

Received DC Office July 3, 2020

Dear Ms. Deliman:

On behalf of the Honourable Deb Schulte, Minister of Seniors, I am responding to your correspondence, which was forwarded to her by the Office of the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau. You wrote concerning the Government of Canada's support for seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government is working to support Canadian seniors during these difficult times and has put a range of measures in place to support Canadians, including seniors, who are facing hardship as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Through these measures, the Government is providing over \$900 more for low-income single seniors and more than \$1,500 for low-income senior couples, on top of their existing benefits, to help these vulnerable Canadians with extra costs during the pandemic.

This includes taking measures to ensure that the Old Age Security (OAS) and Canada Pension Plan (CPP) benefits seniors rely on will continue to be paid without delay, and that new applications for these benefits will also be processed in a timely fashion. Should you wish to learn more about the OAS program or CPP, please visit www.canada.ca.

The Government's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan invested \$1.3 billion in a one-time special payment through the GST credit in April. More than 4 million low- and modest-income seniors benefited from this top-up, which provided an average of \$375 for singles seniors and an average of \$510 for senior couples. Eligible individuals, including seniors, did not have to apply for this benefit.

The Government introduced a one-time tax-free payment of \$300 for seniors eligible for the OAS pension, with an additional tax-free payment of \$200 for seniors 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. This \$2.5 billion investment in financial support will help Canadian seniors cover increased costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This payment will be issued during the week of July 6. Individuals who are eligible to receive the OAS pension or the GIS in June 2020 are eligible for this payment and do not need to apply to receive the one-time payment for seniors. The one-time payment will be paid to their bank account if they are enrolled for direct deposit. Those who are not enrolled for direct deposit will receive a cheque. OAS pensioners and GIS recipients who currently receive payments by cheque are encouraged to sign up for direct deposit to avoid payment delays. To sign up for direct deposit, please visit www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/direct-deposit.html.

To help protect seniors' assets during a volatile market, the Government reduced the minimum withdrawals required from Registered Retirement Income Funds by 25 percent for 2020.

The deadline for filing 2019 taxes was June 1, 2020. The Government has put additional measures in place to ensure that GIS payments will continue without interruption even if a person's 2019 income information has not been received. This will guarantee that the most

vulnerable seniors will continue to receive their benefits when they need them the most. Allowance payments to 60-64 year olds will also continue without interruption. Seniors are encouraged to submit their 2019 income information as soon as possible and no later than October 1, 2020. Further, the Canada Revenue Agency is working with volunteer organizations across Canada to help seniors with low and modest incomes complete and file their tax returns so they can continue to access benefits and credits to which they are entitled.

In addition, the Government has introduced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), which is providing a taxable benefit of \$2,000 a month for up to 24 weeks to support workers who lose their employment income as a result of the pandemic. The intent of the CERB is to provide emergency income support to those working Canadians who have lost their jobs, are sick, are quarantined, or are taking care of someone who is sick with COVID-19, as well as working parents who must stay home without pay to care for children who are sick or at home because of school and daycare closures. This support is intended to serve as a short-term bridge during this difficult time, replacing the employment income that has been lost due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19. Pensioners who continue to work, even part-time, may also qualify for this benefit. For further details, I invite you to consult the following website: www.canada.ca/en/departement-finance/economic-response-plan.html#individuals.

The Government of Canada is also providing support for seniors in the community during this time of physical distancing by supporting voluntary and service organizations who are working to provide necessary services to seniors.

On May 12, the Government 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.

In addition to this increased funding, the Government is providing flexibility on how NHSP recipients can use their funds by allowing them to use previously approved project funding, approximately \$50 million in small grants, for essential services to seniors affected by COVID-19. The approximately 2,700 community organizations that were approved for funding for 2019–20 can now use their funding to deliver services to seniors in the community, such as food and medication, or provide tablet computers to help our seniors stay connected to their loved ones through videoconferencing.

Further, the Government created the Emergency Community Support Fund, with an investment of \$350 million, to support charities and non-profit organizations that deliver essential services to those in need, including seniors. This fund will provide funding to national intermediaries with networks across the country, including United Way Centraide Canada, the Canadian Red Cross, and Community Foundations of Canada to support a variety of activities. These activities include

carrying out volunteer-based home deliveries of groceries and medications; providing transportation services; scaling up help lines that provide information and support; helping vulnerable Canadians access government benefits; providing training and supplies to volunteers so they can continue to make their invaluable contributions to the COVID-19 response; and supporting virtual contact through phone calls, texts, teleconferences, or the Internet.

The Government is continuing to monitor this evolving situation closely and assess the need for additional measures to protect your health and safety, stabilize the economy, and help Canadians affected by the impacts of this challenging period. To learn more about Canada's whole-of-government actions to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, I invite you to visit the following website: www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/canadas-reponse/government-canada-takes-action-covid-19.html.

I hope that this information is helpful. Thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely,

Nancy Milroy-Swainson
Director General
Seniors and Pensions Policy Secretariat
Income Security and Social Development Branch
Employment and Social Development Canada



April 29, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
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Re: Assistance for Low-Income Seniors

Dear Prime Minister, Premier and Mr. Zimmer,

On behalf of the Peace River Regional District (PRRD) Board, I would like to express concerns regarding the financial inability of low-income seniors to sustain themselves during COVID-19.

We are proud of the residents and businesses in the PRRD. Local businesses have changed their hours to provide segregated shopping times for seniors and those with disabilities only. Our seniors are staying at home and minimizing their grocery shopping trips, which impacts their ability to shop at several stores or shop more regularly to take advantage of the sales they so depend on due to their limited incomes. Further, our seniors are paying pharmacy dispensing fees monthly rather than once every three months as not all pharmacies are able to fill prescriptions for a full three month period.

We respectfully request your consideration of our concerns and further support low-income seniors during these challenging times.

Yours Truly,

Brad Sperling
Chair

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PLEASE REPLY TO:

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