

Subject: 173915 Lewis, and Smandych - MSD Response
By email: 1 April 18 2012

Ref: 173915

Fiona Lewis, and Wendy Smandych
Co-Chairs, Health Practice Committee
BC Association of Social Workers
bcasw@bcasw.org

Dear Ms. Lewis and Ms. Smandych:

Thank you for your letter of December 1, 2011, forwarded to the Honourable Stephanie Cadieux, Minister of Social Development, by Linda Korbin, Executive Director of the BC Association of Social Workers, regarding housing stability for people with complex health-care needs. As Assistant Deputy Minister Responsible for the Policy and Research Division, I am pleased to address your concerns and I apologize for the lengthy delay in responding.

I want to assure you that the provincial government is committed to assisting persons with disabilities and with barriers to employment to gain greater independence, including security of income and enhanced well-being.

Many issues raised in your letter fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry Responsible for Housing. Our minister has shared your concerns with her colleagues the Honourable Mary McNeil, the Honourable Michael de Jong and the Honourable Rich Coleman and I understand that they have provided you with more information on housing, health and poverty issues.

The Ministry of Social Development's key accountabilities include the provision of income assistance to those in need, support for community living services that help adults with developmental disabilities and their families achieve their goals and connect to their communities, and delivery of employment programming and services to unemployed and underemployed individuals, employers and communities, including employment support for British Columbians with disabilities.

Ministry clients with the Persons with Disabilities designation receive a higher rate of assistance and a wider range of health supplements in recognition of the additional barriers they may face in entering the labour market or fully participating in their communities. As you may be aware, clients with chronic health problems may be eligible to receive an additional supplement each month. Clients with a diabetic diet, such as "Rob" mentioned in your case study, would be eligible for a \$35 monthly supplement to assist with additional costs.

I appreciate that persons with disabilities experience costs and financial challenges that other citizens do not. That is why the ministry pays higher rates to clients on disability assistance. The provincial government strives to meet the needs of those who require assistance while ensuring that available funds can be shared to address the needs of all British Columbians who require support.

You also mentioned the difficulties many of our clients have accessing housing. While the provincial government monitors the costs of rental housing in British Columbia when setting income assistance

rates, we recognize that in many areas of the province shelter costs can be high. We are continuing to explore innovative ways to collaborate with community agencies, municipalities and developers to promote safe and affordable housing.

One example of this work is the ministry's Homelessness Intervention Project, where provincial staff worked closely with community partners, BC Housing and health authorities to house over 3900 homeless people across five communities in British Columbia. This collaborative approach provides vulnerable people with housing, income assistance, life skills and assistance to access services, as well as supports to help individuals maintain their housing and improve their outlook.

Thank you for taking the time to contact us with your concerns. We will take your comments into consideration as we evaluate programs and services that support our continuing commitment to deliver services to those in need.

Sincerely,

Molly Harrington
Assistant Deputy Minister