



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To GP - MW 4 2013

To: General Purposes Committee **Date:** February 12, 2013
From: Cathryn Volkering Carlile **File:**
 General Manager, Community Services
Re: Request for support letter in relation to a proposed Increase in 'Persons Living With Disabilities' (PWD) benefits.

Staff Recommendation

That a letter be sent to the BC Premier in support of an increase in 'Persons living With Disabilities' (PWD) benefits to a minimum level of \$1200 per month.

Cathryn Volkering Carlile
General Manager, Community Services
(604-276-4068)

Att. 1

REPORT CONCURRENCE	
CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER 	
REVIEWED BY DIRECTORS	INITIALS:
REVIEWED BY CAO	INITIALS:

Staff Report

Origin

This report is in response to a request from Richmond Centre for Disability (RCD) (**Attachment 1**) that Council write a letter to the Government of British Columbia to request that there be an increase in 'Persons with Disabilities' (PWD) benefit.

Analysis

Over the last decade, the cost of living in British Columbia (BC) has steadily increased. However, BC's Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefits, which are administered through the Ministry of Social Development, have not kept up with the cost of living. Since 2001, the PWD rate has increased by only \$120 per month with the rate for a single person now standing at a minimum of \$906 per month. The December 2010 Survey of Household Spending shows that the average household needs about \$1,400 per month to meet the cost of basic necessities. This includes an estimated cost of \$768 per month for rent, \$478 per month for food, \$76 per month for clothing and \$48 per month for basic communication. A single individual on PWD, receiving the minimum PWD rate, receives almost \$500 below the amount needed to cover the estimated cost of basic essentials. During the same time period the cost of basic essentials, such as food, clothing, transportation, health, personal care and shelter have increased by 17.2% with the cost of food alone having increased by nearly 25%.

Richmond Centre for Disability (RCD) is proposing that the PWD rate be increased to a minimum of \$1,200 per month. Through its advocacy the RCD is seeking to increase the ability of people who are receiving PWD benefits to better meet the living costs of living in British Columbia. They are also seeking to bring PWD assistance levels in line with those provided to low income seniors through the Federal Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement support.

The RCD notes that people with disabilities have ongoing disability related costs, such as non-prescription health or medical goods, user fees for various health care services, as well as costs for transportation and personal care. Often these costs are not covered by PWD benefits. Moreover, as housing costs continue to increase, and in the absence of a corresponding increase in shelter assistance, many living on PWD benefits are forced to make difficult choices in order to make ends meet. More detailed information is provided in **Attachment 1**.

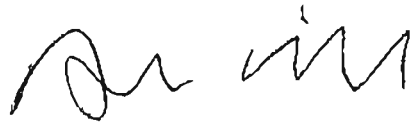
To date, nine communities across BC have written letters to the Provincial Government stating their support for a raise in PWD benefits. It is recommended that a similar letter be sent by Richmond Council with the aim of reducing the gap between what people with disabilities need for basic essentials and what they receive.

Financial Impact

None

Conclusion

This report presents a request from Richmond Centre for Disability (RCD) that City Council write a letter to the BC Government advocating for an increase in the Persons Living with Disabilities rate to a minimum of \$1200 per month. Based on the information presented herein, staff recommend that Council support this request.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Hill', is positioned above the typed name and title.

Alan Hill
Cultural Diversity Coordinator
(604-276-4391)

AH:ah



Richmond Centre for Disability

“Promoting a new perspective on disability”

2012 Business Excellence Awards – Association of the Year Winner

The Case for Increasing the Persons with Disabilities Benefits in BC

Request for Support from
 Mayor Malcolm Brodie & City Councillors of City of Richmond
 Submitted by the Richmond Centre for Disability

Executive Summary

Over the last decade, the cost of living in British Columbia (BC) has steadily increased. However, BC's Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefits, which are overseen by the Provincial Government's Ministry of Social Development, have remained relatively flat. Since 2001, the PWD rate has increased by only \$120 per month, while the cost of basic essentials such as food, clothing, transportation, health, personal care and shelter have increased by 17.2%. During this period, the cost of food alone increased by nearly 25%.

This increase in the cost of living, without a similar increase to the PWD rate, means there is an ever-increasing gap between the cost of basic living expenses and what PWD recipients can afford. Recognizing the real human and social consequences of this growing disparity, the Richmond Centre for Disability (RCD) is appealing to the City of Richmond to help support a worthwhile and coveted movement. Our goal is to call on the province to increase the level of assistance provided to persons with disabilities to more accurately reflect the cost of living; thereby individuals and families relying on BC's PWD benefits can live with dignity, and with the supports they need to engage and be part of their communities.

