Credit Canada

Keys to Home Confidence:

Renter's Toolkit

CreditCanada.com

YOUR GUIDE TO

Stress-Free Renting & Smart Financial Planning

Need Advice on Renting? No Problem.

Renting is often one of the biggest monthly expenses Canadians face, and managing this alongside other financial responsibilities can be a real challenge.

That's why Credit Canada, the country's first and longest-standing non-profit credit counselling agency, created this Renter's Toolkit. For over 60 years, Credit Canada has helped millions of Canadians get out of debt and back into life.

This guide is part of our Keys to Home Confidence program, designed to give you clear, practical insights for every stage of housing. To explore the full program, visit CreditCanada.com/Confidence.

Here's What You'll Find Inside

CHAPTER 1

Rent Smart: How to Build a Budget that Works

Budgeting Basics

Finding a place to live isn't just about what looks good or feels right. It's about what fits your budget, so ask yourself:

- How much can I realistically spend on rent without stretching myself too thin?
- Have I accounted for all the hidden monthly expenses that come with renting?
- What will I do if unexpected costs pop up this month?

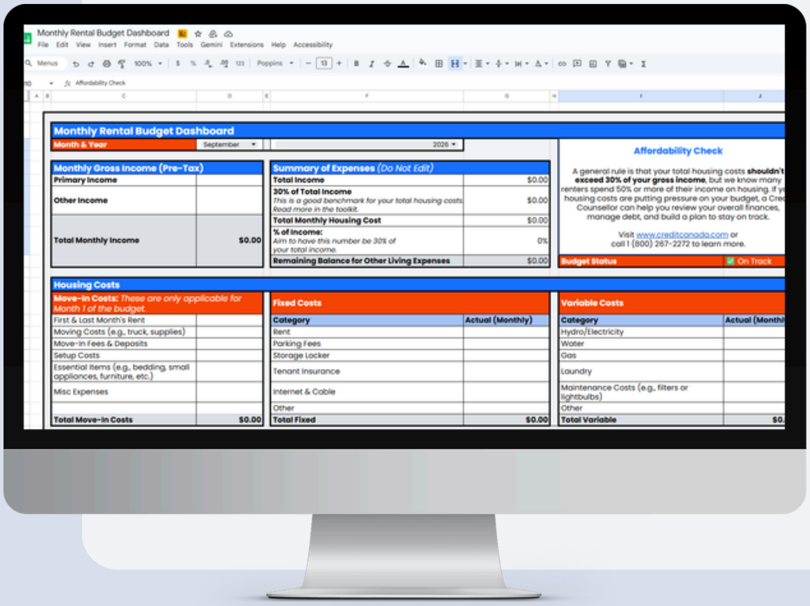
Rent is often your biggest expense, but utilities, groceries, transit, and insurance also matter. Use this chapter to determine what you can afford comfortably and start renting with confidence.

Quick Tip!

Try the 30% rule! Experts recommend spending no more than 30% of your gross monthly income on housing costs to keep your budget balanced.

Monthly Rental Budget Template

This editable [PDF budget template]() lets you easily input your monthly income and expenses, giving you a clear picture of your finances at a glance.



It covers all key categories to help you plan for rent, bills, and everyday costs, giving you the confidence to make informed renting decisions. Simply download the template, complete it digitally or print it out, and use it to guide your budgeting journey.

When Reviewing Your Budget, Ask Yourself:

- What would I do if my income changed unexpectedly?
- Have I left room in my budget for fun? Or am I setting myself up to feel restricted?
- Is my income stable enough to comfortably cover rent every month?
- Could I still reach my long-term goals while paying this much rent?

Want to Learn More?

Learn more about how much rent you can afford in this Keys to Home Confidence video.

CHAPTER 2

The Rental Readiness Checklist: Documents, Savings & Essentials

Ready, Set, Rent!

When you find a rental you love, things can move fast. Having your paperwork, finances, and essentials in order helps you stand out as a reliable renter and saves you from last-minute stress.

Quick Tip!

