

2024 Poverty Reduction Strategy



Prepared for:





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Message from the Minister

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction



We're all better off in a province where we take care of each other – a province where people can afford to follow their dreams, and seek a better life. We know that societies with more equality and less poverty are societies where people are healthier, happier, and more secure. That's why reducing poverty is a top priority for this government – and has been since taking office in 2017.

Our government has been focused on making life more affordable for people living in British Columbia (B.C.), through actions such as building more affordable homes, boosting access and lowering the cost of child care, improving wages, and making skills training more accessible and affordable. In 2019, we brought in B.C.'s first poverty reduction strategy so we can track progress and make sure our efforts are helping those who need it the most.

Between 2016 and 2022, we helped 163,000 people out of poverty, 50,000 of them children, bringing poverty down by 27.5% for all people and by 36.8% for children.

However, global inflation has made life more expensive across Canada, eating away at our efforts to put money in people's pockets and make life more affordable for families. B.C. is a great place to live, but it's expensive. We know it's especially hard right now for people who are already struggling to make ends meet and that we need to take more action to help people with costs.

That's why we are anchoring our new Poverty Reduction Strategy firmly in the future, with new targets and a new 10-year timeline that will allow government to make generational change to cut income inequality and help people get out and stay out of poverty.

The new strategy started with listening to people: over 10,000 people around the province told us what would make a difference in reducing poverty. It's especially meaningful that over 70% of the people who participated have lived experience of poverty. What we learned from them has been invaluable.

This spring, we passed the Social Development and Poverty Reduction Statutes Amendment Act 2024, paving the way for the new Poverty Reduction Strategy. This new strategy aims to reduce overall poverty by 60%, child poverty by 75%, and senior poverty by 50%.

We know that rising costs are making life more challenging for people. And we know those challenges are most acute for seniors and people who experience discrimination in housing, health care and access to opportunity, including Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, and people with disabilities. That's why we refined and broadened the key populations impacted by poverty and added a poverty reduction target for seniors – so that we are developing solutions designed to help and include those most in need.

Going forward, we will continue to work with Indigenous partners to incorporate Indigenous wellness measures and actions into our work – recognizing that services and supports need to be tailored to

be inclusive of different cultures, experiences and communities. One-size-fits-all solutions don't work for everybody.

The Act we passed this spring didn't just update our poverty reduction targets, it also updated our foundational income and disability assistance laws to give people the stability and financial security they need to return to the workforce, without removing supports for those who cannot.

Too many people in B.C. are just one missed paycheque away from poverty. We're working over the long term to make life more affordable, but we want people to know that government understands that people can't wait, help is needed now. The changes we made to income and disability assistance this spring reflect government's commitment to building a safety net that everyone can depend on – a system of supports that prevents poverty by helping people recover from short-term setbacks and get back on track.

We also know that climate change poses a critical challenge to our efforts to tackle poverty in B.C. Climate-related emergencies disproportionately affect people living in poverty, and as the effects of climate change continue to accelerate, more and more people might enter poverty because of disruption, displacement and increased costs associated that come with climate change.

Over the next 10 years, we will be working hard to implement policies, programs and actions that respond to existing and emerging challenges – policies that prevent poverty, and intervene early to help people in crisis.

One new area of focus in this strategy is food security. Food costs are the highest they have been in over 40 years, and, as a result, people are struggling to afford healthy, nutritious food, even as grocery stores post record profits year after year. So, we're working to protect people from rising food costs now and over the long term.

Our vision is of a province where everyday necessities like food, housing, health care and transportation are accessible and affordable for everyone. We want everyone to have real access to opportunity – including skills training, accommodations, and employment services that help people find good jobs and keep them.

We're working to build a province where everyone feels safe, welcome and included in their communities, where people can find and get the help they need, and where income and disability assistance is accessible and inclusive. We've brought in a lot of change for people but were not satisfied yet and there's more to do.

Together, we can build a province and an economy that works for everyone.



Honourable Sheila Malcolmson
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction



Executive summary

Everyone deserves to live a life of dignity, with the services and supports they need not just to survive, but to thrive. Addressing poverty and inequity is the right thing to do, for people, for families, and for communities. We're stronger when we take care of each other.

Since 2017, the provincial government has been working hard to reduce poverty and make life more affordable for people living in B.C. And we've been making progress.

Until the release of 2019's TogetherBC, B.C. was one of the only provinces in Canada without a poverty reduction strategy. TogetherBC outlined a plan to achieve B.C.'s legislated targets of reducing the poverty rate for all persons by 25% and the child poverty rate by 50% by 2024¹. As of 2022, there were 163,000 fewer

people living in poverty in B.C., including 50,000 fewer children², a reduction in overall poverty by 27.5% and child poverty by 36.8%.

Until 2022, B.C. had surpassed targets for both child poverty and overall poverty, but the most recent federal data shows we are no longer meeting the child poverty target. Rising interest rates, increasing housing costs, and global inflation are putting increased pressure on people's pocketbooks, threatening the progress we have made. Poverty continues to impact far too many people, especially people who face discrimination and exclusion in employment and housing, including Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, 2SLGBTQIA+ community members (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual and the + stands for other identities not included in the acronym), and people with disabilities. So, we must do more.

¹ The 2024 poverty reduction targets are measured based on the 2016 poverty rate, which is calculated using the Market Basket Measure.

² Poverty rates are measured based on 2016 Market Basket Measure levels. Due to a two-year data lag from Statistics Canada, final success in meeting 2024 targets will not be known until 2026.

This new strategy outlines the work we are doing to tackle poverty and build a stronger future for everyone. It highlights the steps that the B.C. government has taken and identifies where more action is needed over the next decade. It includes new, updated 10-year targets to reduce the overall poverty rate by 60%, the child poverty rate by 75% and a new measure to reduce the seniors' poverty rate by 50% (from 2016 levels).

A decade is a long time, so the approaches our government is taking today will need to evolve. There will be challenges that emerge in the years to come that cannot be anticipated by this strategy, nor addressed by policy in advance. That's why for each of the critical action areas discussed in this strategy, we're outlining key priority areas where policy is still being developed and decisions are pending, as we see the results of our current actions and respond to new and emerging drivers of poverty. We're also acknowledging where more work needs to be done to respond to existing needs.

No one knows better how to tackle poverty than people who are living with its impacts today. That's why we based our new strategy on extensive public feedback – one of the most comprehensive engagements in Canada (including distinctions-based engagement with First Nations and Métis Nation British Columbia) – with input from over 10,000 people, more than 70% of whom have lived experience of poverty. This document was shaped by all who shared their strength and their stories with us.

What emerged from those stories was the importance of addressing the systemic, intergenerational and structural factors that lock people into cycles of poverty.

Accordingly, the updated Poverty Reduction Strategy sets out ways government can fix the factors that lead to poverty, and provide accessible pathways to opportunity, through eight critical action areas:

- Upholding Indigenous self-determination
- Preventing poverty
- Meeting basic needs

- Making programs and services better and more accessible
- Updating income assistance and disability assistance
- Opening up access to education and skills training
- Providing effective pathways to employment
- Facilitating greater social inclusion

Indigenous people are disproportionately impacted by poverty due to many complex and interconnected factors, including the historical and ongoing practices and impacts of colonialism. This recognition is foundational to the updated strategy and will help ensure that B.C. is a place where the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples are recognized, and Indigenous Peoples can thrive by leading the way forward. The updated strategy includes actions that were identified by, and for, Indigenous people, reflecting their priorities and unique needs related to poverty reduction, including economic, social and cultural development.

With this updated strategy, we are setting out a long-term strategic vision to break the cycle of poverty and ensure all people living in B.C. are fully included and have equitable access to opportunity.

“ **[we need] ...structural and systemic change to ensure marginalized voices are not only heard, but responded to in a thoughtful manner, and followed up with actions/change** ”

(Participant, Online survey)

British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy – Highlights

We are taking action to create a B.C. where everyone can build a good life, where services and supports are available, equitable, and accessible to people who need them, where people feel connected to their culture and communities, and society is just, inclusive, and thriving. These highlights are a snapshot of some of the actions being taken through B.C.'s Poverty Reduction Strategy to achieve these goals.

Achieving our 10-year vision

1. Acting on urgent and emerging issues such as food security, affordability, the housing crisis, and climate change to meet immediate needs
2. Dismantling long-standing systemic barriers such as racism, discrimination, and inequitable policies that keep people in poverty
3. Working across government to eliminate systemic issues and promote a whole-of-government approach to reduce poverty
4. Honouring our reconciliation commitments by including Indigenous-identified actions and measures in the strategy
5. Building partnerships across sectors and governments, and renewing relationships based on recognition of rights, respect, and co-operation

Accountability through poverty rate targets

Set 10-year poverty reduction targets (based on 2016 poverty levels)

- Reduce overall poverty rate by 60%
- Reduce child poverty rate by 75%
- Reduce seniors' poverty rate by 50%

Preventing poverty

- Delivering more high-quality, affordable, and inclusive child care
- Building more than 20,000 affordable rental homes for people with moderate and low incomes
- Improving access to housing and support for people fleeing violence
- Supporting youth aging out of care by offering rent assistance, mental health and dental support and unconditional income support
- Making it easier for children and youth to connect with mental health and addictions supports
- Helping those who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Meeting basic needs

- Putting money back in people's pockets through tax credits and benefits, and increasing minimum wage annually and indexing it to inflation
- Funding not-for-profit dental clinics to reduce costs for low-income people and families
- Providing free prescription birth control for people in B.C.
- Establishing the Feeding Futures program, the largest investment in school food programs in B.C.'s history
- Supporting children 12 and under by making BC Transit and TransLink service free

Making programs and services better and more accessible

- Expanding Community Integration Services so people in need are connected to services and supports
- Launching the Service BC Mobile Service Centre van to help those in rural and remote communities access ID and services
- Working in partnership to help more people access key identification documents and store them safely
- Reducing barriers to tax filing, so more people can have access to the benefits that are dependent on tax filing

Updating income and disability assistance

- Raising income and disability rates five times since 2017
- Doubling the Senior's Supplement and expanding the benefit to support approximately 85,000 seniors
- Increasing the earnings exemption to the highest in the country, so people can earn more money working
- Reducing barriers, expanding income and asset exemptions, and improving availability of income supplements
- Implementing a Client Needs Assessment for recipients that more accurately reflects clients' employment needs

Providing effective pathways to employment

- Providing a wide range of employment services through 102 WorkBC Centres
- Providing Assistive Technology Services to support people with disabilities to remove barriers to finding and keeping a job
- Offering specialized project-based training and work experience for people who are underrepresented in the workforce

Upholding Indigenous self-determination

- Enshrining in legislation the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and co-developing the Declaration Act Action Plan
- Working together to improve access to programs and services while upholding inherent rights of Indigenous communities to keep Indigenous people safe, healthy, and connected to community

Opening up access to education and skills training

- Waiving tuition fees for all former youth in care to attend free post-secondary education
- Restoring tuition-free Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning
- Eliminating interest on B.C. government student loans
- Helping newcomers work in their fields with faster assessments for internationally trained professionals
- Helping low- and middle- income students with up to \$4,000 a year to pay for tuition, textbooks and other study items

Facilitating greater social inclusion

- Enabling seniors to live longer in their homes by expanding non-medical home support services
- Connecting all homes in B.C. to high-speed internet service by 2027
- Increasing flexible housing options that foster independence and choice for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Launching a trauma-informed, multilingual racist incident help-line for witnesses and victims of hate to report incidents



Our vision for the future includes supports for children and youth

Our Vision: a B.C. where everyone can build a good life

Our vision is of a B.C. where everyone can build a good life, a province where services and supports are available, equitable, and accessible, and where people feel connected to culture and included in community.

To achieve this vision and make B.C. better for people, we will continue strengthening programs and services people rely on, supporting employment and community connections, and fighting inequity, with the goal of reducing poverty.

Together, the actions government is taking now, and the ones being developed to meet emerging challenges, aim to make government work better for people. They are designed to create a province where accidents, illnesses and unexpected financial losses don't lead to lifelong and intergenerational poverty. They also aim to address systemic discrimination, economic marginalization and other factors that make it more difficult for people to access training, secure housing, and find the jobs and opportunities that can provide pathways out of poverty.

Our approach

We are taking a comprehensive approach to help achieve this vision. Our approach includes:

- **Acting on urgent and emerging issues** such as food security, affordability, the housing crisis, and climate change. This will ensure the Poverty Reduction Strategy continues to be relevant and responsive to the most immediate challenges facing people and communities
- **Dismantling long-standing systemic barriers** such as racism, discrimination, and inequitable policies that keep people in poverty. We will focus on reducing equity gaps by ensuring everyone has access to culturally inclusive and relevant services, supports and opportunity
- **Working across government** to eliminate systemic issues such as barriers to access, and improve co-ordination and alignment to promote a whole-of-government approach to reduce poverty
- **Honouring our commitments under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) and the Declaration Act Action Plan (Action Plan Item 4.15)** by including Indigenous-identified actions and measures in the strategy and continuing to advance government's commitment to reconciliation across the Province's poverty reduction efforts
- **Building partnerships** across sectors and with other levels of government to ensure a strategic, co-ordinated, cross-sector approach. We'll also work in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis through renewed relationships based on recognition of rights, respect, and co-operation to support transformative change

Understanding poverty

There are many complex factors that contribute to poverty, and each person in poverty has their own story and experience with personal and community challenges.

B.C. has the most unaffordable housing market in the country, with prices for renting and buying far exceeding average incomes, often leaving little money left over to meet other basic needs. Systemic challenges such as inequity, racism and discrimination perpetuate the cycle of poverty. People in poverty often face barriers to completing high school, transitioning to and completing post-secondary education or skills training, and finding employment, which are predictors of passing poverty from one generation to the next. Too often, they also face barriers when trying to access needed services and supports, including income, employment, mental health and addictions support. Cost of living increases due to global inflation have hit people hard, especially those living on low or fixed incomes. As the cost of living outpaces income growth, poverty deepens.

Impacts of poverty

Poverty has wide-ranging implications for people, communities, and society. Poverty can mean isolation and disconnection from one's community and the labour market. It can mean not having access to healthy and nutritious food, or to a safe and stable home. It can also mean stigma and discrimination, and a lack of choices that other people take for granted: people often feel invisible, shamed and ignored.

For communities, poverty can contribute to high unemployment, low labour market participation, homelessness, and increased crime and victimization rates. For society, it means higher costs to address the consequences of poverty, such as increased use of the health care system, like acute care.

Some populations continue to be disproportionately impacted by poverty, such as Indigenous people, members of racialized communities, people with disabilities, single parents, and single working age adults.

