



Working for a Living Wage

Making paid work meet basic family needs in Metro Vancouver

2021 CALCULATION GUIDE

A technical appendix to the report *Working for a Living Wage*, updated for 2021, for those seeking to calculate the living wage in their own communities.

Note: While this guide is most appropriate for BC communities, its methodology could be adapted fairly easily for other communities.

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The 2021 Living Wage update and original 2008 full report are available at policyalternatives.ca/livingwage2021



Living Wage for Families BC



CCPA
CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
BC Office

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Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE is to assist others to calculate a living wage for their own communities using the method developed by the CCPA and First Call to calculate Metro Vancouver and Greater Victoria living wages in 2008, which now serve as the model for living wage calculations across the country. It will be most useful for the calculation of the living wage in communities in BC. The method can be applied in other provinces and territories, however, the government transfer and tax information would need to be adjusted accordingly.

This guide serves as an updated technical appendix to the report *Working for a Living Wage: Making Paid Work Meet Basic Family Needs in Metro Vancouver* updated for 2021. The report presents the concept of a living wage and the arguments in favour of its adoption by employers and can be downloaded at policyalternatives.ca/livingwage2021.

This detailed, step-by-step guide explains how you can calculate the amount of a living wage for your community using the living wage calculation spreadsheet accompanying it (which can be downloaded at policyalternatives.ca/livingwage2021).

Working for a Living Wage focuses on the living wage for a two-parent family with two children.

As a caution, the living wage amount is based on ever-changing information regarding family expenses and government transfers and taxes. Therefore, the information provided is accurate as of the date of this writing. Bear in mind that the living wage calculation must be revised annually to ensure its accuracy.

Finally, the living wage amount is an estimate based on the assumptions outlined below and summarized on pages 23 to 33 of *Working for a Living Wage 2008*. The precise expenses of any given family will obviously vary. The purpose of the family expenses calculation is to ensure that the family has the income to:

- Feed, clothe and provide shelter for their family.
- Ensure healthy child development.
- Participate in activities that are an ordinary element of life in a community.
- Avoid the chronic stress of living in poverty.

To ensure that the calculation continues to reflect the realities of low-income families in Metro Vancouver, we convened a roundtable of social policy experts and community advisors to review the methodology in the fall of 2014, followed by two focus groups with low-wage parents. The review resulted in a key change in the calculation in 2015 and later years: adding the costs of full-time care for the seven-year-old child during school breaks, since this care is not covered under the regular monthly fees for before- and after-school care unlike care during professional development (PD) days (which typically is covered).

Additional refinements were made in 2017 to include the cost of high-speed internet subscription and to replace the family landline with two basic talk-and-text cell phone plans with unlimited Canada-wide minutes. This was

necessary to ensure that the living wage allows for a standard of living that keeps up with technological change and the changing realities of Canadian families. Data from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) confirmed that Canadian families were increasingly shifting away from landlines to cell phones and residential internet subscriptions were growing rapidly.¹ Plus, internet access at home had practically become a requirement for participating in community life and to access government services and education, particularly in small towns where government offices have closed and in-person education opportunities are not easily available.

In this year's calculation, the following updates are made:

- Replacing the talk-and-text cell phone plans with basic mobile data plans to reflect the reality that a vast majority of Canadians now have a mobile data plan.¹ The CRTC's latest available data show that in 2019, 82 per cent of Canadians had a mobile data plan and the average data usage was 2.9 GB per month, which is why the living wage calculation now includes a data plan with a minimum of 3 GB of data.
- Upgrading the family's residential internet connection to speeds of at least 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload and access to unlimited data to reflect the target minimum plan to be made available to all Canadians through federal government programs aimed at closing the digital divide.
- Claiming the new Canada Training Credit. This new refundable tax credit allows an individual to claim a portion of the tuition fees they paid for courses taken in 2020 and subsequent tax years up to a limit of \$250 for the 2020 tax year. We assume that the family claims the full \$250 available since the family's tuition fees exceed that amount.

If you or your organization uses our methodology to calculate a living wage for your community, we would very much appreciate hearing from you.

¹ Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. *Canada's Communication System: An Overview for Canadians. Section 2.0*. Ottawa : Government of Canada, 2016. <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/policymonitoring/2016/cmr2.htm#a2>.

Calculating the living wage

Overview of the calculation process

THE CALCULATION OF THE LIVING WAGE can be quite complex in its details. As you work through the steps, keep in mind the following stages.

Stage 1: Calculating family expenses.

Stage 2: Calculating government transfers: the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), Goods and Services Tax (GST) credit, the BC Low Income Climate Action Tax Credit (BCLICATC) and others.

Stage 3: Calculating government deductions and taxes.

Stage 4: Determining the living wage amount.

Stage 5: Verifying the calculations.

The living wage is calculated using the Excel calculation spreadsheet accompanying this guide (also available for download at policyalternatives.ca/livingwage2021). The spreadsheet has built-in formulas to calculate the appropriate government transfers and taxes for the living wage family in your BC community. Some of the family expenses used in the living wage calculation are based on province-wide statistics and are built into the calculation spreadsheet for your use but you will need to collect data on some of the family expenses in your community. This guide explains how to source this information.

The method of calculating the living wage remains constant. However, the following will change and require updating every year. These updates are built into the calculation spreadsheet.

- **FAMILY EXPENSES:** Require the most recent data sources and Consumer Price Index (CPI) data and Market Basket Measure (MBM) estimates for certain expenses.
- **GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS:** The CCB, the GST credit and the BCLICATC amounts usually remain constant from July of one year to June of the next. The formulas may change each July, but they sometimes change in other times of the year.
- **GOVERNMENT TAXES:** The tax rules and formulas change for each tax (calendar) year.

If you are calculating the living wage in a BC community, you need to make adjustments only to family expenses to reflect the costs in your community (skipping Stages 2 and 3 as outlined in the next section). However, if you are calculating the living wage in a community in another province or territory, you will need to make changes to the government transfer and tax formulas as well.

