

Inside this issue:

| | |
|--|---|
| The New BC Hydro Customer Crisis Fund | 2 |
| Marjorie Martin | 3 |
| A Win for Tenants | 3 |
| Welcome Back | 4 |
| Hold...Hold...Hold... | 6 |

DOCTOR! DOCTOR!

APPLYING FOR PWD WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE A PHYSICIAN

By Izzy Dehler-Hyde

The doctor shortage in British Columbia, where almost 700,000 people do not have access to a regular family physician, has left many with walk-in clinics as their only option for medical care. Yet walk-in clinics are also feeling the pressure of the doctor shortage, with long waits, reduced clinic hours, clinics quickly filling up for the day, and rushed patient-physician interactions. All of this can affect the quality and continuity of care patients

receive. There can be major consequences, as well, for people trying to apply for Persons With Disabilities (PWD) status.



PWD is the disability benefit available through the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. The three-part PWD application form is long and complex, and relies heavily on detailed information provided by medical professionals.

What happens if you do not have a family doctor familiar with you and your medical conditions? Unfortunately, our experience shows, you may end up with an application of poor quality, or the physician may simply refuse to fill your application out.

So how can you get your PWD application filled out if you do not have a family physician? Here are some strategies and tips:

Start establishing a relationship with a walk-in clinic physician

If you are left with no choice other than to go to a walk-in clinic,

(See Doctor, page 4)

TOGETHER
AGAINST
POVERTY
SOCIETY

T
A
P
S

#302 – 895 Fort St.
Victoria, BC
V8W 1H7
Tel: 250-361-3521
Fax: 250-361-3541
www.tapsbc.ca



THE NEW BC HYDRO CUSTOMER CRISIS FUND

By Yuka Kurokawa

BC Hydro has recently launched a new pilot project called the Customer Crisis Fund (CCF), designed to help hydro customers facing disconnection due to a temporary financial crisis.

Follow us on twitter
@tapsbc

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

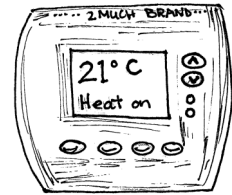
TAPS has advocates who can help you apply for Person With Disabilities status (PWD) through the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. TAPS can also help you with an appeal if you have been denied. Call us at 250-361-3521 for more information. If you are at the appeal stage, get in touch with us as soon as possible after receiving your letter of denial, and tell the receptionist you are calling about a disability appeal.

What are the eligibility criteria?

- You must be a residential hydro account holder (or an authorized representative applying on behalf of an account holder).
- The application must be for your primary residence.
- Your account must be in arrears (have overdue payments), and you must be facing disconnection.
- You must have experienced a life event within the last 12 months that caused a temporary financial crisis.
- Your outstanding balance must be \$1,000 or less, and you should be able to demonstrate that you have attempted to make payments towards your bill.

**Together
Against
Poverty
Society**

- You may only receive one CCF grant per year. However, if you apply for a CCF grant and are denied, and subsequently your circumstances change, you can apply again in the same year.



How much can I get?

The amount that you can get depends on how much you owe. The most that is available is \$600 for customers who heat their homes with electricity, and \$500 for customers with non-electrically heated homes (e.g. natural gas heat).

How do I apply?

- Online at www.bchydro.com
- By getting an application and filing it at a Service BC office
- By getting an application at a Service BC office and mailing it to PO Box 8910, Vancouver, B.C., V6B 4X3

Where can I get help with my application?

- Through BC211 (1-844-708-3208)
- At TAPS (250-356-3521, #302 - 895 Fort Street). ■

MARJORIE MARTIN

Marjorie Martin, who taught for many years at the UVic School of Social Work and who was deeply committed to social justice throughout her life, has recently passed away. Marjorie was also involved with TAPS in the early days of the organization and supported the anti-poverty work we do.

As part of the memorial for Marjorie, people were asked to make donations to TAPS in Marjorie's name. We are very grateful to all those who contributed so generously.

Every day at TAPS we aspire to live up to the goals and values set out at the foundation of our organization: to end poverty through an approach focused on justice, not charity, and the dignity of every person.

