



Submission to the British Columbia Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultation

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

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BC Poverty Reduction Consultation

Submitted via email: BCPovertyReduction@gov.bc.ca

Attention: Honourable Shane Simpson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

Dear Minister Simpson:

First Call has been tracking child and family poverty rates in BC for more than two decades. Every November, with the support of the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC), we release a report card with the latest statistics on child and family poverty in BC and recommendations for policy changes that would reduce these poverty levels.

Our first provincial report card containing data for 1994 showed that one in five BC children were poor. It is profoundly disappointing that 20 years later the data still shows that one in five BC children are poor.

Despite this dismal record on child and family poverty, First Call members are encouraged, indeed optimistic, that government's commitment to develop a comprehensive provincial poverty reduction plan will bring significant relief to many struggling families and individuals.

Additionally, government's early initiatives in the areas of child care affordability, removing post-secondary education barriers, increasing social assistance rates and earnings exemptions, reinvesting in public schools, reducing MSP premiums, promises of new rental housing investments, and the creation of a new ministry of mental health and addictions, are all welcome first steps in addressing many of the issues noted above.

First Call's overarching recommendation has long been for the provincial government to adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines, and we are encouraged to see this is now in progress, and that a cabinet minister has been given the authority and responsibility to ensure government achieves its targets.

As a starting point, we recommend the plan contain a goal to reduce BC's child poverty rate to 7% or lower by 2020.

We submit the following recommendations for specific actions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Adrienne Montani". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adrienne" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Montani".

Adrienne Montani, Provincial Coordinator
First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

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About Us

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition is a non-partisan, cross-sectoral coalition of 102 provincial and regional organizations¹, individuals and local community networks who share the belief that children and youth should have “first call” on our province’s resources.

We are committed to achieving the following 4 Keys to Success for B.C.’s children and youth:

- A strong commitment to early childhood development
- Support in transitions from childhood to youth and adulthood
- Increased economic equality
- Safe and caring communities

First Call welcomes this opportunity to share our collective ideas for making B.C.’s poverty reduction strategy comprehensive, effective and accountable. This submission outlines the evidence and consequences of high rates of child and family poverty and growing economic inequality in B.C. Drawing on this evidence, and the input of our many coalition members we make a number of recommendations for the development of B.C.’s poverty reduction strategy.

First Call’s overarching recommendation for the provincial government has been to adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines. We are encouraged that consultations are now underway to develop a poverty reduction plan for B.C., and that a cabinet minister has been given the authority and responsibility to ensure government is achieving its targets on time.

¹ See Appendix A for a list of coalition members.

Key Statistics

First Call publishes the annual [BC Child Poverty Report Card](#) in cooperation with Campaign 2000, the national campaign to end child and family poverty. Our 2017 BC Report Card² contains the following facts, summarized from the nine fact sheets in the report:

Fact Sheet #1 B.C.'s Child Poverty Rates

- 1 in 5 B.C. children are poor (18.3% or 153,300 children), higher than the all-ages poverty rate of 15.3%.
- Nearly half (45%) of recent immigrant children are poor, one in three (31%) Indigenous children are poor (not counting children living on First Nations reserves), and 23% of racialized ('visible minority') children are poor in B.C. Children affected by a disability, youth transitioning out of foster care, and LGBTIQ youth also have much higher poverty rates than the average.

Fact Sheet #2 BC's Child Poverty Rates Over Time

- B.C.'s child poverty rate is higher now than it was in 1989.

Fact Sheet #3 BC Child Poverty by Family Type

- Half (48%) of B.C.'s children in lone-parent families are poor, more than four times the rate (11%) for their counterparts in couple families. These children make up over half of the poor children in the province, even though they make up only one fifth of the child population.
- 36.2% of the 14,490 children living with grandparents, alone or with relatives, non-relatives or in foster care, were living in poverty.

Fact Sheet #4 Depth of Family Poverty

- Incomes for poor families with children in B.C. average from \$10,000 to \$12,300 below the poverty line by family type.
- The 2017 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count found 386 homeless children and youth under 25 years, including 201 children under the age of 19.

Fact Sheet #5 Child Poverty and Working Parents

- The majority of poor children in BC live with parents in paid work, either full or part time. Low wages and precarious work are important causes of family poverty.³

² First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, *2017 BC Child Poverty Report Card*, www.still1in5.ca

³ Iglika Ivanova, *Working Poverty in Metro Vancouver*, CCPA, 2016.

- Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would still leave a single parent with one child working full time, for a full year, \$1,572 below the 2015 poverty line. Two parents working full-time full, for a full year at this wage would be lifted \$13,354 above the 2015 poverty line.

Fact Sheet #6 Children in Families on Welfare

- In spite of recent increases, income and disability assistance rates remain below the poverty line, with severe consequences for the health of parents and children depending on this income.
- A couple with two children on welfare in 2015 had a total income that was just 64% of the poverty line, leaving a poverty gap of \$12,958. The increase in B.C. welfare rates in October 2017 will have reduced that gap by only \$1,200.

