




POLICY BRIEF

From data to action:

Policy implications of *Welfare in Canada, 2024*

Jennefer Laidley and Alexi White

September 2025



The full version of *Welfare in Canada, 2024* is available to download at <https://maytree.com/changing-systems/data-measuring/welfare-in-canada/>.

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About Maytree

Maytree is a Toronto-based human rights organization committed to advancing systemic solutions to poverty and strengthening civic communities. We believe the most enduring way to fix the systems that create poverty is to ensure that economic and social rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled for all people living in Canada. Through our work, we support non-profit organizations, their leaders, and people they work with.

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Introduction

Social assistance is intended to be a program of last resort to support people when they have few or no alternative sources of income. However, as the *Welfare in Canada* report series shows, the amount of social assistance benefits, even combined with other income supports, has long been far too inadequate to allow recipients a life of dignity. This trend continued in 2024 as total welfare incomes remained well below Canada's Official Poverty Line.¹

The adequacy of total welfare incomes is an important metric of Canada's commitment to human rights. Canada acceded to the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* in 1976 after securing the explicit support of all provinces. The Covenant requires all levels of government to use their maximum available resources to progressively realize the right to an adequate standard of living. Despite tremendous gains in per capita wealth in the ensuing 50 years, governments have made little progress in addressing the inadequacy of welfare incomes.

Although *Welfare in Canada* is focused on adequacy of welfare incomes, it is important to recognize that Canada's human rights record is also marred by persistent inequity. Disaggregated demographic data on social assistance beneficiaries is scarce, but we know that rates of poverty – and almost certainly of rates of reliance social assistance – are higher among several demographic groups because of historical and ongoing systems of oppression.²

Building on the data and analysis in *Welfare in Canada, 2024*, this brief takes a sharper look at some of the ways government policies perpetuate poverty and offers specific recommendations for change.

The full version of *Welfare in Canada, 2024*, including household definitions and the methodology used in our analysis, is available to download at <https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/>.

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- 1 More information about how we define and calculate total welfare income and about the Official Poverty Line (Statistics Canada's Market Basket Measure and Northern Market Basket Measure) can be found in *Welfare in Canada, 2024*: <https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/>.
 - 2 DiBellonia, S. & Oliveira, T. (2025) *No Progress, no plan: What the latest poverty numbers tell us*. Maytree. <https://maytree.com/publications/no-progress-no-plan-what-the-latest-poverty-numbers-tell-us/>.

Total welfare incomes in 2024 were deeply inadequate across Canada

Inadequate welfare incomes are an unfortunate reality from coast to coast to coast, though there are meaningful differences across jurisdictions within Canada. The comparative adequacy of a province's total welfare incomes depends somewhat on which household is considered and how one measures adequacy. In this brief, we compare across jurisdictions by looking at the size of the gap between the total welfare incomes of *Welfare in Canada* example households and the Official Poverty Line in each jurisdiction.

Roughly speaking, when looking across all the households we track, Prince Edward Island stands out among the provinces as having the most adequate incomes. Among the territories, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon similarly stand out.

Quebec shows more adequate incomes, particularly for families with children and unattached singles considered employable; however, this primarily applies only to the small percentage of households who receive benefits through the province's Aim for Employment or Manpower Training programs (more on this below).

Conversely, Nova Scotia and Ontario stand out for the comparative inadequacy of incomes across households. The inadequacy of welfare incomes in Nunavut is partly explained by *Welfare in Canada* methodology (see footnote 4).

Figures 1 and 2 summarize the adequacy of total welfare incomes for the two unattached single households modelled in *Welfare in Canada* across all thirteen provinces and territories. We are highlighting these households because single individuals make up most social assistance cases across Canada,³ and this group experiences a higher poverty rate than households with children.⁴ The data is presented in order of least to most adequate income by jurisdiction.

Household: Unattached single considered employable

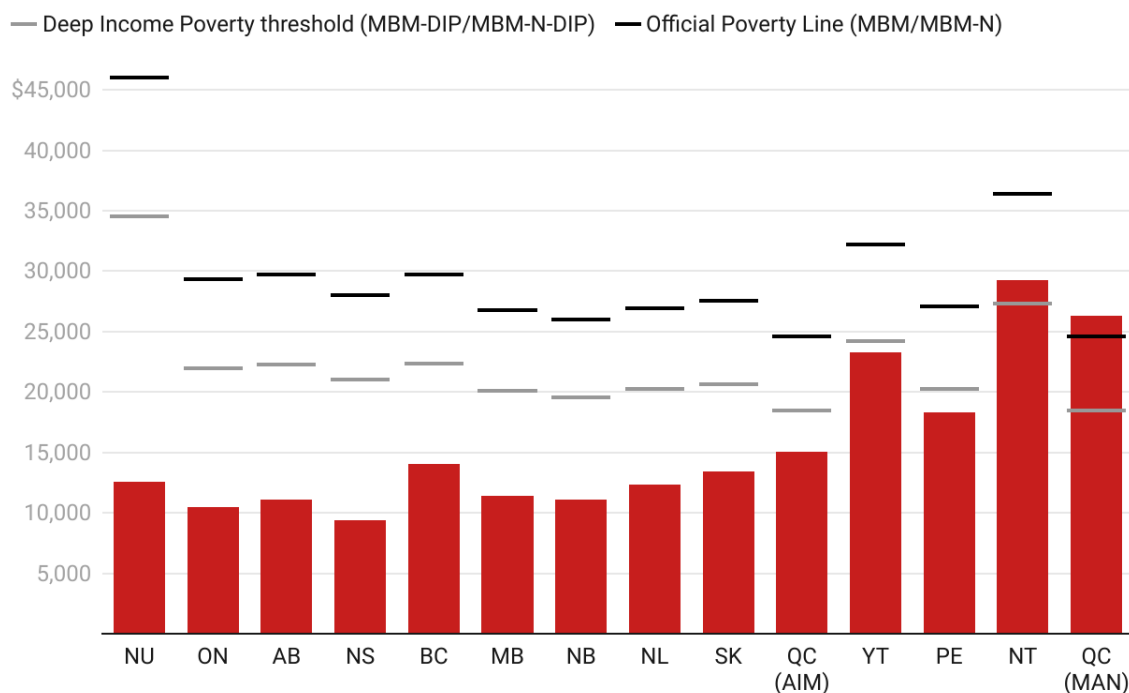
Unattached single considered employable households had the least adequate total welfare incomes of the four example household types analyzed in the *Welfare in Canada* report. Across the country, adequacy for this household ranged from 27

