



## **Disability Without Poverty Network Applauds Introduction of Annualized Earnings Exemption for All British Columbians Receiving Disability Assistance**

**For Immediate Release  
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**Vancouver, BC** – The Honourable Don McRae, Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation and Sam Sullivan, MLA Vancouver-False Creek announced last week that the Annualized Earnings Exemption (AEE), available to some as a pilot in January 2013, will now be available for all British Columbians on disability assistance.

The Disability Without Poverty Network believes this is an important step toward helping British Columbians receiving disability assistance live with greater dignity and independence.

“Disability Alliance BC has been urging the introduction of the AEE and we are very happy the Minister has implemented this initiative. The AEE will provide more flexibility and independence for people with disabilities and help them to keep more earned income,” says Jane Dyson, Executive Director of Disability Alliance BC.

Faith Bodnar, Executive Director of Inclusion BC says, “Inclusion BC welcomes the announcement as a positive step forward. Annualized earnings exemptions will give people the flexibility they need to enter and stay in the workforce, removing a significant barrier to work.”

The AEE allows individuals receiving disability assistance with earnings from employment to use their exemption on an annual basis instead of monthly, without a monthly maximum. There is still a limit to the amount of income someone receiving disability assistance can earn, but it is calculated on an annual basis, which results in a more fair and person-centred system.

“Working to reduce the inequality that can happen through disability is important. Access to employment and economic security represents a critical part of the equation and it is great to see government continuing to work to identify ways to help close the gap” says Lorraine Copas, Executive Director of the Social Planning and Research Council of BC.

Under the AEE program, people receiving disability assistance are able to earn more income during periods of wellness without breaching monthly limits, meaning they have more income to live on when their symptoms are more severe and they may be unable to work.

“The introduction of the AEE recognizes the changing, and at times, complex conditions that many people with disabilities experience as it relates to employment. The AEE will assist to provide greater employment flexibility, economic stability, security and inclusion for individuals who are accessing disability assistance within British Columbia.” says Neil Belanger, ED of the BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society.

Making the program available to all British Columbians receiving disability assistance will impact those who are experience mental illness and/or substance use problems more severely at different times of the year. Over 50% of disability assistance recipients live with a diagnosed mental health and/or substance use problem. “This is a really important step in helping people living with episodic illnesses, including mental health problems, to be better able to make ends meet” adds Bev Gutray, CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association – BC Division.

“The announcement of the AEE marks the most recent step the government has taken towards its goal of making British Columbia the most progressive province in Canada for people with disabilities” says Belanger.

“While this is a welcome announcement, Inclusion BC continues calling for an increase in Persons with Disabilities benefits to reflect the cost of living and help lift people out of poverty,” says Bodnar. Says Gutray, “We would like to see disability assistance rates indexed against the cost of living in BC.”

The Disability Without Poverty network continues to call jointly for an increase to disability benefits to \$1,200 a month.

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*The Disability Without Poverty Network is a network of organizations including Inclusion BC, the Disability Alliance BC, Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division (CMHA), Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS), the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) and BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS).*

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