For more help
www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca

The Family Law in British Columbia website has more information about family problems, including:
- fact sheets
- self-help guides
- online publications and videos
- court forms
- updates on the law
- definitions of legal terms
- links to online legislation (the laws)
- links to other useful websites
- information about where to go for help

How to get Sponsorship Breakdown:
Read online (in PDF) at www.lss.bc.ca/publications
Order online: www.crownpub.bc.ca
(click the Legal Services Society image)
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Acknowledgements
Writer: Lois Shelton
Editor: Judy Clarke
Designer: Gillian Boyd
Project coordinators: Eduardo Aragón, Fran Auckland
Legal reviewers: Rod Holloway, David Morrison, Michelle Poulsen,
Alison Ward, Brenda Wemp

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This booklet explains the law in general. It is not intended to give you legal advice on your particular problem. Because each person’s case is different, you may need to get legal help. Sponsorship Breakdown was up to date as of November 2009.

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Please be advised that it is against the law to provide false or misleading information to government officials in Canada, or to fail to tell them relevant information. This is called misrepresentation. You may face imprisonment or a heavy fine if you lie about your personal information. You may also risk losing your permanent resident status in Canada.
This booklet tells you what to do if the person who sponsored you for permanent resident status in Canada will not support you, and you cannot support yourself. It can be frightening when this happens, but there is help available.

This booklet explains how to get help as quickly as possible.

**Who is this booklet for?**

This booklet is for you if you came to Canada as a family class immigrant from outside of Canada. This means that a family member such as your child, grandchild, spouse, same-sex partner, or a parent living in Canada sponsored you to come into the country. Family class immigrants come to Canada with immigrant visas and become permanent residents when they enter Canada.

This booklet also applies to you if you are an immigrant in the “spouse or common-law partner in Canada class.” This means your spouse, living in Canada, sponsored you when you were already in Canada. You received your permanent resident status at an immigration office in Canada.

Throughout this booklet, the term “sponsored” refers to someone granted permanent resident status based on a promise of support from a family member.
This booklet does not apply to you if you:
• are in Canada and in the process of being sponsored by your spouse or common-law partner of the same or opposite sex (in other words, you do not have your permanent resident status yet),
• came to Canada as a refugee or as the relative of a refugee,
• came as a family member of an entrepreneur class immigrant, or
• are on a visitor or student visa.

If you are in any of these situations, you need to get information from another source. See “Who Can Help?” on page 26.

If you need information about how to sponsor someone, or what to do if you are a sponsor but cannot continue supporting your family member, you should consult other sources. You can get information from one of the groups listed on pages 26–31, or the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) website at www.cic.gc.ca.

**What is in this booklet?**
The first section of this booklet has basic information about sponsorship. It also tells you what can happen if your sponsorship breaks down.

The second section tells you how to apply for welfare if your sponsorship breaks down.

The third section has a list of community groups. These groups have community workers who can help you with welfare and immigration matters. Some organizations can also help you find a lawyer or legal advocate.

The fourth section has a list of important words used in this booklet and explains what they mean.
What is sponsorship?
Canadian citizens and permanent residents who live in Canada can apply to sponsor their family members to live with them in Canada. Anyone who applies to sponsor a relative may have to meet certain income requirements. The sponsor must also agree to support the person for 3 to 10 years. The length of time of this support depends on the age of the sponsored person and how he or she is related to the sponsor.

An eligible person can sponsor his or her:
- husband or wife
- common-law partner
- conjugal partner
- dependent children (biological or adopted)
- parents
- grandparents
- brother, sister, nephew, niece, or grandchild who is under 18 years old, orphaned, and not married

In this booklet, we use the word “spouse” to refer to a husband, wife, or common-law partner of the same or opposite sex.

If someone does not have enough money to support the relative he or she wants to sponsor, a spouse can help. This second person is called the co-signer of the sponsorship agreement. In this booklet, we use the word “sponsor” to refer to both the sponsor and any co-signer.
The federal government is in charge of sponsorships through Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). Anyone who sponsors a person to come to Canada must sign an “undertaking” — a promise to the government to support the person he or she sponsors. This means he or she agrees to provide that person with food, clothing, a place to live, and other essential things. The sponsor also agrees to pay the fees for BC medical insurance (Medical Services Plan) and medical costs such as dental or eye care that are not covered by the Medical Services Plan.

**What are my responsibilities as a sponsored person in Canada?**

When a relative sponsors you, you must sign a “sponsorship agreement” with the sponsor. You must agree to try and support yourself and to ask your sponsor for help before you go to the government for support.

**What are my rights as a sponsored person in Canada?**

When you are sponsored to come to Canada as a family class immigrant, you get permanent resident status when you arrive in the country. If you are sponsored in Canada by your spouse, you receive your permanent resident status at the local CIC office. As a permanent resident, you have the right to stay in Canada unless you break Canada’s immigration laws. You also have the right to work in Canada.

You may also be eligible to receive some benefits, such as:

- Employment Insurance,
- WorkSafeBC benefits (formerly called Workers’ Compensation Board),
- Canada Child Tax Benefit, and
- BC Family Bonus.

There are laws in Canada against:

- violence against anyone, including women, children, and seniors,
• unfair pay,
• unsafe working conditions,
• job discrimination, and
• discrimination in providing public services.

These laws apply to everyone in Canada no matter what their immigration status is.