3 Oliveira, T. (2025). *Social Assistance Summaries, 2024*. Maytree. https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Social_Assistance_Summaries_2024.pdf.

4 DiBellonia, S. & Oliveira, T. (2025) *No Progress, no plan: What the latest poverty numbers tell us*. Maytree. <https://maytree.com/publications/no-progress-no-plan-what-the-latest-poverty-numbers-tell-us/>.

to 107 per cent of the Official Poverty Line, depending on province or territory of residence.

Figure 1: Adequacy of total welfare incomes for unattached single considered employable households, 2024, by distance to the Official Poverty Line



Note: AIM refers to Quebec's Aim for Employment program. MAN refers to Quebec's Manpower Training measure.

As shown at the left in Figure 1, the unattached single considered employable households with the least adequate total welfare incomes were in Nunavut,⁵ Ontario, Alberta, and Nova Scotia. In each of these jurisdictions, this household had a total welfare income that was far less than 50 per cent of the Official Poverty Line. Put another way, these households experienced a depth of poverty of over \$18,000.

In the middle of the pack are many jurisdictions where total welfare incomes for this household were well below the Official Poverty Line. Next, in the Yukon and

5 The very low relative incomes in Nunavut are partially explained by the fact that most social assistance recipients have very low shelter costs. This is because the majority of households receiving social assistance in Nunavut live in public housing, which is deeply subsidized by the territorial government. For more information, see the Nunavut section of *Welfare in Canada, 2024*: <https://maytree.com/changing-systems/data-measuring/welfare-in-canada/nunavut/>. See also the Methodology section for information about the MBM-N for Nunavut: <https://maytree.com/changing-systems/data-measuring/welfare-in-canada/methodology/>.

Prince Edward Island, total welfare incomes begin to approach the Deep Income Poverty threshold, which is 75 per cent of the poverty line.

At the right in Figure 1, the Northwest Territories is one of only two jurisdictions where total welfare incomes for this household surpass the Deep Income Poverty threshold. Finally, the only unattached single considered employable household with a welfare income above the Official Poverty Line in 2024 was the household in Quebec receiving benefits through the Manpower Training measure (MAN), which is a stream under the Social Assistance Aim for Employment (AIM) program.⁶ While this is notable, only about 2 per cent of the Social Assistance caseload in Quebec receives AIM, and even fewer receive the MAN stream under AIM.⁷ Thus, in the case of this specific household type, readers should be cautious in comparing Quebec to other jurisdictions.

Household: Unattached single with a disability

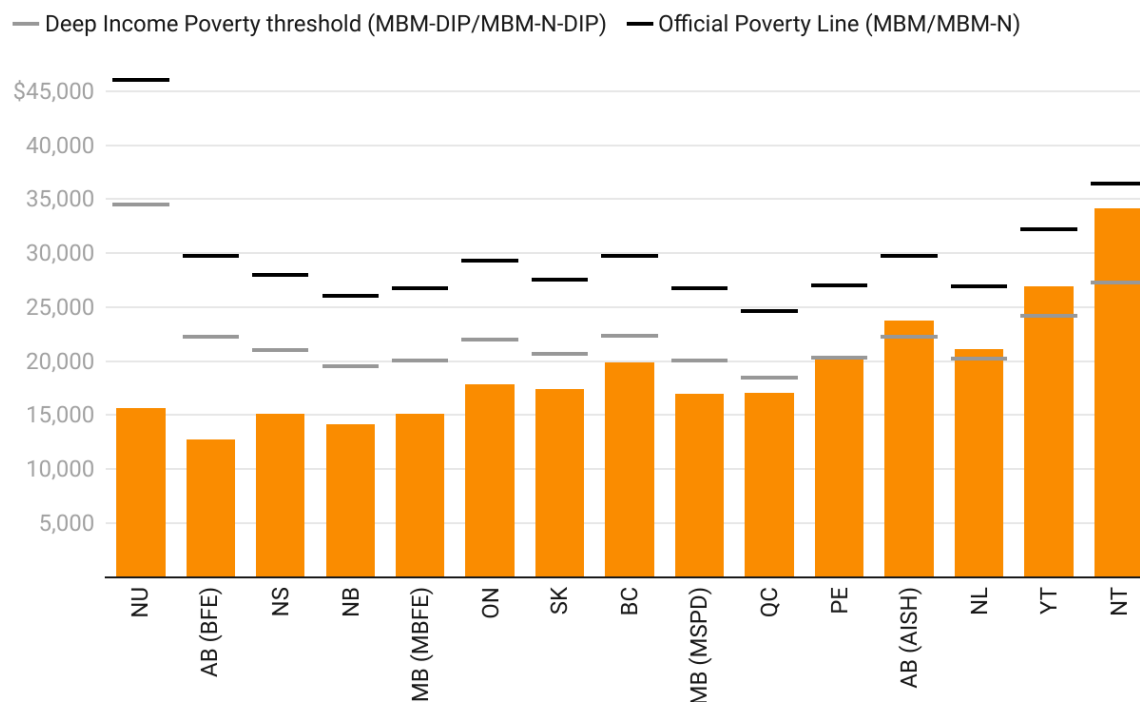
While far from acceptable, unattached single with a disability households generally have incomes that are more adequate than those of unattached single considered employable households, though it should be noted that the Official Poverty Line and Deep Income Poverty threshold do not account for the higher cost of living faced by persons with disabilities.

