



# A JUST TRANSITION IN BC

leaves no one behind

In every cabinet mandate letter, ministers are asked to deliver results people can see and feel in four key areas. One of those is as follows:

"A sustainable, clean, secure, and fair economy: We will continue our work investing in British Columbians, fighting racism and promoting equity, and building a clean economy that addresses our obligations to combat climate change by driving down emissions, while creating good, family-supporting jobs."

This paragraph closely resembles one of the BC Climate Emergency Campaign's 10 actions, endorsed by over 500 signatory groups from across the province:

"Leave no one behind. Ensure a just transition for fossil fuel workers, resource-dependent communities, and Indigenous and remote communities impacted by fossil fuel production. It will be critical to collaborate in true partnership with Indigenous peoples in climate action. Prepare our communities for the impacts of the climate crisis to minimize human suffering and infrastructure damage. Support those most vulnerable to climate change impacts."

This briefing note and accompanying policy backgrounder elaborates on four areas for provincial action to support people through a just transition. It was prepared by representatives from the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Poverty Reduction Coalition, Worker's Solidarity Network, Climate Emergency Unit and the Wilderness Committee.

# **Overarching provincial just transition policies, institutions, and framework**

The province needs to adopt an overarching just transition policy that convincingly communicates to workers and communities that, as our society transitions off fossil fuels, no one will be left behind. This policy needs to include guiding principles, a good jobs guarantee, robust financial commitments, and new programs and institutions that, combined, offer hope for economic and employment security in a zero-carbon economy.

- **Advocate** to the federal government for a Just Transition Transfer of at least \$25 billion a year, to be delivered to provincial just transition agencies (and directly to Indigenous Nations).
- **Establish** a just transition agency jointly governed by federal, provincial, Indigenous and municipal governments, with representation from unions, impacted workers, business groups, academia and civil society.
- **Create** a Youth Climate Corps that would offer guaranteed two years of employment and training to anyone aged 35 and younger to work on climate mitigation and adaptation projects in their communities.

# **Support resource workers and communities in northern BC**

Attracting residents and businesses requires people with the right skills and places they want to live. Strategic investments now can power rural economic prosperity and create green jobs through the transition from fossil fuels. But northerners must be involved in planning for the next economy in their region. Provincial officials must start and support that process, while taking care of gas workers and their families.

- **Launch** a community-led process with clear direction and funding commitments which will examine strengths and opportunities across the region, consult economic development experts, engage key stakeholders and identify investment priorities.
- **Invest** in infrastructure and services so northern communities can attract new residents and businesses in low-carbon sectors.
- **Create** good, family-supporting green jobs in ecological restoration and clean energy that work to heal the land and eliminate climate pollution while also supporting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.
- **Support** unionization within these sectors and ensure job creation is tied to pathways for equity-seeking groups that have been under-represented in the energy sector.
- **Provide** skills training for gas workers to successfully transition to new employment in the event they lose their jobs due to climate policy or declining demand for fossil fuels. Remove as many barriers as possible to this training by providing childcare, transportation, and education in their communities.
- **Support** pension bridging and other financial tools for those who are near the end of their career and wish to retire.

# **The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and a Just Transition**

Indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices because of the colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests.

Colonization has created and perpetuated systemic inequities that have, in many cases, made Indigenous communities more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, more reliant on outdated fossil fuel infrastructure, and economically marginalized and isolated from the rest of British Columbia.



- **Strengthen** First Nations' economic independence by supporting First Nation-led low-carbon economic development initiatives.
- **Improve** the coordination between First Nations', provincial, and federal governments on a just transition from fossil fuels.
- **Maximize** First Nations participation in economic development and employment opportunities arising from the transition to a low-carbon society and align with parallel initiatives to close infrastructure gaps.
- **Recognize** the economic component of First Nations' Title, the right to benefit economically from the use of Indigenous lands and resources.
- **Provide** financial support and incentives to Indigenous communities affected by fossil fuel production to transition to a clean-energy economy.
- **Retrain** Indigenous community members for the roles required for a just transition and work to end the economic isolation of First Nations communities.



## **Adaptation for the most vulnerable communities**

Low-wage workers are at the frontlines of the climate crisis in essential positions that will be impacted first. At the same time, low wage work is often undertaken by racialized, feminized workers, migrant workers and newcomers, and sections of labour that face marginalization on multiple fronts.

- **Introduce** and strengthen income and other supports to help low-income folks through the transition.
- **Establish** a right to cooling and heating for low-income communities, as well as the right to clean drinking water.
- **Retrofit** the existing stock of BC Housing while ensuring vulnerable tenants will continue to be able to afford their rent.
- **Establish**, enforce and provide employer education on basic climate safety standards for workplaces in consultation with low-wage workers including maximum temperature standards, enforced hydration breaks, access to cooling, and evacuation training.
- **Provide** migrant workers a path to permanent residency so their immigration status is not tied to their employer and they will not fear retaliation if they refuse unsafe work.
- **Equip** Indigenous communities with heat pumps and the capacity to maintain them.
- **Promote** climate adaptation for vulnerable communities, including low-wage workers, precarious workers, racialized and feminized workers, unhoused folks.
- **Minimize** human suffering and infrastructure damage, prevention and mitigation strategies for equity-deserving groups such as low-income and unhoused folks, disabled people, racialized folks, low-income workers, renters etc.

**Currently, the BC government's approach to just transition leaves much to be desired.** BC does not have a clear just transition framework or policy, spelling out its commitments to workers, vulnerable people or communities as we transition our economy off fossil fuels. In the [BCCEC's Progress Report Card on Confronting the Climate Emergency](#), we note that extreme weather events – the heat dome, flooding, wildfires – are disproportionately impacting vulnerable people and communities and deepening inequalities. To minimize human suffering, we must prioritize climate action in ways that promote equity, anti-racism, and social justice; support those that have been directly affected; and implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. And to prepare for the inevitable end of demand for fossil fuels and transition to clean energy, the province must begin planning as soon as possible.

While the province has made an investment of \$134 million to the CleanBC Communities Fund for local infrastructure projects, it has yet to create a plan to support workers and communities through a managed phase out of fossil fuel extraction. BC has an action plan to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples but its application is incoherent and inconsistent, especially when it comes into conflict with resource extraction. Finally, there is no comprehensive plan to support vulnerable communities from the impact of climate change. Our hope is for this briefing note to provide details on what these plans could look like and how they should take shape.

### **Section one: Overarching provincial just transition framework**

The province needs to adopt an overarching just transition policy that convincingly communicates to workers and communities that, as our society transitions off fossil fuels, no one will be left behind. This policy needs to include guiding principles, a good jobs guarantee, robust financial commitments, and new programs and institutions that, combined, offer hope for economic and employment security in a zero-carbon economy.

The framework can take as its starting point the just transition principles identified by the [International Labour Organization](#), [Indigenous Environmental Network](#) and [Just Recovery Network](#), which together emphasize the importance of taking a holistic view of transition. It is necessary but not sufficient for just transition policies to support workers in the fossil fuel industry as they find work in other areas. A just transition must cast a wider net of support, such that no worker or community is left behind, whether or not they are directly implicated in the production of coal, oil or gas.

The CCPA's [Roadmap to a Just Transition](#) offers the following principles:

- Recognition of rights (including Indigenous rights, migrant rights, disability justice, addressing environmental racism, workers' rights / Health and Safety, etc.)
- Participation of affected workers and communities
- Expansion of the social safety net

- Creation of new economic opportunities
- Inclusive workforce development

But the framework must be more than high-level principles. Without significant money to back up the principles in a just transition policy — a substantial investment in the jobs of the future — and transformative new programs, just transition will remain a hollow promise.

The BC government needs to make an audacious and hopeful offer to those workers and communities whose employment and economic security are currently tied to the fossil fuel industry (and to a lesser extent, the auto, steel, concrete and agriculture industries, all of which face substantial transition challenges), to young people setting off on their careers who are deeply anxious about the climate emergency, and to Indigenous communities on the front lines of fossil fuel extraction.

While much of climate policy and new climate infrastructure comes under provincial, municipal and Indigenous jurisdiction, it is the federal government that has the greatest capacity to pay. For this reason, **the BC government should advocate for a new federal Just Transition Transfer (JTT)**. The BC government should also establish a **Youth Climate Corps (YCC)**. These would be transformative programs that communicate that we are indeed entering emergency mode. They would be specifically linked to funding climate infrastructure projects that would create hundreds of thousands of jobs, along with training and apprenticeship programs for young workers and those leaving the oil and gas industry.

