

1983
JUNE

**Benefit and Policy Changes in Social Allowances:
A Community Response**

**Brief presented to the Minister of Social Services
and Community Health, Dr. Neil Webber**

June 3, 1983

**Prepared by the Edmonton Social
Planning Council on behalf of
voluntary agencies active in the
Edmonton Community.**

A. Introduction

1. As a supplement to the Provincial budget presented in the legislature on March 24, 1983 the Minister of Social Services and Community Health, Dr. Neil Webber, announced a number of significant changes in the benefits and policies regarding social allowance. These changes included:

- a 5% increase as of July 1, 1983 in the basic allowance for food, clothing, personal and household expenses
- major reductions in the ceiling for shelter allowances, and the elimination of the policy of paying 50% of the difference above the ceiling
- the standardized lowering of asset limits for all recipients at \$1,500 for single persons and \$2,500 for married people or those with dependents
- the removal for employable recipients of the automatic payment of monthly clothing and household benefits after three months of assistance
- the limiting of support to 16 and 17 year olds, as well as young single parents to one months room and board
- the elimination of social allowance support for single people and couples without dependents awaiting Unemployment Insurance past the normal waiting period
- a 50% cutback in the funding available for special benefits, such as payment for household appliances, home repairs, moving expenses, emergency accommodation, and the introduction of tighter controls for approval of the special benefits

In the announcement that accompanied these changes to benefit levels and policies the Minister indicated that they would "more realistically reflect economic circumstances". While the anticipated savings of \$50 million may indeed reflect the government's perception of its economic circumstances, it is our view that the changes seriously underestimate the economic circumstances of many of

the almost 60,000 Albertans who are presently receiving social allowance.

2. The purpose of this brief is to express our collective concern about the anticipated impact of the benefit and policy changes as of July 1st. As well, in the light of our experiences, we wish to offer a series of recommendations that we believe deserve the prompt attention of the government and the Social Services and Community Health department. This brief has been prepared collaboratively by representatives of seventeen voluntary social service agencies and community organizations in Edmonton. Through a series of meetings all of these groups have been able to share with others their "front line" experiences of the likely impact of the announced changes in social allowance. These opportunities to meet have served to confirm for us all that the difficulties and disruptions that will result are profoundly disturbing; particularly as they will affect already vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens groups in our community. It is also important to appreciate that the preparation of this brief has involved board and staff members of voluntary agencies and community groups; all representatives of service delivery organizations who can expect to have to bear the brunt of the increasing demand for our services that is likely to result from the announced changes. Understandably we too are faced with the painful dilemma of restraints on our funding at a time when requests for our assistance are rapidly rising.

B. The 5% Increase in the Basic Allowance -

1. In the light of the high cost of living in Edmonton, and the proposed reductions in the shelter allowance, we are very concerned that a 5% increase in the basic allowance will prove to be quite inadequate. While purchased food costs between April 1982 and April 1983 have in fact increased by 5.3% it must be appreciated that the increases on a monthly basis for 1983 have been closer to 2%; given an anticipated annualized increase for 1983 of 24%. Further, during this past year in the city, public transportation costs have increased by 18%, health care by 10% and tobacco products by 40%. It should also be appreciated that there has not been an increase in the basic rate of social allowance since April 1982.

2. Although we have been informed that Alberta provides the most generous social allowance program in Canada, the basic allowance payments as of July 1 will still leave Albertan single recipients and single parent families with one child, in fourth place - behind Newfoundland, Saskatchewan and British Columbia - among the provinces who distinguish between a basic and shelter allowance component. An unfortunate situation in a province that has the highest average income in the country. When the new basic shelter allowances are combined it is also evident that the province will no longer be able to maintain its number one ranking. Assuming the payment of the long-term basic assistance and the maximum shelter allowance, single Albertans, who presently make up almost one third of all recipients, will receive less than the allowance available in Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. As well, single parents with one child under 12 will, as of July 1, be receiving less than is provided in British Columbia.

3. With the proposed changes in the basic rate and the shelter allowance, a single person on social allowance will be expected to absorb a 14% decrease in his monthly income, a couple, a 4% decrease, a single parent with one child, a 5% decrease, and two adults with two children, a 3% decrease. Certainly a difficult burden for anyone to bear in a depressed economy where inflation is not expected to show a significant decline.

C. Reductions in the Shelter Allowance

1. Of all the changes introduced by the Minister, it has been the reduction in the maximum shelter allowance and the removal of the payment of 50% of the difference, that has aroused the greatest concern. The Minister and his department have continued to justify the reductions on the basis of increased vacancy rates. Unfortunately this is a very misleading indicator of the availability of affordable housing, and as well fails to appreciate the operation of the housing market in the city.

2. While the April 1983 vacancy rate for Edmonton stands at 7.5%, information provided by Statistics Canada on the consumer price index shows that this change in the rate has not been reflected in housing costs for the last twelve months. This is particularly evident in the index relating to the cost of household

operations, which includes utilities, as there has been a 12% increase between April 1982 and April 1983. These costs are likely to be much worse for this year. For example between March and April of 1983 there was a 2.3% increase in the cost of household operations - an increasing expense that social allowance recipients will be expected to meet out of their reduced shelter allowances in this coming year.

3. Arguing for reduced shelter allowances on the basis of overall vacancy rates is also very dependent on the "trickle down" theory and its application to the housing market. It completely ignores the fact that competitive pressure for affordable housing increases the lower the level of income that a family or individual is required to live on. As a result those with a low income, which obviously would include those on social allowance, are required to spend a much higher percentage of their available funds on meeting their shelter needs. This aspect of the operation of the housing market is even more crucial for those who are renting their accommodation; which is true of 90% of those presently receiving social allowance. (1)

(1) It is also evident from an examination of Edmonton's income levels in 1981 that the lower a family's income the greater is the likelihood that they are renters. This is well demonstrated in the following table.