“ **We need programs that better reflect and adapt to the difficulties that the majority of us have been faced with; even those who do not rely on a supplemental income program to survive have felt the rising costs of living.** ”

(Participant, Online survey)

This list is not comprehensive, and the B.C. government continues to work on data quality improvements, such as the Gender and Sex Data Standard, to have a clearer understanding of communities most impacted by poverty. By meeting people where they are and collaborating across government, we can build numerous pathways of support.

B.C.’s updated legislated Poverty Reduction Framework

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act was passed unanimously into law in 2018 and sets a strong legislative framework for B.C.’s poverty reduction strategy, including guiding principles, priority areas, population groups and the B.C. government’s commitment to reconciliation. It also includes key accountability measures, including legislated targets and annual reporting.

It was first-of-its-kind legislation for B.C. when introduced in 2018. Since then, the social and legislative landscape has changed considerably. We updated our poverty reduction legislation in March 2024, ensuring that it remains relevant and responsive.



Poverty has wide-ranging implications



We are setting a new seniors' poverty reduction target

New poverty reduction targets

One of the most important updates we've made to legislation was to deepen and expand B.C.'s poverty reduction targets. We've made progress but we need to continue to build on it.

That's why government set new, 10-year targets (based on 2016 levels) to:

- Reduce overall poverty rate by 60%;
- Reduce child (under 18) poverty rate by 75%; and,
- Reduce seniors' poverty rate by 50% by 2034

These targets are significant, but achievable, and will result in hundreds of thousands fewer people living in poverty.

While the Province provides income and disability assistance for people living off-reserve, the federal government provides funding to First Nations bands to deliver assistance for those living on-reserve. This

can create additional navigation and communication challenges for people moving in and out of community.

Self-determination is part of ensuring services and supports respond to community needs and inclusion of culture, language, and connection to land. There have been calls for more Indigenous-led services and programs, including support for First Nations and Métis communities to build capacity to deliver their own social programs based on their communities' socio-economic, education and health priorities. It is also important to provide services to Indigenous people where they reside. Close to 80% of Indigenous people in B.C. live in urban spaces, away from their home community, so there's a need to promote, develop and deliver more programs and services for the growing number of Indigenous people living in urban areas.

Indigenous experiences of poverty are reflected in more detail in the Indigenous What We Heard Report.

Committing to reducing seniors' poverty with a new poverty reduction target

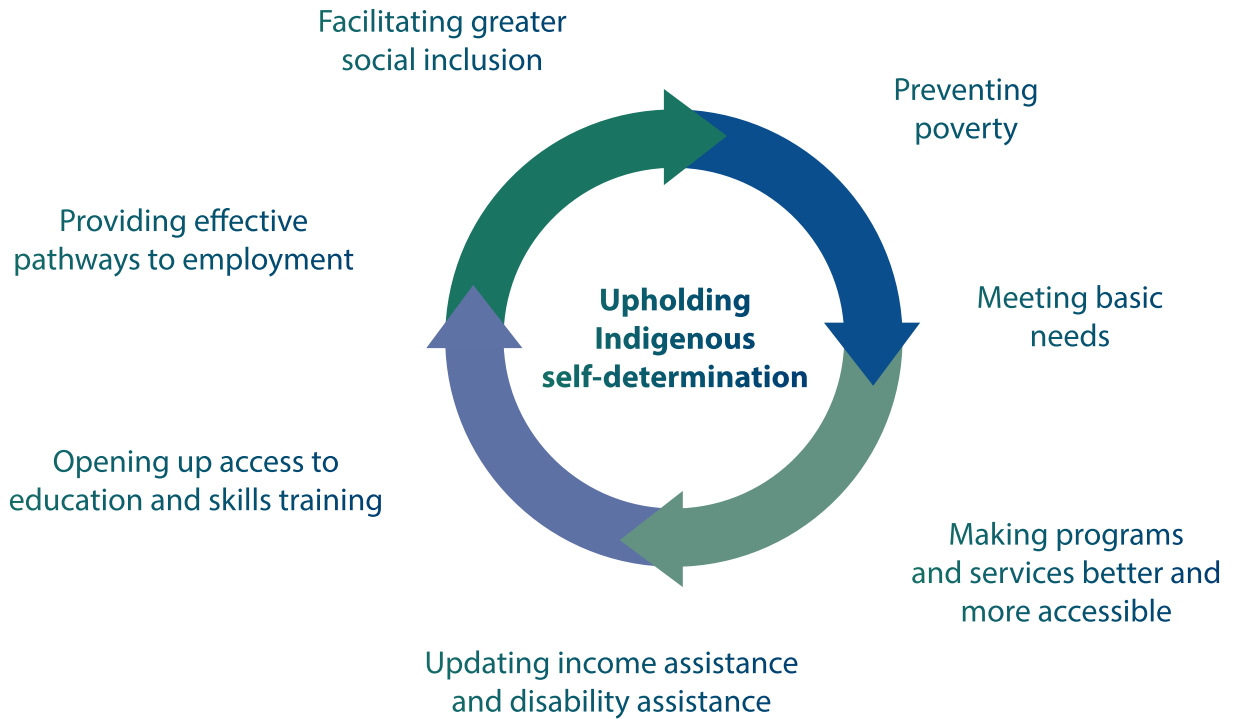
Seniors have been hit especially hard the last few years with rising costs of living. We've seen this through increasing rates of homelessness and food bank use.

Since 2016, seniors have had the lowest reduction in poverty of any age demographic (a reduction of 24.3%), and as of 2022, B.C. has the second-highest rates of seniors' poverty in Canada.

As part of responding to these factors, we are setting a new target to reduce poverty for seniors by 50% by 2034 (with 2016 as the baseline measure).

Actions and investments

Critical action areas to break the cycle of poverty



The critical action areas build upon the previous action areas in TogetherBC, to recognize that a holistic continuum of responses is required to effectively disrupt the cycle of poverty.

In each area, we've highlighted significant actions and investments that B.C. has taken towards our vision. But we also know that continual work is needed over the coming decade to address emerging challenges and further strengthen supports in each of these areas. So, each section also highlights priorities for further action, based on input from people with lived experience of poverty.

Indigenous Peoples' experiences of poverty

Colonial government policies and practices directly harmed First Nations, Métis and Inuit in B.C., and are at the root of the disproportionately high levels of poverty faced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit here. Through the Indian Act, reserve system, residential schools, and the child welfare and legal systems, colonialism caused forced disconnection from land, culture, community and family. These policies and practices, as well as systemic anti-Indigenous racism, continue to harm Indigenous Peoples today. They have also led to significant mistrust of government.

Indigenous people can face additional barriers to exiting poverty, such as limited access to post-secondary education, skills training, and employment, particularly for Indigenous people living on reserve or in rural and remote communities. Racism and discrimination in hiring processes can limit opportunities for on-the-job work experience and prevent Indigenous people from accessing sustainable employment. Even when people gain employment, wages for entry level jobs can be inadequate for people to move out of poverty.

Reconciliation is a guiding principle of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Part of this work includes a commitment to recognize the ongoing impacts of colonialism and ensure that Indigenous experiences and knowledge, and Indigenous-identified actions and progress measures, are embedded throughout the strategy and all of B.C.'s poverty reduction efforts.

Indigenous experiences of poverty are reflected in more detail in the Indigenous What We Heard Report.

“ **Indigenous peoples used to live off the land and had no need for money. They have now been put into a colonial structure in which money is necessary to survive. The land is also being diminished, such as low salmon counts. There are no jobs to make money to afford the resources that Indigenous communities need.** ”

(participant, virtual session)

“ **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.** ”

(participant, Burnaby Neighbourhood House)



Reconciliation is a guiding principle of the Poverty Reduction Strategy

Upholding Indigenous self-determination

Self-determination is part of ensuring services and supports respond to community needs and inclusion of culture, language, and connection to land. The community knows best what the community needs –self-determination is all about supporting Indigenous-led services and programs, including support for First Nations and Métis communities to build capacity to deliver their own social programs based on their communities’ socio-economic, education and health priorities.

How we’re taking action

- Respecting and upholding the inherent rights of Indigenous communities allowing for Nations to create and provide their own child and family services through amendments to Indigenous Self-Government in Child and Family Services Amendment Act (2022) which amends both the Child, Family and Community Service Act and the Adoption Act
 - These amendments make B.C. the first jurisdiction in Canada to recognize an inherent right of self-government, specifically in provincial legislation, which will help keep Indigenous children and youth safely connected to their families, cultures and communities

Upholding the B.C. government’s commitment to reconciliation and the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) was passed into law in 2019, establishing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation in B.C. It requires the B.C. government to bring provincial laws into alignment with the UN Declaration, develop and implement an Action Plan to meet the objectives of the UN Declaration, monitor progress through public annual reporting, and allow flexibility for the Province to enter into agreements with a broader range of Indigenous governments, including joint or consent-based decision-making agreements.

The Declaration Act Action Plan (2022) is a five-year, cross-government action plan that guides the Province’s work to implement the UN Declaration in B.C. It is the first of its kind in Canada, developed in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples, and includes 89 actions in the areas of self-determination and self-government, rights and title, ending anti-Indigenous racism, and enhancing social, cultural and economic well-being for Indigenous Peoples



Partnering with Indigenous People to improve well-being

We are working with First Nations to advance reconciliation, self-determination, and well-being and address the overrepresentation of First Nations people in poverty in B.C with community-led initiatives.

We're taking action by:

- Funding First Nations led projects that support well-being and poverty reduction through the First Nations Well Being Fund
 - This fund supports projects like installing smokehouses in community, regalia-making workshops, and Elders teaching community members about traditional food preparations
- Advancing self-government and self-determination, strong healthy communities, and services that make life better for families through the 25-year gaming revenue-sharing commitment between the provincial government and First Nations reached in 2018
 - This has helped develop community-driven initiatives to address a broad spectrum of issues, including the development of local economies, addressing housing shortages, promoting health and wellness, and preserving and strengthening Indigenous languages
- Partnering with Indigenous non-profit housing providers, First Nations, and other Indigenous organizations to build an additional 1,750 homes for Indigenous people on and off reserve, doubling the number of affordable homes delivered through the Indigenous Housing Fund

Working to end violence against Indigenous women and girls

Violence and related trauma can lead people to losing their homes, their jobs, and their support systems. This loss of resources and stability is a factor in poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Implementing A Path Forward: Priorities and Early Strategies for B.C., which focuses on creating and supporting community-based supports that are culturally safe

- Supporting projects that help prevent and respond to violence impacting Indigenous women and girls with funding through the Path Forward Community Fund, managed by the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres
- Encouraging dialogue about gender-based violence and opportunities for healing through the Giving Voice Initiative (GVI), sponsored by the Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women, which has already supported 187 community-led initiatives
- Taking broad action to address gender-based violence, including through providing stable funding to sexual assault response services, launching a sexual violence prevention campaign at all public post-secondary campuses, making improvements to the Crime Victim Assistance Program, and supporting the creation of transition housing throughout the province

Supporting Indigenous women experiencing homelessness

One of the projects funded under Giving Voice is the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness' (ACEH) "Indigenous Women Experiencing Homelessness" project. Through the project, more than 30 participants, including women, youth, young mothers, women at risk and women living in poverty, engaged in group discussions to help identify barriers and safety challenges, ways to improve engagement, and supports. The outcomes were compiled into a report that was co-developed with participants and helped inform ACEH's programs and services for new housing.

Improving outcomes for Indigenous people involved with the justice system

Involvement in the justice system is a significant risk factor for poverty. Improving outcomes for people with justice system involvement is key to reducing poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Supporting improved outcomes for Indigenous people in their interactions with the justice system by establishing 15 Indigenous Justice Centres (IJC) across B.C.
 - IJCs provide culturally appropriate information, advice, support and representation directly to Indigenous people at the community level
 - There are currently nine physical IJCs and one virtual IJC operating in B.C. , with an additional six to be opened by the end of fiscal year 2024/25

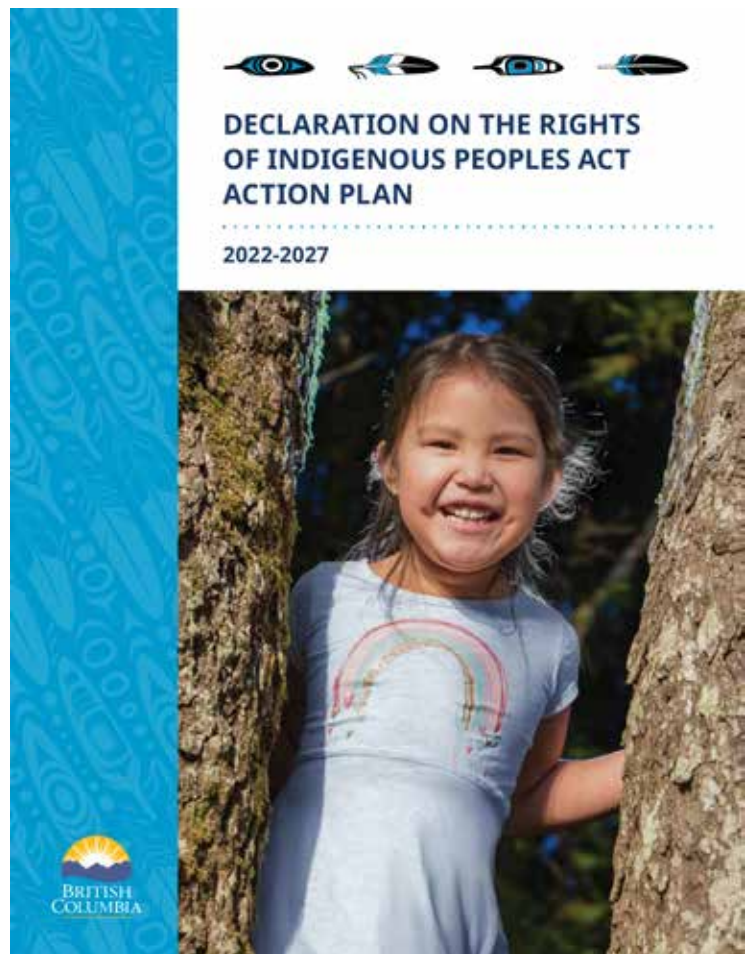
Vision for the next ten years

Our vision, in alignment with the [Declaration Act Action Plan](#), is to move towards a B.C. that honours and upholds Indigenous Peoples' inherent right to self-determination and self-government: where Indigenous communities are self-determining of their distinct social, cultural, and economic needs with a focus on well-being; where systemic barriers are eliminated, and Indigenous people have equitable access to services and supports; where Indigenous people exercise and have full enjoyment of their inherent rights, enabled by reconciliation-based agreements and other constructive arrangements; and, most importantly, where any actions we take are co-developed with Indigenous people.