All thirteen of the unattached single with a disability households had total welfare incomes below the Official Poverty Line in 2024, and ten had welfare incomes below the Deep Income Poverty threshold. Across the country, adequacy for this household ranged between 34 and 94 per cent of the poverty line, depending on province or territory of residence.

6 Refer to the Quebec section of the *Welfare in Canada* report for further information about the Manpower Training measure: <https://maytree.com/changing-systems/data-measuring/welfare-in-canada/quebec/>.

7 The number of recipients of AIM is low because the program is available to new recipients of Social Assistance for one to two years only before they are moved to the Social Assistance program. See: Oliveira, T. (March 2025). *Social Assistance Summaries*, 2024. Maytree. <https://maytree.com/changing-systems/data-measuring/social-assistance-summaries/>.

Figure 2: Adequacy of total welfare incomes for unattached single with a disability households, 2024, by distance to the Official Poverty Line



Note: BFE refers to the Barriers to Full Employment category of Alberta's Income Support program. AISH refers to Alberta's Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program. MBFE refers to the Medical Barriers to Full Employment category of Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance program. MSPD refers to the Manitoba Supports for Persons with Disabilities program.

Starting on the left in Figure 2, the least adequate welfare incomes were in Nunavut⁸ at 34 per cent, Alberta (for the household receiving benefits through the Barriers to Full Employment program) at 43 per cent, and Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, both at 54 per cent.

The most adequate welfare incomes, as shown on the right in Figure 2, were for the households in the Northwest Territories at 94 per cent of the Official Poverty Line, the Yukon at 84 per cent, and Newfoundland and Labrador at 78 per cent.

Households with children

Households with children fared better than unattached singles, primarily because of the addition of child benefits to their total welfare incomes, but these households still lived below the Official Poverty Line in all but one jurisdiction in Canada.

⁸ See footnote 4.

Starting with single parent with one child households, all thirteen had total welfare incomes below the Official Poverty Line in 2024, and nine had welfare incomes below the Deep Income Poverty threshold. The three least adequate welfare incomes were in Nunavut⁹ at 35 per cent of the Official Poverty Line, Nova Scotia at 57 per cent, and Ontario at 58 per cent. The three most adequate were in the Yukon at 96 per cent, Prince Edward Island at 84 per cent, and Quebec at 79 per cent.

Of the couple with two children households, all but one had total welfare incomes below the Official Poverty Line in 2024. The least adequate welfare incomes were for the households in Nunavut¹⁰ at 42 per cent of the poverty line, Ontario at 60 per cent, and Nova Scotia at 63 per cent.

To its credit, the Yukon raised the total welfare income of this household to 100 per cent of the Official Poverty Line. This milestone was first reached in 2020, after which this household's total welfare income dropped back down below 100 per cent. The adequacy levels in Quebec and Prince Edward Island were also above 90 per cent in 2024.

Overall, although a few jurisdictions stand out for the relative adequacy of their total welfare incomes, deep poverty remains the norm across all household types we track. While we encourage each jurisdiction to look to their more adequate peers for policy inspiration, the sad truth is that no province or territory deserves praise for its record.

Geographic and jurisdictional disparities

As the analysis above shows, where you live largely determines the adequacy of your total welfare income. Depending on the province or territory of a household's residence, adequacy ranged from less than 35 per cent to more than 100 per cent of the poverty line in 2024. If where you live determines how adequate your income is, we don't have a safety net in Canada. We have a postal code lottery.

Geographic disparities are compounded by federal policies. In 2024, unattached singles received between 1.5 and 10.8 per cent of their total welfare incomes from federal sources, depending on the jurisdiction; households with children received between 19 and 43 per cent from federal sources.¹¹ These numbers reveal another disparity: thanks to federal child benefits, households with children receive more adequate total welfare incomes than households made up of single unattached adults.

9 See footnote 4.

10 See footnote 4.

11 See pages 33-34. Laidley, J. and Oliveira, T. 2025. *Welfare in Canada, 2024*. Maytree.

Canada's social safety net does not support everyone equally, and rectifying this situation should be a national priority. A much higher level of federal investment – particularly for single unattached adults – would help to ensure all households in all provinces and territories can receive enough total welfare income to live a life of dignity.

Improvements to provincial / territorial income were deeply uneven

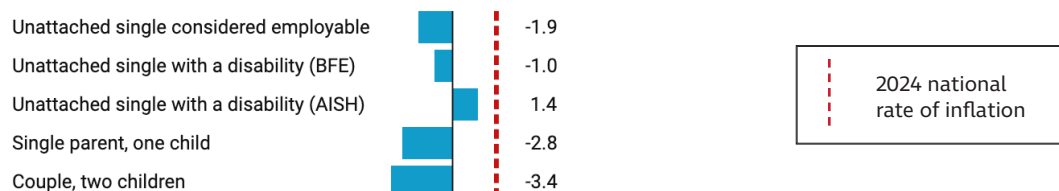
All provinces and territories have yet to fulfill the human right to an adequate standard of living for everyone who relies on social assistance. Under international human rights law, all governments are required to take progressive steps, up to the maximum resources available to them, to rectify this. But not all jurisdictions are progressing as much as others.

