



**Council Member Motion
For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of February 4th, 2021**

Date: January 29th, 2020

From: Councillors Potts and Loveday

Subject: UBCM Resolution: **Increase Disability Benefits and Income Assistance Rates**

Background:

For decades B.C. has had one of the highest rates of poverty in the country. As part of a broader Poverty Reduction Strategy, the current Provincial government increased disability and income assistance rates, for single people, by \$150 between 2017 and 2019. Even with these increases most people who receive this assistance continue to live below the poverty line.

In response to the economic hardships of the pandemic, the Federal Government determined that \$2000/month was required to meet a minimum standard of living in Canada. This is significantly higher than what people on disability or income assistance receive per month.

In April of 2020 the Province of British Columbia provided an automatic, monthly, \$300 COVID benefit for those receiving disability and income assistance. This significantly reduced people's risk of losing their housing and increased their access to necessities including food and medical supplies but did not raise disability or income assistance rates to or above the poverty line.

A single person on income assistance receives \$760/month and \$1060 with the COVID top-up. Someone on disability benefits is eligible for \$1183.42/month or \$1483 with the top-up. These rates do not reflect the cost of living in BC. The current average rent for a one bedroom in Victoria is \$1600, forcing people who access assistance to give up basic necessities in order to pay rent. These gaps send an impact across our whole community, creating or worsening other social crises, including homelessness and mental health issues, and lock community members into poverty.

As of January 2021 the \$300 monthly top-up has been reduced by half and there is no guarantee of an extension of this top-up past March 2021. Access to one time, temporary measures to address gaps in funding, like the Recovery Benefit, are subject to an application process. The application process will be a barrier for those who require additional support to apply.

The Provincial government has signaled towards a permanent increase for disability and income assistance. This is welcomed news but reinstating the \$300 top-up, even permanently, would not raise disability or income assistance rates to the poverty line. Ultimately, to eliminate poverty, disability and income assistance must be raised to livable rates that are above the market basket measure (MBM).

Community members have shared their significant challenges, poverty and disability groups, locally and across BC, have strongly advocated for this change, New Westminster City Council recently passed a similar motion, and Vancouver City Council passed a motion to raise rates in 2019. We recommend advancing this issue to the Province through the Union of BC Municipalities.

Recommendation:

That Council endorses the following resolution and directs staff to forward copies to UBCM member local governments, as well as the Provincial ministers responsible for Social Development, Poverty Reduction, Finance, and Housing, requesting favourable consideration.

Resolution:

WHEREAS after many years of frozen income assistance rates and only minimal increases to disability benefits the current Provincial Government increased rates, for single people, by \$150 between 2017 and 2019 but most people who receive disability benefits or income assistance continue to live well below the poverty line;

AND WHEREAS the Provincial Government added a \$300/month COVID benefit for those receiving disability and income assistance, which temporarily reduced people's risk of losing their housing and increased their access to necessities including food and medical supplies, but as of January 2021 the benefit has been reduced to \$150/month and there is no commitment to provide additional support past March 2021.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Province of British Columbia permanently reinstate the automatic, \$300/month benefit for people receiving disability benefits and income assistance and move to raise disability and income assistance to a livable rate that is above the market basket measure (MBM).

Respectfully submitted,



Councillor Potts



Councillor Loveday