

May 1, 2020 Update

The trustees of the IBEW Local 353 Health and Welfare plan have been actively seeking a solution to the federal government's decision not to allow Supplementary Unemployment Benefits (SUB) to be paid to plan members who are on Canadian Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) or Employment Insurance Emergency Relief Benefit (EI-ERB). As a result, we have concluded that a Relief Grant, which falls within the scope of allowable income under the CERB and EIERB payment plans from the Canadian Government, is the best resolve and will be implemented as soon as possible.

The Relief Grant provides economic relief to eligible members in the amount of \$150 per week for a maximum of 16 weeks - effective from March 15, 2020 to October 3, 2020. These dates are exactly the same as the Federal Government's ERB programs.

The creation of the Relief Grant is in response to your inquiries about the prohibition on the payment of SUB while on the Emergency Relief Benefits (CERB and EI-ERB), which were made effective on March 15, 2020. These Emergency Relief Benefits, were deemed the default program for all applications, including regular EI, thus blocking everyone from collecting SUB.

The application form will be on the website as soon as possible. TEIBAS will be processing the payments, which will be delivered either through email transfer or by cheque sent via Canada Post.

You can **only** claim for the relief grant if **all** of the following apply:

1. you are an active participant on the IBEW LU353 Health & Welfare Plan
2. You are receiving EI-ERB or CERB Benefits from the Federal Government
3. you are laid off because of shortage of work or COVID-19 or eligible leave under the Employment Insurance Act
4. you have applied for and been approved for benefits through either CRA or Service Canada
5. you are registered as out of work, trade school, maternity leave, parental leave, family caregiver leave, family medical leave, critical illness leave, or Temporary Layoff due to COVID 19, at the union hall

There are currently just over 2800 members on TLO due to COVID-19, and this number is trending downward as members start to return to work. Those who have already returned to work may still apply for the Relief Grant, if they meet the eligibility criteria above.

Re-Opening Ontario

On April 28th the government of Ontario announced that they have commenced planning for re-opening the province. There were no definite dates stated, but it was noted that it will be gradual

and staged and that public health and safety will be the number one concern through all stages. The full release can be viewed at - <https://www.ontario.ca/page/reopening-ontario-after-covid-19>. As parts of the construction sector were deemed essential, we foresee that the rest of construction will most likely be re-opened in the earlier stages of the process. Below is a summary of the government's statement on how that will happen.

Reopening businesses and public spaces

Reopening will be gradual and occur in stages. There will be two-to-four weeks between the launch of each stage to allow health officials to assess conditions before moving to the next one. This will determine if measures should be adjusted, loosened or tightened. This approach will enable the government to ensure there are appropriate measures in place to open safely and limit health risks. Everyday actions to protect your health, like physical distancing, frequent hand washing and staying home when ill, will continue through each stage.

Stage 1

In the first stage, we will consider:

- *opening select workplaces that can meet current public health guidelines*
- *allowing essential gatherings of a limited number of people*
- *opening some outdoor spaces*
- *continued protections for vulnerable populations*

Stage 2

In the second stage, we will consider:

- *opening more workplaces with significant mitigation plans*
- *opening more public spaces*
- *allowing some larger public gatherings*
- *continued protections for vulnerable populations*

Stage 3

In the final stage, we will consider:

- *opening all workplaces responsibly*
- *relaxing restrictions on public gatherings*
- *continued protections for vulnerable populations*

Considerations for each stage

To reopen the economy, we will consider factors such as the risk of the spread of COVID-19 and the ability to implement protective and preventative measures in the workplace. The Chief Medical Officer of Health and health experts will advise the government on when it may begin to ease public health measures using a range of criteria, including:

- *a consistent two-to-four week decrease in the number of new daily COVID-19 cases*
- *sufficient acute and critical care capacity, including access to ventilators and ongoing availability of personal protective equipment*
- *approximately 90% of new COVID-19 contacts are being reached by local public health officials within one day, with guidance and direction to contain community spread*
- *ongoing testing of suspected COVID-19 cases, especially of vulnerable populations, to detect new outbreaks quickly*

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a spotlight on job site conditions. As you should all be well aware, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (Green Book) provides for sanitary and hygienic sites and the right to refuse unsafe work where they are not clean. These principles were central to regulating construction safety and controlling the spread of COVID 19 but should not be forgotten when we are back to “normal”, they should remain our guiding principles. As the economy and remainder of construction re-opens, we need to stay vigilant with respect to safety protocols.

This has certainly been an unprecedented and difficult experience, made more challenging by the constant barrage of news and social media, which has created personal challenges for all of us, notwithstanding the inability to disengage at the end of the day. The result has left many people on edge and created further physical and mental issues for some. I implore those who may be struggling to get help. As members you enjoy access to a very comprehensive benefit plan that includes an Employee Assistance Program that can help in difficult times.

In closing, I am encouraged by the government’s actions, and although planning is in its early stages, it stands to reason that construction, being one of the biggest economic drivers of Ontario, they will want us back to work as soon as they can. We are in this together and we will come through this together.