We are thinking of Marjorie as we continue to fight for the elimination of poverty and for justice for all.



All of Us at TAPS

A WIN FOR TENANTS

Former residents of Super-in-Tent City, a tent city formerly located on the Victoria law courts property, have received a decision from the BC Supreme Court affirming their rights as tenants in the social housing building at 844 Johnson Street, which was set up to house them when the tent city was dismantled.

The decision dismisses an appeal brought by the Portland Hotel Society (PHS), a non-profit supportive housing provider and operator of the property at 844 Johnson Street, and affirms the findings of the Residential Tenancy Branch that tenants in the building are covered under the Residential Tenancy Act and should be afforded all the same rights as tenants who reside in market housing. The decision also mandates that blanket guest restrictions, like those imposed on the tenants at 844 Johnson Street, are illegal and must be removed.

The above is adapted from the press release issued by TAPS and Community Legal Assistance Society. See the full press release at www.tapsbc.ca, or drop into the TAPS office to read a paper copy. ■

TAPS STAFF

Doug King
Executive Director

Khalela Bell
Outreach Legal Advocate

Izzy Dehler-Hyde
Coordinator of the
Volunteer Disability
Advocacy Project

Daniel Jackson
Income Assistance Legal
Advocate and Federal
Disability Legal Advocate

Yuka Kurokawa
Tenant Legal Advocate

Jen Matthews
Income Assistance Legal
Advocate

Stephen Portman
Employment Standards
Legal Advocate

Emily Rogers
Tenant Legal Advocate

Caitlin Wright
Federal Disability Legal
Advocate

On Leave
John Cooke
Thea McDonagh

Taproot is published bi-monthly. Newsletter artists:
Mitch Lindsay Joan Stiebel

VOLUNTEER AT TAPS!

**Come and volunteer
on our busy front
desk—
a great way to
participate in the
fight against
poverty!**

**Call Heidi
at 250-361-3521**

**Check us out at
www.tapsbc.ca**

(Cont'd from Doctor, page 1)

try to go to the same walk-in clinic, and try to see the same doctor each time you go. Many clinics post the physicians' schedules online, or you can call the clinic to get the schedule for the week. By seeing the same doctor, you can start building a relationship with them and they can start to build a better picture of your health and life. Go see the doctor a few times before asking them to fill out your PWD application, as they will likely want to know who you are before they fill out an application for you.

Explore alternatives to a walk-in clinic physician

Any physician registered and licensed to practice medicine in BC can fill out sections 2 and 3 of the PWD application, including specialists such as rheumatologists, neurologists, ophthalmologists, and psychiatrists. Nurse practitioners can also fill out sections 2 and 3 of the application. If you are seeing a specialist or a nurse practitioner, consider asking them to fill out your application.

Write a self-report and bring it to the doctor

The first section of the PWD application is for the applicant's self-report. Here you have the chance to describe your disability and how it impacts your life. Not only will your self-report help your application, but you can also give a copy to your doctor so that they have information about your daily life that they might not otherwise know. TAPS has volunteer disability advocates who are here to help you write the self-report, and they will make sure your self-report covers all the information the doctor may need to know to fill out your application.

Start keeping a daily log and bring it to the doctor

Each day for at least a couple of weeks, try to log what symptoms, pain levels, and restrictions you experienced that day. Bring that to the doctor to show what your day-to-day life looks like.

Get Section 3 filled out by someone else

Section 3 (also known as the Assessor's Report) is the longest and most detailed part of the application, and it is very important for your

(See Doctor, page 5)

WELCOME BACK!

We welcome Stephen Portman back to TAPS after his eight-month educational leave of absence. Stephen has resumed his work as employment standards legal advocate, and he is also bringing his energy and passion for justice to his work fighting for change at the broader policy level.

We also welcome Leila Geggie-Hurst back to TAPS. Leila spent a term at TAPS as a Law Co-op student two years ago, and is here for the summer doing federal disability and income assistance advocacy.

