

# Our Voices Together

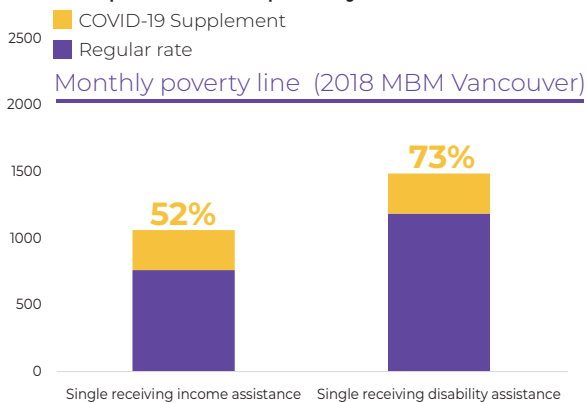
We asked people receiving BC income and disability assistance to share how the \$300 supplement has impacted them, and what difference a permanent increase would make. As of June 21, 285 individuals have shared their stories. While community members have told us that the \$300 has helped, it is very much not enough. **Income and disability rates need to be raised to at least the poverty line**, as defined by the MBM, indexed to inflation. **Our stories matter.**



285 people answered 3 open-ended questions describing 16 areas in their lives most impacted by lack of resources and most improved by the \$300 increase:

- **Healthy and sufficient food** (69%)
- **Rent** (24%)  
safe and stable housing
- **Bills for utility costs** (21%)  
hydro, phone etc.
- **Medical costs** (20%)  
supplements, non-covered prescriptions, treatments, dental, assistive equipment etc
- **Basic personal necessities** (19%)  
clothing, hygiene products, basic household items
- **Anxiety/stress/mental health** (18%)
- **Physical wellness** (8%)  
reduction of pain and sickness
- **Transportation** (7%)
- **Social interaction** (6%)  
connecting to family & friends
- **Savings/Emergency costs** (6%)
- **Not being able to eat consistently all month** (6%)
- **Debt** (6%)
- **Providing for children** (4%)
- **Rising costs/inflation** (4%)
- **Schooling/Training/Employment-Seeking** (3%)
- **Repair or replacement of broken items** (2%)


## Total BC income and disability incomes compared to the poverty line



*I could **afford medicine/supplements that aren't covered, specialty food and household supplies.** It is an amount that is closer to recognizing that disabled people have as much value as non disabled people. Disabled people need more resources than abled people. Not less! This leads to less feelings of hopelessness and despair.*

## A closer look at specific questions

**72%**  of respondents said that the \$300 increase helped purchase healthy and sufficient food.

**25%**  of respondents said they struggled with medical costs before the increase.

**39%**  of respondents said that they struggled with rent and housing before the increase.

*It helps mentally and physically. To finally have enough groceries. Not an abundance but enough. **Cost of groceries has increased since COVID so we all will have even less than before COVID without the \$300. It's still not enough as I pay 90% of my disability check to rent. Please please make the \$300 supplement permanent!***

**The 300toLive Campaign is a coalition of disabled and neurodivergent people in B.C., fighting for our right to survive during the pandemic and afterwards.**

## **“I wish life was more than the constant stress of survival”: Living on Assistance in B.C.**

Since mid-May 2020, the 300 To Live organizing team has been circulating a survey on social media asking disabled and neurodivergent people in B.C. what they struggled with before the temporary \$300 increase to PWD and income assistance, what impact the \$300 increase has had on their lives, and what impact it would have on them if the increase was made permanent. We have received over 300 responses to date, with more coming in every day.

**The survey responses highlight the impossible choices people on income and disability assistance have to make in their day-to-day lives, the significant impact the COVID-19 supplement has already made, and the urgent need not only to make the \$300/month increase permanent, but to further increase assistance amounts to a level that reflects the true threshold of a healthy, safe and stable existence in this province.**

By far, the most referenced area of struggle identified throughout the surveys is food – healthy, fresh, and sufficient food. Many respondents mentioned the low quality and poor nutrition value of the cheapest available food, and the scarcity of fresh food available at food banks. One respondent explains that the \$300 supplement means that “my children can have fresh fruit and protein every day,” and if the \$300 is made permanent “we will have a healthy diet instead of relying on cheap carbs from food banks.” Respondents with long-term disabilities spoke to the adverse effects of poor quality and insufficient food, leading to exacerbation of their conditions and additional medical costs.

A significant number of respondents talked about not being able to eat consistently throughout the month on the regular assistance amount, often enduring periods of hunger and rationing between assistance payments. One wrote, “I had enough to eat properly this month instead of going hungry for the last week before payday as I usually do.” Another explained, “I’ve been able to eat proper meals every day for the first time in 5 years (the length of time that I’ve been on PWD).” Another respondent highlighted the difference the \$300 has made: “To be able to purchase fresh food EACH week was amazing.”

