



Personal tax measures: Canada's COVID-19 response plan

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The Government of Canada has introduced a variety of measures to help individual Canadians and businesses facing hardship as a result of COVID-19. Here's a summary of some of the many relief measures that may be available to you.

Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)

If you lost your job, were working reduced hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic, or were sick, quarantined or forced to stay home to care for children or other relatives, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit¹ ("CERB") provided income support of \$500 per week (or \$2,000 per four-week eligibility period) for up to 28 weeks, with a maximum claim of \$14,000.

The CERB was available if you were a worker who had lost your job, or were still employed but either were not being paid because of disruptions to your workplace or, in some cases, had your working hours reduced. It was also available if you were sick, quarantined, or taking care of someone who was sick with COVID-19. If you were a working parent who had to stay home without pay to care for children, either because children were sick or were at home due to school and daycare closures, you were also eligible for the CERB. It did not, however, apply if you were a worker who voluntarily quit your job.

To be eligible for the CERB, you had to be at least 15 years old, reside in Canada and have a Social Insurance Number. You must also have had a minimum of \$5,000 of (self-)employment income or maternity or parental benefits under the Employment Insurance ("EI") program² in either 2019 or in the 12 months prior to your date of application. In the initial four-week claim period, you could have earned more than \$1,000 of income from (self-)employment for at least 14 consecutive days. For claims in subsequent periods, you could not have earned more than \$1,000 during the four-week benefit period of that claim. You may also have been eligible for the CERB if you were eligible for EI benefits.

You could apply for the CERB for any four-week period starting March 15, 2020 and the last period ended on September 26, 2020. The four week periods did not need to be consecutive but you could only receive benefits for a total of 28 weeks. You must have applied separately for each four-week period and the last date to have applied retroactively for the benefit was December 2, 2020.

¹ For further information on the CERB, see the CRA's *Questions and Answers on the Canada Emergency Response Benefit*, which can be found online at canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/cerb-application/questions.html.

² For Quebec residents, benefits under the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan qualify.

The CERB was administered by the Canada Revenue Agency (“CRA”) and you could apply online through either [Service Canada and the Employment Insurance program](#)³, or through the CRA using the [CRA My Account](#)⁴ system – but not both. If you were a full-time employee (i.e. someone who worked 30 hours or more per week) for at least four months in 2019 or a part-time employee for at least eight months in 2019, you applied through Service Canada; otherwise, you applied through the CRA My Account system. You could also apply over the telephone using an automated phone service.⁵

To help manage the volume of applications, the government originally designated specific days of the week for you to apply for the CERB, depending on your month of birth.⁶

The CERB is linked to the EI benefit system so that you could not be paid both EI benefits and the CERB for the same period.

If you were eligible to receive EI benefits before March 15, 2020, you would continue to receive those benefits until the end of your benefit period. If those benefits ended before October 3, 2020, you could then apply for the CERB so long as you were eligible at that time.

If you became eligible for EI on March 15th or later, your claim would automatically be processed through the CERB even if you originally applied for EI, and even if you started to receive EI. If your EI entitlement exceeded the CERB benefit, you retained your eligibility to receive EI after you stopped receiving the CERB and your EI entitlement would not be impacted. You could still access regular EI if you continue to be unemployed after the 28-week period of receiving the CERB.

The government will issue a T4A tax slip for 2020 showing the total amount of CERB you received, and you must report this amount as income when filing your 2020 income tax return. No tax was deducted at source from your CERB payments. The amount of tax that you will owe on your CERB will depend on your 2020 marginal tax rate, so you may need to pay tax on the CERB amounts you received when you file your 2020 income tax return.

If you received a CERB payment to which you are not entitled, you will need to either return the payment or make a repayment. This could happen if you applied for the CERB twice through both the CRA and Service Canada. You could also be required to repay the CERB if you discovered you were not eligible after receiving benefits. For instance, you may have been rehired, possibly because your employer participated in the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy Program.⁷ For your first eligibility period, you needed to return or repay the CERB if you earned more than \$1,000 from (self-) employment income within a 14-day interval during the initial 4-week period. For subsequent periods, you needed to return or make a repayment if you earned more than \$1,000 at any time during that 4-week period.⁸

As of October 4, 2020, 8.9 million people had applied for CERB benefits, with over \$74 billion in CERB benefits paid out.⁹

³ Service Canada and the Employment Insurance program is available online at canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/portfolio/service-canada.html.

⁴ The CRA’s My Account system is available online at canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/e-services/e-services-individuals/account-individuals.html.

⁵ Further information on the application process can be found on the CRA website canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/apply-for-cerb-with-cra.html.

