

Post Engagement Session Summary

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The following are summarized, bullet-point form notes for each session. Each engagement featured two discussions, and the session notes have been organized accordingly. This feedback is also what informed the Key Themes section of this report.

Prince George: May 25, 2023

Discussion 1: Understanding Challenges in Your Community

- Communities are not receiving enough assistance.
- It is difficult to find a place to rent while on income assistance. Even if an affordable rental can be found, most landlords do not want to rent to people on income assistance.
- There are too many barriers in place for qualifying for a Person with Disabilities (PWD) designation and claiming disability assistance:
 - One of the requirements is needing a family doctor who is familiar with the applicant’s case, which is difficult for those who are unhoused.
 - The hotline often goes unanswered.
 - The amount of funding provided is barely enough to pay rent – it does not match the current cost of living. This means that some people must choose between food, rent, or electricity.
- Having a maximum income to qualify means that money is taken away from their cheques when they are trying to make ends meet.
- Crisis cheques are very limited. There are only 6 per year of \$45 each, and if it is taken from them or misplaced, it cannot be replaced.
- Stolen IDs can only be replaced once for free.

- Hotels do not qualify for coverage under rental shelter forms.
- People can lose their housing if they are not paid on time.
- Mental health and addiction create unique challenges.
- When someone has become accustomed to homelessness, it is challenging to suddenly be given housing and then expected to budget.
 - Without being given any education around budgeting, it increases the chances of someone misusing their funding and ending up back on the streets.
- Those who do not have an address have difficulty picking up their cheque.
- The application process is now online, and difficult for those who are not familiar with the system. It also creates barriers for those that do not have access to technology or cell phones, since they are needed to upload images for the application.
- People with social anxiety struggle with lining up to receive their income assistance.
- People who may struggle to express themselves are met with pushback.
- Some individuals in need do not realize that disability assistance is available to them.
- Due to the cost, some Elders have stopped taking their medication as frequently because they want to stretch it out as long as they can.
- The response to poverty needs to lift people up instead of tearing them down.
- People in poverty can come from any economic class.
 - For some, poverty started in residential schools, where they lost their way of life.
- Why is the funding provided for children in foster care higher than that for children under the care of their own parents?
- Instead of hosting a dinner and meeting formally, why not interview the unhoused on the street and see the challenges firsthand?
 - Some of the participants received the invitation for this event an hour or two before it started, which is embarrassing on the B.C. government's part. If the funds used for the event were brought out to the streets, they would get more answers.
- The results from this engagement need to be publicized. Often, engagements like this are held and the participants do not see any results from their contributions.

Discussion 2: Supports and Actions to Promote Well-Being in Your Community

- Those experiencing poverty need more than just financial support:
 - There must be more accessible supports for mental health.
 - There is a need for more supportive housing, detoxes, and in-between homes outside of the private market.
- What has worked?

- Uniting Northern Drug Users (UNDU) has given lots of opportunities to the unhoused or those suffering from addictions. These opportunities include training and connecting them to work.
- ARCH program provides those recovering from addictions with rehabilitation, community housing, training, and work to sustain themselves.
- For lost or stolen IDs, Active Support Against Poverty (ASAP) will replace birth certificates and provide \$15 to get a replacement BC ID.
- The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) was helpful during the pandemic. People could afford food, phones, and clothing.
- There used to be work incentives such as receiving \$100 for volunteering, but those incentives are no longer in place.
- Everyone needs to collaborate and provide outreach together to bridge gaps.
 - There are too many barriers with even just the application process.
 - It takes three months after paperwork is submitted to start receiving assistance.
 - The process needs to be streamlined so cheques can be released by the next day.
 - How do we break down these barriers and make the entire process less difficult for applicants?
- Resources are limited.
 - There are not enough homeless shelters and detox centres. Without these resources, people will keep falling back into drugs.
 - The waitlist for detox is over two months.
- As First Nations, how do we help our own people?
 - There are organizations with the funding, but they are not listening.
 - In terms of addressing reconciliation and generational trauma, each community will have different needs.
 - Why follow the provincial policies if they are detrimental to Indigenous Peoples? They should be able to develop their own programs.
 - People should be taken at their word and not made to jump through hoops to receive assistance.
- The challenges for those who live in community versus away from home are different. For those living at home, there are shortages everywhere and not enough people to fill the gaps.
- Resource and Friendship Centres should have a booklet that details the assistance that they can provide for people, as well as a directory for agencies and organizations that they can seek assistance from.

