

Institutional Allowances & the Canadian Disability Benefit Act

Prepared by Megan Linton and Kendal David for *Invisible Institutions* and the *Inclusion Canada/ People First of Canada Joint Task Force on Deinstitutionalization*. Design and Layout by Kit Chokly.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- × People with disabilities who are subsidized to live in institutional settings are entitled to monthly allowances but are **disqualified** from accessing other disability income supports.
- × The current rates of institutional allowances are very low and **prohibit** adequate quality of life and community involvement for persons with disabilities.
- × People with disabilities, particularly intellectual or developmental disabilities, are most likely to live in institutional settings;¹ as such, they are **most impacted by forced poverty** through extremely low institutional allowance rates.
- × Federal income supplements **should be used to top off monthly allowances** to ensure that all people living in institutional settings are receiving at least \$1000/ month in personal allowances.

STATEMENT OF ISSUE

Low-income people with disabilities who live in institutional settings (i.e., group homes and long-term care facilities) receive monthly allowances. These allowances are intended to cover the costs of clothing, internet, mobility plans and medications not covered by provincial pharmaceutical plans. Federal investments in disability support which seek to address inadequate rates of income across the country—including the recently tabled *Act to reduce poverty and to support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit and making a consequential amendment to the Income Tax Act (Canadian Disability Benefit Act)*—must also include people with intellectual or developmental disabilities living in institutional settings who are currently excluded from accessing the same rate of income supports available to those living in the community.

BACKGROUND

People with disabilities living in non-institutional settings/in the community may be eligible for provincial disability income support programs such as the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) or Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH; in Alberta). However, individuals with disabilities who live in residential institutions are not eligible for these programs or the full rate of support. Rather, subsidized individuals who live in residential institutions receive monthly allowances, sometimes called personal needs allowances or comfort allowances ([Table 1](#)).

For eligible, subsidized residents, the allowance is the only source of income they receive. Payments for shelter and food costs are typically paid directly from provinces to institutions, and low rates of monthly personal allowances are justified by the argument that

Table 1: Monthly institutional allowances

Province	Allowance Rate	Name of Program
British Columbia	\$220*	Comforts Allowance
Alberta	\$340	Modified Living Allowance
Saskatchewan	\$265	Personal Living Benefit
Manitoba	\$370	Disposable Income for Personal Expenses
Ontario	\$149	Personal Needs and Comfort Allowance
New Brunswick	\$135	Comfort & Clothing Allowance
Newfoundland	\$150	Personal Care Allowance
Prince Edward Island	\$123	Personal Need Allowance
Nova Scotia	\$300	Comfort Care Allowance

Source: Provincial Ministries of Health and Long Term Care (see [Appendix A](#) for detailed source information)

* Residents are also eligible for the Transit Supplement, which is provided to Persons with Disabilities as \$52 in cash or as an in-kind bus pass.

residents' needs are fully met by the facility they live in. However, residents are responsible for providing their own cellular mobility plans, clothing, wireless internet, over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, recreation activities, hairdressing, menstrual products and other monthly personal needs. Current allowance rates, demonstrated in [Table 1](#), make it impossible for people with disabilities to afford personal effects and maintain an adequate quality of life.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The forthcoming Canadian Disability Benefit Act seeks to reduce poverty for working age persons with disabilities and meet Canada's international obligations under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.² In order to meet these objectives, people with disabilities who live in institutions must be considered and made eligible for the impending Canadian Disability Benefit.

Provincial policies which assume that people with disabilities who live in residential facilities have their full needs met by institutions are

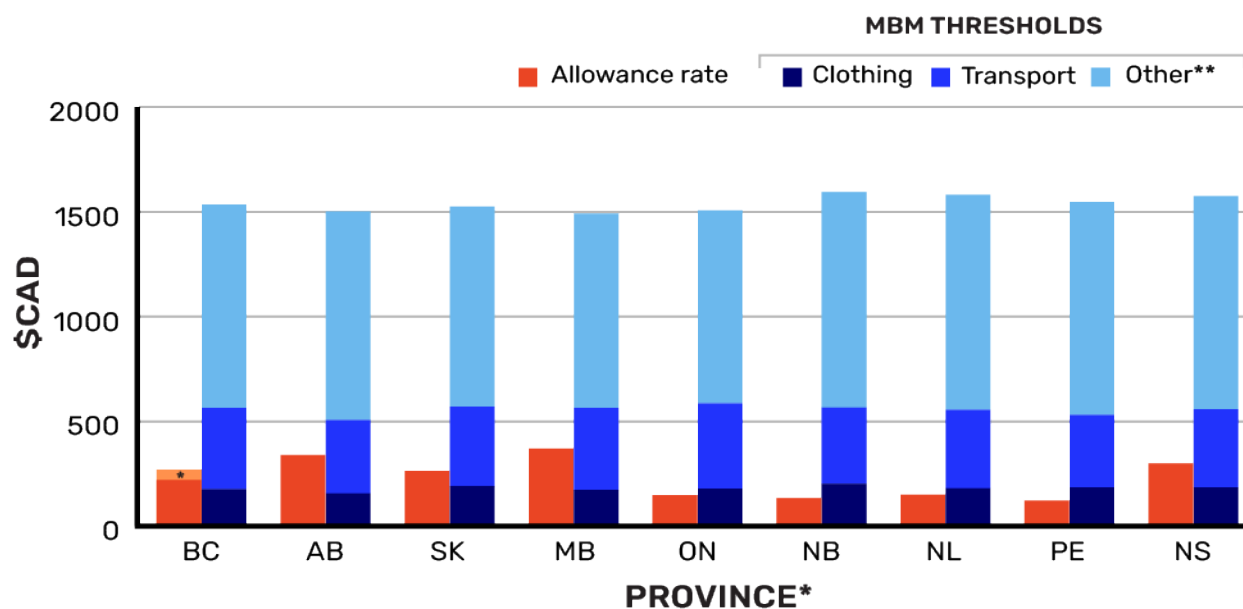
fundamentally flawed. Rates of monthly allowances for residents of group homes and long-term care facilities are woefully inadequate at addressing even the cost of basic comforts they are intended to cover. When compared to only select components of the Market Basket Measure thresholds (i.e. clothing, transport, and other basics; excluding shelter and food components), the rates of monthly allowances for people with disabilities living in institutions are abysmal ([Table 2](#) and [Figure 2](#)).