For more information about these benefits and rights, ask a community worker from one of the community groups listed on pages 26–31.

What is sponsorship breakdown?
Sponsorship breakdown is when your sponsor cannot or will not provide for some or all of your basic needs, such as food, housing, clothing, or medical care, and you are unable to support yourself and/or your dependants.

Some examples of a sponsorship breakdown are when your sponsor:
• wants to support you, but no longer has enough money;
• allows you to stay in his or her home, but does not pay for your food, clothing, or medical needs;
• says you must leave the house and refuses to support you;
• leaves you and no longer supports you; or
• refuses to support you after you leave the home.

Sometimes a sponsor treats you so badly that you have to leave, even if he or she does not tell you to go. For example, you may decide to leave your sponsor if he or she:
• is abusive (for example, forces you to have sex, physically harms you, threatens you, or scares you by yelling at you), or
• makes unreasonable demands, such as forcing you to work for him or her for no money.

If you are in this situation, it is a kind of sponsorship breakdown. (See pages 7 and 18 for more information about what to do if this is happening to you.)
What will CIC do to me if my sponsorship breaks down?
CIC will not do anything to you if your sponsorship breaks down because you already have permanent resident status. You will not lose your permanent resident status even if you need to apply for welfare (this is money from the provincial government for basic needs such as housing, food, and clothing).

If your sponsorship has broken down but you do not have permanent resident status, get the help of a community worker (see page 26) as soon as possible.

Can my sponsor make me leave Canada?
No. Your sponsor cannot make you leave Canada, no matter what kind of problem you have with him or her. Only Canadian immigration authorities can order a person to leave the country. This can only happen after a hearing takes place. You will not be ordered to leave the country just because your sponsorship has broken down, or your sponsor wants you to leave. If your sponsor tells you to leave, you do not have to go. If you are being forced out of Canada, contact one of the groups listed on pages 26–31, or ask for help at the airport.

What will happen to my sponsor if the sponsorship breaks down?
If your sponsor and co-signer do not support you for the time they promised and you have to go on welfare, they will not be allowed to sponsor other family members unless they pay the government all the money it gave you.

The federal and provincial governments (and even you) all have the right to take your sponsor to court (sue) to get money for your support. If you are collecting welfare benefits, the provincial government’s policy is to actively collect money from your sponsor. Sponsored people rarely sue their sponsor directly because it is difficult to do (see also page 18), but often a sponsored spouse will go to court to apply for spousal or child support.
What if my sponsor is hurting or scaring me?

If you are in danger, call the police by dialing 9-1-1. If you live in one the few areas of BC that does not have 9-1-1 service, call your local emergency police or RCMP. You can find that phone number on the inside front cover or first page of your phone book, or call your local municipal office and ask for the number.

You have the right to leave someone who is hurting or scaring you even if that person sponsored you. If your spouse is your sponsor, you still have the right to end your relationship.

If your children sponsored you but are now abusing you, you can get help. You can get information about what to do from the Legal Services Society booklets *When I’m 64* (in English only) and *Benefits and Services for Seniors* (in Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), English, Farsi, French, Korean, Punjabi, Spanish and Tagalog). These booklets are available on the society’s website at [www.lss.bc.ca](http://www.lss.bc.ca) (click on “Our publications”). You can also contact the BC Centre for Elder Advocacy Support that provides help and support to older adults who are, or may be, abused at 604-437-1940 or 1-866-437-1940 (call no charge).

If you are a woman, there are safe places you can go. You and your children can stay at a transition house or women’s shelter until you find a better place to live. These places are free. To find a transition house, women’s shelter, or emergency shelter, look in the front pages of the phone book under “Crisis Centre” in the “Emergency” section, or phone VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808. You can also ask the police to take you to a transition house.

Even if you are not in immediate danger, but your sponsor is intimidating or scaring you, you need to get help as soon as possible. Contact one of the groups listed on pages 26–31.
What will happen to my children and our house?
If your spouse is your sponsor and your sponsorship breaks down, this does not mean that he or she has the right to keep your children or your property.

If you and your spouse separate or divorce, your spouse still has a legal responsibility to help support your children. This is called child support or maintenance. He or she may also have to give you support payments. This is called spousal support and it is different than sponsorship payments. You can go to court to apply for child or spousal support. If you do not want to go to court, you and your spouse can try to work out an agreement with a mediator or with lawyers. You can also get help from a family justice counsellor. Look in the provincial government listings (blue pages) of the current phone book under “Attorney General, Ministry of — Justice Services Branch — Family Justice Centres.”

You may also have a right to some of the property you shared with your spouse. The two of you could decide how to divide up your property, or you could go to court to do this.

For more information about what your rights are, read Living Together or Living Apart (available in English and French) or the online information sheet called If You Are an Immigrant Sponsored by Your Husband (available in Chinese (traditional), Farsi, Punjabi, Spanish, and English). Both are published by the Legal Services Society and available on the website at www.lss.bc.ca (click on “Our publications”).

The society’s other website, Family Law in British Columbia, also has useful information on family law matters at www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca.
Applying for welfare

Where can I get help if my sponsor will not support me?
If you cannot support yourself, you can ask the Ministry of Housing and Social Development (referred to in this booklet as “the ministry”) for help. The ministry is part of the British Columbia provincial government. It provides money for housing, food, clothing, and other basic expenses to people who qualify for help. The money you get from the ministry is usually called welfare. It is also sometimes called income assistance or social assistance.