- Having a reference list of resources readily available would make support more accessible.
- Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association (PGNAETA) released a booklet recently. However, the booklet is made of paper and is vulnerable to the elements. A more permanent version, such as a laminated sheet, should be created.
- Other agencies also release booklets, but they can quickly become obsolete. They need to be treated as living documents.
- Some of these people have not worked in a long time. They need to be connected to support so they have a sense of belonging. This must be done in a non-judgemental way.
 - A lot of people refuse to apply for assistance out of pride, as they are discriminated against once they are on assistance or PWD.
- Preventative measures are urgently needed because children are being taken from their families due to poverty.
 - The community should be allowed to use their natural resources to feed their own families.
 - There should be more sports programs or other extracurricular activities for the children of parents who are on assistance. These parents cannot provide anything that the Province does not already allow.
- We need to focus on education and starting it at much younger ages.
 - Children are missing out on school and going unnoticed because their parents are struggling with poverty or addiction.
 - Struggling employers are paying the youth for part-time jobs so that they will not need to provide them with benefits. This results in these young people having to work multiple part-time jobs to make ends meet.
 - Provide financial support for youth to get through school on the condition that they are no longer eligible for income assistance afterwards, because they would then be marketable and able to support themselves.
- It feels like the provincial government is herding those with addictions like cattle by enforcing so many rules.
- If the Ministers had to rely on the same B.C. government assistance that people experiencing poverty and homelessness do, they would be more inclined to improve these conditions.
- People with lived experience need to be included at the decision-making tables.
- No one should be penalized for failing to report additional income.
 - The assistance amount is not even enough for the rent of a bachelor suite.

Virtual (ISET): June 19, 2023

The following are the session summary notes from the June 19 virtual session. This was a targeted session for ISET providers and organizations with questions tailored to employment supports and programs.

Discussion 1: Understanding Challenges in Your Community

- Inflation is a substantial challenge, along with housing and homelessness. Due to inflation and a lack of affordable housing, it is difficult for the homeless population to access training or work opportunities.
- There are unique challenges that arise from rural and remote areas and an overall lack of resources and services.
- Certain areas have clients that are struggling with addictions or mental health and a lack of counselors in the area, specifically grief counselors to help address deaths in small communities. Due to these challenges with addictions and untreated mental health, it can really impede people's abilities to move forward and get to a place where they can apply for training or consider employment opportunities.
- Access to affordable housing is a major issue in the Kamloops region. Two years after the Lytton fire many people are unable to move home, and there are numerous displaced people living in different communities. Overall, the rebuilding process has been slow.
- Multiple participants spoke about challenges related to WorkBC and the fact there is no unified system in place that links the different sites. There is also no process in place to connect Indigenous clients with a local ISET provider.
 - Rural, remote, and smaller communities also face issues with service recipients program jumping and taking advantage of the system for their own benefit, since there is no communication between WorkBC sites and there is a no due diligence on the part of the Province.
- Remote communities face additional financial challenges when it comes to accessing training or various services (such as mental health), because it often involves traveling into the city. This also creates new barriers associated with being away from family or support systems.
 - This is a particular challenge in remote/rural settings, especially for youth and newer members to the community as there is a lack of medical doctors, widespread mental health struggles, and high rates of toxic substance abuse.
- Unless people have safe housing and better food security, they will not be seeking employment or training opportunities that could help get them out of that cycle.
- All costs are escalating while food banks are receiving less donations. There is also a shortage of affordable housing. The combination of these factors mean that clients are not receiving enough money to get them through the month.

