



Dear Stakeholders:

We are following the advice of Public Health Officials closely to keep British Columbians as safe as possible and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

It is important, now more than ever, that we work together to keep our communities safe. The ministry supports some of the most vulnerable people in our province, and we are working to ensure that they receive the information and support that they need during this time.

Risk reduction efforts are being escalated, here in British Columbia and across Canada and I want to share some of the things the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction is doing to support clients, staff, and service providers as well as minimize potential disruptions.

### **Service Changes to Protect Clients and Staff:**

- In anticipation of groups larger than 50 congregating at SDPR offices we have developed a cheque issue week plan and taken the following steps:
  - We are limiting holds on any cheques and actively encouraging the use of phone and online for our clients.
  - We have added tape on the floor to help clients maintain distance between each other and the front counter.
  - We are installing temporary shields at the front counter to promote physical distancing.
  - We have reduced the number of people in the waiting room to allow for greater distance between people as much as we can, without creating large lineups outside the offices.
  - We have added signage asking clients to use only every second chair while waiting inside.
  - We have added additional security resources who can help to support clients with physical distancing.
  - We have added signage to our offices promoting physical distancing and other practices to reduce the risk of transmission
  - We have enhanced cleaning in the client areas of our offices
- The requirement for specific documentation is being waived on a case-by-case basis where a client or an applicant is not able to provide it virtually (e.g., through My Self Serve).
- Employment plans and work searches are also being waived at this time. Further waivers are being considered and more information will be shared as decisions are made.



- It is the client's decision to access WorkBC or not. If they decide not to attend it will not impact their eligibility.
- For Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD) applications, the ministry pushed all signals for existing requests out two months.
- Cheques are being sent through the mail or by direct deposit where possible. More than 80 per cent of our clients already receive their payment through direct deposit. We are encouraging anyone with a bank account to sign up for direct deposit.

### **Additional Client Supports**

To support those who are impacted by COVID-19 (through self-isolation and/or quarantine) the ministry has enacted the Emergency/Disaster Supplement, funding that can be used for COVID-19 needed supplies only. Clients can contact our office via 1-866-866-0800 to request this support.

WorkBC is offering services by phone or online. Clients can call or email their local WorkBC office to see how they can help you. Please do not refer clients to an office in-person as the office may be closed.

The Federal Government has introduced a response plan to support Canadians impacted by COVID-19. You can find details at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

### **Direct Deposit**

Here is how someone can sign up for Direct Deposit, a safe and dependable way to receive payments:

- On My Self Serve: Complete the Direct Deposit request form (HR2648), attach a void cheque or online bank form, and sign electronically.
- Ministry website <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/income-assistance/payment-dates/direct-deposit>: Get a Direct Deposit request form (HR2648), complete the form, attach a void cheque or print an online bank form, sign the document, and return to the office via fax or in-person drop box (located outside of the ministry office).
- If you need help in accessing the forms or the process, please contact the ministry at 1-866-866-0800.

### **COVID-19 Action Plan**

On March 23, the Province announced the Covid-19 Action Plan, a \$5 billion plan that builds on the federal government's economic plan and brings aid to British Columbians who are worried about paying bills and staying afloat. To support our most vulnerable people, the plan includes \$1.7 billion for the critical services British Columbians need including investments in housing and shelter supports, income and disability assistance



Ministry of  
Social Development  
and Poverty Reduction

programs and crucial health services.

For more information on the plan, go to:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support>

Over the next few weeks we will be sending out update emails to keep you informed and share actions the Ministry is taking to support the people who rely on our services, our staff, and our communities.

These are unprecedented times, challenging us in ways we never could have imagined. I know that we can count on each other and I encourage you to contact me directly if you have any questions.

As always, you can call the ministry's toll-free phone at **1-866-866-0800** during regular business hours (9 am to 4 pm, Monday to Friday, excluding statutory holidays).

Sincerely,

Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction