

Letter from Minister Stilwell August 17, 2016
Re: Bus Pass Issue

Ref: 190572

Linda Derkach
President
BC FamilyNet Society
lindaderkach@shaw.ca

Dear Ms. Derkach:

Thank you for your follow-up email of July 26, 2016, regarding changes to the Bus Pass Program and disability assistance rates.

I appreciate receiving your comments and commend you for your advocacy on behalf of vulnerable citizens in British Columbia (BC).

As you are aware, beginning September 1, 2016, all people who have the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) designation will receive a monthly rate increase of \$25. Everyone will also receive a Transportation Support Allowance. This means they will now have the choice to keep their bus pass or receive their Transportation Support Allowance in the form of \$52 added to their PWD payment.

In addition to the monthly rate increase of \$25, and as you noted, the ministry is also eliminating the \$45 bus pass administration fee and the annual renewal process for people who have the Persons with Disabilities designation. Because the annual administration fee and renewal process is being eliminated, the bus pass they hold will no longer expire on December 31st of each year.

At any time, Persons with Disabilities can decide to cancel their BC Bus Pass and instead receive a \$52 Transportation Support Allowance on their next assistance payment. They can also change their mind later and ask for a new bus pass.

I also recognize that living with a disability and on a limited income is very difficult; however, I would like to take this opportunity to clearly point out the truly comprehensive set of supports that are available to people in BC who are receiving disability assistance.

On top of the basic disability assistance rate, everyone on assistance receives free Medical Services Plan coverage and 100 percent coverage of eligible prescription costs as well as dental and optical coverage.

People with disabilities have access to even more support like wheel chairs, orthotics, hearing aids, medical transportation and nutritional supplements.

People with disabilities who leave assistance for employment or federal programs like Old Age Security are also eligible to keep basic health supplements.

More than 22, 000 people who have left disability assistance still receive these benefits, and will continue to do so if they meet eligibility requirements.

As well, on January 1, 2015, BC became the first province in Canada to annualize earning exemptions so people receiving disability assistance can maximize their earnings by calculation it on an annual basis instead of monthly.

This is particularly helpful for individuals with disabilities whose ability to work can fluctuate during the year.

As well, child-support payments are now fully exempt for families receiving income and disability assistance.

In December of 2015, BC also raised the asset limits for people on disability assistance:

- Single person or family where one person has the PWD designation; from \$5,000 to \$100,000
- Couple where both people have the PWD designation; from \$10,000 to \$200,000

Cash gifts or inheritances now have no impact on disability assistance, provided the recipient is within the asset limit.

I know many people would like to see a larger increase in assistance rates, and that's something we will continue to look at.

Thank you again for writing and sharing your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Michelle Stilwell
Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation