Applying for Welfare Benefits

This publication is for those who want to apply for basic welfare, called income assistance. Learn about the types of benefits available, who is eligible, and the steps to apply.

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People's Law School
Work out life's legal problems

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About this publication

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About People's Law School

People's Law School is a non-profit society in British Columbia dedicated to making the law accessible to everyone. We provide free education and information to help people deal effectively with the legal problems of daily life.

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Introduction

This publication is for those who want to apply for basic **welfare**, called **income assistance**. It tells you about the types of benefits available, who is eligible, and walks you through the steps to apply.

At People's Law School, we believe accurate, plain English information can help people take action to work out their legal problems. This publication explains in a general way the law that applies in British Columbia, Canada. **It is not intended as legal advice.** For help with a specific legal problem, contact a legal professional. Some sources of legal help are highlighted in the section on who can help.

We've tried to use clear language throughout. See the glossary section for definitions of key legal terms, which are also bolded in the text.

The information is current to December 2025.

Tip Visit peopleslawschool.ca/welfare for more detailed information on the types of welfare benefits available and how to apply for them, your responsibilities when on welfare, and how to challenge a ministry decision.

What you should know

Welfare provides financial help to those in need

"I was in a tough spot. I was out of a job, and I didn't qualify for EI. I was skipping meals to save money, and was barely able to afford rent. A friend suggested I meet with a community worker, who encouraged me to apply for welfare. Now I don't have to stress about paying for essentials while I sort out my work situation."

– Pamela, Penticton, BC

For British Columbians who lack resources and are struggling to meet their basic needs, **welfare benefits** offer a lifeline. These are payments provided by the provincial government. Those who qualify receive money every month to help pay for their support (daily living costs) and shelter (housing expenses).

The government office that oversees BC's welfare program is the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. In this guidance, we refer to it as the **ministry**.

Who can qualify for welfare

There are rules about how much income and assets you can have and still get welfare. In order to qualify, any money you get from other sources (minus some exemptions) must be below a certain level. This is called your **income limit**. As well, the value of your assets (the things you own) must be below a certain amount. This is called your **asset limit**.

You may be eligible for welfare if any of the following apply:

- you're out of work or not earning enough to meet your basic needs
- you're waiting for other sources of income to arrive
- you can only work very little, or not at all
- you urgently need food, shelter, or medical attention

We explain the full eligibility requirements below, starting on page 7.

Tip

If you live on reserve

If you live on reserve in BC, welfare support doesn't come from the provincial government but rather from the federal government. A social development worker at your band's office can help you with your application for financial assistance from the federal government. Legal Aid BC's website has guidance on the topic, at aboriginal.legalaid.bc.ca.

There are four types of welfare benefits

In BC, there are four types of welfare benefits available. Each pays a monthly amount to help with support and shelter costs. But the amount you receive differs, depending on which benefit you qualify for.

- **Income assistance** is the basic type of welfare that most people start with when they apply.
- **Disability assistance** is available to those with a severe mental or physical impairment that restricts their ability to perform daily living activities.
- **Benefits for persons with persistent multiple barriers to employment (PPMB)** are available to those with a medical condition and other barriers that make it difficult or impossible to look for work or keep a job.

- **Hardship assistance** is available on a temporary basis to those who, for specific reasons, don't qualify for any of the three welfare benefits listed above.

The information below focuses on income assistance and hardship assistance. We cover disability assistance and PPMB benefits in our publication *Applying for Disability Benefits*.

Welfare includes a support and shelter allowance

If you qualify for welfare benefits, you'll receive money each month that's made up of a support allowance and a shelter allowance.

The **support allowance** is money that goes towards your daily needs, such as:

- food
- clothing
- personal items
- laundry
- debt payments
- transportation

The amount of your support allowance depends on the type of welfare you get and your living situation. We explain this below.

The **shelter allowance** helps with housing expenses, including:

- rent
- mortgage payments
- essential utilities
- property taxes
- moorage or campground fees for those with non-traditional housing

Below, we explain how your shelter allowance is calculated.

How much you may receive in welfare benefits

The amount you receive in welfare benefits depends on which benefits you qualify for, your age, and the size of your family unit. Your family unit includes you and your **dependents**. A **spouse** (married or unmarried) who lives with you is a dependent. So is a **minor** child who lives with you more than half the time and relies on you for necessities, like food and shelter.