To put the province on track to meeting this vision, over the next 10 years, government will explore policies, programs and actions that:

- Transform government systems to eliminate systemic barriers, racist and discriminatory practices, and remove colonial policies

- Improve outcomes for Indigenous Peoples by removing systemic barriers in the B.C. Employment and Assistance program
- Make services more equitable and ensure that Indigenous people feel supported and respected when interacting with government
- Improve educational attainment rates for Indigenous learners
- Respond to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report and its 231 Calls for Justice, so that all Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people feel safe and supported
- Advance the co-development of culturally inclusive supports and services that reflect the holistic – social, spiritual, and emotional – priorities of Indigenous people and communities



The cover page of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan

Preventing poverty

“ **Prevention should always be the first line of defense.** ”

(Participant, online survey)

“ **[We need a] better understanding of transitional phases and major life changes.** ”

(Participant, online survey)

By focusing supports on preventing poverty, we can intervene early and connect people to services and supports before poverty becomes entrenched. This includes investing in targeted supports at key life stages and transition points including early childhood, high school completion, youth transitions, people leaving abuse, and people leaving Corrections.

Increased access to affordable child care supports parents to pursue employment or skills training opportunities. Enhanced supports during critical transition points can prevent people from falling through the cracks. Actions to improve high school completion rates are critical to address the substantially lower graduation rates among students from low-income families, which is even lower for Indigenous youth and those involved with child welfare experience.

HOW WE'RE TAKING ACTION

Delivering more high-quality, accessible and affordable child care

Child care is critical to allowing parents to continue their careers, finish their schooling, and access training opportunities. For many families, accessing affordable high-quality, inclusive and culturally relevant child care is the key to exiting poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Continuing to fund high-quality, affordable child care spaces through ChildCareBC:
 - Building quality, inclusive and accessible facilities
 - Lowering fees for families by up to \$900 per month per child at over 130,000 licensed child care spaces, and expanding fee reductions to school-aged child care
 - On track to meet our ChildCareBC \$10 a Day target of 20,000 spaces by 2026
 - Continuing to help low- to middle-income families with additional income-tested support of up to \$1,250 per month per child on top of our other affordability programs, with some families paying even less than \$10 a day
 - Expanding access to training for people to become early learning professionals and providing a wage enhancement so people can continue this important work
 - Supporting Indigenous-led child care through the ChildCareBC New Spaces Fund with the creation of over 2,000 Indigenous-led child care spaces



We are delivering more high-quality, accessible and affordable child care

Preventing homelessness

Becoming unhoused can lead to lifelong and even intergenerational poverty. Keeping people housed is a key means of preventing poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Making it easier to navigate and access services, so people experiencing or at risk of homelessness get the help they need with health, housing, and social supports
- Increasing co-ordinated outreach services to help facilitate new shelter and housing spaces and helping those experiencing or close to experiencing homelessness get the help they need
- Building on the over 19,000 existing shelter spaces, housing units and rent supplements for those experiencing or at greatest risk of homelessness to further support people in communities
- Expanding health and social supports for people sheltering in encampments so they can stay safe and healthy as they transition to housing
- Continuing to open more shelter spaces and supportive housing units to support people in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside
- Reducing and preventing homelessness through the Supported Rent Supplement Program
 - This initiative provides a rental supplement of up to \$600 per month with wraparound health, social, and cultural supports for people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness to enable them to find or keep a stable home in market housing
- Supporting people with developmental disabilities at risk to maintain their housing placements through an emergency support pilot program
- Expanding the use of community integration specialists to work with people in encampments, including conducting street outreach, and connecting people with support

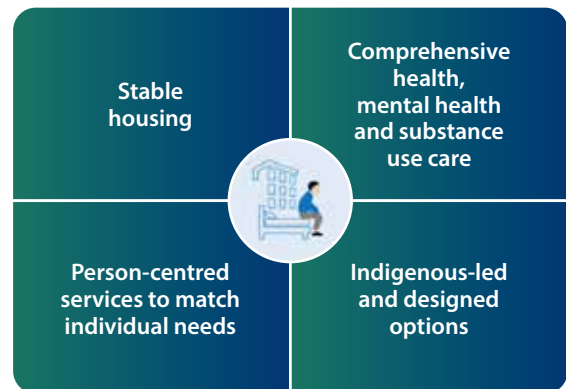
Providing health, mental health and substance use and other supports through complex care housing

Complex care housing is a new approach that provides voluntary supports for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness who have complex mental health or substance use issues.

We know that existing housing programs like supportive housing meet the needs of most people who experience homelessness or housing instability. But a growing number of people in our communities require additional health, mental health, social, and other services to help them find and maintain housing.

So, through Budget 2022, we invested \$164 million over three years to create complex-care housing services for 500 people throughout the province. Budget 2023 built on that investment by committing an additional \$266 million, including \$169 million in capital funding for new, purpose-built homes.

These services help people with the greatest needs get connected to the housing, care and support they need to thrive.



Acting early to improve educational outcomes for children and youth and support their inclusion and mental well-being

Youth who don't complete high school have limited opportunities and are at a much higher risk of experiencing poverty in later life. Early intervention to support youth in finishing school is a critical part of preventing poverty

We're taking action by:

- Continuing to enhance student learning and address long-standing differences in educational outcomes by:
 - Ensuring that boards of education annually report on student outcomes and continuously improve education outcomes for all students
 - Supporting Indigenous learners by amending the School Act to ensure effective relationships between First Nations and boards of education
 - Implementing the First Nations Children and Youth in Care Protocol, in partnership with the First Nations Leadership Council and First Nations Education Steering Committee to ensure youth spending time in care are receiving high-quality education and supports
 - Aligning with a distinctions-based approach and creating safer spaces for Indigenous students by directing superintendents of schools to honour, acknowledge and teach the languages and cultures of First Nation(s) whose territory a school district is located on
 - Working with school districts to ensure First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, heritages, and languages are celebrated and reflected at all levels of the education system
 - Identifying learning difficulties early, using evidence-based literacy screening from kindergarten to Grade 3 and connecting those who need it to extra support sooner
- Making B.C. schools safe and welcoming for students from 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, through ongoing educational and anti-bullying initiatives
- Providing school districts with student affordability funding to help students and families that are financially struggling to thrive in school by assisting with expenses, providing emergency funding,

or helping cover the cost of school field trips or extracurricular activities

- Addressing mental health issues early with Integrated Child and Youth Teams that help children and youth connect with a range of care services when they need it, close to home. Members of these multidisciplinary teams include program leaders, mental health and substance use clinicians, clinical counsellors, Indigenous support positions and peer supports
- Expanding Foundry centres so that more young people can access vital health-care services and address mental health and addictions challenges before they become roadblocks to finishing school and getting a strong start in life, including expanding the Foundry network by an additional 10 centres, as announced in March 2024

Transforming how young people and their families find resources, through Foundry

Foundry is a provincewide network of integrated health and wellness services for people from the ages of 12 to 24, that aims to support young people in living a good life.

This mission was co-created by a diverse group of youth, families, caregivers, staff and service providers throughout the province. The phrase "living a good life" was inspired by First Nations and Métis youth who participated in a Talking Circle with Foundry, and it acknowledges the diverse nature, experiences and perspectives of health and wellness.

Foundry integrates five core services for young people in one convenient location: mental health care, substance use services, physical and sexual health care, youth and family peer supports, and social services.

Government has continued to invest to increase the number of Foundry centres open, from five in 2017-18 to 16 as of April 2024, with 19 more expected to open in the coming years. Addressing the health and support needs of young people quickly and comprehensively is critical to giving them a strong start toward a healthy and successful life.

Supporting youth who have experienced the child protection system as they transition to adulthood

At a time when many young people are living with their parents well into their 20s and beyond because of high housing costs, youth with limited or fractured connections to their families and communities are at high risk of becoming unhoused, especially in the critical years as they first enter adulthood, putting them at risk of chronic or reoccurring homelessness throughout their lives. Addressing these risk factors and giving young people who have experienced the care system a strong start in life is a key component of government's efforts to prevent homelessness and reduce poverty over the long term.

We're taking action by:

- Expanding and enhancing services for young people who have experience in care as they transition to adulthood through the Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment (SAJE). This includes:
 - Delivering an unconditional income support for youth with no limits on earnings so that young people can afford to pursue education, training and new employment opportunities without fear of losing stability or supports
 - Offering rent supplements, SAJE housing, and support agreements to help former youth in care get housed and stay housed
 - Improving supports for transition with guides and navigators that work with young people to plan for their future and help them achieve their goals.
 - Funding life skills courses and cultural learning
 - Improving access to counselling and strengthening medical benefits
- Offering former youth in care, regardless of age, free tuition at all 25 public post-secondary institutions, the Native Education College, and approved union-based training providers through the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program

Providing support to people leaving abuse

Living in poverty can make people more vulnerable to gender-based violence and create barriers to leaving unsafe situations. Experiencing abuse can also disrupt work, schooling, and relationships that people need to thrive, putting people at increased risk of experiencing poverty. Strong supports for people leaving abuse can help prevent poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Preventing, addressing and responding to gender-based violence through cross-government actions outlined in "Safe and Supported: British Columbia's Gender-based Violence Action Plan"
- Investing in legal aid expansion for people experiencing family violence, including legal representation through a new family law clinic model and a significant expansion of legal aid eligibility criteria
 - Developed in partnership with Legal Aid BC and the Centre for Family Equity, the new multidisciplinary, trauma-informed family law clinic model offers in-person and virtual services, and eligible clients receive the legal representation and related services necessary to meaningfully stabilize their legal situation
- Providing trauma informed, culturally safe sexual assault services throughout the province, including 70 new sexual assault programs, 18 of which are Indigenous focused
- Improving access to financial and other benefits available through the Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) by:
 - Expanding eligibility
 - Ensuring the program is delivered in a culturally safe and trauma informed way
 - Adding new offences related to gender-based violence and online sexual exploitation to those covered by CVAP
 - Increasing the rates available for counselling services to support recovery from trauma
- Helping women and their children escape violence without becoming homeless with Women's Transition Housing Fund which operates over 1,500 units of safe housing with more on the way

Supporting women and children experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, violence

The Women's Transition Housing and Supports Program supports women, gender-diverse people and children who are at risk of violence, or who have experienced violence. It provides housing and support services, referrals, and assistance in planning next steps.

Types of housing include transition houses, safe homes, second-stage housing and long-term housing. The programs provide a temporary place to stay, support services, referrals, and assistance in planning next steps.

Helping families through separation

Many children enter poverty when their parents separate or divorce. Single parent households face higher costs and barriers to pursuing economic opportunities.

We're taking action by:

- Expanding services and supports for families going through separation or divorce, including access to legal aid through Legal Aid BC
- Assistance in facilitating child or spousal support payments and case workers through the BC Family Maintenance Agency's mobile app
- Simplifying the collection of cross-border child support payments and streamlining the processing of international child support documents through amendments to the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act
- Designing programs, supports, and benefits such as the B.C. Child Benefit and the B.C. Climate Action Tax Credit to take into account the higher costs facing single-parent families

Improving transitions from corrections to the community

People experiencing poverty are over-represented in correctional facilities and face additional barriers when leaving the system that negatively impact their ability to exit poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Expanding Community Transition Teams to all 10 provincial correctional centres
 - These teams provide comprehensive care co-ordination and peer support to clients with an opioid use disorder. The teams include social workers, nurses, peer support workers and Indigenous patient navigators to provide immediate supports and help establish ongoing supports and services within the community
 - Connecting with these teams can help clients connect to and maintain treatment and other health supports outside of correctional facilities, reducing overdose and death from toxic street drugs
- Completing income assistance application intakes for people who are serving a sentence and are within 4-6 weeks of their discharge date to ensure people have an income when they leave a corrections facility
- Taking a collaborative, integrated approach to case management to combat challenges faced by people facing complex unique social and economic barriers
 - For example, the Downtown Community Court in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside works collaboratively through partnerships between justice, social and health care services, to provide timely, co-ordinated and meaningful case management and response for treatment and sentencing of justice clients
- Reforming the existing justice system, while restoring First Nations legal traditions, systems and structures through the expansion of Indigenous Justice Centres (IJC's)

Reducing the impacts of climate-related emergencies

Climate-related emergencies, such as wildfires, floods, drought and extreme temperatures disproportionately affect people living in poverty, including Indigenous people, people with disabilities and seniors. Disruption and displacement from climate-related emergencies further exacerbate inequities.

We're taking action by:

- Assessing disaster, climate risks, and community resilience among equity-deserving groups, to develop resources and tools designed to help keep people safe
- Requiring local governments and critical infrastructure owners and operators to conduct disaster and climate risk assessments and emergency management plans that consider age, disability, socioeconomic status, or susceptibility to discrimination
- Enhancing the Emergency Support Service so that those who need short-term support have disasters can get the services they need quickly
- Providing free, portable air conditioning units for those vulnerable low-income people

Vision for the next ten years

Our vision is of a B.C. where programs work seamlessly to prevent people from entering poverty, where services and supports are co-ordinated and able to mobilize quickly to support people at crucial life transition points, and to intervene early when people experience crises that threaten their housing, income and stability.

To put the province on track to realizing this vision, over the next 10 years, government will explore policies, programs and actions that prevent poverty and intervene early when life crises occur:

- Deliver access to high-quality, affordable child care for more families
- Enhance public education so more students graduate from high school prepared for further education, skills training, and employment
- Prevent intergenerational poverty and increase opportunities for young people who:

- Experience trauma and other adverse childhood events
- Have grown up in poverty in households that rely on income supports
- Have experienced the child protection system
- Improve the in-care system (i.e., children and youth who are under government care) to make sure that children and youth in foster care or other care arrangements receive the warm, responsive, and supportive care that every child deserves
- Provide timely supports for those who, later in life, experience unemployment, violence, or unexpected health-care crises to build strong, stable lives
- Help people experiencing abuse find safety and stability, and achieve independence from abusers. Possible examples include:
 - Making changes to income and disability assistance regulations to strengthen supports for those experiencing violence who seek assistance, to ensure they get the support they need
 - Addressing policies that disadvantage or erase people from 2SLGBTQIA+ communities
 - Supporting community and Indigenous-led initiatives and programs, and improving the diversity and cultural safety of new and existing programs
- Ensure people have supports in place after leaving health facilities, addictions treatment and correctional facilities so they are not discharged into homelessness
- Address disparities and barriers in the delivery of government services and supports
- Protect people from the impacts of climate change, and support community resilience
- Improve supports for renters, low-income people, and others who are disproportionately impacted by displacement due to extreme weather events

Meeting basic needs

“ ***I am not able to afford food. It's rent and bills or rent and food. I can't have all.*** ”

(Participant, online survey)

“ ***No housing and lack of food creates health issues, both physically and mentally, which then leads to complications in accessing work and allowing those people to become productive members of their communities.*** ”

(Participant, online survey)

“ ***Affordable housing, accessible and effective mental health care. When someone is struggling and their state of mental health is not good, every big task seems daunting. People will do better in job interviews if they were doing better in their daily life with better health and financial stability.*** ”

(Participant, online survey)

Meeting basic needs is a key element of affordability and stability. Food security, safe and affordable housing, and accessible health care are necessary for well-being and ensuring people can move beyond “survival mode” to begin accessing meaningful social and economic opportunities.

