



BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction: Poverty Reduction Strategy Update Reporting and note-taking template

Note taker name/organization:	
Community Connections Coordinators at Burnaby Neighbourhood House	

Please ensure your participants know that all questions are optional and that their responses are anonymous and confidential. All responses will be compiled and analyzed as a group, from an external third party (Argyle Communications Inc.) and reported back to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

Comments and questions (summarize/paraphrase comments/verbatim quotes)	
Questions	Comments/questions/themes
<p>What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?</p> <p>What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses?</p> <p>How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, food and housing affordability challenges, etc.) impacted your ability to afford these expenses?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Housing affordability, almost all my paycheck or income assistance goes to pay the rent, and the house doesn't even have enough rooms for the whole family // I have to leave my transition home soon, and I don't have the income to rent a place ▪ Limited income assistance, \$500 of rental support seems like a joke, impossible to find housing with this amount of money ▪ Food security, I use the food bank to cover basic needs, the increase of prices is hard to handle ▪ Childcare services, I can't work because I can't afford childcare for my younger child, it is a permanent struggle ▪ Post-immigration stress, the government doesn't have adequate help or system to help people looking for employment opportunities to cover living expenses in general ▪ I used to work in high-position jobs prior migration, but here I am not able to transfer my credentials, too much money and time should be invested if I want to pursue the same career here, meantime I have to work to provide for my family ▪ The government adjusted my child benefits, so I won't be receiving the bonus that I was counting on, they changed the support provided without notice and despite the needs ▪ Inadequate education opportunities for refugees or certain minorities of immigrants, to upgrade skills and get a better job ▪ Slow processing time to receive a work permit; people wait for work permits too long and therefore they cannot support themselves ▪ Government workers strike will delay the process to get a work permit ▪ Lack of employment equity, some nationalities receive work permits easier/faster than others, despite the government knows all my history before entering to Canada (engineer with years of experience) // Government knows how immigrants have professional backgrounds, government should allow immigrants to work in professional fields

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multiple barriers for professionals trained abroad who are able to work ▪ Fuel increase ▪ Lack of support for students, people want to upgrade skills but can't afford expensive courses; better skills, better work and not income assistance ▪ The immigration policy has increased the number of immigrants who can enter the country but not enough support to settle and thrive ▪ War crisis has created differences between groups, some communities receive more support than others, and the processes are less bureaucratic for certain nationalities ▪ One year support for refugees is not enough with all the barriers that they need to face to get a job ▪ Family doctor crisis, I have been in Canada for two years and still don't have a family doctor to rely on, lack of mental health support in the health care system
<p>What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)?</p> <p>What makes these programs or services most helpful? How are people learning about these programs or services?</p> <p>How are people accessing these programs or services? Are there barriers to access?</p> <p>Are there ways to improve how to learn about, or access, these programs or services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Food banks alleviate the need of food in the community, but the quality is not always good ▪ BC Housing helps many families, but it is not enough. The application process is very long, I have shared all my information and submitted all the supporting papers, and it has been over a year, no call with good news, they just call me to ask if my address has changed ▪ Child benefits has helped me to cover my children's expenses ▪ Nice programs offered, nice ideas but not enough for everybody ▪ Many newcomers are not aware of the services available, better promotions needed to spread the information ▪ Migrants with precarious status also need support (refugee claimants) ▪ More interpretation services are needed, there is a lot of information online, but not translated to different languages ▪ Applications online to access to services can be very long, they ask for a lot of information that many people might not have available ▪ WorkBC services were not helpful, they don't have staff who understand needs and provide effective support, they are not aware of culture differences, knowledgeable of different languages, and they don't advocate for employment equity ▪ Many people don't know about available resources, I met someone who was not able to use public transportation for months, until a friend from church gave her information about BNH, then she was able to receive orientation and information ▪ Too much information online, which can be difficult to navigate, and not enough in person services ▪ Increase hour of services, I work 9 to 5pm, so I can't access to available programs and services that are open during the time I am working ▪ Get back to services face to face, it can save time, instead to get lost and waste time in multiple websites ▪ Simplify the language of application forms, the multiple options can be confusing ▪ Host more events to share/exchange information in a simple way ▪ Support seniors who don't manage digital devices to access to services, work opportunities, benefits ▪ Train workers to visit places such as schools, food banks, churches, etc., to provide information in multiple languages ▪ At the airport should be a booth to provide key information to newcomers, who arrive to Canada just with a backpack, fleeing war or persecution
<p>What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many services and programs don't provide a long-term solution; I remember the phrase "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime", if the government designs stronger programs to develop people's skills, they won't need to apply for social assistance to survive

<p>How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?</p> <p>Where is more support needed?</p> <p>Are there key groups in your community that are facing the most challenges getting the supports they need to meet their needs?</p> <p>Do different programs work well together? Why or why not?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Taking good use of skilled immigrants workforce, or immigrants in general, who can contribute to the local economy ▪ Lack of advocacy, between people in need and government services, there is a disconnection between what is really needed and what government provides ▪ Family with young children, students, seniors, single parents, people who don't speak English, people with disability, and Canadian citizens who were immigrants, are the groups who face challenges ▪ Students' loans are too high, the government should intervene to manage the loans and people won't graduate just to survive and pay the debt ▪ More access to education and training ▪ People shouldn't receive a different treatment based in their nationalities ▪ Programs can work well together if they are connected efficiently, for example I can work, but when my kids are in school, or if I have support to pay childcare, because otherwise I will work to pay the childcare services ▪ I want to take courses to get certified in my career, but I can't afford take classes the whole day or pay the expenses of exams, I have to provide for my family, programs should make sense
<p>From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More cultural awareness and language proficiency, in different languages, among staff at WorkBC ▪ Value the diversity of skills, talents, and knowledge of immigrants ▪ Follow the Employment Equity Act to eliminate barriers ▪ Hire qualified workforce, including decision makers, to make the necessary changes ▪ Reduce the amount of online interactions, make the services more people oriented ▪ Introduce more opportunities for business development, first, manufacturing, to create a sustainable economy ▪ Tackle the housing problem ▪ Implement more strategies to help people to get a job, because people who can't find a job get depressed and nervous, which impact in their family and the Canadian society ▪ Increase the support given to certain newcomers who face barriers from 1 year to 3 years ▪ Loose processes for immigrants who have education and experience to access to work ▪ Speed up processes and reduce bureaucracy ▪ Redefine the concept of poverty, based on real numbers ▪ Increase BC Housing accessibility, basic needs such as shelter and food can't wait ▪ Programs should be designed having in mind to empower people to become self- sustainable ▪ More programs for people with disability ▪ Access to education and training is the pathway out of poverty ▪ Improve data collection, they are many people left behind ▪ The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction should offer frequent sessions to inform people about initiatives, processes, eligibility, etc. ▪ Please remove the rental agreement for the food bank ▪ More spaces for single mothers to get together and support each other
<p>Other notes</p>	

<p>Post-event summary</p>	
<p>Task</p>	<p>Key themes</p>

Please write down any key themes that you noticed throughout the session. Include recurring questions/comments, including:

- Recurring questions
- Recurring comments
- Points of agreement
- Points of divergence
- Any shifts in opinion during the event

- Employment equity and access to work opportunities
- Reduce barriers for internationally trained professionals to get a job in their field, accomplish re-certification, and obtain an open work permit
- Despite of the diverse available programs and services, those do not cover the high demand/need, not enough support for all
- Applications to access services are long and usually have waitlist
- Need for a better strategy to spread the information about programs and services among community members
- Solve the housing crisis
- Multiple challenges affect the mental health of community members
- Increase the language capacity and cultural awareness of government employees

BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction: Poverty Reduction Strategy Update

Reporting and note-taking template

Note taker name/organization:	Contact information of notetaker if clarity is needed:
Coordinator Burnaby Neighborhood House Food Hubs	

Please ensure your participants know that all questions are optional and that their responses are anonymous and confidential. All responses will be compiled and analyzed as a group, from an external third party (Argyle Communications Inc.) and reported back to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

Comments and questions (summarize/paraphrase comments/verbatim quotes)	
Questions	Comments/questions/themes
<p>What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?</p> <p>What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses?</p> <p>How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, food and housing affordability challenges, etc.) impacted your ability to afford these expenses?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -food costs have “tripled up”; fuel, heating, electricity, all services are too expensive -main challenge is food – you can’t go into a grocery store and buy anything -income is not going up, but everything else like food and gas is -inflation and the rising cost of everything makes me poorer every day -I am a single person. 100% of my OAP and CPP goes just to rent. I am despairing. Why am I living? I don’t want to be a burden on my child, who is giving me \$600 a month just so I have food and clothes. -having to try to use technology makes it harder to find work -I am one step away from homelessness – is it better to be a criminal> -I can’t get dental or health care – my tooth aches every day -without the food bank I would be stealing toilet paper – how is this one of the best countries in the world? -I have two kids and I’m on disability, but because my wife was able to find some work, my own application got rejected for government support -I am eating only one meal a day so that my kids can eat two; I have been in this situation for 7 years -as a senior I haven’t gone to the dentist for 12 years because it’s too expensive. I am ashamed of my teeth. -I never got any work back after layoff during Covid
<p>What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)</p> <p>What makes these programs or services most helpful? How are people learning about these programs or services?</p> <p>How are people accessing these programs or services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Covid relief money helped but it is all gone now -maybe there are government programs out there but how do we find them unless we can use a computer? -I have a neighbour who is a Syrian refugee family who says she gets \$10 000 a month from the government for the 5 people in her family. -for BC Housing, there is a long, long wait – I only got \$100 rent assistance a month but I pay \$2000 rent a month. -some programs are not for Canadian citizens but we need the support too -I need help but do not have access to technology and don’t know where to look -can’t you (the government) mail program and service information to citizens? -people who don’t have or don’t know how to work computers are left out; they are often the ones who need the help the most -neighborhood food hubs help

<p>Are there barriers to access?</p> <p>Are there ways to improve how to learn about, or access, these programs or services?</p>	<p>-can there be brochures and flyers about government services so people can read about them?</p>
<p>What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?</p> <p>How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?</p> <p>Where is more support needed?</p> <p>Are there key groups in your community that are facing the most challenges getting the supports they need to meet their needs?</p> <p>Do different programs work well together? Why or why not?</p>	<p>-for single seniors and people with disabilities, dental care is needed</p> <p>-can all health care/dental care be a part of Canada's services?</p> <p>-it seems like you can never catch up with the difference between increases and expenses – the government gives you a little bit but it doesn't cover all the costs you have to deal with just to live</p> <p>-rising costs lead to more crime and more homelessness and nothing seems to get done. It feels more unsafe in the city.</p> <p>-rents are way too high; cannot find somewhere to live</p> <p>-the people who don't quite fit into any category have the hardest time.</p> <p>-why is disability cut off when you turn 65? Your disability is for your lifetime. OAP and CPP are way less, you just get poorer and poorer.</p>
<p>From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?</p>	<p>-do not give people free drugs. Give them job training, food, safe housing, and a basic income they can actually live on in the place where they live.</p> <p>-why don't we have government resource centers in each neighborhood where we can walk in and say, "I have a problem" and then an advocate can bring all the possibilities to us, rather than trying to figure out what might be out there.</p> <p>-I don't think I have a true awareness of what benefits exist, and I don't know how to find out</p> <p>-I wish there was a place where people could be guided to the resources they need, where the whole person and their context and situation were considered, and all the resources were brought to the person, rather than the person trying to go to different places and seek out help</p> <p>-what about more work trials? Instead of trying to make up resumes, have employment opportunities where people can just try to work, and see how they do</p> <p>-if you don't have a phone or a computer, you can't get online to find out a program. If you don't know how to use a computer, you're a goner.</p> <p>-rent relief is way too small</p> <p>-how can I get a doctor?</p> <p>-can people with disabilities and low income get dental credits?</p> <p>-what about people who don't fit in any of the categories the government has? What if they need help too?</p>
<p>Other notes</p>	

Post-event summary	
Task	Key themes

<p>Please write down any key themes that you noticed throughout the session. Include recurring questions/ comments, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recurring questions• Recurring comments• Points of agreement• Points of divergence• Any shifts in opinion during the event	<p><i>The above comments are verbatim from 14 participants over three sessions. In this section are the impressions of the note taker regarding themes that emerged:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>-rising costs for all basic needs including food, housing, fuel, and utilities is at a crisis point for an increasing number of the most vulnerable members of our communities</i><i>-prompt and accessible health and dental care is not readily available for some</i><i>-in some participants there is an increasing sense of hopelessness and despair</i><i>-local, individual, personalized, neighborhood-based supports are seen as critical (eg food hubs)</i>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction: Poverty Reduction Strategy Update

Reporting and note-taking template

Note taker name/organization:	Contact information of notetaker if clarity is needed:

Please ensure your participants know that all questions are optional and that their responses are anonymous and confidential. All responses will be compiled and analyzed as a group, from an external third party (Argyle Communications Inc.) and reported back to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

Comments and questions (summarize/paraphrase comments/verbatim quotes)	
Questions	Comments/questions/themes
<p>What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?</p> <p>What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses?</p> <p>How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, food and housing affordability challenges, etc.) impacted your ability to afford these expenses?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of everything had increased, especially rents and groceries, while income stays the same; this is becoming very concerning. • I have been here three months. The cost of living is shocking. Taxes, rents, daycare. I work, but my salary is simply not covering expenses. • I am a single parent on single income. After I pay for daycare and housing, nothing is left. • I am a nurse, make a decent wage but still cannot go ahead how costly everything is. • Main issue for First Nation families is housing. Once you are off the reserve, the housing become a real problem. Even subsidized housing is still under colonial policies of a nuclear family. We do not live like that, we live together: extended family, grandparents... there is no solution for us. • Jobs and lack of services for First Nation families is also an issue, the stigma that we are using government money, the ignorance and complacency... these are all real issues. • I have three children. My wife and I work in shifts so one of us can be with children all the time. We cannot possibly pay for daycare for three children. • The cost of summer programs for children is higher than during the school days, but the wages are not going up in the summer. • There are too many buildings been built in Burnaby, but not enough infrastructure: not enough daycares, recreation centres etc. Spots in daycares are not available. • Day care shifts are 10 hours max and no night daycares, while some parents work 12 hours and some night shifts. • Driving lessons are very costly, but the life here is built around cars and driving.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if I pass the road test, as a single mother I have no Class 5 driver to sit with me when I need to drive my child to places. • The low income cut-off is not realistic. • There is lack of education, no awareness or empathy for our community members who are facing poverty. Opportunities to honestly talk about it are so rare.
<p>What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)?</p> <p>What makes these programs or services most helpful? How are people learning about these programs or services?</p> <p>How are people accessing these programs or services? Are there barriers to access?</p> <p>Are there ways to improve how to learn about, or access, these programs or services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCFRI is helpful • Affordable child care • Organizations that serve immigrants • Canada Child Benefit • YMCA and YWCA subsidies
<p>What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?</p> <p>How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?</p> <p>Where is more support needed?</p> <p>Are there key groups in your community that are facing the most challenges getting the supports they need to meet their needs?</p> <p>Do different programs work well together? Why or why not?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCFRI not available after Grade 1 • Affordable child care not yet in place everywhere • Canada Child Benefit not available for certain immigration status • Subsidized housing governed by colonial policies • Total gaps in services for First Nation families
<p>From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCFRI to be extended beyond Kindergarten • Affordable child care in all communities

<p>your community? What opportunities are missed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise the low income cut offs • Providing funding for organizations that will serve First Nation families (similar to what IRCC provides for immigrants) • Change housing policies to accommodate all cultures • Extend Canada child benefit to families regardless of their immigration status • Extend day care hours beyond 10 and create night daycares for shift workers • Make summer children’s programs more affordable • Build more daycares to follow the increase in housing development • Create a public program to offer community driving lessons at an affordable rate • Include driving lessons in high school/ adult education community programs curriculum • Have an ongoing community conversation about poverty reduction that will build awareness and empathy.
<p>Other notes</p>	<p>Everyone in attendance is a parent or grandparent and a working community member.</p>

<p>Post-event summary</p>	
<p>Task</p>	<p>Key themes</p>
<p>Please write down any key themes that you noticed throughout the session. Include recurring questions/ comments, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recurring questions • Recurring comments • Points of agreement • Points of divergence • Any shifts in opinion during the event 	<p>Wages do not follow the increased cost of living. RENTS are problematic. Working families are struggling to afford day to day living. The struggle takes away the joys of raising children and living in such a beautiful and peaceful place. More support is needed for families with school age children. More support for First Nation families; Change in housing policies. More empathy and awareness about financial struggles people are facing daily.</p>

Questions	Themes
<p>What are the main factors contributing to food insecurity in your community today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of accessing food? • How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, housing crisis, etc.) made this more challenging? 	<p>Main themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Costs • Employment • Language Barriers • Lack of Access to Appropriate foods • Fixed Income • transportation
<p>What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of food insecurity and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)?</p> <p>What makes these programs or services most helpful? How are people learning about these programs or services?</p> <p>How are people accessing these programs or services? Are there barriers to access?</p> <p>Are there ways to improve how to learn about, or access, these programs or services?</p>	<p>Biggest impact: Food Bank services and referrals</p> <p>What makes programs most helpful: Inter-organizational referrals (I.e. services within Archway include food bank, mental health, Immigrant supports)</p> <p>How people are learning about services available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word of mouth • community advertising • Referral from other programs (Settlement, Career Pathways for Immigrants, Best for Babies) <p>Barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation • language barriers • lack of knowledge <p>Improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted advertising
<p>What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?</p> <p>How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?</p> <p>Where is more support needed?</p>	<p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transportation • language barriers lowered • awareness of services • appropriate food selection/variety for clients accessing services • food delivery timing (once a month not enough)

<p>Are there key groups in your community that are facing the most challenges getting the supports they need to meet their needs?</p> <p>Do different programs work well together? Why or why not?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow process time for paperwork for newcomers • Fixed income prevents any improvement
<p>From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline paperwork for newcomers • Increase financial supports (EI, Disability, GST rebates) • Rental Caps • Higher minimum wage • Supplemental income for low-income families • Increase food programming in schools • Issues are gendered (lack of resources for single fathers) • Improve food sovereignty for Indigenous folk/ hunters/fishers/gatherers • Lowering barriers to credential recognition for newcomers • Community fridges/pantries/gardens • Food bank stigma reduction • More satellites • Gift cards from food bank as a top up • Family-friendly community meals • Cooking classes and recipes to assist in cooking at home
<p>Other Notes</p>	

Tasks: Please write down any key themes that you noticed throughout the session. Include recurring questions/ comments, including: • Recurring questions • Recurring comments • Points of agreement • Points of divergence • Any shifts in opinion during the event

Archway Community Services' Food Justice program facilitated 2 sessions of focus groups on April 17, 2023. There was a total of 20 participants with a diverse demographic including seniors, single-parent households, families, newcomers/refugees, unhoused individuals, and Indigenous households. The majority of themes identified had significant overlap with each other as well as other factors associated with poverty. Through these discussions, the following themes were identified:

Key Themes Identified:

Increased Food Access Services (noted 17x):

Participants noted that while they understand the food bank is supplementary, there is a need for more food access services in our community. This includes more frequent visits to the food bank and having affordable market programming that can be accessed when needed. The hours of the food bank were also noted as a barrier as individuals are forced to choose between working or food with a few participants being unable to access the food bank as they are unable to miss work due to financial reasons. Participants with families all noted the need for more food programming for school aged children. It was noted that the only no-cost food access service with hampers in our community was the food bank and not many other resources for affordable foods.

Housing Costs (noted 11x): Almost all participants noted that the cost of rent is too high and there is very limited access to subsidized/affordable housing due to long waitlists. Many clients noted that the majority of their income went towards rent and having to skip meals, so they are not evicted. Participants noted that despite the high costs, the capacity is very limited and often have to fit multiple people in a room.

Immigration (noted 10x): Newcomer participants noted a great deal of additional factors that affect their access to their needed foods

including language barriers, lack of culturally preferable items (halal), paperwork processing wait times, access to employment, and decreased quality of life in comparison to their home country. It was also noted that there is typically one sole provider that families are reliant on making their budgets severely limited.

Fixed Income (noted 9x): Individuals with lived experience of food insecurity often are reliant on government subsidies which are a fixed rate. Most accessed subsidies include Child Benefit Tax, Disability Benefit, and CPP. During discussions it was noted as one of the largest barriers impacting their access to food. There is an inequity in the amount they receive, and the current cost of living outweighs the amount they receive with no opportunity to increase their income due to other external factors outside of their control. Participants with families noted that they do not eat often so they are able to feed their children. Many participants noted that they cannot afford both rent and food on a fixed income and are forced to choose between housing and eating each month.

Access to Appropriate Food (noted 8x): Those living with food insecurity may have dietary restrictions that are not being currently met through food service programs. Diets like gluten or dairy free make meals more complicated for families. Access to fresh food. Having more variety in current food programs, more control over food choices, or being able to swap or exchange items were mentioned by some participants as ways to improve access to appropriate foods. Participants noted that the most needed affordable items were produce, dairy, and meat. Participants with families noted that children's health need to be prioritized as they are growing, therefore the healthy items were typically reserved for the children.

Transportation (noted 7x): Transportation was identified as one of the top barriers to community members accessing the food they need. Community members who do not have access to cars are reliant on public transport or

	<p>taxi services. The current bus strikes have had a large impact on community members as it is the only affordable option with many individuals walking for groceries as they are unable to afford taxi fares. One participant noted that they were told they would be charged extra for putting groceries in the trunk and needed to wait for another taxi as they were unable to carry the groceries home. Newcomer participants also noted that many are dependent on one individual in the house for transportation and are unable to transit to a job to help afford groceries or to simply go get groceries until they are home. Participants also noted that bus stops may not be in an easily accessible area for them and they are required to walk more than half an hour to get to their needed bus stop which can be difficult with children and groceries or if they have mobility issues.</p> <p>Family Needs (noted 7x): The majority of participants noted 2 or more dependants that relied on them as the main source of income. Dependants ranged from 2-7. Increased support for children and food insecurity was a recurring theme with many suggestions of more school food programming in our district.</p> <p>Other External Barriers: Other external barriers that were outside an individual’s control included inflation and its effect on rising food costs, stigma associated with food access services, and mental health challenges. Disabilities and medical issues also increase the cost of living and creates additional barriers to achieving food security.</p> <p>Suggestions for Improvements: Abbotsford has a significant gap in terms of food access services and programming with the Archway Food Bank being the main service accessed. Suggested implementations for this community includes an affordable market, increase in food bank satellites/neighbourhood house model (decentralizing current model to better meet people where they are at), increase in food access programming for families, and reduction of other factors that affect poverty</p>
--	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>(increase in benefit amounts, more affordable housing, etc..).</p>
--	-----------------------------------------------------------------------

Poverty Reduction Meeting Notes

Note takers: (names removed)

What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?

- **What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses?**
- **How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, food and housing affordability challenges, etc.) impacted your ability to afford these expenses?**

Stigma and discrimination

Inflation and food prices

Lack of access to information (phones, data and wifi)

Lack of consistent medical care and pharmacies

Barriers to employment

Income assistance levels too low, return to pre-COVID rates

Lack of affordable housing

What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why (liketax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)?

- **What makes these programs or services most helpful? How are people learning about these programs or services?**
- **How are people accessing these programs or services? Are there barriers to access?**
- **Are there ways to improve how to learn about, or access, these programs or services?**

Embers is a good program for people who want to work

Outcare methodone Van

Mount st Joseph is the most underrated hospital out there for us, methodone doctor is very compassionate, should be open 24/7

St. Paul's is getting better

Heroin program has been helpful

Residents feel that the social workers that come [to CRAB Park Tent City] in the morning are awesome, they feel really heard and helped by them.

What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?

- **How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?**
- **Where is more support needed?**

From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?

Supports

Residents expressed a lack of access and the need for more forms and larger scope of the following:

- Health/medical
 - Access to proper medications
 - Access to better pharmacies; the need to address inconsistencies in accessibility and availability of medications at pharmacies

- The need for advocates for entry into drug programs; structural foundations and data collection to gauge and meet interest in such programs
- Access to family doctors/general practitioners (residents expressed “inability” to access GP’s)
- More free health care services; such services in Vancouver are “great” but they lack capacity and scope
- Need for treatment centres for women
- Need to improve coordination, integration and navigability of health services
- General comments on health and health services:
 - Nurses practitioners are perceived as more helpful than doctors
 - “Health care system is unclear, hard to know where to go when you don’t have a phone, access to the internet, I.D.”; “navigating the whole system is very hard to understand.”
 - “Addiction is not a crime.”
 - Difficulty in accessing GP has a knock-on effect; makes it difficult to get on disability assistance while working
 - Outcare methadone programs in Vancouver were referenced
 - “Mount St Joseph is the most underrated hospital out there for us, methadone doctor is very compassionate, should be open 24/7”; “St. Paul’s is getting better, heroin program has been helpful”
- Social supports, disability & income assistance
 - Resident related story of applying for disability and being denied; need for accountability and recourse
 - Need to improve rates of all forms of social assistance, “put it back to Covid levels” (reference to CERB rate)
 - Broad support (“resounding yes”) for a Basic Income program
 - Access to adequate crisis grant programs; “shouldn’t have to appeal or explain why you need it, shouldn’t be able to only apply once”; “80\$ is not enough”, does not account for inflation
 - All forms of social assistance and crisis grants should reflect rate of inflation; rates should meet the poverty line at minimum
- Employment
 - Need for more employment opportunities
 - Need for support of entrepreneurship and resident initiatives
 - Access to training and skill development programs
 - Access to women’s/women-centred training programs
 - Need for easily accessible Food Safe and First Aid/CPR certification
 - Need to address accessibility of language in training and employment; “none of us have a professional vocabulary”
 - Access to remote work and work-from-home opportunities
 - Need for resources to make a good resume
- General comments on employment and opportunity
 - Folks expressed desire to start legitimate businesses from their place of residence and to acquire business licences
 - Idea: “starting a food truck at the park and making some money for the [benefit of the] camp”
 - Residents assert that everybody has skills to offer; “We all have major skills here and we’re all getting held down”
 - Residents expressed interest in more interim projects that could be realised immediately
 - Embers was referenced as a good program for people who want to work
- Hygiene
 - Residents experiencing homelessness need better access to facilities
 - Washrooms closer to camp
 - “More showers for men”
 - “It would be nice if we could wash our clothes and have a shower here [at tent city]”

Housing

Residents shared general perspectives on the state of housing:

- “It’s hard to get up at 5 in the morning when you don’t know where you’re going to sleep the night before”
- “Tickets are still useless because there’s no steady space to sleep and to have a steady schedule”
- Residents experiencing poverty experience discrimination by landlords
- Rent rate increases are unhelpful
- Need for easier access and more affordable housing
- SRO’s are very difficult to access
- Successful programs to house people in the UK (guaranteed income) and Medicine Hat were referenced
- Need for affordable non-market housing provided by government
- Need for geographic expansion of housing options; upgrading shelters or homes to be treatment centres/homes in “some spot in Surrey” (non governmental fund-raising for home-building)
- “We could build tiny homes, temporary settlement at CRAB [Park Tent City], bring in trailer with showers & washrooms”
- Need for more modular housing
- Residents expressed inadequacy, lack of amenities and undignified conditions in existing SRO’s, affordable and supportive housing:
 - “I want my own bathroom”
 - “I want to cook my own food”
 - 100 sq ft isn’t enough living space
 - SROs feel like square jails; buildings are highly monitored/surveilled
 - Restrictions on entering buildings : ID needed, guest limits and bans

Policing & community safety

- Police presence & City of Vancouver employee presence inflicts violence on unhoused folks; they don’t feel safe
- Need to divest from the police and put money into community funds

Food Security

- Residents need more and better access to food/food programs
- Food insecurity increases with inflationary pressure on food prices

Transit & Connectivity

These issues are interconnected and residents expressed their impact on many aspects of life, including health and employment:

- Need to address impact of phone theft
- Need for access to phone credit
- Need to address general lack of access to internet
- Ideas: making a free transit area or transit pass for folks in poverty; transit prices based on income
- Better access to transit would make it easier to get around for work
- Need for better access to wifi & data in the downtown core
- Such issues are tied to employment opportunities and access to services
- “[Access to internet, transit and connectivity] should be a right now a days”

Inclusion

Residents expressed the need for meaningful consultation, inclusion, Peer-led programs and frustration with existing programs and use of funds:

- Residents appreciate such consultations –“this meeting is a great idea, somebody actually listening to us for once”
- Need for Indigenous-led poverty reduction measures
- A lot of people make money by working in this field [housing/service providers, nonprofits, government and their leaders, managers and administrators]; funds could be redirected towards the people who are supposed to benefit
- Need more funding for Peer support and Peer-led programs
- Residents expressed difficulty and lack of clarity in accessing Peer support programs
- “We can get a lot more people trained and stay within our community”

Stigma and general comments

Residents expressed the need to address stigma towards folks in extreme poverty. They also expressed perspectives on what creates poverty, specifically mentioning drugs [drug policy] and discrimination. In addition, navigating the whole system [of social supports and resources] is very hard to understand. There is a need to “really look at everyone’s applications and make them feel as though they have been heard and recognized”. Residents feel that the social workers that come [to CRAB Park Tent City] in the morning are awesome, they feel really heard and helped by them.

Rough breakdown of Expenses Incurred

The meeting was held on Thursday May 4th. Twenty five people participated, along with three external volunteer facilitators/organizers. Notes were recorded and formatted into the above report.

Costs:

- Participant spends: \$500
- Peer facilitator honorariums \$200
- Volunteer honorariums: \$400
- Food/refreshments: \$400
- Organization staff time for minute-taking/recording and transcribing notes: \$500 (16 hours @ \$30)

Greater Trail BC Poverty Community Input Roundtable

April 24, 2023 11am-1pm

Location: Skills Centre, 123-1290 Esplanade Ave Trail BC

Eight participants, one facilitator and one note taker

Notes:

1. What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Affordable housing• Transportation costs• Inflation• Programming inaccessible• Income assistance too low
2. What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food banks• Skills development• Free upgrading• * Federal support in the future (opportunity for all)
3. What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More funding• Improving accessibility• Some services lack dignity• Safe housing• Affordable housing• Affordable mental health service• Access to health care
4. From you experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to healthcare in rural settings• Help for first time homebuyers• Help with rental discrimination for single people• More doctors• Support for plant based eating• Shelters• Better communication between services• Healthier foods at food bank

Post Event Summary:

Housing

Housing insecurity was the most talked about theme. The City of Trail has a temporary homeless shelter that is set to close in Sept 2023. There is no suitable land that BC Housing can use to place a permanent

shelter and/or supportive housing on. Even if there were, there are concerns that the funding or planning won't be available to ensure wrap around services so that we can support those with complex needs. Housing for those precariously housed was also identified as a concern. Rent is far too high and many families and individuals go without food and other necessities to make sure rent is paid. More subsidized housing needs to be built, and it also needs to accommodate single low income individuals as well as families.

The Rural Context

It was also noted that the rural context needs to be considered when forming the strategic direction for BCs new poverty reduction plan. It needs to be flexible and adaptable to meet the individual needs of rural and remote communities. What works in the cities won't work here. In Many services, particularly health care services, are hours away. People living with low income often have to go without medical treatment because of the distance they are required to travel for specialists. They can not afford the gas required to travel, and the transportation services between communities is inefficient and those that are available are very costly. We are cut off from much of what would be preventative. Thus, they need to wait until it is an emergency to be seen locally and it is only at that time that transportation to a specialist to provide for free. Thus it costs the province more in the long run than to provide adequate services in our communities. If it isn't possible to have services locally, then at a minimum, have funds to support travel for medical services. There is a large reliance on non -profits to do this work and they are not properly funded so they cannot support the need. We do not have a walk in clinic within 60 km of the town, there are no doctors accepting new patients, and many specialities are located almost 400km away, over mountain passes and/or rivers. How are those with low income supposed to have access to health care? The emergency room then becomes the default walk-in clinic, which obviously ties up resources for truly emergent situations.

Access and Awareness

A third theme was access and awareness. Many of the people in the group were unaware of all the programs offered to support people living in poverty. The system is too complex to navigate. Online navigation is not always feasible, as most do not have access to a computer and/or internet. Another related concern is that people on the margins of poverty are often left out of the discussion. People in deep poverty (i.e. the homeless and unhoused) have supports, but people working hard to make a go of it do not; and they are already at capacity so to find local resources aimed at them is extremely difficult

to do. With housing insecurity at an all time high, along with inflation, where are the preventative programs to support people that are one crisis away from deep poverty? How do they find out about these programs?

Food

Food programs was talked about as being both a positive outcome of past programs, but also needing work. To ensure healthy climate friendly food options for low income populations, the input session suggested more investment in accessing healthy food for the food banks and more funding to support healthy food options for people with low income. Right now it is believed healthy climate friendly sustainable food options are only available for the wealthy.

Mental Health

Lastly, mental health was a theme that generated a lot of conversation. Many people living in poverty are experiencing mental health issues that impact their daily lives. Yet only the most severe get access to free treatment. People living on low income can never break the cycle if they are mentally unwell and have no funding to seek out the supports they need. Even if funding was addressed, in our rural and remote setting there just isn't enough mental health supports to access.

Final Thoughts

There were no dissenting opinions in the group. The primary frustration expressed by the group, which requires a shift in the global conscience, was the need for compassion and understanding between all members of the community. The belief is that this compassion will result in a permanent solution. One member of the group suggested that if we continue to focus on personal financial wealth, poverty will never be eradicated. This shift is necessary and government can look within its own systems to see if they can change to a more compassionate way of governing and policy implementation. Government can also ensure that more support is directed to housing, health, awareness and food security.



Submission of Feedback from Public Consultation

Ishtar Women's Resource Society, April 12, 2023

Prepared by: (name removed) on behalf of Ishtar Women's Resource Society



Acknowledgments:

Ishtar Women's Resource Society (IWRS) gratefully acknowledges the women of Langley, BC who joined this consultation event for their time, passion, courage, and wisdom. While each participant added her own unique experiences and ideas, their combined contributions represent a unified voice calling on the provincial government to use the tools of legislative and financial action to support them in living dignified and meaningful lives. This report seeks to honor their wisdom, and amplify their power.

IWRS provides support to women and children impacted by violence in relationships in Langley and Aldergrove BC, in the traditional and ancestral territories of the Katzie, Kwantlen, Matsqui, and Sto:lo first nations. Since our founding in 1973, IWRS has been committed to preventing and ending the cycle of abuse through an expanding set of programs responding to the unique and evolving needs of survivors. Our programs include transitional housing, outreach supports, community-based victim's services, domestic violence liaison to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Stopping the Violence women's counselling, and Prevention Education Advocacy and Empowerment children's counselling. While this submission reflects the concerns of survivors of relationship violence within our community, the following recommendations are offered in solidarity with women and children experiencing violence and poverty across the province.

Participants:

The participants in this consultation were 13 adult women accessing services through IWRS in Langley, BC. The women represented a diverse cross section of multiple intersecting identities including age, race/ethnicity, mental and physical wellness status, faith orientation, immigration status, parenting and relational roles, etc. All participants self-identify with lived experiences of abuse or violence in relationship across the lifespan and disadvantage due to limited economic resources. Each woman expressed gratitude and a sense of empowerment in being able to add her voice to the shaping of ongoing poverty reduction policy in BC.

Background-The State of Poverty in BC for Survivors of Violence:

IWRS recognizes and celebrates the significant progress in poverty reduction resulting from current TogetherBC based interventions, including the BC Family Benefit, expansion of low-cost childcare, modest investments in affordable housing options, and the substantial impacts of COVID-19 related income supplement programs at the federal and provincial level.¹ These actions reveal that significant decreases in poverty are possible when political will is applied—

¹ [An unexpected consequence of the pandemic: Poverty declined sharply in Canada | Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives](#)



and also clearly demonstrate that the ongoing depth of poverty in BC is not necessary, but a result of policy and investment choice.²

While over all rates of poverty in the province have declined in response to TogetherBC policies, the realities for women and children experiencing violence remain extremely challenging. Single working aged women have the lowest incomes relative to the poverty line—\$7,396 below the deep poverty threshold.³ Children living in single-mother led households following the end of an abusive relationship are at much higher risk of experiencing deep poverty than the general BC population, and this risk increases for racialized/indigenous families.⁴ Women account for 25% of the hidden homeless in BC, and consistently name the fear of homelessness, or being forced into equally unsafe and transitory conditions which may also jeopardize their ability to maintain guardianship of their children as one of the greatest deterrents to escaping an abusive situation.⁵

Survivors of violence face unique financial barriers related to accessing necessary services to support their physical safety, mental and physical wellness, and personal dignity. In particular, costs to access to legal supports, mental wellness supports, and healthy community engagement (i.e. childcare, children's programming, education, etc.) are elevated, as most survivors require legal assistance and experience negative impacts on wellness related to the abuse. Women experiencing relationship abuse require reliable, timely, and quality legal advice and representation to address a myriad of concerns including: their safety and the safety of their children, protection from ongoing coercion and harassment, financial support entitlements, and equitable asset distribution.⁶ While Legal Aid does offer priority support to women fleeing violence, the income ceiling and service hour caps are so highly restrictive that more than half of those who apply do not qualify, leaving many vulnerable to ongoing violence and harassment.⁷ Women and children who have experienced violence are 3-5 more likely than non-abused counterparts to experience PTSD, Complex PTSD, suicidality, and use substances to cope.⁸ As they seek to heal, survivors are often faced with extreme financial strain in accessing services paid services, or unconscionably long wait times for inadequately funded public services.

Women and children who have experienced abuse have unique needs to reduce their experiences of poverty that current policy and investment priorities do not sufficiently address.

² BC Poverty Reduction Coalition: Toward a poverty-free BC: BC Poverty Reduction Coalition submission to the BC Government review of the TogetherBC poverty reduction plan (2023).

³ Welfare income for the cited study includes: recurring additional social assistance payments from the province; Federal and provincial child benefits (for households with children); Federal and provincial tax credits or benefits; and payments related to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. The publication is available on [Welfare in Canada - British Columbia - Maytree](#).

⁴ [2022 BC Child Poverty Report Card | First Call: Child and Youth Advocacy Society](#).

⁵ Maki, K. (2017). Housing, homelessness, and violence against women: A discussion paper. Women's Shelters Canada; Flock, I., and Benjamin, E.A. (2019). Best practices in addressing homelessness: A literature review of existing research. UBC School of Community and Regional Planning.

⁶ West Coast Leaf (2021). BC budget 2021: A missed opportunity

⁷ West Coast Leaf (2020). Four busted myths about Legal Aid in BC: Access to justice shouldn't be reserved for those who can afford it.

⁸ Dutton, M., Kaltman, S., Goodman, L., Weinfurt, K., Vankos, N. (2005). Patterns of Intimate Partner Violence: Correlates and Outcomes. *Violence Victims*, (20) 5, 483-497



The following report represents an overview of the high-level themes expressed in consultation regarding factors contributing to poverty, barriers to accessibility and equity in public services and programming, and recommendations for investment and policy change. These recommendations reflect the unique needs of survivors of relationship violence. The priority areas women recommend guide provincial policy reflected throughout this report are:

- **Housing affordability**
- **Income supplements and fair wages**
- **Expansion of public health and wellness programming options**
- **Autonomy and dignity in service delivery**
- **Community integration**

Consultation Results:

Question 1: What are the major factors or issues contributing to poverty in your community today?

Themes:

Unaffordable housing

Participants unanimously named unaffordable housing as the primary expense causing and perpetuating their experiences of poverty. Multiple members shared personal stories regarding difficult choices they have made to remain with, or repeatedly return to, abusive partners because they simply had no other housing option for themselves and/or their children. In particular, women shared that the ever-increasing cost of rental units increases poverty as the majority of household income, including supplements intended to cover other costs must be devoted to paying rent, leaving little to nothing for other necessary expenses. Women also shared that the lack of affordable housing supply, and options that are geared to the unique needs of women and children experiencing abuse (i.e. housing that is accommodating of children, larger family units, support animals, safe housing away from frequent triggers of trauma) can amount to discrimination, and force them to stay in inadequate and unsafe conditions, or leave their communities and natural support systems. The frequency of these reports at the consultation table is a stark reminder that poverty and violence work hand in hand, and that the economic freedom to choose and access safe and stable housing options equates to the freedom to leave abuse.

Insufficient supplements

Women reported that income supplements such as Income Assistance, Disability, and rental supplement programs are increasingly inadequate to rising costs. Women shared about the impacts of inflation on their ability to pay for basic needs including food/groceries,



transportation, information technology that is increasingly necessary to participate in the community, and healthcare such as dentistry and eyecare. Women reported that the rates of assistance are simply not high enough to cover these expenses, as typically the majority must be devoted to housing costs, even given temporary rental supplements. Several women noted that temporary COVID-19 benefits were larger than ongoing Disability and Income Assistance supports, and expressed frustration that these temporary measures are not continued—questioning how the government and society values those who may not be able to work due to mental and physical wellness circumstances. Additionally, many women shared about their desire to, and felt experience of dignity in work—either to no longer require income supplements where possible, or to raise their income threshold to rise above the poverty line. However, they reported that the high rate of income supplement ‘claw backs’ and the speed at which supplements are removed for those transitioning back to more full-time work are punitive, and enforce entrapment in cycles of poverty, as they cannot afford to simultaneously lose benefits while seeking to increase work income.

Insufficient wages for work

Many of the women participating in the consultation work either full or part time positions and shared that work is very meaningful to them. However, they cited that wage thresholds are dramatically inadequate, and do not reflect the value of their work. Several cited concerns regarding automation replacing minimum-wage jobs that may be more accessible to them, and their work is often precarious, with very little wage or job security. Some reported their work in female dominated sectors that are traditionally understaffed, and underpaid contributes to mental health complications, poverty, and work-force withdrawal.

Insufficient public programming

Participants shared that there is not enough available publicly funded programming for their unique needs including legal supports, mental health services for them and their children, childcare, and educational/recreational programming. Many women shared about their experiences with the LegalAid system as they sought to separate safely from abusers with protection for their physical safety, child guardianship to protect their children, and asset division and support enforcement. They agreed that the income cut off for eligibility and insufficient number of funded hours to resolve extremely complex and contentious court battles placed them in financial precarity, debt, and also at risk of violence. While most women shared that they, and their children need mental wellness supports to address the ongoing impacts of trauma, they are not able to afford these supports in the private market and that wait times for understaffed public and non-profit services are far too long. Many women also reported the importance of educational and recreational programming for themselves and their children in re-forming healthy lives and identity after abuse, and reported concerns that without enough funded programs in these areas, cycles of trauma and poverty may continue as their own children are not able to access supports in building healthy relationships and identity.



Question 2: What government support programs are having a positive impact in addressing your needs?

