

BC Poverty Reduction Policy Recommendations

It's now more important than ever that the provincial government hear our collective voice loud and clear highlighting the pillars of a strong, comprehensive poverty reduction plan.

Key Messages

The BC poverty reduction plan must be grounded in a human rights foundation.

The existence of poverty in BC is a violation of human rights. There is not only a moral duty to eradicate poverty but also a legal obligation under international human rights law. A human rights approach to poverty reduction is based on a fundamental respect for human dignity as opposed to a charitable approach, and is grounded in the experiences and engagement of low-income people and communities. A human rights foundation must ensure meaningful reconciliation including a commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

An upstream approach focusing on the social determinants of health has the greatest impact.

Just as we pool our resources to provide public health care and education to all, we must work together to ensure the provincial government provides and adequately funds public poverty reduction.

Poverty reduction is a whole-of-government responsibility.

All government ministries must actively participate in the goal of ending poverty in BC and not continue to be 'silo-ed' in their approach to issues of poverty. We recommend legislating a poverty/equity lens at Treasury Board that requires all ministries to consider the impact of any change to government policy, program or service on low-income people and prohibit changes that will have a negative outcome or exacerbate poverty and inequality.

Poverty reduction is an economic investment for our province.

We know that we all pay for the failure to address poverty. The cost of doing nothing to address poverty is \$9 billion per year, while the implementation of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan in BC would be far less. Let's stop mopping up the floor and fix the hole in the roof.

To ensure long-term sustainability of the poverty reduction plan, targets and timelines must be legislated.

We urge the provincial government to provide leadership, and to adopt and legislate poverty reduction targets and timelines with annual reports 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.
- ◆ Recognize that poverty is concentrated in particular marginalized groups and ensure likewise declines in the poverty rate by 30% in four years, and by 75% in ten years within these groups.
- ◆ 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).

BC POVERTY REDUCTION POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Housing and homelessness

End homelessness and adopt a comprehensive affordable housing and supportive housing plan

BC has the worst record of housing affordability in Canada, and the numbers of homeless and under-housed people are increasing.

Priority actions:

- ◆ Recommit to building thousands of new social and co-op housing units per year. BC should be bringing on stream 10,000 such units per year.
- ◆ Introduce stronger tenant protections including tighter limits on annual rent increases, tying rent control to the unit (not the tenant), adequately enforcing the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) and the Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Act, and extending tenant rights to include all non-profit social housing currently exempt from the RTA.

Equity

Address the needs of those most likely to be living in poverty

Indigenous people, people with disabilities and mental illness, recent immigrants, refugees and temporary foreign workers (including farm workers and live-in caregivers), single mothers, single senior women, and queer and transgender people (particularly youth) have higher rates of poverty and homelessness. The poverty reduction plan must focus its efforts on the structural barriers faced by these groups.

Priority actions:

- ◆ Restructure federal and provincial funding to better address the needs of all Indigenous people, including the large off-reserve population.
- ◆ Increase disability rates and index them to inflation.
- ◆ Guarantee access to income assistance for all regardless of citizenship status.
- ◆ Provide free transit for children 0-18 years of age and a low-income transit pass for adults.



Health and food security

Enhance community mental health and home support services, and expand integrated approaches to prevention and health promotion services

Poverty is a fundamental determinant of health, and the health care costs of poverty add up to \$1.2 billion per year. So, all of the other objectives will have a direct impact on improving the health of low-income people. That said, government provision of essential health services and community health care—home care, home support, assisted living, long-term care, and community mental health services — should be enhanced and expanded.

Priority actions:

- ◆ Expand essential health services in the public system, such as dental and optical care and community mental health services.
- ◆ Eliminate MSP premiums (already cut by 50% with a commitment to eliminate).
- ◆ Expand home support and residential care services, and increase the number of residential care beds.



Welfare

Income Assistance

Provide adequate and accessible income support for the non-employed

Welfare and disability benefits are far too low at \$710 for a single person and \$1033 (plus a \$52 transportation subsidy) per month for a person with a disability. And the eligibility rules and procedures make income assistance far too inaccessible for many.

Priority actions:

- ◆ Significantly increase welfare and disability rates to the Market Basket Measure, and index them to the cost of living.
- ◆ Increase earnings exemptions, and remove clawbacks and arbitrary barriers that discourage, delay and deny people in need

Employment and the living wage

Improve the earnings and working conditions of those in the low-wage workforce

Most adults living in poverty have a job, and the majority of poor children in BC live in families with parents who work in the paid labour force. The employment standards protections for vulnerable workers, which cover areas such as overtime hours and vacation pay, are far too lax.

Priority actions:

- ◆ Increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for all workers with no exemptions and index it to the cost of living
- ◆ Restore the coverage and enforcement of employment standards.
- ◆ Become a living wage employer of provincial government staff and contractors; and encourage other employers to adopt the living wage for families



Low Wage



Education

Education

Enhanced support for training and education for low-income people

Without meaningful long-term training and education, people cannot access stable and well-paying jobs.

Priority actions:

- ◆ Reduce tuition fees by 50% and increase the availability of post-secondary grants for low-income students.
- ◆ Allow welfare recipients to attend post-secondary education and get apprenticeships.
- ◆ Adequately fund K-12 education to mitigate inequalities and to ensure adequate library staff and resources, and special needs assessment and support.

Child care

Provide universal publicly-funded child care

The high cost of child care is a huge burden for many families and makes it completely inaccessible to others. Moreover, there is a shortage of child care spaces and the quality of care available is inconsistent across providers.

Priority actions:

- ◆ Improve the wages of early childhood educators promptly with a final goal of an average wage of \$25/hour plus 20% benefits.
- ◆ Continue to increase the number of licensed child care spaces and support high-quality programming
- ◆ Prioritize expanding the fee reduction program so that the affordable child care benefit can be reduced over time until free child care is provided directly to low-income families



Child Care

For more background information, visit:

bcpovertyreduction.ca

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition is a coalition that includes community and non-profit groups, faith groups, health organizations, First Nations and Aboriginal organizations, businesses, labour organizations, and social policy groups. We have come together around a campaign aimed at seeing the introduction of a bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan from the government of British Columbia that would include legislated targets and timelines to significantly reduce poverty, inequality and homelessness. We seek to improve the health and well-being of all British Columbians. We have over **80 Coalition Members** and over **400 supporting organizations** that have joined the call for a poverty reduction plan.

Support for this project does not necessarily imply funder's endorsement of the contents.

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