



Raising Your Voice for Income Assistance

Inclusion Saskatchewan



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Raising Your Voice: A Toolkit for Advocacy in Saskatchewan is a toolkit created by Inclusion Saskatchewan to help make advocating for change more accessible. It can help you advocate for change in the provincial government by sharing your own experiences with the people who make decisions.

This resource, *Raising Your Voice for Income Assistance*, will tell you some of the specific issues that are causing barriers for people with disabilities who need income support. It will also tell you some of the things that could be helpful to share with your MLA or a Minister to advocate for systemic change.



About Income Assistance

Income Assistance programs are provincial services that provide money to people who have barriers to working full time.

In Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Social Services is responsible for managing income assistance programs, including Saskatchewan Income Support (SIS) and Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID).

This means the Ministry of Social Services is responsible for managing:

- The eligibility criteria for SIS and SAID
- Creating the policies that SIS and SAID follow
- The amount of money people are able to receive from SIS and SAID
- The staff needed to run the income assistance programs

Issues Your MLA Should Know About

Funding Levels

Both SAID and SIS provide such low amounts of funding that everyone receiving them lives below the poverty line in Saskatchewan. Because funding is so low, many people experience difficulty meeting their basic needs due to the rising costs of food and rent.

Some of the causes of this are:

- The basic income provided does not meet the cost of living for things like groceries, clothing, and other basic goods
- The housing allowance provided does not cover average rents in any community in Saskatchewan
- SAID only allows \$200 a year in gifts to be exempt, which means if people receive any more than this, their benefits are reduced dollar for dollar
- SAID and SIS allow wage exemptions, but the exemptions are low and making more than allowed in a year means people risk being removed from the programs. This means they also lose Supplementary Health Benefits

Here are a few key messages about funding levels that you can consider sharing with your MLA or the Minister of Social Services:

- The basic rates for SAID and SIS funding are too low, and keep people living in deep poverty, struggling to meet their most basic needs. I want you to increase the funding that recipients of income assistance receive so that they can live a good life.
- People should be encouraged to work and be allowed to have gifts from the people who love them without worrying about losing their income assistance or health benefits. I want you to increase the amount that people who receive SAID and SIS can get in gifts and employment without it affecting their benefits.

Complicated to Access

SAID and SIS provide income assistance, but have very complex policies and practices that make navigating the system very difficult at times. For example:

- Application forms can be hard to fill out. The application processes are complicated and have many steps.
- It can be difficult to find out what benefits you are entitled to or how to access additional funding.
- The policy manual is not in plain language and is very long.
- It can be hard to reach your SAID or SIS worker, or they might not be able to help with what you need. Some people have also felt that the staff were disrespectful or unhelpful to them.

Here are a few key messages about income assistance being complicated to access that you can consider sharing with your MLA or the Minister of Social Services:

- All forms, policies, and outlines of available benefits should be written in plain language. Application processes should be simple to navigate. I want you to make sure that these are all made accessible for people with disabilities.
- SAID and SIS offices should be fully staffed with people who are knowledgeable about the benefits that are available. The staff should also be understanding and aware of the barriers faced by people with disabilities. I want you to update staff policies to ensure they can meet the needs of the people who access income assistance programs.



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supporting people with intellectual disabilities