Themes:

What works—Integrated programming

Women in the consultation shared that many programs funded by government are impactful including rental supplements, income supports—particularly the increased supports during the COVID-19 pandemic, childcare supplements and the limited trials of \$10/day daycare, and public funding for mental health and for anti-violence organizations such as IWRS. In particular, participants highlighted the impact of services/programs that are integrative in nature—where their multiple intersecting needs as survivors of violence can be addressed (i.e. housing supports, applications for benefits, trauma recovery and addictions treatment, childcare, legal information support, etc.). Consultees shared that the programs that have been most helpful in alleviating financial strain, getting safe from abuse, and supporting them in re-engagement with life and community are women's services that operate from a wraparound, anti-oppressive, and trauma-informed perspective. However, women unanimously reported barriers in accessing services like these due to chronic understaffing resulting in extremely long wait times averaging 4 months to over a year.

Complexity

Consultees highlighted significant barriers to accessing publicly funded supports for housing, mental health, and basic needs are the degree of complexity, difficult paperwork, and lack of coordination between agencies/programs. Several women shared that at their times of greatest need to access these programs—as they were in or leaving very traumatic experiences—their mental and physical wellness as a result of the trauma was so negatively impacted that the amount of detailed paperwork and navigation of disconnected systems was overwhelming and either slowed or prevented them from getting the help they needed. They reported that advocacy workers from non-profit organizations such as IWRS are crucial in navigating these systems, but that not nearly enough are available. Women also reported that eligibility criteria that is highly restrictive, or changes significantly across programming/supplement supports makes these resources inaccessible. Some even reported feeling as though the degree of barriers and complexity involved create the conditions for remaining trapped in the cycle of poverty.

Lack of dignity

Members spoke frequently in the consultation about their valuing of their own dignity—highlighting that interpersonal trauma that often damages their and their children's sense of self-worth and identity, and that a restoration of dignity is vitally important in recovering from abuse and returning to life in the community. Many reported that a primary barrier in accessing poverty-reduction supports is the experience of being seen as a 'number, not a person,' or



feeling stigmatized for themselves and their children in using these supports. Women who have accessed some publicly funded housing developments shared that units are often in severe disrepair and that tenants fear complaining at risk of property management evicting them. Several women cited a lack of trauma informed education for public health and mental health workers, as well as law enforcement and legal professionals, and that a lack of understanding about the dynamics of abuse on mental wellness makes services inaccessible and stigmatizing. Many participants shared about the importance of supports for return to work, and education as this offers an opportunity to enhance a sense of self-confidence and meaning, and that they do not necessarily want only support focused on allowing them not to work. Rather, participants shared about the need for a flexible continuum of supplements and programming that supports dignity as they transition through different phases of their healing journeys.

Lack of equity for unique groups

Multiple consultees represented specific equity deserving groups including folks with disabilities, seniors, and recent immigrants. Women with disabilities reported that accommodations in navigating government programming, accessing housing, and help in getting the health/mental healthcare they need is inadequate. Senior women reported that accessing affordable housing, and adequate social/community recreational supports for mental wellness presents a significant barrier to economic stability and life satisfaction. Women with recent immigration status shared about being left behind from poverty reduction programming and supplements due to their status, and that this increased their difficulty in transitioning away from abuse. Some shared specifically about the negative impacts of restriction on temporary worker permits, and advocated for equity driven exemptions for survivors of violence to allow them to support themselves more quickly.

Question 3: From your experience, what more could the government be doing to reduce poverty and benefit life in your community?

Themes:

Continuum of affordable housing

Participants unequivocally recommended that the most significant need to reduce or eliminate poverty is affordable housing. Women shared a range of ideas to make housing more affordable and tailored to their own unique needs as survivors of violence—emphasizing a flexible continuum model ranging from immediate and short term shelters (such as transition houses and shelters specifically for women and children), container/pod and SRO housing, second-stage housing for women, longer-term supportive housing for those with mental and physical wellness challenges, rent-geared to income rental units throughout the community, and cooperative housing development for permanent occupancy. As Langley, BC currently does not have second stage housing (acknowledging that this program is now in development) for women experiencing violence, women at this consultation particularly remarked on the need to



invest in this program, in this community. Women recommended that the prioritization for BC housing placements following leaving abuse are not fast enough, and that women should have the option to be placed in market rentals in the community immediately with rental supplement that is equivalent to the investment for a BC housing complex unit.

Women reported that, while temporary housing that is grouped together (i.e. all units devoted to residents of a similar socio-economic background, or solely for survivors of violence) may be necessary and useful in rapid responses to poverty and violence, that they believe that increased autonomy and diversity in their housing choices over time is most beneficial to ending the cycle of poverty, and increasing a sense of belonging in the community for themselves and for their children. Members shared freedom and flexibility to accommodate children and animals, and to offer exposure to the richness of diversity in society as important guiding values in housing policy. Women supported the idea of mixed-model development communities with some units designated for rent-geared to income, or survivors of violence, and other units for those of different backgrounds/market rate rentals. Many members were initially unfamiliar with the cooperative model of housing (rental and ownership), but when the terms were defined, unanimously agreed that government investment in this model would reduce their poverty and increase a sense of dignity and participation in the broader community.

Raising rates of income and housing subsidy supports

Participants advocated for legislated increases to minimum wage, above currently scheduled increases and specific low wage redress to undervalued, female dominated industries. Several women shared about the value they place on work, and the impact on their own sense of self-worth, and that their work needs to be valued equally and reflected in fair compensation that matches real costs of living adjusted for inflation. Members recommended significant increases to Income Assistance and Disability rates, and/or rental subsidy for at least 50% of rental cost up to low income cut offs specific to geographic community, to support their ability to pay for housing. Women also argued to eliminate or cap 'claw backs' of all supplemental payments until such a time as work-based income is sufficient to support the individual/family above the poverty threshold.

Increased investment in publicly funded services

Consultees recommended increases in public investment for key basic services including trauma-informed mental health and addictions counselling and treatment for trauma survivors, dental, prescription, and eye care health needs, childcare, adjunct healthcare (i.e. holistic nutrition, physiotherapy), LegalAid, post-secondary education/employment training, food security, and community building and recreational programming for all ages (see next section). Many women indicated a desire to contribute to funding for these services to increase their own sense of autonomy and participation, but agreed that public funding infrastructure is needed to keep costs down. Consultees also advocated for increased funding specifically for



women's serving organizations that provide the tailored supports they need in an integrated manner.

Participants were particularly vocal regarding the need to incorporate mental health care into the public health system. They shared that current short term, time-limited, crisis oriented supports with long wait times and frequently changing counsellors are inadequate to meet their needs as trauma survivors. They advocated for incorporating not only psychiatrists and psychologists, but also clinical counsellors into the MSP coverage program, so that they can have autonomy in seeking professionals in the community with proper specializations and lower wait times for themselves and their children, and be able to access treatment for longer time periods to address debilitating symptoms related to trauma and to prevent long-term negative effects of trauma for children. Many members also advocated for more trauma informed substance detoxification programming, to be more accessible for folks in immediate need to prevent overdose.

Support for community spaces/programming

Members shared a resounding call for policies and programs that will support inclusion and belonging in community. They reflected that both poverty and relationship violence create impacts of isolation, distorted identity, and diminished self-confidence for them and their children, and that these factors perpetuate cycles of violence and poverty. Consultees advocated for creativity in poverty reduction strategies, including investment in public spaces and educational/recreational programming to enhance a sense of being in community, enrich and diversify a web of social connection, and increase access to professionals/support programs in a non-stigmatizing setting. Women supported the idea of funding for wraparound resource hubs, and particularly advocated for expansion of funding for the 'neighborhood house' model where community members can access safe community space, build life skills, have access to flexible part time employment opportunities, access recreation, and interact with support/outreach workers who can connect to other resources. Members suggested that this would address mental health issues, loneliness, and the need for community by including members of the community from all backgrounds in these opportunities. Several women suggested collaboration with faith and culturally based community resources to create these supports. Participants emphasized that investment in this approach would increase a sense of dignity for them.

Summary of Recommendations:

- **Fund and build a flexible continuum of affordable housing for survivors of violence**
- **Raise rates of income assistance, disability, and rental supplements**
- **Decrease 'claw backs' from income supports**
- **Raise minimum wages to cost of living adjusted with inflation**
- **Fund development of cooperative housing developments**
- **Expand stable contract funding for women's anti-violence organizations**
- **Incorporate psychologists and clinical counsellors in MSP**
- **Increase detox beds for survivors of violence**
- **Fund universal coverage for dental and eye care health care**
- **Expand LegalAid programming, and change the income threshold to more realistically reflect the cost of lengthy court proceedings following abuse**
- **Increase education and employment training funding for survivors of violence**
- **Remove barriers to work and access social supports for immigrants and refugees experiencing violence**
- **Fund expansion of 'neighborhood houses' model of community-based resource hubs**

Concluding words: The following are responses to the question: "if you could sum up in one sentence or phrase, what you want the provincial government to know about your experience and your needs, what would you say?"

"Everyone should be treated as well as the next person; from one class to another."

"Treating each person as a human being and assessing them; having proper facilitated people for each and every situation to have proper analysis of it."

"We need housing for everyone that is safe, secure and meets their needs, including animals."

"What used to be retirement is no longer available and not sustainable, people should be supported in the lifetime."

"If we are helped to switch from survival to thrive-al mode, you will have a community and economy that thrives."

"We need access to services when we need them."

"Everyone should be able to get free medical, dental, mental health, eyes, hearing, physiotherapy, massage, naturopath and the financial health they need. This is healthcare."

"I am grateful to be here today."

"50% rental income assistance would be so beneficial to everyone everywhere."



"Help me help myself by providing programs I am eligible for."

"Create a catch all for those who do not fit eligibility criteria."

"Quicker access to mental health care for both adults and children."

"More income assistance, \$1140 is not enough."

"Try to make it easier for us to find rentals."

"Help me help myself through education so that I can provide for myself and my family."

"Empower me to do that for myself so I can keep myself and my children safe and not need to count on anyone else."

"Don't just throw more money at me. Add value and worth and support my work, my faith, my independence, my housing, and my healing journey."

In Solidarity,

The voices of women in Langley, BC.

Community Conversation for input to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

Location: Lift Community Services Community Resource Centre, qathet (city of Powell River)

Demographics of respondents

- (1) Single, others who may face discrimination and racism (ageism- over 65)
- (2) single individual, person with a disability who face barriers.
- (3) Indigenous, Single individual
- (4) Single individual
- (5) Others who may face discrimination and racism
- (6) Single individual, others who face discrimination, facing homelessness
- (7) Single individual, facing homelessness
- (8) Indigenous, single individual, person with disability, and faces barriers and others who may face discrimination and racism
- (9) 2SLGBTQ+ people
- (10) 2SLGBTQ+ people, under 19

How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, food and housing affordability challenges, etc.) impacted your ability to afford these expenses?

- (1) Pension doesn't cover much beyond very basic expenses: certainly not money for shoes, glasses, dental work, supplements etc. The existing systems seem to require that things must be dire before help is offered. It makes more sense to attend on a case by case basis to ensure well being. Attention to the requirements of the moment would ameliorate a lot of stress. Attend suggestions: before it gets worse. Dental care, free rec center passes, shoes, glasses/eyes, community events, massage, physio, counseling, more buses. The focus here seems to be on the rather vague and general goal of reducing poverty. Perhaps in the meantime the focus could be on alleviating the lives of the people who are being impacted by poverty. It's stressful and it's pervasive, affecting every area and encounter. It had an unsettling and cascading effect. It exacerbates existing conditions and erodes healthy relationships.
- (2) I have not been able to afford a rental for decades beyond living in a vehicle or boat.
- (3) I'm 63 and work just to keep my bills even.
- (4) Cost of living has increased by 50% at least
- (5) Mortgage payments increased by 800\$ a month

(6) Homelessness

(7) My home was sold during the pandemic and I became homeless.

(8) I was homeless for 2 years and 4 months until I got housing on December 15th of 2022. Unsuitable housing conditions is the main thing that made me have to find a new place to live.

I ended up homeless because I couldn't afford the rent. \$1,200 up to \$1,800 a month isn't something that I can afford on PWD.

Because of being on PWD a limited income with the rising cost and inflation of food I no longer can afford my regular diet and I end up using food bank 1 a month and food lineups 2 times a week also go to Lift Community Services that is a place that makes hot lunch 4 times a week on a monthly basis.

I can no longer afford to go out for dinner once a week. It is now only once a month because of the high price of inflation for food.

Living in Powell River and traveling to Vancouver used to be a once every 6 weeks event for me but I no longer afford because of the high price of living I support my 24-year-old daughter with \$300 to \$500 a month so that she doesn't end up homeless resulting in that I can only travel to Vancouver once every 5 months now.

(9) The creation of unnecessary stress on families and communities.

(10) I don't have a lot of information, but I know gas was affected

What are some of the biggest challenges you, your family or your community have experienced in terms of covering day-to-day expenses?

(1) Eating nutritious food. Renting a suitable space.

(2) Having nowhere to go when the weather is really bad because "you have a car/boat, you're not homeless"

(3) Food and hydro is going up leaps and bounds.

(4) Lack of good paying employment

(5) Increase in mortgage payments

(6) Drug dependency, medical expenses (unexpected), vehicle accident, dental care

(7) Inflation and food and services.

(8) To me my biggest challenges in covering day-to-day expenses are that on PWD I'm normally allowed to make \$15,000 a year and now that I've broken my back I can no longer make that extra money and work as a care aide that I was doing previously to supplement my income. In the past I used to once every few months use the food bank or go to a soup kitchen and now I do the food bank every month and I do the Salvation Army once a week food pickup I do it 4 times every month as I cannot afford the food that I normally eat. I had to cancel my cell phone coverage plan and go on a limited plan as I couldn't afford my old plan. I also had to change my internet to PWD internet for good through Telus because I could not afford \$120 to \$140 a month for internet now because I'm on PWD on the internet for good through Telus program I pay \$19.97 a month plus taxes. To be able to eat two meals a day I eat at Lift community services 4 days a week lunch. I no longer buy new clothes & don't buy new shoes. I buy these items from second life's terms and hand stores. I can't afford to go to movies or events as I can no longer afford it. On PWD.

Challenges of my family are negatively affected by My inability to work . Which has affected my daughter as I used to be able to send her \$500 to \$800 a month to assist her with the high cost of living as her rent for her and her roommate rent is \$1,850 a month. Because they have pets they are not eligible for assisted or subsidized housing. They are juggling their bills every month & I send them about \$300_ \$500 a month as I don't want to see them homeless.

Challenges the community faces to cover day-to-day expenses is that rent is \$1200- \$1800 for a one bedroom and a lot more expensive for a two bedroom or more. Our public Education System is not equipping our youth to deal with life on Life's terms as they dont know practical life skills. Way more people at the food bank at Salvation Army at Lift community services for food as the cost of rent has taken a big chunk out of what they normally spend on food. There are way less kids playing sports, no soccer, no tennis, no baseball as the parents can no longer afford the cost. There are way less kids in brownies, scouts, guides, Cubs, Rangers ect..as the parents can no longer afford the cost. A Lot of young adults are in shelters or in tents or couch surfing because they can't afford the rent.

(9) Simply how much it costs just to live

(10) low wages and housing

What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?

(1) skyrocketing price for rent and food

(2)rent is way too high

(3)housing costs and food costs

(5)Housing affordability and supply, not having a liveable wage.

(6) living expenses/inflation. telephone/cell bills. (necessary for protection). Hydro, Gas, Heating. Food increased costs. Rent increases. Incidentals and entertainment.

Medications/drugs. Children growing up.

(7) Homelessness and addiction

(8) Absolutely no affordable rentals in Powell River. The homeless shelter has had an average of 20 to 25 people living in it for the past two plus years. We have young people and older people working minimum wage jobs that cannot afford housing and are living in either precarious positions or couchsurfing. We have people living in tents or their vehicles because there is no housing available in Powell River.

Minimum wage is not a livable living wage, especially with rent being as high as they are.

There's nothing in Powell River for less than \$1,200 for a one bedroom apartment up to 1800 dollars for a one bedroom .

Isolation of the community of Powell River contributes to poverty in our community today.

As it takes two ferries to get to Vancouver we pay an enormous amount to get to Vancouver even more to get to Vancouver Island to get anything we need that we can not get in our town. An oil change for my Chevy spark costs me \$172.- in Powell River & \$62- in Courtney... We don't have many choices for shopping & we don't have Costco. We Need to be able to grow our own food.

(9) unaffordable housing, lack of supported housing

What does not being in poverty look like?

- (1) less stress over limited choices, being able to eat well.
- (2) like a holiday with your family with anything possible.
- (3) paying your bills. Affording food etc.
- (4) abundant
- (5) liberation, good mental health
- (8) Raise minimum wage up to \$21.00 an hour. Raise income assistance \$300. Also raise the amount for PWD \$300. Also raise the amount \$300. for people on old age pensions . Also allow people on income assistance, PWD & old age security to make more than to help meet their needs of inflation.
Have cheaper ferry rates for people that live in Powell River.
Everyone being affordably housed in Powell River & no homelessness. Regulate rent prices. Have Rental inspections. That Students are taught budgeting, have home economics again to learn how to cook, learn about banking ,about paying bills, about keeping a home clean, about money management, about life skills, learn how to argue without ripping another person apart, learn how to grow food, learn how to store food, canning & freezing,learn communication skills to effectively speak there truths, especially learn about politics, learn about mental health issues and treatments so mental is understood, learn about all religions not to convert so as to actually know what different religions are Muslims, buddhisms, Catholicism, Jehovah's witness etc....learn about all religions so there isn't any prejudice or fear of other religions. Teach Real history of Canada. Residential schools 60s scoop and day school. Every Food bank have a garden to grow Vegetables and fruit to give out to clients, every hospital, group home & old age homes have gardens & fruit to their clients, have elementary and high school students learn about gardening in gardens in their own schools and have trained students be employed to work at other gardens within their community ... Food bank has a garden that feeds the people vegetables and fruits, Lift Community Services has a bigger garden to Serve Community hot meals 5 days a week instead of 4 days. & Open 5 days not 4. Lift Community Services be given more \$ to run programs that educate & support people to be independent & employed & Expand their teaching garden to educate more people & youths. Every city & town needs a resource center like Lift Community Services.
- (9) Being allowed to live and enjoy life.

What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why?

- (1) LINK helps! Welcoming empathetic staff helped a lot in calming me down and assisting in orientation and planning. Good location. I don't know any other services or programs.
- (3) Lift, Inclusion and lifecycle are trying.
- (5) food programs- because of the cost of food. Housing availability and affordability.
- (6) Covid infection and rent increases would have had a more significant effect on our family if not for the additional supplemental cheques welfare supplementing monthly

cheques ect. Small jobs, increased outreach programs, food, medical, support, transportation, free foods like granola bars, yogurt, juices, fruits and pastries and meals distributed by the Community Resource Centre and overdose prevention center in qathet. Workshops, food banks, honorarium. I think the Covid supplemental cheques proved to greatly benefit many, however there were some problems with identifying eligibility and thus individuals are now under stress of having to pay back because they received money unknowingly due to them.

(8) Lift Community Services the Salvation Army Seventh-Day Church the food bank could make a bigger impact on addressing poverty when they get more financial support and also have gardens so that they can give out vegetables and fruit.

What makes these programs or Services most helpful? How are people learning about these programs or services?

These Services feed over 100 people a day and turn away about 40 or more people a day.

(9) Locally, Lift community services

(10) Thrift stores and Food Bank

What makes these programs or services most helpful? How are people learning about these programs or services?

(5) community resource center and shelter; treat people with respect and dignity, build community, ability to give back, barriers are hours of operations

(6) Different programs work well together, adding to the extra guarantees to cover all areas requiring assistance.

(8) Walk in first come first serve. Barriers are people getting turned away because of food.

(9) lift has a broad range of services that help all humans with all of their struggles.

How are people accessing these programs or services? Are there barriers to access?

(4)lack of personal contact - toll free numbers ? really?

(6) availability and hours play a role in accessing certain services. Barriers are increased needs and increased usage, lack of communication of support programs availability, transportation.

(8)These services are on a community list that is given out about services in Powell River at the Salvation Army at Lift Community Services, 7th Day Church, Ministry of income assistance and Ministry of children and families . also on Facebook and have websites.

(9) Walk-ins, word of mouth, social media, etc.

(10) I don't know about many programs which I suppose is a barrier itself, but out of the ones I do know of, that would be beneficial to me, such as programs helping people access period supplies or gender affirming materials like binders. I often struggle with wondering whether or not I qualify for these services or am 'deserving' of them and I really don't know who to ask.

What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?

(3) More affordable housing everywhere! Gaps in seniors affordable housing.

(6) Reducing poverty would require a better understanding of the reasons for its existence in individual communities, individually and as a whole. Family environment, abuse, lack of support necessary for basic needs due to various reasons, these need to be identified and addressed when can. Drug addiction. Mental health. Go first at home csp in the case of identifying causes of a child's poverty and again more even child and teenager is left home (youth agreement beneficial for setting youth up with housing, proper support, rental and supplemental money. People are lacking continuous support, we need follow up counseling not as an exchange for financial aid but genuine concern and continuous support.

(8) The cost of renting is way too high for everyone. Cost of food is way too high. Not enough food grown in the community.

(9) The continued work of love, care, respect and commitment from human to human.

How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?

(1) There is a huge gap between actual income and cost of living. Not much help available to address physical and mental health emphasis should be on prevention.

(5) cut corporations' ability to bonus when receiving government support.