Keep digital copies of your documents ready on your phone or cloud storage for quick access during rental applications.

This checklist includes the most common items landlords ask for, plus a few smart-to-have extras that can make your transition smoother.

Whether you're renting for the first time or the fifth, these steps help you feel confident, prepared, and ready to say yes when the right opportunity comes along.

What to Have on Hand

- [x] **Credit Score Checked**
  Most landlords check your credit to see how consistently you pay your bills. Knowing your score upfront gives you a chance to fix errors or explain past issues. You can access your credit score through Canada's two major credit bureaus, Equifax and TransUnion.

- [x] **Employment Letter Ready**
  This confirms your income and job stability, which helps landlords feel reassured that you can pay rent consistently. Here's a template of what that looks like.

- [x] **References Lined Up**
  Good references from former landlords, supervisors, or even roommates can help show that you're trustworthy and responsible.

FAQ: Do I need a credit score to rent in Canada?

Not always, but it helps. Many landlords check your credit to see if you've paid bills on time in the past.

First & Last Month's Rent Saved
Landlords usually ask for both up front, so having this saved puts you in a stronger position to apply.

Emergency Fund
Having three to six months' rent saved for emergencies gives you peace of mind and can prevent you from falling behind if something unexpected happens.

Tenant/Renter's Insurance
Protects your personal belongings and covers liability in case of damage or injury. It's usually affordable and often required. Many banks and insurance providers offer tenant insurance, including TD, Square One, and Sonnet.

As you prepare your documents, ask yourself:

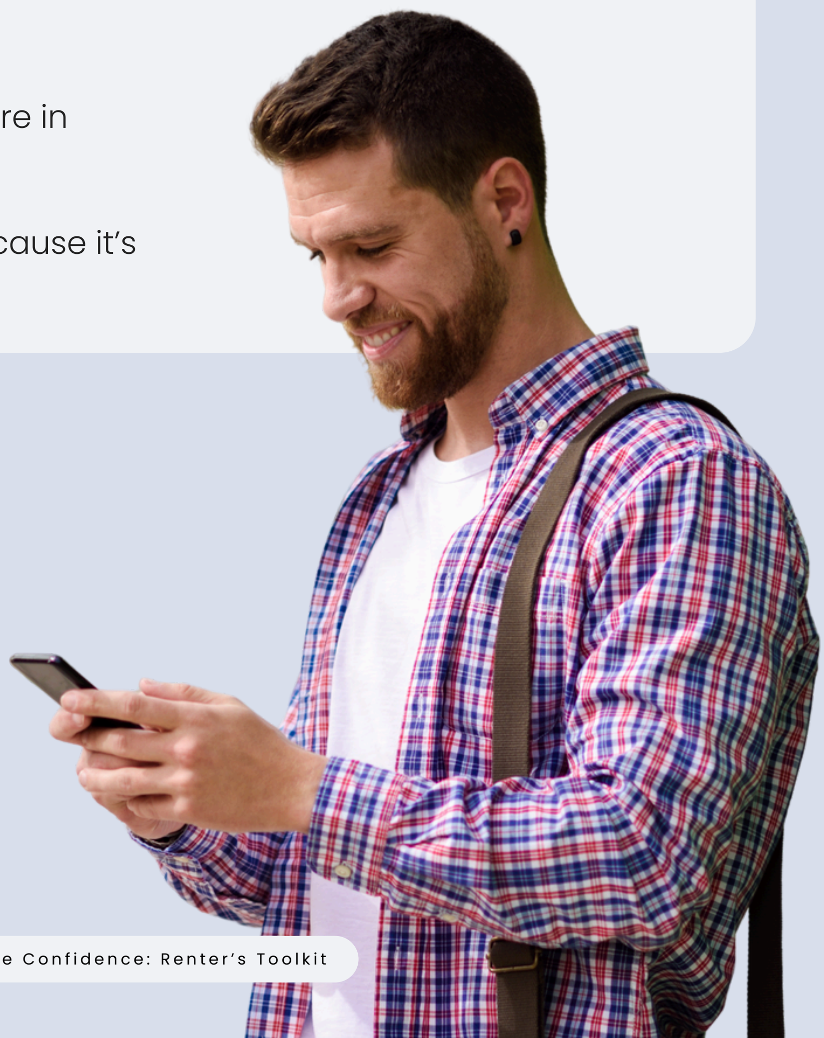
- Could I confidently explain my credit score to a landlord (what affected it, and what I'm doing to improve it)?

Need Tips for Renting with Bad Credit?

We've got your back! Check out this blog.

Before applying for a place, ask yourself:

- Will this location cost me more in transportation or groceries?
- Am I rushing into this just because it's available?



CHAPTER 3

New to Canada, Ready to Rent: The Rental Guide for Newcomers

Renting as a Newcomer

If you're new to Canada, welcome! Finding and securing housing is one of your first big steps, and while it can feel overwhelming, it's absolutely doable.

This checklist is here to guide you through the unique steps that come with renting in a new country. From building your credit history to understanding your rights as a tenant, we're here to help you settle in with confidence.

Before You Rent:

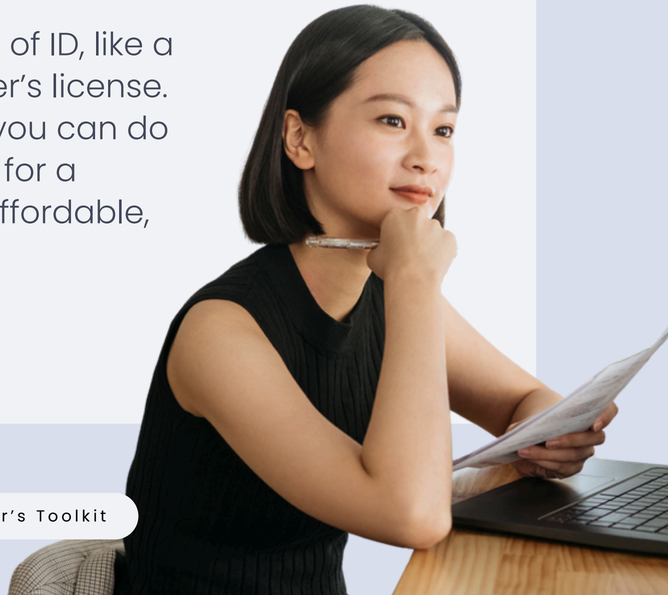
- [x] **Apply for a Social Insurance Number (SIN)**
  You'll need this to work, open financial accounts, and access many essential services. You can apply for your SIN with the government of Canada here.

- [x] **Open a Canadian Bank Account**
  This makes it easier to pay rent and bills, and is the first step toward building a financial foundation in Canada.

FAQ: Can I rent an apartment before I arrive in Canada?

Yes, but proceed with caution. Rental scams targeting newcomers are common. If you're renting remotely, always request a live virtual tour, confirm the landlord's identity, and never send money before signing a verified lease.

- [x] **Have Secure Identification**
  Landlords will usually ask to see some form of ID, like a passport, permanent resident card, or driver's license. If getting a driver's license isn't something you can do right away, don't worry. You can also apply for a provincial photo ID. It's often easier, more affordable, and works just as well as proof of identity.



Start Building Credit History

Apply for a secured credit card or explore newcomer packages offered by financial institutions. Many of these packages include a credit card with a manageable limit of $1,000, which can be a great way to start building your credit history in a new country. Good credit helps you qualify for rentals, loans, and better interest rates. Want to learn how to build your credit from the ground up? Explore our free e-learning modules for step-by-step guidance.

