



# BC HOUSING SECTOR COVID 19 OPERATIONS MANUAL

April 2020

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# Introduction

**BC Housing** is committed to supporting community housing and homelessness service providers throughout the COVID-19 crisis. This Operations Manual Guide contains information to help housing and service providers prepare and respond to COVID-19.

The Guide includes a collection of new procedures and safety measures designed to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, education for frontline staff, and resource tools to communicate with tenants and clients.

The situation with COVID-19 continues to change daily; guidance and recommendations from our Health Authorities is subject to change as the epidemiology changes. Please ensure that you continue to monitor our [website](#) for the latest information, updates and resources.

# Resources and Planning

# Resources and Planning

BC Housing is sharing resources and information with our local housing and service providers to assist them in preparing their responses to the situation with COVID-19. A [COVID-19 Factsheet for Housing & Service Providers](#) is available on BC Housing's external website. In addition to maintaining a [COVID-19 resource section](#) on our website, BC Housing provides important housing sector news and COVID-19 updates through a newsletter. Providers can [subscribe](#) to receive our *COVID-19: Community Housing Sector Updates* newsletter for the latest updates about preparation, prevention and response planning, as well as resources and important information.

BC Housing has activated our Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), which is staffed virtually during business hours Monday to Friday, and for half days on the weekends. The EOC acts as a clearinghouse to connect BC Housing staff to resources and information, and ensures that the leadership team has current situational awareness.

The [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) (BCCDC) website is a good resource for information on the symptoms of COVID-19 and how the virus is spread. For **non-medical** information, please call **1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268- 4319)** or via text message at **604-630-0300**. Housing/Service Provider Pandemic Plan.

BC Housing has developed this sample [Pandemic Continuity Plan](#) as a guide for Housing and Service Providers to facilitate the continuation of essential services and/or functions during a pandemic emergency. The BC Non-Profit Housing Association has also developed a [resource on Pandemic Planning for COVID-19](#), shared by and adapted from the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association.

The following have been developed to provide practical steps to help your organization prepare.

## Have a Response Plan

- Monitor your local health authority website for updates on COVID-19.
- Identify a plan for employees who might have a higher risk due to complex health conditions. Employees and/or volunteers at high risk for COVID-19 (i.e., seniors and those with underlying health conditions) should not be caring for tenants who may be sick.
- Report suspected COVID-19 cases to your local health authority and to BC Housing through our online [COVID-19 Housing Partner Contact Form](#).
- Develop a mitigation plan to help minimize the potential risk to employees. For example:
  - Use physical barriers to protect employees who will have interactions with tenants with unknown infection status (e.g., check-in staff).
  - Install a sneeze guard at the check-in desk or place an additional table between employees and tenants to increase the distance between them.
  - If employees are handling tenants' belongings, they should use disposable gloves.
  - Any tenant with a cough or sneeze who is being transported in a car must be provided with – and wear – a mask or use a tissue to contain any particles.

- Plan to have extra supplies on hand in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak, including:
  - Soap
  - Alcohol-based hand sanitizers for employees who have no access to soap and water
  - Tissues
  - Disinfecting wipes
  - Trash baskets
  - Gloves
  - Masks to use for people who are sick
  - Paper plates, disposable cups and utensils

*We recognize the challenges that many service providers are having in accessing supplies. Please use the [COVID-19 Housing Partner Contact Form](#) if you are having difficulty finding supplies.*

### **For More Information**

- [Information for Patients with Chronic Health Conditions](#) (BC Centre for Disease Control)
- [VCH Pandemic Response Planning Checklist for Homeless & Housing Service Providers](#)
- [CDC Interim Guidelines for Homeless Shelters](#)
- [WHO Formula for DIY Hand Sanitizer](#)

### **Promote Prevention Practices**

- Encourage proper handwashing with soap and water. Post [handwashing](#) signage in the common areas.
- Encourage employees to use hand sanitizer when a sink and soap are unavailable.
- Follow good respiratory etiquette. Post [cough etiquette](#) and [STOP 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) poster](#) in common areas.
- Encourage employees to stay home if they are sick. If they have symptoms like coughing, shortness of breath, fever or sore throat, encourage them to call their primary care provider, local public health office or call 1-888- COVID19 (1-888-268-4319).
- [Post signs](#) at entrances instructing visitors not to visit if they have symptoms of respiratory infection.

### **Plan for Employee Shortages**

If you have not already developed plans for employee shortages, now is the time to consider the following:

- Develop clear guidelines for when employees and volunteers are expected to stay home and when they can return to work. Staff (and volunteers) may need to stay home when they are sick, caring for a sick household member, or caring for their children in the event of school/daycare dismissals. Employees should not be asked to provide medical notes during this time.
- Note: childcare is available from the government for essential service workers during the COVID-19 crisis. Visit the [Request Temporary Emergency Child Care for Essential Workers](#) webpage for details.