(6) Domestic abuse addressed by counseling should be more accessible or mandatory, stigma underlying diseases, mental, physical, spiritual health are addressed, maintaining keeping people out of poverty. Make healthcare more accessible, psychiatrist, therapists, teachers, social workers working on healing trauma, bridge gaps, create stronger families, better schools, education, homes. Allow people to pursue education for their passions and interests. Take time to identify strengths, likes and interests.

(8) Lower the cost of renting in BC, have rental units be inspected on a regular basis to make sure that they provide for the needs of the person that lives there. Make changes in schools education as in answer challenges the community faces to meet day-to-day expenses.

Where is more support needed?

Affordable Housing, raise minimum wage. Raise the amount of money that people get on fixed income like PWD income assistance and old age security.

(9) Educate humans about what true community is.

Where is more support needed?

(1) Need more support for PTSD, ACE and Kids

(3) increase availability of existing support

(4) housing- reasonable rent

- (5) we need housing supply that is no more than 30% of income
- (6) parental counseling, some of this may be rejected as the morale overall is challenged daily, tiredness sets in and health suffers- simply attending (getting up, getting there, feeling comfortable enough to stay there can be/seem impossible to some. Councilors, therapists, nurses, doctors, out-reach workers, teachers, all workers, and our parents - our leaders must know, abide and teach us these basics and I truly believe we will start moving forward again, out of negative areas, unhealed out of fear and ignorance. It has and will continue to have dire consequences if left like that. Consequences and subsequently more consequences like addictions, mental diseases, depression, crime, sin, suffering, poverty of the soul. Addictions, crime, mental health is not just for those directly experiencing them, it affects us all. We must all educate ourselves in the basics of these areas and help stop the stigmas to destroy the negative feedback systems we have.
- (9) Everywhere in all communities

From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?

- (1) Change the system! Cap on rent! Focus on stress reduction!
- (3) quit giving raises to government officials and give it to people and communities.
- (5) address systemic issues, allow dcc funds to finance affordable housing. Stop criminalization of poverty
- (6) support, support, support. Discipline, change, growth, support, support, support. This should not be taken lightly, psychological, physical, mental, spiritual, financial, occupational, emotional support. Hygiene support, animal/pet support, family support is vital, very important if it can be saved. Teaching better family habits is a good place to start structuring everything on top of and therefore so very important. Family love will ultimately teach self love. Clears confusion, doubt, fears, ignorance, negativity etc. Change is always welcomed in life if it encourages growth and success. Family responsibility is so important, nature's first survival contract is between parent and child bond, the first and strongest, most important bond we have is to our parent or child. When parent and child are in close proximity our bodies release endorphins, if that bond and connection with our family is broken for whatever reason and separation occurs, the endorphins that are released in the survival bond/contract we have with our parents/children becomes compromised, no endorphins = no good/happy/safe feelings. Being in survival mode in their brains, especially for children, is threatening the brain, fight, flight or freeze kicks in. We ultimately go out into life now quite frazzled as we no longer feel safe and we literally do not have parents to protect us for whatever reason and the hunt for survival is on. Well, exercise but not always and more often than not drugs come into play- of course they do, they are designed to make us feel good, aid

what ails us, and that's what they do temporarily that is. And then the heart is on again, this is not living, but this is surviving and it ultimately leads to addiction, more times than not, of all sorts of things, anything actually that releases endorphins. So there it is, we have no choice but to start here from the beginning. Find out what happened if it was about and caused trauma, address it, work on healing and reluctantly the self of each individual, family and then community, local and then global. The results could only be positive and beneficial for everyone. Planetary families and our histories exist, but we've lost chapters, puzzle pieces along the way and we need to fix what is broken and grow/mature as a species, we know this is as above, so below all around us is signs of distress, we need to stop, listen, fix/change, grow, evolve, take responsibility of our humanity - as poverty should not exist! We have a planet to protect as it is the planet that protects, feeds and shelters us. This is basic cosmic awareness, but do we know/remember this, do we teach our children this and live and adhere by this? Acknowledge, respect these relationships to our children, parents and neighbors. Our very survival is dependent on it so I would think that it would be at the top of the things to learn and abide by through our lives here on earth. This is what religion should be, spirituality is the relationship we each have with god/dess to our creator. There is no other goal, or anything. All other relationships stem from, grow out of and are sustained from this relationship! So we better remember that, and teach it. This will start and support the healing we all need, it will fix problems, mend hearts, heal bodies and community.

(8) We need more affordable housing in Powell River. We need to educate youths and the public about sustainable food canning storage and cooking and growing of our own fruits and vegetables.

(9) More subsidized housing. Real action and not just empty talk or promises.

Together BC is being guided by 4 principles: Affordability, Reconciliation, Opportunity, Social Inclusion.

(1) Are they meeting any of these? Where is there more work to be done?

No not that you'd notice. Crisis prevention.

(3) They are trying to meet them but it is slow.

(5) decolonize work. Keep people in their communities. Treat people with dignity. Give people what they need.

(6) No judging = no suffering caused. Find a way, design a method to not only fix mistakes but be in remembrance of not repeating them. Respect will be gained from our sleeves, from our families and by our community. This will become the basis of a better community and ultimately healing = less addiction, crime, separation, suffering and poverty.

(8) Are they meeting any of these? Where is there more work to be done?

We're not coming close to meeting affordability. We need to create more community events

so that we meet social inclusion better. Reconciliation needs a lot of work with more information about the past history of residential schools in 60 scoops and Day school is needed so that people may understand what Aboriginal people in Canada went through and are still going through. Every community needs smokehouses, longhouses, traditional herb gardens, sweat lodges, language revitalization and support for families to be brought back together. Please email me as I have a lot of suggestions for reconciliation. Need more information on where people attended residential school. We need to reconnect to family and be told who our family is.

(9) No. The colonial system does not work as a means to fix anything. Too many empty promises.

(10) I definitely have had issues with affordability, particularly with the medical system. I have motor control issues in my wrists and sometimes my legs, and I need braces to keep my muscles still. I have struggled to afford good wrist braces and currently only have one good one and one for my other hand that only works 50% of the time. I do not have knee braces although when it gets really bad I can barely walk, and I once had to tie socks above my knees so that I could get to my next class. My government insurance won't cover the cost because my issues have repeatedly been brushed off as anxiety by my doctors.

Any other comments?

(1)The respect that is shown to every individual who enters the CRC is really helpful.

(3)) I think every political figure should do 6 months on a low income including a winter so they can really get a grasp on choosing heat/hydro over food or medication.

(5) housing service providers in community helps build relationships + trust + resilience

(6) love heals all. Self love is the basis for loving others. To look at ourselves and our children, and identify stigmas may be contributing to and eliminate them by educating ourselves and our children. We have a responsibility to and this will help heal our own traumas and others, and stop contributing to any more negative systems that have been created by stigmas - judging others must stop. We should stop thinking we have the right to judge anyone, including ourselves, only love. We need to like it when we go into the forest and take out what we bring in. Everyone needs to help stop the stigmas. To be rich is to be abundant with spirit, emotion, mental health and physical health. Healing poverty, homelessness, addictions, etc. And in all areas of life, no matter the occupation, we must be held accountable for the suffering we cause or don't. So this requires everyone to jump on board to fix. The ministries of housing should know very well what they need to do better. Stop stigma, everyone is entitled to basic needs, if they cant work or choose not, please respect.

(7)My knowledge is very basic on all these questions. I see the challenges of poverty, but yet to have enough experience to comment accurately.

(9) More real action and less empty talk.

Survey Summary

- Unable to afford basic needs of housing, food, medication, leisure etc. leading to food insecurity, housing insecurity and emotional dysregulation.
- Help needs to come in material and human centered ways
- People need support and capacity to heal
- Families and communities need to be reunited
- Equity needs to be embedded in the systems of ministry of social development and poverty reduction

Event Discussion Notes

- Decent wages are needed, it will help people live and grow the economy.
- Affordable housing lacking basic standards for habitable, suitable safe housing.
- Being in poverty leaves people in survival mode. Often in fight, flight or freeze mode. Not able to pursue what their interests are and are in a state of hypervigilance. Services thus need to hold space for people at heightened emotional states and provide safety.
- Youth need more capacity and guidance on dealing with life on life's terms.
- Ministry integration specialists play a positive role in the community. Rather than a 1 866 number. Big discouragement from it, turns people off. Local real people make a huge difference in how to access money and resources by the ministry. The human experience and the difference of being able to sleep on a good mattress makes. In powell river (name removed) is recognizing people's need is enough, clients are served with dignity and respect by (names removed) Ministry integration specialists. Past experiences with the ministry makes people feel like they need to exaggerate or lie or beg to get income assistance and funding. Exhausting. Being told to lie. Rules feel like being told things. "Years ago ministry was a last resort, ministry is instead here for people. The old people with old legislation hold power and don't like new people with new lenses.
- The time involved in being in poverty needs to be recognized, searching for food, budgeting etc. The cyclical nature of every month going further into debt and lacking in needs being met.
- More federal support for persons transitioning from provincial to federal income. Housing, food and medical device coverage or supplements are highly needed for people over 65.

How can we improve locally?

- Free rehab
- Less cops, community management instead.
- Clear away broken down houses that are condemned and build 1 and 2 bedroom housing.

- More healing and less enabling.
- Available access to showers in shelter or access for transportation to showers.
- Affordable housing (land share, fish and farm)

What would living without poverty feel like?

- Safe, expansive, amazing.
- Feel like security, self respect and a sense of worth and belonging.
- Feel like less stress and improved mental health.
- Feel like liberation
- Not having constant and blaring barriers to my choices

What would living without poverty look like?

- Meeting basic needs comfortably.
- Having more leisure time
- No poverty looks like everyone can find their passions and fulfill them with the support of their community
- Not having to Juggle money priorities
- Erasing financial privilege. Everyone has enough.
- Affordable housing, not having to choose between food/medicine/rent/hydro/heat.
- Cleaner, easier, safer and happier life and environment for everyone.



BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction: Poverty Reduction Strategy Update

APPENDIX D

Reporting and Note-taking Template - April 2023

Note taker name/ organization: **Richmond Poverty Reduction Coalition**

BACKGROUND

Two RPRC community conversations took place with a total of 22 individuals including: people with lived/ living experience of low-incomes, representatives from local non-profit service providers, and community activists advocating for poverty reduction in Richmond.

We chose to separate the two conversations to ensure the (6) people experiencing poverty felt comfortable enough to voice their thoughts and views without having service providers present.

Herewith are the **Comments and Key Themes** from the two RPRC community conversations in line with the BC Poverty Reduction Strategy pillars of Affordability, Reconciliation, Opportunity and Social Inclusion.

MAIN FACTORS AND CHALLENGES

Affordability:

- Increased cost of living in 2022-23
- Increased cost of food (Richmond food bank clients increased 65% between 2021-22)
- Seniors forced into taking pension and having income clawed back
- Lack of affordable, accessible and appropriate housing
- Too many people in core-housing need (>50% of monthly income)
- Not enough non-market housing in Richmond
- Governments depend on for-profit developers to supply housing

- Temporary modular housing leases are expiring

Reconciliation:

- Increasing incidents of racism and discrimination
- Stigma associated with poverty (not ‘deserving,’ not ‘grateful,’ get so much ‘free’)
- System beats people down over time, resulting in more mental health issues
- Government programs do not recognize culture and identity (eg. indigenous, refugees)

Opportunity and Social Inclusion:

- Loss of social networks and feeling of belongingness through Covid
- Transit for seniors and people with disabilities (Handy Dart not readily available)
- Pedestrian safety is an afterthought, vehicles are the priority
- People with lived/ living experience not part of local decision-making tables

BIGGEST IMPACT - WHAT WORKS

Affordability:

- Transit passes for PWD
- Free transit for 12 years and under
- \$10 a Day child care program
- Modest increases in IA and PWD
- Increase to PWD earnings exemption
- Universal school meal programs
- Recreation subsidy programs through City of Richmond

Reconciliation:

- Anti-Racism Data Legislation

Opportunity and Social Inclusion:

- Accessing services through local non-profit agencies
- Pop-up sessions - one-stop-shops for information and referral
- Volunteering in the community via non-profits
- Peer support programs offered by non-profits (people feel heard and valued)
- Local community kitchen programs (teach life skills, create community)
- Student financial aid and repayment program
- Community Engagements such as these!

BARRIERS AND SERVICE GAPS

Affordability:

- Gap between actual market rent and rent supplements
- Gap between actual costs and IA/ PWD subsidies (food, emergency, clothing)
- Individuals not included in rent supplement program

- Not enough \$10 a day child care spaces or trained workers
- Silo-ed ministries create barriers for people with multiple needs to access programs

Reconciliation:

- Language barriers (50% of Richmond residents are non-English speakers or ESL)
- Jargon-free (plain language) information on government services and supports

Opportunity and Social Inclusion:

- Lack of primary healthcare services for chronic health conditions
- Hospital transfers onto the street or shelter - no continuum of care
- Inequitable access to education, food and health services
- Lack of transit to get to programs, services, daily living activities

WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE

Affordability:

- Increase the minimum wage
- Increase IA and PWD payments to poverty line
- Urge Federal government to implement the Disability Act
- Reduce/ eliminate gaps between government supplements/ subsidies and real costs
- Include individuals in rent supplement programs
- Extend temporary modular housing lease agreements
- Earmark government funding for non-market housing
- Introduce transit fares on a sliding scale for low-income individuals
- Provide training and decent wages for child care workers

Reconciliation:

- Anti-racism/ anti-discrimination training/ bystander training
- Anti-bias training for frontline and public re: homelessness
- Empathy training for ministry staff serving people experiencing poverty
- Un-silo ministries serving people experiencing poverty
- Research intersectionality across all ministries re: policies with negative repercussions on other ministry programs and policies (eg. claw backs)

Opportunity and Social Inclusion:

- Improved primary health care especially for vulnerable people
- Include people with lived/living experience at decision making tables
- Support non-profits working together to develop local poverty reduction initiatives
- Provide barrier-free job training options for those with health or addiction issues
- Fund programs for non-profits to provide basic life skills training to youth
- Encourage and fund inter-generational programs, services, and housing
- Implement recommendations from the Seniors Advocate report

RPRC_AppxD_Comments and Key Themes_April 2023/dew

Preamble:

On April 25th, approximately 15 clients of Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre met to provide input on the BC Poverty Reduction Strategy. People from a broad spectrum of socio-economic circumstances attended: those that were unhoused, those living in affordable housing, a couple living in market housing, and one person who owns multiple properties but is currently unemployed and has a low income. Approximately four people identified as hard of hearing, approximately eleven people identified as culturally Deaf. Some people attending the event identified as having secondary disabilities.

Two people participated by filling out the survey online with assistance from our facilitators outside of the event; their numbers, comments and votes are thus not included here. Of those individuals, one identifies as Deafblind, and one as hard of hearing.

Four questions were posed, written on flip chart paper hung on the walls. Some suggested answers were listed by the facilitators, while room for other suggested answers to be placed by participants was provided. Participants were given three stickers for each of the four questions/papers. They could place all three stickers on one suggestion if they wanted to express its weight/importance or spread out their stickers to two or three written answers. Two Deaf facilitators and one hearing facilitator were on hand to explain to individual participants what each of the questions and answers meant. An interpreter was also available to interpret ASL-English/English-ASL. Questions suggested in the guide were adapted to be as accessible as possible for the participants present.

Question	Answers	Comments/Notes
<p>What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?</p>	<p>Listed in order of the most “votes” descending to least “votes”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to interpreting and captioning services • Housing affordability and supply 	<p>Note: Some group members acknowledged there are some services that have funding for interpreting and captioning; still others may have funding in theory, but trying to arrange for an interpreter is difficult given the shortage of interpreters in BC. Lack of communication access and the fatigue resulting from trying to survive each day intersect, making it difficult to do things like making sure one makes a deadline to get on a housing list, or get a spot at a shelter.</p>
<p>What BC government programs are currently most helpful to you?</p>	<p>Listed in order of the most “votes” descending to least “votes”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidized housing, SAFER program for seniors’ housing • Seniors Income Supplement 	<p>It could be noted that of the roughly 15 attendees, roughly 13 were over 50 years of age. Some attendees stated they use IDHHC to help them learn about such programs, as there are language/communication</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seniors/PWD Bus Pass/transportation supports • WorkBC • Post-Secondary Funding (BC Access Grant and Canada Study Grant) • Affordable Childcare BC • PWD 	barriers in other avenues for information.
What other Programs and Services available in the community have been helpful? services?	<p>Listed in order of the most “votes” descending to least “votes”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and Community Services (at Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre) • Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre • Food Banks • Pacific Centre Family Services • Community Centers • Victoria Native Friendship Centre 	<p>A comment about what makes the programs so helpful was that programs/services specifically aimed at Deaf and hard of hearing people are more accessible to this group. Another comment was that bulletin boards of resources listed in plain English could be set up at IDHHC, and/or videos in ASL about other community resources could be posted. Likewise, a participant suggested regular information-sharing events could be implemented at IDHHC and other places. As it happens, IDHHC recently started a bi-monthly coffee hour, where information about supports and services can be shared.</p>

What groups of people are most in need of better help/services?	<p>Listed in order of the most “votes” descending to least “votes”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deaf and hard of hearing people • People with disabilities • Seniors • Indigenous People • Single Parents • Students • Small business owners/self-employed people • People of Colour 	

<p>What more could be done to make your life better?</p>	<p>Listed in order of the most “votes” descending to least “votes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More funding for interpreting and captioning services • More affordable housing was tied with + Restore funding for Family and Community Services at IDHHC • Cheaper hearing aids/more funding for hearing aids • Return funding to BC Parks <p>One vote each:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal basic income • Homelessness Services • More funding and resources for First Nations Foster care • More Greenspace in urban areas • More funding for clothing in my size 	<p>Note: IDHHC had a contract with MCFD via Provincial Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services to provide services to families and adults on Vancouver Island. This contract was recently terminated resulting in staff layoffs and the winding down of all services provided by the Family and Community Services team. Roughly 12 of 15 participants of this event use these services. Comments were made that these funding cuts will create a gap in services for Deaf and hard of hearing adults and seniors.</p>
<p>Other ideas provided through discussion:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street-based outreach workers who are Deaf • More people with living experience in helping roles • More accountability for shelter operators and access to interpreters in shelters • A tent city with all services/resources in one place 	<p>One (unhoused) participant stated that it is fatiguing to have to travel from one resource to the next to get their daily/weekly needs met: one location for a shower, another to sleep in a tent, another to access food, another to access communication supports. Providing funding to IDHHC to install a shower would be of help, they stated. Two (unhoused) persons stated that lack of WIFI contributes to the fatigue, isolation and marginalization associated with living in poverty.</p>

<p>Please write down any key themes that you noticed throughout the session. Include recurring questions/ comments, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recurring questions • Recurring comments • Points of agreement • Points of divergence • Any shifts in opinion during the event 	<p>Themes:</p> <p>Access to information/communication</p> <p>Housing affordability</p> <p>Supports for Seniors/Adults</p> <p>A discussion around whether communication access (via interpreting and captioning services or information in ASL) was a direct part of poverty reduction, or if it was a separate issue. A point was raised that interpreting and captioning services are now legislated as rights under the Accessibility British Columbia Act; accommodations and access should now be a basic service provided; lack of access to information/communication is not the same as living in poverty. Others pointed out that the two issues intersect: lack of access to information can lead to poverty, keep people from getting out of poverty, or worsen the effects of poverty. One person explained that they lost some belongings at a shelter as an interpreter/ASL wasn't used to tell them that their belongings would be locked in the room for a portion of the day.</p>	<p>Note: While many post-secondary training programs are eligible for funding for interpreting and captioning services, note takers, etc., some courses that are provided by ineligible institutions are not able to provide interpreting and captioning funding, or the process for educating these institutions on their duty to accommodate is prohibitive to timely access. Some people stated that while interpreting and captioning funding is available in all post-secondary institutions in theory, timely access is not provided due to the shortage of qualified interpreters in BC. Providing more funding to the institution offering the interpreter training program in BC would allow for more interpreters to be trained and working.</p>
<p>Specific Comments individual participants wanted documented:</p>	<p>“The government needs to realize how complex it is to be unhoused and Deaf. I felt so isolated at the shelters with no other Deaf people there, so I’ve been living on my own in a tent for over a year. But there, without Wi-Fi, I have felt so incredibly alone and isolated.”</p> <p>“I need to be housed with people from my own (Indigenous) culture.”</p> <p>“Why are they making cuts to programs? We need more support, not less.”</p>	

	<p>“Funding for mental health for Deaf people seems to be ‘as needed’; have they forgotten about the affects of the abuse we suffered at the (former) provincial school (Jericho Hill School for the Deaf)?”</p> <p>“The Sound of Change Program at IDHHC changed my life. It gave me the chance to hear again”</p> <p>“Many of us find it difficult to choose priorities. We have multiple competing needs and are just trying to function.”</p> <p>“We need equal access to jobs”</p> <p>“Choice and self-determination are important.”</p> <p>“WIFI needs to be more widely available”</p> <p>“Family and Community Services were instrumental in helping me through my divorce. I honestly don’t know what I would have done without them.”</p>	
“Parking Lot” Ideas	“Even those with higher incomes need support and skill development programs”	

Cost Breakdown of Expenses

Item	Cost
Food/Coffee/Tea/Juice	217.97
Gift Cards for participants- 17 @ 10.00	170.00
Supplies: paper plates, napkins	14.43
Interpreting Services	166.75

Total Cost:

569.15



Honourable Minister Sheila Malcolmson
Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
PO Box 9058 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

April 28th, 2023

Building on Foundations to End Poverty in BC

Centre for Family Equity submission to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction consultation and review of *TogetherBC: British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy*

Dear Honourable Minister Sheila Malcolmson,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our input to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction's TogetherBC poverty reduction strategy consultation.