Although the federal government is in charge of sponsorships, CIC cannot give you assistance if your sponsorship breaks down, and it does not help you get money from your sponsor.

This section of the booklet provides basic information about welfare. You can get more detailed information about how to apply for welfare, and what benefits are available, by reading Your Welfare Rights, a booklet published by the Legal Services Society. It is available in English only.

If you do not have permanent resident status and need help supporting yourself, it is important to talk to a community worker or a lawyer before you apply for welfare.

What if I do not speak English very well?
If you do not understand or speak English very well, you have the right to have someone interpret for you when you talk to the ministry. If you need an interpreter, let a ministry staff
person know as soon as possible. The ministry will arrange for the interpreter and pay the fee for the interpreter’s services.

You also have the right to bring someone with you for support. Ask someone you trust, such as a friend, relative, neighbour, or community worker. It is best to bring someone other than your sponsor. Tell the ministry who the person is.

**Where do I apply for welfare?**

To start your application, contact the nearest ministry office that takes applications for welfare. The ministry offices are listed in the provincial government listings (blue pages) of a current phone book under “Housing and Social Development-Ministry of — Employment and Assistance Offices.”

If you cannot go to a ministry office in person, you can apply over the phone. Call the ministry office closest to you and ask to speak with an employment and assistance worker (EAW). That person will fill in the application form with you over the phone. However, you will have to find an “official” and sign the ministry’s application form in front of that person within five business days. The EAW will explain this to you.

**What if I need money right away?**

**Immediate needs assessment**

If you need money right away, ask for an immediate needs assessment when you first apply for welfare.

You will qualify for an immediate needs assessment if you (or one of your dependants) have:

- an emergency need for food,
- an emergency need for shelter (including heating and/or electricity), or
- a medical need that must be dealt with immediately.

Anyone leaving an abusive relationship should also be able to get an immediate needs assessment.

If you are fleeing an abusive relationship or need help right away, ask for an immediate needs assessment even if
the ministry worker does not tell you about it. If you need help explaining why you cannot wait the usual three weeks (see pages 12-13) to have an eligibility interview for welfare, contact one of the groups listed on pages 26–31 or a trusted friend to help you.

You do not need to prove that you have tried to get help from food banks, shelters, or transition houses before you can get an immediate needs assessment. You can get an assessment even if you are staying in a shelter or transition house and/or getting food from food banks.

If you are eligible for an immediate needs assessment, the ministry is supposed to give you an eligibility interview within one business day after you fill out the Application for Income Assistance (part 1).

If the ministry cannot do this, you must be given the resources you need (for example, food vouchers, medical items) until the day of your eligibility interview. When you have your eligibility interview, you will still have to give the ministry all the papers listed in Step 4 (see page 13).

The Ombudsman of BC tries to make sure that people who need immediate needs assessments get them quickly. If you are having problems getting your assessment, you can contact the Ombudsman’s office for help (see page 32).

How do I apply for welfare?
The usual steps to apply for welfare are:
1. Fill out an Application for Income Assistance (part 1) form.
2. Do an orientation.
3. Do a three-week work search.
4. Have an eligibility interview with an employment and assistance worker (EAW).

1. Fill out an Application for Income Assistance (part 1) form
The first time you contact the ministry, you will be asked to fill out an Application for Income Assistance (part 1) form. This is also the time when you can ask for an immediate needs
assessment (see page 10). If you go to the office, bring along proof of your identity and immigration status. When you fill out and sign the Application for Income Assistance (part 1) form, you will get a package of information, arrange to do an orientation session, and get a time for an eligibility interview with an EAW. Ask for the earliest possible appointment for the interview.

2. Go to an orientation session or do an orientation online
Most people have to go to an orientation session or do an orientation online before the ministry will schedule an eligibility interview. There are orientation sessions available online in 12 languages, including simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, English, Punjabi, Spanish, and Vietnamese. If you have access to a computer and want to do the orientation online, go to www.weborientation.gov.bc.ca.

At the orientation, you will find out more about welfare and what papers you need to bring when you apply for welfare.

You do not have to go to an orientation if you:
• are 65 years of age or older,
• have a mental or physical condition that prevents you from doing an orientation,
• are applying for Child in the Home of a Relative benefits (benefits for relatives who care for children under age 19), or
• have gone to an orientation in the last 60 days.

If you think there is a good reason why you should not have to go to an orientation, explain this to the EAW. You can also ask any of the groups listed on pages 26–31 for help.

3. Do a three-week work search
Ministry staff will give you information about how to look for work, and the forms you will need to fill out to prove that you have done a three-week work search. Be sure to keep a record of what you have done to find work and where you have applied for a job.

You do not have to do the three-week work search if you:
• prove to the ministry that you already actively looked for work for at least three weeks in the month before you put in part 1 of your application,

• are leaving an abusive spouse or relative,

• have a physical or mental condition that the ministry believes stops you from doing a work search (for example, you are pregnant, in the hospital, or have a serious illness),

• have an immediate need for food, shelter, or medical attention,

• are the only person caring for a child under the age of three,

• are applying for Child in the Home of a Relative benefits, or

• are 65 years of age or older.

