



# **DEAF COMMUNITY POVERTY REDUCTION CONSULTATION REPORT**

## **Contribution to the Development of a Poverty Reduction Strategy for BC**

### **Led by the BCPRC Community Action Network**

May 22, 2018

**The provincial government's Poverty Reduction Strategy engagement carried out between October 30 2017 and March 31 2018 gathered a wealth of knowledge and experience about what should be included in British Columbia's poverty reduction strategy.** However, deaf people living in poverty were notably absent from much of the consultation process. In order to address this gap, deaf members of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition's Community Action Network organized another small group discussion with deaf members of the community. Thanks to the provincial government and the Social Planning Council of BC for extending the consultation deadline and providing funding for this focus group.

The focus group was held in Vancouver from 6 to 8 pm on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018. Seven people attended the small group discussion, including two people who were deaf-blind. To reduce barriers to participation, food, bus tickets, and an honorarium were provided for each attendee. Two experienced interpreters were present for the deaf-blind attendees, as well as two interpreters to ensure that non-ASL fluent note-takers were able to capture full and accurate notes.

#### **ABOUT THE COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK**

The **Community Action Network** is a community-based leadership initiative of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition. CAN provides an opportunity for capacity-building for individuals with the lived experience of poverty to increase their involvement in anti-poverty advocacy, policy development that impacts poverty, and the creation of poverty reduction plans at the provincial and civic levels.

#### **ABOUT THE BC POVERTY REDUCTION COALITION**

**BC Poverty Reduction Coalition** is an alliance of organizations that have come together to raise awareness about poverty and inequality in BC and improve the health and well-being of all British Columbians through the call for a comprehensive poverty reduction plan that addresses the systemic causes of these problems.

## Overview

*“You can’t make changes without working with the deaf community.”*

Overall, participants shared a huge frustration with discrimination and feeling ignored and devalued by society. They expressed a *“right to well-being.”* Other priority issues that were raised by participants were housing, employment, education, transportation, language barriers and disability assistance.

*“My expenses versus my earnings are out of balance.”*

People expressed difficulty making ends meet due to low-incomes (both difficulty finding dignified jobs and dealing with low rates and clawbacks on disability assistance) and high expenses, particularly rent as well as the fees required for accessible education. One participant expressed the unattainability of quality of life when he is merely struggling to survive. Government can take action by investing in lowering barriers for deaf and deafblind people, raising incomes, and helping to create universal basic services. *“Policy is the only the way to change it, strong government policy.”*

The main themes are outlined below with highlights drawn from the full transcribed notes, which are included in Appendix 1.

## Themes

### Discrimination

Participants face constant discrimination. They report that potential employers do not recognize what they can contribute and that potential landlords won’t rent to them. Participants see the huge need for education of hearing people about the skills and contributions that deaf people bring and existing barriers that need to be removed. They also see a lack of attention to people with disabilities within government policy and a society that has created barriers for deaf people.

### Housing

High rents have become a large source of stress for participants. There is a huge gap between the cost of rent and the \$375 that people with disabilities receive for shelter, and landlords discriminate against people on disability assistance. The waitlist for affordable, social housing provided by BC Housing is too long. Participants are having to move farther from their communities and their work to be able to afford rent. There are also privacy issues in how much landlords ask potential renters to provide, including bank statements. A common concern was increasing rents, often due to renovations that are done solely to create a reason to evict tenants and raise rents. Participants expressed the need for governments to implement rent control tied to the unit to address these issues.

### Employment

Participants shared that they had difficulty finding work due to discrimination of employers. When they do find work, their income is far too low to make ends meet. One participant working at a low-wage job at a fastfood restaurant expressed frustration at being constantly passed over for raises and promotions. Another is working two jobs to make ends meet. Those who can’t work full-time for medical reasons still desire part-time work or flexible work hours. One deafblind participant physically cannot work 8 hours because it is too tiring and stressful but

wants to work with flexibility, and another stressed that, as a deafblind person, he works ten times harder. Employment policies should be framed around *“what we can do to help this person and give them the hours they need at the rate they work.”* They shared that employers can benefit from hiring deaf and deafblind people, including having more focused employees with enhanced attention to their job. Government can support by providing job training, skill enhancement and helping to educate employers.

### **Education and training**

Participants had very mixed experiences of education and training, and emphasized the importance of good public accessible education. Participants recommended a thorough review of how deaf students are taught. Education and training were commonly cited as being needed in order to obtain employment. There are some job training opportunities with organizations serving the deaf community. However, tuition fees for training in privately-run courses taught in ASL are prohibitive for people living in poverty.