Introduction – Our Shift

We would like to begin by sharing some updates about the development of our organization. The Centre for Family Equity (formerly the Single Mothers' Alliance) will retire our previous name for the past eight years publicly in early May 2023. Our new name better expresses our focus on gender diversity in our pursuit of gender equality, and the gender diversity of our current members. We have also expanded our mandate beyond our current focus on lone-parent-led families to all families experiencing poverty in BC. Our third update is that as of March 2023, we attained charitable status in the category of relief of poverty with defined purposes and activities.

The Centre for Family Equity addresses family poverty by conducting research, making public policy recommendations, taking legal action to uphold human rights, and providing targeted programs. Our work is grounded in community-engaged research on the effectiveness and impact of social services and public policy on families experiencing poverty. We use the results of our research to inform public policy recommendations that promote equity, inclusion, and social justice for marginalized families. We take targeted legal action to address violations of the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms impacting family poverty. We also provide culturally appropriate programs that address the systemic discrimination and resulting poverty experienced by Indigenous families due to our colonial legacy.

Our approach to addressing family poverty is determined by an intersectional equity lens. We consider and address how the social identities of families such as race, Indigeneity, gender identity, trans identity, sexual orientation, health and mental health status, class, marital status, religion, ability, age, newcomer and refugee status, citizenship, and other



characteristics may compound and result in systemic marginalization, discrimination, and poverty.

We remain a lived-experience-led organization with a membership of over 300 justice-minded lone mothers and gender-diverse lone caregivers living in 41 diverse locations across the province including cities, towns, and rural and remote locations. Our membership is now expanding to include a diversity of parents and caregivers in poverty.

Since we were founded in 2014 as the Single Mothers' Alliance, we have been defined by a community-based organization model we have never abandoned, which is appreciated and valued by our membership. We determine our annual priorities, initiatives, and campaigns based on community engagement and a listening campaign we conduct annually through February with our members.

Our Listening and Demographic Survey 2023 data

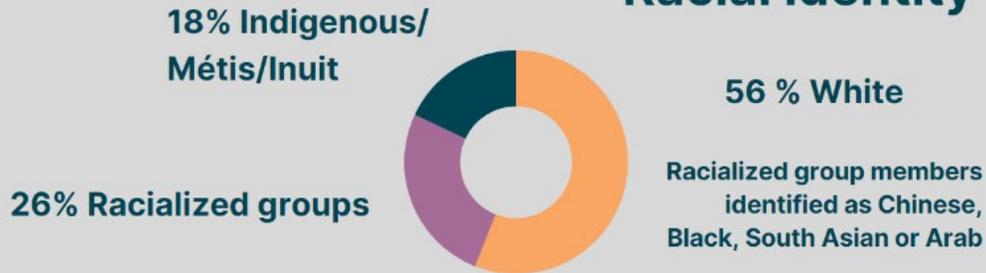
In February, we distributed our 2023 Listening and Demographic Survey, unrelated to the MSDPR poverty reduction strategy consultation.¹ This anonymous survey included demographic, open-ended, and drop-down questions on issues impacting members at this time. We heard from 51 members located in 17 diverse locations located in all the health regions of BC. Our data provide a quality snapshot bringing forward the urgent needs and wishes of the lone mothers and lone caregivers living in BC who make up our membership. This report will provide a summary of the data to impact our recommendations for the development of TogetherBC.

Whom We Heard From

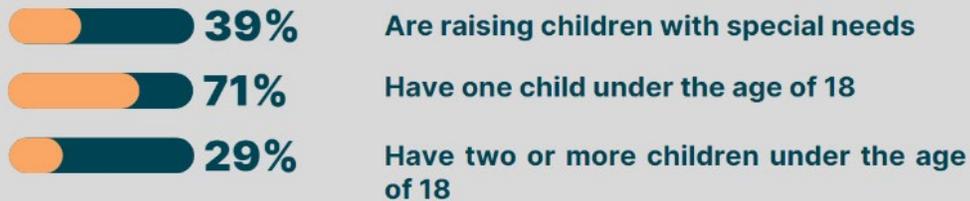
Our respondent group – a snapshot of our organization - consisted of 56% white respondents and 44% members of racialized groups, with 18% identifying as Indigenous/Metis/Inuit. A high proportion of respondents – 39% - are raising special needs children in BC. While many have accessed higher education and college-based training, it is alarming that only 6% of respondents have completed elementary school. Data collection we have conducted for other purposes indicates a 10%-15% rate in this area. Also of relevance is the fact that while 40% of respondents work full time, 75.5% of respondents live below the Market Basket Measure poverty line for their area in BC. Nearly the same number of respondents live on Person with Disability Assistance (PWD) in BC – 36%. Of those raising their children on PWD, 23% said they do not access work at all as they raise their children on PWD.

¹ We released our [2023 SMA Listening and Demographic Survey Results: What We Heard](#) to our members and then the public in April 2023. This report contains much of the original data and content from our What We Heard report.

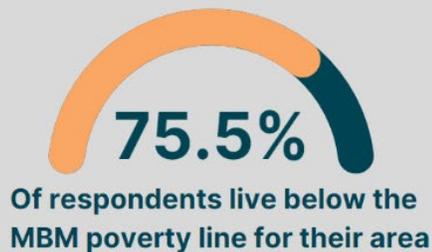
Racial Identity



Children

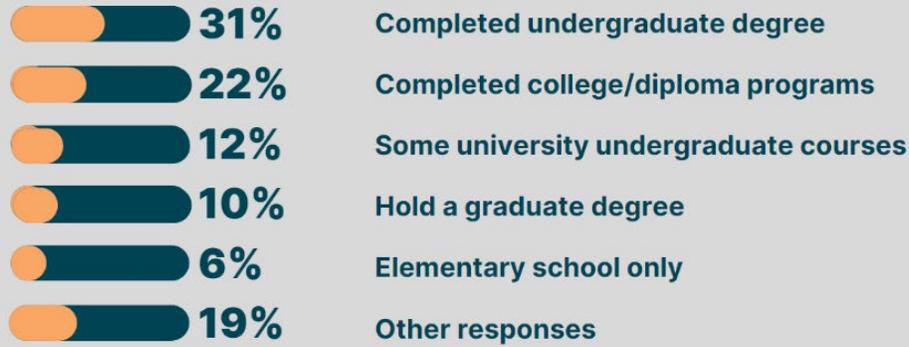


Income & Poverty

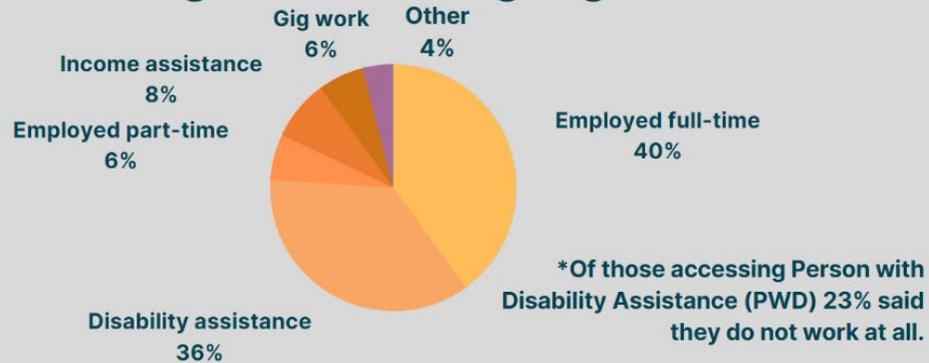


*Based on the Market Basket Measure (MBM) poverty measure used in BC for families. The MBM calculates a basket of goods and services and is adjusted for the cost of living based on population size.

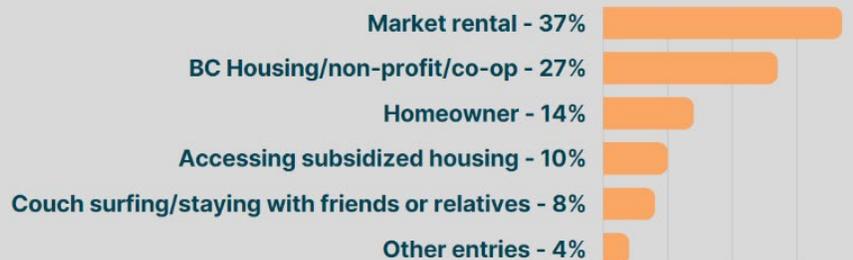
Education Level



Working Situation Highlights

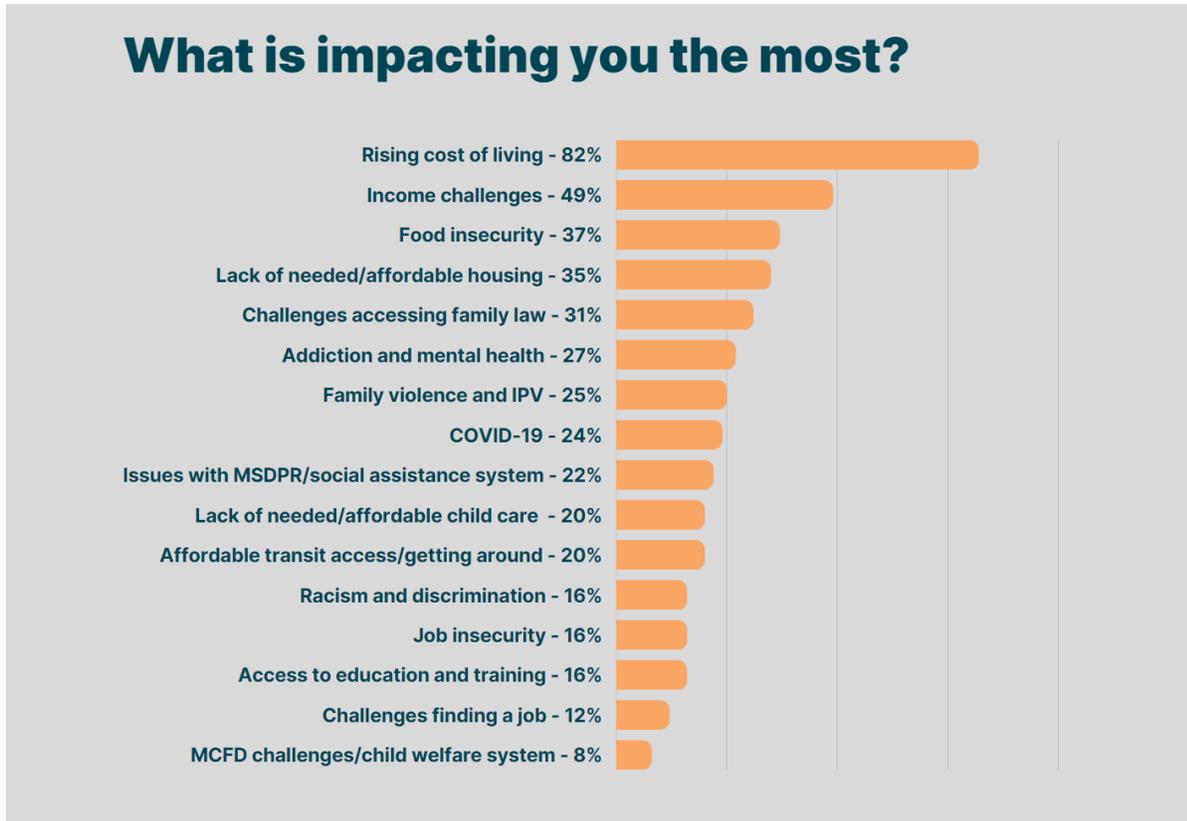


Housing Highlights



Our Data

To identify the concerns and challenges members are currently facing and thereby inform our organizational priorities and recommendations for 2023, the survey included questions on what issues are impacting members the most right now. A drop-down of 16 options was provided out of which the respondent could select an unlimited number of issues.



Though the responses had a wide range, the rising cost of living (82%), income challenges (49%), food insecurity (37%), lack of needed/affordable housing (35%), and challenges with the family law system (31%), were the top five issues impacting our members at the beginning of 2023, five years after the debut of TogetherBC.

Beyond the top five, addiction and mental health (27%), family violence (25%), COVID-19 (24%), lack of affordable child care (20%), and lack of affordable transit (20%) rounded out the top ten key issues impacting respondents. Respondents shared that they continue to struggle to access job training, stable employment, and livable wages. The impact of family violence, racism, and discrimination were also highlighted as key issues. The impacts of COVID-19 are still being felt by members in various aspects of their lives.



TOP FIVE: COST OF LIVING

“Before the pandemic, I was hanging on by a thread, but I was proud that I was hanging on, and finding a way to make it work as a single mom struggling after years of severe and controlling IPV [Intimate Partner Violence]. Each year since 2020 has compounded the hardship with the price of everything still increasing, while my income and ability to safely earn a living stagnated.”

Focus on the high poverty rate for lone parents

We applaud the government for introducing the BC Family Benefit (previously known as the BC Child Opportunity Benefit) in October 2020 and recently recognizing the unique policy needs of lone-parent-led families in the 2023 budget. The introduction of the up to \$500 annual supplement for low-income lone parents beginning in July 2023 is an excellent policy development. Though we are waiting for data on the impact of the BC Family Benefit, we know that cash transfers have a proven impact on child poverty; the recognition of the unique challenges of lone-parent households, though long overdue, is critical and welcome.²

Lone-parent-led families, the majority of which are led by women, experience high poverty rates. Despite making up only 20% of families in BC, lone-parent-led families are raising a staggering 59% of children living in poverty.³ For far too long all levels of government have failed to meaningfully recognize the different needs and economic circumstances of lone-parent-led families in policymaking, including the gendered reality of lone-parent poverty, contributing to their systemic exclusion and high poverty rates. We commend the government for beginning to recognize the unique disadvantages and higher poverty rates of lone parents in the last provincial budget. On this front, we are on the right track.

As of 2020, there are 116,500 children in poverty in BC with one out of eight children in need.⁴ Many have cautioned that although the child poverty rate has decreased since the last available statistics for BC, this reduction may be due to emergency relief measures available to families during the COVID-19 pandemic. We remain concerned that the end of these relief measures will result in an increase in the child poverty rate in the next reporting cycle that captures the full impact of the pandemic.

² [Statistics Canada: The effects of child tax benefits on the income of single mothers](#)

³ [2022 BC Child Poverty Report Card – First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition](#)

⁴ [Ibid.](#)

Recommendation:

- + Focus on the high poverty rates of lone-parent-led families in all aspects of policymaking and expand the supplement for lone parents in the BC Family Benefit.

Upstream and income-based solutions to food access issues

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation has resulted in skyrocketing food prices.⁵ The impact of rising food costs on families already struggling to put food on the table has caused a worsened food access crisis for our members. Rather than relying on stopgap and charitable food measures such as food banks, we recommend an income-based and public infrastructure systems-building approach to address family food access in BC.

Recent temporary cash transfer top-ups of up to \$175 per child through the BC Family Benefit in 2023 to address inflation have been impactful and the permanent raise to the benefit is timely and necessary.⁶ However, the current net income cut-off of \$25,806 is too low to begin tapering down the benefit and leaves many of BC's most disadvantaged families with a shrinking benefit when they remain far below the poverty line.

Recommendation:

- + Raise the net income cut-off for the BC Family Benefit rate reduction to ensure better distribution of this impactful benefit to families living in the greatest depths of poverty.

Our second primary recommendation to address food access takes the form of an opportunity to create public infrastructure and build our labour market and economy while ensuring no child or youth goes hungry at school. A universal school food system provided within the Ministry of Education and Child Care, as recommended by the BC Chapter of Healthy School Food of which we are a member, would ensure the provision of healthy food to every child and youth accessing public school, leveling the playing field for disadvantaged children and youth.⁷

Our research with low-income families already accessing school food programs concludes that a universally accessible opt-out system, rather than an opt-in one, available to all children at school would eliminate the stigma many food-insecure families can experience while accessing charitable food programs.⁸ We welcome the Province's new investment of \$214 million in funding distributed to all school districts over the next

⁵ [Behind the Numbers: What's Causing Growth in Food Prices in Canada – Statistics Canada.](#)

⁶ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/affordability/family-benefit>

⁷ <https://www.healthyschoolfood.ca/bc-chapter>

⁸ [A Universal School Food System for BC: SMA Research and Policy Brief](#)

three years through the new Feeding Families initiative.⁹ We recommend expanding the program to establish a full school food system within the Ministry of Education and Child Care to continue past 2026. This will uphold children's and youth's right to access education and increase food access for families in BC.

- + Expand the Feeding Families initiative to establish a fully universal school food system within the Ministry of Education and Child Care that creates a culture of healthy eating and guarantees universally accessible, free access to healthy meals at all public schools in the province.

Finish building our child care system

The development of BC's child care system and the implementation of TogetherBC have gone hand in hand since 2018-2019.¹⁰ Parents and caregivers must secure child care in order to access the labour market and children have the right to be safe and secure in quality child care settings. However, we are alarmed by the glacial pace at which our fully universal \$10 a Day system is being built. Despite the addition of more spaces at \$10 a Day ChildCareBC Centres to a total of 12,729 spaces to date, licensed child care is still only available for 25% of BC children according to the \$10aDay campaign.¹² While we believe that significant increases to affordability benefits including the Affordable Child Care Benefit are having an impact, our members and survey respondents share that they struggle to access any spot at all, remain shut out on waiting lists, and often give up trying. Based on what has been brought forward to us, few can attain a spot in a coveted \$10 a Day Childcare BC Centre. We have heard a great deal about the low wages and precarity that define this sector from our members who work within it.

Despite the recent injection of \$3.2 billion from the federal government for BC to build a \$10 a Day system by 2026, our system remains a construction site, failing to provide many of BC's families with access to the universally accessible and available spaces they desperately need. We support the \$10aDay campaign's call for the leveraging of capital planning resources of the education ministry to expand child care with school districts and municipalities. Budget 2023 lacked the needed new investments to expedite the completion of our promising child care system so crucial to reducing poverty and supporting families to thrive in BC.

⁹ <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023ECC0020-000424>

¹⁰ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/ndp-childcare-10-a-day-budget-1.4544266>

¹¹ <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019SDPR0009-000421>

¹² https://www.10aday.ca/child_care_successes_can_t_stop_here



Recommendation:

- + Complete building BC's \$10 a Day child care system to guarantee a spot for every family that needs one and ensure all spots are universally accessible and free.

Public before-and-after-school care so all parents can work

Our data collection through 2022 on the impact of BC's new child care policies on low-income lone mothers has revealed the need to expedite the building of BC's public before-and-after-school system to ensure all parents and caregivers can meet the demands of our labour market to support their families.¹³ We support CUPE BC's Public Childcare Now call for BC's public school system to provide a needed before-and-after-school system in BC.¹⁴

We support the notion that the public school system has the tools to overcome the most significant barriers to creating before-and-after-school care. A publicly provided system can deliver improved access and fewer transitions for kids. Accessible and affordable before-and-after-school care is essential for BC's parents and caregivers to work and meet the demands of the labour market. We call for a system of high-quality school-aged child care that is publicly funded and replaces our current patchwork of non-profit providers with a universally accessible and convenient system for parents and families.

Recommendation:

- + Build a publicly funded, publicly provided seamless before-and-after school care system within the Ministry of Education and Child Care.

Address access to transit

Challenges accessing affordable transit are a top issue impacting our members. We support the call for free and accessible transit for all in BC brought forward by many of our allies and the #AllOnBoard campaign led by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition. We applaud the introduction of the Get on Board initiative in 2021 which provides free transit for youth up to age 12 in every transit system in the province.¹⁵

Our research through the City of Vancouver's Affordable Transit Pilot Project in 2021-2022, in which we were a community partner carrying out data collection, provided data that captures the value and importance of free transit for low-income and at-risk youth

¹³ Our [Making Mothers Matter: Understanding the Role of Child Care on the Health and Wellbeing of Low-Income Lone-Mothers in British Columbia](#) project with UBC has finished data collection and a research report will be released in spring 2023.

¹⁴ <https://www.cupe.bc.ca/campaign/public-childcare-now/>

¹⁵ <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TRAN0054-001724>



and all youth in BC.¹⁶ We advocate for the government to build on the success of the Get on Board program in BC by including all youth up to age 18. Expanding Get on Board would ensure all youth in BC can access school and get everywhere they need to go while instilling active and sustainable transportation habits and values in the next generation.

Recommendation:

- + Provide free transit for all youth by expanding the Get on Board age of eligibility up to 18 in every transit system in the province.

Vision care, medication, counselling, and dental care as health benefits

We welcome free contraception for the province and applaud this meaningful progress, yet we have also heard much from our members about the lack of access to other essential basic extended health benefits such as vision care, medication, counselling, and dental care.

While progress has been made by our federal government with the introduction of the Canada Dental Benefit for low-income children up to age 12, uptake of this important program is now a concern according to a new report released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.¹⁷ We have also received feedback from low-income families about the challenges they face trying to access the Canada Dental Benefit.

Recommendations:

- + Include medication and vision care as extended MSP-covered health benefits beginning with roll out first to families and others living below the poverty line.
- + Ensure maximum uptake of the Canada Dental Benefit in BC for low-income families who are eligible.

