

END HOMELESSNESS

ST. JOHN'S #WECANENDIT

May 8, 2020

END HOMELESSNESS ST. JOHN'S CALLS FOR AESL INCOME SUPPORT RECIPIENTS TO MAINTAIN HEALTH AND SUPPLEMENTAL BENEFITS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Given the unprecedented circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's declaration of a public health emergency, **End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ) is requesting the province institute measures to ensure all Income Support recipients who have received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) can maintain health and supplemental benefits for the duration of the public health state of emergency.**

On April 9, 2020 the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour released a public advisory stating that:

It is important to note, individuals cannot receive both provincial Income Support and the CERB at the same time. Should Income Support clients receive the CERB, they will no longer qualify for Income Support, and benefits will be suspended immediately. An overpayment will be set up on Income Support files where there is an overlap in payments from the CERB.

It is understood that CERB was implemented without the usual checks and balances in order to deliver payments to Canadians quickly and easily in a time of great need and uncertainty for a period of up to 16 weeks. Individuals have had to make the best decisions for themselves and their families based on available information, even as both federal and provincial policies are shifting beneath their feet.

EHSJ's aim in writing this letter is to ensure that Income Support recipients who access CERB are not inadvertently penalized by putting their health and supplemental benefits in jeopardy during and after the pandemic. While individuals are able to apply for the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Plan (NLPDP), this places a lot of strain on provincial systems to shift people from one program to another for the sake of 16 weeks. In this uncertain time, it is more important than ever for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and especially our vulnerable neighbours, to maintain access to the healthcare supports they need for daily living. Any gap in supports is likely to result in preventable health-related emergencies and further exacerbate public health risks. **For the sake of 16 weeks, it is unlikely that suspending health and supplementary benefits will result in net savings, and it will inevitably result in poorer health outcomes for our most vulnerable neighbours.**

Therefore, it is critical that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador ensure all Income Support recipients who receive CERB are able to maintain their health and supplemental benefits.

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