Tenure Type by Income for Edmonton, 1981

Annual Income Level	Home Owned or Being Bought	Home Rented
\$8,000 - \$8,999	25%	75%
\$15,000 - \$15,999	33%	67%
\$30,000 - 34,999	68%	32%

4. It is customary to accept the notion that a family should not be expected to spend more than 25% of its annual income in meeting its shelter costs. The table that follows reveals that in Edmonton in 1981 this was impossible for well over half the renters within each income level below \$20,000. In fact for those renters with an annual income level under \$9,000 over half spent more than 50% of their income meeting their shelter costs. This income level would have included a large proportion of those on social allowance - all single persons, many single parents and many couples without children. It demonstrates that even if the individuals in these groups had received the maximum amount in shelter allowance. (1) at least half of them would have been unable to meet their shelter costs on the funding provided. Notably also a quarter of all home owners on an annual income between \$12,000 and \$13,000 were also paying more than 50% of the maximum social allowance available, would have difficulty in meeting their shelter costs on the basis of the allowance provided.

Percentage of Annual Income Spent on Shelter Costs
Edmonton, 1981

<u>Income level</u>	<u>Percentage who spend more than 25% of income</u>		<u>Percentage who spend over 50% of income</u>	
	<u>Owners*</u>	<u>Renters</u>	<u>Owners*</u>	<u>Renters</u>
\$5,000 - 5,999	47	73	17	52
7,000 - 7,999	46	89	30	51
9,000 - 9,999	24	81	15	25
11,000 - 11,999	26	83	15	12
12,000 - 12,999	47	76	24	7
15,000 - 15,999	43	55	10	1
20,000 - 20,999	43	24	4	-
30,000 - 35,999	23	2	1	-

* Includes mortgage holders

(1) For a person on long-term assistance the shelter allowance accounts for approximately 50% of their income

5. An examination of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation survey of apartment rental charges in Edmonton in April 1983 shows that the average rent for a bachelor apartment is presently 25% above the proposed shelter allowance for single individuals. One third of the areas surveyed - west, southwest and northeast Edmonton, have no bachelor apartments for rent under \$320 a month. While the average rent for one bedroom and two bedroom apartments is roughly similar to the shelter allowance for two and three persons, the average rent for three bedroom apartments exceeds the shelter allowance maximum for four persons by approximately 10%. In four areas of the city - the centre, the west, the northwest and the northeast, there are in fact no three bedroom apartments being rented for an amount equivalent to the shelter allowance that will be provided for a four person family following July 1st. It is also very important to appreciate that these existing rental rates in the city did not include the cost of most utilities; an expense which a social allowance recipient would be expected to meet out of the shelter allowance provided.

6. Accepting the average vacancy rate for the city as an indicator of the availability of alternative housing for social allowance recipients ignores the issue of the availability of affordable housing for those receiving a shelter allowance. A newspaper survey conducted over a five day period revealed that of the 1,264 average listings per day, only 7% would have been potentially available to single social allowance recipients receiving the \$290 shelter allowance. At least half of these vacancies included various restrictions, such as shared accommodation, a preference for females, professionals, working couples, mature adults and non-drinkers or non-smokers. At the other end of the housing market, only 2% of the advertised accommodation would have been suitable for a family with three children. In the majority of these advertisements, the rent being asked exceeded the new shelter allowance ceilings. A detailed examination conducted by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in northeast Edmonton showed that there were presently no vacant two bedroom apartments for under \$430, and only a 1.8% vacancy rate for accommodation under \$290.

7. Our review of existing affordable housing also shows that many of the social housing options that should be available for those in receipt of social allowance are likely to be beyond the shelter allowance levels. For example a

three bedroom town house operated by the Edmonton Non Profit Housing Authority is presently renting for \$600 a month, plus utilities, which would be beyond the shelter ceiling for a family of five. As well the Housing Authority at present has only a 3% vacancy rate in its 355 units. Canative Housing, 50% of whose tenants receive social allowance, have indicated that some of their rental rates will exceed the new shelter allowance ceilings, particularly when utility costs are considered, and as a result they anticipate that some of their present tenants will have to relocate. The Alberta Home Mortgage Corporation has subsidized apartments available in a new building on Jasper Avenue, however the rent for a one bedroom apartment is \$433 and two bedroom \$512; with utilities being extra. The Canadian Mental Health Association has one bedroom apartments available for their mental health clients. Although the association has received considerable support in the financing of the apartments, it is still necessary for them to charge \$350 for a one bedroom apartment including utilities, which would of course be beyond the financial resources of a single person on social allowance.

8. We also wish to express our concern at the difficulties that will be faced by those on social allowance who have a mortgage. Although homeowners presently represent 10% of those receiving social allowance, their numbers have increased significantly during the past year. As the department has indicated, approximately 3,200 social allowance recipients who hold a mortgage already have payments that exceed the proposed shelter ceiling. While the policy changes have allowed for new applicants who are home owners to receive up to 50% of the shelter costs in excess of the ceilings for a maximum of 90 days, this is hardly sufficient when the potential loss of a person's home is at stake.

9. An issue of major concern in our meeting has been the serious dislocation to the lives of those on social allowance who will be required to relocate. As one agency commented:

"The single parent will be especially badly hit by having to move. She or he has few resources to count upon in finding decent accommodation. Most single parents are women, a large number do not have transportation, and many will be forced to take all of their children with them, because of the lack of child care, when they are searching for alternative accommodation.....Particular problems occur with the marginally capable single parent who is in the process of rebuilding her life and attempting to regain children who have already been apprehended." (See appendices.)

The problems of coping with relocation will likely be particularly traumatic for mental health clients, many of whom have come to appreciate the stability that their home or apartment provides in an otherwise troubled world. The Boyle Street Co-op in its brief expressed anxiety about the likely impact on some of their clients.