Tip

Who is considered a spouse

Under BC's welfare laws, a spouse is someone:

- you're married to, or
- have declared you're in a marriage-like relationship with, or
- have lived with for **at least one year** in a marriage-like relationship.

Indicators of a marriage-like relationship include sharing finances and presenting as a couple to friends and family.

Calculating your support allowance

The law sets out how much you may receive as a support allowance on income assistance. The amount of your monthly payment increases with the size of your family unit. And those age 65 or older are entitled to a higher rate. Here are some examples of monthly support allowance rates as of December 2025.

Family unit size	Age	Support allowance
One adult	Adult under 65	$560
Single parent with one child	Parent under 65	$710
Two parents with one or more children	Both parents under 65	$1,055
One adult	Adult 65 or over	$860
Two adults with no dependent children	Both adults 65 or over	$1,505

For those receiving **disability benefits**, the support allowance rates are different. See our publication *Applying for Disability Benefits*.

Calculating your shelter allowance

Your shelter allowance is what you pay for your housing, including utilities, up to a maximum amount. If your housing costs are more than the maximum, you must pay the difference out of your support allowance or other income.

The amount of your shelter allowance increases with the size of your family unit. Here are some examples of monthly shelter allowance rates as of December 2025.

Family unit size	Minimum shelter allowance	Maximum shelter allowance
One person	$75	$500
Two people	$150	$695
Three people	$200	$790
Four people	$225	$840

If your actual housing expenses are less than the minimum shelter allowance rate, you'll still receive the minimum allowance. For example, if you live alone and your monthly housing costs are $55, you would still receive a $75 shelter allowance.

If your family unit of two or more includes someone who receives the Old Age Security (OAS) pension, you are entitled to the maximum shelter allowance for your family size, even if your costs are less than the maximum amount.

Visit the ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr for current support and shelter allowance rates for those on income assistance.

Tip

Alternative living arrangements

If you pay **room and board**, you don't necessarily get the full support and shelter allowance. (Room and board means that a room, furniture and meals are all included in your rent.) Instead, the ministry pays your room and board up to a certain amount, as well as a support amount for your daily living needs.

The same goes for if you live in a **special care facility**. The ministry pays the cost for you to stay there up to a certain amount, as well as a comfort allowance for your daily living needs.

If you don't qualify for income assistance, you may be eligible for hardship assistance

If you're struggling to meet your needs but don't qualify for income assistance, you may be eligible for **hardship assistance**. Like income assistance, hardship assistance provides a monthly support and shelter allowance. But it's temporary, and is paid on a month-to-month basis. So you'll need to prove your eligibility for each month you require assistance.

The ministry only provides hardship assistance in certain situations. For example, if you're waiting for other income to come in, like **employment insurance**, and in the meantime you don't have enough money to meet your essential needs.

Some (but not all) hardship assistance payments are repayable. That is, those receiving hardship assistance may run up a debt owing to the ministry. There are often time limits to how long you can receive hardship assistance. For example, in some cases you can only receive hardship assistance for three consecutive months at a time.

How much you may receive in hardship assistance

The law sets out the maximum amount you may receive in hardship assistance. You'll get up to the same support and shelter allowance as a family unit of your size on income assistance, described above. Check the ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr for current hardship assistance rates.

Note that hardship assistance rates are different for those with the **persons with disability (PWD) designation** or who face health issues and other barriers to employment.

Supplements offer additional support

If you qualify for welfare benefits, there is additional help in the form of **supplements**. These are on top of the support and shelter allowances described above.

Supplements are additional payments and supports the ministry provides to those on welfare to help them with a particular need. The ministry provides some supplements automatically. Other supplements you have to apply for.

Some supplements must be paid back to the ministry through a small reduction in your monthly benefit.

General supplements help cover a range of costs

General supplements help with expenses relating to housing, employment, transportation, family, and more.

For example, the confirmed job supplement helps pay for work-related items you need to start a new job. Another supplement helps with the cost of obtaining identification documents.

Housing-related supplements help pay security and pet damage deposits, and can cover some moving expenses. Family- and children-related supplements help cover camp fees and costs associated with children starting school. There's also a winter supplement to help with extra expenses during the winter holiday season.

A crisis supplement may be available to assist those facing an unexpected need or expense. It provides a one-time payment to prevent imminent danger to the health of the recipient or someone in their family unit.

Basic medical coverage and health supplements

Everyone receiving welfare in BC qualifies for **basic medical coverage**. This includes Medical Services Plan benefits and PharmaCare coverage for many prescription drugs. The ministry can apply for you to get basic medical coverage.

