



Minister Announces Biggest Social Assistance Increase in 40 Years



Hon. Buckley Belanger

Everyone deserves an opportunity

Everyone deserves to share in the province's success. This government is committed to

providing opportunities for all Saskatchewan people. Regardless of needs and circumstances, everyone should have the chance to contribute to and be included in their communities. We are committed to a province where no one is left behind.

For some people, living independently may require some accommodations, support, or guidance. This is where our *Building Independence* strategy comes in. It is our foundation and we continue to build on its success. Our programs and services are aimed at improving the quality of life for individuals and families, and helping them on the road to employment.

Input and consultation with the community and our clients is vital to the continuous improvement of our services and supports. By meeting with community stakeholders and surveying clients, we gained a better understanding of concerns and whether or not we're meeting people's needs. We

welcomed the feedback, plan to continue seeking it on a regular basis, and have made some changes to our programs and supports based on what we heard. Our goal is to be flexible and responsive.

In Saskatchewan, we continue to believe the best way to achieve financial independence is by working. We want people to stay employed, and to enjoy a productive work life. This is how we can help people achieve a sense of pride and accomplishment, a sense of directly contributing to the well being of their families and communities.

Lending a Hand

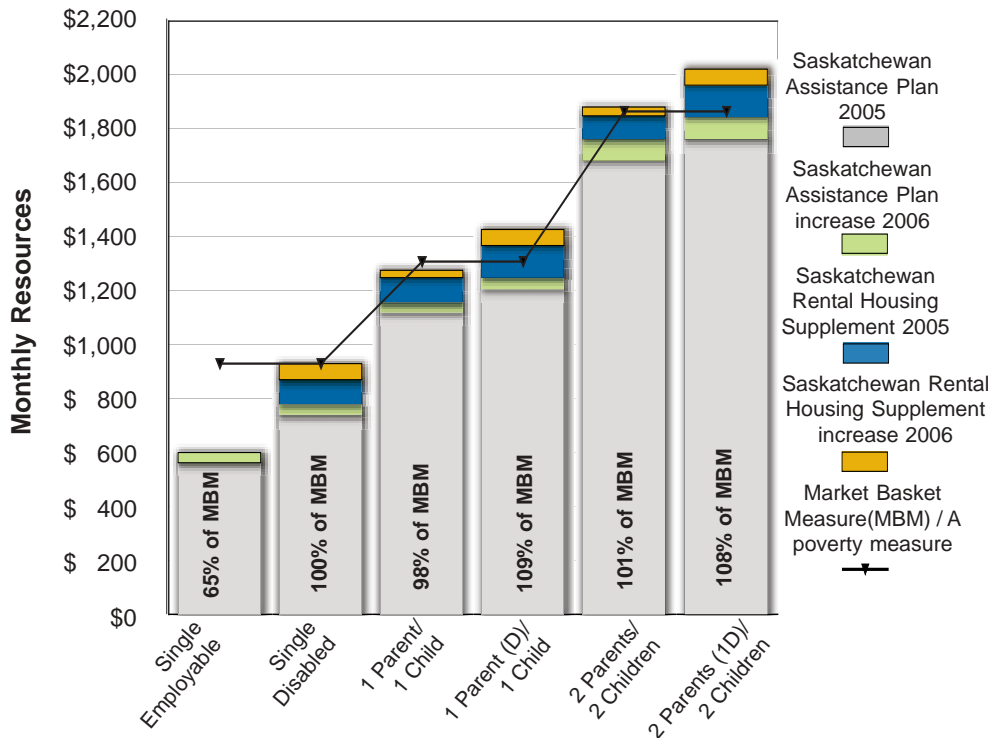
In this year's budget, we're introducing nearly \$17 million in income support enhancements, targeted at improving the quality of life for low-income people and families, and helping people move from social assistance to jobs, wherever possible.

We are investing \$14.2 million to increase the adult allowance rates for both the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan (SAP) and the Transitional Employment Allowance (TEA) by \$40 a month. This is the single largest increase since the social assistance program was introduced nearly 40 years ago. The increase to the SAP basic allowance will benefit about 16,000 people.

