



**SOCIAL WORK PRINCIPLES TO
GUIDE INCOME SECURITY REFORM**

The Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers supports the following principles that have been developed as part of our response to income security program reform currently underway in Saskatchewan. The principles are based on the perspective that economic security is a human right and that when people's economic stability is secured the result is a healthier society.

It is the position of the SASW that the reform of income security programs in Saskatchewan should be guided by the following principles:

1. Ensuring adequate economic security must be the pre-eminent goal

The primary goal in income security programs is to provide an adequate material standard of living that will ensure well-being, dignity and self-determination for individuals and families who are in financial need. The amount and structure of benefits must be geared to meet the needs of children and youth who are part of the family receiving benefits. Income security benefits should be calculated to include the cost of adequate and nutritious food, decent and affordable housing, clothing and other personal necessities, utility costs, transportation, and any additional expenses related to health needs or a disability of the individual recipient of benefits and/or a dependent family member.

2. Social activation goals must be voluntarily undertaken by clients

Social activation goals for clients may include labour market entry, occupational or trades training, educational completion, enhancement of parenting skills, rehabilitation in relation to a disability, or recovery from addiction. Income security programs may be involved in helping clients to achieve such goals.

SASW supports such efforts, provided that:

- ensuring economic security, with no requirements or conditions, takes precedence as the primary goal (see principle 1 above)
- client participation in social activation programs is based on encouragement and incentives, rather than the loss or reduction of core benefits for non-participation or non-compliance
- adequate supports (e.g. child care, affordable transportation, accommodation of disabling conditions) are provided to clients to facilitate their voluntary participation in social activation programs

3. Income support programs must be delivered to clients in an individualized, respectful and professional manner

Service and benefits to clients in income support programs must always be treated with courtesy, respect, competence, and flexibility. Income support programs must be sensitive to individual circumstances of clients. In particular programs must accommodate special needs related to the health status and/or disabilities of the applicant (or a member of his/her household), and responsibilities for children and any other dependent family members.

Service to applicants and beneficiaries should be provided in a timely fashion, in ways that are readily understandable to clients and their family members, and with a minimum of 'red tape'.

To meet these standards, income security programs must provide applicants and beneficiaries with ready access to social workers and other professionally trained staff who can provide appropriate forms of counselling, specialized support, and referral as necessary to other resources.

Information technology (e.g. call centres, on-line application forms) should only be used for dispensing basic information and expediting routine administrative procedures, and when its use can be clearly demonstrated to be in the best interests of clients.

4. Program administration in income security must be accountable to the public and to the best interests of clients

Income security programs must be delivered in ways that ensure:

- maximal simplicity and transparency in program design, administration, and delivery of benefits
- points of services access (e.g. local offices, toll-free phone lines, websites) that are readily identifiable and easy to use
- service provision in the public sector, through government offices and community-based organizations that are provided with adequate resources
- the right of clients to appeal administrative decisions in regard to eligibility, access to basic and specialized supports, and decisions to terminate benefits