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## RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

# Social Assistance and How to Calculate Housing Charges

Some assisted households receive social assistance (with or without a shelter component), which affects how the co-op calculates their rental assistance. A detailed explanation of social assistance and examples of calculations is available in CMHC's Reference Guide [here \(section 4.2\)](#).

### Income without an explicit shelter component

When a household receives income from a provincial social-assistance program without a specified shelter component (for example, Assured Income for the Severely Disabled (AISH)), the co-op completes the calculation in the same way as for households with other types of income. The assisted housing charge for these households is the approved rent-gear-to-income rate (25-30%) of their gross monthly income.

### Income with an explicit shelter component

Maximum Shelter Component:

When a household receives social assistance with a shelter component, under Rental Assistance Program rules the co-op should always use the maximum shelter component when calculating the household's rental assistance. This means that even if a member's social assistance statement does not show the maximum shelter amount, the co-op administrator should apply it after first verifying the maximum shelter component for the family size online. (See the links at the end of this resource.) Do not just look at the household's statement.

Often the amount on the stub or letter is the net shelter amount. Start with the maximum shelter component first and then apply the eligible allowances, including those for heat and hot water and any special allowances.



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A member approved for and receiving social assistance is entitled to the maximum shelter component for their family size, even if it is not listed in the statement. However, members need to provide their ministry/caseworker with copies of all their invoices for the eligible services to have their shelter benefit re-evaluated and adjusted to match the maximum shelter component used for the rental assistance calculation.

### **Additional shelter amounts**

In situations where additional shelter amounts are listed on the member's stub, include these with the maximum shelter, not the basic need.

### **Benefit unit size**

The benefit unit size is the number of people the social assistance benefit/shelter component is meant to cover. This information can be found in a copy of the letter of eligibility or the social assistance statement. Note that the benefit unit size may not be the same as the unit size.

### **How to Determine Net Social Assistance and Gross Income**

Always ask to see the member's social-assistance stub as it provides all the details about the payment, including deductions, as opposed to a letter, which does not always include all the required information. Be sure to collect the appropriate monthly income documents from the household when verifying income to ensure you have accurate information. Be careful not to double count any amounts.

When completing a rental assistance calculation, please note that the gross monthly income is the total income from all sources, e.g., the net social assistance and any additional income (CPP, employment, etc.). The net social assistance is the actual amount that was deposited into the member's account. However, if the government is recovering an overpayment from a member, add back the amounts being withheld into the net amount of social assistance.

Special allowances shown on the social assistance statement (i.e., diet, volunteer, travel, medication, etc.) are excluded from net social assistance and must be deducted. These allowances are not considered "additional income." The



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adjustment for special allowances cannot be less than zero. We recommend that the administrator keep detailed notes when adjusting for special allowances.

### **Additional Included Shelter Service Allowances (as of 1 October 2021)**

Members receiving social assistance with a shelter component are eligible for additional included shelter service allowances if the housing charge does not include these services, or if the co-op does not cover the cost of these services for all members.

These services include:

**Electricity** – Always check this. Whether or not the household receives an allowance will depend on whether electricity is included in the full occupancy charge. Special note: If electricity is included in the full occupancy charge, the member receives the deduction and then, as with all rental assistance households, a surcharge is applied for electricity. The result is that a member will never pay more than the maximum shelter component unless they have other income.

**Sewer and water** – Households rarely pay for this service themselves. However, if they receive a physical water bill, and the co-op does not pay for this service for all members, then they are entitled to the allowance.

**Garbage and recycling** – Households rarely pay for this service themselves. However, if they receive a physical bill, and the co-op does not pay for this service for all members, then they are entitled to the allowance.

**Insurance** – if the co-op has a by-law requiring all households to have personal content insurance, then the allowance applies. If the co-op has no such by-law provision but the household on social assistance provides annual proof of insurance, they qualify for the allowance.

**Telephone/Security** – This allowance applies only in co-ops with either an intercom system dependent on an active phone line (land line or cell phone) for entry or a security system accessible to all members.



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**Laundry (Ontario only)** – Households are eligible for the laundry deduction based on the social assistance benefit unit size. The only time these households do not qualify for the allowance is where a co-op provides a free laundry service, including laundry appliances and products, for all members.

### Government Changes to the Maximum Shelter Component

A co-op does not need to take action or update its rental assistance calculations if the government adjusts the maximum shelter component after the co-op has completed its annual review of income.

However, co-ops must use the new shelter component when updating rental assistance calculations in the following circumstances:

- Mid-year income changes
- The next annual income verification
- A new household begins to receive rental assistance
- Internal move
- Family composition changes

### Helpful Information

Under the Rental Assistance Program, a household cannot charge room and board to anyone, whether or not the person is a member of their family. If a co-op resident is receiving a payment for “room and board” from social assistance, ask their caseworker to reassess their payment at the “maximum shelter component” and “basic need” for their family size.

The rent-geared-to-income rate (25-30%) for the gross monthly income is then compared to the adjusted shelter component; the co-op uses the higher of the two amounts for the rental assistance calculation.



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## Links to Provincial Websites for Verifying the Maximum Shelter Component

[British Columbia Link for BC Benefits & Persons with Disabilities](#)

[Alberta Website Link for Private Housing](#) (not Social Housing)

Ontario Links:

- [Ontario Disability Support Program](#)
- [Ontario Works](#)

[PEI Link for Shelter Rates](#)

For more information please contact us at [agency.coop](http://agency.coop).