- Those who are on income assistance are being punished instead of supported to do better.
- Services are all siloed, and it is difficult to reach out to workers directly. Workers are no longer assigned to handle clients, and the clients are left to fend for themselves.
 - Communities lack the power to design their own policies.
- The mandate around having education plans on people's files can be limiting.
- Current lack of interest in training, possibly due to COVID-19. It is important to cater to people's interests individually.
- There have been tremendous losses in First Nation communities within the last six months having an impact on overall mental health.
- Isolation is an issue when community members need to travel for training or job opportunities.
- Opportunities to move ahead are limited and there are high barriers to entry to the workforce.

Discussion 2: Employment Supports and Services to Promote Well-Being

- Whatever path forward is taken, it needs to happen soon. Indigenous Peoples cannot just keep answering the same questions over and over – something tangible needs to happen to show progress is being made.
- WorkBC sites and the social assistance or income service providers need to work in collaboration for any Indigenous client that needs their help. They should be directed to the nearest ISET provider or referred to an Indigenous organization that can help them in the right way.
- Starting with culture is key. Incorporating cultural activities within programming provides cultural support for Indigenous students and helps to build their confidence and ties to their community. If they are feeling confident and supported, then they will be more successful moving on to other things.
- There should be more recognition of micro-credentials – courses weeks in length that can be combined to qualify for a certificate from an accredited academic institution. They are a more accessible form of education for a lot of people and would help give Indigenous students industry-specific training that will help them secure employment.
- Success should not just be measured on the grand scale of things – individual successes are just as important, and more important in some cases. It is also helpful to celebrate the achievements of students throughout their training, including graduating from high school, graduating from a trade, certificate, or other program, etc. It is important to celebrate all the wins, big or small.
 - Participants agreed that going the extra mile for your client is important, and it is rewarding to be able to walk with them every step of the way and see them

succeed. It should be more about making individuals successful, rather than focusing on community-wide big successes.

- It is important to look at what has not been working in the past decades, and to make the necessary changes moving forward.
- More resources are needed to build capacity for everyone.
- The B.C. government and workers behind the policies and programs should reflect on the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.
 - Consistency in lowering barriers is needed between the provincial government departments.
 - The B.C. government should adjust for those in poverty and for the Indigenous instead of the other way around.
- There needs to be an Indigenous-led policy table that would look at a new design, as opposed to a B.C. government-led piece.
- Mental health has become one of the major issues with the new generation. It is important to know how to help and support them early on.
- Flexibility to provide support for everyone rather than individuals grouped as a whole.
- There needs to be more communication between the different provincial government branches to provide support to those in poverty.
- There are a lot of youths that pass or struggle due to drug addiction. It is important to educate them early on and take a more collaborative approach in saving lives.
- It is essential to build relationships with employers, matching individuals through interests so that they can engage in targeted training.
- Systemic racism still exists. There have been instances where equally qualified people are treated differently due to being involved in the 'Indigenous' Training Assistance Program.
- There still exists a lot of myths and stereotypes (mostly negative ones) around those in poverty.
- There is no point person or resource that can be contacted for any questions regarding the rules and regulations.
- Collaboration is key. The SDPR needs to work with the First Nations and Indigenous organizations. Clients are more successful if they are in a consistent program from start to finish. There are numerous barriers that can prevent someone from accessing training and employment opportunities, such as homelessness, lack of affordable housing, higher cost of living from inflation, or more location-specific barriers that exist in rural and remote communities. In these areas, people will often have to travel to access training, which adds an additional financial barrier and burden from being removed from a person's usual support systems.

- Culture needs to be incorporated into any solution or process – it empowers Indigenous clients and is an important key to them being successful.
 - Understanding the mindset of the new generation is also an important step in providing support and encouraging them.
- It is important to measure success according to the individual, rather than the community. Focus on going the extra mile for each person and making sure they are succeeding, rather than thinking that success must be grand to count. Personalized training is much more beneficial than group training.
- Members would love to be at the table discussing social welfare programs, income assistance programs, food banks, and such policies. There needs to be less silos and instead more communication between the SDPR and the citizens.
- There needs to be a guideline or repository to search for and gather information, connect people with one another, and to seek support from the SDPR.