Fact Sheet #7 Child Poverty Across BC

- Approximately 85% of the poor children in B.C. live in the province's 25 urban areas. However children living outside urban areas have a 23.3% poverty rate, much higher than the provincial child poverty rate of 18.3%.

Fact Sheet #8 Growing Income Inequality

- The income of B.C.'s richest 10% of families with children took home 24% of the income pie in 2015, compared to the 2% shared by the poorest 10% of families.
- Between 1989 and 2015 (26 years), the income of the richest 10% of families with children increased by 56%, while income for the poorest 10% of families increased by only 25%.

Fact Sheet #9 The Importance of Government Help

- In 2015, B.C.'s child poverty rate was reduced by 29% due to government transfers, less than the 37% Canadian average. Quebec reduced their poverty rate by 47%.

Recommendation 1: Accountability

Background

As a coalition focused on the rights and well-being of B.C.'s children and youth, we look to our government to live up to our commitment as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to uphold their rights to special protections, education, health, child care and family supports, and to have their best interests taken into account in all matters affecting them. Article 27 of the Convention requires us to “recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.” It also requires us to “take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and (...) in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.” B.C.'s high child and family poverty levels violate these rights.

We are very pleased to see government's new commitments to adopting and implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Many of these calls to action have direct impacts on Indigenous children, while others will have a major impact on their circumstances over time. Keeping these commitments has important implications for the provincial poverty reduction strategy, especially since Indigenous children and families are so over-represented in poverty statistics and other indicators of inequity.

Recognizing that children of recent immigrants and refugees, Indigenous children, children of female lone-parent families, children in racialized families, children affected by disabilities, youth aging out foster care, and LGBTTQ youth are at greater risk of living in poverty, efforts should also be targeted to achieve major reductions in poverty levels for these populations.

Recommendations

- B.C.'s poverty reduction strategy must be accountable to commitments to children's rights, Indigenous rights and the TRC Calls to Action across all action areas.
- The B.C. Poverty Reduction Plan should set an ambitious goal of reducing child poverty to 7% or less by 2020, as measured by the after-tax Low-Income Measure.

Recommendation 2: Focus on Building a Healthy, Resilient, Inclusive Society

Background

There is ample evidence that socioeconomic position is one of the most important social determinants of health. Children who are raised in poverty face risks to their health over their life course.⁴ In contrast, healthy, well-supported children and youth are more likely to become the engaged and contributing citizens that are essential for creating a healthy, sustainable society.

International studies have shown that high rates of economic inequality negatively impact both the rich and the poor on a range of health and wellness measures.⁵ B.C. studies also show the impacts of poverty on people's vulnerability to chronic disease and the effects on their life span.⁶

Allowing income and wealth inequality to continue to grow in B.C. brings with it increased health and social costs related to higher rates of many chronic diseases, obesity, mental illness, suicide, violence and addictions. Beyond these negative health effects and the widespread suffering that accompanies them, growing socioeconomic inequity erodes social cohesion, empathy and compassion, which leads to increased social isolation, stigmatization and marginalization of the poor, distrust, crime, stress and despair.

Inequality reduces social mobility,⁷ undermining the promise of a fair society and increasing social alienation for those left behind.

The vulnerability of children is underscored by the research on the impact of economic inequality on children's well-being which demonstrates a direct correlation between a large gap between the rich and the poor in wealthy societies and reduced child well-being.⁸

Recommendations

- BC's poverty reduction strategy must be intentionally focused on creating a healthy and resilient society, founded on respect for human rights, fairness, the importance of building social cohesion and reducing inequity, including inequities of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability, as well as poverty.

⁴ World Health Organization, Commission on Social Determinants of Health, *Closing the Gap in a Generation, Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health*, 2008.

⁵ The Equality Trust, *The Spirit Level* <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/about-inequality/spirit-level>.

⁶ Health Officers Council of BC, 2008 and 2013, <https://healthofficerscouncil.net/positions-and-advocacy/poverty-and-health-inequities/>

⁷ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/a-tale-of-two-canadas-where-you-grow-up-affects-your-adult-income/article35444594/>

⁸ Equality Trust, <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/child-well-being>

Recommendation 3: Establish Quality, Affordable Child Care

Background

A key measure to reduce child and family poverty, particularly for lone-parent families, is to address the child care crisis. First Call supports the \$10aDay Child Care Plan to create a universal, affordable, high-quality, inclusive and publicly accountable system of child care in B.C. that is fee free for lower income families, pays living wages to the people working in the system and supports an Indigenous-led process to develop and implement an Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

We applaud the historic investments in the new Child Care BC plan announced in the 2018 budget that move us toward key elements in the plan and urge prompt action to improve Early Childhood Educator wages and prioritize expanding the fee reduction program so that the affordable child care benefit can be reduced over time.

BC families with young children continue to face a child care crisis — a crisis in affordability and access to quality, regulated care. Child care providers face a crisis in recruiting qualified early childhood educators because relying primarily on parent fees has meant wages have stayed low. This crisis is affecting parents' ability to return to work after the birth of a child and their decisions to even have children.⁹

The fiscal costs of this crisis for families, for businesses and for the province are an unnecessary drag on the provincial economy, and the implementation of a universal, regulated, quality child care system is a well-researched remedy to this crisis.¹⁰

Recommendations

- First Call supports implementing the \$10aDay Child Care Plan.
- To begin addressing the current crisis in recruiting and retaining qualified Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), implement an ECE wage lift of at least \$1/hour in 2018, with accountability measures.
- To begin addressing the shortage of licensed child care spaces, work with public partners to meet local child care needs. Specifically, advance opportunities to add child care to schools across BC.

⁹ http://www.10aday.ca/the_child_care_crisis

¹⁰ Robert Fairholm, Centre for Spatial Economics, and Lynell Anderson, CPA, CGA, *Socio-Economic Impact Analysis of the \$10aDay Child Care Plan for British Columbia*, 2017.

https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/10aday/pages/357/attachments/original/1484678674/10aDay_C4SE_Exe_c_Summary.pdf?1484678674 and P. Kershaw, L. Anderson, *A New Deal for Families*, 2011.
http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/publications/Family%20Policy%20Reports%20and%20Resources/does_canada_work_for_all_generations_fact_sheet.pdf

Recommendation 4: Raise the Minimum Wage

Background

The statistics on the depth of poverty show poor children in BC, including those living with parents working full-time or part-time, are being raised on median annual incomes more than \$10,000 below the poverty lines for their respective family sizes.

In 2015, a single parent with one child working full-time for the whole year for minimum wage would have only earned \$18,761 in employment income, leaving them \$10,111 below the \$28,872 LIM before-tax poverty line for this family type and size. A two-parent family with two children with both parents working full-time for the whole year for minimum wage would have only earned \$37,522 in employment income, leaving them \$3,724 below the \$41,246 LIM before-tax poverty line for this family type and size.

Stagnating wages and precarious work leaves families face soaring costs for essential living expenses such as housing, food, child care and transportation, and a social safety net that has failed to respond to this growing unfairness and inequality.

Recommendations

- Address working poverty by raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2019, indexing it annually and ensuring all workers are covered by this minimum wage.
- Government should take responsibility for paying a living wages to all direct and contracted government employees, and take steps to encourage other employers to do the same.
- Reform B.C.'s employment standards and increase enforcement to better protect the rights of workers from wage theft and other predatory and exploitative employment practices.

Recommendation 5: Raise Income and Disability Assistance Rates

Background

Punitively low welfare incomes makes life difficult for the average 38,000 children in BC families currently on welfare. Welfare is often the only option for these families, 84% of which are led by lone parents. Over two-thirds of these parents or caregivers are on welfare temporarily or permanently and are exempted from work expectations due to disabilities, persistent multiple barriers, medical conditions and other temporary exemptions.

Lone parents with a disability and children under the age of 25 have an astronomical poverty rate of 53% across Canada. The challenges of poverty are multiplied for people with disabilities.

Welfare benefits have not been indexed or increased automatically with the cost of living, so they have lost value over time. Welfare recipients living below the poverty line are frequently forced to rely on food banks and other sources of charity to feed and clothe their children.

Recommendations

- Increase income and disability rates significantly to bring them into line with actual living expenses, indexing them to the annual rise in the cost of basic living expenses.
- Remove barriers to accessing assistance including excessive wait times and unreasonable criteria.
- Increase earnings exemptions.
- Remove claw backs that discourage, delay and deny people in need, including allowing them to retain benefits while enrolled in post-secondary education programs.
- Expand the Single Parent Employment Initiative (SPEI) to include both parents and allow people to take post-secondary programs that are longer than 12 months.

Recommendation 6: Enhance the Provincial Child Tax Benefit

Background

Without government transfers, using only family market income, British Columbia's child poverty rate was 25.8% in 2015. It came down to 18.3% after government transfers.

BC's government transfers were less effective than most provinces or territories at reducing child poverty, keeping 29% of children out of poverty, below the Canadian average of 37%. If BC had a government transfer effectiveness similar to Quebec, we could have helped to keep another 101,163 BC children out of poverty in 2015.¹¹

On average, social transfers in high-income countries reduce child poverty rates by about one-third.¹²

Recommendations

- Redesign the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit into a BC Child Benefit that covers children under 18, and increase the maximum benefit to \$1,320 per child per year.