"Undoubtedly a number will be hospitalized, who would not have been hospitalized had they not been forced to move. A much greater number will simply cope as well as they can, with the strain of moving and the disappointment of having to leave places which, in some cases, they have lived in for years. The time spent organizing a move will inevitably prolong the period of readjustment into society and many will likely drop out of programs which are useful for learning life skills."

For the physically disabled, having to relocate could be a financial as well as an emotional burden. As one of the involved agencies commented:

"Accessibility means more than being able to wheel a chair into an apartment; for the person who is deaf it may mean visual signals to indicate telephone or doorbell rings, for others it may mean grab bars, railings, etc. Currently the Home Adaptation Program provides landlords or owners with some financial assistance to adapt homes or apartments. If persons are forced to move will adaptation funding become available before the relocation? Can persons qualify for a second home adaptation? (See Appendices.)

10. Since the announcement of the reduction in shelter allowances, it has been frequently mentioned that landlords will likely be encouraged to lower their rents. While our experiences have indicated that this is likely to happen in the inner city rooming houses, it is apparent that a large number of landlords and owners in newer accommodation simply cannot afford to lower their rents for one bedroom or bachelor apartments. They are tied to mortgages taken out at a time of high rates and therefore they have very few options open to them in terms of rent reductions.

D. The Standardized Lowering of Asset Limits

Although this change of policy has received little attention, we are concerned by both the intentions of the department and the implications of the new policy. By lowering the asset limits in this way it appears to

be an attempt to stem some of the flow onto the social allowance and to insist that recipients would have exhausted all available resources before making application. The likely impact of the decision is that those who eventually discontinue their receipt of social allowance will have even less resources upon which to rebuild their lives.

E. The Removal of Automatic Payment of Monthly Clothing and Household Benefits for Employable Recipients

In March 1983 there were 15,631 recipients of social allowance who were considered to be employable; almost a third of the total receiving social allowance. Given our continuing depressed economy and the growing number of Unemployment Insurance exhaustees, this change of policy will have a significant impact on many individuals and families presently receiving social allowance. Notably in October 1982 almost half of those on social allowance had been claiming for more than three months. It is a policy change that is discriminatory; suggesting that there is a necessary distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' on social allowance. The household costs of the employables on social allowance after three months are hardly likely to be less than those of others in receipt of social allowance, and certainly clothes for their children are subject to the same wear and tear.

F. Limiting of Support to 16 and 17 Year Olds

Voluntary agencies in the Edmonton community who work with young people are understandably concerned by the policy changes regarding 16 and 17 year olds. The 727 young people who are currently receiving social allowance, including 423 young single parents, are to be limited to one months room and board. This change of policy rests on the assumption that these young people will be able, during the one month they are receiving social allowance, to "re-establish family contacts and obtain appropriate support". This assumption is not supported by the facts. The majority of the young people concerned have no families to return to; many have left home because of abuse, neglect and rejection. Some have been apprehended by Alberta Social Services at an early age and have spent much of their lives in group homes, foster homes

and government institutions. Agencies who work with these young people are concerned that a month is insufficient time for them to provide the type of assistance that is necessary. There is understandable anxiety that those young people who are denied social allowance will eventually turn to crime and prostitution as a means of supporting themselves. It is also unrealistic and impractical for the child welfare department to apprehend a young person who is in need of extended assistance. Placing a young person in care in this way is a totally inappropriate form of income support.

G. Limiting of Social Allowance Support for Those Awaiting Unemployment Insurance

While we are not aware of the numbers who have been affected by this policy change, our concern is that individuals who are in need of support during a very difficult period in their lives have become unwitting pawns in federal and provincial politics. It is certainly a denial of the lofty principles of the Social Development Act that the province should be refusing to provide support for those who are trapped in the bureaucratic red tape of Unemployment Insurance.

H. 50% Cutback in the Funding For Special Benefits

With the anticipated relocation of many of those on social allowance, our volunteer agencies are understandably concerned to discover that the department has cut by 50% the funding available for special benefits. As well, tighter controls have been introduced which will make it much more difficult for those on social allowance to receive the assistance that they are entitled to. Clients on social allowance have already expressed anxiety about the payment of utility arrears, of the department's willingness to cover moving expenses, particularly when the person or family has already moved once during the past twelve months, and the difficult issue of damage deposits.

I. Recommendations

In light of the "Frontline" experience of the voluntary agencies who have collectively expressed their concern over the proposed benefit and policy changes we wish to present the following recommendations:

1. That the basic allowance provided under social allowance be indexed and increased to more accurately reflect the cost of living in the province of Alberta.
2. That the implementation of the policy and benefit changes regarding shelter allowances be suspended until such time as a more thorough review of the implications of the changes is carried out; particularly in reference to the availability of affordable housing. Further we recommend that adjustments in the shelter allowance should reflect regional variations in both availability and cost of accommodation.
3. That provisions be made to insure that 16 and 17 year olds and young parents remain eligible for -xtended assistance.
4. That any costs incurred by those who are forced to relocate as a result of the implementations of the reduction in the shelter allowance ceilings should be met by the department; including all costs associated with moving, the breaking of leases, the payment of damage deposits, utility hookups, and the provision of special adaptations.
5. That any suggestions on the part of the Department that social allowance recipients be encouraged to "double up" in their accommodation, take in boarders, or sublet, should be withdrawn in that these proposals may contravene the Landlord and Tenant Act, Municipal Bylaws, existing Management Agreements and Public Health Regulations.
6. That exceptions in shelter ceiling allowances for medical reasons, disability and the unavailability of accommodations suitable for families of five or more, be increased to meet actual costs and that they remain available on an ongoing basis.

