

BC Needs a Poverty Reduction Plan with Legislated Targets and Timelines

AN OPEN LETTER TO BRITISH COLUMBIA POLITICAL PARTIES

It is time for British Columbia's provincial government to launch a comprehensive poverty reduction plan—a detailed and accountable strategy with concrete and legislated targets and timelines to dramatically reduce homelessness and poverty in our province. Six Canadian provinces either have such plans or are in the process of developing them, but so far, not BC.

By any measure, BC has the highest rate of poverty in Canada. BC has recorded the highest child poverty rate for six years running. Despite years of strong economic growth and record low unemployment, almost half a million British Columbians—11 per cent of the total population—live in poverty, and homelessness continues to rise. As we struggle through a global economic downturn, poverty risks getting worse unless action is taken.

We all pay for poverty. Study after study links poverty with poorer health, higher justice system costs, more demands on social and community services, more stress on family members, and diminished school success. Effective poverty reduction will require the efforts of all segments of society (all levels of government, the private sector, non-profits, and citizens generally), but the provincial government must take the lead.

The policies needed to make a dramatic difference are known, and other jurisdictions that are setting clear targets and timelines are getting results. A comprehensive approach needs to boost the incomes of those living in poverty, but also build the social infrastructure, public services and assets that are vital to providing a path out of poverty.

We, the undersigned, urge the provincial government to adopt and legislate poverty reduction targets and timelines, and commit to implementing a comprehensive action plan.

We recommend the following targets and timelines:

- Using Statistics Canada's low-income cut off after tax (LICO-AT), reduce BC's poverty rate from 13 per cent to 9 per cent in four years, and to 3 per cent in ten years (meaning, effectively, a one third reduction within this government's mandate, and a 75 per cent reduction within a decade).
- Ensure the poverty rate (using the LICO-AT) for children, lone-mother households, single senior women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants likewise declines by 30 per cent in four years, and by 75 per cent in ten years, in recognition that poverty is concentrated in these populations.

- Within two years, ensure that every British Columbian has an income that reaches at least 75 per cent of the poverty line (using the LICO-AT).
- Within two years, ensure no one has to sleep outside, and end all homelessness within eight years (ensuring all homeless people have good quality, appropriate housing).

In order to achieve these targets, we call upon the province to commit to specific policy measures and concrete actions in each of the following policy action areas. Special attention should be focused on the needs of those most likely to be living in poverty (single mother households, single senior women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and mental illness, and recent immigrants and refugees).

Policy Action Areas

1. Provide adequate and accessible income support for the non-employed.
2. Improve the earnings and working conditions of those in the low-wage workforce.
3. Improve food security for low-income individuals and families.
4. Address homelessness and adopt a comprehensive affordable housing and supportive housing plan.
5. Provide universal publicly-funded child care.
6. Enhanced support for training and education for low-income people.
7. Enhance community mental health and home support services, and expand integrated approaches to prevention and health promotion services.

There is nothing inevitable about poverty and homelessness in a society as wealthy as ours. If we commit to a bold plan, a dramatic reduction in poverty and homelessness within a few short years is a perfectly achievable goal.

SIGNED BY organizations and community leaders from across the province, including faith leaders, health organizations, doctors, businesses, First Nations and Aboriginal groups, labour unions, immigrant and refugee organizations, community service agencies, municipal councils, women's groups, and many more.

List of signatories — now totalling 300, with more added daily — on the following pages

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Signatories as of December 16, 2009

411 Seniors Centre	BC ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now – BC)	BC Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM)
Aboriginal Neighbours		BCGEU Community Social Services Component
Jim Abram, Director, Area C, Strathcona Regional District and Former President of the Union of BC Municipalities	BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance	BC Government and Service Employees' Union
	BC Asset Building Collaborative	
ACCESS (Aboriginal Community Career and Employment Services Society)	BC Association for Community Living	BC Government Retired Employees Association, New Westminster and District Branch
The Advocacy Centre (Nelson)	BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs	
Ahavat Olam Synagogue	BC Association of Social Workers	BC Health Coalition
ASPECT (Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training)	BC Civil Liberties Association	BC Healthy Child Development Alliance
Association of Neighbourhood Houses of Greater Vancouver	BC Coalition for Health Promotion (Duncan)	BC Healthy Living Alliance
Atira Women's Resource Society	BC Coalition of People with Disabilities	BC Lung Association
Aurora Centre	BC Community Economic Development Network (BC CEDNet)	BC Nurses' Union
AWARE Society	BC Community Nutritionists' Council (BCCNC)	BC Peace and Global Educators
Be The Change Earth Alliance	BC Family Net Society	BC Persons With AIDS Society
BC Aboriginal Child Care Society	BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations	BC Old Age Pensioners
BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society	BC Federation of Labour	BC Retired Teachers' Association – Vancouver Branch
		BC Soccer Association
		BC Society for Public Education
		BC Teachers' Federation

