

The Honourable Kamal Khera
Minister of Seniors
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada
K1A 0A6

Re: Emergency payment needed to support seniors who lost GIS due to CERB

January 20, 2022

Dear Minister,

We write today first to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of Seniors. We also wish to applaud your government's important decision to exclude the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) as income sources that would lower payments under the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for low-income seniors.

Our understanding is that sufficient funds have been set aside to reimburse GIS recipients in May 2022 for the income they lost as a result of the earlier policy to claw back pandemic benefits. The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) reported that typical losses to the 80,000+ recipients affected would be in the \$5,000 range for each recipient.

The reason we are writing to you today is that for many very low-income seniors, May 2022 is far too late a date for the expected reimbursement. We are aware of seniors who have already been evicted from their housing. Those who live in rent geared to income housing had rental charges increase by 30% of the pandemic benefits received *in addition* to the GIS clawback.

Other seniors are on the verge of eviction, and they need help now. In many cases, their landlords can't and won't wait until May. Still others are faced with borrowing against the future payment through payday loan outlets that can charge exorbitant interest rates and perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Eviction can often mean the loss of eligibility for retail credit which would result in more reasonable interest rates.

In addition, many social service agencies and legal clinics have been swamped with urgent requests from affected GIS recipients for help with housing at a time when community shelters have been overrun with the Omicron variant.

It's one thing for a non-aged person to become homeless when shelter beds are unavailable. It's quite another for a low-income senior woman to be faced with eviction and absolutely no place to go. Yet this continues to happen and will continue throughout this abnormally cold winter unless action is taken immediately.

In order to blunt the worst effects of this unfolding crisis, we propose that you undertake the following measures immediately:

1. Immediately implement a \$100 million housing fund for pandemic clawback victims using a very low barrier distribution method to help keep seniors housed and mitigate evictions; and
2. Immediately provide an interim down payment of \$2,500 to all GIS clawback victims with losses of at least this amount.

With these direct measures, you can assure the success of your government's decision to end the clawback. Without them, this important element set out in your Mandate letter will fail.

We urge you to act now.

Sincerely,

Leila Sarangi
National Director
Campaign 2000

AND

Shalini Konanur
Executive Director/Lawyer
South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario

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