

COVID-19 MESSAGE FROM ISC BC REGION

UPDATE #75 / February 9, 2021

This update and earlier editions are also available on the [First Nations Public Service Secretariat website](#).



Good afternoon,

These are challenging times. Whether your community is managing an outbreak or you are trying to protect your community from COVID-19 cases, we understand the strain this puts on you and your staff. We recognize your extended efforts to support the health and safety of your members and share our thanks yet again.

We continue to work with our partners such as the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and Emergency Management British Columbia (EMBC) to ensure a coordinated approach to the evolving situation and to be able to respond as quickly as possible. A reminder that should you have questions or have identified a need for additional resources or support from us, please contact your FSO or the ISC BC Regional office at aadnc.isbccovid19.aandc@canada.ca.

We note that all COVID-19 public health orders and restrictions in BC are being kept in place. On Friday, the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, said that we need to use this time to reduce the potential for new COVID-19 variants to spread in our province, as we await more vaccine from the manufacturers. "Let's continue to work together to push our curve down – today and in the weeks ahead, so we can get to the brighter, safer days ahead," she said. Please see more on the need to restrict social gatherings – even for ceremonies and funerals – from the First Nations Health Authority later in this Update.

In the midst of all this, comes the [data review](#) led by former judge Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, which shows with quantitative evidence that too many Indigenous people in BC don't have access to family doctors and other primary-care services, and instead end up in the emergency room dealing with health crises. This leads to poorer health outcomes at the best of times, let alone during a pandemic. On January 28, the Honourable Marc Miller, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, the Honourable Patty Hajdu and the Honourable Daniel Vandal issued a [statement](#) on the work to eliminate racism against Indigenous people in the healthcare systems. In BC Region, we echo this pledge and will continue to work with our partners at the First Nations Health Authority and the Province of British Columbia to address systemic racism.

How can you
help protect your community?



UPDATES

Indigenous Community Support Fund

First Nations will now have all received their funding amendments the third round of the Indigenous Community Support Fund. Please be advised that stream 2 amendments for the ICSF2 application-based proposals which we were unable to fund in December are going out to your communities this week. We're pleased to report that all First Nations with unfunded approved proposals from ICSF2 will be issued a funding amendment.

We expect to forward the third round of ICSF stream 2 off-reserve components in about two weeks.

Income Assistance COVID-19 Funding for 2020-21 Round 2

Until the end of March 2021, Income Assistance available to members is actually going to go up \$150.

In light of ongoing needs during the pandemic, an additional \$95.2 million of COVID-19 funding has been provided for the On-reserve Income Assistance program. This is in addition to the \$270 million in supplemental, COVID-19 funding for the On-reserve Income Assistance program **announced by the Prime Minister** last May. The funding is to help ensure that First Nations individuals and families who rely on income assistance will be able to cover their essential living expenses during these uncertain times.

A letter and information package were sent to your communities on Monday, February 1. Similar to Round 1 of funding, this amount is based on a \$300 per month temporary COVID-19 benefit per Income Assistance client for three months (January - March 2021).

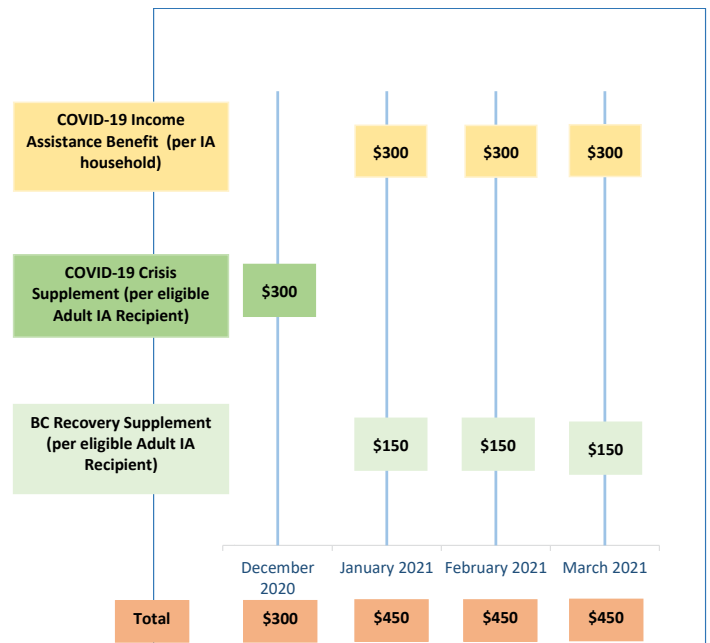
Please note that this funding is separate, and in addition to, the \$300 per adult **COVID-19 Crisis Supplement** (April to December 2020) and \$150 per adult BC Recovery Supplement (January to March 2021).