7. That the funding available for special benefits be substantially increased and that it be provided and administered on an area basis, so as to best meet the needs of those requiring additional assistance.
8. That a Taskforce, involving representatives from the community, be established to examine all policies and regulations regarding social allowance in the province of Alberta.

APPENDICES

REGIONAL ACTION GROUP OF EDMONTON
10043 81 Ave.

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

T6E 1W7

Phone 4396058

May 27, 1983

Dear Sir,

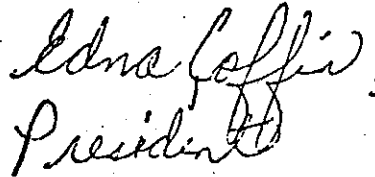
We, the Regional Action Group of Edmonton, endorse the Social Allowance Shelter Cutback brief presented to Minister Neil Webber.

We feel the disabled community will be adversely affected by such policy changes and strongly advocate that the recent decisions made in this matter be reversed.

Sincerely,



Karen Lienau
Project Manager



MEMBER OF
THE COALITION OF PROVINCIAL ORGANIZATIONS OF THE HANDICAPPED
(C.O.P.O.H.)



canadian mental health association

201, 10580 - 109 STREET
EDMONTON, ALBERTA
T5H 3B2

telephone 426-7020

May 31, 1983

Dr. Neil Webber
Minister
Social Services & Community Health
424 Legislature Building
Edmonton, Alberta

Dear Dr. Webber:

The Canadian Mental Health Association, North Central Region, Board of Directors support the Brief prepared by various concerned Edmonton Social Service Agencies and other Community groups pertaining to the decreased shelter rates and benefits previously provided by Social Services and Community Health.

The Canadian Mental Health Association, North Central Region, is concerned as to the "mental" anguish that this recent policy decision will have specifically on ex-psychiatric patients but also as to the added "strain" on the general social assistance clientele in having to relocate to rental space within the new shelter rates. Market research indicates that the availability of rental space within the new shelter rates is not as the vacancy rates may indicate.

Sincerely,

Renee Cochard
President
Canadian Mental Health Association (N.C.R.)

RC/ct

Impact of the Shelter Allowance Changes on the Physically Disabled

A recent survey of the accessible housing market in Edmonton indicates that rents in general were beyond the shelter ceilings. Only those individuals receiving AISH plus a supplemental \$100 could afford even the subsidized accessible housing units. The effect is to force a greater number of physically disabled Albertans to apply for AISH - even though they anticipate future employment and financial independence. Some will be ruled "ineligible" because they are considered "employable". Others may have to wait extended periods of time because of increased applications.

The limited amount of affordable accessible housing may force disabled persons to move into rural areas. For those requiring easy access to medical centres this move may cause grave concern if the services are not available in rural areas. In addition, transportation costs increase if you must go to other areas for services, or transportation may not exist.

One cannot deny that it is difficult to find accessible housing in urban centres and such housing is even more limited in rural areas. Mobility impaired persons cannot live in basement suites or walk-ups.

Accessibility means more than being able to wheel a chair into an apartment: for the person who is deaf or hard of hearing it may mean visual signals to indicate telephone or doorbell rings; for the person who is blind it may mean auditory signals or tactile signals; for other persons it may mean grab bars, railings, etc. Currently the Home Adaptation Program (HAP) provides landlords or owners with some financial assistance to adapt homes/suites, for persons in wheelchairs only. If persons are forced to move, will adaptation funding become available before the relocation? Can persons qualify for a second home adaptation? Given the current high costs of construction or renovation, are additional funds available as incentives for landlords to adapt premises?

Some disabled persons require the services of an aide. Current placement requirements include a separate bedroom for the aide. This then means two bedrooms but the shelter ceiling is for one person - excluding an aide. What will be done to cover the additional accommodation costs of aides?

Client Profiles

1. Mobility Impaired person - single parent with 3 children. The current home was made accessible under HAP. The family has lived here for 7 years. The current rent exceeds the shelter ceiling and the landlord cannot reduce the rent because of his own mortgage payments.
2. Single person with respiratory and allergy problems. The individual requires a live-in aide, a waterbed and must live above a certain level in the city. Currently pays more than the proposed ceiling for single persons. This individual may be forced onto AISH - an additional cost - although he would like to get a job when one becomes available.
3. New accessible apartments opening at a base rate of \$400 and utilities. This exceeds the shelter ceiling even if a person receives AISH plus \$100.



... PROJECT

Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5H 3V5
Phone: (403) 421-7770

Head Office
McMan Youth Services Association
#1, 8207 - 104 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T6E 1A1
Phone: (403) 432-9111

IMPACT OF SOCIAL ALLOWANCE CHANGES ON 16 - 17 YEAR OLDS

" I hope as many of them as possible will move back home... Their problems may not be that severe."

Mr. Neil Webber, Minister for Social Services, Edmonton Journal, Saturday May 7th 1983.

There are 727 young people aged 16 - 17 currently receiving Social Allowance. 423 of these are single parents. Under the new policy 16 - 17 year olds will receive assistance as follows;

- Maximum payment reduced from \$375.00 to \$290.00
- Period of assistance reduced from 3 to 1 month.

During this period young people are expected to "re-establish family contact and obtain appropriate support." Those who do not will be referred to Child Welfare Workers, or to the Guardian Social Allowance Program. As workers our aim is to assist disadvantaged young people. We are seriously concerned about the impact of these policy changes upon our clients.

Statistics Canada reports that inflation is running at 7.9% nationally and 8.4% in Edmonton. There have been recent price increases in utilities, transit costs, food and clothing. Cutting maximum payments from \$375.00 to \$290.00 will mean that those already on tight budgets will have to stretch them further, particularly single parents. A recent survey of room and board accommodation advertised in the press revealed that there were only 94 vacancies in Edmonton priced under the new shelter ceilings. Many of these vacancies occur in run down inner city areas, inappropriate accommodation for young vulnerable people.