Background information

The primary determinants of the living wage are income from employment and family expenses. However, the calculation also factors in the income the family receives from government transfers and deductions from income for statutory contributions (EI and CPP) and taxes. Thus, the living wage is the hourly rate of pay at which a household can meet its expenses once government transfers have been added and government deductions have been subtracted.

The living wage is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Annual family expenses} = \text{Income from employment (living wage)} + \text{Income from government transfers} - \text{EI and CPP premiums, federal and provincial taxes}$$

The calculation spreadsheet integrates the information regarding family expenses with the calculations for government transfers and deductions from income, as indicated in this formula.

THE QUESTION OF TIMING

Because all the elements of the calculation of the living wage (family expenses, government transfers, and government deductions and taxes) are frequently changing, you need to make decisions regarding the point in time at which you fix expenses, transfers and taxes.

For the calculations for the 2021 living wage, we chose:

Family expense amounts as of summer 2021, i.e., adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) average for the first half of 2021, with the exception of rent where October 2020 data are used and child care fees where data for the fiscal 2020/21 are used. Previously, family expenses as of December of the previous calendar year were used, however, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a number of uncharacteristic and temporary declines in prices in 2020 and thus low inflation as measured by CPI. Prices have largely rebounded in the first half of 2021, and in some cases increased rapidly. To remove the temporary pandemic effect on prices and more accurately reflect the costs that BC families are facing in 2021, this year's living wage calculation spreadsheet adjusts family expenses using the CPI average for the first half of 2021.

Government transfer amounts:

CCB, GST credit, BC Child Opportunity benefit and BCLICATC amounts for the July 2020 to June 2021 benefit year, excluding any one-off pandemic-related benefit enhancements.

BC Affordable Child Care benefit and Rental Assistance Program amounts for the calendar year 2021.

Government deductions and taxes for the 2020 tax year.

The mechanics of the calculation spreadsheet

The spreadsheet has three tabs: “First-time LW calculation,” “Using last year’s LW income” and “Family expenses.” Use the “Family expenses” tab to manually enter the correct amounts for expenses in your community in the shaded cells. Cells that are not shaded contain provincial-level data and do not need to be changed. Built-in formulas will use the numbers you enter to update the monthly or annual family expense for each of the 10 expense categories (bolded in the tab) and automatically enter them in the correct cell of Table I in both of the first two tabs of the spreadsheet. Which of the first two tabs you use for the living wage calculation depends on whether this is the first time the living wage for your community has been calculated, as explained in the spreadsheet.

The first two tabs of the calculation spreadsheet are structured as follows:

Table I: Family expenses

Table II: Non-wage income (government transfers)

Table III: Family income less family expenses

Table IV: The living wage and government deductions and taxes

Table V: Family income less government deductions and taxes plus government transfers

Tables I, II and IV each calculate one element of the formula presented above. Table III compares family income with family expenses, and based upon this the wage in Table IV is adjusted to calculate the living wage. The details of this are as follows:

Cell C20 in Table I is the amount of the family’s total annual expenses.

Cell C32 in Table II is the total annual amount of government transfers received by the family.

Cells B47 and C47 in Table IV are the hours per week of employment for each parent.

Cells B48 and C48 in Table IV are the hourly wages for each parent. These are set to be equal.

Cells B50 and C50 in Table IV are the annual incomes from employment for each parent.

Cell D58 in Table IV is the total annual amount of income available for the family after government deductions and taxes have been subtracted.

Cell C39 in Table III is the family’s total annual income: the sum of government transfers and employment income after government deductions and taxes.

Cell C40 in Table III reproduces the family’s total annual expenses.

Cell C41 in Table III indicates the gap between the family’s annual income and its annual expenses.

Cells J40, J41 and J42 contain the amounts of the BC Affordable Child Care Benefit the family would receive.

Table V summarizes the family’s overall finances, presenting its income from employment, total government taxes and total government transfers, and its annual net surplus.

Stage 1: Family expenses

CALCULATING THE LIVING WAGE requires deciding upon the characteristics of the family listed in Table 1. The table presents the assumptions used in the living wage calculation for Metro Vancouver.

Family characteristics	Metro Vancouver living wage assumptions
Parents	
Number	2
Gender	1 female, 1 male
Age	between 31 and 50
Number of parents in paid work	2
Hours of paid work for each parent	35 hours each
Hourly wage	equal for both
Children	
Number	2
Gender	1 male, 1 female
Age	boy aged 7, girl aged 4

The categories of family expenses

family expenses are divided into nine categories:

- Food
- Clothing and footwear
- Shelter and telecommunications
- Transportation
- Other household expenses
- Child care
- Non-MSP health expenses
- Parent education
- A contingency amount

A tenth category of family expenses, Medical Services Plan (MSP) premiums, was used in previous living wage calculations until the elimination of MSP premiums in BC as of January 1, 2020.

The first five categories of family expenses are adapted from Statistics Canada's Market Basket Measure (MBM). The living wage calculation uses the MBM amounts for the following three expenses: Clothing and footwear, Private transportation (i.e., owning and operating a car) and Other household expenses. For Food, Shelter, Child care, Parent education and Public transportation, data providing local amounts were used.

For each family expense, the following sections explain the source of the data, provide links to the data sources when available, and present the calculation formula used. Some family expenses are calculated on a monthly basis and the others are calculated on an annual basis.

The family expenses are based on conservative or lower than average family expense amounts. The reason is that the purpose of the living wage is to provide an adequate level of well-being based on what a family requires. This is accomplished in part by adopting the MBM amounts, as the MBM was developed to provide a perspective on low income in Canada, and therefore the MBM thresholds are based on less than median expenditures. When incorporating local family expense estimates from other sources we use median expenditures, which are almost invariably less than average expenditures. The reason for this is that average expenditures are pulled upward by elevated incomes and expenditures of higher income families.

Calculating each of the family expenses

The information in this section explains how each of the family expenses is calculated.