Mental health counselling as a core part of our health care system

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the mental health of marginalized families, many of whom were already dealing with existing mental health challenges. For a long time, we have heard about the lack of access to basic counselling from those living below the poverty line, and the need to position basic mental health care as health care in BC. Our listening and demographic survey data regarding the of the pandemic on family mental health reinforces the need to address mental health services access in BC for low-income families.

¹⁶ [Transit for Teens: Parental Perspectives on the Impact of Free Transit for Youth 13-18 in BC – SMA Research Brief](#)

¹⁷ <https://monitormag.ca/articles/why-did-canadas-housing-and-dental-benefits-have-such-low-take-up-rates/>

Recommendation:

- + Make counselling an MSP-billable service and ensure basic psychotherapy and counselling is cost-free and universally accessible within our health care system.

TOP 5: INCOME CHALLENGES

"[It is] challenging under high [cost of] living, gasoline, and transportation cost under low payment from income assistance. Getting only minimum wage with a part-time job and having difficulty to find a suitable job as a single parent."

Respondents shared that they struggle to access stable employment and livable wages. The COVID-19 pandemic left many already working precariously now jobless or with reduced hours and pay. Our members are over-represented in female-dominated sectors defined by precarity and low wages, including the cleaning industry, hospitality, grocery retail, child care, and various precarious forms of work in health care. We heard about the impact of the CERB claw back and CERB debt on precarious workers without enough work hours to qualify who were confused by CERB program administration. They are now living in poverty with significant pandemic-caused debt to the federal government. Income and disability assistance rates that remain far below the MBM poverty line continue to leave our members in deep poverty while raising their families. The earnings exemption continues to be a policy that is underutilized to build bridges to quality work while penalizing those who try with an overly complex and stigmatizing system that still claws back income when people remain below the poverty line. Another significant issue is the lack of access to sick days for lone parents and caregivers to care for their sick children and family members. The implementation of five paid sick days for all in BC in January 2021 was an important gain for workers.¹⁸ However, we have heard much from parents who miss work and suffer job loss due to a lack of sick days to take care of their children when they fall ill. We recommend building on the foundation laid in 2021 by adding five family wellness days for a total of ten sick days for BC starting in 2023.

Recommendations:

- + Increase the income and disability assistance rates to the Market Basket Measure and ensure annual increases linked to inflation.
- + Significantly raise the earnings exemption for those accessing income and disability assistance and ensure no income is clawed back below the poverty line.
- + Scrap the unlivable minimum wage and replace it with a Minimum Living Wage. We echo the BC Poverty Reduction's recommendation to close the gap between BC's

¹⁸ [BC Gov News: Five paid sick days coming Jan. 1](#)

current minimum wage rate of \$15.65, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate of \$24.08, and Victoria's Living Wage rate of \$24.29 an hour by 2026 with regular annual increases to reflect changes in the cost of living.

- + Provide five family and caregiver wellness/sick days for all British Columbians to ensure no parent's livelihood is threatened by their children's sickness.
- + Implement a fair wage grid for early childhood education workers in our child care system and ensure all jobs are family-supporting with livable wages, benefits, and job security.
- + Ensure all jobs within a publicly provided before and after-school care system are unionized with a wage grid, benefits, and job security.
- + Implement pay equity legislation for BC.
- + Advocate for CERB amnesty for impacted BC residents.

TOP FIVE: LACK OF AFFORDABLE AND ADEQUATE HOUSING

"It's all just a lot to balance to keep myself as a parent stable while there is so much pressure financially and emotionally and physically to maintain a roof over our heads."

Respondents brought forward that the continued lack of access to adequate and affordable housing is a key issue impacting them in 2023. We heard about rampant under-housing with mothers sleeping on mattresses in living rooms, whole families in single bedrooms, and parents sharing rooms with older youths who need privacy. The inability to move due to fear of losing an affordable rental rate after a length of tenancy and inability to pay current market rates keeps families in core housing need locked in inadequate housing. The culprit is the lack of vacancy control. Families have the right to move to suitable and affordable housing that meets their needs.

Recommendations:

- + Enact vacancy control across BC.
- + Implement a province-wide plan to build new dedicated, non-market affordable housing that aims for a quarter million units over the next decade or 25,000 new non-market units per year as proposed by the CCPA-BC and supported by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition.¹⁹
- + Ensure non-market affordable housing includes an appropriate amount of three, four, and five-bedroom + options to ensure large families are not excluded from affordable housing options.

¹⁹ [Still So Far From Home: An Update on BC's 114,000 homes promise.](#)



TOP FIVE: CHALLENGES WITH FAMILY LAW

“Ongoing family violence and legal issues. I separated from my ex in 2016 and I am still being dragged through the court system...the legal costs are crippling.”

Lack of access to legal aid landed in the top five issues impacting listening campaign respondents. Well over a decade ago, legal aid in BC was drastically cut by 40% overall and by 60% for family law, and though some investments have been made no significant funding has been reinstated to rebuild our legal aid system. Access to family law legal aid is generally restricted to those who are recognized as needing an immediate interim court order to ensure their own or their children’s safety. Even when women do manage to get help from a family law lawyer through the legal aid system, the time the lawyer can spend preparing for the case is capped at such a low level that many of their legal needs are still likely to go unmet. In addition, the extremely low-income requirement for legal aid eligibility excludes a huge number of people who cannot afford a lawyer.

Recommendations:

- + Provide access to legal aid for those with incomes below the Market Basket Measure poverty line and ensure adequate hours to solve complex cases.
- + Overhaul the family law system to ensure women impacted by intimate partner violence are safe, heard, and protected with their right to security and safety upheld.

What is impacting our members personally the most right now

We asked a series of open-ended questions to find out more about our members’ perceptions and descriptions of their mental health status, overall social connectedness, and social-emotional quality of life.

Our analysis of the open-ended responses identified three primary trends:

1. The stressors of raising special needs children.
2. Significant mental health challenges for both parents and their children and youth.
3. The ongoing impact of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence on the mental health of mothers and families including those both with and without formal IPV-related PTSD diagnoses.

We encourage TogetherBC to consider the three contexts above, which are disproportionately impacting lone-parents and caregivers.



Summary of Recommendations

Our twenty-two recommendations are grouped in our four focus areas for 2023.

Priced Out responds to our community engagement results by addressing the rising cost of living and its impact on BC's families. Priced Out addresses solutions to rising costs and food access, lack of affordable and accessible child care and before-and-after-school care, and access to dental care, transit, medication, vision care, and counselling for families experiencing poverty in BC.

Summary of our nine recommendations in this area:

- + Focus on the high poverty rates of lone-parent-led families in all aspects of policymaking and expand the supplement for lone parents in the BC Family Benefit.
- + Raise the net income cut-off for the BC Family Benefit rate reduction to ensure better distribution of this impactful benefit to families living in the greatest depths of poverty.
- + Expand the Feeding Families initiative to establish a fully universal school food system within the Ministry of Education and Child Care that creates a culture of healthy eating and guarantees universally accessible, free access to healthy meals at all public schools in the province.
- + Complete building BC's \$10 a Day child care system to guarantee a spot for every family that needs one and ensure all spots are universally accessible and free.
- + Build a publicly-funded, publicly provided seamless before-and-after school care system within the Ministry of Education and Child Care.
- + Provide free transit for all youth by expanding the Get on Board age of eligibility up to 18 in every transit system in the province.
- + Include medication and vision care as extended MSP-covered health benefits beginning with roll out first to families and others living below the poverty line.
- + Ensure maximum uptake of the Canada Dental Benefit in BC for low-income families who are eligible.
- + Make counselling an MSP-billable service and ensure basic psychotherapy and counselling is cost-free and universally accessible within our health care system.

Our **Income Justice** 2023 focus area responds to member input on work, wages, quality jobs, and job opportunities. This focus area will address solutions to low and unlivable wages, inadequate income and disability assistance rates, lack of access to higher paying work, and sustainable part-time and full-time jobs with benefits for families impacted by socio-economic inequality. We will also address the need for pay equity legislation and tackle the entrenchment of marginalized parent and caregiver workers, including trans

and gender-diverse parents, 2SLGBTQIA+ parents, mothers, racialized parents, those with disabilities, and other equity-seeking parent-workers in sectors defined by low-waged and precarious labour.

Summary of our eight recommendations in this area:

- + Increase the income and disability assistance rates to the Market Basket Measure and ensure annual increases linked to inflation.
- + Significantly raise the earnings exemption for those accessing income and disability assistance and ensure no income is clawed back below the poverty line.
- + Scrap the unlivable minimum wage and replace it with a Minimum Living Wage. We echo the BC Poverty Reduction's recommendation to close the gap between BC's current minimum wage rate of \$15.65, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate of \$24.08, and Victoria's Living Wage rate of \$24.29 an hour by 2026 with regular annual increases to reflect changes in the cost of living.
- + Provide five family and caregiver wellness/sick days for all British Columbians to ensure no parent's livelihood is threatened by their children's sickness.
- + Implement a fair wage grid for early childhood education workers in our child care system and ensure all jobs are family-supporting with livable wages, benefits, and job security.
- + Ensure all jobs within a publicly provided before and after-school care system are unionized with a wage grid, benefits, and job security.
- + Implement pay equity legislation for BC.
- + Advocate for CERB amnesty for impacted BC residents.

A Roof Over Our Heads addresses the housing crisis in BC for low-income families with a focus on justice for renters and the right to move. A Roof Over Our Heads aims to ensure all families in BC have access to appropriate, safe, and affordable housing, enabling them to grow and thrive.

Summary of our three recommendations in this area:

- + Implement vacancy control across BC.
- + Implement a province-wide plan to build new dedicated, non-market affordable housing that aims for a quarter million units over the next decade or 25,000 new non-market units per year as proposed by the CCPA-BC and supported by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition.²⁰
- + Ensure non-market affordable housing includes an appropriate amount of three, four, and five-bedroom + options to ensure large families are not excluded from affordable housing options.

²⁰ [Still So Far From Home: An Update on BC's 114,000 homes promise.](#)



Safe, Heard, Protected: A Vision for Family Law addresses both the necessity of a family law system that is financially accessible for low-income parents and caregivers in BC and one that works to ensure those impacted by intimate partner and gender-based violence are safe, heard and protected in and by every facet of the system.

Summary of our two recommendations in this area:

- + Provide access to legal aid for those with incomes below the Market Basket Measure poverty line with adequate hours to solve complex cases.
- + Overhaul the family law system to ensure women impacted by intimate partner violence are safe, heard, and protected with their right to security and safety upheld.

-End of report-

Thank you for the opportunity to bring our input forward to the TogetherBC consultation process.

Sincerely,

Centre for Family Equity (Single Mothers' Alliance)



Honourable Minister Sheila Malcolmson
Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
PO Box 9058 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

April 28th, 2023

TogetherBC Poverty Reduction Consultation

Small Group Discussion Report

We would like to start out by expressing our gratitude for the opportunity to carry out community engagement with financial support from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction to impact the TogetherBC consultation process.

We held two virtual group discussions in April 2023 with lone-mothers, one during daytime hours and one in the evening for accessibility considering the varying schedules of parents. There was a significant interest in enrollment for the sessions which resulted in two waiting lists for each session with a targeted focus group size of eight in each.

The report provides a summary of the discussions and is organized thematically according to the set of guiding questions provided by MSDPR.

Demographic Information

We gathered detailed demographic data from all discussion group participants. The following results are for all the participants in the two groups combined. A total of 17 lone-mothers and caregivers living in locations across BC attended the small group discussions. Nearly 30% of participants were newcomers who had lived in Canada for less than 10 years. Participants represented diverse backgrounds, with 70% of participants identifying as racialized. Out of the racialized participants, 29% identify as Indigenous, 18% South Asian, 12% Black, and 6% each as West Asian and Latin American.

Participants with college certificates or diplomas make up nearly half of the participants, followed by 29% of participants who completed undergraduate degrees. Eighteen percent of participants have less than high school degrees. Based on the Market Basket Measure for the various regional locations of participants, all participants live below the poverty line. Seventy percent of our small group discussion participants live on a fixed income, of which 58% receive disability assistance and 42% receive income assistance, and half of whom engage in some type of work to earn some money to supplement their income.

All participants are lone-parents or caregivers of at least one child under 18. Fifty-nine of participants have two or more children under the age of 18 living with them. Over 40% of participants are raising a child or children with special needs.

Discussion and findings

1. What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses?
 - Our findings: child care, food prices, housing, the rising cost of living and legal issues.
2. What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)?
 - Our findings: Co-op housing, food banks, childcare subsidy, leisure access pass, and nonprofit services and programs including the Aboriginal Mothers Center, Mom2Mom, and Elizabeth Fry coupons for local markets.
3. What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?
 - Our findings: Need to raise the income and disability assistance rates, more child care and before-and after-school care, streamline the renewal and application process for government benefits such as the childcare subsidy, link it to the tax return to trigger automatic renewal, provide trauma-informed service provision, provide more dental coverage for low-income moms and their children, increase affordable housing, more support for activities for kids, better communication of available services, provide education support for single moms to re-enter the workforce, and provide access to legal aid
4. From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?
 - *Please see our summary in the data below.*

Question Set #1: Data and Results

What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?

What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses?

How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, food, and housing affordability challenges, etc.) impacted your ability to afford these expenses?

Based on their individual experiences, participants shared several factors that they believed contributed to the challenges families are facing in making ends meet. As the



small groups were attended by lone-mothers, the discussion was guided by a recognition of the hard choices they make to provide for their families.

Child care and after school care

A lack of access to affordable childcare prevents lone-parents from working and maintaining a job. For most participants, access to affordable childcare is the biggest challenge jeopardizing their ability to work and earn a decent living. This is also true for parents with school-aged children who are struggling to access out-of-school care. Some participants noted that they are forced to stay in a low-paying job with precarious conditions because it accommodates their child care arrangements.

“There are a lot of good jobs for me. I do not have trouble getting jobs, but it just does not match with the childcare.”

“I’m stuck in this job because I can’t get another job without having the child care.”

“Daycare is really expensive, and I cannot get morning programs for my kid who is going to kindergarten next year because none of the schools in our catchment area have before-school care. So, then I’m also going to take a pay cut because I’m going to have to work 80% so I can still get my kid to school. So now even what I thought was, is this enough money right now, is going to go down probably 20% but everything else just still keeps going up.”

The rising cost of living

Participants shared examples of how low-income households have been most severely impacted by the rising cost of living. All participants are finding it increasingly difficult to put food on the table and provide other necessities for their households. For those who live on fixed incomes, the rising cost of living has worsened the ongoing challenges they face to make ends meet. Even for participants who work full-time, wages have not kept up with the cost of living, leaving them scrambling and looking for resources and side jobs to get by. The rising cost of living and limited assistance have also led families to accrue more debt as they are increasingly relying on credit cards to pay for necessities.

“Every week I go grocery shopping and I find that the things that I usually buy go up. Before it used to go up 20 cents 30 cents but now it’s like \$1 or \$2 within in a week.” “I have been working full time, but I now make less money because everything is expensive now. I could say our grocery bills have doubled in the past two months. We are buying the same stuff, but everything is much more expensive now.”

“Inflation when it comes to gas and food has been really biting.”

“A few years ago, I was able to save a little bit for emergencies, but I haven’t been able to do so in the last few years.”

Food insecurity

The price of groceries has made families severely food insecure, which is forcing parents to prioritize their children and skip meals or eat canned and unhealthy foods. Most participants have been forced to visit food banks more frequently to feed their families



even though the food offered at food banks is primarily canned foods and the availability of fresh produce is extremely limited.

"I am at a point where I am literally living on bread because that's all I can afford. I have to feed nutritious meals to my child but for myself I skip meals. We're like on bare minimum. We are struggling since COVID. The grocery prices at least what I buy have tripled. Veggies and dairy products are literally triple in price."

"I've been reaching out to different organizations for food and other support and that is difficult too, because my son has autism so he's very specific about the things he'll eat."

Housing

Access to safe, secure, and affordable housing continues to make life difficult for participants. Many of the participants are finding it nearly impossible to find a place that is within their budget, forcing them to spend most of their limited income on housing. Under-housing is also an issue for participants who live in houses that are overcrowded, unsafe, and under-maintained. For most of the participants, it has become far too common to live with roommates and share a bedroom with children. As rent prices increase, participants have experienced evictions where property owners kick out longtime tenants to bump up the rent price. With the current rent prices, participants are unable to find a decent place that is affordable and safe. Moreover, participants on social assistance find it challenging to get a market rental as property owners are often hesitant to rent them a place because of their financial situation. Those who live in BC Housing/subsidized housing or co-op housing, though it took them years to get it, are grateful and many feel lucky to have secured a place.

"Until recently, I used to live with a roommate with my three kids. My three kids and I lived in one room. The four of us were sleeping in one bed."

"I applied for government housing five years ago, but they keep saying I must apply again, and I just stopped trying."

"The house I live in now has rats and cockroaches and I tried buying things to get rid of them, but it is the whole house. I cannot move out, if I move out, I will be homeless. I spend most of my disability assistance on rent and we eat rice with yoghurt to survive."

"It took me 6 years to get co-op housing."

Dental care

Lack of dental care for families was a common concern for all participants. Even though there is some support for children, the coverage is not enough to cover dental expenses for kids. Parents have had to pay out of pocket for some procedures and items.

"My son needed a major surgery and even after the government dental coverage I had to pay \$1500 out of pocket because the anesthesia is not covered after Healthy Kids' coverage and after the new dental benefits."



More so, lack of or partial dental coverage for parents has left many participants struggling to pay for dental care and resorting to getting the cheapest treatment to deal with pain and discomfort rather than addressing long-term dental care.

"I had a root canal that came out that I had to redo, but it costs around \$1700, so I decided to pull it out because \$1700 is too much."

"I keep postponing a dental appointment until I get \$200 for filling. Even on income assistance, they only cover 50% of dental expenses."

Medical needs

In addition to dental care, low-income families often struggle with the lack or limited coverage for other medical expenses such as physiotherapy, vision care, counseling, medical equipment, and medications.

"I have severe fibromyalgia and complex PTSD from the trauma I had experienced for 15 years in marriage, and I have not been able to access counseling, physio and massage which I should have been accessing regularly."

"I need glasses for the last three years, but I can't afford it."

"Navigating to get mental health services is even more stressful."

Legal fees and family law

Lone-mother participants who experienced family breakdowns and are going through the family law system are forced to make tough financial decisions to defend themselves in court due to a lack of adequate legal aid. It has been difficult for those going through the family law system to stay afloat as they are taking on more debt to pay for legal fees.

"The most challenging expense for me right now is legal, as I am still in the process of separating from my partner and settling custody issues. Legal aid doesn't cover a lot as it only covers parenting time, and because of that, my process has taken over seven years because I can't afford legal support. I have to make a decision; pay to get my life or pay for my groceries."

"We can barely help ourselves and going to court is another money process. We can barely live right now with the money that we've got and on top of it going through the family law process is another expense. It's very hard and difficult to live these days."

Finding stable and fair-waged employment.

Many of the participants struggle to find and maintain employment that is stable and allows them to provide for their families. Even those who have full-time employment are looking for a second or third job to earn additional income, despite the difficulty of doing so as a lone-parent.

"On paper, my job sounds or looks good. It has the optics of looking good. I'm in a unionized environment but the fact is it is not keeping up at all. The job stability is

why I don't leave. I've been here 16 years. I'm not going anywhere. But still income wise, it's not keeping up with



things like inflation and childcare expenses.”

“Income hasn’t kept us with costs both wages and social assistance rates- we continue to have the same type of income with which we can barely make

ends meet. I have to rely on food hampers to get by.”

“With the current gas prices, gig work such as food delivery will not let you earn much cash.”

Government assistance

Participants who are on income and disability assistance are barely surviving with the monthly income they get from the government. The income and disability assistance rates are low, keeping participants well below the poverty line. Participants shared that besides the rates, the system is not built to help those who need it the most as the system treats them as scammers, and they are often asked intrusive questions to prove their eligibility to access assistance and services, including crisis grants.

“Disability assistance is not enough to cover the basics, food and rent.”

“Income assistance is like pulling teeth to get them to help you. And a lot of the times they don't.”

“I think of income assistance like they're there to help you. But they make you feel guilty when you go to ask for help.”

“They make you feel like you are stealing from the system so people just give up.”

“The questions they ask are just insane. And one of the questions is what's going to happen if you don't get this crisis grant? Well, we're going to go hungry. That's what's going to happen, and I said to the lady one time, what do you want me to say? We're going to go hungry. So yes, there is going to be risk of us just being hungry and they don't care.”

Racism and discrimination

Racialized and immigrant participants emphasized the racism and discrimination they face as one of the reasons they are struggling to break the cycle of poverty. They experience racism from institutions and systems that are meant to provide them support. They mentioned the discrimination they face in accessing institutions and services, including schools and food banks.

“I haven’t been able to gather the courage to go to a food bank. The stigma and shame attached to being the visual minority. I am even more conscious for even asking for help.”

“Discrimination based on colour is getting worse and worse even at the institutional level.”

“Because of how I was treated at the food bank I said to myself I am never going to go back to a food bank. I use my credit card and now I have \$14,000 debt I can't pay back I just pay interest.”



Access to activities for kids

Lack of or limited access to activities and programs for children from low-income families is a concern of most participants who feel that their children are being left behind.

"I can't get my children into any kind of afterschool activities. It's a waitlist to be on the waitlist. And my son was two years old, and my daughter was four when I was forced into poverty and hardship. And now my daughter is turning nine and my son will be turning seven, and neither of them can swim. You can't get into swimming classes. You can't get into any kind of after school program."

Funding for people with disabilities and special needs

The funding provided for people with disabilities and special needs is limited. Participants struggle to cover the various additional expenses that come with raising children with special needs and living with disabilities.