With global inflation and increased cost of living, more people are struggling to afford rent and find a safe place to call home. Creating more housing and more supports to reduce homelessness is essential to reduce poverty.

Food banks and other food programs are dealing with historic levels of need. With food inflation at its highest level in over 40 years, people living on low incomes and in poverty are often struggling to afford a healthy and nutritious diet. Many Indigenous people experience food insecurity due to income

inequality as well as the destruction of traditional Indigenous food systems, including hunting, fishing and gathering.

Our vision is of a B.C. where everyone is able to meet their basic needs, a province where people have access to culturally appropriate, safe, trauma-informed services, and aren't excluded from help because of who they are.

HOW WE'RE TAKING ACTION

Making life more affordable and helping put money back into people's pockets

Higher wages and lower costs both help people get out and stay out of poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Increasing the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation. As of June 2024, B.C.'s minimum wage is the highest of all Canadian provinces
- Helping families through the B.C. Family Benefit, including a permanent increase in 2023 to give families with children a 10% monthly increase, and single parents as much as an additional \$500 annually
 - Starting in July 2024, the B.C. Family Benefit will be raised by 25% and income thresholds for receiving the benefit will be increased by 25% for a year, which will benefit approximately 340,000 B.C. families for the upcoming benefit year, an increase of 66,000 families
- Giving renters a tax credit of up to \$400, which could be claimed when people filed their 2023 income tax returns
- Enhancing the Climate Action Tax Credit, increasing the maximum annual payment from \$447 to \$504 for the first adult, from \$223.50 to \$252 for a second adult or first child in a single parent home, and from \$111.50 to \$126 per child
- Removing tolls on B.C. bridges to make life more affordable for people
- Funding children 12 and under to “Get on Board” any BC Transit or TransLink service for free

Climate action tax credit helps people with everyday costs

The B.C. climate action tax credit is a quarterly payment that helps offset the impact of the carbon taxes paid by individuals and families.

In Budget 2023, the Province increased income thresholds and climate action tax credits to support more people. Budget 2024 allocated more than 100% of revenue from the carbon tax increase to the climate action tax credit increases.

A family of four receiving \$890 over the course of the year will see their payments increase to \$1,008 a year, starting in July 2024. Individuals receiving \$447 this year will collect \$504 a year, starting in July 2024.

Approximately 65% of people in B.C. receive money back through the tax credit. The credit will increase annually with the goal of 80% of individuals and families receiving the credit by 2030.

Making housing more secure and more affordable

A stable home is key to building a secure life and pursuing opportunity. Rising housing costs and low levels of housing stability are significant risk factors for poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Delivering a projected 108,000 homes by 2027-28, with the 2023 “Homes for People” plan
 - The plan focuses on delivering housing for low- and middle-income households, using public land to build more homes faster, building more homes closer to transit, and building more affordable housing for renters, families, and students

- Restricting short-term vacation rentals to open up more homes for long-term renters
- Discouraging short-term speculation that contributes to inflated housing costs, using a property flipping tax starting in 2025
- Developing affordable rental housing for families, independent seniors and individuals through the Community Housing Fund (CHF), an investment to build more than 20,000 affordable rental homes for people with moderate and low incomes by 2031-32
 - Since its launch, 12,500 affordable rental homes are already open or underway through the CHF program
- Protecting renters by ending the practice of evicting tenants in purpose-built rentals using the landlord’s use clause, closing loopholes that landlords were using to skirt maximum rent increases, and preventing landlords from evicting tenants to do minor renovations
- Protecting renters and preserving valuable affordable housing through the Rental Protection Fund
- Improving the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program and providing a one-time rental benefit of \$430 to bring relief for families and seniors with low incomes who are receiving a rent subsidy through the Rental Assistance Program and SAFER program
- Helping people sustain their housing when faced with an unanticipated financial challenge through additional funding to BC Rent Bank



Supporting people towards a fresh start with Welcome Home Kits

Everyone deserves to have a safe and welcoming place to come home to.

Welcome Home Kits are designed to support people with a history of homelessness to make a fresh start in their new home. In collaboration with the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC), Welcome Home Kits provide “housewarming” kits to help with start-up supplies as people settle in their new homes.

The kits include items such as kitchen supplies, bedding, and linens, as well as cleaning supplies and other items that can help families and individuals make a new start. In addition to common household items, kits can be supplemented with a mobile phone, a fan for air circulation and gift cards to buy items from home or grocery retailers.

Ensuring safe, supportive and appropriate housing for Indigenous Peoples

- Continuing to engage with First Nations, Métis and other Indigenous partners on the implementation of the “Belonging in B.C.” homelessness plan, as well as improvements to outreach and support services in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver
- Developing a Reconciliation Strategy through BC Housing that focuses on addressing oppressive legacies of colonialism and its present-day impacts on Indigenous Peoples
- Creating more housing on and off reserve through partnerships with First Nations communities, including becoming the first province in Canada to invest provincial housing funds on-reserve, which is federal jurisdiction

Strengthening the health care system

Many people become impoverished after experiencing health problems or developing disabilities. Addressing barriers and disparities in health care is key to addressing poverty.

We’re taking action by:

- Addressing racism in health care to ensure everyone has equal access to appropriate medical care
- Making prescription birth control free for people in B.C.
- Making prescription drugs more affordable for more people by improving and expanding coverage through the Fair Pharmacare Program
- Opening Urgent Primary Care Centres, which have helped over 2.3 million people access medical care since 2018 and adding hundreds of new family doctors to our medical system
- Allowing for pharmacists to prescribe medications like birth control, or medications for minor ailments to make accessing medical care easier and reduce waits for family doctors or walk-in clinics
- Improving mental health and addictions care including expanding substance-use treatment and recovery beds, and supporting Indigenous-led treatment, recovery and aftercare services
- Ensuring that adult bed-based mental health treatment and recovery services remain open and accessible to people who need them, regardless of cost, through a \$117-million investment, supporting more than 2,200 community mental-health and substance-use treatment beds at more than 300 health authority and community care facilities
 - Of this, \$60.5 million over three years includes an increase to the per diem rates at registered mental-health and substance-use homes. The daily rate changes, paid to facilities on behalf of eligible people receiving income and disability assistance, came into effect June 1, 2024. This rate change builds on a 2019 increase, which was the first in 10 years
- Funding not-for-profit dental clinics to provide dental treatment at a reduced cost to low-income individuals and families
- Supporting seniors to remain independent by investing in home care and community-based services like grocery shopping and yardwork

Improving food security

Access to affordable, fresh, healthy food is critical to preventing poverty and helping people experiencing it. Rising grocery prices are putting pressure on many families.

We're taking action by:

- Providing more children and youth with access to healthy meals and snacks at school through the Feeding Futures program, including the largest investment in school food programs in the province's history with approximately 90% of schools in the province now offering a school food program
- Providing unprecedented financial support to food banks and other hunger relief agencies to help meet rising demand throughout B.C. among families and people
- Enhancing equitable participation of Indigenous people in the agriculture and food sector and supporting their economic development objectives through the Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food
- Developing, expanding, and strengthening Indigenous food systems in partnership with New Relationship Trust through the Indigenous Food Security and Sovereignty Grant program

Supporting Community Food Access

With food costs at their highest levels in over 40 years, people are struggling to afford healthy, nutritious food for themselves and their families. Food banks and other food programs are dealing with historic levels of need, and since 2019, total visits to food banks have increased by 57%. B.C. is making historic investments to strengthen food banks, food distribution and food access by:

- Working with Food Banks BC to address urgent food security needs throughout B.C., including meeting unprecedented food bank demand and addressing food access challenges faced by northern communities and people affected by emergency events, such as wildfires and floods
- Expanding United Way BC's Regional Community Food Hub network by adding more food hubs throughout B.C., including in Northern B.C. and Southern Vancouver Island
 - The total number of food hubs will increase from 23 in 2023 to 40 by 2028
 - Community food hubs provide access to food, food literacy and wellness programming, together with wraparound services such as mental health support, employment services, child care and more
- Supporting communities with critical infrastructure (e.g., cold food storage, kitchen improvements and transportation) including:
 - \$14 million for local organizations and Indigenous communities through the Critical Food Infrastructure Grant (administered by United Way)
 - \$15 million to First Nations Well Being Fund, which supports a significant number of food security initiatives including gardens, greenhouses, smokehouses, and traditional food harvesting
 - \$7 million to Loaves and Fishes to build a new food recovery and distribution warehouse
 - Supporting a range of local organization to improve their infrastructure including the Victoria Community Food Hub Society and Mustard Seed Food Bank, Britannia Community Services in East Vancouver, Langley Meals on Wheels and Cloverdale Community Kitchen

These investments are helping communities and strengthening B.C.'s food access system. We are continuing to work in collaboration across sectors to make sure that everyone has access to nutritious, affordable food and to support a co-ordinated provincial approach to B.C.'s immediate and longer-term food security needs.

Working with the federal government towards a national school food program

The federal government has announced that it will launch a national school food program through a \$1-billion investment over five years. The program is anticipated to be in place for the 2024-2025 school year.

The Province will work in collaboration with the federal government to support implementation of the program, including augmenting existing policies and programs to make sure that all children have the nutrition they need thrive.



We are taking action to improve food security

Building and expanding local school food programs through Feeding Futures

Through a commitment of \$214 million over three years beginning in 2023, B.C. has been ensuring children and youth have access to healthy meals and snacks at school through Feeding Futures, which invests in building and expanding local school food programs and supports families with rising food costs.

Feeding Futures provides dedicated, predictable funding that school districts can rely on to create or expand existing school food programs to make sure that all students have access to food in a way that reduces stigma.

Through Feeding Futures, we're establishing provincial consistency while recognizing flexibility for local communities, improving affordability for families, prioritizing locally produced food, and ensuring that students are properly fed for learning

Supporting Indigenous food sovereignty

B.C. is improving access to culturally important food and supporting Indigenous food sovereignty by:

- Funding Victoria Foundation's Food Security Provincial Initiatives Fund focused on Indigenous food security and food sovereignty projects throughout B.C.
- Funding innovative local organizations working to improve food access for diverse communities such as Immigrant Link Centre Society and the Support Network for Indigenous Women and Women of Colour
- Enhancing equitable participation of Indigenous people in the agriculture and food sector and supporting their economic development objectives through the Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food
- Developing, expanding, and strengthening Indigenous food systems in partnership with New Relationship Trust through the Indigenous Food Security and Sovereignty Grant program

Vision for the next ten years

Our vision is of a B.C. where everyday necessities like food, housing, health care and transportation are accessible and affordable for people, and where help is available quickly, without shame and stigma, for all those who need support.

To put the province on track to realizing this vision, over the next 10 years, government will explore policies, programs and actions that:

- Make housing more secure and affordable. Possible examples include:
 - Delivering new, affordable homes, including homes for people with middle incomes
 - Providing targeted supports that tackle homelessness and help people with complex needs to retain their housing

- Improving rental housing laws
- Building more purpose-built rentals by addressing barriers that disincentivize and slow down the creation of new, affordable homes
- Tackling flipping, housing speculation and other practices that drive up housing costs
- Make working safer, fairer, and more rewarding, including by:
 - Protecting workers by ensuring laws, policies and regulations keep pace with changes in the workplace
 - Investing in initiatives that create more high-paying jobs all over the province
 - Addressing emerging trends that threaten jobs, wages, and worker safety
 - Continuing to tie minimum wage increases to the rate of inflation, this year and every year
- Build on recent historic investments in food security, including by:
 - Strengthening partnerships with food producers, grocery stores, food banks, schools, and non-profits, to ensure that everyone has dignified access to food
 - Working with Indigenous partners to support Indigenous food security and sovereignty and improve food access and affordability in rural and remote communities
 - Enhancing provincewide infrastructure and co-ordination to better support the access and distribution of food (e.g., through non-profit community food hubs and regional distribution centres)
 - Creating a provincial advisory body for government on food security
- Continue to support people by working to lower everyday costs on essentials like energy, car insurance, child care, and food.
- Make prescription drugs and medical supplies more affordable
- Increase the stability and sustainability of care and community support for adults with developmental disabilities, including by:
 - Ensuring rates for home shares and other critical supports are fair and sustainable as costs rise over the long term
 - Co-developing approaches to community living with people with disabilities and their families
- Support seniors to remain independent. Possible examples include:
 - Regularly reviewing the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program, Senior's Supplement and other targeted supports for seniors to ensure they are responsive to needs and keep pace with rising costs
 - Protecting seniors who are long-term renters from being targeted for unfair evictions.
- Strengthen the health care system, making it faster and easier for people to get the care they need, including by:
 - Ensuring that Indigenous-led and culturally appropriate services and supports are available and accessible
 - Improving how people access medical equipment and health services, especially for seniors and people with disabilities who pay out of pocket for extended health benefits
 - Addressing discrimination and stigma within the health care system, including by updating health systems and programs to be respectful and inclusive of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, including Two-Spirit people, queer people and transgender people

Making programs and services better and more accessible

“ ***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.*** ”

(Policy Brief Submission, Women Transforming Cities)

“ ***The paperwork and bureaucratic process was very difficult to navigate, questions go unanswered as wait times to talk to someone at the ministry are very long, even first thing in the morning.*** ”

(Participant, online survey)

“ ***Mental health is a waitlist. When a person needs help, they need crisis help in person. Ongoing support is lacking.*** ”

(Participant, online survey)

Accessing supports can often be difficult for those who need them the most, due to a lack of awareness or barriers to access. To address this, we are working to decrease system complexity, increase co-ordination and information sharing across programs, and eliminate systemic barriers. This includes ensuring that people have access to basic resources including tax filing and personal identification. We are also identifying how to better promote programs so that people know what services and supports are available. By making programs less complicated and easier to access, we can support people before they are in crisis, and prevent them from falling further into poverty.

HOW WE'RE TAKING ACTION

Helping people access identification documents (ID)

Without ID, people can struggle to access the full scope of services and supports available. Helping people get their ID is part of making sure people can get their needs met quickly.