1. FOOD

INFORMATION NEEDED: 1. The latest food costing report of the BC Centre for Disease Control, Population and Public Health Program, *Food Costing in BC 2017: Assessing the Affordability of Healthy Eating*, available at <http://www.bccdc.ca/our-services/programs/food-security#Reports--&--resources>. 2. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) for food in BC for 2017 and for the first half of 2021 from Statistics Canada Tables 18-10-0005-01 and 18-10-0004-01, available at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000501> and <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000401>.

The *Food Costing in BC* reports involve the periodic collection of food prices in grocery stores across BC for a number of food items to calculate the average monthly cost of an adequately nutritious diet based on Health Canada's National Nutritious Food Basket. The reports provide monthly food costs for adults and children by gender and age categories at the provincial level. Average monthly food costs for a reference family of four are provided for each health authority and its respective Health Service Delivery Areas.

Here is how the 2017 food costing data are used to derive estimates for food expenses in the living wage:

Step 1: We calculate the family's monthly expense based on the average monthly cost of the 2017 food basket in BC for different age and gender groups (Table 5 on page 12 of *Food Costing in BC 2017*), using the living wage family composition of one male and one female parent, both between 31 and 50 years of age, a seven-year-old boy and a four-year-old girl. This number is included in cell B6 of the "Family expenses" tab.

- Step 2: We look up the average monthly food expense for the *Food Costing in BC* reference family of four, which has a different composition than the living wage family (Table 3 on page 11 of *Food Costing in BC 2017*). This number is included in cell B7 of the “Family expenses” tab (“BC average”).
- Step 3: Look up the average monthly food expense for the *Food Costing in BC* reference family for the health service delivery area in which the community for which we are calculating a living wage is located (Table 2 on page 9 of *Food Costing in BC 2017*). This is the only number you need to update in the Food section of the “Family expenses” tab of the calculation spreadsheet (Cell B8).
- Step 4: Calculate the monthly food expense with the formula:

$$\frac{\text{Amount from Step 1} \times \text{Amount from Step 3} \times \text{Adjust to 2021 prices using the CPI for food}}{\text{Amount from Step 2}}$$

This formula is already built in the spreadsheet.

Note: Metro Vancouver is unique in BC, as parts are located in two health authorities, Fraser Health and Vancouver Coastal Health, and span multiple health service delivery areas. To reflect this, in Step 3 we used a weighted average of the sample family’s food expense amounts for the health service delivery areas of Fraser North (\$985), Fraser South (\$989), Richmond (\$978), Vancouver (\$1,093) and North Shore/Coast Garibaldi (\$1,038) with each weighted by their respective populations in 2020. For North Shore/Garibaldi, we used the population of the local health areas of North Vancouver and West Vancouver—Bowen Island only, as the rest of the health service delivery area falls outside Metro Vancouver. Population estimates by health authority, health service delivery area and local health areas are available from BC Stats, <https://bcstats.shinyapps.io/popApp/>.

2. CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR

INFORMATION NEEDED: 1. Statistics Canada’s MBM amount for “Clothing” for 2019 from Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0066-01, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110006601>. 2. CPI for “Clothing and footwear” for BC for 2019 and for the first half of 2021 from Statistics Canada Tables 18-10-0005-01 and 18-10-0004-01, available at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000501> and <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000401>.

3. SHELTER AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The Shelter and telecommunications expense uses the following formula:

$$\text{Shelter} = \text{Rent} + \text{Utilities} + 2 \text{ cell phone plans} + \text{Internet} + \text{Contents insurance on possessions}$$

Rent

INFORMATION NEEDED: The latest Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) data on the median rent for three-plus bedroom apartments in your community. The CMHC conducts a regular Rental Market Survey in October of each year, and reports both median and average rents for bachelor, one-, two- and three-plus bedroom apartments for selected municipalities (urban areas with a population over 10,000). The latest

statistics can be found on CMHC's Housing Market Information Portal here: <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/#TableMapChart/59/2/British%20Columbia>.

The calculation for Metro Vancouver is based on the median rent for a three-plus bedroom unit for the family of four.

If you are calculating the living wage for a smaller community which is not included in the CMHC Rental Market Survey, you would need to use a Local Housing Assessment or the Canadian Rental Housing Index to find the cost of rent for a family of four.

Utilities

INFORMATION NEEDED: 1. Data on the median annual amount spent on utilities (i.e., water, fuel and electricity for their principal accommodation) by BC couples with two children from the 2019 Survey of Household Spending (latest year available). The data source is a Statistics Canada Custom Tabulation obtained in July 2021. 2. CPI for "Water, fuel and electricity" for 2019 and for the first half of 2021 for BC from Statistics Canada Tables 18-10-0005-01 and 18-10-0004-01, available at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000501> and <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000401>.

Cell phone plans and internet

INFORMATION NEEDED: 1. The least expensive cell phone plan that includes unlimited Canada-wide minutes, at least 3GB of data and the cost of a basic smartphone (usually pro-rated over a two-year contract). 2. The least expensive residential internet plan in your community that provides minimum speeds of at least 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload, including the costs of modem rental and applicable taxes (GST and PST).

For Metro Vancouver in 2021, these are the \$40 per month before tax plan with 4.5 GB/month of data and Canada-wide unlimited talk and text provided by Chatr (same price as the cheapest 3 GB/month plan offered by other providers), and the \$64.95 per month high-speed internet service provided by TekSavvy (DSL 50 Unlimited). Chatr charges up front for their phones, so we include the costs of a Moto E phone pro-rated over 24 months in the family budget. TekSavvy also charges a \$9.99 per month for 12 months for a rent-to-own modem, which is included in the living wage calculation. Other upfront costs such as activation fees, shipping fees and SIM cards are not included. Also excluded are any short-term promotional discounts for new customers.

You will need to update the cell phone and internet service amounts to reflect the costs in your community in the Shelter and telecommunications section of the "Family expenses" tab of the calculation spreadsheet (Cells B24 and B25). Remember to include applicable taxes (GST and PST).

Contents insurance

INFORMATION NEEDED: A contents insurance quote from an insurance agent.

