

INCOME SUPPORT PROGRAM REFORM

Policy Primer



The Government of Nova Scotia runs various income support programs, including the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, the Heating Assistance Rebate, and the Poverty Reduction Credit.

Although these programs were developed to assist people with the cost of living, their qualifying criteria and cut-off thresholds exclude many struggling households living below the poverty line. The value of each benefit also weakens every year as inflation grows and the cost of essentials continues to escalate.

With over 90% of food bank clients in Nova Scotia reporting cost of living as their primary reason for needing emergency food support[1], it's clear that these programs are not doing enough.

That's why Feed Nova Scotia is calling on the provincial government to improve both the access and the impact of their key income support programs.

What do income programs offer?

- **The Nova Scotia Child Benefit** is a monthly payment of \$127 per child to families with children under 18 years old. Households with income above \$34,000 are not eligible for the benefit.
- **The Heating Assistance Rebate Program** is an annual payment of \$400 to single person households earning less than \$30,000 per year, or to multi-person households with a combined net household income of \$45,000 or less.
- **The Poverty Reduction Credit** is a quarterly payment of \$125 (totalling \$500 per year) to single people and to couples with no children who receive Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) and live on incomes below \$16,000 per year.

Why are improvements needed?

- **Many struggling households do not qualify for support.** Current income eligibility requirements for these programs remain lower than the poverty line. This results in thousands of people living on or below the poverty line who do not have access to support.
- **The impact of these programs is weakening over time.** None of these income support programs are adjusted to match annual inflation rates. This means that the extent of support provided to recipient households continues to decrease over time as the cost of living continues to rise.

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- **Recent cuts to income support programs have made the affordability crisis worse.** In 2025, the provincial government cut the budget and adjusted eligibility for the Heating Assistance Rebate Program, resulting in nearly 8,000 households suddenly losing financial support, despite rising energy bills and a cost-of-living crisis[2].

What specific improvements are needed?

Nova Scotia's income support programs need to effectively support people living in poverty and struggling with the cost of living.

So we are calling on the provincial government to:

- Adjust eligibility for the Nova Scotia Child Benefit to the Market Basket Measure – Canada's official poverty line –and index it to inflation.
- Adjust eligibility for the Poverty Reduction Credit to 75% of the poverty line based on household size and expand eligibility to include workers.
- Reinststate the thresholds and benefit amounts that were in place for the Heating Assistance Rebate Program before the 2025 program cuts and index them to inflation.

Want to learn more?

Contact us at advocacy@feednovascotia.ca

References

1. Feed Nova Scotia. 2026. [Quarterly Report on Food Bank Visits](#).
2. CBC Nova Scotia. September 2026. [Thousands of Nova Scotians denied heating assistance would have qualified if not for cut](#).