BC Vibrant Communities	Castlegar and District Community Services Society	Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, Western Region
Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland	Castlegar and District Health Watch	Communicopia
Britannia Community Services Centre Board	Castlegar United Church	Community Advocates for Little Mountain
Burnaby Teachers' Association Executive Council	Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House	Community Business and Professionals Association
Canada Without Poverty (formerly National Anti- Poverty Organization)	Central Coast Teachers' Association	Community Connections Society of Revelstoke
Canadian Cancer Society, BC & Yukon Division	Centre for Native Policy and Research	Community Connections Society of Southeast BC
Canadian Centre for Community Renewal	Centre for Population Health Promotion Research, UBC	Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria (Community Council)
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives	Changing the Face of Poverty	Comox Valley Women's Resource Centre
Canadian Farmworkers Union	The Church of St. John the Divine	Council of Canadians
Canadian Federation of Students – BC	City in Focus	Council of Senior Citizens of BC (COSCO)
Canadian Mental Health Association – BC Division	Citywide Housing Coalition	Creative Employment Access Society
Canadian Mental Health Association (Richmond Clubhouse – Pathways)	Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC	Creston Valley Teachers' Association
Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union (COPE) Local 378	Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE)	Daxgat'inhI Goodin Anti- Poverty Group Society
Career Link BC	Coastal Community Advisory Committee (Vancouver Coastal Health)	Heather Deal, City Councillor, Vancouver
Carnegie Community Action Project	CoDevelopment Canada	Delta Teachers' Association
Carnegie Community Centre Association	Columbia Institute	Charlotte Diamond, children's entertainer
	Commercial Drive Business Society	Dietitians of Canada, BC Region
	Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, Local 464	

DisAbled Women's Action Network (DAWN) Canada	First Unitarian Church of Victoria	Hospital Employees' Union
Division of Prison Health and Education, UBC	First United Church Mission	Interfaith Summer Institute for Justice, Peace and Social Movements
Doug Donaldson, Municipal Councillor, Village of Hazelton	Fleetwood Christian Reformed Church – Social Justice Group	Island J.A.D.E. Society
Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House	Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House	Kerry Jang, City Councillor, Vancouver
Duncan City Council	Gallery Gachet	Jewish Family Service Agency
Duncan United Church	Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women – Canada (GAATW–Canada)	Justice and Peace Unit of the (Anglican) Diocese of New Westminster
Eagle Valley Community Support Society (Sicamous)	Grandview Woodlands Area Council	Justicia for Migrant Workers BC
EMBERS (Eastside Movement for Business and Economic Renewal Society)	Grandview Woodlands Drug and Alcohol Coalition	KAIROS BC–Yukon (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives)
Ending Violence Association of BC	Greater Trail Community Skills Centre	KAIROS Parksville Qualicum
Faith and Society Committee of the BC Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada	Greater Victoria Citizens' Counselling Centre	KAIROS Prince George
Faith in Action	Growing Together Child and Parent Society	KAIROS Richmond
Faith Lutheran Church (Powell River)	Gulf Islands Teachers' Association	KAIROS Salmon Arm
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks	Mike Harcourt	Kamloops Christian Hostel
Fernie City Council	Health Sciences Association of BC	Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society
Fernwood Community Association, Victoria	Health Officers Council of BC	Kamloops Women's Resource Group Society
First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition	Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC & Yukon	Kingcrest International Neighbours
First Christian Reformed Church of Vancouver	Dr. Clyde Hertzman, Director, Human Early Learning Partnership	Kitimat District Teachers' Association
		Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
		Joy Kogawa, novelist and poet
		Murry Krause, City Councillor, Prince George