### **Transportation**

Due to high rents, participants have been forced to move away from Vancouver, making their commutes to work longer. This, in turn, can then contribute to making their disabilities worse. Some are unable to obtain a drivers' license, limiting their employment opportunities. Public transit has, therefore, been a vital service for most participants. Unfortunately, bus and skytrain fares are currently too high for those living in poverty.

### **Language**

Participants shared that many people in the deaf community don't have access to services because those services are not provided in ASL or LSQ. Interpreters should be provided for universal access. It often takes a legal process with a fight at every step of the way to even access medical interpreter services. Language barriers have also created an information gap about rights and government policy. Landlord tenancy rights were cited specifically as an area where there needs to be more available information. Deafblind participants also emphasized the clear need for funding for intervenors. One person on welfare has to look for a job but shared that she needs help with the translation of documents and that she had nobody willing to help teach her English, which is causing much stress in her life.

### **Disability assistance**

Most participants received disability assistance. Rates for disability assistance are too low to pay rent for appropriate housing and make it difficult to afford food and other needs. On top of this, the most common concern about disability assistance was the clawbacks of disability assistance income. This includes the clawback of CPP-Disability payments and the clawback of income over the annual earnings exemption.

## Appendix 1: Full Transcribed Notes

What are the issues facing you and people in poverty right now?

We are going to talk about how poverty impacts you and the ideas of the poverty reduction plan.

P1: Okay, I am interested to hear about what you want to say tonight about how poverty has impacted you?

P2: I am deaf blind, I have had experiences growing up, always been in poverty and growing up

- Income small
- Rent high
- Little savings
- Education horrific
- Good education training, some not good
- Lots of barriers- discrimination
- Rent (forget it—too expensive)
- Discrimination
- BC housing- waitlist too long
- Want to see affordable housing and live without assistance
- Be independent
- Well-being life and get out in community
- Enjoy flexibility (work)
- Physically (do not have the ability to work 8 hours, very tiring to work and stressful)
- Work is overwhelming
- Flexible work schedules
- I have a right to well-being

P3: One of the things that I find is expensive is earnings vs. expenses are out of balance

- Quality of life? Concerned about having enough to survive
- PWD in rental is \$375
- ^ No rentals for that price
- The system needs to change
- An individual might need some support and have to contact gov't; others have the money
- Those who have money, still get assistance. those who don't, still don't have enough
- You have to provide budget (not feasible to rent housing)

P4: I want to have others speak→ do not have an experience of poverty

P5

- Went to school for deaf→ bad experience

- Work at McDonalds (No raise, young people tend to get more)
- Different rates and levels ^
- Every 6 months they ask how I am doing with a 25-50 cent raise
- Not very much ours
- Find out I'm deaf and don't hire
- I am just like everyone else
- We did not get that →. Don't want anything to do with it
- Hard dealing with public
- WIDHH
  - o Job readiness program
  - o But I wish there were more opportunities
- Look at person on paper not deaf or not
- I have had drug abuser roommates and problems with landlords
- Lease holder is difficult with landlords
- Sending out emails (don't get emails back because I am deaf)
- ^ Don't use drugs, just deaf that's it
- Lives in Surrey → witness to a gun shot (not safe)
- Government assistance (need to help in these areas)
- Hard time making ends meet
- Deaf people don't live in Vancouver anymore but the job are here
- Some warehouse work and light industry out there
- Difficulty is that I don't have a drivers license
  - o Need transit
- Pay attention to PWD
- If someone has a disability they need to be included in governments plan
- Seems to be lack of awareness of PWD and affordability
- Housing, co-op housing (b/c I'm deaf)

#### P4: Political activist, not experienced poverty directly

- Worked at VCC
- After years of no access to
- \$2000 for one semester Sept-Feb (full-time)
- ^Cannot afford
- Have a program for immigrants that are learning ASL and have made a change (confusing what training is going to look like)
- Start at VCC (job readiness, upgrades)
- Poverty is affecting education (limited access)
- Who started school late? After 5
  - o Several people will have parents who do not speak ASL
- Gender is a factor, regardless of deaf or not there is a disparity of income between male and females
- Subsidies clawed back, hard to work
- PWD are not the only ones who cannot afford homes
- Landlords do not want to have tenants who are on PWD
- Individuals who can hear and have an education are still not able to live in Vancouver

