



Reduced support and shelter rates

Support

As of April 1, 2002, the Ministry of Human Resources (MHR) has reduced the support portion of welfare to \$325.58 per month (from \$376.58 per month) for a single parent with a child three years of age or older. This new support rate remains the same even if you have more than one child.

Shelter

As of July 1, 2002, MHR has reduced the shelter allowance for families of three or more.

If a child is removed from a family under the Child, Family and Community Service Act, ministry workers can continue paying the family the original shelter allowance for up to three months (even though the child is not with the family).

When custody is shared

If you and the other parent share custody of your child and both of you are on welfare, MHR will only include your child in *one* family unit when it calculates benefits. The parent who has the child for less time will not be paid a support allowance for the child but may be eligible for extra shelter money.

As of April 1, 2002, MHR has introduced rules for determining which parent will receive extra money for the child and how much each parent should receive when custody is shared. MHR uses the number of nights per month your child stays with you to calculate the percentage of time he or she resides with you. For example, 12 nights a month equals about 40% of the month.

If you have problems figuring out how to calculate the amount of time your child spends with you, contact an advocate in your area. 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.

Dependent child

If your child resides with you for more than 50% of each month and relies on you for the necessities of life (such as food, shelter, and clothing), he or she is considered your dependant for welfare purposes. MHR will pay you support and shelter for a family size that includes your child. You do not have to have a court order to prove that your child is with you more than 50% of the time.

Joint custody (50/50)

If your child resides with each parent for 50% of each month, MHR will only give increased support and shelter to one parent. You and the other parent must agree on who will be the "designated parent" for welfare purposes and fill out a Child Residency Statement setting out this agreement.

The parent who is *not* the "designated parent" may be eligible for extra shelter money called Shared Parenting Assistance (SPA). Under the new welfare rules, you can only get SPA if your shared custody arrangement is outlined in —

- a court order,
- an order that is recognized by, or deemed to be an order of, a BC court, or
- an agreement filed in a BC court.

Split custody

If your child resides with you at least 40% of every month (but not more than 50%), you cannot claim him or her as a dependant. You can, however, ask for SPA (see above).

If you need court documents to get SPA, ask an advocate for help. You can also write your own separation agreement and register it in the court, or ask for help at a Family Justice Centre.

Note: If you have a shared parenting arrangement, make sure that any family bonus paid by one parent to the other is not counted as income by MHR.

Income exemptions

Deductions will now be made from your welfare cheques for maintenance payments and the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Orphan's Benefit (if applicable).

Child care subsidies

Financial eligibility

The government subsidizes (pays for) some of the cost of child care for financially eligible families through the Child Care Subsidy program. As of April 1, 2002, the government has reduced the net monthly income a family can have and still be eligible for the Child Care Subsidy. This means that fewer families will receive this form of assistance.

If you earn more than the allowable limit, you may still have some of your child care costs paid for by the government. However, if you are eligible for a subsidy of \$50 or less per month per family, the government will not pay for any of your child care costs on your behalf.

If you are applying for the Child Care Subsidy, remember that the government will use your *net* income to calculate your eligibility. To figure out if you are eligible, visit the government's website at <http://www.childcareestimator.gov.bc.ca/default.asp> and use its Child Care Subsidy Estimator.

When you can get a subsidy

As of April 1, 2002, you can get a subsidy for child care (including a subsidy for preschool, special needs day care, group care, or family day care) if you are a single parent and you are —

- conducting a job search or attending an employment program,

- going to school or job training, or
- employed or self-employed.

You may receive an increased subsidy if —

- the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) says you should have child care as part of a risk-reduction plan, or
- you are participating in a Young Parent Program and MCFD says you should have child care.

If you are in a two-parent family, both parents must meet the above criteria in order to be eligible for a subsidy. If one parent meets these criteria and the other is sick or looking for work, your family should be eligible for a subsidy.

Child in the home of a relative

Unmarried children under 19 years of age are usually not eligible for welfare if they are not living with one of their parents. An exception to this is a situation where a parent places his or her child with a relative but is unable to give that person money in return for caring for the child. In these cases, the ministry may pay the relative a Child In the Home of a Relative (CIHR) allowance on the child's behalf.

As of April 1, 2002, a relative taking care of a child can get the CIHR allowance only if he or she is not the legal guardian of the child and does not have legal custody. If the relative *is* the legal guardian of the child or has legal custody, the child will no longer be eligible for CIHR. Legal guardians can receive child-tax benefits, depending on their income.

Youth

The new welfare laws, which will likely be in force by fall 2002, will likely create a new category of recipient called a **dependent youth**. A dependent youth will be a dependent child who is 16 years or older. The new laws may require dependent youth to go to school or enter into an employment plan. If the dependent youth does not do this, his or her family may receive less welfare.

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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