We obtained quotes from several insurers providing contents insurance. The median quote was \$43.50 per month for Metro Vancouver, and this amount was used for the 2021 calculations. You will need to update this amount for your community in cell B26 of the "Family expenses" tab in the calculation spreadsheet.

4. TRANSPORTATION

INFORMATION NEEDED: 1. Statistics Canada's MBM amount for "Transportation for rural communities" for 2019 from Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0066-01, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110006601>. 2. CPI data for "Operation of passenger vehicles" for BC for 2019 and for the first half of 2021 from Statistics Canada Tables 18-10-0005-01 and 18-10-0004-01, available at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000501> and <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000401>.

The living wage calculation assumes that one parent commutes to work using a car while the other commutes by public transit. The formula for the transportation expense is as follows:

$$\text{Transportation} = \text{Vehicle} + \text{Public transit}$$

Vehicle: This is the amount for transportation from the MBM for rural communities in BC (which represents the costs of owning and operating a second-hand car), adjusted by the CPI to prices in the first half of 2021.

Public transit: For the Metro Vancouver two-parent family, this includes the expense of one two-zone monthly bus pass, available at <https://www.translink.ca/transit-fares/pricing-and-fare-zones>. Note that the parent who takes a regular studies course of three or more credit hours at any Metro Vancouver public college qualifies for a discounted U-Pass for the duration of the course (typically, a four-month semester), which is about three times cheaper and reduces the family's public transit expenses considerably. The 2021 calculation is based on eight months of U-Pass eligibility and four months of two-zone monthly bus passes at the rate applicable in 2021 (i.e., including the July 2021 fare increase for half the year). You will need to update this amount for your community in the "Family expenses" tab in the calculation spreadsheet (cells B33 and B34).

5. OTHER HOUSEHOLD AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION EXPENSES

INFORMATION NEEDED: Automatically calculated in the spreadsheet.

The MBM calculates the Other expense at 75.4 per cent of the combined expense for Food and Clothing and footwear. This amount is intended to cover toiletries and personal care, furniture, household supplies, laundry, school supplies and fees, bank fees, some reading materials, minimal recreation and entertainment, family outings (e.g., museums and cultural events), birthday presents, modest family vacation and some activities for the children (e.g., swimming lessons, dance classes or team sports).

6. CHILD CARE

INFORMATION NEEDED: 1. THE LATEST DATA ON MEDIAN MONTHLY PARENT FEES BY CARE TYPE PROVIDED BY THE BC GOVERNMENT ARE AVAILABLE AT <https://mcf.gov.bc.ca/reporting/services/early-years/case-data-and-trends>. 2. Estimates of local child care expenses for full-day care for a seven-year-old on days when schools are closed on PD days, during school breaks and for summer care.

Our assumptions:

The four-year-old is in full-time child care (licensed group child care).

The seven-year-old is in before- and after-school care during the school year, with three weeks of full-time care during winter and spring breaks (assuming that one week of winter break is covered by statutory holidays and informal arrangements), and six weeks of full-time summer care.

The BC government has started providing timely regionally disaggregated data on median monthly parent fees by child care type. Data are available for BC as well as by service delivery area. The latest data available are for the 2020/21 fiscal year. This eliminates the need to source local data on child care fees for the four-year-old child, and before and after school fees for the seven-year-old child.

At this time, the child care fee data available from the BC government do not include the costs of full-day care for the school-age child during the summer months. Estimates for child care expenses are sometimes available from regional child care referral centres, which conduct surveys of child care providers in the areas they serve.

For Metro Vancouver in 2021, we surveyed a number of Vancouver-based child care centres and calculated the median fees of the child care providers we surveyed, which was \$225 per week. Note that the vast majority of summer care providers surveyed charge weekly without a discount for monthly care so we discontinued the use of the discounted monthly fee in the calculation because it significantly underestimates the costs most families face.

In Metro Vancouver, monthly fees for before- and after-school care often include full-day care on days when schools are closed for professional development. This may not be the same in your community, in which case you will need to include costs for full-time care on PD days during the school year in cell B44 of the “Family expenses” tab of the calculation spreadsheet. Check with your regional child care referral centre or inquire with your local child care providers (make sure you call a number of providers to get a sense of the range of policies and fees charged in your community, and use the median child care fees for calculating your community’s living wage).

Note: Metro Vancouver is the only BC municipality that spans multiple service delivery areas. For the 2021 Metro Vancouver living wage, we used a weighted average of the median parent fees for child care type and age group for the entire Metro Vancouver region by request from the Office of the Minister of State for Childcare.

7. NON-MSP HEALTH CARE EXPENSES

INFORMATION NEEDED: The estimate for non-MSP covered health care expenses assumes that the family’s health care expenses are equivalent to the cost of purchasing private health insurance. This amount has been obtained from the expense of purchasing Pacific Blue Cross insurance (https://www.pac.bluecross.ca/pdf-bin/370/34-70-210_rates.pdf), under the following terms and circumstances:

Plan:

Blue Choice, Family

Age group of oldest person: 45 to 54

Coverage:

Core extended health care benefits

Prescription drug option: Essential

Dental option: Essential

This amount is \$188 per month for a family of four in 2021 living in BC and does not vary by community.

Note that if the family used this amount to purchase Blue Cross Insurance, it would still face the costs for the non-insured portions of medical expenses, which would be covered through the budget for Other household and Social participation expenses.

8. PARENT EDUCATION

INFORMATION NEEDED: The expense from a local college for the following costs for two regular studies courses of three units each, including:

- Tuition
- Textbooks
- Student fees

For Metro Vancouver this amount was estimated at \$1,249.82 per year, based on the information in Table 2. This information was obtained online for Douglas College, which charges the median fees of all public colleges in Metro Vancouver. See <https://www.douglascollege.ca/study-at-douglas/fees-and-related-information/tuition-fee-charts>.