As we cease all new fossil fuel infrastructure projects, the JTT and YCC would allow us to tell workers and young people:

*“None of you will be out of work. We need your help to meet this moment. Your skills and strength will be deployed building renewable energy projects, retrofitting buildings, renewing existing infrastructure to make it more resilient to extreme weather and managing our forests to reduce wildfire risks in the summers to come.”*

A new federal [Climate Emergency Just Transition Transfer](#), in scope and substance, would be close to what is described [here](#).

A new federal JTT should be at least \$25 billion a year (representing about one percent of Canada’s GDP). The transfer’s distribution could be based on a formula linked to recent GHG emissions in each province (but fixed from that point onward, so that it does not perversely incentivize continued high GHGs). However, rather than this transfer money going directly to provincial governments, the funds would go to newly established **just transition agencies** — one in each province and territory — jointly governed by the federal government, provincial/territorial and local governments, and, vitally, Indigenous nations from each province, with civil society representatives too from labour, business and academia/NGOs. Some of the funds should go directly to Indigenous communities. This would ensure the transfer money isn't simply absorbed into provincial budgets or used to displace other infrastructure or training

funds. It would ensure the money is used for its intended purpose. There are already models for a joint structure like this in Canada, such as the Port Authorities. The benefit of structuring the transfer around local just transition agencies (locally governed) is that it provides assurance that the projects undertaken are sensitive to the realities and needs of each locale. Each jurisdiction has its own GHG profile and its own local labour market/training needs and realities. In some jurisdictions, the focus is on fossil fuel workers; in others, the issue is more one of transitioning agriculture or the auto industry. This model would allow for such differences.

There is a long list of worthwhile projects such a transfer could fund. The key is that this transfer would represent *real* dollars for *actual* transition and new jobs (not vague assurances and the historic false promises of just transition). An innovation such as this could be a linchpin within an overall transition plan that is fair and just.

A new [Youth Climate Corps](#), in scope and substance, would be close to what is described [here](#). Ideally, the YCC would be jointly funded by the provincial and federal governments, but the province should be prepared to go it alone and model what a transformative YCC could accomplish. It would be a training and employment program for people 35 and under, empowering them to work within their communities and across the country on low-carbon and climate mitigation work. The program should be open to any young person who wishes to enroll, and would offer two years of meaningful climate work restoring ecosystems, managing forests to reduce wildfire risks, responding to climate disasters and enhancing community resilience/safety, building new climate infrastructure (renewable energy projects, building retrofits, high-speed rail), and engaging in low-carbon care work (elder/childcare).

A YCC would provide opportunities to engage rural and fossil fuel-dependent communities to reimagine a future where youth can stay in their communities to solve local challenges. And at a time when many communities wrestle with the future prospects for their youth, and when many young people are wrestling with climate anxiety and mental health, the YCC could be just the hopeful solution to captivate people's excitement.

## **Section two: Supporting resource communities through transition**

Northern B.C., particularly the Peace Region, must be prepared for significant changes in the coming decades as the province works to meet its climate commitments and the world seeks to limit its use of fossil fuels. While there are obvious challenges in navigating this transition for workers and communities who currently rely on the gas industry, there are also enormous opportunities in the emerging green economy that require targeted supports to take advantage of. From ecological restoration and renewable energy to outdoor recreation and remote work, there are countless ways northern communities can build on their strengths to create vibrant economies if the right funding and policy frameworks are there to support them.

Workers and communities must be at the table to make sure this transition is successful, but without leadership from the provincial government showing why a transition plan is necessary, there's no effective place to start that conversation. We need the premier and cabinet to

demonstrate that planning for transition is in everyone's best interest and that they are prepared to offer the investments and policies needed to make it a success. Only once there is buy-in — or at least acceptance — from the people who will be most impacted by this transition can the work begin to determine what a future without fossil fuels looks like on the ground.

Step one is for the provincial government to engage all relevant stakeholders in northern B.C. in an honest conversation about the necessity of planning for a world that no longer needs or wants fossil fuels. While there is room for debate about the timeline, it should be clear by now that this is inevitable and the sooner the province starts preparing the better. Few spaces exist for the kind of cross-sectoral collaboration necessary to develop an economic vision for the region that does not rely on fossil fuel exports. Provincial leaders should use their convening power to bring together workers, First Nations, unions, municipalities, regional districts, chambers of commerce and academics based on their interests in the region's long-term sustainability. This must accompany a shift in messaging from false solutions like carbon capture to the opportunity this transition provides northerners to reimagine their role in the province's economy.