- Seniors are growing and are not able to live in Vancouver
- Husband and I had to move to 1 floor but we owned a home in Vancouver so could downsize
- Accessibility sometimes only speaks to wheelchair but could be bathrooms, etc. PWD in general
- Lack of access
- Mon
- PWD Advisory committee for Vancouver (PWDAC)
  - o Monthly meeting
  - o Have to find a replacement and someone who is deaf, read in English, and email, able to respond to emails
  - o Small group committees on G-Chat
- Landlords aren't knowledgeable
- Interpreters cost money → who is going to pay for it?
- We are so far, and full of barriers
- All about the fact that we can't hear
- You are right
- Many people in deaf community don't have access
  - o Sign language
- ASL and LSQ become official languages
- Legal process to get access to medical interpreter services
  - o Fighting every step of the way

P5: Talking about banks, different

- Federal law, and service will be expected to follow that law
- Employment is a big barrier and need drivers license
- Not having a drivers license is a huge barrier and limitation
- Agreed
- Location to [bus] stops, and employment
- 2
- currently I am looking for a home, a house, I found a place that isn't secure, apartments are more secure, but I don't understand rent increases just occur
- they don't rent to me because I am deaf
- more money means more access to security
- -one bedroom is 1200 there is no way I can afford that on my budget
- PWD pays 375 to rent, I am in a basement suite, electricity is included but the commute is killing me to work, I had to move far to afford a place
- We are capable beings
- There is a culture of dependency we are treated like we need help with anything
- I can't drive a car
- That policy needs to be addressed
- Whoever is responsible for housing needs to impose I am constantly discriminated against because I am deaf
- Policy is the only way to change it, strong government policy

P3:

- I was able to buy a condo, I was lucky I got one, and it isn't going to go up like rent
- Sometimes I don't meet the criteria to get good job
- Don't enjoy being on PWD, really dislike it
- Challenging to find full-time employment
- Went to school, got some good experiences up my belt, somewhat getting better

P5

- Surrey housing becomes expensive
- Not even a room you can sleep in
- Seems to be nothing overseeing it, in England if you want to make a renovation you apply to gov't and might turn you down
- Reno w/o permission → get a fine
- Need something like that in BC
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P4

- Need to have a building code in Vancouver
- Issue here is the building only → accessibility was problem (Steps outside)
- Need to make rooms livable
  - o Also need to know the language
  - o Issue w/foreign investment
  - o 500 square feet (\$5000 for rent)
- Reno eviction (seniors)
  - o Control over rental increase
  - o Claim they need to make renovations because landlords want to increase rent
- We need gov't to follow through on policy so PWD and people in poverty aren't being left behind

## NEXT QUESTION

P6: What would address these issues and help you get out of poverty?

P5: Job training, skill-enhancement, to help employer's bridge the gap... hire people that are deaf

- People think it is a risk
- A deaf person has a lot of other skills (more focused, pay attention to what they are doing)
- **Education** needs to happen, system needs to change
- Review of how deaf students are taught
- Bring in a educated person to do a thorough review (Oversight)
- ^Report back to gov't
- Public vs. Private Schools
  - o Have to have a certain amount of English to go to these classes
  - o Gov't does not pay for private institutions

- Limited peoples access in private schools
- Two different systems
- Private system is not required to give access

P2: Situation of Deaf/blind has many different.

- Very tiring, cannot work fulltime
- ^Physically and mentally
- Policy for employment, what can we do to help this person and give them the hours they need at the rate they work
- Friend that is completely blind cannot find work, person has limited mobility
- Income is very low and cannot do another job
  - Too much physically
- Transportation
- Deaf/blind is even more stressful
- Interveners (service that assists Deaf/blind)
  - Need them badly
  - Multiple people not just one

P3:

- Deaf/blind and working
- Being deaf blind is an extra challenge and I have to work 10 times harder
- At VCC, I am focused and is focused on my job compared to my colleagues
- Jobs: IA at VCC and work contracts
- Teaching contract at VCC (ASL)
- Maintain employment (one or two jobs) but for now I am trying to get experience
- Q: People who are in poverty, some of them prefer to have an independent life style (may be some people want to live on the street) do not want support
- P7: PRC have talked to people that are homeless and have a broad range of reasons (many are close to homelessness) Advocate for people that are homeless
- P3: My parent went to Cali and met a poor happy individual, go through garbage... just curious... some want service and some do not
- Curious from a research point of view
- P7: The work that we do through CAN: Condition of their poverty... poverty is very entrenched in our society (hard to measure).
  - Talk about a different reality (health, food, housing)
  - Striving for human rights for all, everybody
  - Want to talk to people about why they feel that way
- P3: Really enjoyed meeting people as well