Depending on the type of assistance you receive, you may also qualify for **health supplements**. These are a separate category of supplements available to those with certain health needs. Examples include supplements to help with the cost of emergency dental services and meeting special dietary needs.

Visit the ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr for the full list of supplements available.

Who is eligible

Eligibility for income assistance

There are four main eligibility criteria for **income assistance**:

- asset limits
- income limits
- immigration requirements
- age requirements

We'll explain each in turn.

> **Tip**
>
> **If you live on reserve**
>
> If you live on reserve in BC, welfare support doesn't come from the provincial government but rather from the federal government. A social development worker at your band's office can help you with your application for financial assistance from the federal government. Legal Aid BC's website has guidance on the topic, at aboriginal.legalaid.bc.ca.

You can have some assets and still be eligible

To qualify for income assistance, the value of your assets (the things you own) must be below a certain amount. This amount is called your **asset limit**. Under the law, an asset includes:

- equity in any personal property or **real property** that can be converted to cash (equity is the value of an asset after subtracting how much is owed on it)
- a beneficial interest in personal or real property held in **trust**
- cash

Asset limits vary depending on the size of your family unit. Your family unit includes you and your **dependents**. A **spouse** (married or unmarried) who lives with you is a dependent. So is a **minor** child who lives with you more than half the time and relies on you for necessities, like food and shelter.

> **Tip**
>
> **Who is considered a spouse**
>
> Under BC's welfare laws, a spouse is someone:
>
> - you're married to, or
> - have declared you're in a marriage-like relationship with, or
> - have lived with for **at least one year** in a marriage-like relationship.
>
> Indicators of a marriage-like relationship include sharing finances and presenting as a couple to friends and family.

Older relatives and adult children don't count as your dependents, even though they may live with you and depend on you for care. They can apply for welfare as their own family unit if they need to.

Assets are classified as exempt or non-exempt

When the **ministry** looks at your assets, some of them don't get counted towards your asset limit. The law calls these **exempt assets**. Examples include clothing, one vehicle, and your family unit's home. Assets that do get counted towards your asset total are called **non-exempt assets**.

To qualify for welfare, the value of your non-exempt assets must be below your asset limit.

You can find the full list of exempt and non-exempt assets, as well as current assets limits for income assistance, on the ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr. Click the search button on the page and type "assets and exemptions."

You can get money from other sources and still be eligible

"A year ago, I scaled back my work to look after my daughter. Rent has gone up, and so has everything it seems. We're barely scraping by. I reached out to an advocate. They told me I may qualify for welfare, even though I work part-time. I'm thinking about it — I could really use the support right now."

– Derrin, Vancouver, BC

To qualify for income assistance, your family unit's **net income** must be below a certain amount. This amount is called your **income limit**. Your income limit is equal to the amount your family unit would receive on income assistance. To get a rough idea of your income limit, check current income assistance rates on the ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr.

Tip

If you qualify for other financial support

If the ministry thinks you're eligible for other benefits, they may ask you to apply for them before you apply for welfare benefits, or while you are receiving welfare. Examples include **employment insurance**, workers' compensation, and **Canada Pension Plan** benefits.

If the ministry asks you to apply for benefits you don't think you qualify for, it's a good idea to speak to a **legal advocate**. To find a legal advocate, see the who can help section on page 18.

Income is classified as exempt or non-exempt

Under the law, some sources of money don't get counted towards your net income. This is called **exempt income**. Examples of exempt income include:

- EI maternity and parental benefits
- Canada child tax benefits
- child support payments
- Indigenous financial settlements

Income that *does* count towards your total net income is called non-exempt income. Examples of non-exempt income include:

- CPP benefits
- regular EI benefits and EI sickness benefits
- pension plan benefits
- spousal support payments

See the ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr for the full list of exempt and non-exempt income.

If you have non-exempt income

If you have non-exempt income that's less than the assistance rate your family unit would get, the ministry will pay you an amount to make up the difference.

For example, say you have a spouse and one child who live with you. You determine that your family unit would get $1,500 per month in income assistance. Your family unit takes in $1,100 per month from other non-exempt sources. In this case, if you qualify, the ministry would pay you $400 in income assistance for the first month. If some of your income comes from employment, you may also be entitled to an earnings exemption.

You get a monthly earnings exemption

Those on income assistance can earn some income from work without having it deducted (taken) from their monthly payments. This is called an earnings exemption. Usually, you

become eligible for an earnings exemption after receiving income assistance for one month. But if someone in your family unit received income assistance or disability assistance in one of the last six months, the earnings exemption will take effect right away.