The BC Recovery Supplement is part of a package of supports announced by the Province of BC to support all British Columbians to recover from COVID-19. For more information on the BC Recovery Benefit please visit the **Provincial website**.

We recognize the unique circumstances on reserve and the additional stress that COVID-19 has placed on First Nations families and communities. Our officials are available to discuss alternative options that may be more effective than providing a benefit to clients.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to the BSDW Policy Support Line, by phone (toll-free): 1-888-440-4080, or by email: **aadnc.tsdbsoutien-bsdwsupport-bc.aandc@canada.ca**. The BSDW Policy Support Line is available Monday to Friday, 9am-3pm, should you have any questions.

The Terms and Conditions for the On-reserve Income Assistance program will continue to apply for this funding along with existing reporting requirements. In addition, an Annual Activities and Expenditures Report (DCI# 4548549) will be required with a due date of July 30, 2021.



COVID-19 Income Assistance Funding



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

● Who is eligible for ISC's temporary COVID-19 benefit?

This benefit is available to all Income Assistance clients on reserve.

Income Assistance clients are defined as the person in a family who is in receipt of Income Assistance funding and benefits. Also known as "family unit" or the "head of household."

● Is each Income Assistance client automatically entitled to receive this temporary COVID-19 benefit from ISC?

Yes, this benefit or an alternative option* needs to be provided to either to the client (head of household) (\$300), or, if the First Nation opts for the alternative option, then to any Income Assistance clients on reserve in amounts determined by the First Nation.

**An alternative option must be deemed by Chief and Council as one that better meets the immediate need(s) of Income Assistance clients.*

● What are alternative options, and when should they be considered?

Alternative options are another way (instead of a temporary COVID-19 benefit in cash) of providing additional Income Assistance supports to clients.



A First Nation community or organization may want to consider alternative options if they have already provided additional emergency benefits (during the months of January, February, and March) to clients and/or feel that there are other, more effective ways of meeting the needs of Income Assistance clients during the pandemic.

Alternative options must be discussed with ISC in advance of implementation.

● What types of activities are eligible as alternative options?

Alternative options must only include activities that are considered eligible expenditures under the **Income Assistance program's terms and conditions**.

For this funding, alternate options can consist of basic and special needs items, employment and pre-employment cost items, and/or employment and pre-employment financial assistance items available in the reference province or Yukon including, but not limited to:



INCOME ASSISTANCE: CASE MANAGEMENT & PRE-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS REGIONAL GATHERING

Hosted by the Tribal Resources Investment Corporation, the theme of the gathering is Building Strength and Resiliency in Challenging Times, and will focus on timely and relevant topics surrounding mental health, resilience, and positive change.

This workshop is intended for those involved in the delivery of Indigenous Services Canada's Income Assistance Pre-Employment Supports Program, including:

- Pre-Employment Supports Team Members
- Band Social Development Workers
- Chiefs and Council Members

If you have any event questions please contact Elizabeth Greenberg by email at tricorp@nautsamawt.com.

February 16 - 18, 2021
8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. PST

VIRTUAL
EVENT
(via ZOOM)

Please kindly
REGISTER
by Thursday, February 11th

- Providing different amounts to clients based on family composition (for an individual versus a family)
- Providing funding to clients in future months (example: Feb, March, April 2021)
- Bulk food purchases for distribution
- Community pantry (including traditional food procurement)
- Greenhouse food program
- Gift cards for food, clothing, gas
- Transportation/delivery service for food and supplies (for IA clients only or the % that represents service for IA clients)
- Cultural baskets (hunting, fishing)
- Bulk cleaning supplies
- Increased hydro costs (power, utilities) and/or purchase alternatives (including firewood)
- Virtual supports and tools (for case management in special cases to be discussed with ISC-HQ)
- Internet fees (for case management in special cases to be discussed with ISC-HQ)

All alternative options must be discussed with ISC prior to implementation.

