



Welfare and Disability Benefits

Applying for disability status

The current law on disability benefits says that you can apply for either Level 1 disability benefits (known as DB1) or Level 2 disability benefits (known as DB2), depending on the extent of your disability. When you apply, it's a good idea to check off both boxes on the application form so that you will be considered for both levels of benefits.

After you apply for disability benefits, you usually have to wait several weeks for a decision from the Ministry of Human Resources (MHR). The wait will be longer if your application is refused and you decide to appeal. While you are waiting for your application for disability benefits to be processed, you may have to live on **welfare** (also known as income assistance or BC employment assistance) for the first couple of months. But if your assets are above those now allowed (see Fact Sheet #4: Welfare and Exemptions), you may not be eligible for this.

If you apply or re-apply for disability benefits after April 1, 2002, you will have to wait three weeks before you can fill out an application for welfare. If you have a disability, you may be excused from the job search requirement of the welfare application.

In the fall of 2002, the new Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act will change the criteria required for disability status and the laws affecting people with disabilities who apply for welfare. Under the new act, you will be granted disability status only if you —

- are 18 years of age or older;
- have a severe mental or physical impairment that a doctor says is likely to continue for at least two years;

- are, in the opinion of a health professional, "directly and significantly" restricted (either continuously or for extended periods) in your daily living activities; and
- need help or supervision from another person because of your disability.

As well, the new law says that disability status is not permanent. Even if you already have disability status, the ministry may periodically review your eligibility under the new law.

To get updates about what is happening with this new law —

- visit the PovNet website at <http://www.povnet.org> or
- contact the BC Coalition for People with Disabilities:
phone: (604) 872-1278
website: <http://www.bccpd.bc.ca>

Note: If you have a disability and you are thinking of applying for disability status, do this as soon as possible. If you need help applying for disability status, contact an advocacy group. Visit <http://www.povnet.org> and click on "Find an Advocate" in the left-hand column to see a map of advocates in BC or contact your local library to find a community group that can help you.

Support and shelter

Although the support and shelter rates have changed for some groups, the rates for people on DB2 have not recently been altered. The rates for single people and families on DB1 and DB2 are as follows:

Disability benefit rates

Category	Support allowance	Shelter allowance	Total payment
Single person on DB1	\$282.92	\$325.00	\$607.92
Couple (both on DB1)	\$452.06	\$520.00	\$972.06
Single person on DB2	\$461.42	\$325.00	\$786.42
Couple (both on DB2)	\$809.06	\$520.00	\$1,329.06
Single parent (on DB2) and 1 child	\$555.08*	\$520.00	\$1,075.08

* The support allowance does not increase if you have more than one child. The BC Family Bonus or Canada Child Tax Benefits are not included in the support allowances shown here.

Asset exemptions

If you are a single person on DB2, you can have \$3,000 in assets and still be eligible for disability benefits.

For a couple (with or without children) on DB2 or a single parent on DB2, the asset exemption is \$5,000 — no matter how many people are in the family. There are no limits on how much of this can be in cash.

When you are on disability benefits, you are allowed to have a vehicle for day-to-day transportation. (See Fact sheet #4: Welfare and Exemptions for more information on asset exemptions.)

Earnings exemptions

As of April 1, 2002, if you are on DB1, any extra income you make is deducted from your welfare cheque. If you are on DB2, you can earn up to \$300 a month without having this deducted from your cheque. (Under the previous regulations, people on disability benefits were allowed an exemption of \$200 per month plus 25% of any other income they earned.)

Exemptions for Family Maintenance, Workers' Compensation benefits, and the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Orphan's Benefit have been eliminated. This means that these benefits will be deducted dollar-for-dollar from your welfare cheque. (See Fact sheet #4: Welfare and Exemptions for more information on earnings exemptions.)

Employment

Under the new legislation, if you have disability status you will still be assessed for employability. If you are found capable of working, you will have to enter into an employment plan and meet the requirements of the plan or lose your benefits.

Home support

As of March 31, 2002, you can no longer get Homemaker Services through MHR if you are on welfare. The ministry will cancel any such services you may be receiving through its offices or as the result of a BC Benefits tribunal decision.

MHR says that people who need home support services can get them through other ministries, such as the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

This information comes from reliable sources. However, more information is coming out regularly. Please watch the LSS website (<http://www.lss.bc.ca>) or the PovNet website (<http://povnet.org>) for up-to-date information and new fact sheets.



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