

# 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. Five Canadian provinces either have such plans or are in the process of developing them, but so far, not BC.

As we approach the May provincial election, we are calling on all BC political parties to commit that, if elected to government, they will implement a comprehensive poverty reduction plan.

By any measure, BC has the highest rate of poverty in Canada. BC has recorded the highest child poverty rate for five years running. Despite years of strong economic growth and record low unemployment, over half a million British Columbians—13 per cent of the total population—live in poverty, and homelessness continues to rise. As we head into 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 all provincial political parties to pledge to adopt and legislate poverty reduction targets and timelines, and commit to implementing a comprehensive action plan.

We recommend the following targets and timelines:

### 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 the mandate of the next government, 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 political parties to commit, prior to the May election, 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 200, with more added daily — on the following pages*

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Signatories as of February 3, 2009

Aboriginal Neighbours	BC Civil Liberties Association	BC Retired Teachers' Association – Vancouver Branch
Jim Abram, Director, Area C, Strathcona Regional District and Former President of the Union of BC Municipalities	BC Coalition for Health Promotion (Duncan)	BC Soccer Association
ACCESS (Aboriginal Community Career and Employment Services Society)	BC Coalition of People with Disabilities	BC Teachers' Federation
ASPECT (Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training)	BC Community Nutritionists' Council (BCCNC)	Britannia Community Services Centre Board
Association of Neighbourhood Houses of Greater Vancouver	BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations	BC Community Economic Development Network
Atira Women's Resource Society	BC Federation of Labour	Canadian Cancer Society, BC & Yukon Division
BC Aboriginal Child Care Society	BC Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM)	Canadian Centre for Community Renewal
BC ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now – BC)	BC Government and Service Employees' Union	Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance	BC Government Retired Employees Association, New Westminster and District Branch	Canadian Mental Health Association – BC Division
BC Asset Building Collaborative	BC Health Coalition	Canadian Mental Health Association (Richmond Clubhouse-Pathways)
BC Association for Community Living	BC Healthy Child Development Alliance	Carnegie Community Action Project
BC Association of Social Workers	BC Healthy Living Alliance	Castlegar and District Community Services Society
	BC Lung Association	Castlegar and District Health Watch
	BC Nurses' Union	
	BC Persons With AIDS Society	

Castlegar United Church	Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria (Community Council)	Fernie City Council
Central Coast Teachers' Association	Council of Senior Citizens of BC (COSCO)	First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
Centre for Native Policy and Research	Creston Valley Teachers' Association	First Christian Reformed Church of Vancouver
Centre for Population Health Promotion Research, UBC	Delta Teachers' Association	First United Church Mission
Changing the Face of Poverty	Charlotte Diamond, children's entertainer	411 Seniors Centre
City in Focus	Dietitians of Canada, BC Region	Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC	DisAbled Women's Action Network (DAWN) Canada	Gallery Gachet
Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE)	Division of Prison Health and Education, UBC	Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women – Canada (GAATW-Canada)
Coastal Community Advisory Committee (Vancouver Coastal Health)	Doug Donaldson, Municipal Councillor, Village of Hazelton	Grandview Woodlands Area Council
CoDevelopment Canada	Duncan City Council	Grandview Woodlands Drug and Alcohol Coalition
Columbia Institute	Eagle Valley Community Support Society (Sicamous)	Greater Trail Community Skills Centre
Commercial Drive Business Society	EMBERS (Eastside Movement for Business and Economic Renewal Society)	Greater Victoria Citizens' Counselling Centre
Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, Local 464	Ending Violence Association of BC	Growing Together Child and Parent Society
Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, Western Region	Faith and Society Committee of the BC Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada	Mike Harcourt
Communicopia	Faith in Action (Victoria)	Health Officers' Council of BC
Community Advocates for Little Mountain	Faith Lutheran Church (Powell River)	Health Sciences Association of BC
Community Connections Society of Southeast BC	Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks	Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC & Yukon
		Clyde Hertzman
		Hospital Employees' Union