Figure 3 shows the percentage change in income from provincial or territorial sources between 2023 and 2024 for every household in *Welfare in Canada*. Provincial or territorial sources include basic and additional social assistance benefits and jurisdictional tax credits or benefits.

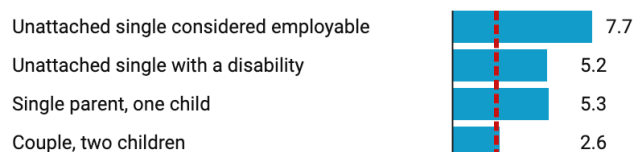
The national rate of inflation in 2024 was 2.4 per cent, which is indicated by the red line in Figure 3. Total welfare incomes must have increased by more than this amount for overall adequacy to have improved.

Figure 3: Percentage change in total welfare incomes from provincial or territorial sources only, 2023-2024, compared to national CPI of 2.4 per cent

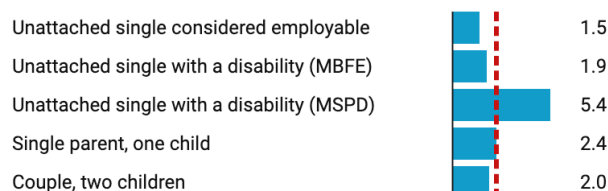
Alberta



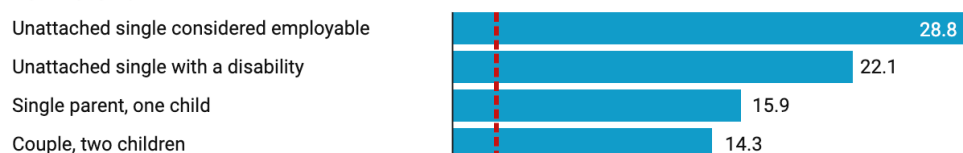
British Columbia



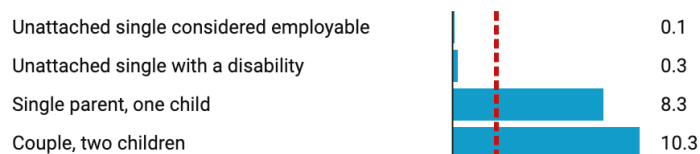
Manitoba



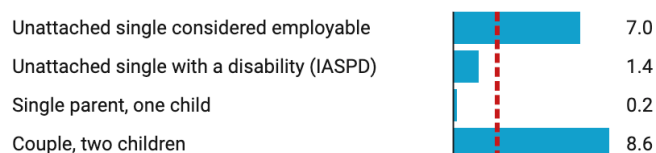
New Brunswick



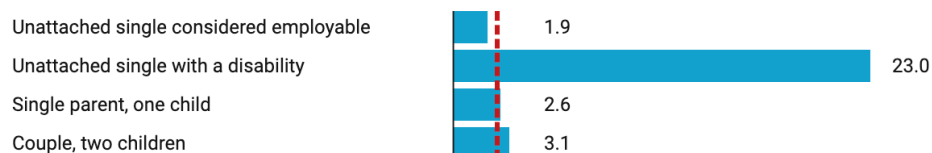
Newfoundland



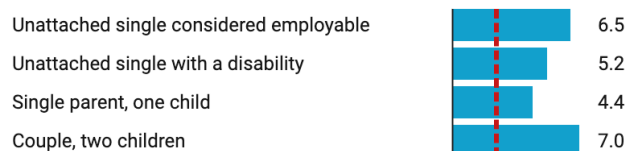
Northwest Territories



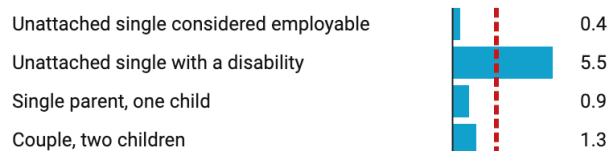
Nova Scotia



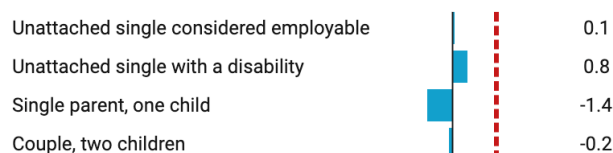
Nunavut



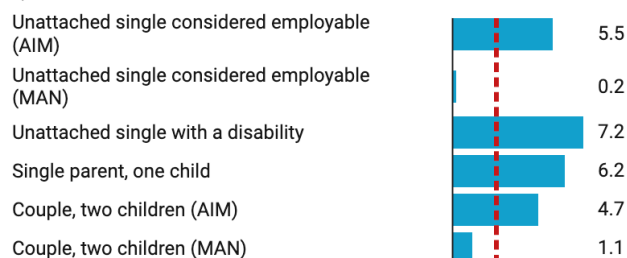
Ontario



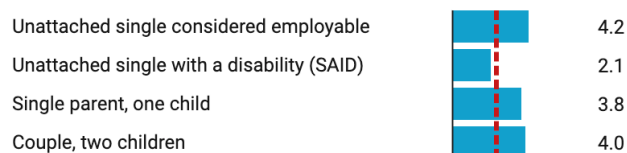
Prince Edward Island



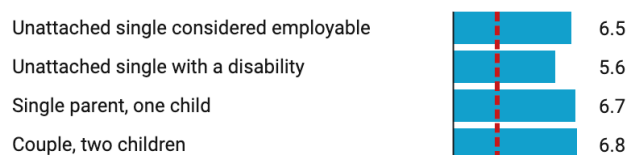
Quebec



Saskatchewan



Yukon



The good news is that, between 2023 and 2024, 89 per cent of the example households we track saw an increase in the portion of their total welfare incomes received from provincial and territorial sources. Households in two provinces stand out as having experienced the highest increases in income between 2023 and 2024:

- New Brunswick saw the largest increase in total welfare incomes thanks to a new Household Supplement of \$200 a month.
- Nova Scotia introduced a new Disability Supplement of \$308 a month that has greatly benefited the unattached single with a disability household.