We're taking action by:

- Helping people who face high barriers get the ID they need, including refugees, people leaving correctional facilities, Indigenous people and people who are homeless or precariously housed
- Assisting with lost or stolen ID, which is especially prevalent amongst those who are homeless or precariously housed, as they are at higher risk of victimization
- Increasing access to important government services by investing in technology that makes it easier for people to access services from anywhere, like the Service BC app
- Creating a Service BC Mobile Service Centre van, to issue BCID cards to people who have been evacuated from, or who have lost, their homes due to a disaster
- Working in partnership with community organizations to help more people access key ID like birth certificates, health-care cards and Service BC cards and store them safely



The Mobile Outreach Service BC van makes services more accessible

Service BC van supports communities

In February 2024, B.C.'s first mobile service centre visited the Ukrainian Church in New Westminster to assist with a recent increase in Ukrainian newcomers to the community. Services were offered through the new Service BC van, including assistance with government-issued ID and signing up for other essential government services.

During a second visit in March, a Ukrainian client who had attended the van's first visit, returned to the Ukrainian Church with a friend who also recently arrived in B.C. She said she knew her friend would be able to access the information needed to get settled in her new Canadian home.

The van was tested in communities like Courtenay, Nanaimo and Cowichan and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. During a visit to one remote community, the Service BC team helped several people obtain their first photo-ID in years. One young man received his very first government ID, needed to apply for student aid to go to school, with the goal to apply for work with BC Ferries.

Reducing barriers to tax filing

Many benefits are means-tested and are delivered through the tax system. People who don't file their taxes may be left out of important programs and supports.

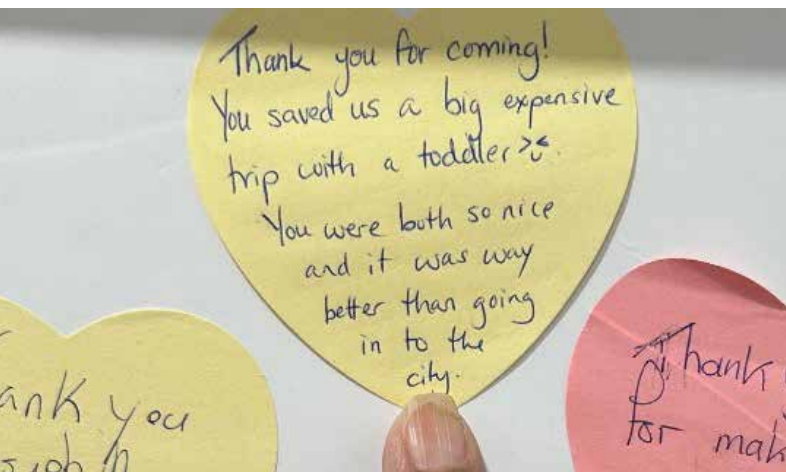
We're taking action by:

- Supporting organizations that help people file taxes, improving access to financial benefits such as tax credits, which are only accessible by filing an income tax return
- Advocating to the federal government to reduce barriers to accessing supports by:
 - Improving transitions between provincial income and disability assistance and federal programs so people do not face gaps in their income, for example when seniors leave provincial supports at age 65 and apply for Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, or Guaranteed Income Supplement
 - Making tax filing automatic so it is easier for people to receive the benefits they're eligible for

Helping people access all their benefits

Since 2018, the B.C. government has provided funding to support the Tax AID program – an initiative through Disability Alliance BC that assists people receiving the Persons with Disabilities and Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers benefits to file their income taxes.

In collaboration with the Vancouver Foundation, the Access to Benefits Advocacy Fund (ABAF) provides multi-year program funding to advocacy organizations to help recipients of income and disability assistance access unclaimed benefits, such as Canada Pension Plan Disability, Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement and any other federal or provincial benefits they may be eligible for. In addition, advocacy organizations assist recipients with filing income tax, obtaining identification, etc., including registering for the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), once implemented.



We're helping people access services in their communities

Helping people access benefits

Benefits are only helpful if people know how to access and navigate them. Confusing and complicated benefits policies and processes can put up barriers to benefits for those who need them the most.

We're taking action by:

- Expanding outreach support, to make sure people know what help is available
- Providing additional benefit navigation support for underserved individuals and key populations through Community Integration Services
 - Community integration specialists meet people where they are and connect people to available services and supports
 - Part of this expansion includes partnering with friendship centres to offer improved access to community integration specialists
- Modernizing services through Service BC to provide increased consistency and access, whether online, by phone, in person or through a community visit with the mobile Service BC van
- Continuing to engage with external partners to better promote available programs and services

Community integration (CI) specialist success story

An immigrant, single-parent mother with five children arrived in Canada after walking across the border from USA. The family was at risk of homelessness due to delays with getting some required legal documents.

The CI specialists helped the family apply for income assistance and was able to approve their application, and also assisted the family with getting their cheques cashed by driving them to the bank. The family had to stay at a hotel while they searched for housing. The CI specialists worked with numerous service providers and settlement agencies, including contacting over 100 landlords on behalf of the family, to help locate housing for the family. Once they were able to secure housing, they helped the family move into their new home and took the family to Walmart so they could purchase necessities for their first night in their new home.

The CI specialists have continued to work with this family, including helping the family enrol the younger children in school.



A look at the interior of the mobile Service BC van

Working across ministries to support a family in need

A 19-year-old was living in a hotel with their parent and two siblings after being evicted from their home. A CI specialist helped the individual complete their intake application for income assistance, and working with a community partner, was able to help the family find housing.

During the first few months of working with the 19-year-old, they spoke very little. The applicant's parent advised the CI specialist that they thought their child was severely autistic as they rarely spoke and hadn't left their home in over two years.

After several months, the 19-year-old reached out to the CI specialist, asking to meet. At the meeting, they opened up about abuse in the home, alcoholism, and days without food. They shared that the situation at home was so bad that they had lost the confidence to speak or to leave home.

The CI specialists and Ministry of Child and Family Development staff worked together to offer supports and assistance over the next few months. The young, almost non-verbal person transformed into a strong young person who now speaks of their hopes and dreams with enthusiasm. They are intelligent and eager to learn and have expressed a desire to become an entrepreneur in the tech industry as they love computers. They have secured a part time job, are going to school full time and want to go to college after high school.

Streamlining access to supports and services

- Exploring new technology that allows users to receive, store and present digital credentials (for example, licences and identities) to minimize people having to re-verify their identity and provide duplicative information
- Providing support to people who face barriers accessing government services in-person, through a new Service BC Mobile Service Centre van
 - The service centre van is equipped to provide the majority of the over 300 government services available in any Service BC office, including renewing drivers' licences and issuing BCID cards
 - The van can also be mobilized to provide additional supports to people who have been evacuated from, or who have lost, their homes due to a disaster, and who may need to replace vital documents and pieces of ID

Vision for the next ten years

Our vision is of a province where it's easy for people to find and get the help they need, and where programs, services and supports are provided in a way that is inclusive, accessible and stigma free.

To put the province on track to realize this vision, over the next ten years government will explore policies, programs and actions that:

- Simplify and streamline program information and services
- Translate materials and information into more languages
- Reduce the time and stress of applying to multiple programs
- Use technology to ensure people get all the benefits they are entitled to through automatic enrolment, data sharing, and cross-program navigation
- Align eligibility requirements and application processes across programs where it will improve the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of services and supports
- Ensure people get the essential supports they need to help break the cycle of poverty, like improving access to ID and tax filing, including scaling up existing programs that have been shown to be effective, so they are available to more people throughout B.C.
- Press the federal government to improve transitions between provincial income and disability assistance and federal programs for people moving on and off reserve

Updating income assistance and disability assistance

The BC Employment and Assistance (BCEA) program serves a core poverty reduction function for government by providing income and disability assistance to eligible people. Yet, until recently, the legislation governing the program hadn't been comprehensively updated since 2002. So, in March 2024,

the Province amended the legislation that governs the BCEA program to better align it with B.C.'s poverty reduction and reconciliation objectives.

Since the first poverty reduction strategy was released in 2019, B.C. has made important changes to reduce barriers and improve outcomes for recipients of assistance. Government will continue building on the most recent legislative, regulatory and policy changes to the BCEA program to further reduce barriers and simplify the program to better support people on assistance. The Province is committed to creating a more flexible program that focuses on meeting people's needs, supports people towards employment and considers the unique needs of Indigenous people and other equity deserving groups. These changes respond to engagement feedback, begin to align the BCEA program with the Declaration Act, and address critical action areas identified throughout this strategy.

“ ***[D]espite the recent increases in PWD and income assistance rates, it is still not enough money to live on, with the average rent being \$1,200 a month for a bachelor suite alone this is still not enough money to pay rent, bills and provide the basic needs. In order to survive, a dramatic increase in support money needs to happen.*** ”

(Participant, online survey)

“ ***There is a fear of accepting part-time or seasonal employment because of the difficulty of getting benefits back if you don't qualify for EI, so some recipients opt not to work. People get punished for working: They take a summer job, and then can't pay rent by October.*** ”

(Participant, online survey)

HOW WE'RE TAKING ACTION

Changing our approach to employment planning

Many people face real barriers to employment or employability. They have complex needs and are unable to meet the goal of employment because they aren't receiving the help they need to overcome barriers. Effectively supporting people on the continuum to employment means meeting people where they are with the supports they need. That's why we're changing our approach to employment planning, to provide more effective pathways to education and employment, and promote meaningful social inclusion.

We are replacing the employment plan with a new client needs assessment, to help us better understand people's needs and build an employability plan that connects them with the supports they need to succeed.

For people who have barriers to employment, the assessment will identify options to become more employment ready. These could be referrals to training, a financial literacy program, or volunteer work. We will support and guide people through the needs assessment, providing more individualized service. The change is intended to reduce stress, lead to focused assessments, and help develop more meaningful employability plans – all of which lead to improved outcomes. The approach will be phased in starting in summer 2024.

We are also removing penalties for people who quit or get fired from a job, which can delay them from receiving the assistance they need, and send them deeper into crisis. We will instead support people receiving assistance to have more confidence to try employment again, knowing that if they are unsuccessful, their assistance will not be denied or reduced when reapplying.

Strengthening income and disability assistance

Direct income supports such as income and disability assistance have a significant impact on both the breadth and depth of poverty in B.C. Making these programs fairer and more responsive is key to addressing poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Raising income and disability assistance rates five times since 2017, including a \$175 increase in 2021, the largest ever permanent increase, and a \$125 increase to the shelter rate in 2023 – the first increase to the shelter rate since 2007
- Doubling the Senior's Supplement – the first increase since it was introduced in 1987 – and expanding the benefit to support approximately 85,000 seniors
- Increasing the earnings exemption three times, to among the highest in the country, so people on assistance can earn more money from working
 - Since 2017, maximum exemptions have been raised from \$200 to \$600 per month for a single person on income assistance, from \$9,600 to \$16,200 a year for a single person with the Persons with Disabilities designation, and from \$12,000 to \$19,440 a year for a family with two adults where only one person has the Persons with Disabilities designation
- Expanding income and assets exemptions, including:
 - Exempting Indigenous financial settlement payments so people can keep the compensation they are paid as restitution for historical wrongs
 - Exempting temporary payments intended to help recipients during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the global affordability crisis
- Expanding eligibility for some supplements, including a Housing Stability Supplement that can help keep people housed during times of transition, such as when someone in the family is hospitalized or in residential addiction treatment

Improving fairness and reducing barriers to income and disability assistance

It's important for income and disability assistance to be delivered fairly and without barriers that reduce accessibility for those most in need.

We're taking action by:

- Extending the deadline for appealing ministry decisions on eligibility to allow more time for review and to secure advocacy support
- Making the system less punitive and more inclusive, including by removing financial penalties for clients who make mistakes when filling out forms and filing reports
- Revising and updating reporting requirements to create more flexibility
- Extending access to legal support for family maintenance until court proceedings are complete, to allow families to obtain spousal and child support they are entitled to, even if they become ineligible for assistance

Committing to reconciliation

Creating the legislative framework for Indigenous Governing Bodies to enter into agreements with the Province is part of aligning the BC Employment and Assistance program's Acts and regulations with the Declaration Act.

We're taking action by:

- Providing authority for the Minister to enter into joint agreements with Indigenous Governing Bodies for decisions under the BCEA program's Acts and regulations
- Recognizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples to self-government and self-determination with a legislated principle statement

Vision for the next ten years

Our vision is of a province where income and disability assistance is accessible, inclusive, and stigma-free, as well as effective at helping people stabilize and meet their basic needs so they have the baseline resources required to access opportunities and viable routes out of poverty.

Community engagement reinforced that more work is needed to shift the income and disability assistance system from payer of last resort to one that better supports poverty reduction. We will continue to look at improvements to ensure people receive the income assistance they need, while being supported toward meaningful employment and community connection.

To put the province on track to realize this vision, over the next 10 years, government will explore policies, programs and actions that:

- Improve direct income supports like income and disability assistance. Possible examples include:
 - Regularly reviewing rates and supplements in response to rising costs and emerging needs
 - Considering the case for indexing rates to inflation
 - Making it easier for people to get help before they are in absolute crisis
 - Removing stigma and shame from the system so that people ask for and get help quickly, before they lose homes, jobs and training opportunities
 - Revising policies where they are found to be discriminatory or exclusionary, or where they impact the safety and security of people needing supports
 - Considering income exemptions that could stack benefits and help people retain more income
 - Examples could include changing the rules around spousal income or exempting federal benefits like Employment Insurance from income
 - Improving eligibility criteria to be more responsive to people in crisis

- Piloting new and innovative ways to support people, through projects like:
 - Considering new approaches to supporting people who leave income assistance for employment to help them stay employed long-term
 - Testing different ways to provide shelter supports to reduce homelessness
 - Looking at new supports for dependent youth to help break intergenerational dependence on income assistance
- Deliver better and more culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous Peoples. Possible examples include:
 - Redesigning benefits to better support people engaging in seasonal, traditional work such as hunting and fishing
 - Recognizing the importance of cultural practices and community connections for Indigenous people by helping people access clothing and travel to important community events
 - Simplifying the application process for provincial services for Indigenous people with disability designations from on-reserve and treaty programs
- Get people the support they need through collaboration with the federal government including by:
 - Supporting the implementation of the Canada Disability Benefit
 - Supporting implementation of the Canada Dental Care Plan
- Continue to align exemptions so people don't lose income for taking actions and participating in programs that make them more resilient and independent, such as:
 - Housing agreements delivered through the Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment (SAJE) that are designed to help keep young people with experience of government care from becoming unhoused
 - Income earned by dependent children, which helps them develop valuable work experience and retain their own money
 - Supports aimed at reducing hardships for recipients of income and disability assistance for injury-related costs, such as money received that helps pay for medical equipment, medical treatment and home care services
 - Training and educational financial supports for programs that are not eligible for student loans, so assistance recipients can participate in more employment programs and build capacity for gainful employment
- Expand health supplements and supports, for example:
 - Adding more medical breathing devices to the list of available health supplements
 - Recognizing more clinical assessors to improve timely access to health care



We are reducing barriers to income and disability assistance

Opening up access to education and skills training

Breaking the cycle of poverty means ensuring opportunities are within reach. Education and skills training can be an important pathway out of poverty, by equipping people with the skills and credentials needed to secure good-paying jobs and open the door for more opportunities.