Once such a group or groups assemble, they should be resourced and tasked to develop regional plans for thriving green economies that build off existing strengths and take advantage of emerging opportunities. This would necessarily involve hiring experts to evaluate business cases and propose economic development plans. For example, an expanded version of the province's Northeast Roundtable might look at the abundance of clean energy in the region and propose a plan for a fiber optic cable to connect new data centres to the world or a high voltage transmission line from the Peace Region to Edmonton to help the city replace its fossil fuel electricity. Its counterpart in the northwest might devise a strategy to encourage retirees in the south to relocate to the region by building affordable seniors' homes, strengthening healthcare services and running advertisements in Vancouver and Victoria. Local workforce skills can also be considered an asset: thousands of people in northeast BC who work for drilling companies make it a prime location for a nascent geothermal industry.

These plans should identify the policy frameworks and provincial investments that are necessary for their success. Whether it's infrastructure, services, human resources, amenities or legislation, any community economic development plan will have factors that enable it to succeed. Maybe a proposed wild mushroom co-op needs a processing and distribution facility or the many artisans across the region need a provincial web portal to market their work to a global audience. This process should result in a list of funding priorities for the provincial government and an estimate of the costs associated with transitioning northern B.C. to a sustainable economy. It should involve credible assessments of the potential for various projects to bring new residents, businesses and economic activity into the region. Finally, it must actually come with sustained funding for northern priorities. This could be delivered through the Northern Development Initiative Trust, or a similar regional body focused on the transition away from polluting industries.

Income security must be available for workers in the gas industry to make it possible to go back to school, maintain the same housing or plan for retirement. For the government to put an end

date on the gas industry, it must assure workers they will be taken care of. In Spain, coal workers were given access to early retirement and green jobs skills training. That should provide a model for B.C. to support workers through this transition. Education programs should be offered in the communities where the gas industry operates or online wherever possible, so people don't have to uproot their lives to go back to school. They also should receive payments to cover mortgages, childcare or other expenses during this time. Older workers could be offered early retirement and potentially increased old age security to make up for lost earning potential.

Northern B.C. has a bright future ahead of it even as the province and the world abandon the gas industry, but it will take careful planning and community buy-in to get there. The sooner this effort gets underway, the better off workers and communities across the region will be. Provincial officials need to show leadership in getting started while also supporting northerners to chart their own future without fossil fuels.

### **Section three: A just transition for Indigenous Peoples**

Colonization has created and perpetuated systemic inequities that have, in many cases, made First Nations communities more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, more reliant on outdated fossil fuel infrastructure, and economically marginalised and isolated from the rest of the province. The parallel responsibilities of the Crown, to uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate climate change, present countless opportunities to partner with Indigenous peoples on shared initiatives that fulfill both obligations.

Relative to other jurisdictions in North America, First Nations are not major emitters of greenhouse gases and do not share equitably in the short-term economic benefits of the fossil fuel economy. Yet First Nations continually demonstrate the willingness to reduce their own emissions, despite:

- the economic disadvantages from historic and ongoing denial of Aboriginal Title and systemic exclusion from the wealth accumulated from First Nations territories,
- a lack of institutional support for the unique challenges stemming from jurisdictional gaps around Indian reserves and the provision of services to First Nations people, and
- inadequate trilateral coordination between First Nations', provincial, and federal governments on climate change mitigation and adaptation issues.

In fact, First Nations in British Columbia have identified [enhanced ambition](#) for emissions reduction measures as an urgent climate action requiring attention from First Nations, British Columbia, and Canada. As well, the BC Climate Solutions Council's [2022 report](#) emphasized the need to work with First Nations "in oil and gas producing regions to identify and advance economic diversification opportunities and seek federal collaboration and funding to support this transition."



Unlike fossil fuel companies, First Nations that are actively involved in oil and gas development are responsible to their citizens. As well, in most cases, they have had their land-bases and economic activities limited by a colonial government for several generations – the economic lifeline of oil and gas has served the purpose of reversing some of the economic stagnation of colonization.