"[My child] being autistic, there is funding, but mainly it will pay for treatments that a lot of autistic people use and the things that they won't support are things you need like certain clothes and certain foods because they are super sensory and sensitive. And all the things that are really needed day to day are not paid for. People who are autistic with autistic kids we are all broke."

"I still find that I can get a lot of services for my son. I feel \$6000 for the whole year is not enough considering if you want to put them in activities or something with autistic learning such as behavioral therapy."

Question Set #2 Data and Results

What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)?

What makes these programs or services most helpful?

How are people learning about these programs or services?

How are people accessing these programs or services?

Are there barriers to access?

Are there ways to improve how to learn about, or access, these programs, or services?

The following services and programs, with their limitations, were the ones that were mentioned by participants as being most impactful and helpful:

Subsidized internet

"They are doing a good job with subsidizing internet access for \$10-\$20 a month for low-income households."

"I used to pay over \$100 for internet."



-Canada Dental Benefit

-BC housing/subsidized housing/co-op housing

-Rent support/subsidy - Rental Assistance Program

Legal aid for immigration status

“I was able access a lawyer through legal aid and that really helped me for my immigration case a few years ago and it was really good.”

Access to a family doctor

“Access to medical care is a huge help. I have a family doctor who is an angel.”

MSDPR Single Parents' Employment Initiative

“WorkBC employment initiative for single parents helps you by paying for your education; this really helped me, even though I didn't have a lot of options in the area I wanted to study because there weren't a lot of options; they also covered after-school activities. I now work as an education assistant.”

Child tax benefit

“Everything I do for my kids comes out of that money.”

Childcare subsidy

“Without it [childcare subsidy] there'd be no point in me going to work because basically I would be working to pay for childcare.”

-Access to food bank and Quest

-Canada Housing Benefit

-Leisure access programs

-Services and programs offered by non-profits.

Over half of the participants responded that the most helpful services or programs they had accessed or are accessing currently are provided by nonprofits. Several non-profit run programs such as the Aboriginal Mother Center, Elizabeth Fry, Mom2Mom, Pacific Immigrant Resources Society, BabyGoRound, and neighborhood houses, which among others provide food, clothing, housing, counseling, and help with connections with jobs and education resources.

“Nonprofits have connected me to part time jobs that helped me get experience and connect with families. It helped with my mental health in terms of getting out of the house and earning extra to supplement my income assistance. I felt

like an active member of the society and just like a normal person not just a mom.”

“I was talking to two different counselors for almost a year and a half once a week for free through a community center. I



think that has been the most tremendous significant help that I've gotten.”

Barriers

Lack of communication and access

A lot of the government programs are not well communicated, and most of the participants rely on their social networks to learn about available support.

“All of these supports are not advertised; they are not out there. They are not easily accessible; you really need to move around.”

“Supports aren't organized; how are we even supposed to get anything done when all we can do is access it through other mothers.”

Federal dental benefit access: Canada Dental Benefit

Participants found the processes involved in accessing the new federal dental benefit burdensome. The reimbursement process, forms, and back and forth have been difficult to navigate for some participants.

Subsidy renewal process

Participants wish to see the process to renew all subsidy applications, such as the childcare subsidy and renter subsidy, streamlined and coordinated with other benefits, like the GST credits, so that tax filing will trigger reapplication for these benefits. Similarly, the paperwork and the process involved in applying for and renewing most government programs are anxiety- and stress-inducing for most participants, even for those who are comfortable filling out forms.

“They are all different times of year to renew these things. So, it's not like you can just expect tax season and do it all. It's like two months and then two months and then two months and requests and all this paperwork.”

Eligibility to access subsidies

The eligibility criteria to access some government programs are limited. For instance, to be eligible to access the childcare subsidy, caregivers must have a job. However, single-parent households require child care support to find a job.

“You need to get a job to have a childcare subsidy. I have to have a full-time job, but I need to have my childcare set up first. So, it defeats the purpose.”

In-person transition

Due to COVID-19, a lot of programs were offered online, which gave single parents flexibility to attend prerequisite classes to pursue training and education through WorkBC, which otherwise would not have been possible because of work and child care arrangements. Some communities, including those with disabilities, will be left behind with the complete transition back to in-person programs and services.



Question Set #3: Data and Results

What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?

How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?

Where is more support needed?

Are there key groups in your community that are facing the most challenges getting the support they need to meet their needs?

Do different programs work well together? Why or why not?

Based on the challenges that participants are facing, the following are the gaps that are raised and discussed that are believed to help address the effects of poverty:

Access to affordable and safe housing

Raising the rates for income and disability assistance

“Everyone has got ambition; everybody wants to get off the system. I certainly never imagined that I'd be on social assistance right now, dealing with all these issues with stereotypes and it just sucks. It really, really sucks. But my entire goal and every ounce of my energy is to make sure my kids don't go through this so that it's getting education for my kids. That's the only way I see my life changing. I will never be able to buy my own house. My daughter will be able to, but I won't.”

“It's too much. And even though there are some scammers out there, like one in 100 and it's probably closer to one and 1000 people get away with it. So, what, that's 99 people that do need the help, that's what the law is for and to hunt to check who's scamming. It should not be a gatekeeping situation. Did we not learn this with all that CERB stuff where it's better to help now and then deal with it after the fact.”

Trauma-informed service

“Violence, oppression, or abuse takes a lot away from us. I went from a productive working woman to this so there are a lot of hidden drawbacks and negatives and losses beyond any dollar number.”

Coverage for vision care, dental care, physiotherapy, counselling, and medications

“Even under income assistance you have to pay \$55 for physio every visit. That is why I stopped going to physio because I cannot afford it.”

“Preventative dental care rather than focusing on root canal or extractions, the system should be built to provide free basic dental services such as dental hygiene care.”



Education support for single parents

Access to meaningful training and retraining is a major barrier to accessing stable and fair-waged employment. Participants emphasized the need for providing grants and loans for lone-mothers to upgrade their education.

From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?

Addressing discrimination towards racialized communities, stigma towards low-income communities, building a trauma-informed system, and providing support for low-income lone-parents were recognized as missed opportunities to meaningfully address poverty.

Racial discrimination

Participants, especially those who are racialized, and are newcomers, often get mistreated by service providers and the broader public and feel that institutions and society shame them and see them as useless because they live in poverty or are on government assistance. Participants agreed that there is an anti-poor and anti-women abusive and hateful stance that needs to be recognized and addressed to reduce poverty. Racialized groups felt the effects of stigma and discrimination more acutely.

“Every service offered, even by private health providers, discriminates against people who are on government assistance because it takes longer to receive payment from the government.”

“I personally don't like to be on social assistance. I want to go to work. I didn't ask to be here and in this situation. And it happens to anyone, and this is what people do not understand. Your life can change at any minute because of illness or family breakdown, no one is immune to it.”

“I had worked all my life before I got disabled so I'm so passionate about becoming employable again, and I'm doing everything on my own. It is such a lonely road. There's no support.”

“The whole shame of being poor and the shame of being a single mother, the shame of being an addict or using drugs any shame is very isolating and makes people not want to get support. And I don't think it's looked at enough and all the professions are shaming.”

“They need to talk to us like we're human beings too and there are some people that do take advantage of the income assistance or crisis supplement and it's them that makes it hard for us to actually get help. They look at us and we're just trying to scam them. They just judge you; they are too quick to judge. It would be nice if they had a little bit of sympathy, just a little bit.”

Trauma-informed service

The support systems and programs that are put in place ignore structural issues such as trauma and PTSD that severely impact the lives of low-income communities. Lack of institutional understanding of the effects of trauma, even by those trained to work with



low-income communities, was identified as one of the biggest factors that prevent uptake of support from institutions.

“I suffer from depression, and it's hard for me to ask for support and knowing that my social workers know my situation, I would expect them to understand and be a little more supportive. I'm not just dumb-dumb sitting at home, I've had five kids to look after.”

“I just wish that there was more acknowledgment of trauma. There is no trauma understanding. If there was an understanding of trauma, then they would know that it literally freezes you in place. So just maybe if they get those

income assistance workers to be more supportive and not so judgmental.”

“They need more training in trauma, because I'm indigenous and I have PTSD, so after you talk to them you are just triggered and smashed.”

Additional support for single parent households

Participants hope to see more support for single-parent households and an understanding and recognition of the challenges single parents face in making ends meet and providing for their families.

“It would be nice if they had more income for single-parent households and maybe different workers for us to talk to you when you phone the government workers that understand single-parent households.”

“More income or maybe more GST for single-parent households or maybe more in Child Tax for single-parent households because my whole struggle my entire life was me doing everything alone and being indigenous and not having family because they're all traumatized.”

Other Notes

Mental health impacts of living in poverty

Participants talked about the multidimensional impacts of poverty on their wellbeing. Participants felt that the mental health effect of poverty is often ignored. Participants experience constant stress and anxiety as they struggle to provide for their families.

“I'm so stressed from living poor, and it's making my mental health worse.”

Community connections

Participants deeply value their community connections and heavily rely on the services and programs offered by community organizations to provide for their families.

“Without the community, my kids would not have had no jacket for winter because we would not have been able to afford it because it would have been either food or jackets.”

-End of report.

BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction: Poverty Reduction Strategy Update

Reporting and note-taking template

Note taker name/organization: Victoria Brain Injury Society	Contact information of notetaker if clarity is needed:
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------

Please ensure your participants know that all questions are optional and that their responses are anonymous and confidential. All responses will be compiled and analyzed as a group, from an external third party (Argyle Communications Inc.) and reported back to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

Comments and questions (summarize/paraphrase comments/verbatim quotes)	
Questions	Comments/questions/themes
<p>What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?</p> <p>What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses?</p> <p>How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, food and housing affordability challenges, etc.) impacted your ability to afford these expenses?</p>	<p>Please see additional pages at the end of this document for answers to all questions (there was not enough room in this sheet to input all comments)</p>

What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)?

What makes these programs or services most helpful? How are people learning about these programs or services?

How are people accessing these programs or services? Are there barriers to access?

Are there ways to improve how to learn about, or access, these programs or services?

What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?

How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?

Where is more support needed?

Are there key groups in your community that are facing the most challenges getting the supports they need to meet their needs?

Do different programs work well together? Why or why not?

From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?

Other notes

Post-event summary

Task

Please write down any key themes that you noticed throughout the session.

Include recurring questions/ comments, including:

- Recurring questions
- Recurring comments
- Points of agreement
- Points of divergence
- Any shifts in opinion during the event

Key themes

BC Ministry of Poverty Discussion: Victoria Brain Injury Society

The Victoria Brain Injury Society (VBIS) has been providing support to individuals living with acquired brain injuries throughout the Capital Regional District and Southern Gulf Islands for 40 years. Due to the nature of brain injury and its heterogenous symptoms, most clients at VBIS are designated Persons with Disability as they are unable to work, consequently living on a fixed income. VBIS saw fit that clientele were provided with the opportunity to speak to their lived experiences as individuals who rely on social assistance programs to help them cover their day-to-day costs. ***The following information are summarized responses from a small group discussion in which several VBIS clients participated and pertains to the experiences of VBIS clients with intersecting brain injuries, physical disabilities and mental health diagnoses.***

1. What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?

The overwhelming theme of the responses to this question was that living on a fixed or low income is frankly unsustainable due to the exorbitantly high cost of living not only within the city of Victoria and its surrounding areas, but across BC. For folks whose primary source of income is from Persons with Disability payments, they are unable to cover their market basket measures – namely, food, clothing, shelter, and transportation – without assistance from community services such as food banks. The inability to support oneself on income assistance such as PWD contributes to poverty within the community.

Moreover, access to government support such as PWD is not conducive to individuals who experience the direct and indirect effects of brain injury, such as problems with executive function (e.g., planning and organization, memory, multi-tasking, inability to prioritize tasks), extreme cognitive fatigue, and the downstream mental health concerns that come with brain injury. The process of accessing a PWD application through BC Self Serve is impossible for some, as they are unable to navigate computers and online portals due to symptoms such as light sensitivity.

Further, if they are able to access BC Self Serve, completing the screening questionnaire/PWD application itself is a daunting and overwhelming task that requires cognitive faculties that some folks with brain injuries no longer have. Due to these barriers, folks are not able to access the funds that are available to them and do not receive an income, forcing them

into poverty. Supports such as VBIS exist to assist individuals through these processes, however a) many individuals aren't aware of the existence of these services and b) these services do not have an infinite capacity to help, and are limited as to what they can and cannot do for clients.

These responses highlight the overarching factor contributing to poverty - inherent ableism and classism evident in legislation, and the lack of follow through to enact policy that would support and include disabled and low-income folks. For example, the Basic Income Panel provided several recommendations to the Government of BC in 2020, including that of a "targeted basic income where they are most helpful, such as for people with disabilities...", "reforms to make the current set of programs more of a coordinated, consistent, and accessible system.", "an overhaul of the Disability Assistance system...", and "regulatory reform to create a more just labour market, improve wages, and job conditions for...low income workers" (citation). Presently, these recommendations have not been implemented. This lack of initiative on the behalf of the Provincial Government to support and dignify disabled and low-income folks highlights the exclusion that these communities face, arguable resulting in the root cause of impoverishment within British Columbia.

2. What are the biggest challenges you face with covering day to day expenses?

The feedback that clients provided with respect to this question centred around the affordability of basic needs – housing, food, utilities – and how these costs exceed the current rate of disability and income assistance payments. Presently, the provincial maximum for a single individual receiving PWD is \$1483, \$500 of which is the shelter rate. As of 2023, the average cost for a one-bedroom rental unit in Greater Victoria is \$1992, and although there are subsidized and below market rate rentals within Greater Victoria, these units have years long waitlists. The disparity between shelter allowance and average rent is stark and is one of the biggest challenge faced when covering living expenses, as it consumes the vast majority, if not all, of the monthly disability payments.

An additional day to day expense that individuals with brain injuries face is the cost of rehabilitative services following their injuries. Many services that folks with brain injuries require to cope with their symptoms and recovery are costly and are not covered under the health benefits that they receive, such as physiotherapy, concussion rehab programs, or alternative methods of healing such as acupuncture. Consequently, individuals go without medical

intervention that could be life altering for them and allow them to return to work or resume the day to day of their life prior to their injury.

The cost and lack of access to transportation is another day-to-day expense that is difficult to access and/or cover. The cost of car insurance and gas far exceeds the financial means of folks living on a fixed income, and often the noisy, busy environment of public transportation can exacerbate symptoms of brain injury. Additionally, some folks with brain injury require emotional support animals that are not allowed on public transit or Handy-Dart. The inability to access transportation due to cost or otherwise results in some folks being home bound and unable to make meaningful connections with support services in their community.

3. How have recent local and global events (inflation, COVID, housing/affordability crisis) made covering expenses more challenging?

Inflation, the housing crisis, and affordability crisis have had a significant impact in one's ability to cover expenses as disability and income assistance payments have not increased with proportion to the cost of everyday expenses. For example, the shelter rate for folks on disability was increased by \$175 this year and had not previously been increased since 2007, however the cost of rent has certainly increased by more than \$175 in the past 16 years.

With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants reported that the greatest impact was with respect to lockdowns and mandates that affected the most vulnerable and contributed to mental instability, severing critical social relationships required for psycho-social regulation and opportunities for physical and financial well-being.

4. What government and non-profit supports and programs have the biggest impact in your life?

Participants noted a variety of supports in the Capital Regional District that impact their lives, including, but not limited to: the Victoria Brain Injury Society, March of Dimes Canada, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, FED Urban Agriculture, Qmunity's food card program, Women In Need, sliding scale counselling through South Island Counselling, Vancouver Island Women's Transition House, Taxi Saver and Handy-Dart, to name a few.

5. What makes these programs helpful?

Participants noted that programs such as those listed above assist them and other low-income individuals in numerous ways – by easing the financial burden, providing tools for self-advocacy, and facilitating social connection and inclusion in a safe environment. Low cost access to mental health resources promotes well-being to individuals who may not otherwise have the means to meet with a clinical counsellor or other mental health professional.

6. How are people learning about and accessing these programs?

The two primary means of learning about these programs was through word of mouth, and through other social services. In fact, during the small group discussion one participant shared contact information with another participant for a dental clinic that offers low cost dental work for folks on PWD. Word-of-mouth sharing of resources further highlights the need for spaces in communities that promote social networking for folks in marginalized communities.

7. Are there ways to improve how to learn about or access these programs?

Participants reported not always being “in the know” about different services and organizations that might offer assistance to them in their community. The participants felt as though often these services are “hidden” (i.e., not easily found via Google search) to prevent them from being taken advantage of. While this concern is understandable, the participants felt as though there could be measures taken to safeguard access to these resources while still advertising them for those who require them. Additionally, participants noted that there isn’t sufficient communication between community services (e.g., non-profits) and health professionals – often, they found that health professionals weren’t able to provide them with recommendations as to where to seek further assistance in the communities. Improving the communication between disciplines, whether that be hospital staff, mental health professionals, government workers or otherwise, and ensuring that they have up to date information on services offered that their clients may benefit from would be helpful for ensuring folks have a supportive network.

To improve access to these programs, standardized messaging and a one-time document that can auto-populate applicable forms would be helpful for identifying, accessing, and filling out forms. By simplifying the process and improving communication, individuals can more easily learn about and access the programs that they need.

**8. How does brain injury affect your ability to access government or local services?
What are the barriers to access that you feel are brain injury specific?**

Brain injury can have a significant impact on one's ability to access government or local services. The most significant barrier to access is exhaustion, which is a common symptom of brain injury. Individuals with brain injury may struggle to wait in lines, which is often required for low-cost services. Social isolation and difficulty with communication are other barriers to access that are brain injury-specific. Additionally, memory and general executive functioning deficits can make navigating complex application processes and understanding the information difficult. Moreover, people's lack of understanding of brain injury symptoms and the injury itself may lead to a lack of support and accommodations. Finally, PWD payments are often insufficient to meet the needs of those with brain injury.

9. How does brain injury affect your ability to obtain stable housing and employment?

Brain injury can have a significant impact on one's ability to obtain stable housing and employment. Specific living circumstances may be required for health, wellness, and quality of life, but affordable housing options in safe and accessible locations may be limited. Additionally, current methods for assisting with employment may not fully comprehend the complexities of disability, and outdated testing modalities may be used. Workplace hierarchies and power dynamics can be difficult to comprehend, and communication in ambiguous frameworks may require additional knowledge and support that is not always available. Advocacy and support for individuals with brain injuries in accessing stable housing and employment are crucial.

10. What gaps exist in poverty reduction services?

There are several gaps that exist in poverty reduction services. Firstly, obtaining or retaining support workers and advocates is challenging due to strict eligibility rules and regulations, as well as a lack of understanding about how mental health intersects with complex disabilities. Additionally, agencies that claim to be supportive often have limited comprehension and acceptance, and hire unqualified staff to look after injured clients.

Secondly, unhoused individuals are not recognized as brain-injured and are often bounced between the medical and judicial systems in a cycle that does not address their individual needs. A more humane and one-on-one intervention approach would be beneficial.

Thirdly, inter-provincial communication would greatly alleviate the burden of having to prove one's disability again when moving or visiting another province. Finally, government supports are not adequate and can be considered structurally violent, as they could easily be improved by following the recommendations of the Basic Income Panel. However, there seems to be a lack of political will to address these gaps, potentially due to the fear of not being re-elected or lining pockets. The confusing and difficult-to-navigate array of services and names further compounds these issues.

11. How can these gaps be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?

One way to address the gaps and ensure that people are not left behind is to reform education models. It is essential to require K-12 and post-secondary students to be academically exposed to all types of people, including those with disabilities so that those who are hired in current and newly-created roles are entering these fields having interacted with people with disabilities. This will help prevent them from being subconsciously at odds with individuals with disabilities due to imprinted conditioning. By improving education and increasing exposure to diverse populations, we can create a more inclusive society where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

12. Where is more support needed?

There are several areas where more support is needed. Firstly, there is a need for campaigns that challenge the stigma associated with developed and/or acquired brain injuries. This would help people understand why individuals with such injuries behave the way they do, through a more empathetic lens. Additionally, it is essential to recognize that individuals with brain injuries can be found both on and off the streets, and they should not be treated as separate entities. However, the scientific understanding of this is not adequately trickling down into medicine, policing, and cultural circles.

Secondly, there is a need for funding for more social workers and case managers who can act as disability liaisons. This will help to mitigate the extra stress and strain on the most vulnerable individuals. Such support could include assistance with legal issues, providing guidance on how to move forward through disability, and supporting individuals with the transition from the judicial system.

Thirdly, there is a need to improve support for low-income individuals, who are often treated as second-class citizens. This includes providing better housing options and increasing the support available for individuals with disabilities. Overall, more support is needed to ensure that vulnerable individuals are not left behind and are given the necessary resources to thrive.

13. From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community?

Offer more support to people that fall outside the normative tradition family descriptions. A legally single individual with no children faces systemic discrimination due to not being in a traditional or contracted family unit. Discrimination is particularly prevalent in access to housing options and food programs. More could be done to reduce poverty by addressing the biases and preferences towards traditional family units and recognizing and supporting different types of families that may exist due to reasons such as trauma, injury, or disability.

14. Any additional thoughts, or comments that you want to share?

Comment from a client: “When presenting our experiences and ideas, and when attempting to implement change, please always consider the pushbacks and arguments you will invariably receive due to the human condition; always have a resolution-oriented response, as every perspective contains at least some truth. Thank you for this meaningful opportunity to have a voice.”