Many respondents commented on the impossible choices they frequently have to make between paying their rent and eating enough, or between eating enough and having basic hygiene products. One respondent described “having to pay half my PWD income to rent, sacrificing healthy eating and adding mental stress and duress.” Another respondent noted that a permanent increase would benefit them “by not having to choose between a package of toilet paper or a real meal.” Yet another shared that with the \$300, “I was able to buy enough food to last me the month, I didn’t have to choose to go without either tampons or food or cut off my only phone, for the first time since getting on PWD.” Another explained that before the increase, “I would have to choose between paying rent, buying enough food to eat, paying for my

medications/medical treatments, dentist, therapy. Nobody should have to choose between those things. Those are human rights. Those are basic needs. That is health care.”

Parents trying to survive on assistance face painful choices around providing for their children and meeting their own basic needs. One survey respondent wrote that before the \$300 increase, “I struggled to pay all my essential bills in full each month and struggled to feed my son and myself. He always ate, but I wasn't always able to afford food enough for both of us.” With the increase, one parent explained, “My child has been able to eat fruits and veggies. Good quality meat. Bought her shoes without having me skip meals to pay for it. I felt like a normal person and didn't have the overwhelming guilt on what we have to pass on.” In considering what the impact of a permanent increase would be, one respondent wrote, “To be able to afford to buy my neurodiverse son - who struggles with mental health issues - a Burger King Burger as an incentive to engage with his therapist from time to time ... the power of that cannot be underestimated.”

Numerous respondents described not being able to cover all of their medical costs on current assistance levels, including those for prescription drugs not covered by MSP, dental care, and other physician-recommended treatments. One respondent described struggling with “having to take meds that don't work as well, but they're covered.” Another writes, “It has been a monthly challenge for years on disability . . . to purchase two prescriptions that are continually not approved by special authority, even with my neurologist submitting time after time on my behalf.” One respondent states, “I have to pay for my own meds, painkillers and diabetes test strips—\$182.81 and \$74.23 each month. PWD does not cover any of it for me.” With the \$300 supplement, one respondent said, “ [I] purchased my meds not covered by B.C. medical. I slept without worry.” With a permanent increase, another explained that they would be able to afford “diet shakes which are recommended by an endocrinologist, and to continue paying for meds that are not covered by MSP and my non-prescriptions that are also prescribed by my physicians.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem of rising costs of food and other necessities for those on assistance. One respondent explains that even with the \$300 supplement, “I just shopped [at] my regular shop and it was twice the price of normal. Now I'm broke until the next PWD payment and don't have enough food for the month.” Another respondent said that the \$300 meant that “with cost of food ever increasing, it allowed us to afford food for the month without having to pawn stuff.” The pandemic has not ended, and neither has the resulting increase in the cost of living. As one respondent points out, “Cost of groceries has increased since COVID so we all will have even less than before COVID without the \$300. It's still not enough as I pay 90% of my disability check to rent. Please please make the \$300 supplement permanent.”

Survey respondents report serious concerns about the end of \$300 supplement:

I am honestly terrified about the 300 being clawed back next month because the extra costs I have in these COVID-19 times will not be going away until a vaccine happens,

which means I will be even poorer and struggling more than before the pandemic if the 300 is taken away, while also worrying about contracting this illness that has a greater chance of killing me. It feels frightening and overwhelming.

Another respondent shares that “when that time limit runs up and they claw back that \$300, it won't take me long to go back to feeling like I have to ration a couple dollars a day just to make it to the end of the month.” The same respondent asks, “Ever had a 25% pay raise switching to a better job? Now imagine being demoted to lesser pay after 3 months.”

**Making the \$300 increase permanent would be a step in the right direction, according to survey respondents, but just a first step.** As one says, “I'm thankful for the \$300 but it's simply not enough. All I did with that money is try to stock up for what I think is coming and that will run out too.” Another explains, “I can eat a bit more days than I did before, but am still short.” Even with the \$300 increase, those receiving income and disability assistance in B.C. are still existing far below the poverty line. As one respondent explains, “Disabled people need more resources than abled people. Not less!” Reflecting on the difference a permanent increase would make, another says:

It would mean that I would finally move on from barely surviving to thriving, thereby contributing even more to the community and world around me. I barely allow myself to hope for this though because the years of feeling like my life is not worth the support of our society has made me rather hopeless. Deep poverty combined with a debilitating illness is a horrible way to live, if the 300 was made permanent it would make me feel like I count.

People living on disability and income assistance deserve to be valued by their community, and to have the opportunity to thrive in and contribute to that community. A survey respondent said, commenting on the impact of the \$300 increase: “Having the extra support helps us feel valued as humans, contributing members of society and helps us to maintain a better mental health place.”

**The clear message from the responses to this survey is that the \$300 supplement has had significant positive impacts, but those benefits will be short-lived if more extensive and permanent increases in support do not follow. As one respondent puts it “I wish life was more than the constant stress of survival.” B.C. must act now to make a life beyond stress and struggle possible for those living on income and disability assistance in this province.**

More highlighted stories from our survey can be found at [www.300tolive.org/stories.html](http://www.300tolive.org/stories.html)