

BULLETIN

## Budget announcements a lesson in irony

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**THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT** has settled on a disturbingly ironic tone in recent announcements.

It began a few months ago, on December 1, which marks World AIDS Day. While local and national governments around the world recognized this date by reaffirming their commitment to continue the fight against HIV and AIDS, BC's government chose this very day to announce plans to do exactly the opposite by cutting funds to community based HIV and AIDS organizations including AIDS Vancouver.

Then, in early March, as the world trained its attention on the Paralympic Games about to begin in our province, the BC government unveiled a provincial budget that makes life harder for the disabled.

Starting April 1, the Ministry of Housing and Social Development will no longer pay for off-the-shelf orthotics, leaving people stuck in wheelchairs or waiting for costly customized orthotic devices. The same date marks the end of a \$75 monthly shelter allowance for people with disabilities, between the ages of 60 and 64, who don't pay rent. That leaves these individuals with just \$531 a month to live on, a 12-per-cent cut in income for someone already facing incredible hardship.

But it's not just the disabled being singled out for this shameful treatment.

A BC government news release announced plans to cut services for the province's poorest and sickest citizens. The headline on the release: "Province protects services for low-income clients". It's not too much of a stretch to call this Orwellian.

Among the changes announced: people with AIDS and other serious illnesses will now find it harder to qualify for the Monthly Nutritional Supplement which helps them buy vitamins, special meals and the healthy foods that are so often more costly than fast food.

The government will no longer pay for the glucometers that low-income diabetics need to manage their condition, putting them at risk of serious medical complications requiring costly care.

Basic dental care for people on assistance will now be paid for just once a year, not twice.

And the government will no longer cover the cost of contraception for women who cannot afford birth control or use it for medical reasons.

As Paul Willcocks wrote in the *Victoria Times-Colonist*, "What can be dumber than measures that increase illness, abortions and unwanted pregnancies?"

Indeed, every one of these announcements is about saving money. And yet each one will have exactly the opposite effect: higher health care costs that could have been prevented with inexpensive and established services. No wonder Provincial Health Officer Dr. Perry Kendall doubts the government bothered to do a cost-benefit analysis of these announcements.

Heres the final irony: the government expects these petty and short-sighted cuts to save \$25 million over the next two years. Thats exactly how much the government spends each year to run the Public Affairs Bureau, the team of public relations experts who came up these very announcements. 

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