If you have left an abusive relationship, you should not have to do a three-week work search before you can have an interview to see if you are eligible for welfare. This is true whether or not you are staying in a transition house. If you have left an abusive relationship and have an urgent need for housing, food, or medical care, explain your situation and ask for an immediate needs assessment when you first contact the ministry (see page 10).

4. Go to an eligibility interview with an employment and assistance worker (EAW)

When you have your eligibility interview with an EAW, he or she will ask for the confirmation number from the orientation session, proof of your three-week work search, as well as documents about you, your finances, and your sponsor. Your application will go faster if you bring these papers with you to the interview.

If you cannot go to the ministry office for your eligibility interview, you can ask to have it over the phone. The EAW will read some things to you over the phone instead of handing you paper copies. You can ask for the EAW to send you paper copies if you want them. Once the phone interview is over, you will have to bring your identification (ID) to another
government office or to a “health professional” to prove your identity and sign forms in front of that person.

If you don’t have all of your papers with you at the time of the interview, ask the EAW for a written list of all the documents that the EAW needs, and find out how long you have to get them to the ministry. If you need more time, ask the EAW. If you do not get all the information to the ministry on time, it may close your file (stop your application), and you will have to reapply for welfare.

If you apply in person, ask the EAW to make a copy of any documents you bring, so you can keep the originals. See “Who Can Help?” on page 26 for the names of organizations that can help you apply for welfare.

You will have to provide the EAW with personal identification, a work history, financial information, and sponsorship information.

**Personal identification**

When you have the interview with the EAW, you need to bring:

- your immigration documents (that is, your confirmation of permanent residence document, permanent resident card, or record of landing);
- photo identification (ID) such as your permanent resident card, driver’s licence, your BC identity card (from the BC Motor Vehicles Branch), passport, or original immigration documents with a photo;
- another piece of identification (ID) (that does not have to have a photo) such as your birth certificate, original immigration documents, credit card, or bank card;
- your Social Insurance Number (SIN) card, or proof of your SIN if you do not have your card; and
- your BC CareCard (if you have one).

If you do not have your SIN card, bring a document that has your social insurance number on it, such as your income tax return. This should satisfy the ministry’s identification requirements.
If you are also applying for welfare for your children or another dependant, you must bring one piece of identification for each dependant. It does not have to be photo ID.

Work history
Most people applying for welfare will have to provide proof that they have done a three-week work search (see Step 3 on page 12).

Before someone can have an eligibility interview, most people will also be asked to prove to the ministry that they have:

• worked for at least 840 hours a year for two years in a row,
• earned at least $7,000 a year for two years in a row, or
• worked for part of two years in a row, and collected Employment Insurance, or another income replacement (not welfare or a training allowance), for the rest of those two years.

This can include work you did in any country at any time.

The easiest way to prove you have worked is to provide a T4 slip or other papers connected with your previous jobs. You can also provide letters from your employers if these are the only records you have. If you cannot get any other proof, you may be able to sign a declaration (create a document with the facts and swear that the information is true).

It does not matter where or when you worked for two years. You can count work you did a long time ago. You can also count work you did in another country.

The rule about having two years’ work experience does not apply to you if you:

• have dependent children, foster children, or are caring for a Child in the Home of a Relative;
• have left an abusive spouse or have changed homes to leave an abusive relative (other than a spouse) within the last six months, and the ministry believes this limits your ability to work;
• were supported by an employed spouse for two years, or were supported by a spouse for some of the two-year period and were on Employment Insurance or an income-replacement plan for the rest of the time;
• have a medical condition that stops you from working for the next 30 days, or that has stopped you from working for at least six months out of the last two years;
• are pregnant;
• have earned a two-year degree or diploma, or a higher degree;
• are under 19 years old;
• have persistent multiple barriers to employment, or are applying for benefits for Persons with Disabilities;
• are caring for a spouse with a physical or mental condition that prevents you from leaving the home to work;
• were in prison for six months out of the last two years, or
• were in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development or a similar agency, or had a youth agreement until you were 19 years of age.

Even if you do not fall into one of these groups, you can still get welfare if the ministry believes that, for no fault of your own, you could not reasonably have supported yourself for two years and you will have a very difficult time if you don’t get welfare.

**Financial information**

You will have to bring information about your income and assets to your interview with the EAW. The EAW may ask to see any of the following:

• bank statements or your bank pass books (these must be up to date and go back two to six months)
• information about other property you have in Canada
• information about savings or property you have in other countries
• your most recent Notice of Assessment from the Canada Revenue Agency
• any recent pay stubs
• Record of Employment (ROE), if you recently left a job
• information about money you get (or could get) from the government, such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit, GST credit, Employment Insurance, WorkSafeBC benefits, or Canada Pension Plan benefits
• documents that show any support payments you get from your ex-husband or ex-wife for you or your children
• information about your Registered Retirement Saving Plans, Guaranteed Investment Certificates, trust funds, etc.

When you give your financial information to the ministry, you will be asked to sign papers that give the ministry the right to claim any support payments you now receive or could receive in the future from your spouse. If you do not want to contact your spouse because you were in a violent relationship or you were or are afraid for your safety, tell the ministry. In these situations, it is ministry policy not to try to get support from your former spouse if you do not want to.

Sponsorship information
You will have to provide the EAW with information about your sponsorship and how it has broken down. This is because your sponsorship agreement could be a possible source of income, and you cannot get welfare until you show that you have no other sources of income. The sooner you get this information to your EAW, the sooner your eligibility for welfare will be decided.