- Identify critical job functions and positions, and where possible plan for alternative coverage by cross-trained staff members.
- Implement a training plan for your employees on COVID-19 and risk prevention measures. This may help address employee concerns and help avoid additional employee shortages due to fear of exposure.

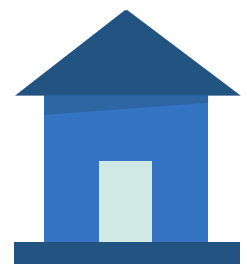
### **Recruitment**

The B.C. Non-Profit Housing Association has launched a new website, [www.housingjobmatch.ca](http://www.housingjobmatch.ca), to connect job seekers with non-profit housing and shelter providers. The website provides a ‘matchmaker’-type service that allows job seekers to submit their contact information, areas of skill, and experience. Providers will be able to submit their information and labour needs to the site and be matched up with potential workers who meet their specific criteria.

### **Communication**

Communicate with employees and tenants on prevention instructions and public health updates:

- Describe what actions you are taking to protect them.
- Answer questions and explain what they can do to protect themselves, fellow tenants and employees.



# Site Procedures



# Site Procedures

The primary focus during this pandemic is to prevent the introduction of COVID-19 and its spread throughout the building. The following operational considerations are designed to help minimize the spread of COVID-19.

## Office Procedures

As a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and support the safety of clients and employees, BC Housing has temporarily closed some in-person services. All BC Housing public reception desks and storefront locations have been closed. Operators are advised to close any public access point, where possible. Where applicable, staff have been requested to telework from home. Movement of people to multiple sites has been reduced to critical staff. Travel between sites by frontline staff (building managers & janitorial teams) is discouraged and should be kept to a minimum.

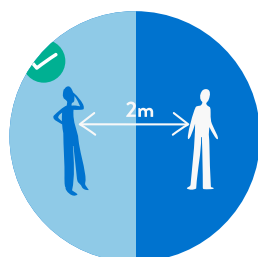
BC Housing has closed site offices to “drop in” visits by tenants and is promoting telephone communication with tenants. [Notices to advise tenants](#) that staff are not on site can be posted in buildings and provide communication options for tenants.

## Safe Work Procedure

For more information on the cleaning and disinfecting of a work area of an employee who has become ill while at work, and for the environmental cleaning of common areas within buildings, please see these [enhanced cleaning guidelines](#).

## Reminders to staff

- If you are sick, stay home.
- Non-essential meetings to be postponed or via teleconference/online meeting. In-person meetings should have no more than 5 people in a well-ventilated room and physical distancing of two meters must be in place.
- As per provincial directive, employees who have left the country are required to self-isolate for 14 days upon return.
- All work-related air travel is suspended.
- Take all necessary steps at work, including washing hands regularly, using hand sanitizer when handwashing is not available, limiting group gatherings, and not using shared dishes or utensils.



## Tenant Communication

As new developments continue to unfold in this pandemic, it is recommended that all - Housing Providers and site staff promote communication and information sharing with tenants. With limited staff available on sites and closed visiting hours, BC Housing's directly managed sites have been utilizing various notices delivered directly, as well as posters that have been distributed in common areas as supplemental information for tenants. Non-Profit Housing Providers can take these same measures.

BC Housing has developed COVID-19 information bulletins, letter templates and posters for Housing and Service Providers to use to assist in communication with tenants. In the case that extraordinary cleaning is required at a site, post notices to inform tenants of external contractors that are scheduled. Notices can be posted to advise that common areas, including playgrounds, have been closed to promote social distancing protection for tenants and staff. The following are examples of important notices that can be posted around the building:

- [Handwashing - Multiple Languages](#)
- [COVID-19 Visitors Notice](#) (available in multiple languages)
- [COVID-19 NO Visitors Notice](#) (available in multiple languages)
- [Tips for residents in apartments & multi-unit buildings](#)
- [COVID19 Important Rent Notice](#)

A full list of BC Housing's posters, as well as posters from various public health organizations are located on BC Housing's [COVID-19 Resources](#) page.

## Site Cleaning Procedures

Cleaning and janitorial work are a priority (essential service) at all sites. Cleaning will concentrate on common areas and "high touch" points (i.e., elevator buttons/railings, common amenity spaces, laundry facilities, door handles, countertops, and bathroom surfaces) a minimum of three or more times a day. Cleaning floors, walls, and windows should be secondary at this time. If you are at risk of running low on any cleaning supplies, you can request support through BC Housing's online [COVID-19 Housing Partner Contact Form](#).

