

## COVID-19 Update – April 3, 2020

**BC Update:** As of the last update, 108 new cases were confirmed, for a total of 1,121 cases. Over half of these cases fully recovered, but we have now recorded 31 deaths due to COVID-19.

**Emergency Funding Supports for Students:** Students attending British Columbia's 25 public post-secondary institutions, who are experiencing emergency financial pressures, will benefit from a one-time investment of \$3.5 million in emergency financial assistance. This non-repayable emergency assistance can be used to help with a broad range of costs, including living expenses, food, travel, portable computers and other supports for students who are not already able to study remotely. This fund can be accessed by contacting the school's financial aid office. Each post-secondary institution will determine the specific amount a student can receive based on their individual needs.

**BC Hydro Power Bill Relief:** Residential customers who have lost their jobs or are unable to work as a result of COVID-19 will receive a credit to help cover the cost of their electricity bills. The credit will be three times their average monthly bill over the past year at their home and does not have to be repaid. Small businesses that have been forced to close due to COVID-19 will have their power bills forgiven for three months. BC Hydro is waiving bills for these customers from April to June 2020. Also, BC Hydro rates will be reduced by 1% on April 1, 2020.

**Emergency Funding Supports for BC's Most Vulnerable:** For people in B.C. currently receiving income assistance or disability assistance, the Province will temporarily exempt federal employment insurance benefits, including the new \$2,000 Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). These payments will be fully exempted for the next three months so people receiving income assistance and disability assistance in B.C. will benefit from these new emergency federal support programs, without any reductions to their monthly assistance payments. Those not eligible for the supports, including low-income seniors, will receive an automatic \$300-monthly COVID-19 crisis supplement for the next three months. Finally, all BC Bus Pass Program recipients receiving income assistance and disability assistance will get a \$52 Transportation Supplement for the duration of the fare suspension.

**Strengthened Enforcement of Orders:** The provincial health officer has issued [new guidelines for municipal bylaw officers and other compliance officers](#) that give clear instruction on warnings, public education and fines – and what can be issued by whom – to make sure there is compliance and consistent enforcement throughout the province.

**Essential Service Providers Given New Protection:** The provincial government is taking steps to ensure those providing essential services cannot be held liable for damages caused by exposure to COVID-19 while continuing to operate, so long as they are complying with orders from the provincial health officer and other authorities.

**Economic Recovery Task Force:** The provincial government is bringing together leaders from business, labour, First Nations and not-for-profits to help ensure the Province's economic response to COVID-19 is effective and responsive to the needs of British Columbians. Representing labour on the task force is BC Federation of Labour President Laird Cronk. The 16-person task force will also develop plans for the province's long-term economic recovery following COVID-19.

**Ethical Decision-Making Framework:** In an effort to assist those struggling with ethical issues during this pandemic, the Ministry of Health has released a [decision-making framework](#) that should help health care workers make difficult decisions in the coming days.

**Federal Guidance on Essential Services and Functions:** The federal government has compiled a list of essential services which can be found [here](#), but it is not exhaustive and is not meant to represent a standard or direction, it is only advisory in nature to assist local and provincial governments.

**Canada Emergency Response Benefit:** Information on the new Canada Emergency Response Benefit can be found [here](#). It was recently updated.

**Income Supports for Workers during the Pandemic:** A full review of all income supports workers can access during the pandemic can be found [here](#).

In solidarity,

Justin Schmid  
CUPE Legislative Coordinator - BC Region