The EAW will ask for background information such as:
• your sponsor’s full name, and any other names your sponsor may use,
• your sponsor’s address and phone number, and
• your sponsor’s work address.
It is helpful to bring any proof you have that the sponsorship has broken down. If you have any letters from your sponsor or other evidence that he or she is not supporting you, bring this with you. It is also helpful if you can show the EAW that you have tried to get support from your sponsor. For example, you could write a letter to your sponsor asking for support and give a copy of that letter to the ministry. If you received help from food banks, churches, or community groups when your sponsor would not help you, it is a good idea to try and bring letters from those places to confirm what help they gave you.

Sometimes, the ministry will ask if you have tried to sue your sponsor for support. People have the right to sue their sponsor for support, but this rarely happens because it is difficult to sue and takes a long time. You do not have to sue your sponsor before you can apply for welfare. If you decide to sue your sponsor, talk to one of the groups listed on pages 26–31.

Once you have provided the ministry information about your sponsorship, the ministry usually contacts your sponsor, tells the sponsor that you have applied for welfare, and asks the sponsor if the sponsor is still willing and/or able to support you financially. If the sponsor says they cannot support you, the ministry will continue to process your application for welfare.

**What if my sponsor has abused me?**

It is very important to tell the ministry if you have been threatened or abused by your sponsor. If this has happened, and the ministry believes there are concerns for your safety, it is ministry policy that:

- you do not have to talk or write to your sponsor asking him or her for information; and
- the ministry will not contact your sponsor for information about your sponsorship, or to see if your sponsor is still willing to support you financially; and
• if you were sponsored by your spouse, the ministry will not try and get you spousal or child support, unless you want them to.

**What if my sponsor has my documents?**

If you are afraid to ask your sponsor for your documents, or if you think your sponsor will not give them to you, you can apply to CIC for a certified copy of your permanent resident papers or a replacement permanent resident card. For more information, phone CIC at **1-888-242-2100**, or go to the CIC website at [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca). A replacement card costs $50 and it will take a few weeks to process. If you do not have $50, you can ask the ministry to pay for it.

The police can help you get your documents from your sponsor. A community worker can help you ask the police to go with you to your sponsor’s house (see “Who can help?” on page 26). The police will probably not make your sponsor give you the papers, but they can make sure you are safe while you are there.

You can apply for and begin receiving a kind of welfare called “hardship assistance” (see page 20) even if you do not have all your ID documents or your Social Insurance Number (SIN). However, you must be able to prove that you are a permanent resident. You must also show the ministry that you are doing everything you can to get your SIN, and/or other ID documents.

If you have not had a SIN card before (or you need to get a replacement SIN card to get welfare), contact a Service Canada Centre to apply for a new or replacement SIN card. Some ministry offices also have application forms for SIN cards. Your first SIN card is free. There is a charge of $10 to get a replacement SIN card. If you cannot afford this, you can ask the ministry to pay for it.
How long do I have to wait to get welfare?

Remember, if you need money right away, you can ask the ministry for an immediate needs assessment (see page 10). If you don’t qualify for the assessment, the ministry will not usually make a decision about whether or not you get welfare until you have:

- completed your application form and given all the necessary papers to the ministry,
- finished an orientation session (if necessary; see page 12),
- completed the three-week work search (if necessary; see page 12),
- had an eligibility interview with the ministry, and
- had your information verified.

After that, it may take the ministry a week or more to make a decision about a welfare application. Your application may take longer if you cannot give the ministry all your papers quickly.

If you do not have to do a three-week work search (see page 12), your application will go faster: the ministry is supposed to give you an eligibility interview within five business days after you fill out the Application for Income Assistance (part 1).

Hardship assistance

You may be able to get hardship assistance if you are waiting for the ministry to make a decision about your application for welfare. You may also be able to get hardship assistance from the ministry if you are not eligible for regular welfare benefits. Hardship assistance is emergency money for people who would suffer “undue hardship” if they have no support. It is not the same as regular welfare. Hardship assistance benefits are limited and usually have to be renewed every month, up to a maximum of three months in a row. Sometimes you have to pay back hardship assistance.
Can the Ministry come to my house to verify information?
Ministry staff are not allowed to visit you at home to verify (check) whether information you gave them is accurate. Ministry staff can only visit your home without warning to check that you live where you say you do — this is called a “residency check.” If this happens, ministry staff are not allowed to enter your home without your permission or talk to children to check the information you give them. The law says you do not have to let a ministry worker into your home if you do not want to.

If ministry staff offer to visit you at home to provide you with information or a service, you do not have to agree to this if you do not want to. If you do agree, the staff member must arrange a time for the visit with you before arriving. They are not allowed to look through your house or ask your children questions about your situation.

What happens once I am receiving welfare?
If your sponsorship has broken down, the ministry will review your file regularly. The ministry will want to know if your sponsor still cannot support you, or if your sponsor can now pay your expenses.

If your sponsor was abusive and the ministry agrees not to contact your sponsor because of concerns about your safety, the ministry will still review your file regularly. The ministry will want to know if it is still a safety concern for you if the ministry contacts your sponsor. Because of this, make sure you tell the ministry if you would still be afraid for your safety if your sponsor is contacted.