Learning Disabilities Association of BC (LDABC)	Mount Olivet Lutheran Church	Oliver/Osoyoos Mental Health Consumers
Julia and Ed Levy, ILLAHIE Foundation	Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House	Overseers Canada (Latin American immigrant collective in BC & Canada)
Raymond Louie, City Councillor, Vancouver	Mount Seymour United Church	PACE (Prostitution Alternatives, Counselling & Education) Society
Lutheran Urban Mission Society	Debora Munoz, City Councillor, City of Prince George	Pacific Community Resources Society
Donna Macdonald, City Councillor, Nelson	Nelson Area Society for Health	Pacific Health & Development Sciences Inc.
Make Poverty History, Canada	Nelson, BC Diocesan Development & Peace Committee	Pacific Northwest Labour History Association
March of Dimes Canada	Nelson Community Services Centre	Parent Support Services Society
Gabor Maté, M.D., author and health practitioner	Network for East Vancouver Community Organizations (NEVCO)	Peace Arch Community Services
Mavis McMullen Housing Society	New Foundations (a Mennonite Central Committee Poverty Alleviation project)	Peace Arch Community Services Food Bank
Michael McKnight, CEO, United Way of the Lower Mainland	Nicola Valley Teachers Union	Pedal Energy Development Alternatives(PEDAL)
Geoff Meggs, City Councillor, Vancouver	North Island Women's Services Society	Pivot Legal Society
John Millar, Executive Director, Population and Public Health Program, Provincial Health Services Authority	North Okanagan Child Care Society	Port Alberni City Council
Mission and Outreach Committee for Knox United Church (Terrace)	North Okanagan Early Childhood Development Coalition	Potluck Café Society
Mission Teachers' Union	Northern Society for Domestic Peace	Powell River City Council
Barry K. Morris (Rev.), for the Longhouse Council of Native Ministry	Oceanside Coalition For Strong Communities (Parksville)	Prince George Diocesan Council for the Canadian Catholic Organization of Development and Peace
MOSAIC (Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities)	Okanagan Skaha Teachers' Union	Prince George District Teachers' Association

Professional Employees Association	Richmond Community Health Advisory Committee (Vancouver Coastal Health)	South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS) Society	Richmond Family Place Society	Spring Ridge Co-operative Housing Association
Prostitutes Empowerment, Education and Resources Society	Richmond Poverty Response Committee	St. James Anglican Church Social Gospel Coordinating Group
Public Health Association of BC	Richmond Women's Resource Centre	St. Rita's Roman Catholic Church, Castlegar
Quest Food Exchange	SOS (Settlement Orientation Services)	Tim Stevenson, City Councillor, Vancouver
Raise the Rates Coalition	Salsbury Community Society	Sto:lo Tribal Council
Surinderpal S. Rathor, Deputy Mayor, City of Williams Lake	Shalom Seekers	Streams of Justice
Ray-Cam Cooperative Center	Sheway	Sunshine Coast Community Services Society
REACH Community Health Centre	Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (SFPIRG)	Surrey Foundation
The Realistic Success Recovery Society	Simon Fraser University Women's Studies Graduate Caucus	Surrey Urban Mission Society
Angela Reid, City Councillor, Kelowna	Lynne Sinclair, City Councillor, White Rock	Sustainable Environment Network Society
Andrea Reimer, City Councillor, Vancouver	The Sisters of St. Ann (Victoria)	David Suzuki
Réseau-Femmes Colombie-Britannique	Skeena Diversity Society	Sylvan United Church
Revelstoke City Council	Social Planning and Research Council of BC	Terrace Anti-Poverty Group Society
Revelstoke Renters Voice	Social Planning Council of Williams Lake & Area	Threshold Housing Society
Revelstoke Social Development Committee	Joel Solomon, President and CEO of Renewal, Executive Director of Endswell Foundation	Tides Canada Foundation
Revelstoke Women's Shelter		Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS)
Richmond Centre for Disability	South Peace Building Learning Together Society	Touchstone Family Association
		Toxic Free Canada
		TRAC Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre

Trail Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Seniors (SPCS)	Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (VIPIRG)	YFC/Youth Unlimited Greater Vancouver
Union of BC Indian Chiefs		YWCA Vancouver
UNITE HERE Local 40	Vancouver Island Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)	
United Way of Campbell River	Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter	
United Way of Castlegar		
United Way of the Central and South Okanagan Similkameen	Vancouver South Presbytery, United Church of Canada	
United Way of the Fraser Valley	Vancouver-Burrard Presbytery of the United Church of Canada	
United Way of Greater Victoria	Vernon & District Women's Centre Society	
United Way of the Lower Mainland	Vibrant Abbotsford	
United Way of North Okanagan Columbia Shuswap	Vibrant Surrey	
United Way of Powell River and District	Victoria City Council	
United Way of the Thompson Nicola Cariboo	Victoria Diocesan Council of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace	
University of BC School of Social Work	West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund	
Urban Coalition (Vancouver)	West Kootenay Labour Council	
Vancity Credit Union	Westcoast Family Resources Society	
Vancouver and District Labour Council	Wheelhouse Project	
Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST)	Wilson Heights United Church	
	WISH Drop-In Centre Society	
Vancouver Island Human Rights Coalition	Women Elders in Action (WE*ACT)	
Vancouver Island Mayworks Project	Ellen Woodsworth, City Councillor, Vancouver	