



Standing Committee on Health and Education

**Report on the *Nunavut Income Support
Policy Review***

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November 2001

**Jobie Nutarak, MLA
Chair**

**Uriash Puqiqnak, MLA
Co-Chair**

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Standing Committee on Health and Education

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November 2001

Hon. Kevin O'Brien, MLA
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Office of the Speaker
Legislative Assembly Building
Iqaluit, Nunavut
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Dear Mr. Speaker:

On behalf of the Members of the Standing Committee on Health and Education, I have the honour of presenting the Standing Committee's Report on the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review*.

Respectfully submitted,

Jobie Nutarak, MLA
Chair

Introduction

The Minister of Education tabled the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review* in May of 2001, during the Cambridge Bay sitting of the Legislative Assembly. At that time, the Honourable Peter Kilabuk, Minister of Education, also announced a number of new programs initiated in response to recommendations made in the *Review*. On May 28, 2001, the *Review* was referred to the Standing Committee on Health and Education for review.

On October 15, 2001, the Minister of Education and his officials appeared before the Standing Committee to discuss the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review* and a number of strategies being considered by the Department of Education to reform the current Income Support program.

This Report details the Standing Committee's review of the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review* and comments on possible reforms of the Income Support Program.

Background

The Nunavut Income Support Program is a program delivered by the Department of Education following policies established by the GNWT prior to the creation of Nunavut. In March of 2000, the Minister of Education appointed three individuals to the Nunavut Income Support Policy Review Panel. A fourth member of the panel represented the Nunavut Social Development Council. The Panel's mandate was to solicit the views of Nunavut citizens and provide direction to the Government of Nunavut regarding the Income Support Program. The Panel's Review was intended to form the basis for developing a new vision of

government support provided to the people of Nunavut through the Income Support Program.

The *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review* is a report completed by the Panel and does not contain any departmental response to the recommendations listed within it.

The Nunavut Income Support Program Review Panel visited seven Nunavut communities, received 12 written submissions, and conducted a survey of 32 income support workers and regional supervisors across Nunavut. The *Review* provides forty-six (46) specific recommendations grouped into five major themes:

- Youth;
- Adults;
- Elders;
- Community; and
- Nunavut Government.

Each theme has an introductory section describing various issues and is followed by a set of recommendations.

The 13 recommendations in the “Youth” section focus on the issues of assessment, training and support for youth. Skills development, especially in the areas of training and education, and support such as career planning are presented as priority areas for Income Support Program reform.

The “Adults” section contains 12 recommendations that focus on the issues of assessment, training and career planning support for adults. Appropriate and adequate day-to-day living assistance and the means of distributing this assistance is a central theme in this set of recommendations.

The “Elders” section contains 4 recommendations that focus on the general theme of Elders not receiving full and adequate access to the services and programs to which they are entitled.

Seven recommendations in the “Community” section relate to community involvement in the design and delivery of income support programs. The Panel specifically recommends that community *Circles of Support* be created with the participation of all “helping agencies” such as the RCMP, church groups and social workers in each community, and recommends a number of roles and activities for each *Circle of Support*.

The “Nunavut Government” section contains 10 recommendations for Government activities that will have either a direct community impact or a broader territorial impact.

Public Consultation on the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review*

As the Nunavut Income Support Policy Review Panel had already visited a number of communities and heard directly from the public on the Income Support Program, Members considered the *Review* and decided to focus Committee consultation efforts on soliciting input from representative levels of municipal government and from key stakeholder groups, as well as from constituents and the general public.

In mid-July, the Chair of the Committee wrote to all Nunavut Mayors and Senior Administrative Officers inviting communities to make written submissions on the *Review*, or to indicate their interest in appearing before the Committee. At the same time, the Chair wrote to the Nunavut Association of Municipalities and the Status of Women Council, as well as to all Nunavut community daycare associations inviting each of these bodies to make written submissions on the

Income Support Review or to indicate their interest in appearing before the Committee.