This recommendation would bring BC's benefit close to the Ontario Child Benefit, while recognizing that the additional costs of raising children do not disappear when they turn 6, and many families with children 6 and older are also struggling in deep poverty.

We think the province can better target its resources to lift more families with children out of poverty by reducing the earning threshold above which the benefit begins to diminish. We suggest the full benefit be available to households with annual net incomes that approximate a living wage for families as calculated by the Living Wage for Families Campaign.¹³ This measure is the best available approximation of an adequate income that supports a 'bare bones' budget for a family with children and is broadly accepted by both the social services and business communities in BC.

- Ensure that households with an annual net income of up to \$80,000 receive the full, increased child benefit and phase out the benefit for households with annual net incomes above \$100,000.

¹¹ 2017 BC Child Poverty Report Card

¹² UNICEF Canada. 2017. UNICEF Report Card 14: Canadian Companion, Oh Canada! Our kids deserve better. UNICEF Canada, Toronto.

¹³ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives *Working for a Living Wage: 2018 update*

Recommendation 7: Reduce the Number of Children Coming into Government Care Due to Poverty

Background

We know that many children in British Columbia are removed from the care of families who cannot keep them healthy and safe. At last count 7,000 children and youth were living in government care and over 13,000 more were living outside the parental home in kinship care or on their own with some government support.

We also know that over 61% of children in care are Indigenous, a gross over-representation after considering that Indigenous peoples in BC represent less than 5% of the provincial population.¹⁴

Poverty, often defined as ‘neglect,’ is the major factor behind many child apprehensions by B.C.’s child protection system. B.C.’s Representative for Children and Youth Bernard Richard has pointed to this systemic failure:¹⁵

"(...) taking a child away because they are poor is not an acceptable reason and clearly the system is failing children if they are doing that, and we know they are, and we know the issue is more prevalent for Indigenous people."

A comprehensive provincial poverty reduction plan that succeeds in reducing the incidence and depth of child and family poverty can be instrumental in reducing the number of children who come into government care. This is critically important especially for reducing the number of Indigenous children taken into care.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the Ministry of Children and Family Development has sufficient resources to support more services to keep children at home with their families when it can be made safe to do so, and to strengthen the system of guardianship workers, foster parents and other caregivers when it is not.
- Commit to funding that ensures no child in care will grow up in poverty.

¹⁴ Representative for Children and Youth, *Annual Report 2016-17*.

¹⁵ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/indigenous-children-largely-apprehended-because-they-dont-have-access-to-basic-resources-1.4412441>; and Ministry of Children and Family Development, Performance Management Report Volume 8 March 2016, p.44.

Recommendation 8: Work with Youth to Establish a Plan for Youth Aging Out of Care

Background

A significant proportion of youth leaving government care at age 19 are on income assistance within six months of aging out of the system, thrusting them into deep poverty.¹⁶ According to surveys, 40% of homeless youth in BC have been in care at some point in their lives, and youth with experience in care are nearly 200 times more likely than their peers to become homeless.¹⁷

Recommendations

- Working in collaboration with youth in and from government care, the provincial government should establish an inter-ministerial action plan to ensure all youth aging out of care can rely on needed supports and services.
- Develop seamless financial, educational and relational supports for youth transitioning out of government care at age 19 and offer the extension of financial and emotionally supportive care to youth up to the age of 26.
- Post-secondary education for youth aging out-of-care should be supported without limits on age or their time in care.
- First Call supports the detailed recommendations developed by youth in and from care in the [Memorandum to Ministers and MLAs](#), presented to government in October 24, 2017.

¹⁶ Ministry of Children and Family Development, Performance Management Report Volume 8 March 2016, p.90.

¹⁷ <http://www.fosteringchange.ca/> and Representative for Children and Youth, *On Their Own: Examining the Needs of B.C. Youth as They Leave Government Care*, 2014.

Recommendation 9: Collaborate with First Nations and Indigenous Organizations to Develop Strategies and Increase Funding

Background

B.C.'s poverty reduction strategy should include accountabilities to the commitments in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, including their right to self-determination, to the calls to action in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and be compliant with the rulings of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to stop discrimination in funding for Indigenous programs and services.

Recommendations

- Immediately increase funding for First Nations child welfare, education and community health services and services for urban Indigenous people and develop a long-term poverty eradication strategy in collaboration with First Nations and other Indigenous organizations and communities.
- Implement the recommendations in Grand Chief Ed John's report on Indigenous child welfare in British Columbia¹⁸ expeditiously.

¹⁸ *Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness and Reunification – From Root Causes to Root Solutions, A Report on Indigenous Child Welfare in British Columbia, Final Report of Special Advisory Grand Chief Ed John*, 2016. <http://fns.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Final-Report-of-Grand-Chief-Ed-John-re-Indig-Child-Welfare-in-BC-November-2016.pdf>

Recommendation 10: Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Background

In BC there are estimated to be more than 13,000 children and youth aged 0-14 being raised by grandparents or other kin, with no parent in the home. Like foster children, children in kinship care families have often experienced trauma and many have physical, emotional, or behavioural challenges.