The amount of your earnings exemption depends on what type of welfare you get and the size of your family unit. As of December 2025, the monthly earnings exemption for a single person on income assistance is $600.

For current earnings exemption amounts, visit the ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr.

You must meet immigration requirements

BC law sets out immigration requirements you must meet to qualify for income assistance. To be eligible, at least one member of your family unit must be one of the following:

- a Canadian citizen,
- a **permanent resident** (with landed status),
- a Convention refugee,
- in Canada under a temporary residence permit,
- in the process of having a claim or application for refugee protection decided,
- subject to a removal order that cannot be executed, or
- in Canada under a temporary resident visa issued for humanitarian reasons related to armed conflict.

An exception to the immigration requirements

The law carves out an exception to the above requirements for single parents without legal status in Canada who are separated from an abusive spouse. To qualify for the exemption, the welfare applicant must:

- have one or more children who are Canadian citizens,
- be separated from an abusive spouse,
- have applied for permanent residence status in Canada, and
- be unable to leave BC for specific reasons.

For the full details, see the ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr.

Tip

If your sponsorship breaks down

If your spouse sponsored you to come to Canada and your sponsorship breaks down due to abuse, you may be able to skip some of the usual steps when applying for welfare. Visit peopleslawschool.ca/sponsorship for more on your rights and options if your sponsorship breaks down.

You must meet age requirements

Generally, you must be age 19 or older to qualify for income assistance.

However, if you're under age 19, you may qualify in these circumstances.

- **If you don't live with your parents.** To be eligible for welfare, the ministry must be convinced that your parents won't support you. The ministry will make reasonable efforts to get your parents to take responsibility for your financial support before giving you benefits.
- **If you live with your parents.** If your parents receive welfare benefits and you have a dependent child of your own, the ministry may see you as a separate family unit from your parents. This means you can apply for welfare as your own family unit and receive benefits separate from your parents.

Tip

Different age requirements for disability assistance

Under the law, you can qualify for the **persons with disabilities (PWD) designation** and start receiving disability assistance at age 18. This is the case even if you still live with your parents.

Before you apply

You have rights when applying for welfare

In applying for welfare benefits, you have rights. These include the right to:

- apply for and get the benefits you qualify for
- fair, efficient, and respectful service from **ministry** staff
- get extra help from ministry workers if you need it for health or other reasons
- have your privacy and personal information protected by the ministry
- have someone with you when you talk to a ministry worker (for example, a **legal advocate**, friend, or family member)
- ask for an interpreter if English isn't your first language
- appeal or challenge most ministry decisions that go against you

It's not your fault that you're struggling to meet your needs. You have the right to ask for help — it's not something to feel ashamed of.

If you need help right away

When you first contact the ministry to apply for welfare, they will do an **immediate needs assessment**. The purpose of the assessment is to find out if you have an immediate need for food, shelter, or urgent medical attention. You have the right to get support right away if you need it.

Circumstances that show an immediate need include:

- relying on community resources (like a food bank) for basic food needs
- having received an eviction notice
- having had your utilities disconnected, or facing a disconnection
- staying at an emergency shelter with no suitable accommodation to move into in the near future
- being unable to pay for prescription medication you need right away

If the ministry agrees you have an immediate need, they will ensure you get help as soon as possible. They will also speed up the welfare application process, and relax some of the eligibility requirements for you.

If you are fleeing abuse

When you apply for welfare, let the ministry know right away if you're fleeing abuse. Ministry staff should ensure the immediate safety of you and any children in your care. They can also speed up the application process, to ensure you don't stay in an abusive situation due to financial need.