HOW WE'RE TAKING ACTION

Helping students access the skills and training they need to find meaningful employment

We're providing support to students to make it easier and more affordable to access the training needed to get the jobs they want.

We're taking action by:

- Helping low- and middle-income students with up to \$4,000 a year to pay for tuition, textbooks and other items needed for their program of study, through the B.C. Access Grant
 - More than 71,000 have received over \$129 million in funding since 2019
- Restoring tuition-free Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning so people can upgrade their skills to get into post-secondary programming or complete their high school diplomas
- Investing in open education resources including more free textbooks, which has saved students millions of dollars collectively
- Eliminating interest on B.C. government student loans, resulting in debt relief for more than 200,000 people – totaling approximately \$40 million since 2019
- Increasing weekly student loan maximums from \$110 to \$220 per week for single students and from \$140 to \$280 per week for students with dependents, and made repayment terms more flexible
- Providing funding for community-based skills training and education programs that lead to employment or further education, as part of Declaration Act Action Plan Item 4.41, through the Indigenous Skills Training and Education program

- Upgrading, essential skills, language revitalization, guardianship, occupational-specific training, post-secondary education and trades training can all be eligible, including cultural supports to support participant success

Creating jobs and training people through the StrongerBC: Future Ready Action Plan

We're building ways out of poverty by creating well-paying jobs and access to in-demand training that opens up opportunities for better paid employment.

We're taking action by:

- Addressing workforce priorities for Indigenous people through expanded post-secondary training and labour-market opportunities designed to boost the participation and employment security of Indigenous Peoples across the B.C. economy through an investment of nearly \$100 million
- Making it easier for newcomers to work in their chosen careers by streamlining the process for internationally trained professionals to get their credentials recognized
- Providing a future-skills grant of up to \$3,500 to cover the costs of tuition for eligible short-term skills training for in-demand jobs delivered by public post-secondary institutions
- Expanding work-integrated learning opportunities at B.C.'s public post-secondary institutions, helping more students access co-op education, internships, clinical placements, service learning and practicums
- Expanding the Skills Training for Employment program, which provides wraparound supports to assist people with multiple barriers to gain relevant skills for employment
 - Multiple barriers includes people with mental health challenges, housing instability, addictions, lack of social networks, limited literacy skills and those with lack of Canadian work experience
 - Support includes employment assistance, counselling, mentoring, job placements, disability support, Indigenous cultural supports, child care, housing and other tailored individual supports



We're taking action to support skills training for meaningful employment

Vision for the next ten years

Our vision is of a province where people are able to access and afford post-secondary and skills training so they can build the skills they need to access good employment opportunities.

To put the province on track to realize this vision, over the next 10 years, government will explore policies, programs and actions that:

- Make education more affordable and accessible so that more people can access post-secondary education, train for future jobs, and help employers find the skilled people they need to support a thriving and innovative economy
- Meet the labour needs and priorities of First Nations and other Indigenous Governing Bodies
- Remove systemic barriers that prevent people from pursuing training and joining the workforce
- Make skills training and education and workplaces more culturally safe and inclusive so that no one is shut out of opportunities because of racism or other forms of hatred
- Address disparities in outcomes across education, training and workforce participation, in particular for Indigenous Peoples and people with disabilities
- Create partnerships with educational providers to improve supports and accommodations for people with disabilities to make skills training and education more inclusive

Providing effective pathways to employment

“ *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.* ”

(Self-convening group participant, Burnaby Neighbourhood House Community Connections)

“ *I have been very fortun[at]e to receive the help from the ministry since August last year. As a domestic violence survivor, this has been my only source of income. In addition, the ministry helped to get my SPEI [Single Parent Employment Initiative] with WorkBC. I'm getting the support needed for me to improve my life and my kid's life. But I wish more people could have access to [these] programs as well. People doesn't know what supporting tools are here.* ”

(Participant, online survey)

People say they feel better off when they have a job and the feeling of belonging and community connection they get from work and volunteering. Part of creating a strong and inclusive B.C. is facilitating opportunities for people to work, participate in their community, earn money, and create a stable and secure life for themselves.

B.C. has a strong foundation of employment supports and services that help reduce poverty, however, gaps still remain.

There is still work to do to improve opportunities and outcomes for people who experience barriers to training and employment, including people with disabilities, people with mental health and substance use challenges, people with histories of trauma, and people with justice system involvement – especially where they have multiple intersecting identity factors that put them at greater risk of experiencing discrimination and stigma.

HOW WE'RE TAKING ACTION

Expanding employment supports and eligibility through WorkBC employment services

Our WorkBC centres help people who are unemployed, underemployed or in a job where their hours are not stable, or their job is not in line with their skills. The

program helps people prepare for the workforce, find better work or upgrade their skills to access employment opportunities. Expanding and improving these supports is an important way we're offering people accessible pathways out of poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Providing a wide range of employment services through 102 WorkBC centres provincewide, including job counselling, workshops, resumé support, skills training, financial supports and on-the-job support
- Expanding eligibility for wage subsidies, personal counselling and occupational skills training services to support people to prepare for and gain the skills they need for good jobs
- Increasing the allowable training duration for occupational skills training to up to two years
- Improving financial supports so that people can afford to participate in skills training and other job creation and skills training programs, and have the supports they need to learn
- Making WorkBC services available to a broader range of people, like refugee claimants



We are expanding employment supports and eligibility

Refining services and supports to meet the needs of job seekers

Making programs and supports work better for people, including those facing multiple and complex barriers to employment, is key to offering everyone accessible pathways out of poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Improving Online Employment Services technology to improve access to WorkBC Centre services
- Providing Assistive Technology Services (assistive devices, equipment and modifications) to support people with disabilities to reduce or remove barriers they face in finding or keeping a job
- Offering specialized Community and Employer Partnership project-based training and work experience opportunities for people who are underrepresented in the workforce
- Making strategic investments to support people to access cohort-based skills training to get life skills supports along with skills training in a variety of sectors, including trades and construction, clean economy and technology
- Pursuing additional measures to support people to find and retain employment, including targeted supports for key groups, like long-term recipients of income assistance
- Encouraging and supporting employers to hire and accommodate people with disabilities
- Supporting employers to create more inclusive work opportunities, so they can better support people who face barriers to employment by helping them successfully connect to the labour market and gain workplace skills that will help them thrive in the workplace

Increasing access to low-barrier employment

Innovative programs that help people facing multiple barriers develop job readiness are a key stepping-stone to the labour market.

We're taking action by:

- Investing in provincewide partnership programs to learn new and better ways of providing employment services to a wide variety of people facing complex challenges, including people with disabilities, those in recovery centres, youth facing mental health challenges, individuals who have experienced violence, and people in racialized communities
- Funding programs that support people living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside with significant barriers to employment, such as:
 - Lookout's Ethical Employment Program (LEEP), an employment program which integrates supportive housing with comprehensive employment services

Lookout Ethical Employment Program success story

While staying at Lookout Housing and Health Society, Michael decided to stop misusing alcohol and make changes in his life. In the Lookout Ethical Employment Program (LEEP), designed to meet the needs of Downtown Eastside community members facing barriers to employment, Michael got one-on-one coaching, pre-employment support and training in his own residence. And now he has a permanent, satisfying job.

"The road that I was going down, I didn't think I'd make it this far but I wanted to succeed in life just like everyone else. I learned a lot from LEEP. I have greater days because of this program and it has made me stronger." – Michael





We are supporting skills training to help people find meaningful jobs

Funding pilot for community-based employment services

No one should be left behind from the social and economic benefits of the labour market.

We are working to improve equity in access to employment opportunities and support the well-being of all people in B.C. by recognizing the broad range of activities that support a person's employability.

The Community Based Employment Services pilot will test a person-centred outreach service model to provide more supportive, individualized outreach services that meet people where they are, with supports to help them overcome the barriers holding them back, so they can connect with their communities and take steps that help move them along their employment readiness path.

Funding pilot for supportive employment services

We want all people going through addiction treatment to have the care and support they need to recover. Integrating employment services into some publicly funded treatment beds will help people get the jobs and connections they need to build a better life.

Through a \$4.9-million grant B.C. provided in 2023, the Canadian Mental Health Association – B.C. Division is piloting a program that integrates employment services within addiction treatment and recovery centres. The pilot will run for at least three years, and will provide enhanced employment services, including pre-employment skills, job search and maintenance support, as well as a range of mental-health and substance-use interventions.

The program will help highlight best practices for integrated evidence-based employment services, which will help guide future improvements in provincial policy and programming for people with complex-care needs.

Investing in people, programs and innovation

Innovative projects ensure people, especially those in underrepresented groups, are better supported to find and keep a job. Learnings from these projects inform ministry policy and program development as well as benefiting the organizations' community-based programs.

Many of these projects include work with program participants to address employment and pre-employment barriers. These projects combine research elements to explore best practices, solutions and the effectiveness of programming, and practical elements where organizations test specialized employment supports and new modes of service delivery, with a goal of improving future programming for those who need it most.

One such example is the Foundry's Work and Education Program and Youth Peer Support Workers Program. The Foundry is working to identify and address gaps in employment and education for vulnerable youth in need, while simultaneously testing new ways improve services and support youth with multiple barriers to employment.

Our partnership with the National Institute of Disability Management and Research (NIDMAR) helps people recovering from physical injury or mental health challenges safely return to work. Early health care, ergonomic and job coaching interventions mean British Columbians with disabilities can continue to thrive in the workforce and achieve brighter futures.

Early intervention for youth with developmental disabilities, through IMPACT, means young people transitioning from high school also gain skills, work experience along with the confidence and awareness they need to find and thrive in jobs in their communities.

Solid State Co-operative funding, training and mentoring, for people in racialized communities, is helping immigrants launch successful co-op businesses, providing them and their employees a living wage and a supportive community network.

Partnering with YWCA's Axis Program, we're supporting immigrant women who have survived violence on a path to employment with one-on-one employment services and connections, in their own languages, to help them gain the skills and jobs to help them rebuild their lives.

HOW WE'RE TAKING ACTION

- Prioritizing people with lived experience when hiring for peer support positions such as navigators and guides for the SAJE program that supports youth and young adults with experience of the child protection system as they transition to independence
- Adopting Provincial Peer Support Training Curriculum, created by peers for peers to integrate the valuable contributions of peer workers in helping people with mental health, prevention and treatment, stigma, harm reduction and recovery. Also available is another B.C.-first: an Employers Guide to Supporting and Engaging Peer Workers

Vision for the next ten years

Our vision is of a B.C. where people can find meaningful and rewarding work, employment services provide effective pathways out of poverty, and workplaces are strong partners in hiring and accommodating workers with disabilities. We will work to better support people facing multiple barriers to access training and employment opportunities, including through delivering innovative projects designed to inform and strengthen future employment services.

To put the province on track to realize this vision, over the next 10 years, government will explore policies, programs and actions that:

- Enable self-determined, community-led programs for Indigenous Peoples to upgrade skills, obtain credentials, secure employment, and develop and support community economies, in partnership with Indigenous Governing Entities and organizations, in line with government's commitments in the Declaration Act Action Plan
- Build on best practices from other jurisdictions that reduce poverty and encourage employment, for example, earnings supplements and tax measures like the United States' Earned Income Tax Credit, which has proven to be the USA's most effective tool in addressing poverty
- Open up opportunities for underrepresented communities in the BC Public Service, including by:
 - Improving and expanding internship programs like the Indigenous Youth Internship Program that provide access to experiences, training and opportunities in the public service for people from underrepresented communities
 - Making the BC Public Service a leading employer of people with disabilities
 - Recognizing the value of lived experience, cultural knowledge, and skills gained through employment and volunteering as equivalent to formal education in BC Public Service hiring outside of bona fide occupational requirements

Facilitating greater social inclusion

It's important for people to feel safe, welcome and included in their communities. Many people living in poverty and people with disabilities face barriers to making and maintaining connections and participating in community, cultural and social activities.

Transportation, including public transportation and good sidewalks and pathways that are accessible to people whether they are walking or rolling, is an important part of social inclusion especially for people with disabilities and seniors who don't drive.

While there are some targeted supports to assist people with transportation, including an annual subsidized bus pass for eligible low-income seniors, a transportation supplement for people with the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) designation, and free transit for children 12 and under, more work needs to be done to help people access and afford transportation, especially in rural, remote and Indigenous communities.

We're working to facilitate better connections with family, friends and culture, with investments in transportation, as well as high-speed internet services that people need to participate in programs, services and the economy.

We're also working to end the stigma and discrimination that people experience because of who they are. For Two-Spirit people, transgender people and other gender-diverse people, discrimination in employment, housing and services can be a major barrier both to exiting poverty and existing in the community.

Our well-being is connected to one another and promoting compassion and inclusion will lead people to more meaningful and fulfilling lives.

Foundational to all of this work is ensuring a human-rights based approach that empowers those who are most disproportionately impacted and at highest risk of poverty. This includes continuing to make changes that strengthen human rights protections and recognize our human rights obligations, to ensure that everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living.

HOW WE'RE TAKING ACTION

Addressing racism and discrimination, and making services more inclusive

Racism and other forms of discrimination create barriers to opportunity that make it more difficult for people to connect with the community and access opportunity.

We're taking action by:

- Upholding Indigenous human rights and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples by combating racism and discrimination, through the addition of Indigenous identity as a protected ground against discrimination to the B.C. Human Rights Code
- Taking action to protect communities against hate through the anti-hate community support fund

- Launching a trauma-informed, multilingual racist incident helpline to provide a culturally safe platform for witnesses and victims of hate to report incidents
- Supporting a more equitable, inclusive and welcoming province for everyone through work under the Anti-Racism Data Act
- Removing outdated, unnecessarily gendered and exclusionary language from B.C. legislation
- Offering the “gender X” designation on identification and working to ensure systems across government work with it
- Working to embed cultural safety and humility into programs and services throughout government

Including adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities need to be included in services, supports and opportunities designed to address poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Focusing on the four goals of the Re-Imagining Community Inclusion initiative:
 - Develop flexible housing options for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities so that people have more choices about where they live including housing options they can afford with the right kinds of supports
 - Provide more and better access to employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by changing attitudes, improving employment supports and helping workplaces become more culturally safe, inclusive, and accommodating of community living clients
 - Improve access to health and mental health services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and make them more inclusive and culturally safe
 - Services for Indigenous people are self-determined, supports for people are culturally safe, and new and existing services are evaluated for how they are working for Indigenous community living clients so actions can be taken to make them better

Increasing flexibility and fostering independence by re-imagining community inclusion

All people with intellectual or developmental disabilities should have the same opportunity as everyone else to live a good life that they choose for themselves. Re-Imagining Community Inclusion (RCI) started with this vision, with priority areas focused on housing, employment, health, and services for Indigenous people to set a 10-year pathway to 2028.

