

Employment and People with Disabilities

This Help Sheet funded by the Legal Services Society of BC, Human Resources Development Canada: Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the Health Sciences Association of British Columbia.

UPDATED MARCH 2008

ADVOCACY ACCESS IS A PROGRAM OF BC COALITION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The BC Coalition of People with Disabilities has prepared this Help Sheet to help you understand what the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) legislation says about employment and people with disabilities.

Employment Plans

An employment plan is an agreement signed by an applicant and the MEIA. It lists activities that you agree to do that may help you learn employment skills or find work. These activities may include attending a job club, or a training course.

The Ministry can require people who receive **basic income assistance** to participate in employment plans as a condition of receiving benefits.

The rules are different for people with disabilities. If you receive the Persons With Disabilities (PWD) benefit, you will **not** have to sign an employment plan. The MEIA can excuse other people from signing employment plans, for example, single parents with disabled children and people receiving the Persons with Persistent and Multiple Barriers to Employment (PPMB) benefit.

Under current Ministry policy, people receiving PWD can choose to sign an employment plan on a **voluntary** basis. Before you volunteer to sign an employment plan, we recommend that you talk with an Employment and Assistance Worker (EAW) about what will happen if you are unable to complete the activities in the plan.

The right to appeal

You cannot appeal the contents of a mandatory employment plan once you have signed it. But you can appeal a decision by the Ministry to refuse, discontinue, or reduce your benefits. This includes a decision to cut you off benefits for not fulfilling employment obligations. If you have signed a voluntary employment plan, the MEIA should not cut you off benefits if you do not follow it.

New applicants

All new applicants face a three-week work search period before they can have an intake appointment with the Ministry. If you have an urgent need for food, shelter, or health benefits, you can ask for an **immediate needs assessment**. If you are granted one, it should take place within 24 hours.

During the three-week work search period you will be expected to look for work unless you have a disability that makes it impossible for you to seek employment or you have the PWD designation. If you do, you may be excused from doing a job search. Let the EAW or the Ministry know about your disability as soon as possible, preferably at your first contact with them. You may need to provide a letter from your doctor about your medical condition.

Earnings exemptions for people with disabilities

An earnings exemption is the amount of money that you can earn from working without your benefits being reduced. You have to be on benefits for 3 months in a row before you qualify for the earnings exemptions.

- The earnings exemption for people on PWD is \$500 per month. This means you are able to earn up to \$500 a month before the Ministry makes any deductions from your PWD cheque. If two people, both with PWD live together as a couple, the earnings exemption for both of them is \$750 a month (not \$500 per person).
- People on PPMB have an earnings exemption of \$500 per month. If two people live together as a couple, and one or more of them is on PPMB, the earnings exemption for both of them is \$500 a month (not \$500 per person).
- If you have a child with a disability whose care requires you to stay at home full-time, you are allowed an earnings exemption of \$500 per month. You should talk to an EAW about this.

You must report all income to MEIA, but if your monthly income stays the same you do not have to report it after the first month. If your income changes (up or down), you must report it to MEIA on your cheque stub by the 5th day of the following month.

Other vocational programs

If you are interested in employment training, you can ask your office to refer you to Employment Programs for Persons with Disabilities (EPPD).



Prepared by **Advocacy Access**, a program of **BC Coalition of People with Disabilities**
204-456 W. Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5Y 1R3 • tel: 604.872.1278 • fax 604.875.9227
tty 604.875.8835 • toll free 1.800.663.1278 • advocacy@bccpd.bc.ca • www.bccpd.bc.ca

This Help Sheet funded by the Legal Services Society of BC, Human Resources Development Canada: Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the Health Sciences Association of British Columbia.