Unfortunately, while 57 per cent of households saw an income increase that was at or above the rate of inflation, 32 per cent saw increases that were below that rate – meaning that any gains were wiped out by inflation. An example is:

- In Ontario, all households except the unattached single with a disability were worse off after inflation than in the previous year thanks to a continued freeze on Ontario Works benefits.

Even worse, however, 11 per cent of households saw actual declines in their incomes from provincial or territorial sources between 2023 and 2024. Some provinces stand out:

- In Alberta, the sunsetting of temporary income supports resulted in incomes from these sources declining for all households except the unattached single with a disability receiving AISH benefits.
- In Prince Edward Island, incomes declined for both households with children.

While there was some progress between 2023 and 2024, it is unacceptable that 40 per cent of households were worse off after accounting for inflation. When welfare incomes are already so low and so inadequate, even small price increases can cause families to go hungry or lose their homes.

Shelter benefits were insufficient to cover housing costs in 2024

As Canada's housing crisis continues and affordable housing remains out of reach for many, governments are almost exclusively focused on increasing housing supply as the remedy. The other side of the equation, however, is the amount of income households have at their disposal to pay for housing.¹²

Welfare in Canada includes data about the shelter-related benefits that are available from provincial and territorial social assistance programs. What we do not know, however, is the actual cost of shelter paid by social assistance recipients renting in the private market in different parts of the country.

A recent dataset released by Statistics Canada brings us closer to having this information. For the first time, public data is available about average asking prices for different rental unit types in various census metropolitan areas (CMAs), ranging from a single room to a two-bedroom apartment.¹³ While asking rents are not the same as rents paid, this data allows for more accurate comparisons between the actual cost of renting in the private market and the amount of shelter benefits available through social assistance programs.

Figure 4 shows the amount of either the maximum monthly shelter benefit or maximum monthly combined benefit available from social assistance programs to *Welfare in Canada*'s unattached single considered employable household in nine CMAs, and the average monthly asking price for a single room there. The CMA data is not available for smaller urban centres and thus we are unable to offer the comparisons for Prince Edward Island and the territories. In six jurisdictions, a specific benefit is provided for shelter costs while in the other three, a monthly combined benefit is provided for all costs. We are comparing benefits with the price of a room because it represents the lowest end of the rental market, which is often where people receiving social assistance are forced to live by virtue of their very low total incomes.

12 For more on the role of income security as housing policy, see: DiBellonia, S. & White, A. (2025). *Why income support is good housing policy: A new case for a permanent housing benefit in Canada*. Maytree. <https://maytree.com/publications/why-income-support-is-good-housing-policy-a-new-case-for-a-permanent-housing-benefit-in-canada/>.

13 Statistics Canada. Table 46-10-0092-01. Asking rent prices, by rental unit type and number of bedrooms, experimental estimates. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=4610009201>.

Figure 4: Comparison of asking prices for a room versus monthly shelter or combined benefits for an unattached single considered employable, by CMA, 2024

Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)	Average of quarterly asking prices for a room	Social Assistance		Difference
		Maximum monthly shelter benefit	Maximum monthly combined benefit	
Calgary	\$780	\$365	-	-\$415
Vancouver	\$1,158	\$500	-	-\$658
Winnipeg	\$575	\$638	-	\$63
Moncton	\$668	-	\$800	\$133
St. John's	\$650	\$299	-	-\$351
Halifax	\$860	-	\$704	-\$156
Toronto	\$860	\$390	-	-\$470
Montreal	\$713	-	\$829	\$116
Saskatoon	\$663	\$640	-	-\$23

In five of the six jurisdictions where a separate shelter benefit is provided, the amount of that benefit is not sufficient to pay for the asking price of a room; only in Winnipeg is the Manitoba shelter benefit for an unattached single considered employable enough to pay for this form of housing.

In the three jurisdictions where social assistance benefits are delivered in a single monthly combined amount, one is not sufficient to pay for a room whereas two would leave a small amount of money left over. In Halifax, an unattached single wouldn't have received enough money from their entire monthly benefit amount to pay for an average room. In Moncton and Montreal¹⁴ they would have been left with only a small amount to cover all their other monthly needs – \$133 in Moncton and \$116 in Montreal.

As this analysis shows, in most major metropolitan areas in Canada, where most people live, shelter benefits – and, often, entire monthly benefit amounts – provided by social assistance programs are not nearly enough to cover the cost of renting even an average room, representing the very low end of the rental market, let alone an apartment that would better suit a household's needs and provide them with dignity.

¹⁴ In Montreal, the combined benefit reflects the entire monthly amount available to an unattached single considered employable who does not receive employment-related benefits from the Aim for Employment or Manpower Training program streams. While we include those benefits in our *Welfare in Canada* analysis of total welfare incomes, this calculation better reflects the reality for more unattached single households in Quebec.

Unhoused households are doubly disadvantaged

For the first time this year, *Welfare in Canada* includes information about the amount of money available to households who are eligible for social assistance but who are effectively “street homeless” – they are, for example, sleeping in a car, an encampment, or a shelter.¹⁵ To look at this issue, we reviewed every jurisdiction’s social assistance regulations to see how eligibility for a shelter benefit – that is, the amount of money available to pay for rent, a mortgage, or other shelter-related costs – is determined.