Table 2: Estimates for the elements of the parent education expense

Expenses	Douglas College
Course tuition	\$120.85/credit ¹
Incidental fees	\$112.36/term
Books and other materials	\$150/course

¹ Average between tuition fees for lower division courses and upper division courses, assumes one of each is taken during the year.

9. CONTINGENCY AMOUNT

The Contingency amount provides some cushion for unexpected events like the serious illness of a family member, transition time between jobs, etc. It is provided as an expense for each parent and is calculated at:

The living wage amount x hours worked per week x 2 weeks.

Stage 2: Government transfers

THIS INFORMATION IS CALCULATED in Table II of the calculation spreadsheet.

Government transfers reduce the amount of the living wage by providing a source of income for family expenses. The possible transfers for 2021 are:

- Canada Child Benefit (CCB)
- BC Child Opportunity Benefit
- GST Credit
- BC Low Income Climate Action Tax Credit (BCLICATC)
- BC Rental Assistance Program (RAP)
- BC Affordable Child Care Benefit.

The CCB, BCLICATC and the GST credit are based on formulas set in July of each year and the amount usually remains the same until the following June. Rarely, the formulas change at other times of the year, but this is not the case in 2021.

The amounts of government transfers that a family receives each year are calculated based on the family's income from the previous tax year. If the living wage for your community has been calculated previously, we suggest that you use last year's living wage family income to determine the government transfers that the family would be eligible for. Since the BC living wage calculations were not updated during the pandemic year 2020, this would be the family income from your community's 2019 living wage calculation. The calculation spreadsheet includes a tab titled "Using last year's LW income" that contains all the formulas you will need—just enter last year's living wage family income, government deduction and taxes in Table IIa. This will automatically calculate the correct amount of government transfers in Table II. This method was used to calculate the Metro Vancouver 2021 living wage.

If this is the first time the living wage is being calculated for your community, use this year's family income to determine the government transfer amounts for the family. The tab titled "First time LW calculation" in the calculation spreadsheet uses this method.

If you are calculating the living wage for a BC community, the calculation spreadsheet includes formulas to automatically calculate the correct government transfers and taxes so you can skip Stages 2 and 3 (though you may still want to read through them to see what is included).

If you are calculating the living wage for a community in another province or territory, you will need to make changes to the government transfer and tax formulas.

A. The Canada Child Benefit (CCB)

This is a non-taxable government transfer to families with children, which replaced the old Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) as of July 1st, 2016.

INFORMATION SOURCE: The Canada Revenue Agency calculation sheet for the Canada Child Benefit, for the period from July 2020 to June 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/child-family-benefits/canada-child-benefit-overview/canada-child-benefit-ccb-calculation-sheet-july-2020-june-2021-payments-2019-tax-year.html>.

The CCB is an income-tested benefit received for children under 18 years of age. The amount is affected by three factors:

Number of children under six.

Number of children six and older.

Family's net income.

Table 3 presents the CCB formula—the numbers in bold and underlined vary with the number of children. The maximum benefit amounts and the income thresholds at which benefits are reduced are adjusted for inflation annually.

Table 3: Canada Child Benefit formula for 2020/21			
CCB by family net income	=	Basic benefit	Benefit reduction
If net income is less than \$31,711	=	# of children under 6 x \$6,765 + # of children over 6 x \$5,708	n/a
If net income is between \$31,711 and \$68,708	=	# of children under 6 x \$6,765 + # of children over 6 x \$5,708	(net income – \$31,711) x <u>0.135</u>
If net income is over \$68,708	=	# of children under 6 x \$6,765 + # of children over 6 x \$5,708	(\$65,975 – \$31,711) x <u>0.135</u> – (net income – \$68,708) x <u>0.057</u>

For a two-parent, two-child family, at least partial CCB is available for families with net income up to \$199,908.

B. BC Child Opportunity Benefit

This is a new tax-free benefit for families with children, which replaced the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit as of October 2020. The benefit is administered by the CRA and the payment is combined with the CCB.

INFORMATION SOURCE: BC Government, Family & Social Supports, Family Benefits, BC Child Opportunity Benefit, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/family-benefits/child-opportunity-benefit>.

It is an income-tested benefit that provides up to \$1,600 for a family's first child, \$1,000 for a second child and \$800 for subsequent children under the age of 18. BC families with net incomes under \$25,000 receive the full benefit and families with two children with net incomes under \$115,000 receive a partial benefit, which means that families at the living wage are eligible for a partial benefit. Table 4 presents the BC Child Opportunity formula.

Table 4: BC Child Opportunity Benefit formula for 2020/21, family with two children

Benefit by family net income	=	Benefit amount
If net income is less than \$25,000	=	\$1,600 + \$1,000
If net income is between \$25,000 and \$80,000	=	first child: $\$1,600 - (\text{net income} - \$25,000) \times 0.04$ but no less than <u>\$700</u> second child: $\$1,000 - (\text{net income} - \$25,000) \times 0.04$ but no less than <u>\$680</u>
If net income is over \$80,000	=	$\$700 + \$680 - (\text{adjusted income} - \$80,000) \times 0.04$

C. GST Credit

INFORMATION SOURCES: Canada Revenue Agency GST Credit – Calculation sheet for the July 2020 to June 2021 payments, <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/child-family-benefits/goods-services-tax-harmonized-sales-tax-gst-hst-credit/goods-services-tax-harmonized-sales-tax-credit-calculation-sheet-july-2020-june-2021-payments-2019-tax-year.html>.

The GST credit is an income-tested benefit and is affected by three factors:

Whether the parent has a spouse.

Number of children.

Family's net income.

Table 5 presents the GST/HST credit formula. All of the numbers, and the formula itself, can change each July.

Table 5: GST Credit formula for 2020/21

GST/HST Credit	=	Basic credit	+	Additional credits	-	Credit reduction
GST Credit	=	\$296	+	spouse credit = \$296; children credits = \$155 for each child	-	(net income – \$38,507) x 0.05
2 parents and 2 children	=	\$296	+	\$296 + \$155 + \$155	-	(net income – \$38,507) x 0.05

For a two-parent, two-child family, the GST credit ceases at a family net income of \$56,547.

