

MEDIA RELEASE

Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta Division

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AISH REVIEW UNNECESSARY: KLEIN'S MIND MADE UP

Edmonton, October 28. Premier Klein's ill-timed remarks concerning two female AISH recipients who "didn't look disabled" reveal a deeply-held conviction that Albertans are fundamentally dishonest, according to Aleck Trawick, newly-elected President of the Canadian Mental Health Association's Alberta Division. "The message Klein is sending is, if you're drawing government financial assistance, we'll assume you're cheating the system until we can prove otherwise."

This, Trawick says, tells Albertans all they need to know about where the Klein government really stands on AISH, an income replacement program for those medically unable to work. The program is currently under review. Trawick adds, "It's clearly the government's belief that AISH clients are abusing the system. Rather than introduce needed improvements to the AISH program, this so-called review is more likely going to result in a purge of the AISH roster, and a redefined program that will be even harder to qualify for."

Adds Peter Portlock, incoming Executive Director of CMHA, "AISH is probably the most difficult government program to qualify for and to stay on. To suggest – as Klein has said – that there are 'some people undeserving of being on AISH,' is to condemn the bureaucrats and physicians who make the case for client eligibility as incompetent, or as conspirators in deception, while characterizing any person currently receiving AISH as a malingerer."

According to Portlock, Klein has failed to recognize that 55% of the 31,000 Albertans currently receiving AISH benefits are not physically handicapped and thus may not "look disabled" – yet their need for the kinds of support that AISH provides are no less acute, and no less enduring. Adds Portlock, "If Mr. Klein wonders what a disabled person looks like, we might, in the light of his gratuitous and ill-considered judgment concerning the legitimacy of AISH clients, similarly wonder what a premier looks like – and at this moment, it's not him".

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