Input was also solicited from the public through the local media. Newspaper advertisements were placed in *Nunatsiaq News* and *News North* from July 20 to August 31, 2001; a Public Service Announcement was provided to CBC North for radio broadcast and a short text calling for public submissions on the *Nunavut Income Support Review* was broadcast on local community television stations.

The Standing Committee on Health and Education would like to thank those representatives who presented their views to the Committee. Copies of written submissions received are included as appendices to this report.

Departmental Consultation on the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review*

Members of the Standing Committee met with the Minister of Education and his staff on October 15, 2001, to discuss the Department's response to the *Nunavut Income Support Review*. As noted earlier, on the same day that the Minister of Education tabled the *Nunavut Income Support Review*, he announced a number of programs in direct response to the recommendations made by the Panel. A number of these programs related to training and training plans for clients on Income Support. The Minister also announced an incentive of an additional \$200 a month for Income Support clients who were working towards completing a Career Action Plan. Several community-based training-on-the-job projects have been announced and many Income Support clients have already been able to take advantage of these.

The Department of Education is working with the Nunavut Bureau of Statistics on a review of the costs of food and land equipment in Nunavut communities. The final analysis of the cost of living in communities may warrant an increase in

benefits provided to Income Support clients for food, clothing, furniture, shelter and emergencies.

Comments on the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review*

The Standing Committee on Health and Education has reviewed the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review* in detail and also considered comments and submissions on the Report.

The Committee was generally satisfied with the Panel's consultation process although Members would have liked to see more visits to smaller communities and, especially, to those communities facing the greatest difficulties in identifying employment opportunities for their residents. Committee Members were pleased to see that the *Review* reflects input from across Nunavut.

The Standing Committee supports the majority of the Panel's 46 recommendations and supports its focus on training and the development of skills that foster self-reliance. The Committee further urges all Departments and agencies to address those recommendations that relate to them and fall outside the mandate of the Department of Education.

On the issue of training and skill development, Committee Members are of the view that the Department of Education should be more creative and proactive when considering training opportunities. Members raised the concern that training is too often defined in terms of classroom-based learning that often does not relate to meaningful employment opportunities within the community. Those communities that do not have designated adult education facilities nor full-time instructors are further disadvantaged. Members discussed the need for Nunavut Arctic College Learning Centre instructors or Income Support Workers to assist clients with other needs such as life-skills training, identifying employment opportunities and job applications. Committee Members are of the view that additional opportunities for training should also be identified through collaboration with the private sector as part of community development projects, in conjunction

with other community activities such as subsistence hunting or harvesting, and based on principles of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit.

On the issue of communication, the Committee agrees with the Panel that the Income Support Program is not always well understood by clients, workers and community residents in general. The Committee discussed the need for a clear communication campaign describing the Income Support Program and the roles and responsibilities of clients, Income Support workers and the Department of Education. Given that literacy skills are often an issue for Income Support clients, the Committee encourages the Department of Education to consider radio and television programming as well as written material to communicate information about the Income Support Program.

On issues relating to Elders, the Committee is in agreement with the Panel's findings in this area. Members share the Panel's view that more effort must be made to provide support to Elders and to make sure that Elders are receiving all the benefits to which they are entitled. Members discussed options for consideration by the Department of Education such as supporting hunters who are receiving Income Support to provide food for other Income Support recipients such as Elders. Another option involved Elders working together with community representatives to develop programs within their community that are based on traditional activities.

The Panel's *Review* included a number of recommendations centred on the creation of a *Circle of Support* interagency group within each community. Members expressed some concern over this concept. Many communities currently have active community groups that provide support for social issues. Members were of the view that creating another support organization could be an additional drain of energy of those community members already involved in these types of activities. Members noted that other committees established through government policies, such as the Committees of Council established under the

auspices of the Department of Health and Social Services, have yet to receive adequate training or resources to carry out their intended roles. The Committee cautioned that such an initiative should not proceed unless adequate resources and support can be guaranteed to any such community group.