APPENDIX E: WELLNESS SHEET

Please offer this wellness sheet to participants in your session.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS CONVERSATION.

Your input is critically important in helping us understand the impacts of poverty in communities across B.C., and how to reduce it by developing and expanding new and existing programs and services. We also recognize how emotional, complex, and potentially triggering these conversations and stories can be. We hope that the resources below can provide immediate support – if required.

Below is a list of 24-7 supports available in British Columbia:

First Nations and Metis KUU-US Crisis Line

Call: 1-800-588-8717

BC Mental Health Support Line

Call: 310-6789 (no area code required)

Youth in BC Distress Line

Call: 604-872-3311 or 1-866-661-0113 (toll-free)

Online chat: <https://youthinbc.com/>

HealthLinkBC.ca to find information and health advice

Call: 8-1-1

BC211.ca for BC-wide social supports

Call: 2-1-1 (call or text)

Additional Resources

- To search for mental health and substance use resources near you visit, www.wellbeing.gov.bc.ca (after Jan 31, 2023)
- To access healing supports available for all Indigenous peoples across Canada, the **Hope for Wellness Hotline** is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 1-855-242-3310 or visit, www.hopeforwellness.ca
- For more information about the Ministry Social Development and Poverty Reduction, please visit, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/ministries-organizations/ministries/social-development-poverty-reduction>



Ministry of
Social Development
and Poverty Reduction

BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction: Poverty Reduction Strategy Update
Reporting and note-taking template

Note-taker organization: Women Transforming Cities

Comments and questions (summarize/paraphrase comments/verbatim quotes)	
Question	Comments/questions/themes
<p>What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?</p> <p>What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses? How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, food and housing affordability challenges, etc.) impacted your ability to afford these expenses?</p>	<p>Criminalization of Poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The criminalization of poverty and addiction has created significant barriers for individuals in poverty, including limited access to housing, treatment, and stability. - Addressing these issues in isolation without considering a person's experience within the interconnected systems they interact with can worsen the problem. <p>Insufficient Employment and Integration Services for Immigrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient immigrant services can create job and resource challenges due to differences in qualifications and living wages between countries. - Addressing these issues is crucial to ensure successful integration into the workforce. <p>Lack of Healthcare Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of resources in healthcare for mental health and culturally appropriate care can lead to a cycle of poverty and job loss. Coping with poverty or other traumas through criminalized means can lead to extreme poverty. - The province's shortage of family doctors is a significant issue that affects the provision of preventative care and early interventions for various health needs. - People often only seek medical help in a crisis or emergency. This leads to high expenses for rehab or therapy, which can affect their ability to afford necessities like food or transportation or cost them their job. - The intersectionality of access to family doctors and preventive care is important to consider. - Navigating the healthcare system can be overwhelming and time-consuming,

disproportionately affecting those who cannot adjust their work schedules.

- The need for medical professionals who understand the unique health needs of marginalized communities is crucial.
- Lack of cultural sensitivity among healthcare providers can lead to misdiagnosis and inappropriate care.

Students' invisible poverty, especially among international students

- International students face invisible poverty due to high expenses such as housing, which may be three or four times what they were used to, and the need to send money back home.
- In many sectors, Canadian experience is a barrier to finding specialized positions and remains an invisible obstacle.

People's Precarious and Unstable Living Conditions

- Many people live in precarious situations where they have one missed paycheck, eviction notice, or rent increase away from falling into poverty.
- Housing instability, such as eviction or rent increases, contributes significantly to this precariousness.
- Healthcare and work instability are also tied to the precariousness of people's lives, particularly for contractors or gig workers.

Gender Pay Gaps and Systemic Discrimination

- Gender pay gaps and other forms of discrimination persist in various sectors, including healthcare and libraries.
- Women and people of color make valuable contributions, yet they face systemic issues in terms of fair compensation, job security, and equal opportunities.

Insecurity and high food costs

- Multinational grocery companies make billions in record profits, while many struggle to afford basic necessities. Meaningful taxation at the provincial or federal level could address this issue.
- The impact of the high cost of food and transit is particularly significant for seniors, people living on a pension, and single mothers.

Vulnerability of single-income households and single moms

- Single people and single-income households are more vulnerable to poverty
- Single mothers are disproportionately affected by poverty and food insecurity and should be considered in any solution-making efforts.

What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)? What makes these programs or services most helpful?

How are people learning about these programs or services? How are people accessing these programs or services? Are there barriers to access?

Are there ways to improve how to learn about, or access, these programs or services?

Harm Reduction Services

- Harm reduction services, such as Safer Supply and overdose prevention sites, intersect with poverty and support vulnerable individuals.
- These services aim to decriminalize poverty and promote a more just and equitable society.
- These services are often at risk of being cut, highlighting the need to maintain and expand them.
- Culturally appropriate and trauma-informed healthcare programs are also a form of harm reduction that can significantly impact vulnerable communities.

Culturally appropriate services led by Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit people

- Many Indigenous women have created healing and cultural spaces across the province to address the impact of social isolation, disconnection from culture and language, and intergenerational trauma.
- Core funding should be provided to these communities without making them go through federal and provincial government grant applications and funding requests, which often require them to engage in the colonial system.
- This approach can uplift Indigenous communities and promote healing without further perpetuating the harms of colonialism.

Co-op and non-market housing

- Co-op and non-market housing were frequently mentioned as potential solutions during community engagement.
- Co-op housing is viewed as an affordable option that fosters community building.
- Both co-op and non-market housing have been successful where they have been established. However, more funding and policies are needed to support these types of housing.

\$10-a-day childcare program

- The \$10-a-day childcare program is a new initiative with varying components, and its effects are still being studied.
- The City of Vancouver has one of the best childcare programs in BC because municipalities control the spaces and rent them out to providers for a nominal fee.
- This level of funding isn't feasible for every municipality, so providing more funding to municipalities could lead to more affordable childcare options
- It's important to continue monitoring the impacts of the \$10-a-day childcare program

	<p>and consider the varying needs of different communities when it comes to childcare.</p> <p>Accessing to Programs and Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Streamlining access to community funds and programs is crucial, particularly when engaging with elders and Indigenous people. This requires reducing bureaucracy and ensuring a straightforward process. - It is important to find ways to make information about services more accessible to people in their own communities. As many people face barriers to accessing information, including time, language skills, and resources. - Improving access to information is crucial, especially regarding people knowing their rights. For example, in cases of eviction, having a process to resolve disputes is essential. - Proactive steps are needed to make information more accessible, such as hosting meetings at community centers, libraries, and other locations where people regularly gather. - Taking steps to overcome the language barrier is crucial since translating policies and notices within a short time frame, and crowdsourcing translations due to budget constraints can be challenging. - Understanding and adapting to the diverse communication methods of cultural communities is crucial in effectively sharing information and reaching a wider audience.
<p>What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty? How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind? Where is more support needed?</p> <p>Are there key groups in your community that are facing the most challenges getting the supports they need to meet their needs? Do different programs work well</p>	<p>Transgender Women and Non-binary Individuals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - During a recent community engagement initiative, transgender women and non-binary individuals expressed feeling excluded and underrepresented. - They face additional barriers in areas such as employment and housing and don't have as much of a social safety net. <p>Women facing gender-based violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poverty is a key factor in gender-based violence. Many women stay in violent and unsafe relationships and housing situations because they cannot rent or secure housing. - These women face challenges in proving their income or child support eligibility. - The province must support these women and address their basic needs to end gender-based violence effectively. <p>Indigenous women and two-spirited people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indigenous women face crises of poverty and violence.

<p>together? Why or why not?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The government has not done enough to address the Calls For Justice from the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's inquiry, including providing economic security for Indigenous women to support themselves and their communities. <p>Refugees and undocumented immigrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - These individuals are prevented from accessing services due to the fear of deportation, and they face significant barriers to engaging with the government and participating in community activities. - Some organizations have attempted to reassure them that ID or a visa is unnecessary, but trust in the government remains an issue. - More inclusive environments and better support are needed for these communities.
<p>From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?</p>	<p>Affordable and Accessible Transit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing free transit would have an immediate and significant impact on poverty. - The Vancouver pilot program demonstrated improved metrics such as insecurity, access to health appointments, social support, community connections, and school attendance. - Free transit should be combined with efforts to make transit more accessible and safe and expand it to regional communities beyond Vancouver in the Lower Mainland. - A free transit system can profoundly and positively impact the community while addressing climate change and disability justice issues. <p>Providing more funding to municipalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipalities are closest to the community and understand their challenges. - For example, the City of New Westminster has a high population of first or second-generation immigrants and refugees. By providing funding through municipalities, the province can ensure these specific communities get the support they need.
<p>Other notes</p>	<p>The need for more comprehensive indicators of poverty beyond the MBM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The MBM is not comprehensive yet still used as the standard to measure poverty reduction. - There should be a province-specific measure that is more qualitative and reported on in addition to the MBM. - Without a comprehensive measure, poverty reduction conversations will be on the periphery and lack accountability.
<p>Please write down any key themes</p>	<p>Intersectionality of poverty:</p>

that you noticed throughout the session. Include recurring questions/comments, including:

- Recurring questions
- Recurring comments
- Points of agreement
- Points of divergence
- Any shifts in opinion during the event

- Recognizing the various factors that contribute to poverty, such as gender, race, and ability, is essential in developing effective poverty reduction strategies that address the complex intersections of these factors.

Community-led approaches:

- Engaging and empowering communities in poverty reduction efforts can be a more effective and sustainable approach, as they can identify and address their unique needs and assets from a bottom-up perspective.

Decriminalization of poverty:

- Ending the criminalization of poverty-related activities is crucial in reducing poverty as it removes systemic barriers that hinder people from accessing basic necessities, education, and employment.

Poverty Reduction: A Community Conversation

#1 A) What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of market housing and discrimination accessing
- Unlawful evictions
- High costs of food and other necessities
- High cost of gas
- Domestic violence
- Social assistance and disability rates far below rising cost of living
- Lack of meaningful access to drug and alcohol treatment and the easy access to addictive substances
- Lack of access to mental health services
- Isolation, low self-esteem, loss of status
- The “one size fits all” approach
- The near impossibility of climbing out of poverty once you hit the bottom
- The lack of available resources for the working poor such as public transit for shift workers, access to programs such as food banks and childcare that operate only during certain hours.
- Few resources in smaller, more isolated communities.
- Poor nutrition and ill health
- The stress and anxiety of day-to-day existence. No sooner get through one day when start worrying about the next. Poverty is exhausting and leaves little time, energy or head space to escape current situations. It is difficult to plan much beyond tomorrow.

1 B) What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses?

The consensus was that they are not able to cover current day-to-day expenses. They stated that just meeting basic biological needs, food, shelter takes all their income and then some. Nothing left for emergencies, clothing, recreation for children etc. Some have resorted to payday loans to get through but then have the added expense of high interest rates and find it difficult to break the cycle of renewing the loan.

1C) How have recent local and global events impacted your ability to afford these expenses?

Covid and inflation have made all the above more acute.

2A) What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why?

- Child Tax Credit
- Food Banks
- Dental Plan for kids
- SAFER Program for seniors
- Horizons Pre-employment Program for women

2B) What makes these programs or services most helpful? How are people learning about these services? Are there barriers to access?

-The direct cash transfer of child tax enables families to prioritize needs. Those present use it to pay most, if not all the rent.

-The dental plan allows parents to keep up with regular hygen visits and deal with emergencies without having to resort to payday loans or take out of food budget.

-Food banks seen as saviour, especially gift cards. The gift cards enable them to get what they need, what their kids will eat. The difficulty accessing food banks seemed to revolve around hours of operation for those who worked shift work. One mother told of the difficulty carrying the food home when no transportation is available and young kids in tow. Another woman stated that she's too embarrassed to line up outside the food bank because it is on the main street.

-The Horizons Program helps women overcome isolation; gain confidence is a

safe environment.

#3 What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction or services to address the effects of poverty?

- Housing was the number one issue.
- Total lack of shelters and support for homeless in small rural communities
- Transportation for work and medical appointments
- Access to medical services beyond the emergency room
- The “one size fits all” approach does not allow individual situations and what required to climb out of poverty. Many spoke of wanting a hand up instead of a handout and a desire to be self-sufficient.
- Meaningful employment programs that provide individual, one on one assistance. Many require more in-depth assistance than merely providing computer access and job postings.
- Basic life skills courses. Many who have been homeless for some time lack or have forgotten the rudiments of “normal living” such as planning and budgeting.
- Lessons on how to survive on not enough.
- Help for kids dealing with issues stemming from poverty

3B) How can this best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind? Where is more support needed?

- Most people feel as though they have already been left behind given that current policies/programs fall short of ensuring that the most vulnerable can meet the necessities of life. Everyone below the poverty line is vulnerable.
- BC Housing to subsidize rental properties

-Access to trained social workers that will work on an individual basis to get people back on their feet.

#3C) Are there key groups in your community that are facing the most challenges getting the supports they need to meet their needs?

-People suffering from physical or mental illness and those who are unable to advocate or reach out for themselves.

4) From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?

-Subsidies for private market housing which would free up income for other necessities. This could be paid directly to private property owners which might alleviate some of the discrimination low-income applicants often face

-Stronger regulation and enforcement of Tenancy Act surrounding illegal evictions.

-Meaningful employment programs and assistance

-Access to transportation for shift workers or gas subsidies for low-income workers

-Increases to minimum wage which could be government subsidized for small businesses.

-Empowering people to let go of the shame, isolation and low self-esteem that keeps so many stuck

-Empowering and supporting people to help themselves and others. Many who live below the poverty line have valuable skills and experience that could be put in service

-Opportunities and support to volunteer which would enable participants to gain experience in different fields, be a part of the community and network.

-Opportunities and support for apprenticeships

Post-Event Summary

11 people attended the conversation, the majority of whom were low-income earners and people on provincial disability. Also spoke to people at the homeless shelter and soup kitchen.

At first people were hesitant to contribute but soon began to open up. At the end of the conversation participants stated that they felt more comfortable speaking honestly because those hosting the conversation are also struggling with poverty.

Some expressed frustration at some of the recommended questions, feeling that enough money and places to live were obvious answers to obvious questions.

The bulk of the conversation turned around housing and the need for subsidized private market housing. There were many homeless horror stories, living in unhealthy rentals because there was nowhere to go, and the constant fear of being evicted. They spoke of the impact frequent moves and frequent experiences of homelessness have had and continue to have on their families.

The emotional, physical, and psychological impact of life below the poverty line was also a common theme. The stress and anxiety of navigation survival, self-blame for their situation, and the impact of poor-bashing.

Strong feelings about wanting to be self-sufficient and wanting to contribute their skills and talents to society. There is mourning for lost potential.

Attendees also stated that these issues require more than a one-time conversation. Felt like did little more than scratch the surface and state the obvious. Some expressed a desire to meet again for further discussion and problem solving. We are going to follow up and keep the momentum going.

Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society

Results of 3 Poverty-Reduction Conversations, 2023

These are the summary results of the 3 poverty-reduction conversation we had with 22 women survivors of family violence. The women were from the Filipino, South- Asian and Chinese communities.

1. What are the main factors contributing to poverty in your community today?

What are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses?

How have recent local and global events (like COVID-19, inflation, food, and housing affordability challenges, etc.) impacted your ability to afford these expenses?

Answers:

- Lack of equitable programs and services for low-income and middle-income earners.
- **Housing**
 - High rent and continuous rent increase
 - Forced to be in shared accommodation with multiple people often in poor hygienic conditions.
 - No available BC Housing units, long waitlist, no expansion from BC Housing, no new buildings
- **Childcare**
 - expensive,
 - Affordable Child Care Benefit amount is too low,
 - long waitlist and lack of available space.
- **Inflation**
 - basic commodities like groceries are very expensive.
 - families are forced to cut down on food and other needs like clothing to still be able to afford rent,
 - transportation,
 - childcare, and other expenses.
 - food bank is running low in supply due to high demand.
- Bus fares keep on increasing and getting more expensive.
- Expensive medication- limited Pharmacare coverage
- Middle-income earners are not eligible for assistance and other programs.
- Low wage- wage is very low compared to the price of food, rent and other necessities.
 - No jobs or limited options for jobs that can offer flexibility, especially to parents with small children.
- **Limited programs and services**
 - for internationally trained immigrants,
 - not enough bridging courses,
 - rigorous and expensive process for accreditation and registration for their professions including credential evaluation,
 - workers in programs for this group do not provide enough information and referral, limited scholarships, and subsidized training.
- Unemployment, underemployment, or difficulty in landing a job because of insufficient Canadian experience.

Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society

Results of 3 Poverty-Reduction Conversations, 2023

- Systemic Inequality: Marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and people of colour, face systemic barriers that can make it difficult for them to access education, employment, and healthcare, leading to poverty.
- 2. What programs and services are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty or the effects of poverty and why (like tax benefits, affordable housing, food access services, etc.)?**
- What makes these programs or services most helpful? How are people learning about these programs or services?
- How are people accessing these programs or services? Are there barriers to access?
- Are there ways to improve how to learn about, or access, these programs or services?
- Income Assistance, Food Bank, and tax benefits are helpful. Their community outreach workers introduced income assistance and other services to clients, from advertisements, websites, families, and friends.
 - Education and Training: Access to education and job training programs can help individuals acquire the skills and knowledge needed to secure higher-paying jobs and improve their economic prospects. Programs such as the Canada Training Benefit and the Canada Student Loans Program provide financial support for education and training.
 - BC Housing and other programs are helpful too, but the waitlist is too long, no available units, etc.
 - How are they accessing services:
 - Online applications, through outreach and support workers
 - **Barriers:** long waitlists, not enough housing units, long hotlines cues, insufficient information on possible questions during the application.
 - For their medication expense, there was no explanation from Pharmacare on why their expenses were not eligible for reimbursement.
 - Limited eligible services for dental care
 - Online applications are convenient but also need more information on how to complete them, video tutorials and live chat with an agent.
 - Families who have plans of sponsoring their children or parents cannot apply for income assistance, BC Housing, and other programs as it might affect their sponsorships.
 - **Ways to improve:**
 - Promote equitable services/eligibility for all, from low-income to middle-income earners.
 - Expand coverage for dental services. Do not limit it to cleaning and extraction only. Require dental clinics to provide patients with referrals to possible free or subsidized dental services so patients or families are not forced to pay an excessive amount of money.
 - Raising awareness about available programs and services through information sessions for immigrants as part of their settlement, advertisements in social media, community centers, schools, etc.

Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society

Results of 3 Poverty-Reduction Conversations, 2023

- Increase income assistance benefit to 40%, with consideration to household expenses and current inflation.
- Fully funded skills training and employment services to people receiving income assistance to guide and prepare them for financial independence.
- Localized phone hotlines for every program and service. Ex. Income Assistance can have offices per city and will only accept calls from that city to prevent long wait times to talk to an agent.
- Chatlines with a person/agent not with an AI during online application to have immediate answers to possible questions. This will also ease phone call cues.

3. What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction services or services to address the effects of poverty?

How can these best be addressed to ensure people are not being left behind?

Where is more support needed?

Are key groups in your community facing the most challenges getting the support they need to meet their needs?

Do different programs work well together? Why or why not?

Gaps:

- **For seniors**- No extended health coverage/insurance, AOS and CPP benefits are not enough to support daily expenses, rent, etc.
- **Internationally trained immigrants** are left behind often underemployed due to “insufficient Canadian experience” but there are also limited opportunities for them to be trained. Government-funded educational opportunities and training are only limited to specific professions/sectors, requirements and qualifications for these programs are also difficult which make it not accessible for all.
- **Youth**- College education is so expensive that parents cannot afford to send their children to college. Youths also choose not to go to college to avoid incurring debt from student loans. Limited options for scholarships, subsidies, and bursaries. Eligible courses for the scholarships are also limited.
- **Women and single mothers**- free education and training with childcare onsite, more jobs that can give accommodation to their situation.
- More financial support to international students and those in precarious immigration status who are forced to use unsafe methods to generate income.
- **Food Access Services**: While food banks and other food access services provide emergency food assistance, they do not address the root causes of poverty or provide long-term solutions to food insecurity.
- **Healthcare**: While Canada's publicly funded healthcare system provides access to healthcare services for all Canadians, regardless of income, there are still gaps in access to mental health services. Mental health issues can have a significant impact on individuals and families living in poverty, and improving access to mental health services is critical in addressing the effects of poverty.

Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society Results of 3 Poverty-Reduction Conversations, 2023

4. From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community? What opportunities are missed?

- Expand eligibility for programs and services- including middle-income earners.
- Give subsidies to students going to college, not forcing them to apply for student loans.
- Increase benefits and expand income eligibility - childcare subsidy, income assistance, Canada Child Benefit, rental assistance, BC Housing, etc.
- More options for educational training and education for internationally trained immigrants, ease up requirements for credential evaluation and professional accreditation.
- Prevent commercialization and privatization of lands, build more BC Housing units instead.
- Have a regular reassessment of people living in BC Housing units to give chances to other applicants who are on the waitlist.
- Regulated rent ceiling, provide rent subsidies for those who are on the BC Housing waitlist, expand eligibility for all programs and services.
- Healthcare: Increase funding for mental health services, so that individuals and families living in poverty can access the support they need to address mental health issues.
- Food Access Services: Increase funding for food access services and initiatives that address food insecurity in communities. This can include support for community gardens, farmers' markets, and other initiatives that improve access to fresh and healthy foods.
- Living Wages: Implementing policies that ensure a living wage for all workers, so that they can earn enough to support themselves and their families without living in poverty.