

Dear Editor,

First off, permit me to express my congratulations to the honourable Minister with responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh and his staff at the Ministry of Finance for their efforts in crafting the nation's largest budget and importantly, with no new taxes, a hallmark of its predecessors under the Ifraan Ali-led administration.

At \$1.382 Trillion, budget 2025 exemplifies the fiscal prudence necessary to ensure social equity. Allow me the space as I assess the impact this has, particularly the marginalized demographics covered by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security.

From my focal point, budget 2025's allocation to the Human Services sector echoes the utterances of Franklin D. Roosevelt who opined, "the test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security in 2025, has secured an allocation of \$58.5 Billion. In 2019, the Ministry of Social Protection, as it was known then was allocated approximately \$19 Billion, representing over a 178% increase in its allocation since this administration took office.

Interestingly, the Honourable Minister for this sector, Dr. Vindhya Persaud revealed that approximately 80% of this year's budget for the sector goes to Old Age Pension and Public Assistance.

Minister Persaud further articulated that the number of beneficiaries has increased significantly since her tenure began with Public Assistance recipients almost doubling, if not surpassed as well as a steep increase in Old Age Pension to around 76,000 beneficiaries.

The People's Progressive Party Civic (PPPC) Administration surpassed its manifesto promise for old age pension, a feat that the previous administration could not accomplish.

For five consecutive budgets we have seen progress, for five consecutive budgets we have seen increased financial support to our senior citizens but a budget is not just about numbers, it is about the people and the impact it has on improving their quality of life.

Our seniors now enjoy \$41,000 monthly compared to \$20,500 when this administration took over. This injects an additional \$4.5 Billion in disposable income into their hands.

Budget 2025 complements the previous four budgets, highlighting the methodological approach to governance by this administration almost as a neurosurgeon meticulously plies his trade with precision, purpose, prudence and creativity.

Over the years, pensioners have been on the receiving end of various initiatives that will no doubt continue and expand to ease their lives. Prior to 2020, senior citizens were only collecting at the post offices. Now, they have over 1,500 agencies to cash their monthly coupons such as MoneyGram, SurePay, BillExpress, Western Union or digital options including the banks or MMG.

Persons who are expected to reach the required age for this non-contributory benefit need not go the offices and apply but do so from the comfort of their homes.

Furthermore, this administration has reintroduced the subsidy on electricity to the tune of \$882 Million, simply equating to \$30,000 per year for beneficiaries. Similarly, the water subsidy, which was taken away under the previous administration has been resurrected to the magnitude of \$298.1Million.

On another note, the Ministry has made significant strides when it comes to Public Assistance, increasing by well over 100% over the last five years.

Permanent Disability also continue to have initiatives that complement their increases in this form of public assistance.

Like old age pension, persons under this category benefitted from cash grants throughout the last few years including \$100,000 for children living with disabilities and most recent, the \$35,000 one-off cash grant.

Applicants are automatically renewed since the implementation of the new policy under Minister Persaud saw them receiving this benefit until reaching pensionable age and would consequently transition.

The ease in which they apply are also significantly improved since they can do so online as well.

The Ministry complemented persons living with disabilities' social integration with the development of the learning lab which provides free skills training exclusively for persons under this category and in 2025, these programmes are expected to amplify, according to the Honourable Minister.

Importantly, the President had announced all persons living with disabilities can receive free assistive aids, an initiative delivered by the Ministry of Human Service, and to date, over 1,000 persons have benefitted from these aids including wheelchairs, walkers, white canes and more.

Overall, since this administration took office, the lives of our pensioners, persons with disabilities and public assistance recipients have tremendously improved and will continue to improve when the Ministry rolls out its plans following budget 2025.

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