Create a Budget

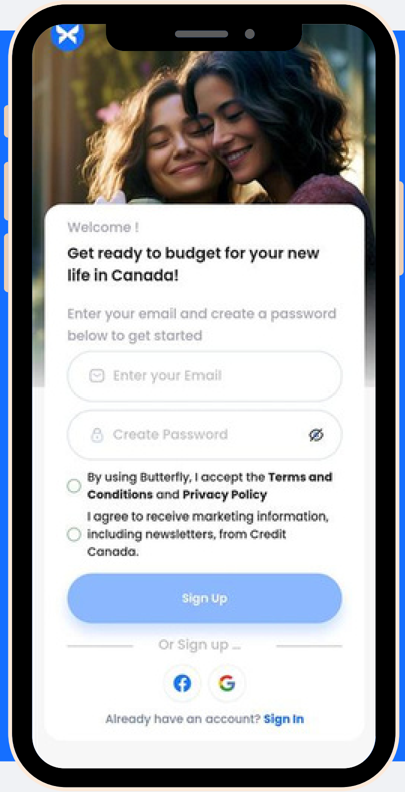
Planning your monthly expenses like utilities, groceries, and transportation helps ensure you're saving enough to cover your rent comfortably each month. It can feel overwhelming at first, but Butterfly, a free budgeting app designed by newcomers for newcomers, makes the process simpler by giving you a clear picture of your finances based on the province you live in.

Butterfly, the Budgeting App for Newcomers

Butterfly helps you budget for life in Canada with confidence.

It provides average living costs based on your location and household size, so you can plan your finances accurately. Designed for newcomers, it includes features like converting your budget into your home currency and is available in Hindi, Spanish, English, and French.

Try Butterfly



CHAPTER 4

Stay Protected: Spotting Rental Scams & Knowing Your Rights

Keeping Yourself Safe

Not every rental listing is what it seems, and unfortunately, scams and bad rental experiences are a growing problem.

Did You Know?

In 2023, The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (CAFC) said 508 victims filed reports about rental fraud, resulting in over $820,000 in losses.

Knowing your rights as a renter and learning how to spot red flags can save you time, money, and stress. This chapter gives you practical advice to help you rent safely and confidently, and it outlines what landlords are (and aren't) allowed to do.

Red Flags to Watch Out For

Requests for Money in Cash Without a Lease
Never send a deposit or rent payment before you've seen the place or signed a lease.

No In-Person or Virtual Showing Offered
Scammers often avoid showing the actual unit. Always ask to see the space before committing.

Photos Don't Match the Listing
If the pictures are overly polished or don't reflect the actual unit, be cautious... it could be a bait-and-switch.

Payment in Crypto, Gift Cards, or Wire Transfers
These payment methods are often used in scams because they're harder to trace or reverse.

Pressure to Pay Immediately
Legitimate landlords should give you time to review the lease and ask questions. Don't rush if it doesn't feel right.

Quick Tip!

Always do a walkthrough with your landlord before moving in to note any existing damage.

Rights and Responsibilities

- **Safe and livable housing:** Landlords must provide homes that meet health and safety standards.

- **Proper eviction process:** You can't be evicted without notice and legal grounds.

FAQ: What do I do if my landlord isn't making repairs?

Start by making the request in writing. If there's no response, each province has a tenant board or agency you can contact for help. Document everything, including photos and dates of communication.

- **Rent control and increases:** Many provinces regulate how often and how much rent can increase.

- **Right to privacy:** Most provinces require landlords to provide notice (typically 24 hours) before entering, but the exact rules and exceptions can differ by province.

- **Freedom from discrimination:** You cannot be denied housing based on race, religion, age, sexual orientation, family status, and more.

Want to Learn More?

Learn more about how to avoid scams in this Keys to Home Confidence video.

CHAPTER 5

Shared Living: Roommates, Leases & Avoiding Conflict

Roommate Readiness

Living with roommates can be a great way to save money, but it also means sharing space, responsibilities, and expectations. Whether you're signing a lease together or moving into someone else's rental, it's important to get on the same page early.

This chapter explores what to consider before committing to a shared living arrangement, including the pros and cons of different lease types and a simple roommate checklist. A little planning now can save a lot of awkward conversations later.

What's the Difference Between Renting and Leasing?

Renting
Month-to-month rentals offer flexibility but can come with sudden rent increases or unexpected end dates.

