
COVID-19 Provincial Supports

Updated April 24, 2020

Below is a rolling list of Provincial announcements to support people and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please visit the COVID-19 Provincial Support and Information website for more information: gov.bc.ca/covid19

New item – April 24, 2020:

[Funding to improve rural internet connectivity](#)

- The \$50-million Connecting British Columbia program now includes a funding stream to help internet service providers with immediate network equipment upgrades to rapidly improve capacity and internet speeds in underserved communities throughout the province.
- Internet service providers throughout the province can apply for grants of up to \$50,000 – or 90% of their expenses – to cover the cost of equipment, including antennas, electronics or other types of devices that relate to the performance or range of their network.
- Applications are now being accepted by Northern Development Initiative Trust. Submissions will be reviewed on a first-come-first-served basis, with funding decisions made within three to five business days. Internet service providers must complete their projects by June 30, 2020.

[Rent relief on the way for B.C. small businesses](#)

- Thousands of small businesses in British Columbia will see their monthly rent reduced by at least 75%, with the new federal-provincial Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance Program (CECRA).
- Launching in mid-May 2020, the CECRA will see B.C. small businesses receive a total of over \$300 million in federal-provincial relief, with B.C. contributing an estimated \$80 million.
- The 75% reduction in monthly rent for small businesses affected by COVID-19 will be achieved by providing forgivable loans to cover 50% of the rent payments for eligible small business tenants for April, May and June.

[Provincial justice system advisory groups established](#)

- The Ministry of Attorney General is establishing two advisory groups to help government support courts and tribunals in delivering services as effectively as possible during the pandemic and in minimizing its impact on the justice system.
- The first group is the Justice COVID-19 Response Group. Establishing this group formalizes a structure for regular discussions that have been taking place between the courts, legal stakeholder groups, and Ministry of Attorney General staff as they respond to urgent and arising issues in the court system. The membership of the group is fluid, and additional members may be added or removed as conditions require.

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[Additional guidelines for silviculture operators, employees](#)

- B.C.'s provincial health officer (PHO) has released an order for industrial camps and guidelines to protect people working in the silviculture sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - This is to help contractors, tree planting operators and their employees reduce the risks of COVID-19.
 - The order applies to workers in the agricultural, aquacultural, forestry and resource sectors, as well as those who provide accommodation for these workers and is This order sets out prevention, control and inspection protocols for workers and employers.
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[\\$5-billion COVID-19 Action Plan:](#)

- British Columbians affected by the COVID-19 pandemic will benefit from \$5 billion in income supports, tax relief and direct funding for people, businesses and services.
- This includes:
 - B.C. Emergency Benefit for Workers – which will provide a one-time \$1,000 payment to people whose ability to work has been affected due to COVID-19.
 - Enhanced Climate Action Tax Credit – up to \$564 for eligible families of four and \$218 for eligible individuals to be paid in July 2020
- Full details on financial supports are available [here](#).

[Applications for B.C. Emergency Benefit for Workers to open May 1](#)

- Emergency Benefit for Workers (BCEBW) opening on May 1, 2020.
- The BCEBW is a one-time, tax-free \$1,000 payment for British Columbians whose ability to work has been affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Most people who are eligible for the new federal Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) are also eligible for the BCEBW, including those who have run out of employment insurance (EI) benefits and subsequently qualify for the CERB.

[Helping rural, remote and Indigenous communities respond to COVID-19](#)

- A new collaborative framework will help ensure people living in rural, remote and Indigenous communities in B.C. have access to critical health care they can count on to meet their unique needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future.
- The framework provides flexibility so local leaders in rural, remote and Indigenous communities can adapt it to meet their unique needs. It will be implemented through full engagement with each of the communities' local leaders.

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- The framework outlines immediate actions to improve health-care services and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including:
 - improved medical transportation options to larger centres, including flight and ambulance;
 - housing options for people looking to self-isolate near their families while remaining in their home communities;
 - new and faster COVID-19 testing technology;
 - culturally safe contact tracing that respects privacy in small communities;
 - access to Virtual Doctor of the Day, a program that connects First Nations members and their families in remote communities to a doctor or nurse practitioner using videoconferencing;
 - options for accommodation near larger centres with more medical services; and
 - increased mental-health supports in communities.