Williams Lake: July 12, 2023

The following are the session summary notes from the July 12, Williams Lake in-person engagement.

Discussion 1: Understanding Challenges in Your Community

- There is a local food bank, but people still need access to fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - There is low turnover in groceries outside of Williams Lake, which is a problem when considering the shelf life of food.
 - For young mothers, healthy food is expensive to feed the whole family.
- There is a lack of childcare, especially after 6 pm when there are a lot of shift workers in the community.
- For more remote Western communities, communication is a challenge because of dead zones and the difficulty it creates for using cell phones out there.
- Communities can be dependent on Wi-Fi, as landlines are expensive, which is why there needs to be more affordable internet providers.
 - Without a phone, people are dependent on Wi-Fi connections on computers. However, when this connection is slow it creates serious challenges. For example, someone passed away because it took so long to call for an ambulance.
- There is a shortage of doctors and nurses. People are spending hours in the emergency room or on long waitlists. This also makes it very difficult to get medication.
- The cost of fuel is more expensive in rural areas.
- A lot of people do not know how to access provincial government programs. Some feel like they must jump through hoops to get access.
- A large barrier is the need for ID to receive income assistance.
- Access for people with special needs has gone down.

- It is not sufficient to pay out \$900 for Income assistance, have minimum wage at \$15 an hour, or keep disability assistance at the current rate.
- There needs to be more solutions in addition to increasing funding for safe injection sites.

Discussion 2: Supports and Actions to Promote Well-Being in Your Community

- Indigenous children should be learning their own language in schools.
- There should be more frequent coverage for hearing aid replacements, this can also be linked to dementia.
- There needs to be more telehealth available for diabetes, heart appointments, and reviewing x-rays, making the appointments more accessible by minimizing travel costs.
- There must be more treatment support and services available through telehealth, as not everyone has access to a local physician.
- Since there are no more Greyhound buses going to larger urban centers, ridesharing companies should be allowed to set up in more cities as competition for local taxi services.
- Expansion of funding for community wellness initiatives:
 - Clients are appreciative of the increased availability.
 - Pay for hunting and fishing services for Elders who do not have family to provide for them.
 - Cultural enrichment – some programming can be expensive due to the cost of fuel and accommodation to come here.
- Rent bank through Canadian Mental Health Association – could borrow for rent and pay back slowly.
- Need continuation of inflation relief.
- Elder programming keeps Elders out of isolation. There should be a holistic mind-body-spirit approach, which can be a better investment than long-term care.
- Youth centres provide the same connections, we should try to keep the same connections to keep mental health strong and keep the youth connected to society.
- Northern areas are producing most of the hydro and natural gas, yet they pay higher prices for it.
- The rate of funding for parents needs to be increased for larger families.
- There must be a livable wage instituted so people can cover all their costs.
- Smaller communities need funding to expand their transit systems, along with operation hours. Many people working late hours or doing shift work are unable to utilize the transit system and instead must take taxis.
- Legislation that prevents farmers from donating their excess food is problematic, because then it goes to waste instead of helping to feed the hungry.
- The Indigenous way was all about community, and we need to get back to that, with everyone coming together and trading or bartering for some things.

- Politicians should give back to their communities, they receive too much money and pension.
- There should be more safe communal areas for the youth, as well as educational courses on mental health, drugs, and safe sex.
- It would be good for single mothers to have extra supports for their kids, such as the ability to pick their kids up and send them home.
- How can landlords be held accountable? There needs to be higher standards set and some sort of enforcement framework created.

Penticton: July 19, 2023

The following are the session summary notes from the July 19, Penticton in-person engagement.

