

## Chapter 7: Social Services—Delivering the Saskatchewan Income Support Program (SIS)

### Why It Matters

In 2020, almost 7% of Saskatchewan's population was living in poverty. The Ministry of Social Services administers the Saskatchewan Income Support Program (SIS) to provide financial assistance for people to meet their basic needs while they work toward self-sufficiency.

### Why We Did This Audit

Effective processes to deliver SIS can assist clients in adequately accessing the Program and receiving the income support needed.

### Key Facts and Figures

- More than 17,000 SIS clients were provided an expected \$261.5 million in benefits in 2022–23. 60% of SIS households comprised of single persons.
- Less than 50% of individuals apply for SIS benefits online
- Overall, 64% of the total SIS calls to the Social Services' service centre (65% of calls specific to SIS applications) went unanswered. Monthly results showed 48%–66% of SIS calls were addressed in 20 minutes or less.
- About 1/3 or over 5,200 SIS clients had unpaid SaskEnergy or SaskPower bills greater than \$100, amounting to almost \$4.2 million at February 2023
- No set timeframes for planning and support specialists to complete initial planning meetings with SIS clients. We found 10 client files in our testing where Social Services took between 40 and 220 days to complete the initial planning meeting.

### What We Found

Social Services needs to improve access to apply for SIS benefits such as making computers available at all of its offices, offering sufficient in-person assistance with the SIS application process, and consistently providing a call-back function.

Social Services received over 255,000 calls to its SIS phone line (including almost 50,000 calls specific to SIS applications) over a six-month period, with over 60% of those calls going unanswered.

### Our Recommendations

Social Services needs to:

- Provide potential clients with better access to apply for SIS benefits
- Periodically analyze data about SIS client evictions and unpaid utility bills, and develop strategies to address them
- Offer timely case planning supports and regularly meet with SIS clients to follow up on their individualized case plan goals
- Refer SIS clients to proper supports (e.g., employment services, counselling) when appropriate, and regularly follow up on referrals
- Implement further performance measures to assess SIS's effectiveness, such as measuring how long certain clients stay on SIS as well as the proportion of clients exiting SIS, but returning within a specified time period

