

Minister of
Seniors



Ministre des
Aînés

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0J9

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, our country is facing an unprecedented public health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a member of the Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on COVID-19, I am committed to ensuring that seniors' needs across Canada are carefully considered.

The Government of Canada has taken a number of steps to assist Canadians during this challenging period.

On May 12, the Government announced additional measures to assist Canadian seniors and provide them with greater help in this time of crisis. These measures include a one-time tax-free payment of \$300 for seniors eligible for the Old Age Security (OAS) pension, and an additional tax-free payment of \$200 to those eligible for the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). This measure will provide a total of \$500 to low-income seniors who receive both the OAS pension and the GIS, and will help them cover increased costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the Government also announced the expansion of the New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP) with an additional investment of \$20 million to support organizations that offer community-based projects that reduce isolation, improve the quality of life of seniors, and help them maintain a social support network. This is in addition to the \$9 million agreement with United Way Centraide Canada announced on March 20. These investments will help provide essential services to seniors such as the delivery of groceries and medications, meal preparation, grocery shopping, transportation to necessary medical appointments or personal outreach to assess individuals' needs and connect them to community supports. They will help vulnerable seniors cope with the health, social, and economic impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Lastly, the Government announced a measure designed to protect low-income seniors who may be negatively impacted by the deferral of the 2019 tax filing deadline to June 1, 2020. While extending the tax filing deadline will benefit many Canadians, including seniors, it does present a challenge for the renewal of GIS benefits paid to low-income seniors.

Every year, in advance of the July to June payment period for the GIS, Service Canada assesses whether individuals who receive the GIS remain entitled to the benefit based on the prior calendar year's income. To do so, Service Canada requires the beneficiary's and their spouse's or common-law partner's income information by June 26 in order to prevent an interruption in benefit payments in July.

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While the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) is processing the tax returns for GIS recipients on a priority basis, the service standard for individuals who file paper returns - a method still widely used by seniors – is eight weeks. Further, some seniors may face challenges in filing their tax returns as a result of self-isolation, health issues, or the lack of availability of tax filing services upon which many seniors rely (often run by volunteers and organizations who themselves may be affected by the pandemic).

In light of the above, Service Canada may not have 2019 income information available in time to reassess GIS entitlements for July.

Therefore, I have authorized measures that will ensure that GIS benefits paid to low-income seniors are maintained through the transition to the upcoming July 2020 to June 2021 payment period.

For beneficiaries for whom Service Canada has received 2019 income information by June 26, GIS entitlements will be assessed and calculated in the typical manner. For beneficiaries whose 2019 income has not been provided by June 26, Service Canada will continue their GIS payments without interruption. Seniors are encouraged to submit their income information by filing their tax returns as soon as possible, and no later than October 1, 2020. Once the 2019 income is available, benefits will be retroactively adjusted to July 2020.

While GIS beneficiaries will continue to receive their benefits without interruption during this period, our current IT system will not be able to acknowledge these payments. Instead, the system will unfortunately identify these clients as having had their benefits suspended.

We recognize that identifying these accounts as suspended, even for the very temporary purpose of implementing this measure, may have an impact on the delivery of provincial or territorial (PT) benefits. Further to the data exchange pursuant to the Information Sharing Agreement between Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and your respective Department, Service Canada provides you with the GIS entitlement of beneficiaries in your jurisdiction, which allows your Department to calculate benefit entitlements under your programs. Under normal circumstances, GIS clients who are identified as being suspended because of missing income information may have their PT benefits suspended.

I am writing to seek your assistance in ensuring that the erroneous information in our data feeds be ignored by your programs in order to ensure that this GIS renewal measure does not negatively affect PT beneficiaries. In the coming days and weeks, ESDC officials will be engaging with your officials to discuss the details of this measure and answer any questions they may have. Together, I am hopeful that we can avoid any negative consequences for seniors as a result of this measure.

In the meantime, should you or your officials have any questions, please feel free to contact Nancy Milroy-Swainson, Director General of the Seniors and Pensions Policy Secretariat. She can be reached by email at nancy.milroyswainson@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

Thank you in advance for your collaboration.

Yours sincerely,



The Honourable Deb Schulte, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Senior