To properly disinfect, follow the product directions. For most products, the proper procedure is to first clean the area with soap and water, then apply the disinfectant and let it sit in place for about 10 minutes before wiping it with a clean cloth. This is in addition to regular cleaning, which must continue to take place.

For disinfection, any of the following should be effective:

- Most common EPA-registered household disinfectants
- Alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol
- Diluted household bleach solution

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a [list of registered disinfectant products](#) that have qualified for use against SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

## Social Distancing Procedures

### Screening and Intake Procedures

- For those buildings that may have visitors
  - Post signs at entrances instructing visitors not to visit if they have symptoms of respiratory infection. BC Housing has created the following posters:
    - [COVID-19 Notice for Visitors](#) – Please don't visit tenants if you have the following symptoms
    - [COVID-19 No Visitors Allowed](#) - No visitors except health and essential services
  - Consider restricting visitors to essential personnel only, which should include health care staff (pharmacists, home support workers, ACT Teams, etc.)
  - If someone is showing symptoms of COVID-19 when they arrive, such as coughing, shortness of breath, fever or sore throat:
    - If possible, request that they do not visit the building.
    - Ask them to wear a mask or use a tissue (if a mask is not available) to prevent transmission to other people.
    - Try to keep them separated from other tenants by six feet (approximately 2 metres).
    - Call the local public health office or call 1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268-4319).
- Implement handwashing protocols
  - Remind people to wash their hands when:
    - They arrive and before they leave.
    - Before and after they work with a client.
    - Before and after eating, etc.
- Designate someone to monitor tenant, employees and visitors for symptoms: fever, cough, difficulty breathing.

### Social Distancing Recommendations for Homelessness Service Providers

- Temporary reconfigurations to allow for social distancing
  - Sleeping arrangements foot to head, instead of head to head.
  - Maintain a minimum distance of 2 metres (6 ft) between individuals whenever possible.
  - For transition houses, avoid women sharing rooms, if possible.
  - Place partitions between beds, if possible.
- Meals
  - For those programs that offer shared meals, eliminate buffet-style eating.
  - Consider temporarily closing dining rooms and communal eating spaces. Create temporary closure and protocol signage.
  - Consider using paper plates, disposable cups and utensils.

- For supportive housing, consider closing dining rooms and delivering meals to residents' rooms.
- If it's not possible to shut down communal dining spaces, consider staggering mealtimes or providing one full meal and meal supplements (bars, Ensure, sandwiches) that clients can take away, so clients don't travel to multiple agencies to eat.
- Discuss arrangements with your kitchen and/or food supplier to package individual meals.
- Run dishwashers at the highest temperature settings.
- Harm reduction
  - Ensure harm reduction supplies are available to eliminate the sharing of supplies for persons using substances (i.e., pipes, needles).
- Educate tenants about what they can do to help prevent the spread
  - Ask tenants to increase distance and refrain from touching, kissing, hugging, handshaking, etc.
  - Encourage handwashing and proper cough etiquette.
  - For transition houses / safe homes, talk to clients about identifying a temporary caregiver for their children if they get sick.
  - Talk to [children about the virus and precautions](#) they can take.
  - Support clients with [managing stress and keeping calm](#).

### **Minimize unnecessary gatherings**

Limit gatherings to only those that are critical in nature and where social distance is possible (under five people in a large, well-ventilated space).

### **Entering Suites**

For those providers who do wellness checks, entry into client suites should be minimized and for emergencies only. Wellness checks can still be done, but staff should stay in the hallway and wash their hands before and after visiting a suite to prevent the spread of viruses.

### **Internet Access for Tenants**

Internet access is a way for people to stay connected and access supports that may be required during periods of self-isolation. BC Housing is working on a number of initiatives to connect people to the internet with major telecommunications providers across Canada.

### **Delivery and Distribution of Mail**

Tenants that have underlying health conditions or are at greater risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 may have concerns about collecting their mail from public spaces. Tenants may request that staff collect their mail from their mailbox, and deliver it to their unit. Canada Post has legal responsibility over the delivery and distribution of mail. Canada Post will only deliver mail to designated mailboxes in communal buildings. For privacy reasons, Canada Post also has a policy that it will not hand over mail to non-profit housing provider employees or volunteers to deliver to tenants. We recognize that this may be a challenge for some tenants with disabilities.

We recommend that if a tenant is unable to collect their mail themselves, they should identify a close friend or family member to access their mail on their behalf.

### **Garbage and Recycling Pick Up**

Tenants that have underlying health conditions or are at greater risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 may have concerns about accessing the garbage and recycling areas, depending on how the building is set up. In social housing buildings across the province there are usually designated garbage and recycling areas for tenants. We are asking our housing providers to accommodate the needs of their individual tenants who have accessibility requirements at this time, but this will be subject to the staffing capacity of each individual provider to accommodate this request.