*Strengthen First Nations economic independence by supporting First Nation-led low-carbon economic development initiatives and expedite transition away from fossil fuels*

Clean energy generation projects can have high overhead and are not always economical in the short term especially compared to the avoided cost of diesel in remote and non-integrated areas that remain diesel dependent.

- Provide baseline resources and capacity for Nations to develop their own priorities and strategies with respect to the development of their territories and resources.
- Provide capacity to engage with the regulatory bureaucracy for project approvals and funding for emissions reduction initiatives, including: clean energy projects, housing and building retrofits, and transportation.
- Create or improve institutional processes within ministries to bring relevant decision-makers together from the provincial and federal governments to support First Nations' just transition initiatives
- Facilitate equitable and transparent resource revenue sharing with First Nations
- Provide financial supports for First Nations impacted by oil and gas production to transition to clean energy

*The Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Jurisdiction, and Climate Change*

The governments of British Columbia and Canada have both passed legislation committing to aligning their laws with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, a human rights instrument to recognize the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples. British Columbia is the only province in Canada in which both levels of Crown government have made commitments to do so – implementing a just transition in partnership with First Nations in BC is one way to demonstrate how meeting the minimum standards of recognizing Indigenous rights leads to greater certainty in large-scale economic planning, not less.

- Align important climate change legislation and regulations with the *UN Declaration* to ensure that First Nations have their rightful say in how the resources in their territories are utilized

## **Section four: Adaptation for most vulnerable communities**

Communities that face forms of systematic disadvantages and barriers on the basis of, but not limited to, race, class, gender identity and expression, sexuality, immigration status and so on; are at the same time the communities most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. These intersections of identity do not exist in isolation. Many individuals and communities face overlapping forms of discrimination and inequity. For example, low-wage work is often undertaken by racialized and feminized workers who face marginalization on multiple fronts including living in precarious housing situations or experiencing limited access to food security.

Ecological challenges disproportionately impact the burden of mortality and morbidity on certain groups (such as racialized, gendered groups, as well as groups already facing other forms of marginalization), and the ongoing social, environmental, access, and income inequality in our societies leads to poorer health and inequities that are unnecessary, unfair and can be remediated by creating a more equitable distribution of societal wealth. We know that people most impacted by climate change are those who are already systematically disadvantaged by poverty, inequality, systemic racism, and colonialism. Many of the marginalized groups we need to center in this work are often exposed to unique climate change impacts such as coastal erosion, flooding, changes in the availability and accessibility of traditional resources and seasonal activities, and extreme weather events.

For example, the prevalence of primarily racialized, and feminized migrant workers performing essential work in key industries, in domestic and health care settings, in the agricultural sector and food supply chain, and supporting businesses in various industries, including restaurants and hospitality, trucking, and construction cannot be overstated. Yet migrants do not have the same level of protection as most labour due to immigration status, conditions enforced upon by temporary foreign worker programs, lack of access to resources or lack of knowledge on how to navigate resources and workplace complaints.

Consider the challenges faced by temporary foreign workers (TFWs) who form the backbone of many of these sectors. In 2021 alone, 103,830 work permits were issued to migrant workers under the TFWP across Canada, who overwhelmingly faced multiple forms of abuse and exploitation.<sup>1</sup> These industries are already vulnerable to crisis, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and will be at the front line of any climate emergency. Temporary foreign workers working in agriculture and the food sector are liable to be impacted by extreme weather, flooding, extreme heat, and other extreme climate events. TFWs will be the first to face and be forced to work under dangerous conditions and there needs to be mechanisms to ensure that they are not working under climate emergencies and have easy access to justice and safeguards that they currently lack.

Another example is the case of unhoused folk. Unhoused folk are also at the very front lines of climate impact, as many unhoused folks rely on public space, which is increasingly being

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<sup>1</sup> [A Promise of Protection? An assessment of IRCC Decision-making Under the Vulnerable Open Work Permit Program](#)

privatized, and do not have safe access to shelter during extreme weather events. Risks such as sanitization barriers, health impacts of extreme weather such as smoke inhalation or heat injury, and food and water insecurity are already extremely high for this group. Even now, for instance, cold weather shelters are inadequate for the needs of unhoused people. A just transition must include truly affordable, and accessible housing options for people who are experiencing homelessness, in safe, adequate, and affordable permanent homes.

