

Income Assistance Application Process for People with Disabilities©

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This Help Sheet is for people with disabilities who need to apply for disability benefits from the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) for the first time. We describe the steps you must take before you get the application for the Persons with Disabilities Designation (PWD) benefit (for information about how to apply for the PWD designation, please see our Help Sheet 2).

Before you get started

About disability

You should understand that at first you may not get any special treatment from the MEIA because of your disability. MEIA staff usually expect you to do the same things as other applicants. If you have limitations, be sure to tell staff as soon as you can. If you think you will have a problem understanding or completing the application process, ask a friend or family member to go with you to help.

About disability benefits (PWD)

You should also understand that people with disabilities do not automatically qualify for disability benefits and that it can take a few weeks to go through the process and get all the necessary documents. First, you need to show you are financially eligible. Second, you must get the PWD application. It must be completed by your doctor and sent to Victoria for approval. If Victoria approves your PWD application, you will then be recognized as a “person with disabilities” and be eligible to receive the disability assistance rate. Disability benefits are not back-dated. This means they are paid from the month the Ministry decides you are eligible.

Most new applicants will not qualify for the Persons with Persistent and Multiple Barriers to Employment (PPMB) benefit because you have to be on assistance for 12 months before you can apply for it.

About income

Income assistance and disability benefits are income tested. This means, if you have too much money, you may not qualify for assistance. For example, if you are a single person whose monthly income is over \$610 per month, it is not likely that you will qualify for regular income assistance. Single people with monthly incomes over \$906 will not usually qualify for disability benefits. It is possible to apply for disability benefits if your income is over \$610, but under \$906.

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About assets

Income assistance and disability benefits are also asset tested. For example, a single person on income assistance can have up to \$1,500 in assets and still qualify for assistance. However, new applicants with more than \$150 cash assets will receive less money on their first cheque. For example, if you have \$300 in cash or in the bank, \$150 will be taken off your first benefits payment. You are also allowed to have a car worth up to \$5,000 and own the home you live in. A person with a disability can have up to \$3,000 in the bank, own a car worth any value, own the home they live in and still receive disability benefits. In fact, a person with over \$3,000 can apply for disability benefits if they are using this money to live on because, as we've said, it usually takes 2 to 3 months to process a PWD application.

About people you live with

A person with a disability living with a family member or roommate can qualify for income assistance or disability benefits as a single person. However, if you live with a spouse or partner, the MEIA will want to know the total income and assets of your household. You will be expected to apply for income assistance as a couple.

Getting started

Step 1: Where to go

Find the MEIA office in your area. You can do this by phoning:

- Vancouver: 604-660-2421
- Victoria: 250-387-6121
- All other areas: 1-800-663-7867

If you have Internet access, you can find your local office by going to: www.eia.gov.bc/contacts/.

Step 2: Going to the Office

Go to the MEIA office and say you want to apply for income assistance and disability benefits. You will be asked to complete an Application for Income Assistance (Part 1) form. A worker will then tell you about the Ministry's expectations concerning 1) a 3-week work search 2) an orientation session and 3) information you have to bring to your application interview (Step 5 in the process). Phone the office if you are unable to visit in person.

You can get an earlier appointment to fill out your income assistance application if you have an immediate need for food, shelter or medical coverage. If you have an urgent need for any of these things, you should ask the MEIA Employment and Assistance Worker (EAW) for an **immediate needs assessment**. In this situation, you should be given an application appointment within 24 hours.

Applicants with an immediate need do not have to complete a 3-week job search. If the EAW cannot give you an appointment right away, you are supposed to be provided with temporary help—for example, food vouchers, bus tickets or a shelter referral. People with disabilities are not automatically excused from looking for work, unless they already have the PWD designation; however, if you have a medical condition that stops you from looking for work, you can be exempted or excused from doing the 3-week job search.

Step 3: The Orientation Session

You must complete an orientation session. You can do this in person or on-line at:

www.weborientation.gov.bc.ca/.

The orientation will tell you:

- rules about eligibility for income assistance
- what information you need to bring to your intake interview.

If you have completed an orientation in the last 60 days, or you are 65 years of age or over, or you have a medical condition that prevents you from completing the session, you can ask to be excused. If you are excused, ask the MEIA to give you the list of things you have to bring to your application interview.

Step 4: Booking the Application Interview

If you do not have an immediate need or have not been exempted from the 3-week work search, you will be expected to contact the MEIA office after 2 weeks to confirm that you have done the orientation, that you are looking for work, and to arrange a time and date for the application interview.

Step 5: The Application Interview

Attend the application interview. If you have a spouse or partner that lives with you, they will need to come with you. You will also need to bring all of the financial and identification information on the list from your first meeting with the Ministry.

The purpose of the application interview is to decide whether or not you are financially eligible for income assistance and/or disability benefits. The documents that you have brought with you will be reviewed and the EAW can also ask you for other information. If some of the information is missing, it will usually take longer for the MEIA to decide whether you are eligible.

Tell the EAW about your disability and why you are not able to work. Ask for a PWD application. If the EAW is not willing to give you an application right away, ask when you can get one. If you are not able to get one in a few days, you should get help from an advocate.

Step 6: Interview Conclusion

By the end of the application interview, you will want to know whether you are eligible for income assistance. Sometimes the EAW will tell you that you have to wait a few days while they verify information you have given them. If more information has been asked for, be sure to get it to MEIA as quickly as you can. If you cannot get what MEIA has asked for, tell the worker as soon as you can. MEIA can close your file if they do not hear from you.

If you receive a PWD application form before you go on income assistance, the MEIA will allow you two months to complete and submit it. If it takes longer than two months, you must tell the office.

If your application for income assistance is denied, you have the right to appeal the decision and we suggest you seek the advice of an advocate. Again, you should also contact an advocate if the MEIA does not give you a PWD application.

Special Situations

Sometimes low-income people cannot qualify for regular income assistance because of special circumstances that are beyond their control. For example, you may be waiting for other income or trying to sell property. In these situations, you could be eligible for **Hardship Assistance**. Usually, people who receive Hardship Assistance must pay it back later.

People who have income slightly above the rates set by the MEIA may be able to qualify for **Medical Services Only** if they have a life-threatening need and there are no other sources of funding for medication and essential health benefits. This means that the MEIA can pay for prescriptions and other urgent health-related items. Often the MEIA needs:

- confirmation from your doctor of your life-threatening need
- a list of your monthly medical expenses
- your monthly budget, including income and expenses
- proof that you are not eligible for any other funding.



Prepared by **Advocacy Access**, a program of **BC Coalition of People with Disabilities**
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