Tips for dealing with the ministry

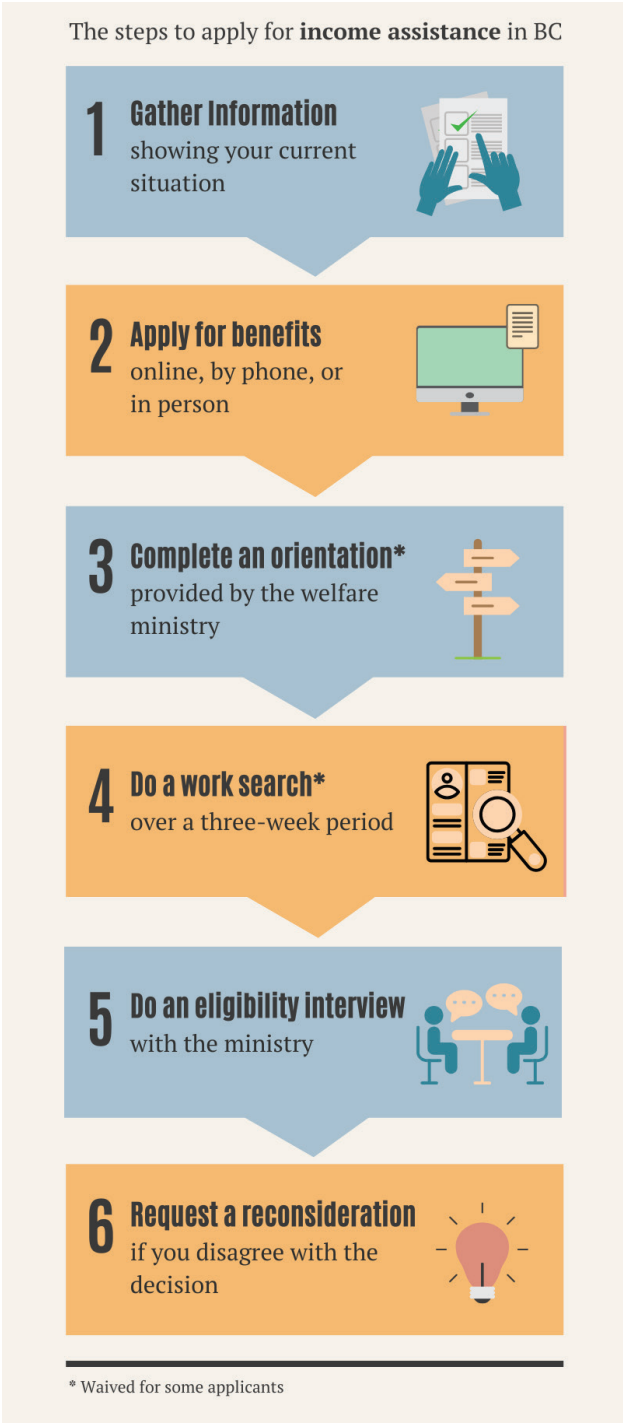
Sometimes, dealing with the ministry can be hard. Here are a few tips when dealing with ministry staff:

- If you need help understanding something, talk to a **legal advocate** or reach out to a friend. An advocate is a community worker trained to help people. It can help to have someone else to talk to the ministry on your behalf. To find an advocate in your area, see the who can help section on page 18.
- Call the ministry back if you don't hear from them when you're supposed to. We tell you the deadlines in the steps below.
- Keep notes of what you do, including the date and time. When you contact the ministry, ask for the name of the person you speak to and write it down.

Ministry staff must follow BC's welfare laws. You can access the laws that deal with income assistance by going to canlii.org and searching for the *Employment and Assistance Act* and Regulations. There are also policies and procedures ministry staff must follow. You can access them on the ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr. Consider contacting an advocate if you need help understanding what the laws or policies mean.

Be persistent. Remember: you have the right to get help.

Apply for benefits



Step 1. Gather information

When you apply for welfare, you need to give information about your current situation. Before starting your application, gather documents showing:

- how much you pay for rent and utilities
- if you have a vehicle, how much you owe on it (if anything)
- how much money you have in the bank
- if you're currently working, your income from work
- if you're getting or waiting for other income (like **employment insurance**, child or spousal support, workers' compensation benefits, **Canada Pension Plan** benefits, or other benefits)
- if someone sponsored you to come to Canada

You should also be ready to provide details about yourself and the members of your family unit. This includes:

- personal ID for you and your family
- your **social insurance number**
- a phone number so the **ministry** can contact you

Step 2. Apply for benefits

It's time to start your application. You can apply in one of three ways: online, by phone, or in person. We'll explain the process for each.

Apply online

The platform to apply for welfare online is called My Self Serve. To use it, you'll need to register for a free account at myselfserve.gov.bc.ca. Once you sign in, you'll receive instructions guiding you through the process.

You can save your progress (keep your answers) at any time during your application. If you aren't sure about an answer, make your best guess. You can change it later. If you need help, you can call the ministry at 1-866-866-0800.

After you apply, make sure to check your My Self Serve account often. The ministry sends important messages there. If you aren't going to be able to check a My Self Serve account regularly, or you don't feel comfortable using a computer, you can apply for welfare by phone or in person.

Tip

If you don't own a computer

If you don't have a computer or the internet at home, you may be able to use a computer for free at:

- public libraries
- community centres
- ministry offices
- Service BC offices
- offices where **legal advocates** work (see who can help, on page 18)

Apply by phone

You can contact the **ministry** by phone to apply for welfare. Their number is 1-866-866-0800. You won't be charged for the call.

A ministry worker will ask you questions to find out if you have immediate needs or if you're fleeing abuse. The ministry aims to phone you back and fill out the application with you within three business days. You'll get a number called an **application service request number**. Write it down, together with the name of the worker you talk to.

Within five business days of completing your application over the phone, you'll need to sign the application in person at a ministry or Service BC office.

Another option is to ask the ministry worker to fax your completed application to a trusted third party like a **legal advocate**, social worker, or doctor. You'd have to sign the application in front of that person within five business days.

It's a good idea to keep a copy of your signed application form for your records.

Apply in person

You have the right to go to a **ministry** office in person for help if you need it. For example, if you have trouble using a phone or don't have a computer. You can find an office near you by going to the ministry website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr.

When you apply in person, a ministry worker will ask you some questions right away to find out if you have immediate needs or if you are fleeing abuse. Tell the worker if you are in either of those situations. What happens next depends on whether you have access to a phone.

If you have a phone, the ministry aims to phone you to complete the application with you within three business days. From here, you'll follow the same steps as someone who applies by phone, described above. If you *don't* have access to a phone, you'll get an appointment time to meet with a ministry worker in person. At your appointment, the worker will help you fill out your application.

Step 3. Complete an orientation

When you apply for welfare, you have to do an **orientation**. Your orientation will explain:

- eligibility requirements for income assistance
- the information you need to provide to the ministry
- the work search requirement (explained next)
- tips and resources to help you find a job
- other sources of income that may be available to you

If you start your application by phone or in person, the ministry worker will tell you what you need to know for your orientation. If you apply online, the orientation is included as part of the application process.

The requirement to complete an orientation is waived for some applicants, including those over age 65 and those with a disability that prevents them from completing an orientation.

Step 4. Do a work search

"When I applied for income assistance, I was told I needed to do a work search in order to qualify. I'd been out of the job market for months, and was feeling discouraged. The ministry worker handling my file suggested I visit a WorkBC centre. I found one nearby, and met with one of their employment experts. She's been very supportive. We're working together to help me rejoin the workforce."

– Joel, Quesnel, BC

Under BC law, most applicants for welfare must complete a work search to qualify for benefits. You can satisfy this requirement in one of two ways:

- complete a three-week work search after starting your application for welfare and before attending your eligibility interview, or
- show that you already completed a three-week work search in the 30 day period before starting your welfare application.

You may not need to complete a work search in some circumstances, including if:

- you're fleeing an abusive spouse or relative
- you're a single parent of a child under age three
- you're 65 or older
- you can't legally work in Canada
- you have a disability that prevents you from looking for work

The ministry's website at gov.bc.ca/sdpr has the full list of exemptions.

Tip

If you have an immediate need

If the ministry determines you have an immediate need for food, shelter, or urgent medical care, you might still need to do a work search. But you may receive **hardship assistance** in the meantime. We explain hardship assistance above, starting on page 5.

What does a work search involve?

The ministry says a reasonable work search involves activities like:

- looking for jobs on the internet, by phone, in the newspaper, and asking around
- writing a résumé and going to résumé writing classes
- applying for jobs
- accessing employment services and going to employment agencies
- going to job fairs and workshops
- attending job interviews

You must keep a record of your work search activities using the proper form. Look for a WorkBC Centre near you for help with your work search.

If the ministry isn't satisfied with your work search, they may ask you to redo it. Or they may refuse to pay you welfare. If that happens, it's a good idea to speak to a **legal advocate**. For tips on finding an advocate in your area, see the who can help section on page 18.

Tip

If you are fleeing abuse

Welfare applicants who are fleeing abuse are exempt from the work search requirement. If this applies to your situation, you will proceed directly to the eligibility interview (described below). In the meantime, the ministry will work to ensure that your safety needs are met.

Step 5. Attend an eligibility interview

Once you've done your orientation and work search, you'll attend an **eligibility interview**. This is the last step in the welfare application process. At the eligibility interview, the ministry looks at your situation and decides if you qualify for welfare.