Disabled people are also at the frontlines of the climate crisis, and often have barriers to responding. When wildfires, flooding, heat domes, and other emergency climate events happen, people with disabilities are often impacted in unique ways. For example, people with chronic illnesses and underlying conditions are deeply impacted by smoke inhalation, may rely on the supply chain for life-sustaining medication, or are uniquely susceptible to heat impacts due to the medications they are on. For years, [research has shown](#) that in emergency contexts, disabled people are significantly more likely to suffer morbidity and mortality. During the heat dome, for example, people with schizophrenia were [four times more likely](#) to die<sup>2</sup>. There is not much available data in BC about the experiences of people with disabilities, as disaggregated data doesn't currently exist, but disabled people's unique needs need to be understood, prioritized, and centered as we move towards a just transition.

A just transition needs to pay particular attention to these communities as social, environmental, class and income inequality already lead to poorer health, inequities, and marginalization; issues that will be exacerbated by the ongoing climate crisis and need special attention to mitigate. In addition, ensuring that measures are in place to address current and future inequities faced by vulnerable communities due to the climate crisis creates “buy-in” to a just transition program, prevents the human and economic cost of climate disasters, and begins to build economic resilience and independence in these communities that begin to address inequities.

To minimize human suffering and infrastructure damage, it is necessary to consider prevention and mitigation strategies for equity-deserving groups such as low-income and unhoused folks, disabled people, racialized folks, low-income workers, and renters. Here, we propose income support through the transition, adequate climate infrastructure, and equipping Indigenous communities with heat pumps and the capacity to maintain them.

- a. **Income supports to help marginalized groups through the transition**
  - i. We know that low-income people, families, and communities are already facing severe impacts from existing climate changes, including extreme weather events. These impacts can be mitigated and prevented with strong, robust income equality support for folks experiencing poverty.
  - ii. Prioritize poverty reduction strategies and economic security measures that specifically target those who have a higher risk of living in poverty due to intersectional disadvantage. This includes women, single senior women, single parents, low-wage workers, BIPOC communities,

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<sup>2</sup> [B.C.'s climate adaptation disability crisis – Briarpatch Magazine](#)

immigrants, and refugees, those engaged in survival sex work and other work in grey economies, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, those living with disabilities (taking into consideration the diverse needs of those with short, intermittent, and long-term disability needs), those with mental health barriers, people who use drugs, and others. As outlined above, many of these groups overlap, and the impacts of robust prevention strategies will resonate beyond one specific group or community.

- iii. The current rates for income and disability assistance remain well below the poverty line and need to be raised to *at the very least* the Market Basket Measure, and must be connected to inflation so as to keep rates current to the cost of living realities.
- iv. Additional income supports, such as the recommendations from the [Basic Income Panel Report](#)<sup>3</sup> should also be considered to build justice into a just transition. These recommendations include:
  1. Generally available basic services addressing unmet basic needs, like extended health and rental housing assistance;
  2. Targeted programs that combine cash transfers with wraparound social support for groups in transition, like youth aging out of care and women fleeing violence, and those facing high barriers to employment, who have more specific needs;
  3. Targeted basic incomes where they are most helpful, such as for people with disabilities and youth aging out of care;
  4. An overhaul of the Disability Assistance system, including for those with mental health and addiction issues, that emphasizes dignity and support for work for those who want it;
  5. A reformed Temporary Assistance program, providing monetary benefits in a dignified and respectful way to those able to work and better facilitating the transition to employment;
  6. Alongside other targeted measures such as extended health benefits for low-income groups, adjustments to taxation for the working poor, and other regulatory reforms as outlined in the recommendations.
- v. Increasing the earnings exemptions for those on income and disability assistance and ending the claw backs of unearned income will allow people to be more equipped with the economic resiliency to navigate the changing climate and reduce human suffering. These income supports will also help prevent the impact of food insecurity, as many people cannot afford the increasing cost of food, which has also been impacted by such climate disasters as the atmospheric river and associated flooding in November, 2021.
- vi. Paid leave policies:
  1. Adequate paid sick leave is a necessary right that must be accessible to all, regardless of employment status or immigration

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<sup>3</sup> [BC Basic Income Panel](#)

status. The current gap in legislated protections has contributed to deeper worker vulnerability as many risk their economic security and employment security to take care of their physical and mental health.