### **Laundry Rooms**

As with all public spaces, onsite laundry facilities should be cleaned with enhanced protocols. It is not advisable to restrict tenants to specific laundry times because we cannot reduce the level of access a vulnerable household has to laundering. In any building, there may be households that need to use the laundry facilities more than once a day to manage ongoing health concerns that require frequent laundering.

To prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, it is important that tenants are able to regularly and freely access laundry facilities. During the Province's State of Emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, BC Housing is providing free laundry to our tenants, and requests that all Providers do the same.

### **Elevators**

As a commonly used public space, elevators need to be cleaned frequently, with special attention to buttons and touchpoints. The BC Centre for Disease Control advises that there should not be more than three people per elevator. Please use [this elevator distancing notice](#) and remind tenants to be mindful of households with small children and mobility issues. They rely on the elevators to access their homes and facilities in their buildings.

### **Protective Gear**

When social distancing or avoiding contact is not possible, several precautions should be put in place for staff who interact with tenants. These measures include wearing masks, gloves or other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Correct usage of PPE is necessary to slow the spread and ensure that we can continue to provide service to our clients. Health authorities are advising that people working in shelter/housing facilities maintain a distance of 2 meters from clients and, where that is not possible, wear PPE (masks, gloves and eye protection). There is [useful information on the BC Centre for Disease Control website](#) about proper PPE use. We understand that many service providers are having difficulty accessing PPE supplies. If you are having difficulty getting these supplies, please submit a detailed supply request via our [Online Housing Partner Contact Form](#).

Please note: if you are somewhere without a mask and encounter a tenant, please practice social distancing, remove yourself from the area and then go wash your hands.

## Homemade Masks

When surgical masks are not available, a homemade mask (like a bandana) may offer some protection. Homemade masks can be used by sick people to prevent spreading the virus to other people, by keeping the person's droplets in. Wearing a mask is not very effective at preventing the wearer from getting infected, as the mask may give a person a false sense of security and will likely increase the number of times a person will touch their own face (e.g., to adjust the mask). Any mask, no matter how efficient at filtration or how good the seal, will have minimal effect if it is not used together with other preventative measures, such as frequent handwashing and physical distancing.

Please see [BC Centre for Disease Control's Interim Guidance to Social Service Providers for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 in their Facilities](#) for more information on masks.

## Maintenance / Pest Control

Maintenance and Pest Control service has been reduced to emergency requests only for BC Housing's Directly Managed and Group Home properties. Providers may consider reducing pest control within your location(s).

BC Housing tenants have been instructed to complete a Tenant Maintenance Request form detailing the nature of their maintenance issue and leave it in an office mailbox for non-emergency requests. For maintenance emergencies, tenants are directed to call their property managers or the after-hours emergency line (where available).

Landscaping and Grounds crew are continuing to operate at this time; this is subject to change if deemed a potential safety concern.

## Renovations

In light of the current situation with COVID-19, BC Housing is implementing - new measures regarding our construction activities in occupied residential buildings. All work in common areas has ceased, and any new work in occupied units has been postponed. Only essential repairs will continue. For any work in occupied areas that needs to proceed for safety reasons, adequate social distancing, protective equipment and enhanced cleaning precautions are being taken. These enhanced safety measures are being taken to further ensure the protection of our tenants and staff.

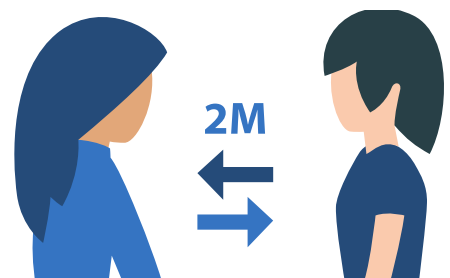
## Guests at Buildings

BC Housing recommends posting [notices](#) at each site to address tenant visitation. Vulnerable tenants may be negatively impacted by reducing visitations (access to food/medication), therefore full elimination of all guests at this stage can be limited to extreme cases. Support workers, health care and essential services staff (pharmacists, ACT Teams, etc.) are not considered to be visitors and should not be restricted from the building.

Examples of notices to be posted for sites that allow no visitors can be found at <https://www.bchousing.org/COVID-19/resources>.

### **Community Partners and Programs**

BC Housing advises all Operators to suspend Community Partners and Programs running out of their sites at this time. In an effort to promote social distancing, these programs are to be put on hold until a future date.