Discussion 1: Understanding Challenges in Your Community

- Income assistance is not livable and pushes people to pursue other means of earning money.
 - A large proportion of the poor are *working poor* who have employment but still cannot afford to care for their children.
 - A single mom is already working two jobs but is still finding it difficult to pay for her kid's extracurriculars.
 - Some people are having to come out of retirement and work full time to survive.
 - The Federal pension is indexed, but the senior supplement and SAFER are not, and people can lose their senior supplement whenever their CPP goes up.
 - Pet-friendly housing is difficult to find, and the overall cost of rent is substantially high.
- There is a lack of compassion for those experiencing poverty or homelessness. Often, these people face discrimination from others.
 - Well-being means a lot. This can mean having good shoes, or something as simple as being able to use a bathroom.
 - People are yelled at to get a job, but this is difficult if they are coming off streets.
 - There are people experiencing homelessness everywhere. They have nowhere to go, and it is worse for women. There are men on the street creating a circle around the women to keep them safe while they sleep and take shifts to stay up and guard them.
 - There are men being attacked because they are not welcome on the streets.
 - Tents are only allowed from 9 pm to 7 am. Past that time, bylaw officers come by and throw their belongings in the dump.
 - Many people find it difficult to fill in forms, and unless they have access and advocacy they cannot function.

- Not all places have trauma-informed workplace training, and they do not realize that they can be re-triggering people when they ask for information and treat them disrespectfully.
- Limited availability at detox facilities is problematic, especially when there can be a six-week wait to get a treatment bed after detox is done. Some patients will deny treatment instead of waiting and go back onto the streets.
- It is also difficult to transition from homelessness to housing. There is a misconception that homeless people are criminals and thieves, but they are compassionate and caring with each other.
- New housing available on the market does not have a space to grow food, which is a lost opportunity for self-sufficiency. There needs to be more planning around how people can have food sovereignty and food security.
- There are clearly not enough resources to go around. How do you determine who gets the resources?
 - Women who are homeless do not have the same resources as men, and if you want to detox it is worse.
 - There are not enough social workers and support workers in general.
 - If anyone has a diagnosis like autism, how would they get through the system? Everyone is staying in their lane and all the services are siloed.
 - While income earning levels have been increased, it is still difficult to maintain a maximum level of income to continue qualifying for PWD benefits, especially for those whose disabilities flare up unpredictably.
- There is a notable lack of support for children's extracurricular activities, especially for children with special needs. There is almost no funding for the arts for children. There are no subsidies for art, theatre, or music.
 - Some parents cannot afford bus fees in the city, and they must spend money on gas to get their children to their sports activities if they can afford it.
 - There also needs to be support for teenagers transitioning into adulthood. Young adults are thrown out of their homes at 19 without the proper resources and this puts them at higher risk for getting into trouble.
- Establishing a connection to community and family is a known method for addiction support, and when one is in isolation, they feel worthless and want to use drugs. A family does not need to be connected by blood; they can be a chosen family that cares for each other.
- Current medical services and MSP coverage are insufficient.
 - Mental health can affect the types of medication that one can take. A participant noted that they had found effective medication after trying various types, but their new medication did not qualify for coverage.
- People face discrimination and exorbitant prices when trying to secure housing.

- There are housing ads that specify “working couples only” even though it is against the human rights code.
- Applicants are discriminated against or rejected if they are on income assistance or disability assistance, and it is necessary to disclose whether they are on disability assistance.
- Income usually needs to be 3 times the cost of rent to be able to qualify.
- Rent can be up to \$3,000 a month for an apartment unit. A participant shared that they were living in a trailer to get by. Another participant mentioned that 90% of their disability assistance goes to their rent.
- Rentals are available in the winter but scarcely in the summer due to short-term renting and the “sunshine tax.”
- The high cost of moving, including first and last month’s rent, make it difficult to leave predatory living situations and abusive relationships.
- Due to inflation, the price of necessities like grocery have increased at an alarming rate. Food security has become a major challenge.
 - Children get sent home with a backpack of food for the weekend, but do not receive any in the summer.
 - There is a local farmer’s market program, however the demand has been so high that coupon amounts have been cut in half.
 - People with certain medical conditions like diabetes cannot eat some of the foods provided.
 - The food bank does not have fresh produce and the food can often be rancid or spoiled.
 - Some participants mentioned drinking coffee/tea to stave off their hunger and stretch out their food.
 - Parents must sacrifice their own health to ensure that their children will have healthy food to eat.
- When someone on disability assistance enters a relationship, their income becomes joint, and they can end up being disqualified and losing their assistance.
- Transit should be free for everyone, as driving has become so expensive.
- Other major challenges that participants face are racism, ableism, and classism.
- People with lived experience should be given a better platform to share their stories.
- There is nothing holding landlords accountable for charging exorbitant amounts for rent.
 - What exactly are these landlords providing in exchange for high rent? Tenants should have the right to inquire about how the landlords justify their rent amounts.
 - Complaints and inquiries to the Tenancy Board take too long. There should be consequences for landlords with multiple complaints filed against them.
 - During COVID-19, people were entitled to \$2,000 monthly from CERB, without that, people are now struggling to make up for the difference.