39% of kinship care families live below the poverty line, some in deep poverty, and many others are using up their savings to raise these children, and will soon be living in poverty themselves.

British Columbia can take leadership in recognizing the value of grandparents (and other kinship care providers) who are raising their grandchildren full time.

Recommendations

- Provide kinship families with benefits comparable to foster parents.
- Provide Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, and all kinship care providers, access to respite, child care, and the same training received by foster parents.

Recommendation 11: Support Immigrants and Refugees

Background

The overall child poverty statistics hide the fact that some children in British Columbia are more at risk of living in poverty than others. 2016 Census data based on the LIM after-tax measure show that in 2015, BC's recent immigrant children had a poverty rate of nearly one in two (45%).

Many immigrant adults are under-employed in jobs that are lower in skill than the job they held prior to immigrating to Canada. And for many families the impacts of poverty are compounded by the housing affordability crisis.

Refugees who have experienced trauma can be highly vulnerable and have even greater difficulties leaving the cycle of poverty.

Recommendations

- Ensure settlement services are properly funded.
- Ensure there are no barriers for children to attend public school.
- Increase efforts to help immigrants and refugees adjust to life in Canada by:
 - improving employment assistance
 - removing barriers to qualification for professionals trained abroad
 - enhancing language training, including classes with child care provided, and
 - improving employment standards and human rights protections and enforcement.

Recommendation 12: End Youth Homelessness and Ensure Affordable, Rental Housing for Families

Background

Facts:

- Youth have higher experiences of episodic and hidden homelessness.
- Indigenous youth are over-represented in the youth homeless population
- Unique to youth homelessness are causes that can include familial conflict and abuse, as well as structural stressors including poverty or system failures such as aging out of foster care.
- Youth homelessness is characterized by a developmental stage where youth may have never lived independently from adult caregivers.
- Youth have increased vulnerability on the streets and experience higher levels of criminal victimization such as sexual exploitation.
- There is a need for early intervention as prolonged youth homelessness results in increased trauma, mental health, substance use, and survival activities. We must intervene before youth become street entrenched.

Recommendations

- Build more social and affordable rental housing, while better protecting renters from rent-related or renovation evictions.
- Enhancing and expand rental subsidies and other income supports to families living in or near poverty to reduce housing insecurity.
- Providing additional funds to social service agencies and non-profit housing societies to provide housing and other supports to populations at higher risk of homelessness such as LBTTQ youth without family support and women with addictions who have young children.
- Fully fund and expand access to shelters and support and recovery programs that allow mothers to keep their babies and young children with them.

Recommendation 13: Ensure Access to Public Transportation

Background

It is well-established that access to public transportation improves the quality of life for individuals and the health of communities.

Transportation costs create barriers for those living in poverty to access education, health care, child care, employment opportunities and a myriad of services that would assist them. Children and youth in poor families should not have to miss school because they can't afford transit fares.

In both urban and rural communities access to safe public transportation is critical to social mobility.

Recommendations

- Provide free public transit for minors (ages 0-18) and free or reduced-fee transit access for low income families.

Recommendation 14: Eliminate Food Insecurity for Families and Children

Background

In Canada, household food insecurity affects one in six children under the age of 18¹⁹ and low-income is the largest predictor of food insecurity. In BC, food insecurity is on the rise, particularly for lone parent families, with 24% of lone parents reporting they are food insecure in our 2015 Child Poverty Report Card.²⁰

Unfortunately, in 2013 and 2014, the Household Food Security Survey Module was optional on Statistics Canada's annual Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), and BC chose not to include the measurement of food insecurity for their populations. However, data from Canada's food banks reveal that children and youth are overrepresented among people helped by food banks. In 2016, 32.2% of BC's food bank recipients were children and overall use of food banks in BC has increase by over 30% since 2008.²¹

In 2011–12, data from the CCHS showed nearly one in 6 (15.6%) or 135,000 children 0-17 in BC were living in food insecure households, representing 28% of food insecure people in the province. In all of the health authorities, households with children had higher rates of food insecurity compared to those without. Female lone-parent families with children under 18 had the highest rate of food insecurity by family type at 34.2%.²²

The CCHS report also stated: "About three quarters (76.0%) of households whose main source of income is social assistance are food insecure; however, working households comprise the majority of the food insecure households in BC (65.0%)."

Canada is one of the only industrialized countries without a national school food program and was recently ranked 37th of 41 countries around providing healthy food for kids.

Recommendations

- Raise social assistance rates significantly to allow families to afford healthy and sufficient food.
- Raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2019 and index it annually, ensuring all workers are covered by this minimum wage.
- Establish a universal school meal program.

