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

2 **Poverty is a Risk Factor**

Consider:

New immigrants, Women, Aboriginals, 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. Connect your patients to Free Community Tax Clinics.

- Even people without official residency status can file returns.

- Drug Coverage: up to date tax filing required to access Trillium plan for those without Ontario Drug Benefits. Visit drugcoverage.ca for more options.
Intervening can have a profound impact on your patients’ health

**Patient Group**  

**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 $1200/month in income through OAS, GIS, and grants from filing a tax return.

**Families with Children**

“Do you receive the Universal Child Care Benefit on the 20th of every month?

Low income, single parents can receive up to an additional $800/year. Additional income supports can be obtained by applying for Canada Child Benefits when filing income tax returns.

**Aboriginals (First Nations, Inuit, Metis)**

“Are you registered under the Indian Act or recognized by an Inuit Land Claim organization?

Aboriginals registered under the Indian Act or recognized by the Inuit Land Claim organization can qualify for Non-Insured Health Benefits, which pays for drugs and extended health benefits not covered by provincial plans.

**Social Assistance Recipients**

“Have you applied for extra income supports?


**People with Disabilities**

“Do you receive payments for disability?

Major disability programs available: ODSP, CPP Disability, EI Sickness, Disability Tax Credit (DTC), Veterans Benefits, WSIB, Employers’ long term protection, Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP).

DTC can provide up to ~$1800/year in tax savings (plus retroactive payments) and is required to receive other benefits including the RDSP, which provides up to $20,000 in grants.

**Ask**

**Educate**

**Intervene & Connect**

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.

Speak with patients’ social services workers. Complete forms such as:

- Mandatory Special Necessities Benefits Application (Bill K054; $25): medical supplies and health related transportation.
- Special Diet Allowance (Bill K055; $20): funds for special dietary needs.

Use a detailed social and medical history to determine the programs to which to connect your patients. Complete forms such as:

- DTC requires a health provider to complete Form T2201.
- ODSP Application (Bill K050; $100): provide as much information as possible, emphasizing the impact of a person’s disability on their social, occupational and self care functioning.

For further training on interventions to address poverty, enroll in the OCFP Treating Poverty Workshop.

**Key Resources**

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

**2-1-1**  
(www.211ontario.ca)  
Call 2-1-1 or browse the website to find community support and advocacy organizations, based on topic and location.

**Your Legal Rights**  
(www.yourlegalrights.on.ca)  
Well-organized easy-to-find legal information. If your patients are denied any of the above benefits, consider referral to nearest legal clinic - acceptance rates on appeal can be high.

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

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Supporting Material

[x] To see who is an eligible Non-Insured Health Benefits Client: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniha-spniha/nihb-ssna/benefit-prestation/index-eng.php

*These supporting materials are hosted by external organizations, and as such the accuracy and accessibility of their links are not guaranteed. CEP will make every effort to keep these links up to date.

References


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