RCI is increasing flexible housing choices and fostering independence and choice, with actions like the creation of a Community Living BC (CLBC) Housing Department and recognition that it is essential Indigenous people can choose to live on or off reserve.

They are also expanding employment opportunities by fostering inclusive hiring practices and promoting growth, through services like L.I.F.E. (Learning, Inclusion, Friendship, and Employment), which explores and creates personalized supports related to employment, community connection, relationships, and lifelong learning open to all people supported by CLBC. People using the service have shared how L.I.F.E has made a difference to them:

“I have accomplished things I did not think were possible. L.I.F.E. showed me I am capable of doing things. I see so many doors opening.”

Helping seniors stay connected to their communities

As people age, they may need help with some day-to-day tasks to stay independent and active in the community. Providing these supports is an important part of social inclusion

We're taking action by:

- Expanding community-based seniors’ services that provide seniors with non-medical support, including assistance with day-to-day tasks
- Delivering programs that help keep seniors physically active and socially engaged

Supporting seniors to live healthy, independent lives at home

The senior population in B.C. continues to grow, and it is expected that 21.7% of people in B.C. will be 65 and older by 2035-36, up from 19.6% in 2023-24. To support more seniors to live safely in their homes longer and maintain ties to their community, the B.C. government is investing in both community-based seniors' services and home health services.

- Improving the quality of home health services for seniors by adding more health-care workers to the workforce, so seniors receive more regular contact with their care manager and improved response to care needs that arise unexpectedly
- Investing to stabilize and expand high-demand community-based seniors' services that operate provincewide, providing seniors with non-medical support, including assistance with day-to-day tasks
- Delivering programs that help keep seniors physically active, socially engaged and connected to their communities
- Providing seniors with access to non-medical home support services such as grocery shopping, light housekeeping, light yard work, snow shoveling, minor home repairs, transportation to appointments and friendly visiting through Better at Home, a community-based program funded by the provincial government and managed by United Way BC
 - There are currently 93 Better at Home programs in B.C. serving 260 communities, including First Nations communities
 - Increased funding to Better at Home will expand and provide a greater emphasis on social connection, with new services being added to support with referral and system navigation, peer support, expanded group activities, social meals and more flexible transportation options
- Expanding community-based seniors' programs:
 - The Family and Friend Caregiver Support Program provides caregivers with supports and knowledge to navigate the health-care system and enhance their own well-being while caring for a loved one
 - The Therapeutic Activation Program for Seniors helps seniors stay active and engaged in their communities by offering proactive outreach through daily and weekly telephone calls to participants, transportation to and from the program, nutritious meals, exercise programs, and recreational and educational activities that support participants' physical and mental well-being
 - The Community Connector positions will be integral to supporting seniors who are frail, or at risk of frailty, to develop health and wellness plans and then connect those seniors to the community programming and health services that meet their needs. Seniors who are less able to access services on their own will be prioritized

Addressing gaps in internet access

Access to the internet is critical for connecting with services, supports and employment.

We're taking action by:

- Connecting all under-served homes to internet services of at least 50/10 Mbps by 2027

Removing barriers to accessibility so people with disabilities can participate in their communities

People with disabilities are often systemically excluded from employment and the community both through

barriers to access and through discrimination and stigma. This is a factor in the overrepresentation of people with disabilities in poverty.

We're taking action by:

- Preventing barriers to the full and equal participation of people with disabilities through the Accessible B.C. Act
- Releasing the action plan, AccessibleBC, which outlines how ministries will embed accessibility and inclusion in their work and services

- Developing accessibility standards that address barriers in a range of areas such as employment and service provision
- Working with partners to fund a range of accessibility projects throughout the province.
 - For example, in 2023-24, we provided more than \$19 million dollars to over 17 non-profit organizations for accessibility related projects
 - This included funding the Social Planning and Research Council of B.C. to establish the Local Community Accessibility Grant Program, providing funding to remove barriers to accessibility within municipalities

Helping people get where they need to go with accessible and affordable transportation

Being able to get around the community efficiently and affordably is key to accessing services, employment and learning opportunities that can help people exit poverty

We're taking action by:

- Funding safe, reliable and affordable regional transportation options for rural communities
- Improving access to safe transportation for Indigenous and other residents along the Highway 16 corridor between Prince Rupert and Prince George through the Highway 16 Five-Point Transportation Action Plan
 - As of December 2023, more than 98,000 passengers have used these new services
- Improving access routes and safety for First Nations communities in the north and remote areas as they travel between communities through a new Indigenous Access and Resiliency Program
- Ensuring the continuation of critical transit services, including community shuttles, which connect people in rural communities to regional centres
 - This includes funding contributed to the Northern Development Initiative Trust to continue BC Bus North and the Northern Community Shuttle Program until 2026-27
- Continuing to invest in BC Ferries, with a focus on keeping fare increases down and improving capacity and reliability
- Restoring the Monday-Thursday 100% seniors' discount for BC Ferries
- Continuing to partner with First Nations to develop programs and policies to better understand and support access challenges, economic opportunities, and transportation solutions for First Nation communities
- Creating, upgrading and improving multi-use pathways, protected bike lanes, pedestrian bridges and other active transportation infrastructure in partnership with local, regional and Indigenous governments, so that people can safely walk, roll, and ride around their communities



BC Transit Bus providing accessible, affordable transportation

Addressing period poverty and supporting menstrual equity

Access to menstrual supplies is critical to the inclusion of women and other people who menstruate in school, workplaces and the community. The impacts of period poverty can also include: sacrificing food and other basic needs to buy menstrual supplies; missing school, employment, and community involvement; and loss of dignity.

We're taking action by:

- Requiring all public schools to provide free menstrual supplies for students in school bathrooms, as issued by a first-in-Canada ministerial order in 2019
- Working to develop and deliver sustainable approaches to end period poverty in B.C., including by establishing the Period Poverty Task Force
- Supporting pilot projects delivered in partnership with United Way BC to test ways of distributing free menstrual supplies to people in communities throughout the province

Vision for the next ten years

Our vision is of a B.C. where everyone feels safe, welcome and included in their community, where seniors and people with disabilities are supported to live independently, and where everyone has affordable access to services and infrastructure like internet and transportation that allow them to make strong and sustainable connections with family, friends, culture and employment.

To put the province on track to realize this vision, over the next 10 years, government will explore policies, programs and actions that:

- Help people grow and develop their skills while building their connections to the community
- Advance the Reimagining Community Initiative, including by:
 - Improving the cultural safety of housing and housing supports
 - Delivering more and better employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
 - Educating workplaces about the ability of Community Living BC clients to work, and ways that workplaces can be made inclusive for people with disabilities
 - Improving employment supports so they work better for community living clients
 - Increasing culturally safe employment for Indigenous people
 - Creating business leader networks that commit to making their workplaces inclusive for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and providing opportunities for people to be included in the workplace
 - Improving access to health and mental health services for community living clients, recognizing that people with disabilities have more complex and deep health needs than most people
- Ensuring that people in the health system have the training and guidance they need to deliver culturally safe, inclusive services for people who have had extremely difficult and unsafe experiences in their lives
- Bringing together inter-ministry tables to find ways to create accessible, person-centred and culturally safe health and mental health care for people
- Working together with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, the First Nations Health Authority and regional health authorities to create culturally safe, accessible, and inclusive health and mental health services for Indigenous people eligible for community living services
- Delivering grants to non-profits to try out new ways of supporting people at home
- Supporting community living clients as they get older, including through health supplements provided as part of disability assistance
- Engage with the public on accessibility standards development, including accessible service delivery and employment accessibility, through formal public consultation to form the basis of future accessibility regulations in B.C. and ensure that everyone can enjoy full and equitable participation in their communities
- Meet government's Declaration Act Plan commitment 4.09 by identifying, preventing and removing barriers for Indigenous people with disabilities, and ensuring that accessibility standards consider the rights recognized and affirmed by the UN Declaration
- Encourage the federal government, as the regulator responsible for the management of telecom services in Canada, to expand the Connecting Families Initiative, to ensure all low-income people in B.C. have access to low- or no-cost internet plans

- Increase access to transportation to more seniors, including assessing the feasibility of expanding the bus pass for people with disabilities and seniors to include HandyDART, so everyone can stay connected to their community
- Determine a path forward towards a comprehensive, long-term response to period poverty in B.C., informed by the recommendations made by the Period Poverty Task Force laid out in a report to the B.C. government in March 2024. Key areas include legislation and policy, distribution of menstrual supplies, menstrual education and menstrual health care
- Align government actions with the Anti-Racism Data Act and the Anti-Racism Act to address systemic racism in government programs, services and supports, and provide supports for people who have been negatively impacted by racism, including by:
 - Delivering grants to Indigenous and racialized communities to help identify and eliminate racism and support people who have experienced racism so those who are most impacted by institutional racism don't have to bear the financial burdens of fixing the system
- Strengthen and build on services that support seniors to age with dignity in the community, including by:
 - Co-developing and facilitating Indigenous-led programs and supports for Elders, while working to make new and existing programs more diverse and culturally safe
 - Improving access to home care services so that people can age safely, at home
 - Ensuring seniors from 2SLGBTQIA+ communities get safe and inclusive supports to access health services and supportive care
- Increase access to accessible, gender-inclusive public washrooms, recognizing that access to bathroom facilities is critical for people's participation in the community, especially for many seniors, pregnant people and people with disabilities
- Make transit more reliable, frequent and affordable, especially in rural, remote and Indigenous communities where many people without cars struggle to get around
- Improve active transportation infrastructure and support communities to accelerate improvements to accessibility



Peer support programs prioritize people with lived experience

Working Across Government and with Partners

Poverty is multidimensional. As such, addressing poverty crosses ministries and sectors and requires a whole-of-government approach that is co-ordinated and responsive. There are multiple strategies across ministries that commit government to action and contribute to reducing poverty in a holistic way. See Appendix C for more detail on key government strategies connected to poverty reduction.

Working Across Government to Reduce Poverty



Addressing poverty also requires strong external partnerships with Indigenous communities and leadership, non-profits, local government, businesses and other key partners. Communities and local organizations are often best positioned to flexibly respond to the unique and diverse needs of their members.

Supporting non-profits through the Stronger Community Services Fund

Non-profit organizations are critical resources in communities throughout B.C. and provide essential supports to people experiencing, or at risk of, poverty including health supports, housing, and food security. Every day, people in B.C. access non-profit programs and services to meet their needs.

Non-profits are on the frontlines of responding to multiple intersecting crises and are able to quickly mobilize and innovate to support communities in ways that government is not able to do. Ongoing impacts of COVID-19, the overdose crisis, climate events and the affordability crisis have all led to historic levels of demand for services.

Since 2022, government has invested more than \$90 million to support unrestricted, multi-year grants to non-profit organizations to ensure that organizations are able to continue to deliver the programs and services that people rely on.

This includes the \$60 million Stronger Community Services Fund, administered by the Vancouver Foundation, to strengthen and support B.C.'s non-profit sector. Announced on October 30, 2023, B.C.'s first Non-Profit Recognition Day, it followed a \$30-million fund the year prior.

This funding aims to respond to what charities and non-profits need right now to address poverty and strengthen communities throughout the province while supporting their long-term resiliency.

“ **To sustainably support people in poverty, the non-profits engaged on the front line must be able to pay rent, recruit and retain staff, meet their goals with the benefits of working technology, and reach their target clients through marketing and advertising.** ”

(Written submission: Family Services of Greater Vancouver)



Progress update on the B.C. Basic Income Panel

In July 2018, the B.C. government convened an expert panel to study whether giving people a basic income is an effective way to reduce poverty and improve health, housing and employment.

The panel's final report, *Covering All the Basics: Reforms for a More Just Society*, was released in January 2021. The panel recommended against both implementing a basic income in B.C. and conducting a pilot, and instead, made 65 recommendations to update B.C.'s system of social supports and services.

As part of this work, a separate study was also commissioned to review income supports for Indigenous Peoples, *Income Supports and Indigenous Peoples in B.C.: An Analysis of Gaps and Barriers*, which includes a total of 51 recommendations (20 recommendations from community, and 31 recommendations from the study).

Assessing the reform recommendations and aligning our actions with the principles from both reports played a significant role in this new Poverty Reduction Strategy. Since the release of the report, over half of

the recommendations have been fully implemented, partially implemented, or have work underway across ministries, including key recommendations like targeting a basic income and supports for youth aging out of care and increasing income assistance and disability assistance rates.



The Poverty Reduction Strategy is the road map to tackle poverty and help people build better lives.

Measuring our Progress

B.C.'s legislated poverty reduction targets and other key statistics offer important insights into how many people are impacted by poverty and in what ways. This includes looking at quantitative measures, such as overall poverty rates (both breadth and depth of poverty), poverty rates for key groups that disproportionately experience poverty, and other critical statistics such as homelessness and food security. This also includes looking at social assistance data, including the number of people accessing assistance for crisis, and the number of people without a fixed address. But these statistics don't tell the whole story of poverty, including its impacts.

Income is a key factor in measuring poverty, but poverty is about so much more than just income: it's about affordability, community supports, inclusion, connection to culture, and so much more. It's important to measure B.C.'s progress in reducing poverty in a holistic way and understand how factors like housing unaffordability, social inclusion, and food insecurity impact the experiences of people. In addition to our poverty reduction targets, we will continue to look at other measures of poverty that capture our progress in a more comprehensive way.

Canada's Market Basket Measure

TogetherBC 2019 aimed to achieve two ambitious targets: reduce B.C.'s overall poverty rate by 25% and the child poverty rate by 50% by 2024. These goals were set using the Market Basket Measure, the official measure of income poverty in Canada since 2019.

The Market Basket Measure is a low-income line that compares the disposable income for a family of four with the cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter,

transportation, and other items that reflects a modest, basic standard of living. While it is an imperfect measure, especially for people who are living in remote and Indigenous communities and people with complex disabilities that increase their costs over and above the baseline basket of goods and services measured, B.C. uses the Market Basket Measure as our benchmark on poverty so that our data aligns with federal programs.