[Applications open for temporary rental supplement](#)

- Renters who are experiencing a loss of income during the COVID-19 pandemic can now apply for the Province's new temporary rental supplement.
- The program will provide \$300 per month for eligible households with no dependents and \$500 per month for eligible households with dependents. Eligible roommates will each be able to apply for the supplement.
- For more information and to apply, visit: <https://bchousing.org/bctrs>
- The Province is implementing a number of other measures to keep people housed and protect their health, including halting evictions and freezing rents. More information here: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020MAH0048-000561>

BC Housing:

- BC Housing has temporarily suspended evictions of tenants in subsidized and affordable housing. More information available here: <https://www.bchousing.org/COVID-19>

[Protecting jobs during difficult times:](#)

- Government is making changes to the Employment Standards Act to ensure:
 - Immediate job-protected leave that allows workers affected by COVID-19 to stay home as needed without the risk of losing their job. Available to people considered employees under the Employment Standards Act who are unable to work for reasons related to COVID-19.

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- Three days of unpaid, job-protected leave each year for people who cannot work due to illness or injury. This is a permanent change to the act that brings B.C. in line with all other provinces in Canada.

[Province supporting people with relief on power bills during COVID-19:](#)

- BC Hydro will offer new, targeted bill relief to provide immediate help to those most in need.
 - Residential customers who have lost their jobs or are unable to work as a result of COVID-19 will receive a credit to help cover the cost of their electricity bills. The credit will be three times their average monthly bill over the past year at their home and does not have to be repaid.
 - Small businesses that have been forced to close due to COVID-19 will have their power bills forgiven for three months. BC Hydro is waiving bills for these customers from April to June 2020.
 - Major industries, like pulp and paper mills and mines, will have the opportunity to defer 50% of their bill payments for three months.
 - In addition to this new targeted bill relief, BC Hydro rates will be reduced by 1% on April 1, 2020. This is the first rate decrease in decades.

[Fortis BC COVID-19 Customer Recovery Fund](#)

- The Customer Recovery Fund addresses the billing concerns of residential and small business customers during the COVID-19 outbreak. Customers who are unable to work or have lost their livelihood, and small businesses that have experienced income loss or been forced to close as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, can receive assistance from FortisBC.

[Province helps essential service workers find child care:](#)

- The Province is launching a new process that will match parents, who are working on the front lines of B.C.'s COVID-19 response and have children up to five years of age, with child care in their communities.
- Starting today, essential workers can fill out a new "parent" form to identify their need for urgent child care. Forms can be accessed by calling 1 888 338-6622 and selecting Option 4, or online: www.gov.bc.ca/essential-service-child-care

[B.C.'s essential service workers matched with child care](#)

- More than 2,500 essential service workers on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic have been referred to open child care spaces through the Province's new child care matching process.

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- More than 2,650 essential service workers have been referred to a licensed child care provider through the Province's matching plan.
- This process helps match parents, who are working on the front lines of B.C.'s COVID-19 response and have children up to five years of age, with licensed child care spaces.

So far, the government has invested \$38 million to ensure essential service workers continue to have access to reliable licensed child care, and centres that close are able to reopen.

[Supporting child care providers and the parents who depend on them:](#)

- The British Columbia government is taking steps to support the child care sector while ensuring parents who must work during the COVID-19 pandemic continue to have access to child care, with new funding for providers.
- The Province will give centres that remain open compensation to continue operating with reduced enrolment. Centres that close will also receive support for fixed operating costs, like rent or lease payments.