In the vast majority of jurisdictions, only those households who incur a cost for shelter are entitled to a benefit that would allow them to pay for that cost. This is because of the “needs-based” orientation of most social assistance programs, wherein if you have a “need,” then you can receive a benefit to address it. In other words, in most instances, only households who have shelter costs – such as rent, mortgage payments, utilities, or insurance – are entitled to receive a shelter benefit.

But what happens to households who don’t have those costs because they are unhoused? In short, typically, they receive no benefits to help pay for shelter. This leaves them with even less money each month than they would have received from already very low monthly social assistance benefits.

Figure 5 below shows the amounts of total monthly base social assistance benefits provided by each jurisdiction to an unattached single person who is considered employable when they are housed, and the amounts provided when they are unhoused. “Base benefits” include those provided for basic needs like food and clothing as well as for shelter, which here means rent or a mortgage and associated costs like utilities. “Housed” means they are paying for their shelter, and “unhoused” means they are not.

Note that this analysis only includes automatic base monthly payments made directly to the housed or unhoused household; it does not include any supports provided through the shelter system or benefits provided on a discretionary basis, which would require a special request or application. It also does not include discretionary benefits that would help unhoused households get into housing, such as a damage deposit on a new apartment. Many of these kinds of supports and

15 See “Shelter benefits for unhoused households” in *Welfare in Canada, 2024*: <https://maytree.com/changing-systems/data-measuring/welfare-in-canada/shelter-benefits-for-unhoused-households/>.

benefits are available in various jurisdictions, but they are not universally available either within a jurisdiction or across the country.

Figure 5: Difference in total base monthly social assistance benefits for an unattached single considered employable who is housed (rent or mortgage) vs unhoused, 2024

	Housed	Unhoused	\$ difference	% difference
AB	\$824	\$459	-\$365	-44%
BC	\$1,060	\$635	-\$425	-40%
MB	\$883	\$245	-\$638	-72%
NB	\$860	\$660	-\$200	-23%
NL	\$931	\$561	-\$370	-40%
NT	\$2,453	\$573	-\$1,880	-77%
NS	\$704	\$403	-\$301	-43%
NU	\$1,003	\$914	-\$89	-9%
ON	\$733	\$343	-\$390	-53%
PE	\$1,452	\$577	-\$875	-60%
QC	\$829	\$829	\$0	0%
SK	\$1,005	\$355	-\$650	-65%
YT	\$1,725	\$495	-\$1,229	-71%


This analysis reveals two key issues:

First, most unhoused single adults receive only a fraction of the total amount of basic benefits available to those who are housed, which is already very meagre. In most instances, they receive 23 to 77 per cent less than they would if they were housed. In only two cases – Nunavut and Quebec – is the difference minimal to non-existent.

This leads to the second issue, which is that the needs-based orientation of most social assistance programs disadvantages those who are unhoused. In a perverse twist, the more needy you are in real terms, the more likely you are to not receive money that would help you live a more healthy, dignified life.

As noted in a recent Maytree opinion, “this decision to provide a person with so little support, and to take support away when they don’t have stable housing, does not make sense in a person’s life. It doesn’t respond to a person’s circumstances or needs. It doesn’t function to bolster their well-being or stop them from falling further into poverty. Instead, it responds to a person who has lost their home by making their life even harder.”¹⁶

16 Broadbent, A. & MacIsaac, E. (2024). “The perverse logic of social assistance.” Maytree. <https://maytree.com/publications/the-perverse-logic-of-social-assistance/>.



Social assistance programs should not be designed to “nickel-and-dime” people who are already living in difficult circumstances. They should be designed to provide enough funds to live a dignified life with an adequate standard of living that meets Canada’s human rights commitments.

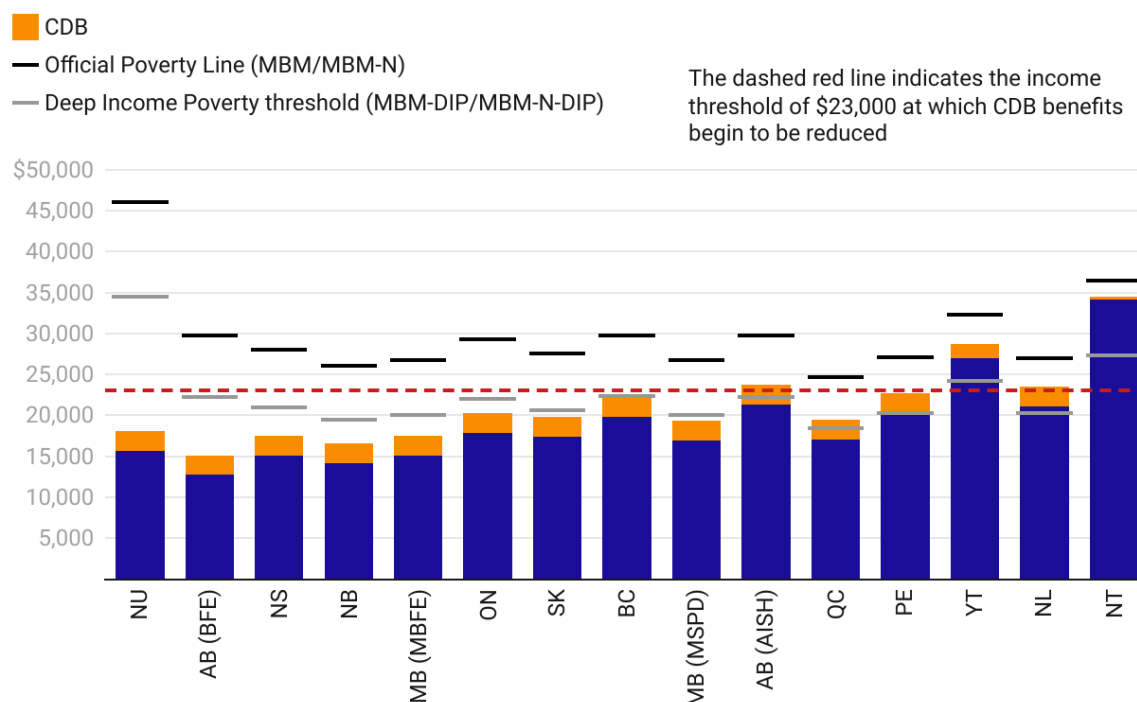
The Canada Disability Benefit will not lift social assistance recipients with disabilities out of poverty