2. In addition, we are calling for an amendment to the Employment Standards Act that would guarantee paid leave for workers at risk of wage loss owing to extreme weather events. Given the precarious nature of low-wage employment, workers often feel unable to refuse unsafe working conditions.

**b. Climate infrastructure for equity-seeking groups**

**Right to cooling and heating:**

- i. During the heat dome of June 2021, 619 people died because of heat injury and its' impacts<sup>4</sup>. The majority of the people who suffered or lost their lives were elderly people, disabled people, and low-income people, and “Most decedents were in homes *without adequate cooling systems* such as air conditioners or fans”<sup>5</sup>. [The Coroner's Inquiry report](#) following these deaths recommended “Identifying and supporting populations most at risk of dying during extreme heat emergencies” as a critical priority.
- ii. This also includes looking at a review of “issuing cooling devices as medical equipment accessible to persons most at risk of dying during an extreme heat event and making public the findings of the review”. Issuing cooling devices to people who are experiencing poverty is absolutely essential in preventing suffering and mitigating the harms of heat. Programs in jurisdictions that experienced the heat dome, such as the [PCEF Heat Response Program](#) provide low-income folks with portable heating and cooling units and devices.
- iii. The issue of energy affordability is also tied to a Just Transition for BC. Energy unaffordability, or energy poverty, impacts many Indigenous, low income, rural, and disabled communities and families across BC. The [2022 Joint Submission to the Energy Affordability Working Group](#) has clear recommendations on steps governments can take to address this urgent issue. A credible long-term strategy for addressing energy affordability in BC is needed and should be developed in tandem with and support of a Just Transition.
- iv. The BC government must also work closely with health authorities, municipalities, and Indigenous Nations to resource cooling, heating, and disaster mitigation strategies that work for local communities, informed by lived experiences of people who are most impacted by extreme weather

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<sup>4</sup>[Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Deaths in B.C. in Summer 2021](#)

<sup>5</sup>[Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Deaths in B.C. in Summer 2021](#)

events. This includes low-income people, who are more likely to be living in heat-impacted neighbourhoods<sup>6</sup>.

- v. Resources, materials, and extreme weather warnings must be available in accessible formats, be multilingual, and direct outreach needs to happen to address the digital divide, as many unhoused people do not have access to the internet, devices, or digital literacy that equip them with the tools to receive this information solely from virtual formats.
  1. Covid-19 magnified the digital divide in BC and this divide disproportionately impacts low-income people, elders, and Indigenous communities: “44 percent of people in lower income households – and 53 percent of people in very low-income households – face one or more barriers to using the Internet, compared with only 18 percent of people in moderate to high income households.”<sup>7</sup>
  2. [We also call on the provincial government to provide \\$10-a-month internet for people living below the poverty line, and those accessing education in BC.](#) The internet and digital information have become increasingly important in accessing safety information during climate disasters, and equipping people now with tools to access those resources is of utmost importance.

**c. Retrofit the existing stock of BC Housing:**

A just transition that creates sustainable green jobs will ensure vulnerable tenants will be able to continue to afford the rent for retrofitted housing. The Coroner’s report recommended that the “BC Building Code incorporates both passive and active cooling requirements in new housing construction and that the release of the Alterations Code for Energy Efficient, Resilient Buildings explicitly identifies both passive and active cooling standards for existing home renovation<sup>8</sup>”; however existing buildings, especially those that house low-income residents, need to be retrofitted to support renters’ rights to “adequate housing”, as laid out in the National Housing Strategy, and International Human Rights laws. Supports for multi-unit buildings, SRO’s, shelter and transition housing, supportive housing, BC housing buildings, and other housing that low-income people access need funding for energy efficient retrofits to both to protect them from climate emergencies, and simultaneously reduce energy impacts of inefficient systems that rely on fossil fuels and non-renewable energy.

**d. Labour standards:**

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<sup>6</sup> [Here's who lives in your city's worst heat islands | Radio-Canada.ca](#)

<sup>7</sup> [One-on-one help needed to achieve digital equity | Legal Aid BC](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Deaths in B.C. in Summer 2021](#)

The Government needs good-faith consultation efforts with low-wage workers to determine other basic safety measures they can carry. Industries with precarious workers need basic protective measures and sectoral bargaining. For example, migrant workers need a viable pathway to receive permanent residency not tied to their employer or employment status to ensure they are able to seek and receive protection without fear of retaliation. To improve social equity during environmental emergencies, we are calling for:

1. Maximum temperature policies in the workplace
2. Enforced breaks for hydration
3. Accessible cooling centres
4. Adequate evacuation training
5. Provision of personal protective equipment
6. Well-coordinated communication channels
7. Free public transit in urban areas, as well as inter-community public transit options. Many workers are forced to commute to and from work in dangerous conditions with little compensation.

