

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Pushing back against changes that make life harder for disabled Albertans

Physicians who care for disabled Albertans are deeply concerned about recent Government of Alberta decisions that are creating financial pressures, worry and distress for people who receive [Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped \(AISH\)](#). These decisions have prompted many disability advocates and physicians to raise their voices to push back against government policies that have been described as punching down on disabled Albertans.

Transitioning AISH to ADAP

Earlier this year, the Government of Alberta announced that it would transition all AISH recipients to a new program, the [Alberta Disability Assistance Program \(ADAP\)](#), that purports to help Albertans with disabilities earn employment income. The province has indicated that all AISH recipients will be automatically transitioned to ADAP in July 2026. Those who are unable to work will have to reapply to AISH and undergo – and pay for – a new medical assessment as part of that process. Those who don't re-qualify for AISH will remain on ADAP and receive \$200/month less in benefits. In 2026, the AISH benefit will be \$1,940/month, and the ADAP benefit will be \$1,740/month. Individuals moved from AISH to ADAP will receive a \$200/month transition benefit, delaying the reduction to their income for 18 months until January 1, 2028.

This news has been met with sharp criticism from disability advocates and physicians across the province. While government will fast track the reapplication process for those who are receiving end-of-life care with palliative conditions, those who reside in continuing care homes and others with severe and profound disabilities requiring round-the-clock care will still have to undergo the assessment. It's a decision that many physicians say defies both logic and compassion.

"It's disappointing that all Albertans receiving AISH must now reapply to the program," explains Dr. Sarah Bates, a Calgary family physician and president of the AMA's Section of Family Medicine. She notes that the AISH application is notoriously time-consuming for both physicians and recipients and that the wait for approvals can take months. Many first-time applications are often denied, and patients must appeal the decision, which can also take considerable time.

"It's a long, difficult journey for people to actually qualify for AISH," says Dr. Bates. "Forcing disabled Albertans to undergo another medical assessment to confirm that they still qualify for AISH is punitive and excessive. Further, administrative needs will be an unnecessary drain on primary care resources."

Then AMA president, Dr. Shelley Duggan, wrote a [President's Letter](#) that alerted members to the planned transition to ADAP and cautioned that this decision was yet another example of "decisions made without sufficient consultation with patients, physicians or subject-matter experts and apparently based on assumptions of desired outcomes."

Clawing back the Canada Disability Benefit

Transitioning AISH to ADAP is not the only decision the provincial government has made in recent months that has sparked criticism and confusion. In June 2025, the Government of Canada announced the creation of the [Canada Disability Benefit \(CDB\)](#). The federal cash benefit of \$200/month is available to disabled Canadians between 18 and 64 years old and is intended to help reduce poverty and provide some financial security.

On the heels of the federal announcement, the provincial government indicated that it would deduct the \$200 CDB benefit from the maximum \$1901/month people receive on the AISH program. No other province or territory in Canada is clawing back the CDB.

In order to be eligible for the CDB, AISH recipients had to first apply and be approved for the [Disability Tax Credit \(DTC\)](#), which requires a medical practitioner to complete paperwork certifying the applicant has a severe and profound disability. The Government of Alberta gave AISH recipients a deadline of September 5 to take steps to access the CDB and update their AISH office or Alberta Supports of those efforts. AISH recipients who didn't meet the September 5 deadline were told their monthly AISH benefit could be reduced by an amount equivalent to the CDB benefit. Physicians who work closely with AISH recipients report that people who were unhoused or had limited access to technology were often unaware of the new federal benefit and the September 5 deadline.

Disability advocates and physicians raised concerns about the short deadline and the unrealistic expectations specified by government. Dr. Bates wrote about the CDB claw back in her [August 19 SFM Bulletin](#) and was inundated with emails from family physicians who were equally appalled. "It is clear that family physicians are worried about what this is doing to their patients," says Dr. Bates.

Some physician groups wrote directly to Jason Nixon, the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services, asking for an extension to the deadline and seeking clarification about whether or not those who were unable to complete the necessary paperwork would see their monthly income reduced. In the intervening months since the September 5 deadline passed, physicians have heard from many patients who did not apply for the CDB that they have seen a reduction of \$200/month from their AISH benefits.

Changes to rent calculations

In the midst of the CDB claw back and the transition to ADAP, there have been other concerning changes. Beginning October 1, rent for Albertans with disabilities living in community housing and Rent Assistance Benefit recipients is now calculated based on 30 per cent of an individual's total income and the calculation no longer exempts benefits received under AISH. Previously, \$735 of the maximum \$1,901 AISH benefit was exempt when calculating income used for rent. With that amount no longer exempt, AISH recipients saw their rents increase by \$220 per month.

Disability advocates warn the change that could result in people losing access to housing, pushing them into shelters or out onto the streets. The rent increase is yet another blow in a year that has seemed intent on making life harder on AISH recipients.

We all deserve basic human decency

Most disability advocates will tell you that we are all just one illness, one accident, one incident away from becoming disabled. What would we need for support if that happened? Advocates often pose the question, should that happen, how would we want our government to treat us? Would we want them to claw back a small federal benefit that all other disabled Canadians receive? Would we want to be repeatedly forced to prove we are still too disabled to work? Or would we want our government to treat us with the dignity and compassion that every person deserves?

“As I said in my SFM Bulletin, Albertans living with disabilities deserve better than this,” notes Dr. Bates. “The recent announcements regarding AISH, ADAP and the Canada Disability Benefit seem to ignore the human reality of persons living with disabilities and are sorely lacking in compassion. The proposed changes have caused, and will continue to cause, unnecessary complexity, anxiety and financial burden to those who might be least equipped to shoulder it. Physicians, and all Albertans, need to speak out and urge government to re-evaluate these ill-considered changes.”

Editor's note: A previous version of this story incorrectly stated the AISH benefit amount for 2026. This information has been updated. We apologize for the confusion.

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