⁶ You were encouraged to apply on the following days based on your month of birth: January, February or March (Mondays), April, May or June (Tuesdays), July, August or September (Wednesdays), and October, November or December (Thursdays). Anyone could apply on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

⁷ Further information on the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy can be found in our report “Wage subsidy programs for employers: Canada’s COVID-19 response plan,” which is available online at cibc.com/content/dam/personal_banking/advice_centre/tax-savings/covid-wage-subsidy-en.pdf.

⁸ Information on the process to make a repayment of the CERB is available online at canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/apply-for-cerb-with-cra/return-payment.html.

⁹ See Canada Emergency Response Benefit statistics at canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/claims-report.html.

Simplified EI Program

EI “regular benefits”¹⁰ are generally 55% of your average insurable weekly earnings in the qualifying period,¹¹ with a maximum benefit of \$573 per week.¹²

The unemployment rate in your region is used to determine the number of:

- Hours of insurable employment you need in the qualifying period (normally ranging from 420 hours in regions with high unemployment, to 700 hours in regions with low unemployment).
- “Best weeks of earnings” used to calculate your benefits (normally ranging from 14 weeks in regions with high unemployment, to 22 weeks in regions with low unemployment).
- Weeks of EI benefits that you can claim (normally ranging from 14 weeks in regions with low unemployment, to 45 weeks in regions with high unemployment).

As of September 27, 2020, new EI claimants:

- Only need 120 hours of insurable employment in the qualifying period¹³ ;
- Would use their best 14 weeks of earnings to calculate EI regular benefits, with a minimum weekly benefit amount of \$500 (regardless of the best weeks of earnings); and
- Can claim EI regular benefits for at least 26 weeks. For claims made between September 27, 2020 and September 25, 2021, the Government proposed on February 19, 2021 that this be increased to a maximum of 50 weeks.

These temporary measures are based on an unemployment rate of 13.1%. This means that if you're in a region with an unemployment rate of less than 13.1%, you would likely receive temporary EI regular benefits that are higher, and last longer, than the EI regular benefits that you would otherwise receive. If you are in a region with an unemployment rate that is higher than 13.1%, you would likely continue to be eligible for EI benefits that are higher, and last longer, than the temporary EI regular benefits.

The government also announced that, under the temporary measures, EI maternity and parental benefits, and EI fishing benefits would be increased. Also, EI premium rates will be frozen for two years (at 1.58% of insurable earnings for employees and 2.21% of insurable earnings for employers).¹⁴

If you received CERB benefits through Service Canada, you will be transitioned to the EI program once maximum CERB benefits have been received, so long as you are eligible for EI and require the income support. However, if you received CERB benefits through the CRA, you will need to apply for EI through Service Canada starting September 26th.

Example

Kareem usually works about 900 hours in seasonal employment annually but, as a result of the pandemic, he is laid off and has only accumulated 200 hours of work in the qualifying period. Even though Kareem does not have the 420 hours normally required to qualify for EI regular benefits, as a result of the temporary measures he has more than the minimum 120 hours of work and can qualify for at least 26¹⁵ weeks of EI regular benefits at a minimum amount of \$500 a week.

¹⁰ In this Report, EI regular benefits refers to the basic EI program, as distinguished from EI maternity and paternal benefits, and EI fishing benefits.

¹¹ The qualifying period is the last 52 weeks, or since your last claim, whichever is shorter.

¹² The maximum yearly insurable earnings is \$54,200 in 2020, so the maximum benefit is \$573 per week, calculated as \$54,200 divided by 52 times 55%.

¹³ This is calculated as 420 hours minus a one-time credit of 300 hours.

¹⁴ For more information, see *Supporting Canadians Through the Next Phase of the Economy Re-opening: Increased Access to EI and Recovery Benefits*, which is available online at canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2020/08/supporting-canadians-through-the-next-phase-of-the-economy-re-opening-increased-access-to-ei-and-recovery-benefits.html.

¹⁵ On February 19, 2021, it was proposed that in respect of EI claims between September 27, 2020 and September 25, 2021, the number of weeks of EI regular benefits be increased to a maximum of 50 weeks.

Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB)

Starting September 27, 2020, if you are not eligible for EI, you may be able to qualify for the new Canada Recovery Benefit (“CRB”.) This benefit was designed to include those who are self-employed and those working in the so-called “gig economy.” You also cannot receive this benefit if you are in receipt of either a provincial adoption or parental leave payment, or the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit or Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit that are described below. The CRB, is scheduled to run until September 25, 2021¹⁶, and will provide a taxable benefit amount of \$500 per week, for up to 38 weeks.