D. BC Low Income Climate Action Tax Credit

This tax credit is a payment similar to the GST credit in that it is paid by the government to individuals below a certain income level. The amount depends on the size and composition of the family and its income level. The payment is combined with the GST credit.

For the 2021 living wage calculation the payment amounts for July 2020 to June 2021 benefit year are used, excluding the one-time COVID-19-related enhanced payment for July 2020. Table 5 shows the credit amounts and income thresholds for this tax credit.

INFORMATION SOURCE: BC Government, Residents, Taxes & Rebates, Income Taxes, Low Income Climate Action Tax Credit, gov.bc.ca/gov/topic.page?id=E9258ADE1AE3423080A1B2674F4EAABD.

Table 6: BCLICATC formula for 2020/21						
BCLICATC	=	Basic credit	+	Additional credits	-	Credit reduction
BCLICATC	=	\$174	+	spouse credit = \$174; children credits = \$51 for each child	-	(net income - \$41,706) x 0.02
2 parents and 2 children	=	\$135	+	\$174 + \$51 + \$51	-	(net income - \$41,706) x 0.02

For a two-parent, two-child family, the BCLICATC ceases at a family net income of \$64,206.

E. BC Rental Assistance Program (RAP)

The provincial Rental Assistance Program (RAP) provides a monthly payment to families who qualify based on their rent and their income. It reimburses a portion of the difference between 30 per cent of the family's total income and its adjusted rent amount. Families are eligible if their gross household income is less than \$40,000. The spreadsheet does not contain the formula because the family's level of income precludes eligibility. Even at the minimum wage, a family of two parents working full-year at 35 hours per week will exceed the total income threshold for the BC RAP.

The adjusted rent amount is the lesser of the actual rent (including utilities) or the amount in the following table. Note that these maximum rent levels have not changed since September 2018 despite rapidly increasing rents.

Table 7: RAP maximum rent levels

	Zone 1 (Metro Vancouver)	Zone 2 (larger urban areas incl. Abbotsford, Greater Victoria, Kelowna, Nanaimo and others)	Zone 3 (other areas of BC)
Family of 3 or less	\$1,108	\$1,086	\$1,067
Family of 4 or more	\$1,250	\$1,136	\$1,117

Note: For a complete list of communities included in each zone, see <https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/rental-assistance-programs/RAP>.

F. BC Affordable Child Care Benefit

The BC Affordable Child Care Benefit replaced the BC Child Care Subsidy as of September 2018. Like the previous subsidy, the new benefit is income-tested and paid to the child care provider rather than directly to the family. However, the new benefit is considerably more generous and significantly increases the income thresholds to qualify for financial support. As a result, families with income in the range of BC living wages are now eligible for the BC Affordable Child Care Benefit.

INFORMATION SOURCE: Schedule A of the *BC Child Care Subsidy Regulation*, available at https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/74_97#ScheduleA.

The Affordable Child Care Benefit amount is affected by three factors:

- Number and age of children.

- Type of child care services used and actual fees paid.

- Family's net income.

Table 7 shows the BC Affordable Child Care Benefit formulas. For the living wage family, we assume full-time licensed group child care for the four-year-old, 10 months of before- and after-school care for the seven-year-old, six PD days, three weeks of full-time care during winter and spring breaks and six weeks of full-time summer care. The maximum benefit amounts for these types of care are as follows:

- \$550 per month for full-time, licensed group care for children aged three to five.

- \$210 per month for licensed before- and after-school care for school-aged children.

- \$415 per month (or \$103.75 per week) for school-aged children attending full-time, licensed programs (e.g., full-time care during school closures and during the summer).

If the actual child care fee paid is less than the maximum benefit amount, then the actual fee is used in the calculation formulas in place of the maximum benefit amount.

The family's adjusted income is the family's net income for income tax purposes less \$2,000 for each dependent child. The maximum benefit amounts and the income thresholds have not changed since this benefit was first introduced in 2018.

Table 8: BC Affordable Child Care Benefit formula for 2021

Benefit by adjusted income		Benefit amount for each child
If adjusted income is less than \$45,000	=	max benefit amount
If adjusted income is between \$45,000 and \$60,000	=	$\text{max benefit} \times \left[1 - \frac{(\text{adjusted income} - \$45,000) \times 0.272}{15,000} \right]$
If adjusted income is between \$60,000 and \$80,000	=	max benefit x 0.728
If adjusted income is between \$80,000 and \$111,000	=	$\text{max benefit} \times 0.728 \times \left[1 - \frac{(\text{adjusted income} - \$80,000)}{31,000} \right]$

The formulas for calculating the appropriate amounts of the BC Affordable Child Care Benefit are built into the first two tables of the calculation spreadsheet and do not require any additional adjustments if you are using the same types of care as the Metro Vancouver living wage family.

However, if you are using different types of child care services in your community living wage calculation, you may need to adapt the formulas built into the calculation spreadsheet. Please contact us for assistance.

Stage 3: Government deductions and taxes

THIS INFORMATION IS CALCULATED in Table IV of the first two tabs of the calculation spreadsheet.