# Tenant Procedures



# Tenant Procedures

## In Person Meetings

If a tenant requests a meeting with a property manager or site staff, the following questions can be asked to help assess potential risk:

1. **Have you had contact with anyone with confirmed COVID-19 in the last 14 days?**
2. **Have you traveled to any country outside Canada in the last 14 days?**
3. **Are you undergoing the 14 days self-quarantine protocol?**
4. **Have you had any of these symptoms in the last 14 days?**
  - a. **Fever**
  - b. **Sore throat**
  - c. **Cough**
  - d. **Difficult breathing**
5. **Are you current experiencing fever, sore throat, cough and/or breathing difficulty?**

***If answered “YES” to these questions, please advise to contact their primary care provider/family doctor or call 8-1-1.***

## Management of Tenants or Shelter Clients with Suspected COVID-19

People who are homeless may be more likely to have underlying or chronic health conditions. Some people with chronic health conditions have a higher risk of becoming severely ill if they have COVID-19. Additionally, elderly tenants also have a higher risk of becoming severely ill if they have COVID-19.

The Ministry of Health is requiring anyone who has symptoms – including fever, cough, sneezing, sore throat or difficulty breathing – to self-isolate for 14 days. If you have a tenant that may have been exposed to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) or is displaying symptoms (fever, a new cough or difficulty breathing), please:

- Contact local public health office or call 8-1-1 (HealthLinkBC). If the person has a health provider, contact them by phone.
- Ask the person to wear a mask to prevent transmission to other people; if a mask is not available, provide tissues for them to cover their mouth and nose.
- Ask the person to wash their hands with either:
  - Liquid soap and running water, and dry with paper towels; or
  - Alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Ask them to [self-isolate](#).
- If it is not possible to self-isolate:
  - Move the person to a separate area of the building or, if weather allows, to a sheltered place outdoors, where they are at least two metres (six feet) away from other clients and staff.
  - Consider using privacy screens, if available.
- Contact your BC Housing representative to discuss options.
- If the client is in distress, call 9-1-1. Signs of distress include:
  - Shortness of breath, rapid breathing, or difficulty catching breath

- New/worsening chest pain
- Cyanosis (bluish discolouration of skin) or general blue discoloration

Use the [BC COVID-19 Online Self-Assessment Tool](#) to determine if individuals require further assessment.

For tenants with suspected COVID-19 and who **are not in distress** consider the following:

- Maintain separation from other clients and staff by 2 metres (6 feet).
- Ask the tenant to follow the [directions for self-isolation](#).
- Ask them to wear or continue wearing a mask in public.
- Contact BC Housing to determine if a designated site or shelter for clients with fever or respiratory symptoms has been set up.
  - If a designated site or shelter has NOT been set up, consider designating a separate area in the existing site(s) for clients with such symptoms.
  - If moving the client to another site is NOT an option, beds or sleeping mattresses for clients with fever or cough should be spaced at least two metres (six feet) from other clients.
  - If possible, provide a designated washroom or toilet and sink/shower area.
  - If possible, serve food in a different area than other clients.
- Consider whether to increase cleaning of commonly touched surfaces in the shelter.
- Be prepared to provide shelter on an on-going basis for the client until they are feeling improved and no longer have fever or cough. The healthcare provider may also advise on other steps that may help in the person's recovery from COVID-19.
- Limit contact with staff and other clients as much as possible. Ensure anyone who touches the client or provides them with food, etc., washes their hands before and after.

Please contact your [Non-Profit Property Manager](#) from BC Housing or Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AMHA) if you have any questions related to responding to COVID-19.

### Quarantine Considerations – Homelessness Service Providers

Discuss the situation with BC Housing and your local health authority to develop a plan for individual's who are COVID-19 positive. In the meantime, if there is no room available for someone to self-isolate, here are some options to consider:

- Check with BC Housing to see if a designated site or hotel/motel space is an option.
- Consider using privacy screens between beds.
- If possible, dedicate a washroom that is cleaned and disinfected after each use.
- Deliver meals whenever possible.
- Move the person to a separate area of the facility where they are at least two metres (six feet) away from other clients and staff.
- Notify other facilities prior to transferring the client with acute respiratory symptoms to another facility for a higher level of care.

## At Risk Tenants / Sites

BC Housing recommends identifying and reaching out to vulnerable tenants to ensure they have the necessary supports in place at the current time and for future planning if self-isolation is deemed necessary. For those tenants with no support, we advise staff to connect with them to offer support and ensure their safety and medication and nutritional needs are met. Follow up measures should be implemented through an 'at risk tenant' list.

This 'at risk tenant' list should include seniors, tenants with underlying health conditions such as respiratory illnesses and immune compromised tenants that have reduced ability to leave their homes during this crisis.

## Tenant Sign Ups and Agreements

In an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect our applicants, tenants, partners, and staff, BC Housing has temporarily suspended accepting and processing Housing Registry applications. Applicants and providers are encouraged to hold on to new applications and non-critical updates and documentation for files until full service resumes. BC Housing's processing capacity is currently prioritizing existing clients and tenants to ensure tenancies are not put at risk. For BC Housing directly managed buildings, this includes a halt to all unit showings and non-critical maintenance and inspections.