● **When will the funds be distributed to recipients?**

ISC is working on amending community contribution agreements now and will be distributing funds to recipients shortly. Recipients can cash manage upon receipt of the funding confirmation letter.

● **When must all funds be expended?**

All funds should be provided March 31, 2021, but carry-forward of the funding may be an option depending on your funding agreement. Your ISC representative can provide further details.

More questions and answers are available through the BC Region Band Social Development Workers (BSDW) Policy Support Group on GCCollab, a Government of Canada online collaboration platform. To be added to the group or to the policy updates email list, please contact the BSDW Policy Support Line at 1-888-440-4080, or via email at aadnc.tsdbsoitien-bsdwsupport-bc.aandc@canada.ca.

THE BC RECOVERY BENEFIT

In addition to ISC supports, your members may be eligible for the **BC Recovery Benefit**. As shared in **Update 74**, an estimated 3.7 million individuals and families (90% of all BC adults), are eligible for the BC Recovery Benefit, including those on Income Assistance. Eligibility includes:

- \$1,000 for families with annual incomes under \$125,000. Families earning up to \$175,000 will qualify for a reduced benefit amount. Single-parent families also qualify for these benefit amounts. (Based on their 2019 tax returns.)
- \$500 for single people with annual incomes under \$62,500. Single people earning up to \$87,500 will qualify for a reduced benefit amount.

People can **apply online** or call 1-833-882-0020 (toll-free within North America). Call centre agents are available to assist those who need help applying or those who want to apply over the phone, Monday to Friday (excluding statutory holidays), from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Pacific time).

A modified application process is available for people who have not filed their income taxes for 2019 or those who do not have banking services. Let members know they can get support by calling the Canada Revenue Agency at 1-800-959-8281 or online at **Doing your Taxes**.

Indigenous Students to Benefit from Federal Funding to Province.

To support BC's COVID-19 response for K-12 education, the Government of Canada announced \$242.4 million in one-time funding for the 2020-21 school year, with the **first half of the investment allocated in September.**

The second instalment of this funding arrived on January 29, 2021. The BC Ministry of Education is allocating \$101.1 million to school districts and \$7.5 million to independent schools, and is providing school districts an additional \$3.5 million to manage COVID-19 exposures in schools.

As part of the February 4 announcement, the Province highlighted that in order to **support Indigenous learners attending provincial schools**, \$8.2 million of that federal funding will go towards: addressing learning loss and student health; technology for remote learning; education and mental health support; adapting classroom spaces; and, enhanced cleaning.

Additionally, all middle and secondary students will now be required to wear non-medical masks in all indoor areas. All staff, from Kindergarten to Grade 12, will also have to wear masks but elementary school students will still have the choice whether to wear one in class.

Status Card Update

Many of you have asked about Status Cards and what's being done to address backlogs caused by the pandemic.

Please be advised ISC has extended the validity date of status cards until further notice. As Indian status does not expire, service providers are encouraged to accept status cards or Temporary Confirmation of Registration Documents (TCRDs), with identification, even if the renewal or expiry date has passed. This message is also available at Canada.ca/indian-status.

TCRDs can be requested by calling 1-800-567-9604.

ISC is also accepting expired government-issued IDs toward registration and status card applications until further notice.

To request priority consideration for a registration application, write to aadnc.infopubs.aandc@canada.ca.



THE REGISTRATION AND STATUS CARD SERVICE COUNTER IN VANCOUVER IS OPEN BY APPOINTMENT

Please call **236-330-9961** to make an appointment before arriving. For application requirements, please visit Canada.ca/indian-status or call 1-800-567-9604.

FUNDING APPLICATION DEADLINES APPROACHING

In August 2020, ISC BC Region rolled out the **COVID Indigenous Community Business Fund**. BC received \$14.3 million with nearly \$12 million expended to date including \$8.7 million in Stream One funds that were distributed to First Nation communities in September. Please note that applications from community-owned businesses for Stream Two continue to be welcomed until March 1, 2021. As well, the April 2020 **COVID Economic Stimulus Package for Indigenous Businesses**, through the Aboriginal Financial Institutions network, closes on March 31, 2021.