[Taking steps to keep kids learning during in-class school suspension:](#)

- Government has launched Keep Learning BC, a central place where families can find ideas for everyday educational activities, annotated links to free learning resources, as well as how to help children learn and how to ensure their well-being while they are at home. Keep Learning BC is available at: www.openschool.bc.ca/keeplearning/

[New virtual mental health supports for COVID-19 on the way](#)

- To ensure British Columbians have increased access to vital mental health supports during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Province has announced \$5 million to expand existing mental health programs and services and launch new services to support British Columbians.
- Enhanced virtual services will help all British Columbians with mental health needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on adults, youth and front-line health care workers. The funding will also increase access for Indigenous communities and those living in rural and remote parts of the province. It will provide more options for people living with mental health challenges who are currently unable to access in-person supports.

[More online options for students to support social, emotional well-being](#)

- New, free virtual educational programs for students, parents and educators are supporting social and emotional well-being as part of navigating the new world of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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- The WE Well-being program was recently launched as part of the new WE Schools @home program. Accessible for grades K-12 in both English and French, the program is aimed at youth who are experiencing anxiety and social isolation. It places a special emphasis on WE Well-being online learning, including social-emotional learning and resiliency.

[Free counselling service launches for post-secondary students](#)

- The Government of British Columbia has launched Here2Talk, a new mental-health counselling and referral service for post-secondary students.
- The service offers confidential, free single-session services by app, phone or online chat, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[Education leaders help students stay fed while in-class instruction suspended](#)

- To ensure vulnerable students do not face barriers to learning while in-class instruction is suspended, B.C.'s school districts are finding innovative ways to provide families with more than 75,000 healthy meals a week.
- The Government of B.C. provides \$53.2 million through CommunityLINK (Learning Includes Nutrition and Knowledge) annually for the province's 60 school districts to support vulnerable students with services that include meal programs. Twenty-five school districts also receive a combined \$11.2 million from the Province through the Vulnerable Student Supplement, which addresses growth in vulnerable student populations.

[New emergency supports for province's most vulnerable:](#)

- For people in B.C. currently receiving income assistance or disability assistance, the Province will temporarily exempt federal employment insurance benefits – including the new \$2,000 Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) – for the next three months so people will benefit from these new emergency federal support programs without any reductions to their monthly assistance payments.
- For everyone on income assistance or disability assistance who is not eligible for the emergency federal support programs, including the CERB, the Province will provide an automatic \$300-monthly COVID-19 crisis supplement for the next three months. This supplement will also be provided to low-income seniors who receive the B.C. Senior's Supplement and recipients of income assistance or disability assistance who reside in special care facilities.
- With the current provincewide suspension of BC Transit and Translink bus fares, the Province will also provide all BC Bus Pass Program users receiving income assistance and disability assistance with the \$52 Transportation Supplement for the duration of the fare suspension. This will be included on the next cheque and for each subsequent month while the fare suspension remains in place.

[New spaces secured for vulnerable people to self-isolate](#)

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- To support British Columbians who need a place to self-isolate and to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Province is partnering with local governments, non-profits and the hotel industry.
- So far, more than 900 spaces have been secured at 23 sites including hotels, motels and community centres throughout B.C. These new rooms and community centre beds are assisting a range of people, including people experiencing homelessness, people without safe spaces to self-isolate and youth.

[Province provides emergency fund for children with special needs](#)

- The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is establishing an Emergency Relief Support Fund for children and youth with special needs and their families. The fund will provide a direct payment of \$225 per month to eligible families over the next three months (to June 30, 2020).
- Using a needs-based approach, the emergency funding will support 50% more of the eligible families that are currently awaiting services. This payment can be used to purchase supports that help alleviate stress. These could include:
 - meal preparation and grocery shopping assistance;
 - homemaking services
 - caregiver relief support (e.g., funded support to allow a family member to provide temporary care for a child or youth);
 - counselling services, online or by phone; and
 - and other services that support family functioning.

[Safe seniors, strong communities during COVID-19:](#)

- As part of B.C.'s emergency COVID-19 response plan, the Province is providing the United Way of the Lower Mainland with \$50 million to bolster seniors' supports at community service agencies throughout British Columbia.
- The Province is funding the expansion of bc211, a provincewide information and referral service, to match seniors whose support network has been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak with volunteers.
- Starting today, bc211 will be available to residents of B.C.'s North and Interior, in addition to the rest of B.C., and provide extended hours of service. This service will take calls from people who would like to volunteer to help seniors in their community with basic needs, including grocery shopping and pharmacy drop-offs and check-ins.

