

The **BC Poverty Reduction Coalition** is an alliance of organizations that have come together to raise awareness about poverty and inequality in BC and improve the health and well-being of all British Columbians through the call for a comprehensive solution that addresses the systemic causes of these problems.

## **Overview**

British Columbia has the highest rate of poverty in Canada. The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition was launched in 2009 in response to these critical issues, and has now gained the support of over 400 organizations throughout the province in the call for a comprehensive and effective **poverty reduction strategy with legislated targets and timelines** to significantly reduce poverty and homelessness in BC.

This approach needs to raise 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: social housing, universal child care, education and training, and community health care. The poverty reduction plan is a plan for healthy families and healthy communities.

The Coalition is made up of a diverse membership of over 70 organizations that bring their collective strength and support to this call, including community and non-profit groups, faith groups, health organizations, First Nations and Aboriginal organizations, immigrant service agencies, businesses, labour organizations, and social policy groups.

The Coalition's goal is to build community support to compel policymakers to commit to a poverty reduction plan. We will continue to build the call until BC has implemented a viable and accountable strategy.

## **Administration**

The Vancity Community Foundation acts as Secretariat for the Coalition providing administration and technology support. Anastasia Gaisenok, Check Your Head: The Youth Global Education Network, and Stephen D'Souza, Burnaby Community Services, are the current co-chairs serving a one-year term. There are five members of the BCPRC team: Community Organizer (5 days/week), Trish Garner; Communications and Outreach Assistant (3 days/week), Omar Chu; Leadership Development Coordinator (3 days/week), Viveca Ellis; Northern Regional Coordinator (1 day/week) Laura Bennett; and Okanagan Regional Coordinator (1 day/week) Christine Mettler.

## Join the Call

There are three levels of involvement for organizations, and an Action Team for individuals to engage with the Coalition's activities:

### Supporters

There are over 400 signatories to the Open Letter calling on the government of British Columbia to implement a poverty reduction strategy – see pages 3-4 for the full text. Once an organization signs the letter and informs Coalition staff, the organization is added to the network and receives updates via e-newsletter.

### Members

Upon receipt of support for the Open Letter, organizations are invited to become members of the steering committee, which meets every two months to guide the direction of the Coalition's activities. Current members include:

Africa Great Lakes Networking Foundation	Health Officer's Council of BC
Association of Neighbourhood Houses BC	Health Sciences Association of BC
Basic Income Vancouver	Hospital Employees' Union
ACORN BC	Interspiritual Centre of Vancouver Society
BC Alliance on Mental Health/Illness & Addiction	Jewish Seniors Alliance of Greater Vancouver
BC Disability Caucus	Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
BC Federation of Labour	Living Wage for Families Campaign
BC Federation of Students	Megaphone Magazine
BC Ferry and Marine Workers Union	Metro Vancouver Alliance
BC Food Systems Network	MOSAIC BC
BC Government and Service Employees' Union	MoveUP
BC Health Coalition	New Westminster & District Labour Council
BC Healthy Communities	North Shore Disability Resource Centre
BC Healthy Living Alliance	North Shore Homelessness Task Force
BC Non-Profit Housing Association	Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education
BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre	PIVOT Legal Society
BC Teachers' Federation	Protein for People
Burnaby Community Services Society	Public Health Association of BC
Canada Without Poverty	Raise the Rates Coalition
Canadian Cancer Society, BC & Yukon Division	Revelstoke Poverty Reduction Working Group
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - BC	Richmond Poverty Response Committee
Canadian Federation of University Women BC Council	Single Mothers' Alliance of BC
Canadian Mental Health Association - BC Division	Society for Children and Youth of BC
Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House	SPARC BC
Check Your Head: The Youth Global Education Network	Streams of Justice
Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods	Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC	Together Against Poverty Society
Community First Foundation	UFCW 1518
Community Legal Assistance Society	Unifor
Community Social Planning Council, Victoria	Union Gospel Mission
Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC	United Way of Greater Victoria
Cranbrook Social Planning Society	United Way of the Lower Mainland
Disability Alliance BC	Vancity Community Foundation
Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House	Vancity Credit Union
Early Childhood Educators of BC	Vancouver & District Labour Council
Faith in Action	Vancouver Foundation
Federation of Community Social Services of BC	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	West Coast Domestic Workers' Association
Grandview Woodland Food Connection	West Coast Women's LEAF
Greater Trail Community Skills Centre	Women Against Violence Against Women
Greater Vancouver Food Bank	YWCA Metro Vancouver

## **Executive Committee**

The Executive Committee operates as an accountability mechanism for the work of the Coalition and its staff. Membership of the Executive Committee will always include the two co-chairs, Executive Director of Vancity Community Foundation, and the Community Organizer, as well as others drawn from Coalition members, up to a maximum of 13. Requests for membership of the Executive Committee will be taken to the co-chairs, and reviewed and ratified by Coalition members at the bi-monthly meetings. Selection criteria will include skill sets and contributions, and attendance and active participation.

## **Basis of Unity**

### **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.