The Committee noted the Panel's recommendation that Bingo winnings or Co-op incentives should be offset by valid purchases. In some communities, if an Income Support client receives an unexpected windfall and uses that money to buy land equipment or household appliances then their Income Support payments are not affected. In other communities, Income Support payments are reduced accordingly. Committee Members are of the view that the guidelines for offsetting winnings of this kind should be applied consistently across all communities.

Comments on Reforming Nunavut's Income Support Program

The Standing Committee on Health and Education discussed a number of strategies and opportunities for reforming the current Income Support Program that were not directly addressed in the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review*.

Committee Members addressed one issue that is of great concern to Income Support recipients, but has not yet been resolved by the Department of Education. Currently, the relationship between the Income Support Program and the Public Housing Program is unbalanced. Under the current Rent Scale, a client who receives Income Support assistance pays a subsidized rate of \$32 a month for rent. When that individual finds employment, not only does this immediately reduce the amount of assistance they receive under the Income Support Program, but under the Public Housing Program, their rent goes up. The combined impact of the policies of the two programs discourages individuals from looking for work for fear that they will no longer be able to afford the rent

once they begin earning. In addition, both Programs verify income differently, and neither Program takes the other into account.

Members of the Committee noted a certain lack of flexibility within the current Income Support Program that limits clients' ability to take advantage of programs offered through other departments. Members are of the view that more effort could be made to create links between government departments and outside agencies to provide the maximum number of opportunities to Income Support clients.

Members also discussed the possible reform of the income reporting system currently used in the Income Support program and expressed approval of a positive reporting system similar to the Employment Insurance Program. Members are of the view that a positive shift towards individual responsibility would serve to reinforce each individual's sense of pride and self-worth.

The results of the cost of living analysis undertaken by the Department of Education and Nunavut Bureau of Statistics will likely demonstrate that current rates of benefits have not kept pace with increased costs in living. Similar developments in the Northwest Territories this past June resulted in an average 7.8 % increase in amounts of money provided to Income Support clients for food as well as increases in other types of benefits. Members are aware that a similar increase in benefits across Nunavut could result in nearly \$2 million additional dollars being required for Income Support benefits alone. In addition, there could be additional costs resulting from such initiatives as training incentives, revised exemption rates, improved career counselling services, etc. Members recognize the need for adequate funds to cover the costs of basic necessities. However, the Committee urges the Department of Education to focus priority resources on creating new opportunities for clients. Members believe that empowering individuals to move towards self-reliance will be one of the most effective

investments in combating the issues relating to cost of living and poverty in Nunavut.

Recommendations

Based on its consideration of the *Nunavut Income Support Policy Review*, the Standing Committee on Health and Education urges the Department of Education to take the following recommendations into consideration as it proceeds further with its reform of the Income Support Program:

1. The Committee recommends that the Department of Education be more creative in developing and supporting training programs for Income Support clients, including exploring opportunities through:
 - a. partnerships with other departments such as Sustainable Development;
 - b. partnerships with municipal organizations to identify and implement community development projects;
 - c. partnerships with the private sector; and
 - d. incorporating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit by developing land skills and traditional skills.

2. The Committee recommends that the Department of Education work closely with the Nunavut Housing Corporation to harmonize the Income Support Program and the Public Housing Program in as timely a manner as possible.

3. The Committee recommends that the Department of Education ensure that training programs are linked to meaningful employment opportunities

within the community through continued consultation at the community level.

4. The Committee recommends that the Department of Education put a strong emphasis on lobbying for funding from outside agencies for training programs.
5. The Committee recommends that community workers responsible for the Income Support Program be given the training and resources to more adequately support their clients.
6. The Committee recommends that the Department of Education consider putting resources into community interagency groups that are currently dealing with social issues instead of establishing new community entities such as *Circles of Support*.
7. The Committee recommends that the Minister of Education table a progress report in the House in the fall of 2002 on the status of Income Support Program reform in Nunavut.