Reducing the period of assistance from 3 to 1 month, seems to be an attempt to force families to assume responsibility for young people who have left home. The policy fails to recognise that many young people are estranged from their families. Some have left home because of abuse, neglect, and rejection. Some have been apprehended

y Alberta Social Services at an early age, and spent much of their lives in group homes, foster homes and government institutions. It would be a difficult and painful process for most of these young people to contact their parents. They would be approaching families not only unable, but often unwilling to support them. Some have no families. In our work we attempt to assist young people in obtaining accommodation and employment. 75% of the young people we work with have been in care at some time in their lives. By cutting assistance to one month only, we are now more limited in our ability to assist young people meet their basic needs. i.e. housing, food and clothing, transit costs for job seeking. We anticipate that some young people may turn to other means of supporting themselves i.e. prostitution and crime. Ultimately this policy could lead to increased numbers of young people being involved with correctional services at a far higher cost to the taxpayers.

It has been stated the Child Welfare Department and the Guardian Social Allowance Program will adequately provide for young people requiring extended assistance. Yet, Child Welfare workers report that it is both impractical and unrealistic for their department to assume this responsibility. Apprehending and placing a young person is not seen as an appropriate method of providing income maintenance. Many of our clients have told us that they are not prepared to become involved with the Child Welfare Department again. The Guardian Social Allowance Program is similarly inadequate as many of our clients do not have the support of an individual who could act as their guardian. Although the policy allows for an appeal for extended assistance, young people lacking the social skills to carry through with this process may well become more alienated from seeking assistance. They are on their own.

Graeme Brown
Youth Worker

Brent MacKinnon
Director



INNER-CITY YOUTH PROJECT
9656 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5H 3V5
Phone: (403) 421-7770

Head Office
McMan Youth Services Association
#1, 8207 - 104 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T6E 4K4
Phone: (403) 432-9

Case Profile

L.S.: 16 years old
Female
Former ward of Child Welfare

Background:

L lives with her older sister's family (husband, one child, one expected). She is paying \$250.00 per month room and board to her sister. Parents are separated, both have alcohol related problems and a history of neglect with their children. Father is legal guardian, however L has not lived with him for several years. Prior to L's wardship being terminated she was in care at the Youth Development Centre. Child Welfare officials believed L to have the social skills, attitudes, motivation, etc to become stable and independent in the community. She was successful in her school program and various work experience programs.

Initial Contact, Assessment and Intervention:

When L became involved with our agency she was on the fringes of the prostitution and drug trafficking business in the Bellamy Hill and 96 Street area. She had dropped out of her school placement and was becoming increasingly involved in the sub-cultures of the inner city. She knew that she was getting too involved with people that were into prostitution, drugs and petty crime, so she asked us for help. L was on social assistance, however her district office social worker clearly warned her that assistance would be cut if she did not get into a school or work experience program. She wanted and needed continued assistance from social services. She also desired a more stable and constructive lifestyle. L was highly motivated to change! Our agency was able to link her up with the Specialized Youth Unit (Department of Manpower) and from there a position was found with the Teen Employment Opportunities Project. L's social assistance was maintained, however it was adjusted since she was receiving a wage while in this program. L no longer was involved with people from the inner city core.

Impact of Policy Changes:

L was experiencing problems at home with her sister's family. Unrealistic expectations, demands and pressures were being placed upon her. L was informed that she would not receive social assist-

ance past June. This was due to policy changes in the Social Services Department. She started to appear more frequently in the downtown core. L approached myself for help with these problems. She clearly stated that she didn't want to become re-involved in the petty crime, prostitution, drug trafficking activity downtown. I discussed L's progress with her Trainer/ Youth Worker at the Teen Employment Opportunities Project. She reported that L was doing very well in their program and that there was a good chance permanent employment could result from her efforts. L, myself and her Trainer from TEOP met several times to find solutions to her problems. Her District Office Social Worker advised L that she could appeal her termination of assistance, but any further assistance would be for one month only. She also suggested that she could be placed back with the Child Welfare Department, "and they could approach L's father to assume financial responsibility for her." Another suggestion was to find foster parents for L. L's father was in no position to assume responsibility. L was resistant to becoming a ward of the government again. L also felt that she was past the point of needing foster parents. Needless to say, L felt very alone, confused and desperate. We have not heard from L since this meeting with her social worker.

Brent MacKinnon,
Director, Inner City Youth Project.

BM/cr

Boyle Street Community Services Co-Op

10229 • 96 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5H 2G8 • Telephone: 424-4106

Changes in Social Assistance guidelines for Single Parents

The recent reductions in available benefits for Social Assistance recipients are largely not specific to particular groups of clients. Especially in the case of the reductions in Shelter Allowance ceilings, the changes are being made almost without reference to the needs of individuals or groups. As a result, they tend to impact most upon those who are least able to cope with "belt-tightening": those groups already at the margins of societal support. One of the major groups in this position is that of single parents.

In one area, single parents are specifically affected by a change: that in Social Service policy towards the single mother under 18 years of age. Old policy was that 16 and 17 year old single parents were able to receive assistance on the same basis as those 18 and over; they were permitted to collect assistance for a period of up to four months after the birth of their child (and up to 11 years in the case of two or more children). Apparently because of an outcry at this "anti-family" policy from "rural Alberta", Dr. Webber has changed the policy to allow for assistance for only one month in total, in Room and Board situations, to permit reconciliation with the young mother's parents, and a return to their home. In the event that this is impossible (a quite frequent event, we would suggest), the mother is to be either "found a Guardian", or referred to the child welfare authorities, who would go to court to have the woman made a ward of the government.