Generally, the ministry should schedule your interview for a date within five business days of when you contact them.

If you applied for welfare online, you may not need to have an eligibility interview. The ministry may be able to decide whether you are eligible just by reviewing the information you submitted through My Self Serve.

Preparing for your interview

Start by gathering the documents you'll need for your interview. Here's what you'll need:

- Personal identification for you and your family members. Each applicant must provide two pieces of ID (one must be photo ID, like a driver's licence). For dependent children, only one piece of ID is required.
- Your **social insurance number** and your spouse's social insurance number (if applicable).
- Records showing benefits or wages you earn now. For example, recent pay stubs, government benefits receipts, or your income tax assessment.
- Statements for all of your bank accounts from the last two months.
- **Lines of credit** you have by yourself or with someone else.
- Financial records for any registered accounts, like **RRSPs** or **RRIFs**.
- Life insurance policies.
- Any family law documents, like court orders or agreements for spousal or child support.
- Registration documents for any vehicles you own.

What to expect at your interview

Your eligibility interview may take place over the phone or in person. Either way, the process is mostly the same.

The ministry worker will collect your information and enter it into their computer system. They may ask you questions about your work history and work search (if you had to do one). They may ask for additional information if they need it.

At the end of the interview, you'll be asked to sign a form. Before signing, read through the form and make sure all the information is correct. If you notice an error, ask the ministry worker to change it. **Do not sign a form that has wrong information on it.**

You'll also have to sign a consent form. This form says the ministry can check the information you provided in your application. It gives them permission to exchange information with other government agencies and social service providers if needed.

Lastly, the ministry worker may ask you to do a **client needs assessment**. This is a tool the ministry uses to determine your readiness to work and identify any barriers to employment. After the assessment, they may ask you to enter an employability plan. Your **employability plan** outlines what you agree to do to find a job and get hired. For example, it may include attending a job placement or training program.

Not all recipients of income assistance have to do a client needs assessment or enter an employability plan. For example, those age 65 or older are exempt. So are single parents with a dependent child under age three.

If the ministry tells you your information isn't complete

If the ministry worker says your application has information missing, ask them exactly what they need. Write down what they say. Ask them if they need the information by a certain date. If so, write it down. If you need more time to gather the required information, contact them before the deadline and ask for an extension.

On learning of the ministry's decision

If the ministry worker says you don't qualify for welfare, ask for the reason in writing. Ask them if you are eligible for **hardship assistance**. This is a type of support available to those who, for specific reasons, don't qualify for income assistance.

If you disagree with the ministry's decision on your case, you can ask for a **reconsideration**.

Step 6. Request a reconsideration of the ministry's decision

Under the law, you can ask the ministry to **reconsider** their original decision on your case. With a reconsideration, a separate department of the ministry reviews your information to ensure you're getting the right benefits. You can request a reconsideration if:

- your application for assistance or a supplement was denied
- your assistance or supplement was reduced
- your assistance or supplement was stopped

You can't ask the ministry to reconsider a decision involving service quality or administrative issues. For these problems, contact an income assistance office to speak to a supervisor.

Tip

Find a legal advocate

Legal advocates are community workers trained to help people. An advocate can tell you if your reconsideration or appeal is likely to succeed. They can also help you with the paperwork involved. To find an advocate, see who can help on page 18.

How to request a reconsideration

First, call the ministry at 1-866-866-0800 or visit your local ministry office to tell them you want a decision reconsidered. They should give you a **request for reconsideration form** within 48 hours. If you haven't received the form within a week of your request, follow up with them. (Note that it's generally best to pick up your reconsideration package in person to prevent delays.)

Fill out sections three and four of the form, then return the form to your local office. Alternatively, you can fill out and submit a request for reconsideration form online through My Self Serve.

To ensure the ministry has all the information you want them to consider for your reconsideration, submit the completed form together with any new evidence you might want to provide. New evidence can include an updated personal statement, letters from doctors or assessors, statements from others, or tests and medical records.

Make sure to meet the deadlines

You must return the form within 20 business days of the ministry's original decision. The 20 business day countdown starts the day after you **learn of** the decision. If your denial decision is dated but you did not read or receive the decision until days later, the 20 day deadline should start the day after you actually learned of the decision. If there was a delay between when your decision is dated and when you found out about the decision, it's important to tell the ministry this when you call to request the reconsideration package. They should change the dates accordingly.

If you aren't able to meet the 20 day deadline, you can request an extension of up to an additional 20 business days. An extension starts the day after you request it, even if you still have time left on your original deadline. This means that if you request an extension too early, you may eat into your original deadline.