The benefit is available if you are a Canadian resident who is at least 15 years old and have a valid SIN, have stopped working due to COVID-19 and are available and looking for work, or are working, but have experienced a reduction in your (self-)employment income by at least 50% compared to your average weekly earnings in either the previous calendar year or the 12-month period prior to the application date for reasons related to COVID-19. Similar to the CERB requirements, you must not be eligible for EI, must not have quit your job voluntarily, and must have had (self-)employment income of at least \$5,000 in the previous calendar year or the 12-month period prior to the application date. You also must be present in Canada during the period for which you have applied.

You are required to apply after every two-week period for which you need support and must attest that you continue to meet the above requirements. In order to continue to be eligible for the benefit, you would need to look for – and accept – work, assuming it's reasonable to do so. This requirement will be satisfied if the reason that you were not available for work during an application period is because you were attending training that a provincial government had referred. The deadline for applying for any two-week period is 60 days after the end of that period.

Unlike the CERB, which put an income limitation of \$1,000 on the amount that you could earn in a four-week period without losing the entire CERB, to encourage CRB recipients to work, you would be able to earn income from (self-)employment while receiving the benefit, as long as you continue to meet the other requirements. To ensure that the benefit targets those who need it most, you would need to repay some (or all) of the benefit through your income tax return if your annual net income (excluding the CRB itself) is over \$38,000.

Specifically, you would need to repay \$0.50 of the CRB for each dollar of your annual net income that is above \$38,000 in the calendar year, up to the amount of CRB you received.

Example

Sarah is a self-employed bookkeeper who earned \$34,000 in 2019 but her business has slowed due to COVID-19. Her CERB benefits ran out in September and she is now only working at 40% capacity. With the CRB, she could receive \$500 per week for up to 38 weeks. If her annual net income in a calendar year is above \$38,000 (excluding the CRB payments), she would need to repay some (or all) of the benefit when she files her income tax return for that year.

Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB)

If you are (self-)employed and don't have a paid sick leave program, the new Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (“CRSB”) may provide a \$500 per week taxable benefit, for up to four weeks¹⁷, if you cannot work either because you are ill or because you must self-isolate due to COVID-19, or you are more susceptible to COVID 19. This benefit is available from September 27, 2020 to September 25, 2021.

In order to be eligible for the CRSB, you must be resident in, and present in, Canada with a valid SIN, be at least 15 years old, be (self-)employed when the application is made. You must have missed a minimum of 50% of scheduled work in the particular week, not be otherwise receiving either paid sick leave, EI or another COVID government benefit, and have earned at least \$5,000 of (self-) employment income in either the previous calendar year or the 12-month period prior to the application date.

¹⁶ On February 19, 2021, it was proposed that the maximum duration of the CRB be increased to 38 weeks.

¹⁷ On February 19, 2021, it was proposed that the CRSB be extended to four weeks from two weeks.

You must attest that you meet the requirements for the CRSB, although medical certificates are not required. Applications can be made after the specific claim week ends. The deadline for applying for any one-week period is 60 days after the end of that period.

Example

Jesse is cashier in a hospital pharmacy, and earns approximately \$35,000 per year. He has continued to work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Jesse must self-isolate for 14 days beginning October 1, 2020, as one of his family members tested positive for COVID-19. So long as Jesse is not provided paid sick leave from his employer, he will be eligible to receive \$500 per week, for up to four weeks, under the CRSB.

Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB)

The Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB) provides a \$500 per week taxable benefit, for up to 38 weeks¹⁸, if you miss work to care for a family member in certain circumstances due to COVID-19. This benefit is also available from September 27, 2020 to September 25, 2021. The CRCB can be shared among household members, but only one household member can receive the benefit in any one week. If a facility is available, but you prefer to keep a dependent at home, you're not eligible for the CRCB.

To qualify for the CRCB, you must also be a Canadian resident, present in Canada, and at least 15 years of age with a valid SIN. You must have earned at least \$5,000 of (self-) employment income in either the previous calendar year or the 12-month period prior to the application date. In addition, you must have been unable to work for at least 50% of your normally scheduled work week because you must take care of a child who is under 12 years old, or provide care to a family member with a disability or a dependent. You must be caring for the child, family member or dependent because either:

- Their school, daycare, day program or care facility is closed (or operates under an alternative schedule) because of COVID-19,
- They contracted or may have contracted COVID-19,
- A medical professional has advised that they cannot attend the facility due to being at high risk if they contract COVID-19, or
- The caregiver usually providing care is not available because of COVID-19.

