



Welfare (also known as income assistance or BC employment assistance) is money and/or benefits the provincial government gives to eligible people.

Unemployment, low wages, or a family break-up can put you in a position of needing help. If this happens, you can apply for welfare.

The Ministry of Human Resources (MHR) looks after applications for welfare in BC. To find the MHR office nearest you, look in the blue pages of the phone book under "Province of British Columbia, Human Resources — Ministry of."

When you go to the MHR office, you will be asked to fill out an appointment and enquiry form. Make sure you ask for the earliest possible appointment. You will then be given a package of information, an appointment for the orientation session you must attend, and a time when you can come back and apply for welfare after your three-week work search.

Orientation session and three-week work search

As of April 1, 2002, most people are now required to attend an orientation session and look for work for three weeks before their application for welfare will be accepted. Even if you have already been on welfare within the past year, if you have been *off* welfare for more than one month, you will have to attend the orientation session and do the work search. People who have just come out of prison are also expected to go to an orientation session and look for work.

You do not have to go to an orientation session if you —

- have a mental or physical condition serious enough to prevent you from attending this session,
- are a child in the home of a relative, or

- are re-applying for welfare after an interruption of only one month.

You do not have to do the three-week work search if you —

- are eligible for a "comforts allowance" (this includes people who were in drug and alcohol treatment),
- have a mental or physical condition serious enough to prevent you from doing the work search (this must be approved by the Associate Regional Executive Director of MHR),
- are applying for Child In the Home of a Relative (CIHR) benefits,
- are in hospital, acute care, or continuing care facilities, or
- were receiving welfare as part of a couple but have separated from your spouse and are now applying for welfare independently.

Note: Even if you do not have to do the work search, you still have to attend some type of an orientation session (unless you fall into one of the categories listed previously) and wait for three weeks to fill out a welfare application form.

You will not receive welfare payments during your three-week work search or waiting period. In some cases, you can apply for an emergency needs assessment to get an earlier application date if you need assistance urgently. After the three weeks are over, you need to do the following:

- Come back for your appointment.
- Fill out an application form.
- Show staff at the MHR office what you have done to look for work.
- Give staff at the MHR office all the documents they require (such as bank records and tax returns).

After ministry staff have reviewed all of your information, they will tell you if you are eligible for welfare.

Ministry staff will look very closely at your job search. Keep detailed records of what you have done every day so that you can show this to the ministry worker.

If the ministry does not believe you have done enough to look for work, your application for welfare may be denied. If this happens to you, you have the right to appeal the decision. You should try to get help from an advocate if you are going to do this. 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.

Eligibility date

The date when you fill out the application form with the intake worker is very important because it is usually the start date for your welfare benefits. This is why you should ask for the earliest possible appointment for filling out a welfare application when you first visit the MHR office.

Emergency needs assessment

You can get an earlier appointment to fill out your welfare application if you have —

- an emergency need for food or shelter, or
- a medical need that must be dealt with immediately.

Ministry staff can do an emergency needs assessment to decide if you need welfare right away. Even if the staff person you are dealing with does not tell you about this option, ask for it if you need financial assistance right away. If you need help explaining to staff at the MHR office why you cannot wait three weeks to apply for welfare, ask an advocate, immigrant settlement worker, or trusted friend to help you.

To be eligible for emergency assistance, you must be able to —

- tell the ministry about other resources you have tried to use, and
- show that there is nowhere else you can get help.

At some MHR offices, staff will ask you to contact all the shelters in your area if you have an emergency need for housing. Other offices will encourage you to go to soup kitchens if you need food. If you have children and need food, shelter, or medical help urgently, you are more likely to be successful in getting an emergency application date.

If you are eligible for an emergency needs assessment, you will be given an early application, which means that you will not have to wait three weeks to get an appointment. Even if you are allowed to apply early, you must meet the same eligibility rules for welfare as other applicants.

If you get an emergency needs assessment, you are still expected to do the three-week work search once you have dealt with your immediate problem of not having shelter or enough food.

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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