Canada Temporarily Waives the One-week Waiting Period for Employment Insurance (EI) Claims

In response to the increase in people needing support, the Government of Canada announced **EI regulations will be amended to temporarily waive the waiting period for EI claimants** who establish a new claim between January 31, 2021 and September 25, 2021. This includes claimants of regular, fishing and special benefits.

People who open a new EI claim after January 31, 2021, and return to work before exhausting all of their weeks of entitlement will benefit from an additional week of income support, due to the removal of the waiting period.

Please note, Canadians who are eligible can be confident that this temporary measure will not change the total weeks of EI benefits for which they are entitled to, nor the service standard for payment. Claims will be automatically processed with this new waiver, meaning workers are not required to take additional steps to receive the support they need.

AFOA BC COVID-19 RECOVERY WEBINAR SERIES

BUSINESS STRATEGIES FOR INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS AND BUSINESSES

Session #1: February 17

Financial Governance: Strategies to Integrate First Nations Economic Development Corporations and Trusts

Session #2: February 24

Operating Risks of your Business and What To Do When Disaster Strikes

Session #3: March 3

Indigenous Opportunities in the Digital Economy

Session #4: March 10

IndigiMall – Virtual Shopping Mall for Indigenous Businesses

Session #5: March 17

10 Ways HR Can Impact Your Business Strategy

Session #6: March 24

Indigenous Procurement Opportunities

REGISTER NOW



Communities to Benefit from Improved Broadband Connectivity

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of reliable internet to keep us all connected. Congratulations to Saulteau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations, who will benefit from one of five recently approved transport projects being funded by the **CRTC Broadband Fund**.

The \$13.8 million being invested in Shaw Cablesystems' GP British Columbia transport fibre project will also benefit five neighbouring communities totaling 1,500 households.

The aim is to improve broadband connectivity in the region. Like other recipients, Shaw will have to provide wholesale access to their infrastructure to those entities that wish to offer retail Internet services.

It is anticipated that construction will start in the second half of 2021.

PARTNER INFORMATION

First Nation Health Authority information about COVID-19 Vaccines

As part of the FNHA's commitment to keep you informed about vaccines, the FNHA **issued a statement** about the shortage of Pfizer mRNA vaccines.

A global delay in receiving vaccine doses from Pfizer may affect the start date of some vaccination clinics of First Nations communities in British Columbia. Health officials in BC are expecting a shortfall of approximately 60,000 doses of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine over the coming weeks. While the FNHA received the Moderna vaccine, in some regions the regional health authority has provided Pfizer vaccines to support community clinics.

The FNHA says its continuing to work with provincial and federal partners to prioritize available doses for First Nations communities, however there will likely be a delay until global vaccine supplies increase.

The statement also includes a reminder that we all need to continue to practice all the recommended public health measures to stay safe, even after receiving the vaccine.

Continued Need to Avoid Gatherings

As the daily count of new COVID-19 cases remains high, a reminder that the First Nations Health Authority encourages First Nations individuals and communities to continue observing physical distancing, maintain small social bubbles, and avoid gatherings.

“While the FNHA recognizes and honours the significance of these ceremonies to our health and wellness—and particularly the trauma caused by past banning of these activities—now is not the time to hold group activities,” said the FNHA’s Acting Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Shannon McDonald.

“Large gatherings and funerals have led to several COVID-19 clusters in those communities,” said Dr. McDonald. “We know it’s difficult, but staying in your bubble is the healthiest choice. It only takes one person, who may not be showing symptoms, to pass on COVID-19.”

So to keep yourself, your family and your community safe, the FNHA recommends following the COVID-19 safety guidelines. You could modify your cultural practice or ceremony to ensure physical distancing of at least two metres (six feet). You could also conduct ceremonies with only family members who live in the same household (and have a larger event later), or consider an alternative such as a FaceTime event.

For more information, read this [FNHA advisory](#).