Leasing
Fixed-term leases (like 12 months) offer stability and rent protection, but can be harder to break if things change.

Roommate Checklist

- **Are all names on the lease?**
  Check if all roommates are listed on the lease. If only one person signs, the others may not have legal rights or protections. Whenever possible, it's best for everyone to be included. Not only does this ensure equal rights, but it also means responsibilities and liabilities are shared if anything happens to the home.

- **Who's responsible for rent and bills?**
  Decide who will send rent to the landlord and who pays which utilities. Clear, written agreements help avoid confusion or resentment later on.

What are the shared space expectations?
Talk about how clean you expect things to be, how chores will be divided, and how you'll handle shared items like furniture, dishes, and groceries.

How will you manage guests, noise, and pets?
It's better to agree on quiet hours, visitor policies, and pet rules before these issues come up.

Quick Tip!

Hold a roommate meeting before move-in to discuss expectations, chores, and bills to keep the peace.

What happens if someone wants to move out?
Discuss how much notice someone needs to give and who's responsible for finding a new roommate or covering their share of the rent.

Need a Roommate Agreement Template?

It can be tough to know how to create a roomate agreement. If you need help, try this template.

Need Extra Guidance?

We're Here for You

You don't have to navigate renting and the financial challenges that come with it alone.

At Credit Canada, we know renting is more than just signing a lease. It's about securing your financial future. Whether you're budgeting your first apartment or recovering from past credit challenges, our certified Credit Counsellors are here to help you every step of the way.

Where to Reach Out for Help:

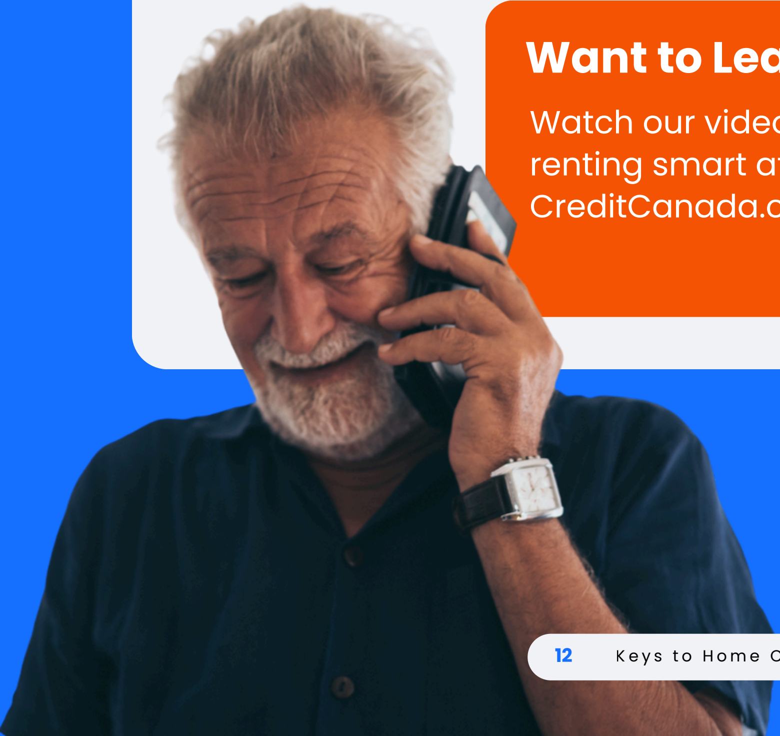
- Speak to a Credit Counsellor by calling 1 (800) 267-2272
- Chat with Mariposa, Credit Canada's AI Agent
- Subscribe to our newsletter
- Check out our free tools, webinars, and blog posts
- All of the above can be found at creditcanada.com

Share This Guide

Know someone who is looking to rent? Send them this guide. The best advice is the kind that helps people avoid expensive mistakes.

More About This Program

This guide is part of Credit Canada's Keys to Home Confidence program—providing Canadians with the knowledge to navigate their biggest financial decisions with confidence.



Want to Learn More?

Watch our video series about renting smart at CreditCanada.com/Confidence