

The Honourable Deb Schulte
Minister of Seniors and Housing
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada
K1A 0A6

August 30, 2021

RE: CERB Impact on Guaranteed Income Supplement

Dear Honourable Deb Schulte,

The Community Leadership Council representing the Community-based Seniors Serving (CBSS) Sector in Alberta is gravely concerned about the impact of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) clawback on vulnerable seniors who received Canada Emergency Response Benefits in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

CBSS organizations from across Alberta are hearing from numerous seniors stating they will no longer receive their full GIS payment due to receiving CERB processed by the Canada Revenue Agency in 2020. Other seniors who received CERB through Service Canada and have been cut off from GIS now have to complete an income estimate form to have their GIS re-instated. Based on the number of calls, and publicly available information about CERB, we are estimating this is impacting 1,000s of Alberta seniors. Both seniors and the CBSS organizations that support them, are unclear on processes and any recourse to address this unexpected impact on GIS.

Many seniors were not aware of the implications when applying for CERB. We strongly believe that this was due to the unclear and confusing communication this population received about the benefits, particularly CERB and the different funding streams. As you know, information on benefits was changing rapidly and there was a high level of anxiety for seniors when they were trying to navigate these resources. Our organizations are hearing from seniors that they were confused regarding the eligibility for CERB, and that media coverage regarding scarcity of items during the pandemic, and heightened anxiety about the future led them to apply for the benefit. Additionally, many of these seniors thought they were eligible for CERB, as they were working part-time before their employment was ended due to the pandemic. We believe that seniors should have been warned during the application process that receiving CERB could put their GIS at risk. This warning would have prevented many applications and this unfortunate situation.

Provincially, it is not yet clear whether these seniors will lose their eligibility for subsidized housing. This decision will be up to individual housing management bodies to determine. If seniors lose access to subsidized housing, the resulting chaos will put extraordinary strain on already stretched social service agencies in the CBSS sector, not to mention the mental and physical harm experienced by individuals who may

become homeless at an older age. Further, if social networks and supports collapse, older adults are likely to experience crisis, putting their health at risk and potentially leading to hospitalization and greater public costs.

The Community Leadership Council requests a prompt solution to this concern to ensure that vulnerable, low-income seniors are not forced further into poverty.

We look forward to hearing your response and continuing to work together to address the needs of seniors in Alberta.

Sincerely,

Alberta CBSS Sector Community Leadership Council

Cc: Josephine Pon, Minister of Seniors and Housing (Alberta)
CORE Canada
CORE Alberta