P6:

- - Bottom line is gov't has to create legislation for access for PWD
- For example, landlord tendency rights (food banks, safe locations)
- Others can hear about it everyday but not true for deaf or deaf/blind communities (NEED FULL ACCESS)

- Lack of information about where you start?? No central place

P5

- I would recommend new legislation (steps) for a person to get a job
- Landlords for ex. Seem to discriminate against people
- People don't know their rights
- In states they look at credit reports, want to see bank statement (private information)
- Want to know too much information and have to prove themselves
- Invasion of privacy
- Some Asian landlords are different than others, need to follow the Canadian way
- Have to learn how to be a Canadian

P2

- I am stuck, literally
- I can't, I have had enough
- Where is the open-mindedness and understanding
- The bus and sky-train, people can't afford to take transit
- Trying to buy food
- Little income, have to pay rent PWD really??
- Loaded with negatives with extensive experience
- Some people think we are devious just because we are PWD
- ^Dangerous
- Can't move forward
- PWD thinks the money
- Let me live
- I can't stand PWD,

P7: Mentioned things about employment, I want to ask minister Simpson has said work for PWD, and wants to create jobs for PWD to access the labour market in a better way.

P7: you say you are not getting enough at McDonalds  
Worried that PWD are being given the 'bad jobs' or low waged jobs

Curious about education?

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P?: Two things

- Can't get to work & needing an intervener
- Not able to get to a bus or work
- **Issue is there is no funding for interveners**
- Have to pay additions to get to work
- New to PWD or close to retirement they are going to be transferred to OAS and there is a \$500 decrease
- Information not accessible (many seniors did not know that was going to happen)

- Need to teach people about this fact about OAS an when they switch at 65
- As you age, you may have a pension, physically you may get to point where you can't live alone and have barriers

P5

- You are on your own if you don't have family

P2

- Always a catch , never on par
- Don't have the information
- What can you access or can't
- Need to be overhauled

P1

- Forced her to take CPP

P4

- PWD had work and had funds go into CPP
- They could not work and on PWD, BC government forced them to take early CPP and they claw it back

P7: Claw is back from 60 to 65?

P1: I was forced to apply for CPP and basically I was forced and my mum made me apply to CPP so I just went along with it. But I still get penalized because my monthly income is clawed back and have so recourse and I can't do anything.  
It is hugely frustrating

P2: P1 is not the only one.

- Minimum age of 60, 50-55 is a person collected CPP
- Last year broke ankle wanted to go on EI, they did not accept and said I had to be on PWD, but didn't want to
- I don't want anything to come back on me.. with affect me financially
- Gov't gives mixed messages
- If use CPP taken off PWD and still get penalized

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P3:

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- o PWD, looks at yearly income (clawing back)
  - o 9,600 a year- have to use it up and have to manage a budget
  - o Frustrating (dealing with expenses)
  - o Deaf/blind need more access

P6:

- On welfare

- Worried about getting a job
- Need a certificate, where am I going to get that job
- So stressed out on a daily basis and it is really hard
- Facing a barrier w/o English
- Need help for translating documents
- People don't have time, I'm a refugee and don't have time to learn English, who is going to teach me

P2

- Limited English
- ESL
- Hard to go to school (post-secondary)

P5

- Training → first nations people should get training what you want and we as a deaf community should be taught in our native language

P3

- My suggestion to focus on PWD system
- Not enough income
- Cost of living is so high
- It would be great if the gov't assessed the person level of need and put them into a affordable housing system
- Budget tailored to person (responsibility)
- People may spend money of drugs, while others can manage money better
- Give people options, PWD want to live in certain areas but cannot

P5

- Talk about different types of business' and bring them together to educate and have more business tax
- PWD need a good life and well-being
- Lets do this soon not wait
- So people can all live comfortably

\*Talking about difference in Scandinavia Canada and US on taxes \*

- Need to have a mindset change

P5

- High taxes to support deaf organizations (give them money for training)
- So deaf people are equip for jobs

- Deaf community needs to be working together like the CAN network
- Want to look at it from local, provincial levels
- You can't make changes without working with the deaf community

P2

- In Montreal Deaf/blind have several issues and I think it is important to have a variety of services for them, even if people are hard of hearing
- Need to hear the voices of the people and sharing their experiences

P7: We want to find out more about the deaf and deaf/blind communities, we are concerned a/b your experience to develop a plan.

Thank-you