - c) Conference workshops with role models.
 - d) Career days and workplace internships.
 - e) Entrepreneurship projects for young people in schools.
 - f) Social and community involvement projects.
 - g) Knowledge and tradition transfer activities.
14. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to increase levels of community action investments to stimulate the creation of resources dedicated to improving living conditions in the communities most affected by poverty.

5. Funding

15. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to jointly develop the new funding formula for the Income Assistance Program with them.
16. The First Nations request that the funding consider:

Regional consultation process on the
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- a) The actual costs of the income assistance and employability programs in the First Nations communities.
- b) The demographic and economic realities and the migration phenomena.
- c) The cost of living in isolated and remote areas.
- d) The actual costs associated with the program management and administration.

17. The First Nations request that the new funding formula as well as the administrative regulations further facilitate the development of social inclusion and professional integration measures for clients. The funding should allow for the development of incentives based on culture and the practice of traditional activities on the land and include language courses to address the language barrier.
18. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to provide additional funds for social inclusion and professional integration measures and that such funding be adequate, predictable and recurrent.
19. The First Nations are calling for pre-employability and employability funding to be decompartmentalized, consolidated and recurrent to enable them to provide better support and ensure a continuum of services for social inclusion and professional integration. This implies that these measures must be integrated and financed in a single program by a single ministry.

1.2 Delivery and regulations

20. The First Nations request that the regulations be more flexible to adapt them to their local realities.
21. The First Nations are calling on the Income Assistance Program to allow for providing an additional allowance to cover transportation costs for clients living in remote and isolated communities. The terms and conditions of this allowance will have to be defined with First Nations.
22. The First Nations request that the Income Assistance Program allow for providing an additional allowance for clients living in remote and isolated communities.

6. Additional recommendations

23. As part of Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy, the First Nations are calling on the federal government to increase its investments to eliminate persistent social inequities between the Canadian population and First Nations.
24. As part of the National Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy, the First Nations are calling on the federal government to make adequate, predictable and sustainable funding available to the communities so that they can meet the housing needs of First Nations community members.

Regional consultation process on the
Reform of the Income Assistance Program
of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)



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25. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to provide adequate, predictable and sustainable community health funding to support mental health and addiction control and prevention initiatives.
26. The First Nations are calling on the federal government to provide adequate, predictable and sustainable funding in the area of education to foster the educational success of First Nations youth, which is essential to securing quality employment.
27. The First Nations are calling on the federal government, in collaboration with provincial authorities, to establish a long-term investment plan aiming to ensure the sustainable economic development of the First Nations communities. The funding will need to be increased, recurrent and distributed equitably among communities rather than through calls for proposals. The conditions related to the management of the program and its funding must allow the communities to have the necessary flexibility to develop and implement an economic development plan that meets their realities and needs.
28. The First Nations are calling on the federal government so that the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) finances not only the client-related operations but also the development of a program to raise awareness among the workforce on the realities and cultures of the labour market outside the communities.
29. The First Nations request that the financial support needed to raise awareness among economic development businesses and organizations on First Nations realities and cultural specificities be determined in consultation with their organizations, the federal government and provincial authorities. The objective of this support would namely be to combat racism and discrimination experienced by First Nations on the labour market.

Appendix 5: Report of a local consultation (in French only)



Rapport d'une rencontre locale Sur la réforme de l'aide au revenu

Présenté à la CSSSPNQL

Le 7 mai 2019

Consultation de la Communauté de Pessamit en lien avec la réforme de l'aide au revenu.

Quant?

La rencontre a eu lieu le 11 avril 2019 de 10h30 à 11h30 auprès de la clientèle de l'aide au revenu, programme pré-emploi et des étudiants de l'éducation des adultes. 60 personnes étaient présentes en plus de quelques intervenants impliqués dans ces programmes.

Il y a eu une belle participation des personnes présentes. Par contre plus difficiles d'avoir les commentaires de tous. Avoir eu plus de temps, nous aurions pu très bien refaire une autre rencontre avec de plus petits groupes.

Au niveau de la méthodologie, nous avons utilisé les questions de la trousse de consultation et nous les avons adaptés pour refléter la réalité de la communauté. Également, nous avons fait en sorte que la clientèle comprenne bien les questions posées.

Au niveau des résultats, il ressemble beaucoup à ce qui a été mentionné en rencontre régionale. Dans l'ensemble, les gens sont bien informés au niveau du programme de l'aide au revenu. Par contre, les gens ont mentionné l'absence de programme spécifique qui ferait en sorte qu'il pourrait s'en sortir. Présentement, à part le programme pré-emploi, il n'y a pas vraiment d'autres programmes qui est destiné à la clientèle de l'aide au revenu.

Les gens ont mentionné vouloir encore plus d'information et de rencontre les concernant. Ce qui permettrait de mieux trouver des solutions collectives pour la population. Ils ont par la suite mentionné qu'il n'y avait pas assez de mesures pour permettre aux gens de s'en sortir. Développer plus de programme et de mesures en lien avec la population locale. Les gens ne sont plus tout à fait d'accord avec l'argent qui est enlevé si une personne travaille. trop restrictif si tu veux qu'une personne s'en sorte.

En générale, les gens présents connaissent le programme et ces quelques mesures comme les mesures pour les personnes enceintes et avec de jeunes enfants. Le débat revient rapidement autour du fait que les gens sont coupés s'ils travaillent un peu. Ce qui fait que cela n'incite pas une personne à vouloir s'en sortir. La question du calcul de la pension alimentaire est également mentionnée. Il faudrait de plus abolir le plafond au niveau de ceux qui travaillent un peu (200\$).

Au niveau des montants de la prestation, tous s'entendent pour dire que ce n'est pas suffisant et que les besoins vont au-delà des montants accordés. Surtout si nous tenons compte du seul de pauvreté au Québec et au Canada. Le facteur éloignement et également la question du transport doit faire parti des modifications en lien avec les montants de base. La situation a Pessamit n'est pas la même que quelqu'un qui est à Wendake ou quelqu'un de la romaine par exemple. Il faut revoir les critères ainsi que de modifier les barèmes. Il est également nécessaire d'avoir l e développement de bon programme qui permettrait de développer au niveau local.

Ici, sur la communauté, il faut de plus en plus travailler avec les autres secteurs. L'approche intersectoriel est primordiale afin de bien guider nos clients et les interventions. L'accès a des services de première deviens de plus en plus probable et souhaiter afin de mieux travailler ensemble pour le mieux-être de la population. De plus en plus de notre clientèle est aux prises avec des problème de santé mentale et autres. Les solutions et les suivis entre les secteurs doit s'améliorer également.

La plupart des autres questions touchant grandement la question de la prestation de base. Il est bien évident que la population trouve que ceux-ci ne reflètent pas la réalité de la communauté de Pessamit. A cela s'ajoute l'éloignement et le manque de transport et nous avons la un manque flagrant au niveau des besoins de base. Pour aller a Baie-Comeau, la population doit en moyenne déboursier 70\$ pour un aller-retour à l'épicerie. Ce qui est totalement inconservable pour une personne qui a un peu plus de 600\$ par mois.

Voici ce qui résume la consultation locale pour la communauté de Pessamit

Stéphane Savard responsable de l'aide au revenu

Pierre Picard Coordonnateur du programme pré-emploi

Vision

First Nations individuals, families and communities are healthy, have equitable access to quality care and services, and are self-determining and culturally empowered.

Mission

To accompany Quebec First Nations in achieving their health, wellness, culture and self-determination goals.



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