
Tips for Requesting a Change in Hearing Format at the Social Benefits Tribunal

How to Use this Tip Sheet:

This tip sheet was created by staff at the [Income Security Advocacy Centre \(ISAC\)](#) in September 2023. The information in this tip sheet is for individuals who have a hearing date with the Social Benefits Tribunal, and who want to change the format of their hearing.

The information below is designed to answer common questions and is not legal advice. The information below may help you figure out how to change the format of your hearing based on your needs and related limitations. If you still need help changing the format of your hearing, reach out to your local [community legal clinic](#).

How do I know what day and time my hearing is scheduled?

The Social Benefits Tribunal sends a Notice of Hearing to you by mail. The Notice gives you the hearing time and date.

Mark down your hearing date. If you are going to be late or cannot attend your hearing, you must contact the [Social Benefits Tribunal](#) by calling **1-800-753-3895** or sending an email to SBT.registrar@ontario.ca. Give a reason why you are going to be late or why you need to reschedule the hearing.

If you move/change addresses before you receive mail about your hearing, call the Tribunal to let them know your new address. If you have trouble accessing or reading your mail, you can call the Tribunal to find out if they have scheduled a hearing date.

How do I participate in my videoconference hearing?

Most hearings are held by videoconference from your personal device (smartphone, tablet, or computer), unless you request an alternative hearing format.

You can choose to attend your hearing from home as long as you have a reliable device that works and that has a fully charged battery. You need to have a microphone so that you can respond to questions and provide information to the adjudicator and anyone else who may be attending your hearing with you (legal support, translator, witness, etc.).

Headsets are recommended but not necessary. Try your best to find a quiet and private space.

I have problems with technology and I need to change the hearing format. What next?

As soon as you receive your Notice of Hearing, contact the [Social Benefits Tribunal](#) and ask for alternative arrangements to make it easier for you to participate in your hearing. You can make this request by filling out an [Accommodation Request Form](#).

Other hearing options include:

- 1) **A video hearing at a Tribunals Ontario site** with the technology already set up for the hearing. The office will have all the equipment set and a person available to help you connect to the hearing. You can bring someone to support you.
- 2) **A phone hearing using a cell phone that the Tribunal will lend you.** If you do not have a working telephone or if you have limited cell phone minutes, you can ask the Tribunal to loan you a basic cell phone so you can attend the hearing by phone.
- 3) **A phone hearing using minutes/airtime paid for by the Tribunal.** If you have a pre-paid or pay-as-you-go phone plan with limited minutes, you can ask for a top up voucher so you have enough minutes to participate in the hearing.

When filling out the [Accommodation Request Form](#), **for digital reasons**, explain the difficulties that you have in using or accessing technology to participate in the hearing. For example, “I cannot participate in the hearing and I need to change the format for a fair hearing because:

- I do not have a reliable phone or device;
- I do not have reliable internet;
- I do not have a reliable headset, and my current device/phone makes it difficult to hear or for others to hear me;
- My phone has limited minutes, and I do not have the money to pay for more;
- I have poor cell/internet service in my area;
- I cannot connect to the hearing because I do not know how to use a computer/device well enough;
- I do not have a private or suitable space to be in during the hearing;
- I need help with using a device and navigating digital documents at the same time, and I have no one I am comfortable to rely on;
- I do not have a reliable place to store my things because my housing situation is unstable;
- I do not have a reliable phone, internet, or device, and I live in a rural or remote part of Ontario; and/or
- I have difficulty with reading and writing and no one to help me review the hearing documents or figure out how to join the hearing.”

- 4) **An in-person hearing at a physical location in or near your community.** You can and should request an in-person hearing if needed due to a medical condition (or due to a combination of factors that makes it difficult for you to participate in a video or phone hearing). You can do this by filling out an [Accommodation Request Form](#).

When filling out the Accommodation Request Form **for medical or disability-related reasons**, explain why you need an in-person hearing and attach any supportive medical documents to the form. If you are waiting for medical information, fill out the form and write, “Further medical documentation will follow.”

Explain how your disability interferes with your ability to participate or attend the hearing. For example, “I cannot participate in the hearing via video or phone due to my disability and other barriers. A telephone or video hearing will cause significant prejudice in my ability to participate and present my case. I have:

- physical disabilities (e.g. tremors, visual impairments, etc.) that make navigating technology alone or without the proper supports difficult;
- problems reading and need aid in navigating documents;
- difficulty processing information (e.g. a cognitive disability such as an acquired brain injury or related illness);
- trouble following and participating in conversations which worsens in a digital setting and causes mental fatigue;
- psychological barriers/trauma that make testifying over the phone or on video difficult;
- difficulty looking at screens for long periods of time; and/or
- executive functioning problems (e.g., poor concentration, required in-person cueing, easily distracted, etc.).”

This is not a complete list - there may be other factors not listed above that make it difficult or impossible to attend a hearing on the phone or through video. Explain any additional barriers that you have in participating in a video or phone hearing, including any digital barriers like the ones listed above in 3), on the Accommodation Request Form.

When you are done filling out the form and attached any medical information, email the form to SBT.registrar@ontario.ca or mail the form to:

Social Benefits Tribunal
15 Grosvenor Street, Ground Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2G6

Try to keep a copy of the filled-out form for yourself so you have a record of the information you shared with the Tribunal.

I still need help. What should I do?

You can visit your local legal aid clinic. Find the legal aid clinic closest to you by clicking [here](#).