New tenant sign ups and transfers have been postponed at this time unless they are of an urgent nature. For critical maintenance and facilitating move-ins that were arranged prior to the current crisis, preventative measures are being undertaken such as keeping a 2-meter distance between individuals and wearing personal protective equipment wherever possible, practical, and available. We strongly encourage providers to take similar measures if they have not already done so.

BC Housing Directly Managed sites have waived in-person signatures until further notice; verbal consent to tenancy conditions with later signing appointment scheduled have been approved (conditional to verbal agreement). Documents are prepared and sent by registered mail with instructions for the documents to be signed and returned in a pre-postage paid envelope.

## Temporary Eviction Moratorium and Rent Adjustments

Until further notice, BC Housing has [advised a halt to any eviction notices](#) being issued for non-payment of rent. The Government of BC has also halted all evictions for non-payment of rent during the COVID-19 crisis. It is important that providers and tenants understand that all tenants are still responsible for paying their rent, and while there is a temporary hold on evictions for non-payment of rent, rent in arrears will accrue and eventually payments will be due. If there are circumstances where a tenant is in rent arrears, those situations will be reviewed after the crisis is over.

The process of applying for a rent reduction has been streamlined for those tenants in Rent-Geared-to-Income units, who have lost income as a result of COVID-19.

In instances where a tenant behaviour is threatening the life, health or safety of others, or putting tenants or staff in imminent danger, we ask that you complete a full management review and take all circumstances into consideration before deciding to proceed with eviction. This should include the

circumstance around the behaviour, risk to tenants and staff, as well as the increased restrictions on alternative housing and access to temporary shelters as a result of COVID-19.

This [COVID-19 Bulletin for Housing Providers](#) provides details on the temporary eviction moratorium and rent adjustments. We have also developed a new [poster](#) that should be posted at sites to notify tenants who may have lost employment income to call us to arrange for a rent adjustment.

On March 31, a notice was provided to Directly Managed tenants to help provide further information on BC Housing's rental policies that have been enacted in the pandemic response. Housing Providers can use this [tenant letter template](#) to communicate to their tenants regarding rent payments.

Key points from this notice include the following:

*While there is a temporary hold on evictions for non-payment of rent in order to ensure tenants have home security during the COVID-19 outbreak, **it is important to understand that rent in arrears will accrue and eventually payments will be due.***

*As a tenant in subsidized housing, **if your income has not changed, your rent is due in full** as usual on the first of the month. Please note the following:*

- *Rent increases: As your rent contribution is based on your income, the provincial moratorium on rent increases does not apply. Therefore, if your rent is changing due to a recently completed annual review, the newly calculated Tenant Rent Contribution will apply.*
- *Have **you lost employment** due to COVID-19? If some, or all, of your household income comes from employment and as a result of COVID-19, your employment income has stopped or decreased, contact your landlord/Housing Provider to **discuss if you are eligible for a rent reduction** or other solutions.*

## Rent Adjustment Procedures

Effective April 1, 2020, Rent-Geared-to-Income tenants, subsidized through an agreement with BC Housing, can apply for a rent re-calculation as a result of loss of employment income. Any tenant whose household income is in full, or in part, from employment can apply for a rent adjustment if they experience a reduction or loss of employment income as a result of COVID-19. The rent adjustment can be made for the next rent roll, no need for a minimum income decrease or proof that the decrease is permanent. Rent reduction can be processed for three months.

To help both tenants and providers practice social distancing and to streamline the process, the following will apply:

- No signature required on the Application for Rent Subsidy form. Print out form (paper or from Housing Connections database), write "COVID-19 adjustment" in the signature block.
- Income proof is waived, rent based on self-declaration for three months at a time, no proof required.
  - If still working, but hours have decreased, take self-declaration of new hours and hourly pay and estimate monthly income as per standard rent calculation rules.
  - If applying for the **Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)**, estimate entitlement based on \$2,000 monthly payments plus any other existing earnings.