Once you receive welfare, the ministry will give you something called a monthly report with your benefits each month. The report has questions on it that you must answer in order to get the next month’s cheque. You have to fill out the form, sign it, and return it to the ministry. It is very important to answer the questions on the report correctly and truthfully.
You must return the monthly report to the ministry office by the fifth day of the month after you got your payment.

**For how long can I get welfare?**

If the ministry approves your application, and you are classified by the ministry as employable, you can get welfare for up to 24 months out of every 60-month period (two out of every five years). This time limit could apply to any welfare you have received since April 1, 2002. If you follow your employment plan, (see below) you can extend this time limit.

There are no time limits to how long you can receive disability benefits (called benefits for Persons with Disabilities) from the ministry, or benefits for Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers to employment. If you have a disability, talk to a community worker to see if you may be eligible for either of these types of welfare.

Because you may be able to get regular welfare only for a limited time, be sure to keep track of when you are on or off welfare. When figuring out your 24-month limit, the ministry will not count the months when you:

- are under 19 years of age or 65 years of age and older;
- have left an abusive spouse within the previous six months and the abuse or separation interferes with your ability to work or look for work;
- are a single parent caring for a child, foster child, or Child in the Home of a Relative who is under three years old;
- are a single parent caring for a child, a Child in the Home of a Relative, or a foster child who has a mental or physical condition that prevents you from working outside your home;
- are in a training, upgrading, or ESL program approved by the ministry;
- live with and care for a spouse who has a physical or mental condition that prevents you from working outside your home;
• receive accommodation and care in a special care facility or private hospital;
• have been admitted to hospital because you require extended care;
• receive the welfare rate for Persons with Disabilities or for Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers to employment;
• receive hardship benefits;
• have a drug or alcohol problem, a mental health condition, or temporary medical condition that interferes with your ability to work or look for work;
• participate in a treatment or rehabilitation program approved by the ministry and your participation in that program interferes with your ability to work or look for work;
• are pregnant;
• receive a reduced amount of welfare because your spouse or someone with whom you live or share assets has reached the 24-month limit for receiving welfare;
• are a Child in the Home of a Relative;
• have an employment plan, are following the plan, are actively looking for work, but have not found a job.

Because you can only be excused from having to look for work with the permission of the ministry, you need to tell ministry staff whenever you cannot look for work. Ask to be “temporarily excused,” and keep a record of the months you did not look for work in case you disagree with the ministry’s records.

If you need help to figure out how long you may be eligible for welfare, check with the ministry or one of the groups listed on pages 26–31.
Can I still sponsor my family members if I go on welfare?
You are not eligible to sponsor anyone to come to Canada — not even your spouse or children — while you are on regular welfare. Once you are able to support yourself and earn enough money, you may qualify to sponsor your family members. However, if you are on regular welfare and urgently need to bring your spouse or child to Canada, it may be possible to do so by filing a sponsorship application and then appealing the rejection. Contact one of the groups listed on pages 26–31 to discuss this possibility.

If you receive disability benefits (known as benefits for Persons with Disabilities) or disability hardship benefits, you can apply to sponsor a spouse or dependent child.

What can I do if my welfare application is turned down?
You have the right to appeal most ministry decisions against you. If you find out that your welfare application has been refused, or your benefits are reduced or ended, it is very important to ask for help from one of the groups listed on pages 26–31 as soon as possible. With the help of someone from one of these groups, you might be able to explain to a ministry worker why you think the decision is unfair. This may sometimes be the quickest way to get a ministry decision changed. These groups can also help you appeal ministry decisions. Be careful not to miss the deadline for any appeal.

There are two levels of appeal. The first level of appeal is called a Reconsideration. The second, and last, level of appeal is to an Appeal Tribunal called the Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal. You must apply for a Reconsideration within 20 business days of when you got the ministry’s decision against your welfare application. If the Reconsideration appeal fails, you have 7 business days to appeal to the Appeal Tribunal.
You must be very careful about time limits when you make an appeal. If you miss any of the deadlines, your whole appeal will be lost, and you will have to apply for welfare all over again.

It is important to make the best appeal you can, and because there is little time to do it, it is a good idea to get help. Ask one of the groups listed on pages 26–31 for help.

**What if I lose all my appeals?**

If your friends and family cannot help you, ask for help from people you already know, such as your church, temple, or community organization. You might also qualify for hardship assistance from the ministry (see page 20).

The best way to deal with this difficult situation is to have a community worker on your side. The next section is a list of organizations that can help you deal with sponsorship and welfare issues.
Who can help?

Where to find a community worker or an interpreter

If you have access to a computer, go to www.welcomebc.ca, and select “Service Providers,” “Programs,” and then “Immigrant Settlement Agencies.” This will give you a list of community workers around the province.

For a list of agencies that have interpretation and translation services, go to www.amssa.org and look under “Members.” This will give you a province-wide alphabetical list of agencies that can help you in your language.

The Law Students’ Legal Advice Program at UBC may have students who can help you in your language. To find out, call 604-822-5791. The program’s website is www.lslap.bc.ca.

The following is a list of groups with workers who can help you if you have problems settling into Canada. They may also be able to provide interpreters. Call the office closest to you.