[Emergency supports for home share, support service providers](#)

- Provincial emergency COVID-19 funding will be distributed through Community Living BC (CLBC) to ensure people with developmental disabilities stay supported and safe during the pandemic.

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- As part of the B.C. Government's \$5-billion COVID-19 Action Plan, up to \$35.6 million will be available over three months from CLBC to support service providers to continue delivering residential services, including group homes, home sharing and supported independent living that about 9,500 adults with developmental disabilities count on.

[Extended supports help youth in care during pandemic:](#)

- Youth in care will not age out of services during the COVID-19 pandemic and those who have recently aged out will get extra assistance. Youth and young adults from care will continue receiving the same level of service during the pandemic, even if they were set to age out.

[Temporary foreign workers self-isolating in government-managed accommodations](#)

- The Province will fund hotel and food-service costs during the 14-day self-isolation period for temporary foreign workers (TFWs) arriving in British Columbia for seasonal farm work.
- The Province is also providing access to socio-economic and cultural supports for workers while they self-isolate.
- Employers are responsible for paying temporary foreign workers for a minimum 30 hours per week during self-isolation, and at the rate of pay specified on the federal Labour Market Impact Assessment.

[Province supporting B.C.'s food banks during COVID-19:](#)

- To support vulnerable British Columbians during the COVID-19 crisis, the Province is providing a \$3-million emergency grant from the Community Gaming Grants program to Food Banks British Columbia to support their immediate needs to buy and distribute food, pay employees and cover other costs essential to the delivery of their food programs.

[COVID-19 support service launched for B.C. businesses](#)

- A new B.C. Business COVID-19 Support Service will serve as a single point of contact for businesses throughout the province looking for information on resources available during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[New COVID-19 supports for businesses, local governments](#)

- The Province is taking significant new steps to support B.C. businesses, non-profits and other organizations through the COVID-19 pandemic by:
 - further reducing the school property tax rate for commercial properties to achieve an average 25% reduction in the total property tax bill for most businesses, providing up to

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\$700 million in relief. This enhances the 50% reduction to the provincial school property tax rate that was originally announced for classes 4, 5, and 6 as part of B.C.'s COVID-19 Action Plan.

- Postponing the date that late payment penalties apply for commercial properties in classes 4,5,6,7 and 8 to Oct. 1, 2020, to give businesses and landlords more time to pay their reduced property tax, without penalty.
- Responding to key concerns from local governments, the Province is addressing cash flow and revenue shortfalls with new measures that provide additional support:
 - authorizing local governments to borrow, interest-free, from their existing capital reserves to help pay for operating expenses, such as employee salaries.
 - delaying provincial school tax remittances until the end of the year. This will provide significant relief to local governments facing cash flow issues.
 - providing local governments greater flexibility to carry debt for an additional year.
 - These measures will provide local governments with the resources to meet their operational costs and required remittances to regional districts, regional hospital districts, TransLink and transit authorities, BC Assessment, the Municipal Finance Authority and other taxing authorities. This will ensure that other minor taxing authorities can count on receiving the full amount they bill to municipalities and the Province's surveyor of taxes before Aug. 1, 2020.

[Minister's statement on COVID-19 support for arts and culture sector:](#)

- The Province has developed a \$3-million Arts and Culture Resilience Supplement to be administered by the BC Arts Council. Operating and eligible project clients will receive a supplement of up to \$15,000 in early April to help them pay their bills.
- BC Arts Council will provide operating clients a 50% advance on 2020-21 funding to help with their cash flow.

[Bringing B.C. music to people while we stay safe at home](#)

- People will now be able to enjoy more music at home, as the Province and Creative BC support musicians impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with new grants for livestreaming.
- The B.C. government is partnering with Creative BC to launch Showcase BC, a new online hub that brings a variety of live performances, entertainment and content to British Columbians at home.
- Creative BC has also opened a new funding stream that will provide one-time micro-grants of \$500 to emerging artists and \$2,000 to established artists for livestreaming, songwriting and professional development.