Dr. Webber seems to place great faith in the possibility of family reconciliation and re-integration into the extended family. Doubtless, when this is desirable and possible, it should take place, but in a great many cases, this is already happening. We have very great doubts as to how many young mothers will go into a suitable environment as a result of being cut off welfare. It is more likely that the young mother has left her family because of an unbearable home situation; indeed, this is often a contributing factor in early pregnancy. The comfort of an early sexual relationship is an alternative to home brutality, drunkenness, and lack of affection. How much is gained by sending a young mother and her child back into that type of environment?

The other solutions, Guardianship, or Wardship, do not appear to offer much hope that they will assist the young mother to build a good life for her children and herself. The Guardianship program perhaps could do so, but there are only a very small number of people willing to offer their services as surrogate parents for the pittance payable. Wardship by the Province, through the child welfare system, seems to be the most unacceptable solution proposed by SEACH. It is simply not within the powers of the family court judges to award Wardship solely for financial reasons, and would be transparently unjust in any case.

What is very likely to happen, in a number of cases, is that the young woman, denied assistance by the government, will turn to street life to provide for herself: hooking, petty crime, almost inevitable apprehension of her child. What does society "save"?

The major "money saver" in the recent changes is the reduction in shelter allowance maximum payments. Selected maximum shelter payments are shown below:

Size of family	New rates	Old rates	%change
2	\$430 p.m.	\$475 p.m.	- 9.5%
3	\$490	\$545	- 10.1%
4	\$505	\$560	- 9.8%
5	\$525	\$585	- 10.3%

The single parent will be especially badly hit by having to move due to these reductions. She or he has few resources to count upon in finding decent accommodations, and arranging to move into them. Most single parents are women, a large number do not have any transportation, and many are forced to take all of their children with them, because of lack of child-care, when they are looking for accommodations. Not only does this exert an extra strain which does not exist for the two-parent family, it also reduces the chances of being accepted in accommodations.

All the problems which the smaller single parent family faces tend to be magnified many times for the larger families. While numbers of one and two bedroom apartments are available for the parent with one or two children, within the new guidelines, this is not the case for the larger families, who have too many children to be accepted into apartment blocks, and have to look for a townhouse. The average rent (before utilities) for a two or three bedroom house on the open market is from \$500 to \$585 per month: in excess of the guidelines for single parents with less than 5 children, when utilities are taken into account. And landlords simply will not rent townhouses to families who will have to put more than two children per bedroom. Many even restrict the number of children to one per bedroom.

Particular problems occur with the marginally capable single parent, who is in the process of rebuilding her life and attempting to regain children who have already been apprehended. In order to prove that the parent can provide adequate care, she has to show that she has adequate accommodation, sufficient for the additional child or children. The catch is that Social Services will only fund for the number of children currently in the care of the parent. With the reductions in shelter ceilings, the task of satisfying the court and keeping within the guidelines becomes all the more difficult. We have a client, "Marilyn", who is caught in exactly this situation. She is now living in a three bedroom house with one of her children (15 years of age). She is ready to take another child of hers (14 years) back, out of custody of the government. But she is \$120 per month over the shelter guidelines for two people, and will have to move into a smaller, less suitable place. In the meantime, the woman has collected a considerable amount of furniture and household appliances, much of which would have to be disposed of in order for her to move into an apartment.

Whatever the merits of the government's overall reductions in welfare payments, their most serious negative impact is as a result of their "blanket" application. Especially in the case of shelter ceilings, it seems quite inequitable that these cannot be appealed in individual cases, a change from previous policy. Dr. Webber's explanation for this change is that too many people were taking advantage of it. But the appeals were heard by a board appointed by the Minister, and the main grounds for appeal was that hardship would result. Will hardship for specially disadvantaged groups such as single parents disappear simply because they can not appeal?

Effects of the changes in Social Assistance on Mental Health clients of the Boyle Street Co-op.

First, it is necessary to define the type of mental health client who typically finds himself/herself on the case-load of our outreach workers.

In a recent piece of research completed at the Co-op, it was found that, of 101 mental health clients in the past two years, over 90 percent lived on their own. They are, therefore, affected largely by the changes in social assistance for singles. As readers will know, it is in this area that the cutbacks have been most severe. The majority of clients have multiple hospitalisations.

Why do these people not apply for Alberta's Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped? The benefits available are considerably higher than those available on Social Assistance, and the majority of our mental health clients appear to qualify. The first and most obvious reason is that a considerable percentage do not wish to be stigmatised as permanently disabled. They retain a healthy, if not entirely realistic, belief that they will re-integrate into normal society at some time in the near future.

The second reason is that the form of payment for A.A.I.S.H. is almost exclusively in cheque form, which many prospective recipients cannot handle. Social Assistance payments, on the other hand, can often be made in voucher form, allowing the social worker to make small, frequent payments, and assure that rent is paid.

Finally, a percentage of our mentally disturbed clients are simply not sufficiently "chronic" to qualify for the "unemployability" provisions of the A.A.I.S.H. program.

The reductions in social assistance for the single person are quite large, though they affect only the "shelter" component of the assistance. The maximum shelter payments now available are \$290 per month, a drop of \$85 from the previous maximum of \$375 per month. This has to cover not only rent, but also utility payments.

Quite simply, there are not a significant number of decent accommodations available at \$290 per month. The only large group of accommodations which have already decided to lower rents to this level are the inner city rooming houses. ~~These places~~ ^{They are} are often in poor repair, and represent an atmosphere of drinking and aggression which greatly outweighs the value of the camaraderie which is the positive aspect of these places. In no way could they be said to offer an environment conducive to good mental health.

At this time, it is not possible to say exactly how many of our mental health clients will have to move. Many landlords have not yet decided what to do, and many clients remain (blissfully) unaware of the consequences of the letter which each of them received outlining the changes.

