

What Will an Increase in AISH Mean to Recipients?

During last year's race for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party, soon-to-be Premier, Alison Redford, announced that AISH recipients would receive a \$400/month increase. Following her election as leader, Premier Redford has tried to keep this campaign promise by giving the Minister of Seniors, George VanderBurg, a mandate letter asking him to find a way to fund an AISH increase from \$1188 to \$1588/month. ACCD awaits the details of the promised increase.

In the meantime, we wanted to show the personal experiences of those who will be affected most by the proposed increase. We contacted two friends of ACCD – both of whom are AISH recipients – and asked them how an extra \$400/month would change their day-to-day lives.

Joe Richter has been an AISH recipient for the past 12 years. Prior to that he owned a successful business and lived what most would describe as an average life. He had a wife, a home, a vehicle, and money for travel and entertainment. Joe was successful and had few worries.



Joe Richter, AISH recipient

Then Joe's life changed. His marriage came to an end; he lost his business in the settlement; and he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. All of this left

him with little personal or financial support. As Joe's MS worsened, so, too, did his ability to provide for himself. Fortunately for Joe, AISH benefits are available to people with multiple sclerosis. Getting on AISH helped Joe prevent the uncertainty of life without a secure income for food, clothing, or shelter, among other things.

Joe is thankful for the AISH program. Without it, his life would be more difficult. But he's also realistic about his finances now that he lives on AISH. In order to make it from one month to the next, he must manage his budget carefully just to make sure his bills are paid. And while he is able to pay his bills, Joe seldom has any money left for leisure. Simple things that make life enjoyable are beyond reach for Joe. For instance, going to the movies or going out for dinner with friends – things many Albertans take for granted – are rarely possible for Joe because of the cost. In turn, these barriers lead to isolation thus reducing Joe's quality of life.

So what would an additional \$400 dollars per month mean for him? "It would bring back some quality of life," said Joe. "I would have more freedom to participate in the community."

Darlene Kays feels the same way. Like Joe, Darlene is also on AISH and has been ever since she was diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive heart failure, and osteoporosis. The daily life she describes is much the same as Joe's. She is also thankful for the security AISH provides. Without it, her life would be uncertain. But she points out that the current amount she receives from AISH does not protect her against unexpected bills, or even bills she expects, but knows she cannot afford, such as the purchase of a new winter coat or new winter boots.

Like Joe, Darlene carefully manages her budget to make sure she always has enough for food, bills, and other necessary items, like laundry soap.

But once these items are covered, she has little money left over for leisure or other expenses, like Christmas gifts for her grandchildren; nevertheless, she is proud of how practical she has become on a limited budget. Darlene speaks about sharing food money with other AISH recipients in order to make community dinners several times a month, which reduces the cost of her monthly food bill.



Darlene Kays, AISH recipient

When asked what she would do with a \$400 increase to her AISH benefits, Darlene said she would be in a better position to handle unexpected bills, stock up on food by making bulk purchases (which are cheaper over the long term), and participate in more events and festivals throughout the city. According to Darlene, this last point in particular – the ability to participate in events and festivals – would give her the freedom to learn more about art and culture, and to develop a greater sense of belonging to her community.

The personal stories of Joe and Darlene are not uncommon. Many AISH recipients are scared to imagine their lives without an assured income, even though the money they do have amounts to very little. And while a \$400/month increase might not

seem like much to those among us who earn more than \$1188, on which AISH recipients live, it's a sum that could create opportunities for AISH recipients to participate more fully in their communities.

ACCD strongly supports Premier Redford's efforts to increase AISH benefits, and we will continue to report details as they unfold.

An Early Bird Notice: The Education for Life Bursary

In honour of our 25th anniversary in 1998, the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities created the Education for Life Bursary, an award that helps students with disabilities achieve full participation in society. Each year, the Education for Life Bursary helps post-secondary students manage the cost of their education. Since 1998, ACCD has awarded bursaries to more than 100 students with disabilities, at an amount totaling more than \$40,000.

June 30, 2012, is the application deadline for the 2012-2013 school year. Individuals with disabilities seeking to continue their education as post-secondary students are eligible for bursaries of up to \$800. Details and application forms can be found on our website at www.accd.net, or contact the ACCD office at 780-488-9088 in Edmonton or toll free at 1-800-387-2514.

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Happy New Year!