In addition, you must not have received paid leave or certain other benefits (including the CRB, CRSB, provincial maternity or paternity benefits, or EI benefits) for that work week.

Similar to the CRSB, applications can be made after the particular claim period ends, and you must attest that the requirements have been met. The deadline for applying for any one-week period is 60 days after then end of that period.

Example

Carl is a single parent with an 8 year old child earning \$48,000 annually. His child's school closed for four weeks starting November 1, 2020 due COVID-19. Carl would be eligible to receive \$500 per week, for a total of \$2,000 for the four week period that his child's school is closed.

Special Goods and Services Tax Credit (GSTC) payment

If you were eligible for the Goods and Services Tax Credit ("GSTC") for the 2019-20 benefit year, in April 2020 you should have received a one-time special Goods and Services Tax Credit ("GSTC") payment, doubling your GSTC amount. The government has estimated an average boost to income for those benefitting from this measure will be approximately \$400 for single individuals and nearly \$600 for couples. This is estimated to benefit over 12 million low- and modest-income Canadian families.

¹⁸ On February 19, 2021, it was proposed that the maximum duration of benefits be increased to 38 weeks from 26 weeks.

Increased Canada Child Benefit (CCB) payments

If you were eligible for the Canada Child Benefit (“CCB”) for the 2019-20 benefit year, your May 2020 payment should have been increased by \$300 per child. The government estimates that the average increase for families receiving the CCB is approximately \$550 on average and that over 3.5 million families with children benefited.

Students

If you are a post-secondary school student, or recent high school graduate, the government announced a number of measures that may be available to you. Further information on the measures for students may be found in our report, [“Post-secondary education budgeting in the era of COVID-19.”](#)¹⁹

Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB)

You may have been eligible for the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (“CESB”) if you were a current post-secondary student, if you graduated in December 2019 or later, or if you completed (or will complete) high school in 2020 and have applied for a post-secondary educational program that begins before February 1, 2021. If you received payments from either the CERB or EI, you were not eligible for the CESB.

The CESB provided \$1,250 for each four-week period in which you earned no more than \$1,000 from (self-) employment. If you were living with a disability, or cared for another person, you were eligible to receive a higher amount of \$2,000 per four-week period. If you were able to work, you must have been actively looking for work in order to be eligible for this benefit. The first four-week period ran from May 10 to June 6, 2020, and the last period ended on August 29, 2020.

If you completed high school after June 7, 2020, you were only permitted to apply for two eligibility periods, starting with the July 5 to August 1, 2020 eligibility period.

You could apply online for the CESB, using the [CRA My Account](#) and you had to submit your application no later than September 30, 2020.²⁰

CESB payments were administered through the CRA. Amounts you received are taxable and you must report these amounts as income when filing your 2020 income tax return. To this end, the government will issue a T4A tax slip indicating the total amount of CESB paid to you. The amount of tax that you owe on the CESB will depend on your 2020 marginal tax rate, so you may need to pay tax on the CERB amounts you received when you file your 2020 income tax return.

If you received a CESB payment to which you were not entitled, you will need to either return the payment or make a repayment. This could happen, for instance, if you applied for the CESB and then found work and earned more than \$1,000 during that period.²¹

As of October 20, 2020, over 708,000 people had applied for CESB benefits, with over \$2.9 billion in CESB benefits paid out.²²

Student and Apprentice Loans

If you were in the process of repaying your Canada Student Loans and Apprentice Loans during the period between March 30, 2020 and September 30, 2020, you did not need to make any repayments and no interest was added to your loan during that time.

¹⁹ The report “Post-secondary education budgeting in the era of COVID-19” is available online at [cibc.com/content/dam/personal_banking/advice_centre/tax-savings/student-budgeting-covid-en.pdf](https://www.cibc.com/content/dam/personal_banking/advice_centre/tax-savings/student-budgeting-covid-en.pdf).

²⁰ Details about eligibility for the CESB and the application process can be found online at: canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/emergency-student-benefit.html.

²¹ Instructions on how to return or repay the CESB can be found online at canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/emergency-student-benefit/cesb-return-payment.html.

²² See Canada Emergency Student Benefit statistics at canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/emergency-student-benefit/cesb-statistics.html.

For the 2020-2021 school year, the government increased the maximum monthly amount that you may receive under these loan programs to \$350 per month, up from \$210.

Seniors

One-time OAS pension and GIS payments

If you are at least 65 years of age and meet certain requirements, you may receive benefits under the Old Age Security (OAS) program. If you were eligible for an OAS pension in June 2020, you should have received a one-time additional payment of \$300. You were eligible if you had applied for benefits or had been automatically enrolled at age 65. If you are a low-income senior who was eligible for the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), you should have received an additional \$200. These one-time payments are tax-free, and you need not apply for them. They were issued during the week of July 6, 2020.