Statistics Canada periodically updates the basket to reflect changes in what is considered necessary for a person to have a basic standard of living. The basket was last updated in 2018. Statistics Canada is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the Market Basket Measure and will release the results in 2025.

Poverty reduction indicators

In addition to our legislated targets, our annual reports will include a range of indicators to assess the province's progress on improving people's lives.

In 2018, the Government of Canada released a federal poverty strategy called Opportunity for All. The strategy introduced 12 indicators to track progress on deep income poverty and aspects of poverty other than income, including indicators of material deprivation, lack of opportunity and resilience. B.C. intends to align with the federal strategy by using the same indicators³ to measure poverty.

To supplement these indicators, particularly where there are reporting year gaps or a lack of information for Indigenous people, we will also be using additional indicators related to housing, employment and education, and children and families, to provide a more complete understanding of poverty, and better understand and reduce the outcome and equity gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

³ See Appendix D for full description of indicators.

Co-developing Indigenous indicators and progress measures

Since releasing TogetherBC in 2019, we heard from Indigenous people how the Market Basket Measure, and other income measures, do not accurately reflect Indigenous experiences of poverty. Indigenous approaches to addressing poverty are strength-based and deeply connected to language, culture, land and identity. They told us these measures do not reflect people living in rural and remote areas. We also heard that the concept of poverty needs to be understood more broadly as it is tied to well-being, relationships with community and land, and a sense of belonging. To address this gap in understanding, the B.C. government is working with Indigenous people to develop indicators that reflect their culture and experiences, particularly in rural and remote areas, to get an accurate picture of the barriers people in such communities are facing, and what they need to live happy and healthy lives.

Data gaps and current work to address them

In June 2022, B.C. introduced the Anti-Racism Data Act as another step to understand the different experiences and better meet the needs of Indigenous people, Black people, people of colour and racialized people living in B.C. This legislation was informed by a comprehensive engagement with more than 13,000 people living in B.C., including Indigenous people and racialized communities, and is the first act of its kind in Canada to be co-developed with Indigenous Peoples. It will help us to better understand who is experiencing disproportionately negative outcomes and how we can best provide supports and services to close those equity gaps. The Act focuses on four key areas: continued collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, collaboration with an anti-racism committee, increasing transparency and accountability, and annual public data releases.

Indigenous Peoples have sovereignty over their cultural and intellectual property, and governments must respect this sovereignty when engaging in data collection. The B.C. First Nations' Data Governance Initiative is a partnership between government and First Nations that puts this principle into practice. It will guide the Province in the respectful and consensual use of First Nations' data and equip First Nations governments with the tools they need to put their data to work supporting community driven, Nation-based initiatives.

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, as the lead on poverty reduction, will also continue to work across governments including with BC Stats and Statistics Canada to improve the quality of data and indicators and ensure that our reporting is consistent, inclusive and relevant.



Conclusion

With this updated strategy, we are setting out a long-term strategic vision to break the cycle of poverty and ensure all people living in B.C. are fully included and have equitable access to opportunity.

The B.C. government's first poverty reduction strategy, TogetherBC 2019, represented the beginning of our efforts to end poverty. We are building on the progress we've made since then, and setting out government's vision for a better province, a vision that goes beyond the numbers to the kind of society and community we want to build in B.C.

We've made a lot of progress on reducing poverty but there is still more to do before we achieve our goal of making the province a place where everyone can build a good life. Over the next 10 years, the Province will have to work not just to help more people leave poverty, but to prevent emerging challenges like global inflation from eroding the progress we've already made.

We can't know ahead of time what the future will bring, but together we will build a stronger future that is ready to respond to new and emerging drivers of poverty. Any actions we take must be grounded in reconciliation and recognition of Indigenous rights to be successful – and we must continue to strengthen relationships and work collaboratively to improve the cultural safety and diversity of government programs and services, and work to address the ongoing impacts and lasting legacies of colonial policies. We will continue to centre people with lived experience of poverty in government decisions as no one knows how to address poverty better than people who are living with the impacts today. This strategy sets us towards a future where all people are fully included in communities and have equitable access to opportunity.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Listening to People to Break the Cycle of Poverty: Insights from Over 10,000 People Living in British Columbia

In 2023, the B.C. government conducted a wide-ranging public engagement to understand people's experiences of poverty, and to learn what is working and where more action is needed to support those that need it the most.

The public engagement took place over spring and summer 2023 and continued until the early months of 2024. There were separate distinction-based Indigenous engagement processes – one focused on First Nations, including Modern Treaty Nations, and another in partnership with Métis Nation B.C. Additionally, work was done to reach out to urban Indigenous people, including Inuit, living in B.C. as part of the broader consultation process.

The engagement strategy was built on advice and guidance from key government partners, Indigenous leadership and the Minister's Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee. As part of the Province's commitment to accountability on poverty reduction, the Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee was formed in 2019 as an independent committee to advise on poverty reduction and prevention. In addition to Indigenous representatives (including elected leaders from First Nations Leadership Council and Métis Nation B.C.), it includes representation from, unions, persons with lived experience of poverty, local government, rural and remote communities, and persons living with disabilities, among others.

In total, B.C. engaged with over 10,000 people, 70% with lived experience of poverty, through in-person and virtual town halls, Minister's roundtables, small group meetings, written recommendations, and an online public survey. To capture input from as many people as possible, Argyle, an independent engagement firm contracted by the Province, conducted both online and in-person public engagement sessions, which included participation supports such as honoraria, food, child care, transportation, and mental health supports. They also developed a conversation toolkit that could be used by groups to facilitate their own conversations around poverty reduction. Accessible options included printed

versions of the online survey and the conversation toolkit, ensuring those without access to internet could participate in a meaningful way.

To ensure a culturally safe, Indigenous-led engagement process, the Province contracted an Indigenous facilitation firm, Mahihkan Management, to conduct Indigenous engagement sessions held in communities and online. Mahihkan partnered with friendship centres and Indigenous organizations for in-person sessions, and each session was opened by an Elder. Participation supports were also provided such as honoraria, food, child care and transportation, and qualified wellness counsellors were available. A separate Métis-led engagement was organized through Métis Nation BC and included a review of Métis community literature related to poverty reduction, a targeted survey, and client interviews.

Results from all engagement consultations and sessions can be found in both the What We Heard: Engagement Summary Report, and the What We Heard: Engagement with Indigenous Peoples Summary Report. These reports, released in fall 2023 and winter 2023-24, provide guidance for how the government can better fill gaps and prioritize actions to break the cycle of poverty. Data collected will continue to inform cross-government programs and priorities.

Appendix B: B.C. in the National Context

- As of 2022, 597,000 people living in B.C. (11.6% of the population) are living below the poverty line, including 97,000 children.
- B.C. has the second-highest overall poverty rate in Canada and the eighth-highest child poverty rate.
- Persons with disabilities are over twice as likely to be living in poverty.
- Indigenous people are about 50% more likely to live in poverty than non-Indigenous people.
- People aged 65+ represent 20% of the total population of B.C., with 8.7% living in poverty as of 2022.

- 38% of renters are spending over 30% of their income on rent and utilities, and 16% are spending over 50%.
- In 2022, 17% of people living in B.C. and 32.9% of Indigenous adults living in urban settings reported experiencing food insecurity in the previous 12 months.
- B.C.'s income assistance (IA) rates are second-highest across Canadian provinces, and disability assistance (DA) rates are third. B.C.'s DA flat rate annual earnings exemption and IA flat rate earnings exemption are among the highest in Canada.

Appendix C: Working Across Government

There are several strategies and significant work underway across government that relate to poverty reduction, such as:

- [Homes for People](#): Released in 2023, Homes for People, B.C.'s new housing plan will speed up delivery of new homes, increase the supply of middle-income housing, fight speculation and help those who need it the most. Focused on four priorities: unlocking more homes faster; delivering better, more affordable homes; helping those with the greatest housing need; and creating a housing market for people, not speculators. The Homes for People action plan was supported by Budget 2023 starting with more than \$4 billion over three years and a commitment to invest \$12 billion over the next 10 years to deliver more homes for people, faster.
- [Belonging in B.C.](#): Alongside Homes for People, the B.C. government is implementing Belonging in BC, a plan to prevent and reduce homelessness. The plan adds 3,800 new supportive housing units and complex care housing services for more than 500 people, as well as 240 new, purpose-built complex care housing spaces provincewide, and creates multidisciplinary regional response teams designed to rapidly respond to encampments to better support people sheltering outdoors to move inside. Belonging in BC was supported by Budget 2022 with \$633 million over three years and an additional \$1.5 billion through Budget 2023 to help thousands of people maintain and access housing and supports.
- [A Pathway to Hope](#): Launched in 2019, B.C.'s mental health and addictions strategy sets out the Province's 10-year vision for mental wellness, improved mental health care and the establishment of an effective substance use prevention, addictions treatment and recovery system. The roadmap is based on four pillars: wellness promotion and prevention, seamless and integrated care, equitable access to culturally safe and effective care, and Indigenous health and wellness. Budget 2024 invests \$215 million over three years to sustain addictions treatment and recovery programs currently operating or being implemented. This funding builds on previous investments, including the historic Budget 2023 investment of \$1 billion to expand mental health and addictions services and build a better, more integrated system of care for people living with mental health or addictions challenges.
- [StrongerBC: Future Ready Action Plan](#) builds on work begun in 2017 to eliminate barriers for people to get the education they need and succeed in the changing economy. The action plan is focused on five pillars – making post-secondary education more affordable, accessible and relevant to people living in B.C.; helping people reskill to find in-demand jobs so more employers facing current and future skills shortages can find people to fill those gaps; breaking down barriers so everyone can find a job where they can thrive; meeting Indigenous Peoples' workforce priorities; and ensuring people new to B.C. find a career in the field in which they are trained. The action plan was supported by Budget 2023 with \$480 million over three years.
- [Safe and Supported: B.C.'s Gender-Based Violence Action Plan](#) (2023) reports on vital work underway across government and actions that will be coming next year and beyond. The actions include boosting programming and supports for survivors, strengthening government's response to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and ramping up prevention and awareness campaigns. Initiatives were developed in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous partners, and with advice from community service providers and advocates. Under a new Canada-B.C.

bilateral agreement to end gender-based violence, the federal government is committing \$61.9 million over four years to implement the plan and the Province \$60 million annually, building upon investments already underway such as the \$1.2 billion over 10 years for housing for women and children leaving violence.

- [Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy](#) looks to strengthen the collective capacity to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to the impacts of climate change. This includes sudden events like wildfires, floods and heat waves as well as changes that happen more slowly like rising sea levels, receding glaciers and shifting ecosystems. The strategy is supported with more than \$500 million in funding from Budgets 2021 and 2022 and part of larger investments, with more than \$2.1 billion, in helping people and communities recover and adapt from extreme weather events.

These strategies all work together to support a holistic, comprehensive approach to reducing poverty.

Appendix D: Opportunity for All (Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy) Measures

1. Deep Income Poverty (Source: Canadian Income Survey (CIS), annual)
 - a. % of people with income below 75% of the poverty line
2. Unmet Housing Needs (Source: Census, every five years (next census 2026))
 - a. Unmet housing needs are measured by the core housing need indicator. People are considered to be in core housing need if the household's housing falls below at least one of the indicator thresholds for housing adequacy, affordability or suitability, and would have to spend 30% or more of their before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (attains all three housing indicator thresholds)
3. Unmet Health Needs (Source: CIS, annual)
 - a. % of people that reported that their health care needs were not met during the past 12 months

4. Food Insecurity (Source: CIS, annual)
 - a. % of people that do not have enough money to purchase or access a sufficient amount and variety of food to live a healthy lifestyle (Source: CIS, annual)
5. Relative Low Income (Source: CIS, annual)
 - a. The proportion of people living in low income; individuals live in low income if their household after-tax income falls below half of the median after-tax income, adjusting for household size. The median income is the middle of the income distribution: it is the amount at which half the population has more income and half the population has less income
6. Bottom 40% Income Share (Source: CIS, annual)
 - a. The share of total after-tax income held by the 40% of the population at the bottom of the income distribution
7. Youth Engagement (Source: Labour Force Survey, updated annually)
 - a. The proportion of youth aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET)
8. Literacy and Numeracy (Source: Program for International Student Assessment – Every three years)
 - a. The proportion of individuals who have a level of knowledge and skills in reading, writing and mathematics to permit them to fully participate in society. Low literacy indicates limited ability in understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written text, which enable basic participation in society. Low numeracy indicates limited ability in communicating, using and interpreting mathematics in daily life
9. Median Hourly Wage (Source: Labour Force Survey, annual updates)
 - a. The hourly wage at which half the population has a higher wage and half the population has a lower wage

10. Average Poverty Gap (Source: CIS, annual)

- a. The average shortfall below Canada's Official Poverty Line for those living in poverty. Once it has been determined that an individual is living below the poverty line, the poverty gap ratio can be calculated by using the amount that the person's family disposable income is below the poverty line, expressed as a percentage of the poverty line. For example, an individual living in a family with disposable income of \$15,000 and a poverty line of \$20,000 would have a poverty gap of \$5,000. In percentage terms, the "gap ratio" would be 25%

11. Asset Resilience (Source: StatsCan Survey of Financial Security, every three years)

- a. The ability of people to cover unexpected expenses, or reduced income, by drawing from assets (e.g., a bank account) for a period of three months

12. Low-income entry and exit rates (Source: StatsCan admin data, annual)

- a. Describe how Canadian tax filers' low-income status changed from one year to another. These rates are estimated for Canadians who filed tax returns for two consecutive years, while those that did not file tax returns for two consecutive years are excluded from the calculations
- b. The low-income entry rate is, out of those who were not in low income in the first year, the proportion who entered low income in the second year
- c. The low-income exit rate is, out of those who were in low income in the first year, the proportion who exited low income in the second year

Appendix E: Supplemental Indicators

- Homelessness and Housing:
 - Homelessness, including the proportion of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness
- Employment:
 - Unemployment rates
 - Number of participants through the Single Parent Employment Initiative, and the number of people who found employment
 - Number of people served by WorkBC, and clients supported through their first year of employment
 - Average hourly wage
- Children and Families:
 - Children accessing child care supports (i.e., number of child care spaces receiving a fee reduction), including the number of Indigenous children accessing child care supports
 - Rate of children in care, including Indigenous children in care
- Education:
 - High school completion rates, including identifying any learning gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students
 - Participation in post-secondary and skills training
 - Number of former youth in care accessing tuition waivers
- Other Indicators:
 - Income and disability assistance data (e.g., number of people requesting crisis supplements, number of people with no fixed address, length of time someone is on social assistance)
 - Number of individuals in custody, including rates of Indigenous people in custody