Through knowledge campaigns, and government advertisement campaigns, as well as accountability and enforcement, offices can provide protection and restitution for workers.

- e. **Equipping Indigenous communities with heat pumps and the capacity to maintain them:** Provide resources and subsidies to low-income households to improve energy efficiency, install electric heat pumps, household-level solar and other renewable energy sources. [Heiltsuk Nation's clean energy conversion efforts put rest of B.C. to shame | Canada's National Observer: News & Analysis](#)

We urge you to take bold, strong, progressive action to tackle the urgent climate crisis while ensuring that lower-income and vulnerable households are not made worse off, and that social justice and economic security is enhanced. Implementing a framework that incorporates redistribution of income and wealth and the broader provision of more equitably accessible public services would facilitate the realization of much-reduced poverty, unemployment, and homelessness as well as a more equitable, balanced, thriving economy, a sustainable environment, a healthier population, an excellent standard of living, quality of life and a better-functioning democracy.

Another thing that is clear is that with the speed and intensity of anticipated climate shifts, **ensuring proper mitigation is put in place to prevent currently non-precarious communities from falling into precarity is essential in planning for BC.** There are communities not currently precarious that may fall into precarity as extreme weather conditions worsen, and without proper safeguards in place, entire demographics may become vulnerable overnight. The government needs to be prepared for rapid response to deal with emergencies as they arise. Consider the towns of Lytton and Princeton, where flooding displaced entire populations that were previously housed and secure - with residents needing urgent housing.



These situations will occur more and more, and the government cannot wait until it happens to formulate responses - response plans need to be in place, with proactive rather than reactive measures and strategies in place. This means ensuring that government is aware of what communities might be impacted by the climate crisis and be ready to respond. Low-wage, essential work in sectors like food service, retail, and hospitality remain precarious and largely unprotected sites of employment. These industries are highly gendered and racialized where workers have limited bargaining power and often tolerate workplace mistreatment as part of the precarious worker culture. In already-precarious industries and compounded with the climate emergency, low-wage workers are more vulnerable than before. Enforceable climate-specific measures are necessary to ensure low-wage, essential workers are no longer susceptible to the health and safety detriments of climate disasters.

Finally, there are many clear, preventative mitigation measures and policy approaches that the BC government can take to the ends of prioritizing and centering groups that disproportionately experience the impacts of climate change that will lead to a reduction in human suffering as well as infrastructure harms and damages. The measures we have outlined are just a start but indicate many ways in which we need to be proactively thinking about, and building in support and protections for groups who experience material disadvantages in our communities. We also know that these measures can build in some support for groups and communities that may easily shift into precarious situations as climate change worsens. We also call on the BC government to take an inter-ministerial, collaborative approach. Finally, we urge you to begin meaningful, ongoing, and collaborative engagement with people with lived experiences of marginalization and who are most likely to experience impacts to better understand from these groups what strategies can assist them in resourcing these communities for what we know will be devastating, ongoing impacts as climate change and extreme weather events continue to increase in frequency, intensity, and duration.

## **Conclusion**

A grand global transition off fossil fuels is coming; demand for BC's gas will fall. The only question is whether the transition will be managed and just, or whether it will leave some workers and communities on the scrap heap of history, like so many previous industrial revolutions. We have before us a chance not only to ensure employment security but to also insulate lower-income people and Indigenous and rural communities from the scourge of rising energy prices. Instead of forking over ever-rising monthly costs to fossil fuel companies, a genuine just transition can provide energy independence and sovereignty for Indigenous communities and protection from energy poverty for vulnerable people.

## **Resources**

[BCCEC's Progress Report Card on Confronting the Climate Emergency](#)

[Guidelines International Labour Organization Guidelines for a just transition](#)

[Indigenous Principles of Just Transition](#)

[Roadmap to a Canadian Just Transition Act](#)

[Voices and Vision of Northern British Columbia](#)

[Canada needs a new federal Climate Emergency Just Transition Transfer](#)