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- British Columbians can access all the grant performances for free through the Showcase BC website and get information on new livestream events by following the hashtag #ShowcaseBC on Twitter.

[Support for sport sector:](#)

- Starting in April 2020, the Province, through viaSport, will provide provincial, disability and multi-sport organizations with the ability to access \$5 million, which represents 50% of their annual 2020-21 provincial funding allocation, to provide access to cashflow sooner.

[Intake for greenhouse carbon tax relief grants open:](#)

- Greenhouse operators who grow vegetables, ornamental flowers and plants, forest seedlings and nursery plants can now apply for carbon tax relief grants for the 2020 production year, until May 1, 2020.
- The grant covers up to 80% of the carbon tax that commercial greenhouse growers of eligible crops paid on the natural gas and propane they used for greenhouse heating and carbon-dioxide production in 2019. Cannabis is not an eligible crop at any phase of production.

[More support for commercial truck drivers during COVID-19 crisis](#)

- To improve travel for commercial truck drivers, the Government of B.C. is funding the installation of portable toilets at several commercial vehicle pull-outs, inspection stations and chain-up locations throughout the province.

[B.C. student loan payment frozen for six months:](#)

- Effective March 30, 2020, all British Columbia student loan borrowers will temporarily have their repayments suspended until September 30, 2020. During this time, no payment will be required, and interest that currently applies to the federal portion of student loans will not accrue. Repayment will be paused automatically, so borrowers do not need to apply to have their repayment suspended.

[ICBC takes further steps to reduce financial burden for drivers during pandemic](#)

- For customers needing more relief than the 90-day payment deferral, ICBC will be waiving the \$30 cancellation fee and \$18 re-plating fee for those people who choose to cancel their insurance during this time. The cancellation fee change is subject to the approval of the BC Utilities Commission (BCUC). Customers will be required to remove the plate from their vehicle while it is not insured and the vehicle must be kept off the road.

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- Customers who reinsure May 30th or thereafter will be able to re-use their plate. Customers reinsuring prior to that date will be issued a new plate at no charge and at that time are expected to surrender their plate.
- ICBC will also allow fleet vehicle customers to suspend their insurance to help them save money during this difficult time.
- People whose learner driver's licences (class 5-8) expire during the pandemic will not have to pay a fee for their first knowledge test after their learner driver's licence expires, once testing resumes.
- As part of the changes, ICBC is also confirming that customers will be able to use their vehicles for the delivery of food or medical products and services, without changing their insurance (vehicle use) or paying a higher premium. This includes people volunteering to help deliver groceries or other essential supplies to seniors and other people in need.

[ICBC Licence renewals and payment deferrals now available during pandemic:](#)

- Customers on a monthly Autoplan payment plan, who are facing financial challenges due to COVID-19, may be able to defer their payment for up to 90 days with no penalty

[Medical Services Plan:](#)

- The three-month MSP coverage wait period will be waived for eligible individuals effective March 1, 2020, and temporary Medical Services Plan (MSP) coverage may be available to assist individuals in B.C. impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

BC Transit and TransLink:

- Fares and passes are not required

Pay parking suspended at health authority sites:

- In an effort to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, pay parking is temporarily suspended for the public, staff and medical staff, at all health authority owned and operated sites.

[WorkSafeBC has resources available for employers and workers](#)

[Liquor store hours extended to protect seniors, most vulnerable](#)

- Government has temporarily extended hours of retail liquor service in British Columbia to provide greater opportunities for physical distancing for seniors and people who are immunocompromised.
- Liquor retailers, such as wine stores or private liquor stores, throughout the province are now allowed to temporarily operate between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. daily, if they choose to do so.

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[Restaurants allowed to deliver liquor when accompanied by a meal](#)

[Distilleries temporarily allowed to produce hand sanitizer](#)