

MEDIA ADVISORY, for immediate release Calgary, Alberta
'No way to a dollar a day. We need something by May.'

Members of the Disability Action Hall are organizing in reaction to the recent \$38 increase to AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped). We are sharing the message to provincial candidates that **policy changes to social assistance programs need to happen**. While people with disabilities on social assistance are thankful for a \$38.00 increase per month, it is simply not enough to make ends meet in Calgary. An income of \$1088 is too little too late.

Says Lloyd, a member of the Disability Action Hall, 'It's not a very good announcement; you can't buy a pop and a drink or pay your phone bills for \$38. It's about a \$1 a day; that doesn't pay for a coffee.' Nearly 80% of people living in poverty happen to have a postal code in Edmonton and Calgary and policy makers need to look at an external cost of living measurement to address the poverty across our province.

The \$38 increase is about a \$1.25 a day—not enough to keep us alive. Hall members used the number of **\$2064 a month as a recommended base rate for AISH** (a calculation recognized by housing authorities that shelter costs need to be no more than 30% of a person's income). Today on average, nearly 63% of a single person's income living AISH goes to shelter costs, leaving on only \$400 for the rest of the month to pay for food and clothing. When we contacted Seniors and Employment Supports about how the \$38 increase was determined, we were told that the monies came from within the ministry's budget. A policy change like using an external measurement to set social assistance rates such as 30% of a person's shelter costs and have social assistance rates indexed every year is not on the Alberta radar. We have to wonder what the real costs are to society when we do very little to keep Albertans barely surviving. Our government is not only in a poverty crisis, but also a moral crisis to improve our social assistance programs for Albertans in need.

In reaction to the recent campaign promise by Stelmach to raise the exemption rate to \$1500, Christina is a single mom and says 'It's not enough to live on when people are trying to live and pay bills on time. I am a single mom. \$38 is peanuts. Raising the AISH exemption rate will help a little bit, it is a step in the right direction but it is still not enough as only 15% of AISH recipients reported income in July 2006. Hall members also have mixed reviews that additional employment agencies are now holding information sessions on how to find a job, but it is a band-aid solution to alleviate poverty in an expensive city. Thomas Poulsen, also a Hall member, states 'I'd like to ask why government has enough money to send people to Washington D.C. to hobnob with oil bigwigs but can only afford to give people with disabilities a dollar a day. We hoped there would be a major policy change announcement at this time.'

*CMHC states the average bachelor suite costs \$ 688 and a one bedroom is \$ 897 per month. 2007 stats report : Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation **Rental Market Report - Alberta Highlights - Fall 2007**



Members of the Hall will make this **an election issue** and will take part in a poverty talks all candidate forum held in the downtown core in mid-February. For more information on the poverty talks event, check out www.povertytalks.ca. Hall members are also available for interviews. **For more information, please contact the Disability Action Hall at 403.717.7630 or actionhall@calgscope.org**

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