Poverty Reduction Strategy COMMUNITY MEETING

Introduction:

| Date: | Monday, March 19, 2018 – 12:00noon – 2:00pm |
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| Community | Positive Living Society of British Columbia (HIV/AIDS Organization) |
| # of Participants | 35 |
| # of Organizations | 1 – Positive Living BC |

**About the Participants:**

Participants in this meeting consisted largely of staff and members of Positive Living BC as well as low income patients from a local Medical office. The population is well represented as people living in poverty many of whom are also living with HIV, we requested participants who were living on <$2,000/monthly which is consistent with the low-income population we serve through our Community Health Fund program.

- Age Range: Overwhelmingly, the population was middle aged (35 – 60 yrs old)
- Gender: 32 male/3 female
- Housing Situation: we estimate that most attendees maintained adequate shelter, none reported as being homeless:

**About the Findings:**

Tell us about the types of insights and feedback received to the following questions:

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?
2. What would address these issues and help you or others out of poverty?

Issues (transcribed from flip chart notes):

Group 1:
1. Access to Safe, Affordable Housing
2. Access to Healthcare/Dental care – we are privileged, more challenging to access some services in smaller communities
3. Access to Education opportunities – helping people create opportunities to increase their employment
Other Identified Issues:
- Lack of Community – people living with lower socio-economic status have less opportunities to participate in community events/want more community building events aimed at this population
- Stigma – for people living on benefits (welfare, disability, other social assistance), their social position makes it more difficult to get a job, find housing access healthcare, connect to community because of your appearance, social status, reduced means or perceptions thereof
- Transportation – public transit does not provide basic facilities like bathrooms, access to clean water in Metro Vancouver; it was observed that in other centres such as Hong Kong every train station has public

washrooms
- Mental Health – the infrastructure and access to Mental Health services and supports is archaic; there is no single source of assistance for multiple services; unless you have an advocate it's difficult to access services
- Entertainment – people have a right to feel happy and have open access to recreational activities; create more events with free access for people living in Poverty.
- Raise The Rates – we just got first $150 increase in 10 years, this is STILL not enough to meet the basic needs of people living on benefits or social assistance

Group 2:
1. Access to Affordable Housing – need more access to affordable housing in locations where there are more people living in poverty with access to services
2. More access to good Nutrition/Food Security
3. Increase Social Assistance Rates
Other Identified issues:
- Access to Info about Services
- Stigma
- Mental Health Services (incl. Drug issues)
- Access to socialization – affording to participate in social events; isolation when you cannot afford to participate
- Medical/Dental Challenges
- Navigate the system with language barriers
- Need programs to reduce the overall cost of living

Group 3:
1. Increase disability allowances
2. Education for single parent families on living skills
3. Improved Housing policies and increase community involvement with zoning changes
4. Reduce the price of beer/pot
Other Identified Issues:
- Processing times to access financial supports is long and frustrating and there is no procedure to follow up on submissions; this stems from lack of adequate staffing from cutbacks; the process is too bureaucratic
- Improve/reduce costs around housing/shelter
- Lack of affordable housing due to government policies/zonings/building codes; disrespectful neighbours; poorly managed security; Crime, drugs, antisocial behavior; new tenants causing crime; don't have education or skills to transition into community
- No support for aging population; concernes about where the money is going; allocations of funds for poverty and other resources
- Rural poverty issues are different to city poverty issues; some services unavailable in smaller communities.
- Accessibility to portable subsidies / discrete

Group 4:
1. Access to Affordable housing
2. Bridging the gap – systems need more flexibility; bureaucracies provide a YES or NO to access supports and programs but there is no middle ground; this prevents people from being able to change their situation (i.e., looking for work; changing residence because it may change/reduce what they supports they already have accessed)
3. Reduce the gatekeepers for access to services, enable people who do not

exactly fit the "guideline" to access services or who may need shorter term supports

Other identified issues:

- Mental Health/Addiction services, improve accessibility and reduce long wait lists
- Provide supports/training to integrate back to normal after illness or disability
- Reduce/eliminate criminalization of Drug Use
- Work harder to reduce High cost of living
- Provide better access to affordable food
- Reduce high prescription costs
- Better access to transportation / bus passes; although there is a restored bus pass program, make it more accessible to working poor rather than only those on benefits
- Work to reduce the stigma of being poor; internalized or external – sometimes feed into each other
- Better access to Government Services /benefits
- Reduce the desperation of being poor and becoming isolated.

**Possible Solutions:**

Provide the results of your discussion of possible solutions – it should be transcribed from your flip chart notes:

Group 1:
1. *Housing* – increase development of more social housing; more co-operative housing; make it more accessible and return to the status quo where people could get on benefits easier.
2. *Healthcare* – simplify access to Medical/Dental Health care; increase universal coverage for dental care, etc.
3. *Education* – provide free classes for workforce training; provide more/easier access to funding for other training programs; let us know where is our tax money going

Other Identified Issues:
- *Lack of Community* – create opportunities for communities to connect; try to connect people from different socio-economic backgrounds such as seniors-to-young people; provide sporting events with free accessiblity
- *Stigma* – create community groups and opportunities for people to learn about others situations re: poverty; health and social status
- *Transportation* – lower fares and/or pay-by-travel distance; improve infrastructure to travel around the province/country
- *Mental Health* – provide access to advocates to help people navigate the system; make accessing mental health programs more widely available; offer peer programs as supports; increase funding
- *Entertainment* – empower participation in entertainment events; fill unsold seats by donating or creating a free-access system for those on benefits/assistance where community organizations can facilitate
- *Raise The Rates* – make it easier to access benefits/assistance/disability; increase basic assistance rates or provide a universal basic income

Group 2:
1. *Housing* – create modular housing; improve rental availability; improve locations for social housing in communities outside Vancouver; make it more affordable to rent/own; enact rent control; increase shelter portions from $325 to $500;

improve public awareness

2. *Food Security* – offer more community gardens; provide access to Quest Foods; reduce food waste; improve assistance rates to include a budget for food; encourage food service/restaurants to provide more charity options; improve community meals programs; improve affordable farmers market prices
3. *Social Assistant* – create volunteer incentives

Other Identified issues:

- Services Information  - charity begins at home; create access to info online and in community situations; access to mental health; drug issues, socialization, politics; reduce isolation from medical/dental health access; more networking opportunities and program solutions; info about access to fitness

Group 3:

1. Increase disability allowances
2. Living Skills Education -
3. Housing – create and promote modular housing; increase availability of rental availability; enact rent-control

Other Identified Issues:

- Processing times to access financial supports is long and frustrating and there is no procedure to follow up on submissions; this stems from lack of adequate staffing from cutbacks; the process is too bureaucratic
- Improve/reduce costs around housing/shelter
- Lack of affordable housing due to government policies/zonings/building codes; disrespectful neighbours; poorly managed security; Crime, drugs, antisocial behavior; new tenants causing crime; don't have education or skills to transition into community
- No support for aging population; concernes about where the money is going; allocations of funds for poverty and other resources
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Group 4 (solutions):

- Make investments in services for accessibility
- Reduce cost of living; supply basic costs of food; reduced the monopoly of food costs;
- Education of single parent families on cost of living and supports
- Increase disability income
- Lower prescription costs; dental costs should be covered; eye exams ; universal coverage for all prescription, dental and eye costs
- Enact policy change around zoning to reduce neighbourhood stigma; wealthy think that when poor people move in it reduces their property value
- Create more containers used/converted into housing
- Reduce the price of beer
- Make medical marijuana funded by MSP;
- Provide a daycare bursary
- Increase income allowance
- Provide Universal basic income
- Improve subsidies for Transportation

**Solutions and Actions That Can Make a Difference**

(a) Looking at the list of issues and solutions generated, what types of solutions did the individuals who participated in your meeting identify as most important to them ?[ Each participant should received four (4) sticky dots to put on the solutions that from their perpective are most important]. Your summary report should include any of the solutions that received a dot from those that received the most dots to those receiving only one dot.

- Create more safe, affordable housing in good areas with accessible services
- Provide opportunities for community building/ improve social skills /training/back to work programs
- Universal Basic Income/ Increase disability/assistance rates
- Better supports for families/parents/daycare, build community opportunities

(b)What emerged as the top 3 solutions or ideas based on the conversations and the individual priority setting?

1. Create more access to safe, affordable Housing; increase community involvement in zoning changes and build better community engagement for housing
2. Improve access to benefits with more flexibility in the programs; reduce the gatekeepers/bureaucracy to access services make it easier to access and keep benefits even when the beneficiary situation changes
3. Increase the basic rates for those on social assistance/disability/benefits programs – the rates have stayed very low despite the costs of living rising dramatically