¹⁹ Food Insecurity Policy Research 2012 Fact Sheets <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/fact-sheets/#children>

²⁰ 2015 Child Poverty BC Report Card.

²¹ Hunger Count 2016 <https://www.foodbanksbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-Hunger-Count.pdf>

²² Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2016). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <http://proof.utoronto.ca>

Recommendation 15: Fund Public Education to Meet the Needs of Students

Background

B.C.'s public schools are in urgent need of stable, adequate, predictable funding. Teachers, parents and school trustees have all documented the underfunding and the resulting inequities created in learning opportunities and outcomes for students. Pressure on parents to spend hours of their time advocating for their schools to be properly funded, made seismically safe, or even to remain open are symptoms of serious neglect by government of its obligations to B.C. public school students. Both operating and capital funding for school districts are in dire need of substantial increases.

We also know that young children with special needs still languish on long waits for assessments and early intervention therapies or access to child care because of limited government funding. Long waiting times mean irreplaceable developmental opportunities lost for these children. When they get to school age they may go on another waitlist for a proper assessment and find that school-based services to meet their learning needs also remain in dire need of restoration.²³

In the public schools, the number of children with identified special needs has been steadily increasing, as the number of special education teachers has been in decline.²⁴ This has left more parents scrambling to find the learning supports their children need.

Recommendations

- Continue to restore funding to the K-12 public school system: in addition to more teachers, provide increased operating funding and resources to support the early identification, designation and appropriate educational programming for students with diverse learning needs and to restore other educational programs that have been decimated by inadequate funding to school districts, such as libraries and arts programs.
- Ensure funding of public schools is adequate to reduce pressure on parents to fundraise to cover school expenses, a key goal for reducing inequities between schools and students and families of different income levels.
- Provide adequate capital funding for facility repair and maintenance, including seismic upgrades, as well as building new schools for growing districts.

²³ http://inclusionbc.org/sites/default/files/KidsCantWait-2016%20ECI%20Summit%20Report_0.pdf

²⁴ BCTF Education Funding Budget Brief <https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/Briefs/EducationFundingBrief2016.pdf>

Recommendation 16: Ensure Access to Post-Secondary Education

Background

Low- and middle-income young people in BC know they need a post-secondary education as a path to a job or career that will, hopefully, pay a living wage and allow them to support a current or future family. But many are asking themselves if their post-secondary journey will actually be a path into poverty.

Cuts to public post-secondary institutions have led to unaffordable tuition fees and crushing levels of student debt. Students who must borrow to attend post-secondary school are paying a 30% premium for their education, compared to those who do not have to borrow.²⁵

Students who are being pushed out of the current model of colleges and universities today are disproportionately Indigenous, racialized, LGBTQ2S+, people with disabilities, people raised in single-parent homes and people from low-income families. They are being further marginalized by the unaffordable costs of a post-secondary education.

Recommendations

- In the short term, reduce post-secondary tuition fees, re-introduce a robust needs-based provincial grant program and provide interest free student loans.
- In the long term, federal and provincial governments should make post-secondary education free for Canadian residents.

²⁵ British Columbia Federation of Students, *Pathways to Prosperity, Recommendations for Improving the BC Post-Secondary Education System*, 2016. <http://www.wearebcstudents.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/GR-BC-Budget-2017-Submission.pdf>

Recommendation 17: Implement Fair Tax Policy

Background

Of the Canadian provinces, British Columbia has the third largest disparity between its richest and poorest families, behind Ontario and Saskatchewan. The richest 10% of BC families collect 11 times as much income as the poorest 10% BC families. Quebec is the province with the least disparity between its richest and poorest families.

Growing income inequality is mainly driven by the growth in the income of the richest families. After adjusting for inflation, the income of BC's richest 10% of families with children increased by 56% between 1989 and 2015, while income for the poorest 10% of families increased by only 25%.

Along with high income inequality come high rates of poverty, social competition and stress, which may contribute to these poorer outcomes for children and youth. They affect children broadly and make life more difficult for the poorest. Income inequality also sustains wider inequality among Canada's children in other well-being outcomes, and it may help explain Canada's lack of progress in the rankings.²⁶

Recommendations

- Eliminate MSP premiums completely.
- Establish an independent commission on tax reform to study taxes levied in BC and recommend ways to make the tax system fairer and reduce income inequality.

