

## **The Call for a Poverty Reduction Plan**

We call on the Government of British Columbia to launch a comprehensive and accountable poverty reduction plan aimed at dramatically reducing homelessness and poverty in our province.

We are ashamed of the levels of poverty and homelessness in a society as wealthy as ours. We can drastically reduce poverty in British Columbia by joining hands and working together for a common goal that touches the hearts and lives of each of us. But we must act boldly.

We know that all of us pay for poverty. We pay in increased health care costs. We pay in higher crime. We pay in higher demand for community, social and charitable services. And we pay in lack of school readiness, reduced school success and in lower economic productivity. People who are poor get sick more, die sooner, and lack many opportunities that others take for granted. There is a false economy in failing to act boldly.

We know that BC is falling behind. All other provinces either have poverty reduction plans or are in the process of adopting them, and the success of these plans is already clear across Canada.

We urge the provincial government to provide leadership, and to adopt and legislate poverty reduction targets and timelines. As a first step, we call upon the government to appoint a lead minister for poverty reduction (a champion for this initiative), have them oversee a cross-ministry poverty action secretariat, and have them report annually on their progress. We recommend the following targets and timelines:

- Reduce BC's poverty rate by 30% within four years, and by 75% within 10 years.
- Ensure the poverty rate for children, lone-mother households, single senior women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and mental illness, and recent immigrants and refugees likewise declines by 30% in four years, and by 75% 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% of the poverty line.
- 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 areas:

1. Provide adequate and accessible income support for the non-employed, and remove policy barriers so that recipients can build and maintain assets.
2. Improve the earnings and working conditions of those in the low-wage workforce.
3. Address the needs of those most likely to be living in poverty.
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. Other jurisdictions that are setting clear targets 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 and improving quality of life. If we commit to a bold plan, a dramatic reduction in poverty and homelessness within a few short years is perfectly achievable.