Abbotsford
Abbotsford Community Services
Tel: 604-859-7681
E-mail: abbycs@paralynx.com

Burnaby
Immigrant Services Society of BC — Burnaby Office
Tel: 604-395-8000
E-mail: settlement@issbc.org

MOSAIC — Kingsway Office
Tel: 604-636-4712
E-mail: settlement@mosaicbc.com
MOSAIC — CCM of Canada Office
   Tel: 604-877-8606
   E-mail: settlement@mosaicbc.com

SUCCESS — Burnaby Office
   Tel: 604-430-1899
   E-mail: settlement@success.bc.ca

Campbell River
Campbell River and Area Multicultural and Immigrant Services Association
   Tel: 250-830-0171
   E-mail: info@crmisa.ca

Chilliwack
Chilliwack Community Services
   Tel: 604-393-3251
   E-mail: ccsinfo@comserv.bc.ca

Coquitlam
Immigrant Services Society of BC
   Tel: 778-284-7026
   E-mail: settlement@issbc.org

SUCCESS — Pinetree Way Office
   Tel: 604-468-6000
   E-mail: settlement@success.bc.ca

SUCCESS — North Road Office
   Tel: 604-936-5900
   E-mail: settlement@success.bc.ca

Courtenay
Immigrant Settlement Office
   Tel: 250-338-5583
   E-mail: dorica@shawbiz.ca

Cranbrook
Community Connections Society of Southeast BC
   Tel: 250-426-2943
   E-mail: cwrs-society@shaw.ca
Duncan  
Cowichan Valley Intercultural and Immigration Aid Society  
Tel: 250-748-3112  
E-mail: cis@telus.net

Fort St. John  
SUCCESS — Fort St. John Office  
Tel: 250-785-5323  
E-mail: settlement@success.bc.ca

Kamloops  
Kamloops Immigrant Services  
Tel: 250-372-0855 or 1-866-672-0855  
E-mail: kis@telus.net

Kelowna  
Kelowna Community Community Resources Society  
Tel: 250-763-8008

Langley  
Langley Community Services Society  
(Immigration Direct Line)  
Tel: 604-534-7810  
E-mail: info@lcss.ca

Maple Ridge  
The Family Education and Support Centre  
Tel: 604-467-6055  
E-mail: familyed@telus.net

Mission  
Mission Community Services Society  
Tel: 604-826-3634

Nanaimo  
Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society —  
Nanaimo Office  
Tel: 250-753-6911  
E-mail: admin@cvims.org
New Westminster
Immigrant Services Society of BC — New Westminster Office
   Tel: 604-395-8000
   E-mail: settlement@issbc.org

MOSAIC — Fraserside Community Services Office
   Tel: 604-522-3722
   E-mail: settlement@mosaicbc.com

North Vancouver
North Shore Multicultural Society
   Tel: 604-988-2931
   E-mail: office@nsms.ca

Parksville
Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society —
   Parksville Office
   Tel: 250-586-1122
   E-mail: parksville@cvims.org

Penticton
South Okanagan Immigrant & Community Services
   Tel: 250-492-6299
   E-mail: admin.soics@shawbiz.ca

Port Moody
Immigrant Services Society of BC — Clarke Street Office
   Tel: 778-284-7026
   E-mail: settlement@issbc.org

Prince George
Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society
   Tel: 250-562-2900
   E-mail: imss.pg@shawcable.com

Richmond
CHIMO Crisis Services
   Tel: 604-279-7077
   E-mail: chimo@chimocrisis.com
Richmond Multicultural Concerns Society  
Tel: 604-279-7160

SUCCESS — Richmond Office  
Tel: 604-279-7180  
E-mail: settlement@success.bc.ca

Surrey
DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society  
Tel: 604-597-0205  
E-mail: info@dcrs.ca

OPTIONS: Surrey Services to Communities Society  
Tel: 604-572-4060 or 604-596-4357

Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society —  
Surrey Office  
Tel: 604-596-7525  
E-mail: pics@pics.bc.ca

SUCCESS — Surrey Office  
Tel: 604-588-6869  
E-mail: settlement@success.bc.ca

Vancouver
Collingwood Neighbourhood House  
Tel: 604-435-0323

Immigrant Services Society of BC (Settlement Services) —  
Drake Street Office  
Tel: 604-684-7498  
E-mail: settlement@issbc.org

Kiwassa Neighbourhood House  
Tel: 604-254-5401

Little Mountain Neighbourhood House  
Tel: 604-879-7104  
E-mail: info@lmnhs.bc.ca

MOSAIC — Grant Street Office  
Tel: 604-254-9626  
E-mail: settlement@mosaicbc.com

Multicultural Helping House Society  
Tel: 604-879-3277  
E-mail: info@helpinghouse.org
Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society — Vancouver Office  
Tel: 778-371-8552  
E-mail: pics@pics.bc.ca

SUCCESS — Granville Street Office  
Tel: 604-323-0901  
E-mail: settlement@success.bc.ca

SUCCESS — Fraser Street Office  
Tel: 604-324-1900  
E-mail: settlement@success.bc.ca

SUCCESS — Pender Street Office  
Tel: 604-684-1628  
E-mail: settlement@success.bc.ca

South Vancouver Neighbourhood House  
Tel: 604-324-6212

Vernon
Vernon and District Immigrant Services Society  
Tel: 250-542-4177  
E-mail: vdiss@shaw.ca

Victoria
Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria  
Tel: 250-388-4728  
E-mail: admin@icavictoria.org

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society  
Tel: 250-361-9433  
E-mail: info@vircs.bc.ca

Help from the Legal Services Society
The Legal Services Society provides legal aid to British Columbians, including legal information (such as this booklet) and legal advice.

