Ensure you and your team are aware of resources available to patients and their families. Start with Canada Benefits and Northwest Territories Health and Social Services.

Intervene by connecting your patients and their families to benefits, resources, and services.

Poverty: A Clinical Tool for Primary Care Providers (NT)

Poverty is not always apparent: In the Northwest Territories, 17% of residents struggle with low-income. 

1 Screen Everyone

“Do you ever have difficulty making ends meet at the end of the month?”

(Sensitivity 98%, specificity 40% for living below the poverty line)

2 Poverty is a Risk Factor

Consider:

New immigrants, women, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTQ+ are among the highest risk groups.

Example 1:

If an otherwise healthy 35-year-old comes to your office, without risk factors for diabetes other than living in poverty, you consider ordering a screening test for diabetes.

Example 2:

If an otherwise low-risk patient who lives in poverty presents with chest pain, this elevates the pre-test probability of a cardiac source and helps determine how aggressive you are in ordering investigations.

3 Intervene

Ask Everyone: “Have you filled out and sent in your tax forms?”

- Ask questions to find out more about your patient—their employment, living situation, social supports, and the benefits they receive. Tax returns are required to access many income security benefits: e.g., GST / HST credits, child benefits, working income tax benefits, and property tax credits. The Native Women’s Association of the NWT has partnered with the Canada Revenue Agency to provide free tax clinic services to eligible taxpayers.
- Even people without official residency status can file returns.
- Drug Coverage: Coverage for medications not available through the NWT Health Benefits Program may be covered under exceptional circumstances. Visit drugcoverage.ca for more information.

Ask questions to find out more about your patient—their living situation, and the benefits they currently receive.

Ensure you and your team are aware of resources available to patients and their families.

Intervene by connecting your patients and their families to benefits, resources, and services.
Intervening can have a profound impact on your patients’ health

Patient Group | Ask | Educate | Intervene & Connect
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Seniors | “Do you receive Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)?” | Individuals over age 65 who live in poverty should receive at least $1,200/month in income through OAS, GIS, and grants from filing a tax return. | Northwest Territories seniors who receive OAS and GIS are also automatically eligible for a monthly cash payment through the NWT Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit (SCSB). Ensure your patients are receiving their SCSB payments and connect your patients to Northwest Territories Education, Culture, and Employment.

Families with Children | “Do you receive the Canada Child Benefit on the 20th of every month?” | Income supports can be obtained by applying for Canada Child Benefit when filing income tax returns. Eligible families can receive up to $6,400/year for each eligible child under the age of six, and $5,400/year for each eligible child aged 6 to 17. Families may be eligible for additional benefits through certain territorial programs. Eligible families can also receive $330/year/child. | Start with Canada Benefits to identify and access income supports for patients and families. Use this in your office with patients and provide them with the link.

Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) | “Are you registered under the Indian Act or recognized by an Inuit Land Claim organization?” | Indigenous peoples registered under the Indian Act or recognized by the Inuit Land Claim organization can qualify for Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB), which pays for drugs and extended health benefits not covered by territorial plans. | Speak with patients’ social services workers. Visit the Northwest Territories’ Income Security website for information on income assistance programs and eligibility.

Social Assistance Recipients | “Have you applied for extra income supplements?” | Additional benefits available include: student financial assistance, Northwest Territories Child Benefit/Territorial Workers’ Supplement, home heating subsidy, and other discretionary benefits. | Use a detailed social and medical history to determine the programs to which you can connect your patients. Complete forms such as:
- DTC requires a health provider to complete Form T2201
- The Extended Health Benefits application must be completed by a physician or nurse on behalf of the patient

People with Disabilities | “Do you receive payments for disability?” | Major disability programs available: CPP Disability, EI Sickness, Disability Tax Credit (DTC), Veterans Benefits, Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP), Extended Health Benefits program. Visit the NWT Health Care Plan website for more information of available programs. | Use a detailed social and medical history to determine the programs to which you can connect your patients.

Key Resources

Canada Benefits
(www.canadabenefits.gc.ca)
Provides a full listing of federal and territorial income and other supports, organized by personal status (e.g., “parent,” “indigenous peoples”) or life situation (e.g., “unemployment,” “health concerns”), with links to the relevant program websites and to application forms.

Northwest Territories Health and Social Services
(www.hss.gov.nt.ca)
Call or browse the website to find community support, social services, and continuing care, based on topic.

Legal Aid
(www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/legal-aid/)
The legal aid program provides confidential legal services, advice, and representation by a lawyer for residents of the Northwest Territories who would be unable to afford these services.

Remember: As health care providers, it is our responsibility to provide complete and detailed information that accurately portrays our patients’ health status and disabilities. It is NOT our role to serve as the gatekeepers for income security.