

# The Economic Well-Being of Persons Receiving Income Supports and Persons with Disabilities in Alberta

On February 4, 2025, the Government of Alberta announced the creation of the Alberta Disability Assistance Program (ADAP), a new income support program for Albertans with disabilities, together with a set of new employment supports. ADAP is scheduled to launch on July 2, 2026.

This study examines the economic well-being of working-age persons with disabilities and recipients of income assistance in Alberta as ADAP is implemented. The study has two objectives. First, we document the economic well-being of working-age Albertans who have a disability and/or who receive income assistance. Second, we examine how that well-being changes as ADAP is implemented. Because ADAP will change the income and employment supports available to this population, the period surrounding its implementation offers an opportunity to observe how economic well-being shifts as program rules change.

To meet these objectives, we are conducting an online survey which participants will receive about every six months. To be eligible, a person had to reside in Alberta, be between 18 and 64 years of age, and either be a recipient of income assistance (AISH or Income Support) or be a person with a disability, whether self-reported or diagnosed. Recruitment materials were distributed through community partner organizations and through social media. The first round (Round 1) was fielded January 2026 to May 31, 2026. This report presents preliminary results from Round 1.

This report is a baseline. Round 1 was completed before ADAP took effect, so the results describe the economic position of respondents prior to the program’s implementation and establish the reference point against which later rounds will be compared. The report therefore describes economic well-being at a single point in time for survey respondents. It does not measure change over time, it does not evaluate ADAP, and it does not attribute any outcome to any program.

## Respondent Summary

Overall, 527 persons completed the Round 1 survey. Of them:

<p><b>76%</b> received provincial income assistance, most through AISH</p>	<p><b>3 in 4</b> lived below Canada’s low-income line</p>	<p><b>5 vs 0</b> median everyday essentials they could not afford, against a national median of zero</p>
<p><b>~2x</b> the national rate of food insecurity</p>	<p><b>75%</b> spent more than 30% of household income on housing</p>	<p><b>58%</b> were completely prevented from working</p>

Round 1 describes a deeply low-income population for whom government income assistance is the financial foundation, not a top-up. Three in four respondents lived below Canada’s low-income line, most received provincial income assistance — the large majority through AISH — and for most that reliance had lasted years. Against that backdrop, one pattern runs through the entire report: economic hardship deepens as disability becomes more severe, and it deepens further among those

who receive AISH. Income, employment, material deprivation, food insecurity, and housing all move together along these two lines.

## Hardship deepens with disability severity

**Work recedes as disability deepens.** Labour-force participation falls at every step of the severity scale. Over half of the respondents with a mild disability were in the labour force; however, among those with a very severe disability, fewer than one in five were.

**Labour-force participation, by disability severity** (*share of respondents in the labour force*)



*Participation falls at every step as disability becomes more severe, to fewer than one in five among respondents with a very severe disability (the Alberta average is 81%).*

**Low participation reflects disability.** For this population, paid work is constrained by disability: among respondents who did not participate in the labour force — those who reported being completely prevented from working, or who would not have taken a suitable job had one been offered — 84.6 percent gave their own illness or disability as the main reason.

For those who can and did work, hourly wage rates were far below the provincial average. Respondents with a mild disability earned, on average \$25.53/hour compared to a provincial average of between \$36.40 to \$40.53/hour. This, combined with fewer work hours — which 66.4 percent or respondents said they did *not* want to work more than 30 hours — means that employment earnings on their own are far too low to secure economic well-being.

Finally, for those that can and did work, self-employment was much more common than the Alberta average and increased with disability severity. For persons with mild and moderate disabilities, 25 percent were self-employed, increasing to 36.8 percent for those with a severe disability, compared to the Alberta average of 13.6 percent.

**Living standards follow the same gradient.** Across the household measures, the more severe a respondent’s disability, the worse the outcome. The share unable to afford seven or more everyday essentials more than triples from the mild group to the most severe, and low income, food insecurity, and housing cost burdens all climb in step.

More severe disability →	Mild	Moderate	Severe(+)
<b>Below the low-income line</b>	65%	79%	<b>78%</b>
<b>Cannot afford 7+ essentials</b>	17%	38%	<b>57%</b>
<b>High food insecurity (5–6 items)</b>	29%	46%	<b>66%</b>
<b>Housing over 30% of income</b>	70%	74%	<b>80%</b>

*Within-sample shares. For material deprivation, food insecurity, and housing, the “Severe” column combines severe and very severe respondents, following the source tables. Full figures and standard errors appear in the report.*

## AISH recipients are the worst off

**Receiving AISH divides outcomes more sharply than disability.** AISH recipients were far less likely to be in the labour force (36 percent compared 61.5 percent for respondents not receiving income assistance and compared to the Alberta average of 81 percent). Only 19 percent of AISH clients were employed, similar to the Alberta AISH caseload average of 16 percent employed. When employed, AISH clients worked an average of 11 hours a week, compared to 20 hours for respondents not receiving income assistance. They also had lower hourly wages of \$18.84/hour, compared to an hourly wage rate of \$30.64 for respondents not receiving income assistance and compared to the Alberta average of \$36.40 to \$40.53/hour. They also had low monthly earnings of, on average, \$622/month compared average monthly earnings of \$2,214 for respondents not receiving income assistance and compared to the Alberta average of \$5,183/month.

The same divide runs through the household measures, where AISH recipients were nearly twice as likely to fall below the low-income line as respondents receiving no assistance, and reported markedly higher deprivation, food insecurity, and housing strain.

Income assistance	AISH recipient	Disability and no income assistance
<b>Below the low-income line</b>	<b>84%</b>	45%
<b>Cannot afford 7+ essentials</b>	<b>41%</b>	24%
<b>High food insecurity (5-6 items)</b>	<b>54%</b>	26%
<b>Housing over 30% of income</b>	<b>80%</b>	57%

*Within-sample shares. AISH recipients are worse off than respondents receiving no income assistance on each measure. Full figures and standard errors appear in the report.*

Overall, in a conventional economic sense, respondents had less favourable employment outcomes; however, these comparisons measure respondents against a labour market organized around full-time, permanent employment—a standard many in this population cannot meet because of real and complex barriers to employment, and against which some apparent shortfalls may not be true deficiencies. What the results show without ambiguity is the level of earnings: respondents and AISH recipients most of all earn far less from employment than the provincial average. That is what makes income assistance the foundation of economic security for these respondents rather than a top-up, and for most, current income is not enough to secure economic well-being.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

For the people in this survey, income assistance is the foundation their material security rests on and AISH recipients are already the most deprived group in this report — going without more essentials, more food, and a heavier housing burden than anyone else, even with current benefits in place.

These are also the respondents the new ADAP program reaches. ADAP changes the income and employment supports available to this population. It is built around work capacity and the expectation of employment while reducing the maximum benefit for those without employment. Yet the evidence here shows most respondents are completely prevented from working, that participation falls toward zero as disability deepens, and that for those who do work — AISH recipients most of all — earnings are far too low to secure economic well-being on their own.

**Round 1 records that starting position. Future rounds, following these same respondents as the program takes effect, will show what changes.**