Budget Highlights

- \$14.2 million for increases to adult allowance in the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan and Transitional Employment Allowance
- \$1.5 million for enhancements to Transitional Employment Allowance Utility allowances
- \$1.15 million to enhance Saskatchewan Employment Supplement
- \$3.6 million increase to the Child Care Subsidy
- \$10 million for Community-Based Organizations
- \$2 million increase to improve access to services for people with intellectual disabilities
- \$1.4 million increase in funding for the Cognitive Disability Strategy
- \$6 million increase to care for children outside the home, including a cost of living adjustment for foster care and assisted adoption
- \$700,000 increase in funding for First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies
- \$600,000 to support drug addicted youth
- \$53.4 million for over 900 affordable housing units, including over 90 in the North
- \$13.4 million for repair and renovation program to improve over 1,300 homes
- \$9 million to help low and moderate income homeowners to improve energy efficiency

Impact of 2006-07 Income Support Initiatives on Social Assistance Clients



(D) - Disabled

subsidy. This year's budget includes \$3.6 million to increase and enhance child care subsidies – the largest single year increase in the program's history. This increase directly benefits low-income families who are working or looking for work, by making licensed child care more affordable.

When it takes effect in September, the increased subsidy will cover over 85 per cent of average child care fees and be more equitable across the province. The subsidy will also reach more families.

As we work to strengthen this province's unbreakable social fabric,

We are investing another \$1 million to provide an additional \$10 a month to the TEA general living allowance, similar to the SAP increase in last year's budget. More than 6,000 people will benefit from the TEA general living allowance increase.

Another \$1.5 million dollars will boost funding for utilities provided under TEA to ensure utility rates remain affordable.

The Saskatchewan Employment Supplement (SES) helps people who have made the transition to jobs, offsetting the child-related

costs of working and providing more income to families. This year, we're enhancing SES by \$1.15 million, which will increase benefits and enable more people to qualify.

More Support for Children and Families

Quality, affordable early learning and child care continues to be top of mind for all Canadians. In this province, we continue to move ahead our made-in-Saskatchewan plan for early learning and child care.

Our role in this department is administering the child care

we are continuing our support for vulnerable families. Currently there are about 750 foster homes in the province, caring for about 1,750 children and youth. To help with the costs of raising these children, the budget includes a two per cent cost of living adjustment for foster care, therapeutic foster care and assisted adoption.

This year's budget also includes an increased investment of \$6 million for children who require care outside of their homes, such as with foster families or extended family. This increase will help us address the

increased needs of children requiring care.

In this province we share our responsibility for child welfare with many First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies and work closely with them with the same goal: protecting children. This year, we are increasing our funding by \$700,000 to cover the cost to these agencies when the department transfers cases to them.

This department has played a key role in developing a strategy that complements Project Hope and meets the needs of drug addicted youth. Our budget includes \$600,000 to provide financial support for these youth.

HomeFirst - Making a Difference

One of the keys to building strong families and communities is access to housing. HomeFirst, the province's five-year \$200 million strategy, will continue to bring safe, adequate, affordable housing and home ownership within reach for thousands of lower-income families.

This year we are making the Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement available to people with cognitive disabilities. Announced last year, the supplement provides support to both families and to individuals with disabilities so that rental housing is more affordable.

We're also increasing the rates an average of \$30 a month. This brings the maximum subsidy for families up to \$151 per month; the maximum for a person with disabilities to \$150 per month; and the maximum for a combined family and disability benefit up to \$227 per month.

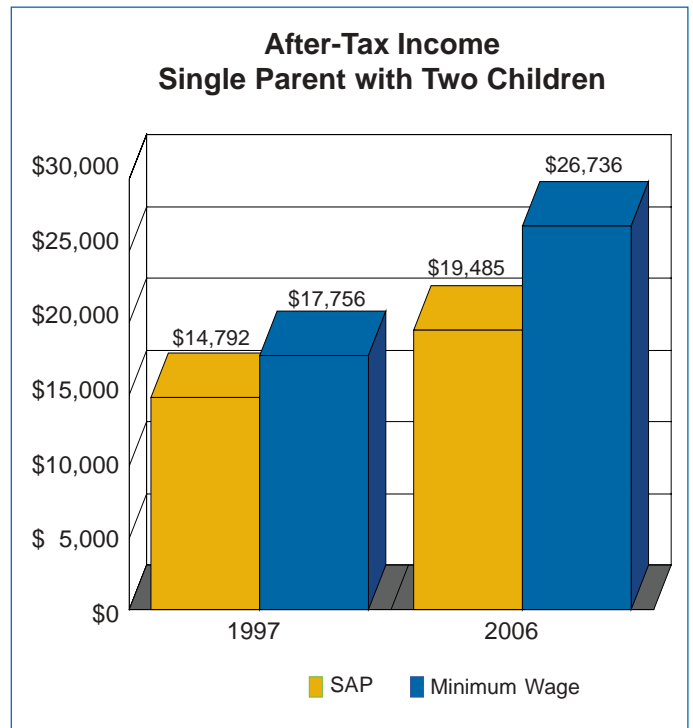
Another goal of HomeFirst is to improve the quality of housing available to low-income people. To help make housing upgrades more affordable, the department offers several renovation programs.