Monthly payments of the new Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) began in July 2025. The CDB will provide a maximum of \$2,400 a year to eligible recipients. The federal government’s original announcement of the creation of the CDB brought hope that it would lift a significant proportion of people with disabilities out of poverty. For several reasons, this is now unlikely.

The benefit amount is too low

The figure below simulates the effect of the CDB on the adequacy of the total welfare income in 2024 of an unattached single with a disability household in all 13 jurisdictions, sorting them from left to right by distance to the poverty line. It imagines a 2024 CDB calculated using total social assistance income for 2024. (In fact, CDB benefits are based on an individual’s Adjusted Family Net Income from the prior tax year.)

Figure 6: Simulated effect of eligibility for the Canada Disability Benefit on the total welfare income of the unattached single with a disability household, 2024



Note: The total welfare income of the household receiving benefits through Alberta's Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program has been decreased by \$2,400 to reflect the program's policy of reducing benefits by a dollar for each dollar of CDB received.

At its current maximum benefit amount, the CDB would not lift any of our example households out of poverty. However, the CDB does have the potential to reduce the depth of poverty of these households by bringing welfare incomes closer to the Official Poverty Line.

The income threshold is too low

The CDB has an annual income threshold of \$23,000 for single adults and \$32,500 for couples, after which the benefit is reduced. In most jurisdictions, the total welfare income of the unattached single with a disability household is well below \$23,000, so those eligible for the CDB would receive the maximum benefit.

However, the example household in the Yukon, where social assistance benefits total \$26,086, would receive only \$1,782.80 from the CDB because their income exceeds the \$23,000 threshold. The household in the Northwest Territories, where social assistance benefits total \$33,251, would receive only \$349.80 from the CDB.

If the federal government were to raise the income threshold to a level where all social assistance recipients in Canada received the maximum CDB, the unattached single with a disability household in the Northwest Territories would be lifted out of poverty.

Not all households in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories who receive the CDB would find themselves in the situation modelled here. For example, in both territories, social assistance recipients living in subsidized housing receive less in social assistance benefits and may receive more from the CDB as a result.

According to data provided by the territorial governments, approximately 14 per cent of all social assistance households in the Yukon lived in Yukon Housing Corporation housing on average each month in 2024. In the Northwest Territories, of those with permanent or long-term disabilities receiving Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities, 38 per cent live in some form of subsidized housing.

From this data, we can still conclude that most unattached single with a disability households in the Yukon and in the Northwest Territories who qualify for the CDB will not receive the full benefit. Moreover, the current design of the benefit gives preferential treatment to recipients who have access to subsidized housing.

Alberta is clawing back the CDB

Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has opted to claw back social assistance benefits from households that receive the CDB. As a result, those receiving benefits through Alberta's Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program will be no better off after receiving the CDB because their social assistance benefits will be reduced dollar for dollar.

In promoting the CDB, the federal government expressed a long-term aspiration to see “the combined amount of federal and provincial or territorial income supports for persons with disabilities grow to the level of Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), to fundamentally address the rates of poverty experienced by persons with disabilities.”¹⁷ This statement has unfortunately allowed the Alberta government to justify its clawback on the grounds that the AISH program already provides a maximum monthly allowance that is higher than the combined support provided through OAS and GIS, and that therefore the federal government's target has been reached.

17 Government of Canada. (2024). Budget 2024: Fairness for every generation. Page 107. <https://www.budget.canada.ca/2024/report-rapport/budget-2024.pdf>.

The federal government was wrong to hold up seniors' benefits as the exemplar for the CDB, rather than insisting on eliminating poverty among people with disabilities in Canada. And it is wrong for the Alberta government to claw back the CDB when people receiving AISH live in poverty. It should reverse this policy immediately.

Eligibility is overly restrictive

Eligibility for the CDB is tied to receipt of the Disability Tax Credit certificate, which uses a narrow definition of disability. Notably, while the government projects that 600,000 people will receive the CDB, there are many more people with disabilities in Canada who may require support. Close to 750,000 households receiving social assistance in Canada include at least one person with a disability, and about 919,000 working-age people with disabilities in Canada lived in poverty in 2023.¹⁸

The definition of disability used in the *Canada Disability Benefit Act* is much more inclusive of the experience of disability in Canada, and it would be more appropriate for use in determining eligibility for the CDB.

To its credit, the federal Liberal platform included a commitment to review and reform the notoriously difficult DTC application process and to consider expanding the eligibility criteria. This process should begin immediately, and we urge the government to learn from the failures of the CDB development process and to truly embrace a “nothing about us without us” approach.

There are too many barriers to accessing the CDB

Accessing the CDB requires a three-step process:

1. Qualify for the Disability Tax Credit certificate;
2. File a tax return; and
3. Apply for the benefit through Service Canada.