We can say, however, that a large number of landlords of the newer accommodations simply cannot lower their rents for one bedroom or bachelor apartments. They are tied to mortgages at the high rates prevailing until recently, unlike the slum landlords whose buildings were paid off many years ago. The irony of the government's indirect attempt to reduce rents for apartments is that it will tend to drive the already-strapped newer apartment owners further into the red, but will fill up and profit the slum rooming houses.

What will be the effect of moving on the disordered client? This is hard to gauge exactly, as human responses can never be predicted. We can, however, describe some reactions of clients to the information that they will have to move.

Some simply did not accept or understand that the fact is that they will have to move. One older lady, a woman with a history of serious disorder, believes that she owns her small one-bedroom house, that she does not receive welfare payments (her rent is paid "surreptitiously" by voucher), and is very reluctant to apply for disability pension. She hears voices which "tell her" that she can return to accommodations from which she has already been evicted because of non-payment of rent. Her current rent, \$425 per month, is covered by welfare because she was able to win her case at an appeal hearing. With the new changes, shelter allowance ceilings are no longer appealable. Neither will SS&CH pay fifty per cent of rent above the ceilings, as was the case previously. Unless changes are made in the new policy, this lady will have to move July 1st, out of a house where she has lived successfully for nearly two years. Dr. Webber has made much in public of a provision to allow rent in excess of guidelines in exceptional circumstances. But this is, as worded at present, only available for up to three months, is non-renewable, and each case must be presented to the minister by the regional director. It is probable that the number of cases allowed in this provision will be a handful of the estimated 17,000 Albertans affected by the shelter cutbacks.

Another long-term client of the Co-op, a man in his late '20's with multiple hospital admissions, will also have to move. At the time of his previous move, a year ago, he was hospitalised within a week.

Some people have been encouraged to move to better accommodations by their social workers. Rightly, the workers have assessed that a good living environment contributes significantly to good mental health. This motive has turned sour, however, when a person has gone to the trouble of moving, only to find a few weeks after doing so that in another two months, they will have to move again. The second move in a year is not covered by Social Assistance.

It is not possible, of course, to say how serious the repercussions of moving into worse accommodations will be on our clients' mental health. Undoubtedly, a number will be hospitalised, who would not have been hospitalised had they not been forced to move. A much greater number will simply cope, as well as they can, with the strain of moving, and the disappointment having to leave places which, in some cases, they have lived in for years. And the time spent organising a move will inevitably prolong the period of readjustment into society; many will drop out of programs which are useful in learning life-skills.

We have one client, a man in his mid-20's, who has been through a period of mental disorder and hospitalisations. In the last few months, he has begun to learn the skills for independent living which he had lacked before his disorder became serious. He is in need of considerable educational upgrading before he can seriously hope to find employment; something which will, in any case, take him out of his apartment to interact with other people. He will now have to move before July 1st 1983. He is not a high-functioning person, and his lack of confidence and enthusiasm makes it impossible for him to both go to his program on a regular basis, and arrange to move. As a result, his education will have to be postponed until after he moves, and after he has found his way around the services available in his new neighbourhood, a process which he finds infinitely more difficult than the average person.

Even special housing programs, such as those operated by the Canadian Mental Health Association, will be affected by the reductions in shelter allowance, forcing a redistribution of resources from other areas of their work.

Finally, though not the central issue to us, the government should consider whether it will really make the savings it expects. The average rent for our mental health clients is approximately \$310 per month. The savings for 100 clients, for one year, are \$24,000. If only two of these one hundred were hospitalised because of the upset of moving, for a period of four months each at \$150 per day, the government would be out of pocket to the tune of \$36,000; that is, \$12,000 more than it will save in shelter ceiling reductions.

Alberta Committee of Consumer Groups of Disabled Persons

10043 - 81 AVENUE * EDMONTON, ALBERTA * T6E 1W7

May 31, 1983

Hon. Dr. N. Webber
Minister of Social Service and Community Health
424 Legislative Building
Edmonton, Alberta

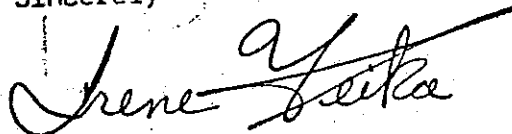
Dr. Webber:

The Board of Directors of the Alberta Committee of Consumer Groups of Disabled Persons wishes to go on record as supporting in principle, the brief **BENEFITS AND POLICY CHANGES IN SOCIAL ALLOWANCE; A COMMUNITY RESPONSE.**

In our previous letter to you we outlined some of our concerns - specifically on how the Social Allowance shelter ceiling cut-backs will affect physically disabled Albertans. In more general terms the Alberta Committee is concerned with the quality of life of all Albertans. While we recognize the need for an efficiently run department - we do not understand why the cut-backs begin with the very population already hardest hit in these times of economic instability.

The Alberta Committee has, in the past, enjoyed a co-operative working relationship with the Department of Social Service and Community Health, and hope to continue to do so in the future. We look forward to receiving your feedback by June 30 on this worthwhile brief which has been a co-operative effort of many agencies.

Sincerely



Irene Feika
President

Boyle Street Community Services Co-Op

10229 - 96 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5H 2G8 • Telephone: 424-4106

May 31, 1983

Honourable Neil Webber, Minister,
Social Services & Community Health,
424 Legislature Building,
Edmonton, Alberta

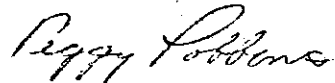
Dear Mr. Webber:

A letter from you dated May 5, 1983, requested that we send you examples of impacts on our clients of the lowered social allowance shelter ceilings.

As a background to a discussion with you re specific examples, we have participated in the writing of this Agency brief. It is our feeling that the situation of single parents and mental health clients are seriously and critically affected by the shelter cutbacks.

