

Income Support Programs Policy Brief

Income support programs are at risk of budget cuts, while demand for them continues to increase.

The Problem

Over 130,000 people are living in poverty in Nova Scotia. In addition to the Government of Nova Scotia's Employment Services and Income Assistance (ESIA) program for people experiencing unemployment, the Government of Nova Scotia also provides various income support programs that support people in various circumstances with cost of living. These programs include the Nova Scotia Child Benefit (in combination with the Canada Child Benefit), the Affordable Living Tax Credit, the Heating Assistance Rebate, and the Poverty Reduction Credit.

These programs provide a disconnected and piece-meal response to poverty and to the affordability crisis faced by Nova Scotians. Each program has different eligibility criteria and requirements and there is no coordinated approach across the various benefit administering departments to ensure they provide adequate support for households struggling to afford basic needs.

Demand for these programs also far exceeds the budgets allocated by the Government of Nova Scotia each year. Improvements to these programs are crucial to support people struggling to make ends meet in the immediate term.

Our Demand

Feed Nova Scotia is calling on the Government of Nova Scotia to improve access and impact of the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, the Affordable Living Tax Credit, the Heating Assistance Rebate, and the Poverty Reduction Credit programs.

Why?

- Current eligibility for these programs falls far below the poverty line, resulting in thousands of struggling households not qualifying for support.
- None of these programs are indexed to inflation, meaning that the extent of support they provide to recipient households is decreasing over time.

- The government cut the budget for the Heating Assistance Rebate in 2025, resulting in nearly 50,000 people losing financial support, despite rising energy bills.
- Indexing these programs to the poverty line and to inflation is crucial to ensure households living in poverty across Nova Scotia can access adequate support.

The Impact

How will this policy change make a difference?

Expansion of these programs will enable more people to get the support they need, especially as the cost of living continues to rise at alarming rates. Until affordability issues are addressed, we will see more people needing more from these supports.

What will happen if the Government of Nova Scotia does not make this change?

Food insecurity rates are continuing to rise year after year, reaching record highs. We know that income is one of the primary drivers of food insecurity and until supports are improved, food insecurity will continue to get worse.

Have questions or want to learn more? Contact us at advocacy@feednovascotia.ca