(Cont'd from Doctor, Page 4)

application. Unlike Section 2, which has to be filled out by a physician, there are more options as to who can fill out Section 3. In addition to physicians, a registered psychologist, registered nurse, occupational therapist, physical therapist, registered social worker, or chiropractor can also fill out Section 3. If your physician does not know you well, it could be in your best interest to get Section 3 filled out by someone else.

If you do not have anyone that fits the criteria for filling out Section 3, the following community organizations have assessors

available specifically to fill out PWD applications:

- Action Committee of Persons with Disabilities
Call 250-383-4105 to make an appointment with their assessor.
(Please note: ACPD is currently in the process of hiring a new assessor, so an assessor is not available until they complete the hiring process—call to confirm).
- Victoria Disability Resource Centre: An assessor is available on a first-come-first-served basis every Thursday at 1:30 pm – call 250-595-0044 for more

information.

- Together Against Poverty Society: We have assessors available for clients working with a volunteer disability advocate.

Filling out a PWD application can be a hard process at the best of times, let alone when you do not have a family doctor. If you need any help with your application, please call TAPS at 250-361-3521. ■

TAPS

BECOME A TAPS MEMBER!

Want to support TAPS? Why not become a member! We are happy to waive the fee, so it doesn't have to cost you anything. You will get the Taproot mailed or e-mailed to you.

Together Against Poverty Society Membership Registration 2018

Together Against Poverty Society, #302 - 895 Fort Street, Victoria, BC, V8W 1H7

Annual Membership Fees: Unwaged \$5 (we are happy to waive this fee)

Waged \$20 Organization \$80

Method of payment: Cash Check N/A

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ e-mail: _____

I would like to join TAPS' mailing list to receive: E-mails from TAPS about its work

Taproot—TAPS' newsletter

>>> by e-mail by postal mail

HOLD...HOLD...HOLD...

By Daniel Jackson and
Jennifer Matthews

Ever try to reach the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction on their central phone line? At TAPS we hear all the time from people who have waited for an hour on hold before being able to speak to a worker or, worse, they have waited for an hour on hold only for the

Check TAPS out on
facebook

FEDERAL DISABILITY ADVOCACY PROJECT

TAPS' Federal Disability Advocacy Project can provide information on CPP-Disability, the Disability Tax Credit and the Registered Disability Savings Plan. If you would like to speak with an advocate about any of these benefits, or would like help applying, contact Caitlin or Daniel at TAPS at 250-361-3521.

line to be dropped without having spoken to a worker at all. Once a person reaches a worker, they may be rushed through the call and their issues not thoroughly addressed.

On April 17, the BC Office of the Ombudsperson released a special report, "Holding Pattern: Call Wait Times for Income and Disability Assistance," that documents the findings of their investigation into the challenges people face when trying to access Ministry services by phone, including excessive wait times, call disconnections, Ministry staff rushing them through the call, and the Ministry failing to return calls. The Ministry's "service delivery model" is focused almost entirely on the phone line—many clients who try to get service in person are turned away, and told to call the phone line.

"Holding Pattern" brings attention to the negative experiences our clients consistently have when trying to access services from the Ministry. The report also notes several instances where people were given wrong or contradictory information by Ministry workers or were treated so poorly by Ministry staff that

they were reduced to tears. That this would happen even once is problematic, but at TAPS we hear these stories every day, and simply reducing wait times will not fix this.



The report makes a number of recommendations with the aim of resolving (at least in part) service delivery issues identified in the Ombudsperson's investigation, including that the Ministry hire additional staff to answer phones, phase out "call sweeping" strategies (limiting calls to under five minutes during periods of high volume), and phase out their practice of resolving only one issue per call.

While these recommendations, all of which have been accepted by the Ministry, represent an important first step in addressing systemic barriers to people accessing services provided by the Ministry, we believe that they only scratch the surface of service delivery failures at the Ministry.

TAPS is calling for a broad-based overhauling of the Ministry's service delivery

(See Hold, page 7)

(Cont'd from Hold, page 6)

model and a fundamental cultural shift to get to the root of service delivery issues. Ministry services need to be premised on respect and dignity, and be provided in a variety of ways, including meaningful in-person options, to meet the diverse needs of people who require them. This will require a significant reduction in the legal barriers to assistance, and a shift away from the overarching “gatekeeper” mentality.

