

FOOD BANK USE BY AISH RECIPIENTS

Alberta's Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program provides income support to those with disabilities that substantially limit their ability to work. Observing their reliance on food banks is a way of evaluating the adequacy of this support.

A recent School of Public Policy [report](#) showed that provincial income assistance for recipients who are able to work is often, even with heavy reliance on charities, insufficient to maintaining stable housing. That research is limited by the authors' assumption that those income support recipients are capable of full-time work and are not constrained by health issues or disability.

This distinction matters because people with disabilities often face additional and unavoidable costs, including dietary requirements, accessible housing needs, and diminished ability to establish or maintain employment.

In recognition of this, AISH, as it is presently designed, differs from other income support programs. First, eligibility requires extensive medical evidence of disability creating a permanent barrier to employment. Second, income support is higher. It's an open question whether benefit levels are high enough to compensate for increased costs and diminished capacity to work associated with disability.

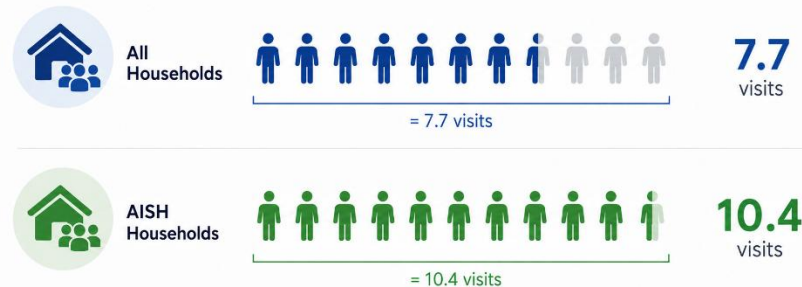
With limits on supplementing income, AISH recipients are especially vulnerable to gaps between benefit levels and basic living costs.

One way to evaluate the adequacy of AISH support payments is to track recipients' use of charitable organizations to support their living costs. Specifically, an AISH recipient might use a food bank to offset grocery costs, freeing up limited income for expenses such as rent and utilities. Reliance on food banks signals insufficient income to retain housing or meet other basic needs.

The graphic highlights a result from on-going research at the School of Public Policy on

Average Number of Visits per Household

AISH households visit more on average than all households.



Calculations drawn from data provided by the Calgary Food Bank. AISH households are those reporting AISH as their primary source of income on their first visit to the food bank.

how people utilize the services of the Calgary Food Bank. When households reliant on AISH were required to use the food bank to make ends meet, they did so noticeably more often than those reporting wages, pensions, and other sources as their main source of income. Households relying on income assistance, including AISH, were disproportionately represented among the most persistent users of the food bank.

Beginning in July 2026, AISH will be restructured into a two-tiered system that adds the new Alberta Disability Assistance Program (ADAP) for recipients deemed able to work. The maximum monthly ADAP benefit will be \$1,740—approximately \$200 below the AISH maximum. Recipients may earn up to \$350 (AISH) and \$700 (ADAP) per month before reductions apply, with ADAP benefits phased out gradually.

As this policy reform is implemented, monitoring reliance on charitable food assistance can provide an early indicator of whether the changes to income support programs are enabling recipients to meet basic needs with dignity and stability.