The government deduction and tax formulas can change each year. For current information consult the following:

The Government of Canada Taxes webpage: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/taxes.html>

General Income Tax and Benefit Guide 2020 for British Columbia: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/tax-packages-years/general-income-tax-benefit-package/5000-g.html>

Income Tax forms for British Columbia (2020):

- T1 General Income Tax and Benefit Return: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pbg/5010-r/5010-r-20e.pdf>
- Federal Worksheet: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pbg/5000-d1/5000-d1-20e.pdf>
- Provincial Worksheet: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pbg/5010-d/5010-d-20e.pdf>
- Schedule 6 (Canada Workers Benefit – Version for British Columbia (BC) only): <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pbg/5000-s6/5000-s6-20e.pdf>
- Schedule 8 (Canada Pension Plan Contributions and Overpayment for 2020): <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pbg/5000-s8/5000-s8-20e.pdf>
- Schedule 11 (Federal Tuition, Education and Textbook Amounts): <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pbg/5000-s11/5000-s11-20e.pdf>
- T778 (Child Care Expenses Deduction): <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pbg/t778/t778-20e.pdf>
- British Columbia Tax (Form BC428): <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pbg/5010-c/5010-c-20e.pdf>
- Schedule 11 BC (Provincial Tuition and Education Amounts – British Columbia): <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/formspubs/pbg/5010-s11/5010-s11-20e.pdf>

Table IV in the first two tabs of the calculation spreadsheet includes the following information:

El premiums: the El premium rate and formula

CPP premiums: the CPP premium rate and formula, including the deduction for CPP enhanced contributions on employment income

Federal taxes:

- Basic personal amount
- Tax rates
- Tax brackets and corresponding tax rates
- Tax credits
 - El premiums
 - Base CPP premiums
 - Employment Tax Credit
 - Canada Training Credit
 - Canada Workers Benefit
 - Tuition amount
 - Medical expenses

Provincial taxes:

- Basic personal amount
- Tax rates
- Tax brackets and corresponding tax rates
- Tax credits
 - El premiums
 - Base CPP premiums
 - Tuition amount
 - Medical expenses
 - BC Tax Reduction Credit

The calculation spreadsheet allocates federal and provincial tax credits between the parents in the way that is most advantageous to the family. There is a table in each of the first two tabs of the calculation spreadsheet that indicates how these credits have been assigned for the living wage calculation.

Table 9 explains the lines in Table IV of the calculation spreadsheet.

Table 9: Tax calculations	
Line	Explanation
Hours per week	This is determined by your assumptions (the calculation for Metro Vancouver and Greater Victoria is 35 hours per week)
Wage	This amount is determined after all the tables have been completed
Employment Income	This is total earnings = hourly wage x hours per week x weeks per year
Adjustments	Subtract child care expenses claimed (actual child care expenses over and above the amount of BC Affordable Child Care Benefit received) up to the maximum allowed. Child care expenses must be claimed by the spouse with the lower income Subtract the deduction for CPP Enhanced Contributions on employment income
Net Income	= Employment Income plus adjustments
EI premiums	= Employment Income x premium rate (2020: premium rate = 0.0158)
CPP premiums	Base CPP Contribution = (Employment Income – \$3,500) x 0.0495 Enhanced CPP Contribution = (Employment Income - \$3,500) x 0.003
Federal Income Tax	See below
Federal Refundable Tax Credits	See below
Provincial Income Tax	See below
After Tax Income	= Employment Income – EI Premiums – Base CPP Contribution – Federal Income Tax + Federal Refundable Tax Credits (if eligible) – Provincial Income Tax
Monthly After Tax Income	= After Tax Income / 12

To calculate the living wage, you need to determine both employment income and net (or taxable) income.

Calculating Taxable Income from Employment Income

The following adjustments are made in calculating Taxable Income from Total or Employment Income:

- Child care expenses net of the BC Affordable Child Care Benefit received (up to the maximum allowed) are deducted from the Employment Income of one of the parents.
- The portion of CPP premiums that corresponds to the new CPP Enhanced Contributions is deducted from the Employment Income of each parent.

Therefore:

$$\text{Net (taxable) Income} = \text{Employment Income} - (\text{Child Care Expenses} - \text{Affordable Child Care Benefit}) - \text{Enhanced CPP Contributions.}$$

Regarding this calculation, there are three relevant tax rules (2020):

- The spouse with the lower income must claim the child care expenses.

The amount of child care expenses that can be claimed is limited as follows:

For children born in 2014 or later, \$8,000.

For children born between 2004 and 2013, \$5,000.

Each parent claims the deduction for CPP enhanced contributions.

Note that the calculation spreadsheet includes a formula to determine the correct amount of the child care expense to be claimed, based on the actual family expense and the amount of Affordable Child Care Benefit received, as well as the formulas for the CPP Enhanced Contributions deduction.

Federal income tax

The structure of the federal income tax calculation is as follows:

$$\text{Tax} = (\text{Taxable income} \times \text{tax rate}) - (\text{Non-refundable tax credits} \times \text{tax credit rate}) - (\text{Refundable tax credits} \times \text{tax credit rate})$$

Table 10: Federal non-refundable tax credits (2020 tax year)

Tax credits	Comments	Claimed by parent
Basic Personal Amount	= \$13,229	Both
El premiums	= B53 or C53 in the calculation spreadsheet	Both
CPP premiums	= B54 or C54 in the calculation spreadsheet	Both
Canada Employment Amount	= \$1,245	Both
Tuition amount	= I50 in the calculation spreadsheet (actual tuition fees paid minus the amount claimed for the Canada Training Credit)	"2"
Medical expenses	= G50 (Family medical expenses: C17 in the calculation spreadsheet – Net income (B52 in the calculation spreadsheet) x 0.03) Note: To be eligible to claim medical expenses, the family's annual medical expenses must be greater than 3% of the net income of the person claiming the expenses. It is advantageous for the parent with lower net income to claim.	"1"

Non-refundable tax credits reduce the amount of tax an individual has to pay, but only up to the amount of tax owed. If the amount of non-refundable tax credits exceeds the amount of tax owed, the person does not benefit from these extra tax credits (they either lose the credits or, in some rare cases as with the tuition amount, these can be carried over for future years or transferred to a spouse). Refundable tax credits, as the name suggests, can be refunded by the government if the amount of credits the person is eligible for exceeds the amount of tax owed. The spreadsheets include a separate line in Table IV for refundable tax credits to ensure that non-refundable tax credits do not result in negative tax owing.