Interfaith Summer Institute for Justice, Peace and Social Movements	Michael McKnight, CEO, United Way of the Lower Mainland	Overseers Canada (Latin American immigrant collective in BC & Canada)
Island J.A.D.E. Society	John Millar, Executive Director, Population and Public Health Program, Provincial Health Services Authority	PACE (Prostitution Alternatives, Counselling & Education) Society
Jewish Family Service Agency		
Julia and Ed Levy, ILLAHIE Foundation	Mission Teachers' Union	Pacific Community Resources Society
Justice and Peace Unit of the (Anglican) Diocese of New Westminster	Barry K. Morris (Rev.), for the Longhouse Council of Native Ministry	Pacific Northwest Labour History Association
Justicia for Migrant Workers BC	MOSAIC (Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities)	Parent Support Services Society
KAIROS BC-Yukon (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives)	Mount Seymour United Church	Parksville Qualicum KAIROS
KAIROS Prince George	Debora Munoz, City Councillor, City of Prince George	PEDAL (Pedal Energy Development Alternatives)
Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society	Nelson Area Society for Health	Pivot Legal Society
Kingcrest International Neighbours	Nelson, BC Diocesan Development & Peace Committee	Port Alberni City Council
Kitimat District Teachers' Association	Network for East Vancouver Community Organizations (NEVCO)	Powell River City Council
Joy Kogawa, novelist and poet		Prince George Diocesan Council for the Canadian Catholic Organization of Development and Peace
Murry Krause, City Councillor, Prince George	North Okanagan Child Care Society	Prince George District Teachers' Association
Learning Disabilities Association of BC (LDABC)	North Okanagan Early Childhood Development Coalition	Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS) Society
Lutheran Urban Mission Society	Northern Society for Domestic Peace	Public Health Association of BC
Donna Macdonald, Councillor, City of Nelson	Oceanside Coalition For Strong Communities (Parksville)	Quest Food Exchange
Gabor Maté, M.D., author and health practitioner	Okanagan Skaha Teachers' Union	Raise the Rates Coalition
		Surinderpal S. Rathor, Deputy Mayor, City of Williams Lake

Angela Reid, Councillor, City of Kelowna	Streams of Justice	United Way of the Thompson Nicola Cariboo
Revelstoke Social Development Committee	Sunshine Coast Community Services Society	Urban Coalition (Vancouver)
Revelstoke Women's Shelter	David Suzuki	Vancity Credit Union
Revelstoke City Council	Sylvan United Church	Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST)
Richmond Community Health Advisory Committee (Vancouver Coastal Health)	Terrace Anti-Poverty Group Society	Vancouver Island Human Rights Coalition
Richmond Family Place Society	The Advocacy Centre (Nelson)	Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (VIPIRG)
Richmond Women's Resource Centre	The Church of St. John the Divine	Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
SOS (Settlement Orientation Services)	The Sisters of St. Ann (Victoria)	Vancouver South Presbytery of the United Church of Canada
Salsbury Community Society	Tides Canada Foundation	Vancouver-Burrard Presbytery of the United Church of Canada
Lynne Sinclair, City Councillor, White Rock	Touchstone Family Association	Vibrant Abbotsford
Skeena Diversity Society	Toxic Free Canada	Vibrant Surrey
Social Planning and Research Council of BC	TRAC Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre	Victoria City Council
Joel Solomon, President and CEO of Renewal, Executive Director of Endswell Foundation	Trail Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Seniors (SPCS)	Victoria Diocesan Council of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House	Union of BC Indian Chiefs	West Kootenay Labour Council
St. James Anglican Church Social Gospel Coordinating Group	United Way of Campbell River	Wilson Heights United Church
St. Rita's Roman Catholic Church, Castlegar	United Way of Castlegar	WISH Drop-In Centre Society
Sto:lo Tribal Council	United Way of Greater Victoria	Women Elders in Action (WE*ACT)
	United Way of North Okanagan Columbia Shuswap	Ellen Woodsworth, Vancouver City Councillor
	United Way of Powell River and District	YWCA Vancouver
	United Way of the Central and South Okanagan Similkameen	
	United Way of the Fraser Valley	