While change comes slowly to bureaucracy, this report demonstrates that the Office of the Ombudsperson is listening. We hope the Ombudsperson will continue to look proactively into systemic injustices and access issues at the Ministry, in addition to addressing

TAPS TAX CLINIC

Thursdays

9 to 11

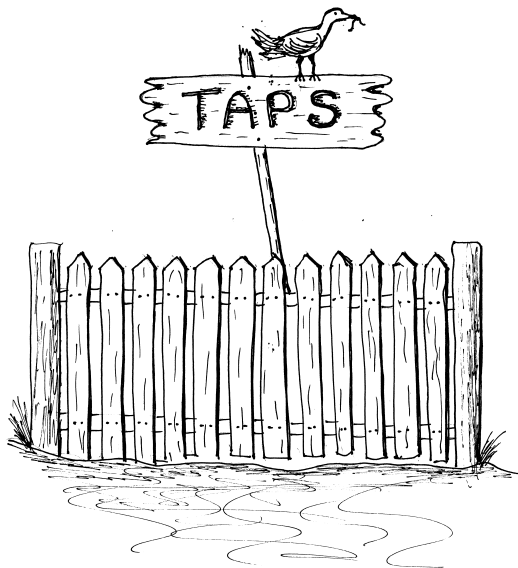
and

1 to 4

First come, first served

individual complaints.

We encourage readers who have been treated disrespectfully by Ministry staff to raise the issue with Ministry supervisors and the Office of the Ombudsperson. TAPS' income assistance advocates are also available to help. ■



BECOME A MONTHLY TAPS DONOR!

With your support, individuals and families living in poverty in our region will have access to critical legal advocacy and educational services. TAPS' services are unique in their design and delivery, and offer knowledge, empowerment and, in many cases, a new sense of hope.

Select a monthly amount that's affordable to you, and TAPS will automatically deduct it from your checking account each month. You'll never have to write a check, buy a stamp or find an envelope again.

Monthly donors receive the following benefits:

- Updates on TAPS programs
- Annual tax receipt for all your donations during the year
- Taproot delivered to your e-mail.

See the monthly donor form on page 8 of this newsletter.

ABOUT TAPS

TAPS was established and registered as a society in 1989. We provide legal information and representation on issues relating to income assistance, provincial and federal disability benefits, residential tenancy, and employment standards to people in the Greater Victoria area. We also provide public legal education in these areas and on broader poverty issues.

You can reach us between 9:30 am and 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday, by phone at 250-361-3521 or in person at #302 - 895 Fort Street. The office is closed daily for lunch between noon and 1:00 pm and is closed to walk-in clients on Monday and Friday mornings.

TAPS IS FUNDED BY



United Way
OF GREATER VICTORIA
COMMUNITY PARTNER



**VICTORIA
FOUNDATION**

**And Other
Generous Supporters**

TAPS BOARD MEMBERS

President

Sarah Cunningham

Vice President

Patricia Cochran

Secretary

Ryan Tonkin

Treasurer

Nathan Cartwright

Members-at-Large

Amy Baylis

Linda Doctoroff

Bernice Kamano

Hilary Marks

Jeffrey McEown

Felicity Smith

Thank You for Supporting TAPS' Legal Advocacy!

The best way to support TAPS is by becoming a monthly donor! Please submit this form and your voided check to: Together Against Poverty Society, #302 - 895 Fort Street, Victoria, BC, V8W 1H7

Date: _____

Please debit my bank account (attach VOID cheque):

\$10 \$25 \$35 \$50 \$100 Other amount \$_____ (please specify)

I would like this donation debit to be processed through my account on the 25th of each month.

Signature: _____

Donor Name: _____

Address: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ e-mail: _____

This donation is made on behalf of: an individual a business

A tax receipt for your total monthly donations will be sent to you at the end of the calendar year.

I would like to join TAPS' mailing list to receive: E-mails from TAPS about its work

Taproot—TAPS' newsletter

>>> by e-mail by postal mail