

April 13, 2005

Revised

New funding for AISH and seniors programs in *Budget 2005*

Seniors and Community Supports budget highlights:

- \$52-million increase for programs to help seniors with the cost of dental and optical care, as well as yearly increases to the education portion of their property taxes.
- \$80-million increase for AISH, including \$45 million to implement MLA committee recommendations.
- \$29-million increase for seniors lodge grants, transitional housing, the homeless, and family and specialized housing.

Edmonton... More than \$176 million in new funding for seniors programs, the renewal of the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program and provincial housing programs highlight the 2005-06 budget for Seniors and Community Supports.

"Albertans can be proud of the many programs that offer assistance to those who need our help the most," said Minister Yvonne Fritz. "Budget 2005 demonstrates our continued support of existing programs, fulfills our commitment to renew the AISH program, and includes a substantial investment in new seniors programs."

Total spending for the ministry will reach \$1.6 billion in 2005-06 - up more than 12 per cent over last year's budget forecast for all the program areas now under the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports.

New seniors programs

Budget 2005 confirms the government's commitment to Alberta seniors with \$52 million in new spending in support of three programs:

- **enhanced dental and optical programs,** which will provide assistance for basic dental services and prescription eyeglasses. These programs will provide the most assistance to low-income seniors, while providing partial coverage to seniors with moderate incomes.
- a new program which will reimburse all senior homeowners for the year-to-year increases in the **education portion of their property taxes.** (See backgrounder for details on new programs and enhancements to the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program announced August 2004).

AISH program

The budget also includes an increase of \$80 million for the AISH program bringing total spending to more than \$488 million. This year, approximately \$55 million - including \$45 million in new funding - will be

committed in response to the report and recommendations of the MLA AISH Review Committee, which will be released on April 15, along with details on how new dollars will be used to increase benefits to clients.

In addition, approximately \$35 million of the new funding will be used to address AISH caseload increases as well as other increased program costs, such as prescription drug coverage and other health benefits provided to the program's 32,000 clients.

Housing and homeless support

New spending of \$16.7 million will be used to address increased costs associated with the operation of family and specialized housing units across Alberta. This includes funding for the maintenance and upkeep of the approximately 25,000 provincially owned or supported units.

Also, support for the operation of homeless shelters located in major municipalities throughout the province will rise by \$6 million in 2005-06 bringing total provincial support for transitional housing and the homeless to more than \$23 million a year.

An additional \$6 million will be used for Seniors Lodge Assistance grants, bringing total program spending to \$21.7 million a year. This funding helps support units that provide accommodation, meals and housekeeping to approximately 8,900 low- and moderate-income seniors throughout Alberta.

Budget 2005 also includes \$25 million to conclude phase one of the Canada-Alberta Affordable Housing Agreement, which has led to the development of approximately 2,400 affordable housing units in Alberta during the last three years. The province is currently discussing the possibility of a second phase of this successful program with the federal government.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities

An increase of \$21 million for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) will bring total program spending to more than \$489 million annually. The new funding will be used to address increased caseloads and program delivery costs.

Other new spending highlights:

- enhancements to the Alberta Seniors Benefit program announced August 2004 will bring total program spending to \$249 million;
- a \$4.5 million increase over forecast for the Alberta Aids to Daily Living Program, which was transferred to the ministry on April 1, 2005 from Health and Wellness;
- an \$800,000 increase for the Office of the Public Guardian to increase the number of staff to provide better services to Albertans; and
- a \$400,000 increase to implement changes to the *Protection for the Persons in Care Act* and for investigation services.

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Revised:

This news release was amended on April 14, 2005.

Attachments:

Budget 2005 - Details on new and enhanced seniors programs.

Media enquiries may be directed to:

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To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

This news release is available on the Ministry homepage at: <http://www.seniors.gov.ab.ca>

Background

April 13, 2005

Budget 2005 - details on new and enhanced seniors programs

Dental Assistance Program for Seniors - estimated 2005-06 cost: \$45 million*

* includes \$35 million in new spending, plus \$10 million previously allocated for dental and optical coverage under the Special Needs Assistance Program.

- Will provide low- and moderate-income seniors coverage for basic dental health procedures (e.g. examinations and x-rays, preventative services, fillings, extractions, root canals and full and partial dentures). Bridges, crowns and cosmetic procedures are not covered.
- Amounts covered per service are based on the average amount charged by dental professionals as identified by the Alberta Dental Association and College, and the Alberta College of Denturists.
- Seniors are eligible for up to \$5,000 total coverage every five years.
- Seniors earning under \$20,000 per year (under \$40,000 per senior couple) will be eligible for up to the maximum amount covered by the program. Seniors earning between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year (or \$40,000 and \$60,000 per senior couple) will be eligible for partial assistance, ranging from 10% to 99% coverage.
- Seniors will be responsible for any amounts charged above the maximum amount covered by the program. Some dental professionals charge different amounts for their services.
- Seniors can access the program directly through their dental office or by contacting the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports. All seniors who have applied to the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program have already been enrolled in the dental assistance program.

Optical Assistance Program for Seniors - estimated 2005-06 cost: \$7 million

- Will provide low- and moderate-income seniors with coverage for prescription eyeglasses.
- Seniors earning under \$20,000 per year (under \$40,000 per senior couple) will be eligible for up to the maximum amount covered by the program - up to \$230 for one pair of prescription eyeglasses every three years.
- Seniors earning between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year (between \$40,000- \$60,000 per senior couple) will be eligible for partial assistance - up to \$115 for one pair of prescription eyeglasses every three years.
- A senior must provide a valid receipt from a service provider and submit it to the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports for reimbursement.
- Magnifying glasses, over-the-counter reading glasses and sunglasses are not covered by the program.
- All seniors who have applied to the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program have already been enrolled in the

new optical assistance program.

Education Property Tax Assistance for Seniors - estimated 2005-06 cost: \$10 million

- Senior homeowners will be reimbursed for increases between 2004 and 2005 in the education portion of their property taxes.
- After paying their property taxes, senior homeowners can apply to this program to be reimbursed for any increase in their 2005 education property tax over the 2004 amount.
- One education property tax rebate per household will be issued based on a senior's principal residence.
- Application to the program will be voluntary, and based on the property tax assessment over the last few years, it is expected that the average payment will be approximately \$50 during the first year.
- Through collaboration with municipalities, senior homeowners living in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, St. Albert, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Camrose and Grande Prairie will receive cheques in July 2005 if their 2005 education property taxes increased from 2004.
- Senior homeowners living elsewhere in Alberta and who have applied for the Alberta Seniors Benefit will be sent a letter in May 2005 requesting their 2004 and 2005 property tax notices.
- Senior homeowners living elsewhere in the province and who have not applied to the Alberta Seniors Benefit can request an application form by calling the Seniors Information Line toll-free at 1-800-642-3853 (or 427-7876 in Edmonton).

Enhanced Alberta Seniors Benefit - estimated 2005-06 cost: \$249 million

- Enhancements to the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program, announced last year, increased monthly payments effective last July 1 for existing recipients, which resulted in 17,000 more seniors being eligible for the program.
- Those seniors receiving cash benefits under the program prior to last August have received increases of approximately \$275 per year.

NOTE:

Information on all programs is available to the public by calling the Seniors Information Line toll-free at 1-800-642-3853 (or 427-7876 in Edmonton).

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Media enquiries may be directed to:

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