To maximize your extension time, you would need to request your extension on the last day of your original deadline. But be careful, as you don't want to miss your deadline by waiting too long. A **legal advocate** can help you with the timing of your extension request.

What happens next

A reconsideration officer will review your form and should get back to you with a decision within 10 business days. If you used My Self Serve, the reconsideration decision will be posted there. If not, it will be sent by mail. Follow up with the ministry if you have not received a decision on your reconsideration after a week.

If you aren't satisfied with the reconsideration decision, you can **appeal**. Welfare appeals are heard by the Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal. Visit the tribunal's website at eaat.ca for guidance on appealing a reconsideration decision.

Who can help

With applying for welfare

PovNet's Find an Advocate
Provides a map of legal advocates throughout BC who can help with applying for disability benefits and navigating welfare problems.
povnet.org/find-an-advocate

WorkBC
A provincial agency offering employment-related services, including help with your work search. You can find your local centre online, or call them to set up an appointment.
1-877-952-6914
workbc.ca

With legal help

Together Against Poverty Society
Helps people in the Greater Victoria and Nanaimo areas with persons with disabilities (PWD) applications and with challenging ministry decisions.
1-250-361-3521
tapsbc.ca

Community Legal Assistance Society
Assists low-income British Columbians who need help with a decision from the Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal.
1-888-685-6222
clasbc.net

UBC Law School's Student Advice Program
Law students provide help to people with limited means in the Vancouver area.
604-822-5791
lslap.bc.ca

University of Victoria Law Centre
Law students provide help to people with limited means in the Victoria area.
1-250-385-1221
thelawcentre.ca

Thompson Rivers University Community Legal Clinic
Law students provide help to people with limited means in the BC Interior.
1-778-471-8490
tru.ca/law/students/outreach/legal-clinic

With complaints

BC Ombudsperson
Independent office that hears complaints about government services or agencies.
1-800-567-3247
bcombudsperson.ca

Glossary

Canada Pension Plan: A pension plan run by the federal government that pays benefits to workers or their families once the worker retires, is disabled or dies. The amount of the benefits depends on how much someone contributed to the plan.

Disability benefits: Welfare benefits that provide targeted help to people facing health struggles that make it very difficult for them to work or to do certain daily living activities. The two main disability benefits are disability assistance (also called PWD benefits) and PPMB benefits (benefits for persons with persistent multiple barriers to employment).

Employment insurance: A program run by the federal government that provides benefits to workers who lose their job. It also helps those who can't work because of sickness, who take time off work to have a child or care for one, or who need time off work to care for an ill family member.

Hardship assistance: A type of welfare available to those who, for specific reasons, don't qualify for income assistance, disability assistance or PPMB benefits.

Income assistance: Financial help the BC provincial government provides to people who have little or no income. Income assistance is a main welfare benefit.

Legal advocate: A professional who receives extensive training on legal problems and the law. They provide free support, advocacy and information to low-income and marginalized people experiencing legal problems.

Line of credit: A pre-set amount of money that a person can borrow as needed.

Ministry: The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. The part of the provincial government that deals with welfare.

Minor: A person who is younger than the legal age of majority, which is 19 in British Columbia.

Net income: "Take home" income after deductions. Deductions may include income tax, and things like Canada Pension Plan and employment insurance contributions.

Permanent resident: Also called a landed immigrant. A person who has been granted permanent resident status by the government and has not lost that status. Permanent residents have the right to enter and remain in Canada, as well as live and work in Canada, subject to the law.

PWD designation: A designation given by the ministry confirming that a person meets the legal definition of a "person with disabilities." You must have this designation to receive disability assistance.

Real property: A parcel of land and any buildings on the land.

RRIF: A registered retirement income fund is an account registered with the federal government that gives a person a steady income in retirement.

RRSP: A registered retirement savings plan is an account registered with the federal government that allows a person to save money for retirement and lower their income tax.

Social insurance number (SIN): A nine-digit number that everyone needs to be able to work in Canada, use government programs or get government benefits.

Trust: A form of possession of property in which a person (the trustee) holds property for the benefit of another person (the beneficiary).

Welfare: Money you may be able to get from the provincial government for food, shelter, clothing and other basic needs when you're unable to support yourself. Welfare includes income assistance, disability benefits, and hardship assistance.

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The information helped me identify what to do next on my legal matter	○	○	○	○	○
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