Supports for Youth in Care Extended Another Year

Youth and young adults set to transition from government care will be able to stay in their living arrangements for **up to one additional year** as the Province extends COVID-19 emergency measures. Minister of Children and Family Development, Mitzi Dean, said “As the economy recovers, housing and employment are recovering too. We are supporting young adults to stay in their current living arrangements, so they don’t need to transition to independence during this tumultuous time.”

All youth who are transitioning into adulthood can access housing supports to stay where they are. In addition, for the first time, those who are eligible for the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program can apply to participate in both programs at the same time. Eligible young adults using the emergency housing support may be eligible to receive up to \$350 per month through AYA, based on their unique needs and the length of their program.

All youth who are set to transition into adulthood at age 19 will continue to receive housing and financial support past their 19th birthday, until March 31, 2022. This means youth who are currently living in foster care, contracted residential agencies or with relatives through an out-of-care arrangement, such as through the extended family program, will be able to stay in their placements, and youth on Independent Living Agreements and Youth Agreements will continue to receive financial support. Social workers will continue transition planning with young adults who are ready to move on from their current placements.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Lockdowns and limited travel options create mental health concerns. It can be challenging to keep people in their homes and manage the frustration in community with people wanting to leave.

The Hope for Wellness Helpline provides immediate, culturally safe, telephone crisis intervention support for First Nations, Inuit and Métis, 24 hours a day, seven days a week (1-855-242-3310 or the online chat at hopeforwellness.ca).

Additionally community members can call the First Nations Health Authority’s 24/7 culturally safe KUU-US Crisis Response Services at 1-800-588-8717 (or 250-723-2040 for child and youth / 250-723-4050 for adult and Elder).

USEFUL LINKS

- **Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Indigenous communities**
- **COVID-19 vaccines and Indigenous peoples**
 - » **Moderna COVID-19 vaccine: what you should know**
 - » **Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine: what you should know**
 - » **Canada's COVID-19 Immunization Plan**
- **COVID-19 Awareness Resources and Videos**
 - » **COVID-19: How vaccines are developed (video)**
 - » **Vaccine development and approval in Canada (infographic)**
 - » **What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine for Canada (poster)**
 - » **Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Statement Series on COVID-19: mRNA Vaccines**
- **Taking care of your mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **Protect your health and your community** – Preventing infection, handwashing and drinking water advisories, how to prepare, what to do if you are sick or caring for someone sick
- **First Nations Health Authority – Information for community leaders**
- **COVID-19 BC Support App and Self-Assessment Tool**
The app will let you receive the latest updates, trusted resources, and alerts. The Self-Assessment Tool is built in.
- **New financial support** – developed by ISC, this page provides financial support information for Indigenous individuals, students, businesses, organizations and communities.
- **Latest Service Canada programs and services posters**
 - » **General**
 - » **For seniors**
 - » **For youth**
 - » **For businesses**

REGIONAL CONTACTS

We've set up a dedicated email for any non-health COVID-19-related questions and requests: aadnc.iscbccovid19.aandc@canada.ca.

- **Regional Director General**
Catherine Lappe / 604-340-7703
- **Associate Regional Director General**
Bill Guerin / 604-803-9476
- **Director, Community Infrastructure**
Paula Santos / 604-790-8451
- **Director, Programs and Partnerships**
Wendy Rogers / 604-363-8117
- **Director, Lands and Economic Development**
David Russell / 604-817-2644
- **Director, Funding Services**
Jody Kaden / 236-334-4742
- **Director, Child and Family Services**
Chiara Taylor / 778-668-9067
- **Director, Community Development**
James Moxon / 604-367-8241
- **Director, Corporate Services**
Harold Powell / 604-219-1737

Should you have any COVID-19 health-related questions, the First Nations Health Authority would like you to use the following:

- **For general inquiries:** COVID19@fnha.ca
- **For FNHA and community health care providers (CHNs, HD, etc.) or CDE planning questions:** CDMgmt@fnha.ca
- **For individual health care and COVID-19 questions:** 811 or primary care provider or contact the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day 1-855-344-3800 or email virtualdoctor@rccbc.ca.

Should you have any questions regarding the Emergency Management Assistance Program, please contact our Duty Officer at 604-209-9709 or bcaandc.do@canada.ca.

