

MEMBER UPDATE

Frequently Asked Questions About the Critical Worker Benefit

1. How much is the top-up? Is it the same rate for all eligible workers?

The Critical Worker Benefit is a one-time payment of \$1,200. It is the same amount for all eligible workers. That breaks down to \$109 per month for the past 11 months, since the pandemic began.

2. What are the eligibility criteria for this program?

In order to be eligible for this benefit:

- You must work in an eligible job (see questions five, six, and seven to know whether your job is eligible)
- You must have worked a minimum of 300 hours total between October 12, 2020, and January 31, 2021.
- If you work in the private sector, then your normal wage must be under \$25 per hour in order to be eligible.

On its website, the government has a list of eligible jobs and eligibility criteria. It's not clear whether that list of jobs is exhaustive or not.

3. Where does this money come from?

The Government of Alberta is finally taking advantage of a large grant from the federal government, which the federal government made available last May. That money was meant specifically to increase the wages of frontline workers during the pandemic. In order to access the funds, the Government of Alberta had to commit to pay 25 per cent of the total cost. So, three quarters of the money comes from the federal government, while one quarter comes from the province.

Since the federal government made the money available, Alberta has been the one province which has refused to take it. AUPE and other unions have been advocating publicly for the UCP to finally give this money to essential workers.

4. Was AUPE consulted about this benefit before it was released?

No. Despite AUPE leading the charge for wage top-ups for essential workers, the UCP did not consult with us as they were developing their plan. If they had, we would have

made the same argument that we have been making for months—that every single frontline worker deserves a wage top-up, not just an arbitrary list of some of them.

5. Which job classifications does this apply to in healthcare?

Eligible workers must work in continuing care, acute care, addictions and mental health, homecare or hospice care. From there, the government lists a series of examples of healthcare jobs which are eligible. These include:

- Orderlies and patient service associates
- Respiratory therapists and technologists
- Nurses (RNs, RPNs, LPNs)
- Food services
- Housekeeping and maintenance
- Unit clerks

If you work in continuing care, acute care, addictions and mental health, homecare, or hospice care, but are not in one of the above-listed examples, you may still be eligible for the benefit, as the government has not been clear about whether its current list is exhaustive or not. Please keep your MSO informed about whether you receive the benefit if your job classification is not on the list of examples.

If you work one of the eligible jobs, but your employer is a private company rather than the public sector, we believe that you will still be eligible for the benefit—but rather than being paid automatically, your employer will have to apply on your behalf. We're working to confirm your eligibility now.

6. Which job classifications does this apply to in social services?

While many of the details remain unclear, we are of the understanding that this only applies to workers in contracted agencies and not for Government of Alberta workers, in the following fields.

- Children service providers
- Community service providers

(Continued on page 2)

Within those fields, the following occupations are eligible to receive the benefit if you also meet the other criteria around hours worked:

- Disability service workers and instructors of persons with disabilities
- Social and community service workers
- Home support workers, housekeepers and related occupations
- Personal care aides
- Shelter and crisis intervention workers
- Child development workers and assistants
- Early childhood educators (minimum 243 hours)
- Family and youth counsellors
- Home support workers
- Bus drivers and other transport workers supporting clients
- Food services, including cooks, attendants, and kitchen helpers
- Housekeeping, cleaners, janitors and caretakers

7. Which job classifications does this apply to in education?

For education workers, there are some extra qualifications regarding the number of hours worked. For education workers:

- Hours of paid work may include some virtual or online work where the work was performed with students.
- The minimum number of paid hours (300) will be pro-rated for periods of time when schools were required to be closed.
- As each school district had different dates when schools were closed, minimum hour prorations will be calculated on a case-by-case basis for individual school authorities.

If you work in one of the following occupations, and meet that criteria, then you are eligible:

- Educational or teacher assistants
- Bus drivers
- Custodians and janitors
- School secretarial staff-related positions

While we are happy that some of our members will be receiving this benefit, we are frustrated by the fact that not all of them will. The UCP laid off a substantial amount of education workers over the past year, and this means that they will also be excluded from this benefit. This government continues to show disrespect to workers, even when it is offering them a reward.

8. Do I need to apply for this benefit, or is it automatic? How do I apply?

If you are a public sector worker, you will receive the payment automatically if you fall within the eligibility criteria.

If you are a private sector worker who falls within the eligibility criteria, your employer is responsible for applying and distributing the funds. Applications begin on February 17, and the deadline for employers to apply is March 19. The government will be launching an online portal for applications on the 17th.

9. Do we expect the access criteria to be expanded?

The government has made no indication that it will be expanding eligibility criteria. We will continue to argue that all essential workers deserve pandemic bonuses—even more than just a one-time payment, but also long-term changes to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions.

10. I'm casual or part-time, does this apply to me?

It depends on how many hours you've worked. The eligibility criteria does not change based on your status as part-time or casual. If you work in one of the eligible fields, have worked a minimum of 300 hours between Oct. 12 and Jan. 31, and (if you're in the private sector), make less than \$25 per hour, then you are eligible. But if you have fewer hours on the books, then you are no longer eligible.

11. The government didn't include me in this top-up, and I'm frustrated by that.

You're right to be frustrated. The UCP took money that was supposed to go to all essential frontline workers, and decided that only some of them would actually get a top-up. They excluded significant numbers of public sector workers at the government of Alberta, and they added a requirement for minimum hours that will de-facto exclude many of our co-workers who are part-time.

Not only that, but even for workers who do receive the benefit, Jason Kenney has made clear that he still intends to cut our wages in the next round of collective bargaining. We see this move for what it is—a bad boss trying to thank us with a symbolic measure, while he tries to make our working lives worse.

If you aren't eligible, but feel that you should be, you can contact Premier Jason Kenney using any of the following methods:

- **Phone:** 780-427-2251
- **Toll Free:** 310-0000
- **Email:** premier@gov.ab.ca

You should also contact your local MLA. You can find their contact information here. Just enter your postal code. Let them know that you don't appreciate their attempt to divide workers, and that all workers deserve this top-up.