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March 2017

Community Update Changes to Online Application for Disability and Income Assistance

Dear Community Partner,

At the end of February, the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI) introduced major changes to the way that British Columbians apply for disability and income assistance. Here are the main changes as explained by the MSDSI:

- People who apply for income and disability assistance are now required to register for the Ministry's MySelfServe online service and acquire a BCeID to start an application. Applicants need to start the process at myselfserve.gov.bc.ca;
- The new application gives the option to upload documents electronically rather than delivering them to a MSDSI office. People who prefer to deliver documents directly to a Ministry office can still do this;
- The new application is optimized for use on mobile phones;
- People who are unable to apply for assistance themselves can request that a Ministry worker assist them to fill out the application over the telephone. To request help call 1-866-866-0800. The worker you talk to should make a request for someone to call back within 3 days to go through the application on the phone;
- The new application questions will have less redundant information than the old application. For example, people without children will no longer be asked to provide information about the amount of child benefits they receive;
- Some confusing questions from the old application have been clarified;

Disability Alliance BC (DABC) is monitoring the impact of these changes. The former online application had some significant issues, and we are pleased that there have been changes made to help address this. At the same time, we have some concerns that the new system will create confusion and be challenging for individuals and community organizations familiar with the old system.

Some of the concerns that have been identified by DABC and the community about the new process include:

- Some people may find the multi-step process of registering for MySelfServe and BCeID confusing;
- It does not adequately notify people of the option to submit supporting documentation directly to a MSDSI office rather than electronically. This could create time delays and barriers to access for those unfamiliar with the application process or who are not comfortable using computers;
- The Ministry often does not provide adequate support to people who require in-person help to apply for disability or income assistance. As a result individuals may be insufficiently supported and find it necessary to contact a community agency for help.

If you have any questions about how the new system works, please feel free to contact our Advocacy Access Program at 604-872-1278 or 1-800-663-1278 to talk to an advocate. We would also like to hear about any challenges you are hearing from your clients with the new system; please contact Advocacy Access Program director Sam Turcott. This helps us in our consultations with the Ministry on operational issues.

Thank you.