Most people with disabilities in Canada are forced to live in chronic, abject poverty. In fact, over 75% of adults with intellectual disabilities in Canada who live outside their family home live in poverty.³ Chronic poverty in institutions for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities are correlated with higher levels of mental illness and development of comorbidities.^{4,5} Chronic poverty serves as a barrier to community involvement and to the development and maintenance of social relationships.⁶

Table 2: Monthly MBM thresholds for clothing, transport, and other costs

Province*	Clothing	Transport	Other**
British Columbia	\$177	\$387	\$972
Alberta	\$157	\$349	\$996
Saskatchewan	\$191	\$380	\$954
Manitoba	\$174	\$391	\$926
Ontario	\$179	\$407	\$921
New Brunswick	\$203	\$363	\$1029
Newfoundland	\$181	\$374	\$1026
Prince Edward Island	\$185	\$345	\$1018
Nova Scotia	\$185	\$373	\$1018

Figure 1: Provincial institutional allowances and monthly MBM thresholds for clothing, transport, and other costs



Source: Statistics Canada. (2021). Market Basket Measure (MBM) thresholds for the reference family by Market Basket Measure region, component and base year 1, 2, 3. (Table no. 11-10-0066-01).

* The Market Basket Measure offers multiple thresholds for major urban centres and rural communities based on population size. The thresholds presented here are averages of all thresholds in each province, rounded to the nearest dollar and presented as a monthly threshold (rather than annual) in order to reasonably compare with provincial institutional allowance rates.

** The “other” component of the Market Basket Measure includes “necessary other goods and services” such as “household items, personal care, reading materials” (Djidel et al., 2020, p. 20) as well as communication costs like basic phone and internet services.

RECOMMENDATION

Chronic and extreme poverty caused by low rates of social assistance should be combatted through federal legislation aimed at providing a total livable income of at least \$2200/month for persons with disabilities through a combination of provincial, territorial and federal income support programs.⁷

In addition to complementing current provincial assistance rates for people with disabilities living in community, the federal income supplement should be used to top off monthly allowances for people

living in institutional settings to ensure that they are receiving at least \$1000/month in personal allowances to bring all people with disabilities at least to the poverty line (in alignment with components not provided by institutions, i.e. clothing, transport, and other expenses). The minimum rate of \$1000/month would support people with disabilities who live in institutions to access the internet, basic cable, mobile telephone plans, transit costs, menstrual and reproductive health products, clothing, dietary supplements, and over-the-counter medication.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Elizabeth Lin et al., "Addressing Gaps in the Health Care Services Used by Adults with Developmental Disabilities in Ontario" (Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences, February 2019), <https://www.ices.on.ca/Publications/Atlases-and-Reports/2019/Addressing-Gaps-in-the-Health-Care-Services-Used-by-Adults-with-Developmental-Disabilities>.
- 2 Article 28 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, enshrines the "right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions"
- 3 Inclusion Canada. (2021). Income Security. <https://inclusioncanada.ca/campaign/income-security/>
- 4 Elizabeth Lin et al., "Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Ontario's Forensic Inpatient System: A Population-Based Cohort Study," *Psychology, Crime & Law* 23, no. 9 (October 21, 2017): 914–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2017.1346100>.
- 5 Elizabeth Lin et al., "Addressing Gaps in the Health Care Services Used by Adults with Developmental Disabilities in Ontario" (Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences, February 2019), <https://www.ices.on.ca/Publications/Atlases-and-Reports/2019/Addressing-Gaps-in-the-Health-Care-Services-Used-by-Adults-with-Developmental-Disabilities>.
- 6 Dennis Raphael, *Poverty in Canada: Implications for Health and Quality of Life*, Third edition (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2020).
- 7 Rate calculated by Inclusion Canada as part of their suggested design for the Canada Disability Benefit: <https://inclusioncanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Canada-Disability-Benefit-Vision-and-Design-July-2021-FINAL.pdf>

APPENDIX A

Provincial programs	Source: Institutional allowance rates
British Columbia Comforts Allowance	BCEA Policy & Procedure Manual-- Room and Board, Special Care Facility & Allowances Rate Table
Alberta Modified Living Allowance	Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, section 3(2); Schedule 1, section 3 Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped General Regulation, sections 1(2)(c) and 2(a)
Saskatchewan Personal Living Benefit	Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability Rates (SAID) 2019 PDF
Manitoba Disposable income for personal expenses	Personal Care Services: A Guide to Services and Charges in Manitoba
Ontario Personal Needs and Comfort Allowance	Ontario Disability Support Program Regulations Sections 1(1), 4(1)3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 5, 4.2 and 32
New Brunswick Comfort & Clothing Allowance	Nursing Homes Act; Regulation 85-187 General
Newfoundland Personal Care Allowance	Direct Communications with the Office for Aging and Seniors, 2021, Department of Health and Community Services, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
Prince Edward Island Personal Need Allowance	Social Assistance Act Regulations, PEI Reg EC396/03
Nova Scotia Comfort Care Allowance	Department of Community Services Disability Support Program 8.16