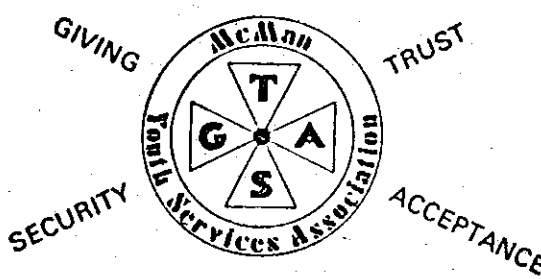
The Board and staff of the Boyle Street Co-op strongly endorses this brief and its recommendations. We look forward to discussing these issues personally with you at the Boyle Street Co-op.

Sincerely yours,



Peggy Robbins, Secretary of the Board

PR/gjd



McMAN YOUTH SERVICES ASSOCIATION
#1, 8207 - 104 Street,
Edmonton, Alberta T6E 4E7
Phone: (403) 432-9153

June 3, 1983


The Honourable Dr. N. Webber
Minister, Alberta Social Services &
Community Health
424 Legislature Bldg.
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

Dear Dr. Webber:

We, the Board of Directors of McMan Youth Services Association, did, on June 2, 1983, discuss the brief prepared by a group of agencies wherein serious concerns in the community regarding the July 1, 1983 implementation of the new Social Allowance Guidelines were expressed. As an association working closely with many young people directly affected by these new procedures we are worried that the consequences in terms of human suffering will be considerable. We are also deeply troubled that a government, which has done so well and prides itself with its social programs, could come to this kind of decision which penalizes those least capable of speaking for themselves.

Our Board has unanimously supported the aforementioned brief and sincerely hopes you will reconsider this very important matter.

Yours sincerely,


Richard Berube,
President, Provincial Board of Directors,
McMan Youth Services Association.

RB/cr

The John Howard Society, Edmonton

A DISTRICT OF THE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ALBERTA
SUITE 301 - 10526 JASPER AVE., EDMONTON, ALBERTA T5J 1Z7
(403) 428-7590

June 2, 1983

Honourable Neil Webber
Minister of Social Services
Legislative Building
Edmonton, Alberta

Dear Sir,

Our Agency has some concern about the effects of the proposed policy changes regarding the Social Service allowance. We would like to take this opportunity to request a review of the policy that is designated to become effective July 1, 1983.

A high percentage of our clientele are those who would be classified as the single, male, unemployed employables. They are usually recently released from various Correctional Institutions. They find themselves on the street, with no appropriate way of having their basic material needs met, other than through the services of the Single Men's Hostel. After they have exhausted their stay at the Hostel, which is usually two weeks, they have no place to go.

In our work, we often assist in the search of accommodations for this group of individuals. We have found that although the vacancy rate has increased, rents on suitable accommodations have not decreased to the extent of making them accessible within the new ceiling. Furthermore, food and clothing costs continue to escalate rather than to decline.

It is our experience that a job search is very difficult to conduct and a positive attitude hard to maintain when ones' basic needs are not fulfilled, specifically for food and shelter.

It is our experience that desperation and hopelessness contribute to crime, and it is our feeling that the proposed cutbacks may tend to increase our clients feeling of desperation and hopelessness.




We are asking that you consider the recommendations set forth by the Edmonton Social Planning Committee. Specifically, we are requesting a review of the proposed new guidelines between Government representatives and concerned citizen groups prior to the implementation of the revised policy.

Yours truly,



Theresa Nunn
Caseworker



(for) Bill Lowen
Executive Director

TN/map

An Executive Summary

1. In late March of this year the Minister of Social Services and Community Health, Dr. Neil Webber announced major changes in the benefits and policies regarding social allowance. At the time of the announcement, the Minister indicated that these changes would "more realistically reflect economic circumstances".
2. Since the changes were announced, seventeen "frontline" voluntary social service agencies and community organizations have been meeting to examine the likely impact of the new policies upon the clients that they serve. It is the collective opinion of these community groups that the difficulties and disruptions will be significant and that the changes seriously underestimated in the economic circumstances of many of the almost 60,000 Albertans who are presently receiving social allowance.
3. The groups are concerned that the 5% increase in the basic allowance - the first in fifteen months - is adequate given the high cost of living in the city. It does not allow those on social allowance to keep up with the rising costs of the past year or the anticipated increases for this year. While we are informed that Alberta provides the most generous social allowance in the country, the basic allowance for the majority of the present recipients is now behind provinces such as Newfoundland, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.
4. The most significant change introduced by the Minister was the reduction in the maximum ceilings for shelter allowances. When this is combined with the minimal 5% increase in the basic allowance, it will mean that all single persons on social allowance, who represent a third of the total caseload, will be expected to absorb a 14% decrease in their monthly income.
5. The lower shelter allowances have been justified on the grounds on increased vacancy rates. Unfortunately this is a very misleading indicator of the availability of affordable housing and as well fails to appreciate the operation of the housing market in the city. Housing costs have not dropped during the past twelve months. In many areas of

the city accommodation, for particularly single persons and large families, is in very limited supply at a rental similar to that provided by the shelter allowance. Even many of the options in social housing will be beyond the reach of some individuals or families on social allowance.

6. Agencies in the community are very concerned about the likely disruption to the lives of many of their clients if they are required to relocate. This is particularly true for many single parents, mental health clients and the physically disabled who require special adaptations. While there is some evidence that landlords of rooming houses in the inner city are prepared to lower rents in the light of the new allowances, it is also apparent that for many landlords this is not a possible option.
7. Of concern to the community agencies has been the decision to limit the payment of social allowance to 16 and 17 year olds to one month. As well as the fact that one month is too short a time for agencies to be of any assistance, there is concern that many of these young people will turn to crime or prostitution as a way of supporting themselves.
8. The agencies concerned are meeting with the Minister this morning to express their concern and to present a list of recommendations.