The third step only introduces an unnecessary barrier. Instead, the CDB should be delivered automatically through the tax system, just as the Canada Child Benefit or Canada Workers Benefit are. Shifting the CDB from a Service Canada benefit to a tax-delivered benefit would also simplify the interactions between the dozens of programs on which people with disabilities rely, and it would make provincial or territorial clawbacks of the CDB less likely in the future.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0090-01. Poverty and low-income statistics by disability status. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110009001>.

Recommendations

Poverty is not inevitable. It is a policy choice made by governments. Drawing on the findings of the *Welfare in Canada, 2024* report, we offer the following recommendations to address poverty and guarantee the human right to an adequate standard of living.

Invest in the adequacy of welfare incomes

1. Provinces and territories should invest in higher social assistance benefits and tax-delivered income supports.

The inadequacy of total welfare incomes in 2024 is the continuation of a decades-long trend. While some jurisdictions have invested in higher benefits, people receiving social assistance continued to live in poverty – usually deep poverty – everywhere in Canada.

Provinces and territories have primary responsibility for social assistance. They must all do more to rapidly and significantly increase benefit and tax credit amounts such that households receiving social assistance can live with dignity.

2. Governments at all levels should index all social assistance benefits and tax-delivered benefits or credits to inflation where they don't already do so.

Indexing all existing benefits to inflation is crucial to protect households receiving social assistance from increasing costs of living by ensuring that the value of the benefits and credits they receive does not erode over time. Too many jurisdictions continue to avoid this most basic responsibility.

3. The federal government should lead by example through new investment in targeted income supports. To address arbitrary disparities between jurisdictions, the federal government should also convene a national conversation about how to guarantee adequate welfare incomes from coast to coast to coast.

Supports from the federal government have long made up only a very small proportion of total welfare incomes.¹⁹ To have any hope of achieving Canada's poverty reduction goals and to meet our international human rights obligations, the federal government must contribute more to the incomes of households receiving social assistance, particularly those of unattached single adults.

19 See pages 35-36 in Laidley, J. and Oliveira, T. 2025. *Welfare in Canada, 2024*. Maytree: Toronto.

One way would be to increase the Canada Social Transfer to assist provinces and territories in raising social assistance rates. Another is to invest in refundable tax credits as a proven and effective approach to alleviating poverty. The federal government should look to enhance existing benefits, including the Canada Workers Benefit, Canada Disability Benefit, and Canada Child Benefit, as well as introduce new tools such as the proposed Groceries and Essentials Benefit.²⁰

Regardless of the specific policy levers that are selected, Canada is in desperate need of a joint federal, provincial and territorial plan to achieve adequate welfare incomes and an end to poverty. It's time for the federal government to step up and lead this effort.

Fix shelter benefits so they keep families housed

4. Increase shelter benefits for all households so they reflect the actual cost of housing.

Taken as a whole, social assistance programs across the country represent the single largest housing program in Canada for non-seniors.²¹ When the cost of renting a room is higher than social assistance shelter benefits – and often higher than total welfare incomes – it's not hard to see why homelessness across Canada is on the rise.

Access to stable, secure, affordable housing is critical to health and well-being. But too often, households receiving social assistance are denied that access by virtue of the very low benefit amounts provided for shelter. Jurisdictions across the country should increase shelter benefits to levels that more closely align with actual rents being charged, ensuring that benefit amounts are enough to provide for adequate shelter for a household's needs, not just shelter at the lowest end of the housing market.

5. Provide shelter benefits to people who are unhoused.

People who have lost their housing and are living in encampments or shelters are doubly disadvantaged by the “needs-based” orientation of social assistance

20 Affordability Action Council. (2023). *Groceries and Essentials Benefit: Helping people with low incomes afford everyday necessities*. Institute for Research on Public Policy. <https://irpp.org/research-studies/groceries-and-essentials-benefit/>.

21 DiBellonia, S. & White, A. (2025). *Why income support is good housing policy: A new case for a permanent housing benefit in Canada*. Maytree. <https://maytree.com/publications/why-income-support-is-good-housing-policy-a-new-case-for-a-permanent-housing-benefit-in-canada/>.

programs. They are left with even less than the already inadequate amounts of monthly income provided by most social assistance programs across the country.

Jurisdictions need to consider the very real impact of the way their systems work, on both the households experiencing homelessness and on communities. At the very least, they should provide households who are unhoused with some form of regular, monthly shelter benefit to recognize their need for additional support. A more lasting solution would be to find ways to reorient the way in which benefits are provided, by moving away from “needs-based” programs to those that are designed to recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living. Coupling better income supports with more deeply affordable housing units is the real answer to the increasing challenge of homelessness in communities across Canada.

Fix the Canada Disability Benefit

6. Improve the design of the benefit to address unnecessary barriers and unintended consequences.

The CDB was launched with several significant flaws that should be rectified as soon as possible, the most important being that the maximum benefit is far too low to address the unconscionable depth of disability poverty in Canada.

Beyond this, we have shown how the income threshold is preventing some social assistance recipients from receiving the full benefit even though they live in poverty. Other concerns include overly restrictive eligibility criteria and an unnecessarily burdensome application process.

The federal government should be applauded for introducing the CDB, but the work is far from done.

7. End clawbacks of the CDB.

Alberta’s decision to reduce social assistance for CDB recipients undermines the foundation of this new benefit and impedes efforts to increase the size of the benefit over time. This decision must be reversed. The federal government bears some responsibility for the situation because of the design and messaging around the CDB. It should take all actions at its disposal – including redesigning the CDB as a tax-delivered benefit – to help end Alberta’s clawback.



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