This booklet, published by the Legal Services Society, explains who is eligible for welfare, how to apply for welfare, what benefits are available, your responsibilities while on welfare,
how to appeal a decision about your benefits, and how to get more information or help. You can find it at www.lss.bc.ca (click on “Our publications”).

**Family duty counsel**
Family duty counsel are lawyers paid by the Legal Services Society to help people with family law problems. You may be eligible for help from family duty counsel even if you do not qualify for legal aid. Family duty counsel offices are located in many provincial courts. To find out more, go to www.lss.bc.ca (click on “Legal aid” and then “Legal advice”).

**Other help**
If the community groups listed in this booklet are not available in your community, you can look for help at a women’s centre, a local community group, or church. You might also find a group that can help you listed in the front of the yellow pages under “Community Services.”

**Clicklaw**
Clicklaw is a website providing links to legal information, education, and help for British Columbians. To access Clicklaw, go to www.clicklaw.bc.ca.

**BC Ombudsman’s office**
The BC Ombudsman’s office provides information about what steps to take in dealing with a public agency and investigates complaints about unfair practices. Services are provided free of charge. Call 1-800-567-3247 (call no charge).
What the words mean

**advocate:** A person who knows a lot about certain issues and laws, and uses his or her experience to help other people.

**appeal:** This is when you disagree with a decision that the ministry makes about your welfare application, and you ask another person or group to review the decision.

**Application for Income Assistance (part 1) form:** You fill out this form when you apply for welfare. The information is put into the ministry’s computer system.

**assets:** Your assets include things you own such as cash, money in the bank, investments, a car or other vehicle, a business, and real estate.

**business day:** A day on which most businesses are open. When you figure out the deadline for your welfare application or any appeal, you should count every day except Saturday, Sunday, and government holidays.

**Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC):** The part of the federal government that deals with immigration and sponsorship.

**common-law partner:** Under federal immigration law, this is a person of the same or opposite sex with whom you have had a marriage-like relationship and lived with for at least one year. If you would have been persecuted in your country of origin for being in a same-sex relationship, you will not have to prove that you lived with the person for a year.

Under provincial welfare law, it is a person whom you identify to the ministry as being your common-law
partner, or with whom you have lived for the last 3 months or 9 of the last 12 months, and the ministry thinks the relationship is marriage-like.

**conjugal partner:** A person of the same or opposite sex with whom you have been in a marriage-like relationship for at least one year.

**dependent children:** Under federal law, dependent children may be your biological or adopted children. To count as a dependant, your child must be unmarried and under 22 years old, or married or 22 years old and over and either be going to school full time or have a mental or physical condition that keeps them from supporting themselves. Under provincial law, a dependent child is an unmarried person under 19 years of age who lives with the parent more than half of the time and relies on the parent for the necessities of life (this includes stepchildren).

**employment and assistance worker:** Also called an EAW, case worker, or worker. This is the person at the ministry who works with you on your file.

**hardship assistance:** Emergency money from the ministry. You may be able to get hardship assistance if you and your dependent children have no other money while you wait to see if you can get welfare. You may also be eligible for hardship assistance if you have been turned down for regular welfare.

**immediate needs assessment:** If you can show that you have an immediate need for shelter or medical assistance and no other place to get help, you may be able to get an interview at the ministry without having to wait for three weeks. This will usually still take a few days to arrange.

**Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD):** The part of the provincial government that deals with welfare.
permanent resident: Also called a landed immigrant. This is a person who has the right to live and work indefinitely in Canada. You must not be outside of the country for more than three years out of every five.

photo ID: Any official card or document that has your photograph and information about you.

regular welfare: Welfare benefits that are not disability benefits or hardship assistance.

social insurance number (SIN): Every citizen, permanent resident, or any person who may legally work in Canada can get his or her own SIN from the federal government. You often need to show your SIN when you go to government offices or apply for a job.

sponsor: The person who signs papers agreeing to support a family member to live as a permanent resident in Canada. If the sponsor’s spouse also signs the agreement, he or she is called a co-signer.

spouse: A husband, wife, or common-law partner of the opposite or same sex.

undertaking: This is a paper that a person signs when applying to sponsor someone. It is a promise that the sponsor will support the person he or she is sponsoring.

verification: This is when the ministry verifies (checks) the information you provided. Someone from the ministry may come to your home (called a home visit), talk with other people, or check other government records.

welfare: Also called income assistance or social assistance. This is money you may be able to get from the ministry for food, shelter, clothing, and other basic needs when you are unable to support yourself.
For more help
www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca

The Family Law in British Columbia website has more information about family problems, including:

- fact sheets
- self-help guides
- online publications and videos
- court forms
- updates on the law
- definitions of legal terms
- links to online legislation (the laws)
- links to other useful websites
- information about where to go for help

How to get Sponsorship Breakdown:
Read online (in PDF) at www.lss.bc.ca/publications

Order online: www.crownpub.bc.ca
(click the Legal Services Society image)
Phone: 1-800-663-6105 (call no charge)
250-387-6409 (Victoria)
Fax: 250-387-1120
Mail: Crown Publications
PO Box 9452 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9V7

Sponsorship Breakdown
Useful information for people who need help when their sponsorship in Canada breaks down