

February 1, 2017

John Horgan, MLA, Opposition Leader
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC, V8V 1X4

Dear Mr. Horgan,

I am writing on behalf of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition to ask about your party's plans for reducing poverty in BC. I have included some specific questions and I would appreciate your answers as soon as possible, but no later than the end of March.

According to a recent poll commissioned by one of our members, 78% of British Columbians think it is important for political leaders in BC to address poverty with a provincial poverty reduction plan with clear targets and timelines. Clearly, the public is ready for political leadership on this issue and we would like to know what actions your party will be introducing should you win the provincial election in May.

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition is a diverse group of 55 Coalition members and our call for a legislated poverty reduction plan with targets and timelines is endorsed by over 400 organizations province-wide, representing thousands of British Columbians. Enclosed please find a copy of the Open Letter and the list of member signatory organizations (for a full list of signatories, please see our website). A few weeks before the election, we will be providing our supporters with an analysis of your responses to the questions and your election platform, as well as communicating it to the general public through a high-profile press conference.

Please answer the questions included with specific details if possible. I appreciate the time you take to consider these questions and provide your responses. It will allow voters to make an informed decision in the upcoming provincial election.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Anastasia Gaisenok
Co-Chair, BCPRC
Executive Director, Check Your Head



Paul Taylor
Co-Chair, BCPRC
Executive Director, Gordon Neighbourhood
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BC Poverty Reduction Coalition Election Questions

Will you implement a poverty reduction plan for BC with legislated targets and timelines?

- a. *If yes, when will the legislation be tabled and what will the targets be?*
- b. *If no, why not?*

What new policies do you plan to introduce to address the seven policy areas that have been identified as crucial components of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan?

1. Providing adequate and accessible income support for the non-employed:

- a. *Would you increase and index welfare benefit rates in all categories, including the Expected to Work and Persons With Disabilities category?*
- b. *What other rule changes do you plan for social assistance?*

2. Improving earnings and working conditions for low-wage workers:

- a. *Will you increase the minimum wage to \$15/hour, and index it to inflation?*
- b. *Do you propose any improvements to employment standards?*
- c. *Will you introduce or enhance any other forms of income support for low-income British Columbians?*
- d. *Would you help to encourage the payment of Living Wages for Families throughout BC?*

3. Addressing the needs of those most likely to be living in poverty:

- a. *What specific measures do you plan to introduce to reduce poverty (rates and depth) among children, lone-mother households, single senior women, indigenous people, people with disabilities (including mental illness), recent immigrants, refugees, and temporary foreign workers, and queer and transgender people?*

4. Implementing initiatives to end homelessness and the lack of affordable housing:

- a. *What plans do you have for the construction of new social housing and the introduction of other measures to increase the supply of low-income housing to fulfill the need of 10,000 social housing units per year?*
- b. *Do you plan to improve tenant protections and rent controls?*
- c. *What level of new funding do you plan to commit to addressing homelessness and housing issues?*

5. Providing universal publicly-funded child care:

- a. *Do you support the \$10 a Day Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning proposed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC?*
- b. *If yes, on what timeline will you phase in its implementation?*
- c. *What level of new funding do you plan to commit to addressing BC's current child care crisis?*

6. Providing support for training and education:

- a. *How do you propose to increase access for people on social assistance and low-wage workers to post-secondary education, training and apprenticeships?*
- b. *Would you reduce post-secondary tuition fees by 50% and increase the availability of post-secondary grants for low-income students?*
- c. *Would you increase funding to K-12 education to address inequality among students and schools?*
- d. *Would you increase funding for children with special needs and ELL students in the K-12 system?*
- e. *Would you restore free Adult Basic Education and provide free ELL for adults?*

7. Promoting the health of all British Columbians:

- a. *How will you ensure access to essential health services not included in the public health care system, such as prescription medication, dental and eye care?*
- b. *Would you eliminate MSP premiums?*
- c. *What are your plans to improve the quality and accessibility of community care for seniors and people with disabilities (including home care and residential care)?*
- d. *What are your plans for improving community-based mental health and addiction services?*
- e. *Would you commit to full implementation of the BC Ombudspersons' report on seniors care in a reasonable time frame?*

Do you have anything else you would like to add about your approach to poverty reduction in BC?

Open Letter: 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. Enhance 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.

Signed,

ACORN BC	Health Officers' Council of BC
Africa Great Lakes Networking Foundation	Hospital Employees' Union
Basic Income Vancouver	Interspiritual Centre of Vancouver Society
BC Alliance on Mental Health/Illness and Addiction	Jewish Seniors Alliance of Greater Vancouver
BC Federation of Labour	Living Wage for Families Campaign
BC Federation of Students	Megaphone Magazine
BC Ferry and Marine Workers Union	MOSAIC
BC Food Systems Network	MoveUP
BC Government and Service Employees' Union	New Westminster & District Labour Council
BC Health Coalition	North Shore Disability Resource Centre
BC Healthy Communities	North Shore Homelessness Task Force
BC Healthy Living Alliance	PIVOT Legal Society
BC Non-Profit Housing Association	Protein for People
BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre	Public Health Association of BC
BC Teachers' Federation	Raise the Rates Coalition
Burnaby Community Services	Richmond Poverty Response Committee
Canada Without Poverty	Single Mothers' Alliance of BC
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - BC	SPARC BC
Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House	Streams of Justice
Check Your Head	Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition
Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods	Together Against Poverty Society
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC	Unifor
Community Legal Assistance Society	Union Gospel Mission
Community Social Planning Council, Victoria	United Way of Greater Victoria
Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC	United Way of the Lower Mainland
Cranbrook Social Planning Society	Vancity Community Foundation
Disability Alliance BC	Vancity Credit Union
Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House	Vancouver & District Labour Council
Early Childhood Educators of BC	Vancouver Foundation
Faith in Action	Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks
Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC	Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition	Vibrant Abbotsford
Gordon Neighbourhood House	WestCoast LEAF
Greater Vancouver Food Bank	Women Against Violence Against Women