Federal refundable tax credits

Table 11: Federal refundable tax credits (2020 tax year)		
Tax credits	Comments	Claimed by parent
Canada Training Credit	= 149 (\$250 or the actual tuition fees paid, whichever is lower)	"2"
Canada Workers Benefit	= 151 (the lower of \$2,379 or (Family Employment income – \$3,000) x 0.26) – [Family Net Income – 17,348] x 0.12 Note: To be eligible for the Canada Workers Benefit, the family's net income must be less than \$37,137.	"2"
Refundable Medical Expense Supplement	= G51 (0.25 x [Family medical expenses (C17 in the calculation spreadsheet) – Net income (B52 in the calculation spreadsheet) x 0.03] – 0.05 x (Family Net Income – \$28,164)) Note: To be eligible to claim the Refundable Medical Expense Supplement, the person must be eligible for the non-refundable medical expenses tax credit.	"1"

Federal tax brackets

For 2020, the tax rate on individual taxable income less than \$48,535 is 15 per cent. For taxable income between \$48,535.01 and \$97,069 it is 20.5 per cent. Therefore, if the taxable income of either parent increases above \$48,535, the formula for "Taxable income x tax rate" becomes:

$$\text{Taxable income x tax rate} = \$7,280.25 + ((\text{Taxable income} - \$48,535) \times 0.205)$$

Provincial income tax

The structure of the provincial income tax calculation is as follows:

$$\text{Tax} = (\text{Taxable income} \times \text{tax rate}) - (\text{tax credits} \times \text{tax credit rate}) + \text{BC Tax Reduction (If available)}$$

Table 12: BC provincial tax credits (2020 tax year)		
Tax credits	Comments	Claimed by parent
Basic Personal Amount	= \$10,949	Both
EI premiums	= B53 or C53 in the calculation spreadsheet	Both
CPP premiums	= B54 or C54 in the calculation spreadsheet	Both
Tuition amount	= I50 in the calculation spreadsheet (actual tuition fees paid minus the amount claimed for the Canada Training Credit)	"2"
Medical expenses	= G50 (family medical expenses: C17 in the calculation spreadsheet – Net Income (B52 in the calculation spreadsheet) x 0.03)	"1"

Note: To be eligible to claim medical expenses, the family's annual medical expenses must be greater than 3% of the net income of the person claiming the expenses. It is advantageous for the parent with lower net income to claim.

Note that currently there are no refundable BC tax credits that the model living wage family would qualify for.

The BC Tax Reduction Credit

The BC Tax Reduction Credit is a non-refundable tax credit that reduces the provincial income tax bill for people with a net income less than \$34,556. Unlike other tax credits that can only be claimed by one person in the family, the BC Tax Reduction Credit can be claimed by both parents as long as their individual net income is below the threshold.

It is calculated according to the formula (2020):

$$\text{BC Tax Reduction Credit} = \$476 - (\text{taxable Income} - \$21,185) \times 0.0356$$

In the Metro Vancouver calculation, only Parent "1" is eligible for the BC Tax Reduction Credit. However, if the living wage in your community is below \$19.04 Parent "2" will also be eligible. The calculation spreadsheet will automatically adjust provincial taxes for Parent "2" if that is the case.

Provincial tax brackets

For 2020, the tax rate on taxable income less than \$41,725 is 5.06 per cent. For taxable income between \$41,725.01 and \$83,451 it is 7.7 per cent. Therefore, if the taxable income of either parent increases above \$41,725, the formula for "Taxable income x tax rate" becomes:

$$\text{Taxable income x tax rate} = \$2,111 + ((\text{Taxable income} - \$41,725) \times 0.077)$$

Stage 4: Determining the living wage amount

THIS STEP IS THE EASIEST. Examine Table III in the calculation spreadsheet. Cell C41 is the gap between Available annual income and Annual family expenses. The living wage amount is the wage at which the gap is as small as possible while still being greater than \$0.

Therefore, if the gap line is negative, increase the living wage amount in Cell B48. If the gap line is positive, reduce the living wage amount in Cell B48 until the gap is negative, and then increase it until the gap line has the lowest possible positive amount.

Stage 5: Verifying the calculations

YOU CAN VERIFY SOME OF THE CALCULATIONS that are part of the living wage calculation through online calculators.

CCB, BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit, GST credit and BCLICATC: The Canada Revenue Agency provides a child and family benefits calculator online at: <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/bnfts/clcltr/cfbc-eng.html>.

BC Affordable Child Care Benefit: The Affordable Child Care Benefit estimator online at: <https://myfamilyservices.gov.bc.ca/s/estimator>.

RAP: The BC government provides a Rental Assistance Program benefits calculator online at: bchousing.org/housing-assistance/rental-assistance-financial-aid-for-home-modifications/rap-safer-calculator.

You are finished.

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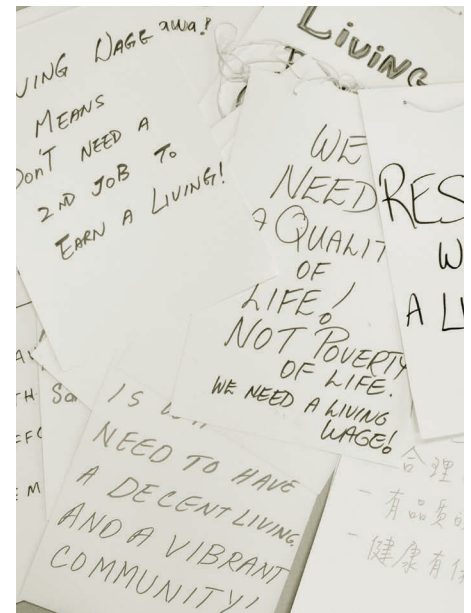
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Living Wage for Families BC aims to reduce poverty for workers and their families. They certify and promote employers who pay their staff and contractors a living wage, and advocate for complementary government policies that would help families make ends meet. They are a program of First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society.

Contact us at 236.979.6062 or info@livingwageforfamilies.ca.

livingwageforfamilies.ca



Child and Youth Advocacy Society

First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society works with a non-partisan, cross-sectoral network of partner organizations to put BC children and youth first in public awareness and public policy. It conducts research and analysis on child and youth rights and well-being, offers education and training events, and makes policy recommendations to promote, strengthen and defend the rights of children and youth in BC.

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