Eligibility for the GIS and other income-tested government benefits depends on the income you reported on your previous year's tax return.²³ Since the 2019 tax filing deadline was extended to June 1, 2020, the government may not have been able to determine eligibility for the GIS for the 2020-2021 benefit year (which began on July 1, 2020) if you did not file your 2019 tax return in time to process before the start of 2020-2021 benefits. The government stated that GIS payments would continue to be made through September 30, even if your 2019 tax return had not yet been assessed.

RRIF minimum amounts

There is no minimum annual withdrawal required from your Registered Retirement Savings Plan ("RRSP"). By the end of the year you reach 71, you must either convert your RRSP to a Registered Retirement Income Fund ("RRIF") to continue the tax deferral, de-register the RRSP and pay the resulting taxes, or purchase a registered annuity.

You must start taking minimum withdrawals from your RRIF in the year after the RRIF is established. Minimum withdrawals are calculated as a percentage of the fair market value of your RRIF assets at the beginning of the year, and the percentage is based on your age. Withdrawals from your RRSP or RRIF are taxable.

The government reduced required minimum withdrawals from RRIFs for 2020 by 25% "in recognition of volatile market conditions and their impact on many seniors' retirement savings." This provided needed flexibility if you were concerned that you may have been required to liquidate more of your RRIF assets than you needed to meet the current legislated minimum withdrawal requirements. Further information on the changes to RRIF minimum amounts may be found in our report, "[Lower RRIF minimum withdrawals for 2020: Canada's COVID-19 response plan](#)."²⁴

²³ If you have a spouse or common-law partner, eligibility for the GIS depends on the income that both of you reported on your previous year's tax returns.

²⁴ The report "Lower RRIF minimum withdrawals for 2020: Canada's COVID-19 response plan" is available online at [cibc.com/content/dam/personal_banking/advice_centre/tax-savings/covid-rrif-en.pdf](https://www.cibc.com/content/dam/personal_banking/advice_centre/tax-savings/covid-rrif-en.pdf).

Individuals with disabilities

If you have a disability, you may receive a one-time, non-taxable payment of up to \$600 in recognition of the extraordinary expenses faced by persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵

You will be eligible for this payment if you have:

- an existing valid Disability Tax Credit (DTC) certificate;
- been eligible and applied for the DTC by September 25, 2020;
- been a beneficiary as at July 1, 2020 of certain disability benefits.²⁶

If you did not receive the one-time OAS pension or GIS payments that are described above, you will receive \$600. If you received the \$300 one-time OAS pension payment, you will receive \$300. If you received the \$500 one-time payment for both the OAS pension and the GIS or the Allowance, you will receive \$100.

You do not have to apply to receive this one-time payment. The government will use your existing Canada Pension Plan Disability, Quebec Pension Plan Disability Pension, Veterans Affairs Canada, or CRA direct deposit or mailing information to issue the payment starting on October 30, 2020.

Tax payment and filing deadlines

Individual T1 tax returns for the 2020 year must be filed by the April 30, 2021 normal filing deadline (or June 15, 2021 for self-employed individuals and their cohabiting spouse or common-law partner.) Generally, any amounts owing must be paid by April 30, 2021 in order to avoid interest. Limited relief is being provided to individuals who received income support in 2020 through a COVID-19 measure²⁷, in which case interest will not apply to outstanding taxes owing for the 2020 year as long as such amounts are paid by April 30, 2022.

²⁵ If you are the parent of a child with a disability, you will receive the one-time payment on behalf of your child.

²⁶ You must have been a beneficiary of the Canada Pension Plan Disability, Quebec Pension Plan Disability Pension, one of the disability supports provided by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), Disability Pension, Disability Award, Pain and Suffering Compensation, Critical Injury Benefit, Rehabilitation Services and Vocational Assistance Program, Income Replacement Benefit, or Canadian Forces Income Support

²⁷ These measures include CERB, CRB, CESB, CRCB, CRSB, EI or similar provincial emergency benefits.

Business owners

The government also announced a variety of measures to support your business and further information on these initiatives can be found in our report, "[Relief measures for businesses: Canada's COVID-19 response plan](#)."²⁸

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²⁸ The report "Relief measures for businesses: Canada's COVID-19 response plan" is available online at cibc.com/content/dam/personal_banking/advice_centre/tax-savings/covid-business-tax-en.pdf.

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