This case outlines the cost of basic essentials in BC and proposes an increase to the PWD rate to a minimum of \$1,200 per month to better reflect the actual cost of living in BC. The proposed increase would not only help to improve the quality of life for PWD recipients, but it would also help to bring the benefit in line with the Federal Government's established minimum for low income seniors.

On behalf of the RCD Board of Directors, we hope that Mayor Brodie and Richmond City Council will send a support letter to Premier Christy Clark to support the RCD's request to increase the PWD benefits.

100-5671 No. 3 Rd., Richmond, B.C. V6X 2C7
 tel 604 232 2404 ♦ fax 604-232-2415 ♦ tty 604 232 2479
 email: rcd@rcdrichmond.org ♦ web: www.rcdrichmond.org

The Rising Cost of Living in BC

The costs of basic essentials in BC have increased significantly over the past ten years, resulting in greater challenges and a diminished capacity for people relying on BC's PWD benefits to meet their basic needs.

The December 2010 Survey of Household Spending shows that the average household needs about \$1,400 per month to meet the cost of basic necessities. This includes an estimated cost of \$768 per month for rent, \$478 per month for food, \$76 per month for clothing and \$48 per month for basic communication. A single individual on PWD benefits receives only \$906 per month to live on – almost \$500 below the amount needed to cover the estimated cost of basic essentials. In addition, people with disabilities have ongoing disability related costs, such as non-prescription health or medical goods and user fees for various health care services, as well as costs for transportation and personal care. Often these costs are not covered by PWD benefits.

Moreover, as housing costs continue to increase, and in the absence of a corresponding increase in shelter assistance, those living on PWD benefits are forced to make difficult choices in order to make ends meet. This includes choices like cutting back on their already limited budgets for food, clothing, and other basic necessities. These choices are unjust and unsustainable.

The Need for Action

The 2006 Census shows a higher incidence of poverty and low income among people with disabilities. Approximately one in five individuals across BC who reported a health and activity limitation was living in poverty in 2006. This represents 193,530 individuals across BC. For individuals relying on the PWD benefits and receiving only \$906 per month (\$10,872 annually), it is extremely difficult to make ends meet. An annual income of \$10,872 is also significantly below the Low Income Cut Offs (LICO) established by Statistics Canada.

It has also been observed that, apart from the personal and individual consequences of living in poverty, there are significant costs to society. This is reflected in both lost productivity and a diminished capacity for people with disabilities to meaningfully contribute to their communities and to realize their full potential. Without an increase in assistance levels, we are likely to see on-going reliance on food banks and other emergency services, and continued high levels of homelessness. It has been proven from the 2011 homeless count data for Metro Vancouver that a high proportion of the homeless population reported some type of health condition or disability.

An increase of \$300 per month (or \$10 per day) in disability assistance would help PWD recipients better meet their basic needs including housing. Even this small increase can help prevent homelessness by reducing the number of people with disabilities who are precariously housed. It would also allow persons with disabilities to live their lives with greater dignity and with the support that they need.

BC is Falling behind Other Provinces

In 2005 the assistance available to people with disabilities in BC was second highest among all of the Provinces. Since 2005, BC has continued to fall behind as other provinces and territories make adjustments to their rates. Currently BC has fallen to 6th place in terms of the overall disability assistance.

Given the higher cost of rent and other necessities in BC when compared to other parts of Canada, the pressures faced by people living with disabilities in BC can be greater. Therefore, the RCD is supporting the movement to ask the province to increase the PWD benefits in BC, thereby to bring it more in line with other provinces and to reflect the true cost of living in BC. We hope that City of Richmond's Mayor and Council would support our intention, which is based on the recommendations put forward by the Disability Without Poverty Network in July 2012; the goal of this partnership is to develop positive recommendations for change so British Columbians with disabilities who receive PWD benefits are not living in poverty.

Recommendation

BC's PWD benefits are not keeping up with the cost of living. The gap between what PWD recipients need and what they receive is growing, and will continue to grow, unless BC changes the way it assists individuals and families with disabilities.

The RCD proposes the following change as a first step towards making a real difference for British Columbians with disabilities.

Increase the PWD benefits rate to a minimum of \$1,200 per month.

- This will reduce the gap between what people with disabilities need for basic essentials and what they receive.
- It will help ensure that British Columbians with disabilities who need provincial support can live in dignity, not poverty.
- It will also result in greater equity between vulnerable groups by bringing the assistance levels in line with those provided to low income seniors through the Federal Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement support.

Attachment:

- ▶ Letter from the City of Cranbrook in support of the increase in PWD benefits

Contact: Ella Huang, Executive Director, Richmond Centre for Disability
Date: January 7, 2013