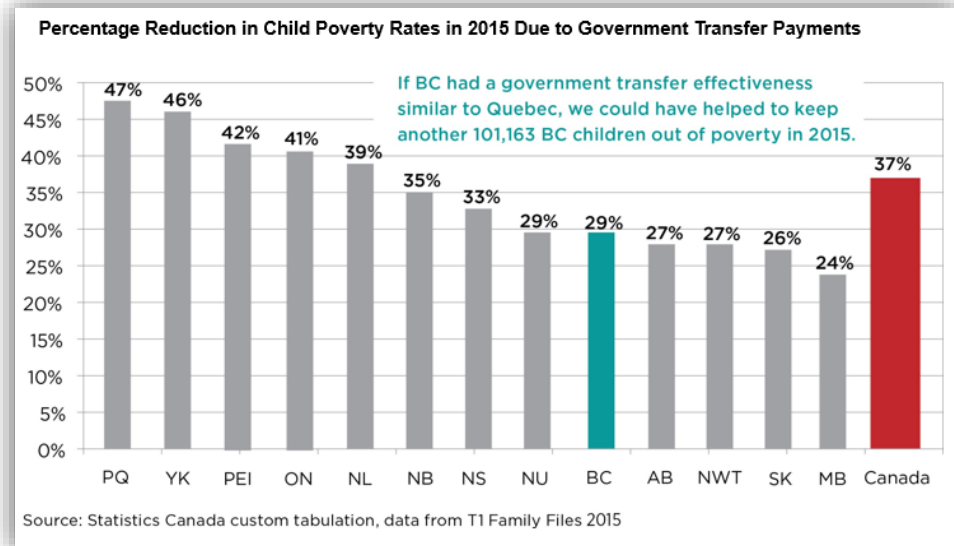
²⁶ UNICEF Canada. 2017. UNICEF Report Card 14: Canadian Companion, Oh Canada! Our kids deserve better. UNICEF Canada, Toronto.

Appendix A: About Child Benefits in Canada

“In Canada, child benefits — meaning income payments on behalf of children, delivered either in the form of cheques or income tax reductions — have historically pursued two fundamental and related purposes: poverty reduction and parental recognition. Under the poverty reduction objective, child benefits help fill the gap between the earnings of low- and modest-wage parents and their families’ income needs, based on the long-recognized reality that a market economy does not vary wages and salaries to take into account the number of family members dependent on that income. The parental recognition objective views child benefits as an important way for society to provide some financial recompense for the fact that parents bear expenses that childless households, at the same income level, do not.”²⁷

First Call has been tracking child and family poverty rates in BC for more than two decades. Every November, with the support of the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC), we release a report card with the latest statistics on child and family poverty in BC and recommendations for policy changes that would reduce these poverty levels.

In our 2017 report card, we made a recommendation to enhance BC’s current early childhood benefit to more effectively reach families with children living in poverty. We know, from international data that, on average, social transfers in high-income countries reduce child poverty rates by about one third.



Without government transfers, using only family market income, British Columbia’s child poverty rate was 25.8% in 2015. It came down to 18.3% after government transfers. BC’s government transfers were less effective than most provinces or territories at reducing child poverty, keeping 29% of children out of poverty, below the Canadian average of 37%. If BC had a government transfer effectiveness similar to Quebec, we could have helped to keep another 101,163 BC children out of poverty in 2015.²⁸

The majority of poor children in BC live with parents in paid work, either full or part time. Low wages and precarious work are important causes of family poverty.²⁹ And we know from the recent recalculation of

²⁷ Ken Battle, *Renewing Canada’s Social Architecture, Child Benefits in Canada: Politics Versus Policy*, June 2015

²⁸ First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, *2017 BC Child Poverty Report Card*, November 2017

²⁹ Iglia Ivanova, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, *Working Poverty in Metro Vancouver*, 2016

the living wage: “The introduction of the Canada Child Benefit – which resulted in small decreases in the Metro Vancouver living wage for two consecutive years in 2016 and 2017 despite rising costs of living – shows how significant government transfers can be. However, most other government transfers and subsidies are reduced or eliminated once a family reaches an income level well below the living wage.”³⁰

In light of the BC government’s commitment to reducing poverty, we revised our cross-Canada comparison of child benefits included in our child poverty report card to reflect 2018 information. This data is presented here.

Quebec’s Child Assistance Benefit continues to be the most generous benefit for families in Canada. Of the provinces offering benefits for families with children, BC continues to be the only one capping the eligibility age for children at 6 instead of 18 years of age. And while some provinces offer a type of ‘working’ or low-income’ tax benefit, they are not specifically aimed to assist families and are therefore omitted from the comparison chart.

