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Over 100 Organizations from Across Canada Call for Immediate Reinstatement of the GIS for Low-Income Working Seniors

TORONTO - The Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC), along with 106 organizations from across Canada, is calling for immediate action for low-income seniors who have seen a reduction or a complete loss of their GIS benefit since the end of July 2021.

“This isn't the first time we've seen people who accessed CERB lose regular benefits,” says ISAC Senior Policy Analyst, Devorah Kobluk. “We saw this happen for people on social assistance early in the pandemic, and the common denominator is that the people affected are living on low incomes.”

The issue of CERB-GIS interaction was raised by advocates and some politicians in early August, following the reduced cheques in late July. The issue has affected low-income working seniors across the country and is particularly concerning given the high rates of GIS uptake for senior women, and racialized and First Nations seniors.

Legal clinics in Ontario started sounding the alarm in August, right before the election was called.

“The government didn't address this before the election and we need them to do so now,” says Claudia Calabro, Communications Specialist and Organizer with ISAC. “Affected seniors have lost up to \$2400 over four months. This is a lot of money for people living on low incomes. It puts people in the position of making impossible choices. This loss of income means having to choose between paying for food, bills, transportation, or medicine.”

Legal clinics across Ontario have heard stories from affected seniors; some have had to borrow money, dip into savings, or sell their possessions to make ends meet because they have lost their GIS benefit.

“We are very worried about the increased risk of homelessness for seniors,” says Calabro. “CERB is causing widespread issues for people living on low incomes more than a year after it has ceased to exist.”

GIS is calculated based on the past year's income which means that unless the government exempts CERB from the calculation, affected seniors will experience reduced income until July 2022. The signatories are calling for action now.

“Every month that passes compounds this problem for seniors,” says Kobluk. “They simply cannot wait.”

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