



Income Support and the Government's Right to Receive Maintenance Payments

Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP)

Income Support refers to temporary financial benefits the Alberta government provides for clients of the Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP). Income Support is also known as social assistance or welfare and was previously known as Supports for Independence or SFI.

If recipients receive Income Support, the government has the right to maintenance payments because the government is supporting those clients. Government staff help recipients obtain Income Support and maintenance orders or agreements. They also register these orders and agreements with MEP.

Once maintenance orders are registered with MEP, payors pay MEP, which forwards these payments to the government, as long as recipients are on Income Support.

By law, the right to support payments belongs to the government for as long as recipients receive Income Support. Payors and recipients cannot agree to reduce or give up any maintenance payments due during that time. Payors also should not pay maintenance directly to recipients. Paying money directly to recipients while files are registered with MEP may result in payors having to pay twice.

How Payments are Calculated When Maintenance Payments Belong to the Government

Court orders or support agreements set the family support.

- If the maintenance amount is **lower** than Income Support benefits, payors owe the government the amount of support
- If the maintenance amount is **higher** than Income Support benefits, payors owe the government the amount paid out in Income Support. MEP forwards the difference directly to recipients when the money is collected

If maintenance payments are not actually made by payors, arrears accumulate. Payors are still required to pay these arrears, even if recipients stop receiving Income Support.

When recipients stop receiving Income Support, they should notify MEP immediately. MEP then confirms this with government staff who provide Income Support. Once MEP confirms that Income Support has ended, MEP directs future maintenance payments to recipients.

- The MEP has other Information Sheets, on a variety of helpful topics. To see them, visit the MEP's website at alberta.ca/mep
 - To contact the MEP, phone 780-422-5555 or toll-free in Alberta at 310-0000.
 - To view information about your MEP file, go to the MEP's website at alberta.ca/mep and select "MEP Accounts Online"