- If resident declares CERB, enter \$2,000 per month as the income from CERB.
  - If CERB payment is **less than estimated**, the resident(s) can provide proof and a further adjustment can be made based on this.
- If applying for Employment Insurance (EI), estimate entitlement based on 55% of previous employment earnings plus any other existing earnings.
  - **EI Maximum benefit: \$573/week, or \$2483/month.** If 55% of income is greater than the maximum, enter the maximum as the income from EI. If 55% of income is less than the maximum, use 55% of income.
  - If the resident's actual payment from EI is **less than what is estimated**, the resident(s) can provide proof and a further adjustment can be made based on this.
- If actual income is less than our estimate, they can provide proof at a later date and a further adjustment can be processed.
- If applying for income assistance and household has no other income, the first month can be based on the minimum rent in order to provide time for MSDPR to process the application, then the second and third month should be the Flat Rent. Flat and Minimum Rent tables are available in the Rent Calculation section of <https://www.bchousing.org/projects-partners/non-profit-resources/resources-a-z>, or in the [Rent Calculation Guide](#).
- Forward the form to BC Housing for entry or follow the steps below if you use online rent calculation.
- Keep a copy in tenant file.
- For questions related to tenant rent calculation, please contact the Rent Desk at 604-439-4167.

## Housing Connections Entry

This section applies to BC Housing staff responsible for rent calculation, and to non-profit and co-op housing providers who enter their own rent calculation into the Housing Connections system.

Previously, BC Housing requested that providers track all adjustments related to COVID 19. That step has been eliminated through the creation of a new income source code in Housing Connections:

- New income source code: COVID-19.
- Select this income source **in all cases** when a signed Application for Rent Subsidy and income proof is not provided. In the “Note” field for that income source, enter one of the following;
  - “EI Estimate” when estimating Employment Insurance
  - “CERB” when estimating Canada Emergency Response Benefit
  - “Income Assistance – New” for the first month that residents apply for Income Assistance and are subject to the minimum rent
  - “Flat Rent” for months 2 and 3 of estimated Income Assistance
  - “Student” when carrying over student status
- In the comments section of Housing Connections, a comment type “COVID-19” has been created. Select this option when making comments related to this process.
- If EI, Income Assistance, or Student Status has been verified, use the appropriate income code.

### Rules for Entering COVID-19 Income Type

Only apply these rules if you are entering the relevant income under the COVID-19 income type:

- **If still working**, residents remain eligible for the employment allowance. If income is from employment, subtract \$200 from monthly employment income OR enter \$0 for income from employment if income is less than \$200.
- **Income Assistance – Calculating Flat Rates**: If recipient is in receipt of Income Assistance but you do not yet have proof, enter the following amounts under the COVID-19 income type. If you have proof, use the relevant “Income Assistance” income type and the Housing Connections system will do this for you. **Note**: Do not include full-time students over age 19 in the calculation of household size (use the household size without them).

### Three-Month Reviews

The preceding exceptions to the Annual Review and Rent Adjustment processes can be applied for three months at a time. Until otherwise noted, there is no limit to the number of three-month allowances that can be provided, but allowances after the first should not be granted until 15 days prior to the expiry of the existing allowance.

BC Housing will advise when circumstances have changed to a point where the standard Annual Review and Rent Adjustment processes outlined in the Rent Calculation Guide can be reimplemented. When this happens, residents will be required to submit a signed Application for Rent Subsidy and supporting proof of income and assets for the first month following their most recent three-month allowance.

To avoid hardship, one additional month at the existing Tenant Rent Contribution can be given if sufficient notice (15 days or more) cannot be provided to the resident.



# Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) Moratorium on Rent Increases

# Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) Moratorium on Rent Increases

Like the moratorium on financial evictions, the Residential Tenancy Branch has also issued a moratorium on rent increases during the COVID-19 crisis.

While the RTB is the authoritative source on the implications of the moratorium, readers should note that the moratorium does not apply to the Tenant Rent Contribution (TRC) of residents living in subsidized, Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) units. As such, increases to a resident's TRC should not be delayed based on the RTB moratorium.

- RGI residents who are financially impacted by the COVID-19 crisis may be eligible for a rent adjustment based on the processes outlined earlier in this document.
- **Low End of Market (LEM) units:** While the RTB's moratorium does not extend to RGI units, it does apply to residents residing in LEM units. In these scenarios, housing providers are advised to issue rent increases as per usual, but to not enact the higher rents until the moratorium has been lifted. This will prevent any further delay of the implementation of the market rent increase based on the standard notice period that is required.

Additional resources on this topic are available here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies/covid-19>





# Temporary Rental Supplement Program – Private Market Inquiries

# Temporary Rental Supplement Program – Private Market Inquiries

The Temporary Rental Supplement program, which will be managed by BC Housing and led by our Applicant Services team, will help households by offering up to \$500 a month towards their rent, building on federal and provincial financial supports already announced for British Columbians facing financial hardship.

The funds will support renters experiencing a loss of income by helping them pay their rent and will be paid directly to landlords on their behalf, to ensure landlords continue to receive rental income during the pandemic. Benefiting people with low to moderate incomes, this supplement will be available to renters who are facing financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, but do not qualify for existing rental assistance programs. Tenants in subsidized housing do not qualify for this program.

