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## **PROPOSED SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REFORMS ANNOUNCED**

WHITEHORSE – Health and Social Services Minister Brad Cathers today announced proposed changes to social assistance rates and program structures, resulting from the most comprehensive review of social assistance conducted since the program’s inception.

“The proposed changes include increases to social assistance rates and an incentive package to encourage social assistance recipients to enter the workforce,” Cathers said. “There would also be a new program with enhanced services for persons with severe disabilities who are eligible for social assistance.”

The review found that nearly 70% of social assistance recipients have been on social assistance on more than one occasion. It determined that often these recipients ended up back on assistance because the current program structure encourages dependency, by clawing back every employment dollar an individual makes for a period of three months, and then allowing them to retain only \$1 out of every \$4 earned as they enter the workforce.

The proposed new structure would eliminate the three-month waiting period for the earned income exemption, and will allow those working recipients to keep \$2 out of every \$4 earned. “This will encourage recipients to work more hours and assist them in building personal savings to prevent future dependency,” Cathers added.

The reentry period would be available for a maximum of three years, recognizing the fact that clients who are able to remain in the work force for a period of two years or more typically never return to social assistance again.

Proposed changes would also include increases in rate categories to reflect current costs; increases to the food allowance to reflect the ‘market basket’ calculation; and enhanced services with improved access for persons with severe disabilities.

Prior to proceeding with these proposed changes, the Yukon government is undertaking consultations with First Nations governments and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Once this work is complete, the government will make its final decision on changes to the Social Assistance Program.

Recommendations from the social assistance review included two other initiatives: the increase to the Child Care Subsidy to assist low-income families which was announced earlier this month, and another initiative to assist low-income families anticipated to be announced in early December.

“This proposed social assistance reform is in keeping with the government’s commitment to review the Social Assistance Program to ensure the adequacy of rates and provide incentives to recipients to enter the workforce and scale the welfare wall,” Cathers stated.

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