Overview of Canadian Provincial and Territorial Child Benefits as of May 2018

	Child's age	Annual benefit dollar amount (1 child) 2016	Annual benefit dollar amount (1 child) 2018	Lifetime dollar investment (1 child, full benefit) 2016	Lifetime dollar investment (1 child, full benefit) 2018	Full benefit annual income threshold 2016	Full benefit annual income threshold 2018	Annual income when benefit phased out 2016	Annual income when benefit phased out 2018	Benefit indexed?	Program Name
Canada	0 - 6		6,400		38,400		30,000		65,000	Y	Canada Child Benefit
	6 - 17		5,400		59,400						
	Sum 0-17				97,800						
PQ	0-18	2,392	2,430	43,056	43,740		34,824	35,000	91,218	Y	Child Assistance Payments
ON	0-18	1,336	1,378	24,048	24,804	20,400	21,037			Y	Child Benefit and Income Supplement
AB	0-18	1,100	1,128	19,800	20,304	25,500	26,141	41,220	42,255	Y	Alberta Child Benefit (ACB)
YK	0-18	820	No change	14,759	No change	35,000	No change		No change	N	Yukon Child Benefit (YCB)
NS	0-18	625	No change	11,250	No change	18,000	No change	26,000	No change	N	Nova Scotia Child Benefit
MB	0-18	420	No change	7,560	No change	15,000	No change	20,435	No change	N	Manitoba Child Benefit
NL	0-18	377	386	6,786	6,949	17,397	17,397	24,849	25,018	N	Child Benefit
NV	0-18	330		5,940		20,921				N	Nunavut Child Benefit
NB	0-18	250		4,500		20,000		30,000	20,000	N	NB Child Tax Benefit
BC	0-6	660	No change	3,960	No change	100,000	No change	150,000	No change	N	BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit
SK											
PEI											
NWT	0-6	330	815	5,940	4,890	20,921	30,000		80,000	N	NWT Child Benefit
	6-18		652		7,824						
	Sum 0-18				12,714						

³⁰ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives *Working for a Living Wage: 2018 update*

Appendix B: First Call Coalition Members

ACT – Autism Community Training	Council of Parent Participation Preschools BC
Adoptive Families Association of BC	Deaf Children's Society of BC
Affiliation of Multicultural Societies & Service Agencies	Developmental Disabilities Association
Alternate Shelter Society	Directorate of Agencies for School Health BC
Association for Community Education BC	Dr. C.J. Patricelli, Inc.
Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia	Early Childhood Educators of BC
Aunt Leah's Independent Lifeskills Society	East Kootenay Childhood Coalition
Autism Society of BC	Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver
Baobab Inclusive Empowerment Society	Family Services of Greater Vancouver
BC Aboriginal Child Care Society	Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
BC Association for Child Development & Intervention	Federation of Community Social Services BC
BC Association of Family Resource Programs	Foster Parent Support Services Society
BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs	Five Family Place Partnership – MPFCS
BC Association of Social Workers	Health Sciences Association
BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils	Health Officers' Council of British Columbia
BC Council for Families	Helping Spirit Lodge Society
BC Crime Prevention Association	Hospital Employees' Union
BC Federation of Foster Parents Association	Immigrant Services Society of BC
BC Government & Service Employees' Union	Inclusion BC
BC Play Therapy Association	Indigenous Perspectives Society
BC Recreation and Parks Association	Justice Institute of BC
BC Retired Teachers' Association	Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society
BC Schizophrenia Society	Kelowna Child Care Society
BC Society of Transition Houses	Kiawassa Neighbourhood House
BC Teachers' Federation	Learning Disabilities Association of BC
Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland	McCreary Centre Society
Boys and Girls Clubs of BC	Métis Commission for Children & Families BC
Breakfast for Learning	Mom to Mom Child Poverty Initiative
British Columbia Federation of Students	MOSAIC
Cameray Child & Family Services	National Council of Jewish Women of Canada – Vancouver Section
Canadian Association for Young Children	Pacific Association of First Nations Women
Canadian Mental Health Association BC	Pacific Community Resources Society
Canadian Red Cross – Respect Education	Pacific Immigrant Resources Society
Capilano Students' Union	Parent Support Services Society of BC
Centre for Child Honouring	PeerNetBC
Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs	Penticton & District Community Resources Society
Cerebral Palsy Association of BC	Phoenix Human Services Association
Check Your Head: The Global Youth Education Network	PLEA Community Services Society of BC
Child and Youth Care Association of BC	Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society
Children's and Women's Health Centre of BC	Provincial Association of Residential & Community Agencies
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC	Public Health Association of BC
Columbia/Kootenay Advocacy and Education Resource Society	Single Mothers' Alliance of BC
Communities that Care – Squamish	Social Planning & Research Council of BC
Community Action Toward Children's Health	Society for Children and Youth of BC

S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
Summit Negotiations Society
Sunshine Coast Community Services Society
Take a Hike Youth At Risk Foundation
United Way of the Lower Mainland
University Women's Club of Vancouver
Vancity Community Foundation
Vancouver Coastal Health Authority – Population
Health
Vancouver Community College – Early Childhood
Care & Education, Cont. Studies
Victoria Child Abuse Prevention & Counselling
Centre
West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund
Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre
Westcoast Family Centres Society
Western Society for Children
Women Against Violence Against Women
YWCA Metro Vancouver

FIRST CALL LIAISONS

BC Representative for Children and Youth
Public Health Agency of Canada
Ministry of Children and Family Development
Human Early Learning Partnership, UBC
BC School Trustees' Association