At this time, this is a three-month program. Details of the program and how British Columbians can apply are available at <https://www.bchousing.org/bctrs>. Applications opened on April 9, 2020.



# Supplies and Support



# Supplies and Support

## Resource Request Support

We are committed to assisting our housing providers who have had difficulties procuring supplies, meals and deep cleaning during the COVID-19 outbreak. BC Housing has centralized procurement for critical supplies needed by frontline providers, including gloves and cleaning products. BC Housing has launched an [Online Housing Partner Contact Form](#) that enables us to better coordinate and centralize information and sector requests based on need. This form is for sites that are supported by AHMA and BC Housing. If you have any questions about this form, please contact [Covid19NPSupport@bchousing.org](mailto:Covid19NPSupport@bchousing.org).

As much as possible, please continue to use your existing procurement channels. When completing the form, you will have the ability to specify the main reason for your contact. We will be monitoring inquiries submitted through this form and will respond as quickly as possible.

## Supply & Deep Cleaning Requests

BC Housing is doing our best to procure critical supplies needed by frontline workers, including personal protective equipment and cleaning products, for direct distribution to housing providers. To help reduce the risk of COVID-19, BC Housing is also working to identify professional cleaners who could be contracted to assist with deep cleaning. Please continue to use your existing suppliers and contractors whenever possible - BC Housing is focused on helping address and fill gaps in these areas. If you are submitting a request for supplies or deep cleaning, please be specific about the items that are required (i.e., hand soap and face masks) instead of requesting 'cleaning supplies' and 'PPEs'.

## Meal Requests

BC Housing is committed to assisting our housing partners in their work to ensure the most vulnerable populations are supported while we work together to slow the spread of COVID-19. The online contact form should be used to identify where there is a need for prepared meals. If you are submitting a request for meals, please let us know if meals are normally provided, and how many residents require meals. Further details about meal requests are available in an [FAQ on the BC Housing website](#).

## Information Updates - Suspected and Confirmed COVID-19 cases

Send updates to BC Housing regarding any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 in your building. Please ensure that you do not include any personal or identifying client information in your submission.

## Emergency Funding for Non-Profits and Co-ops

BC Housing is committed to supporting our non-profit partners with the cost pressures they incur as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The items we will support include:

- Supplies
- Vacancy Loss
- Reduction in Revenue

- Goods and Services that need to be purchased
- Food for tenants where necessary

This is by no means a comprehensive list and we will consider all other expenses and costs that are a direct result of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Finance department has created a code to be used for these costs and approvals will be considered on an organizational level. When seeking approval for COVID-19 related costs, please provide quotes, cost estimates or invoices and supporting documentation to your NPPM or SHA for consideration. A log will be maintained to track the COVID-19 costs from all providers.

BC Housing requires estimates from Directly Managed and Non-Profit sites of expenses expected to incur. This should include the type of goods or services for housing providers, the quantity of goods and services required and, of course, the estimated costs. Related costs include masks for housing provider staff, additional staffing, mileage claims, etc.

A new business unit, **17201 - COVID 19**, has been set up for you to easily code costs. Any costs you have related to COVID-19 response must be coded to

**17201.53931 – Pandemic Response – NP**

For non-profit/housing provider related costs (masks for housing provider staff, additional staffing requirements, etc.). At this time any receipts and invoices that have been charged to either of these cost centers should be sent to your NPPM or SHA.



# BC Housing COVID-19 Resources

# BC Housing COVID-19 Resources

**For COVID-19 updates, visit [bchousing.org/COVID-19](https://bchousing.org/COVID-19):**

[COVID-19: What is BC Housing doing?](#)

[Community Housing Sector Updates](#)

[Homeless Service Provider Updates](#)

[Service Updates & Notifications During COVID-19](#)

## **Community Self-Isolation Sites**

Find the [list of sites](#) secured in each region.

## **Community Housing Sector News and COVID-19 Updates**

[Subscribe](#) to BC Housing's eNewsletter.

## **Housing Provider Contact Form**

Use the [Housing Provider Contact Form](#) to request COVID-19 supplies, meal service for vulnerable tenants, enhanced cleaning services, and report any suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases in your sites.

**For Sector Communication, visit [bchousing.org/COVID-19/resources](https://bchousing.org/COVID-19/resources):**

[Archived COVID-19 Housing Sector eNewsletters](#)

[Bulletins - Housing & Service Providers](#)

[Covid-19 Factsheets](#)

## **Housing Provider Communications Materials**

Access COVID-19 [Rent Notices & Information](#) for tenants about rent adjustments.

## **Planning Templates & Guides - Housing & Service Providers**

Access [Housing & Service Provider planning templates and guides](#).

## **Posters - Housing & Service Providers**

Access the full list of [posters and notices](#) created by BC Housing.