This year, there is \$13.4 million available for these programs with a target of improving over 1,300 homes.

We are also committed to providing people with the chance of realizing their dreams of home ownership. Through the Centenary Affordable Housing Program and an investment of \$53.4 million, this year over 900 affordable units will be delivered in Saskatchewan, including over 90 in the north.

Affordable energy efficient upgrades are something else this budget will deliver for low and moderate-income Saskatchewan people. This is a \$9 million investment.

Under Saskatchewan EnergyShare, we have two programs to help low to moderate-income homeowners pay for home improvements such as: heating system upgrades, draft proofing, insulation, and window replacements.



The programs offer varying grants up to \$4,700 depending on the homeowner's income level, where they live, and the number and age of people living in the home.

Our Partners: Community-Based Organizations

Like many other government departments, we rely heavily on hundreds of community-based organizations or CBOs to deliver vital programs and services on our behalf. Services range from group homes for people with disabilities to mobile crisis units for children and families.

To help human service community-based organizations attract and retain qualified staff, there is an additional \$10 million in this year's budget. Part of a \$30 million, three-year commitment, this increase is a significant step toward closing the wage gap and bringing stability to the CBO system. It is one way we can help ensure that, here in Saskatchewan, our citizens with disabilities will

have the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential.

Supporting Persons with Disabilities

This year's provincial budget includes more than \$12 million in increased funding to support the inclusion of people with disabilities in our communities and economy. The key investments are in income support, health, housing, inclusion in families and communities, and accessibility.

Besides the increased investments in income support, which fall under this \$12 million enhancement, Community Resources' share of the increase specifically to support people with intellectual disabilities is \$2 million, plus \$1.4 million for the Cognitive Disability Strategy.

Looking Ahead

Since the introduction of *Building Independence* in 1997, over 7,800 families, including over 17,000 children, no longer rely on social assistance. More families receive active support under one or more of our programs, as they work or participate in training.

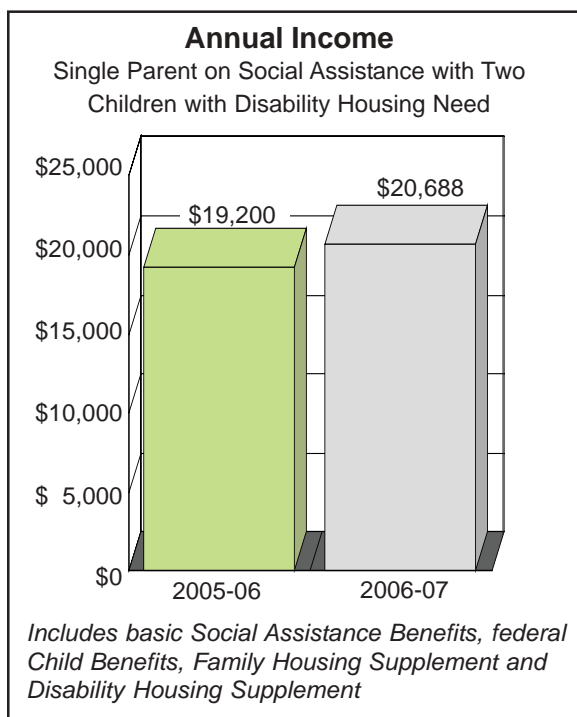
Over the past year, the social assistance caseload continued its steady year-over-year decline. This is not because we are reducing benefits or changing the criteria. In fact, we have introduced an historic increase in benefits. And these increases are making a significant difference in enhancing the quality of the lives of clients.

We recognize the success of *Building Independence* and strides we've made in reducing poverty, and the work that remains to be done.

As the new Minister of Community Resources, I am pleased to be a part of a department that plays such an integral role in what the Premier calls, "the unbreakable social fabric" of this province and making sure the door to opportunities is open to everyone. And that no one is left behind.



Buckley Belanger
Minister of Community Resources



The \$2 million will help to develop new and enhanced community-based residential and day program supports for people with intellectual disabilities. The \$1.4 million will help to improve access to supports and services required by people with cognitive disabilities and their families.