

BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Small Group Discussion

West End Seniors' Network (WESN) – Report

Introduction:

Small Group Discussion Date: Wednesday, March 21

Community: West End (near English Bay in Vancouver BC)

The # of individuals who participated - 10 participants

The # of organizations who participated - 1 organization (WESN)

The # of individuals with lived experience who participated - 0 participants

About the Participants:

The general demographic and age profile of your participants:

All participants were 55+, 70% were Caucasian, 70% were women, one participant was disabled and they ranged from low- to middle-income.

About the Findings:

Our small group discussion notes are split up in Part 1 and Part 2. Part 1 addresses the *What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?* question. For Part 2, to make the most of our time, the group chose their top 4 issues from Part 1 and then the group thought of potential solutions for those top 4 issues. We also included a 'General Solutions' list of solutions in Part 2 so participants could include other ideas/solutions they had for other issues that the group didn't delve into (as we did with the top 4 issues).

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

Part 1: What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?

- Income rates for programs are too low, ex. GIS, Disability, Social Assistance etc.
- Lack of dignity in application process (those in need do need feel comfortable applying for assistance)
- Child poverty; prevention is needed to end ongoing cycle of poverty among youth
- Homelessness
- Affordable housing
- Systemic barriers in legislation
- Difficulty navigating government systems (including systemic discrimination)
- Residential tenancy act doesn't support/cover lease holds, co-ops
- Lack of program access and education

- Limited pension increase
- Low-wages
- Cost of living is too high, ex. health care coverage is too low to compensate for health care premium coverage, especially dental care and medication
- Exchange rate has an impact on cost of food
- Mental health
- Jobs for seniors
- Food bank cuts
- Low nutrition education
- Old Age Pension problem – not keeping up with inflation and costs of living

Part 2: What would address these issues and help you or others out of poverty?/Possible Solutions. These are the 4 top issues the group decided on along with the proposed solutions and there is a General Solutions list as well. These are in no particular order.

Affordable Housing

- put more money into public housing (adequate housing, affordable and available housing)
- increase number of co-op housing numbers that are available
- more housing options, ex. shared accommodation
- look at new models, ex. landlord tax to subsidize low-income housing or a mansion tax to fund new housing
- rent freeze
- rent based on suite not the person
- remove limit of non-related individuals for group homes
- modify zoning to allow alternative housing options

Difficulty Navigating Government Systems

- plain language fact sheets and online information and in person
- client service communication education and sensitivity training; front line workers need to be aware of who is being served and how to treat them with respect
- policy and procedure change on systemic discrimination training and education
- local community offices where you can access all gov't services/programs
- keep info updated
- poverty navigator to help guide you through system(s)
- clear layout of programs/services and who can use them

Income and Program Rates are too low and the Cost of Living is too high

- offer living wage base on where you live, urban vs rural

- transparency from governmental on what decisions are being made
- no claw backs on existing programs/services with the introduction of new programs/services
- offer true guaranteed income
- raise income rates

Mental Health

- levels of mental health to be addressed; provide support at all levels
- mental health education; public awareness
- more services/programs
- access to services/programs
- job opportunities
- focus on promotion of mental wellness
- provide serious treatment options

General Solutions

- investigate, compare and report on how other countries are addressing homelessness ex. Japan
- raise rates on income supports to live sufficiently
- development of empathy within society
- more housing units and options
- Improve employment standards: minimum hours in a shift, paid breaks, guaranteed hours, ability to organize workplaces etc.

Solutions and Actions That Can Make a Difference

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

- poverty navigator to help guide you through system(s)
- Improve employment standards: minimum hours in a shift, paid breaks, guaranteed hours, ability to organize workplaces etc.
- raise rates on income supports to live sufficiently
- no claw backs on existing programs/services with the introduction of new programs/services
- policy and procedure change on systemic discrimination training and education
- client service communication education and sensitivity training; front line workers need to be aware of who is being served and how to treat them with respect

- offer living wage base on where you live, urban vs rural
- put more money into public housing (adequate housing, affordable and available)
- more housing options, ex. shared accommodation
- levels of mental health to be addressed; provide support at all levels
- more job opportunities for those facing mental health issues

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

1. Raise rates on income supports to live sufficiently
2. Policy and procedure change on systemic discrimination training and education
3. Put more money into public housing (adequate housing, affordable and available)

Include individual stories or case study examples based on the discussion in your group to help build a more complete picture of some of the specific experiences and circumstances of people living in poverty and the challenges that they face. However, please ensure that the individual is comfortable having their story shared and that no names are used and that they are not identified.

- I would like to see the reinstatement of welfare tribunals and restoration of a simple appeal process of government decisions