Discussion 2: Supports and Actions to Promote Well-Being in Your Community

- There is a lack of integrated case management that is both consistent and action focused, current methods are siloed and do not cater to individual situations.
 - Frontline workers need to have trauma-informed workplace training, and they need to be prepared to listen without judgement.
 - Passing people from worker to worker does not help. There needs to be trust in people, where they will not have to tell their story to gain the benefits. They need consistency, and needing to justify their circumstances repeatedly is retraumatizing.
 - Care should be client-centered and holistic (mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional).
- Workers need to meet the clients where they are. That means using language that is respectful and that they can understand. Language is so important and can be triggering when used wrong.
- It is difficult to marry colonial systems with the way that the community lives, wherein they focus more on connectedness and ensuring that everyone is fed and warm and no one is left behind. When the data overshadows the work being done, the people suffer.
- The bartering system in the past was good. If implemented now it would service so many knowledgeable people who are out on the street.
- People hesitate to ask for assistance with food and necessities because there is a high risk of having their children taken away.
 - The expenses for children on welfare are higher than assessed. While the B.C. government has increased the levels; they did not anticipate the sharp increase in food prices over the last few years.
- It is crucial to have employment counsellors in every Friendship Centre.
 - Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills (Advanced Education Skills, and Training) was initially funding 17 Friendship Centres for employment counsellors, and this was decreased to 13 Friendship Centres.
 - Micro-certification has helped; however, it works best when there is an employment counsellor who can assess individual situations and decide what skills are needed. Furthermore, the SDPR is not providing funding for every provincial Friendship Centre, and this has impacted the process of getting micro-certifications.
 - More thought needs to be given to how we can foster careers instead of just jobs.
- Rent should not have been commodified to this extent. Rent and mortgage amounts are higher than experts recommend. The current system is made to keep people in poverty. Housing should be a human right.

- There used to be a program in place to reward people who were not delinquent on rent.
- Some buildings have units that are rented out at vastly different price points.
- There needs to be more B.C. government-run or B.C. government-owned housing. There also needs to be a set limit to rent increases and more regulations for rental prices. There should be more protections in place against the eviction of Indigenous and other marginalized people.
- Rent is higher than the properties are worth, and the locals are getting priced out of their homes.
- Racism is rampant in the rental industry, and people no longer feel safe in their homes.
- In the past, only half of a single mother's income was deducted from her welfare cheques.
- Disability assistance cheques decrease the following year if you make over \$15,000, which makes it difficult to plan your finances as your disability assistance is cut when you may need it more.

Vancouver: July 24, 2023

The following are the session summary notes from the July 24, Vancouver in-person engagement.

Discussion 1: Understanding Challenges in Your Community

- One of the biggest challenges identified was housing, or the lack thereof:
 - While it is nice to have assistance when applying for housing, instead of being Nation-based, the assistance needs to be more inclusive of non-registered individuals who also live in the community.
 - There is a lack of planning on how to combat discrimination in the housing market.
 - Even when housing is provided, some people will struggle as they are not used to having a home and they end back up on the street.
 - When someone needs rental assistance, the increase in assistance is based on their income in the previous year, which does not accurately reflect their current circumstances.
 - People who experience homelessness also have their belongings stolen often. Few of them will have phones, let alone a fixed mailing address or access to the internet which is often required to apply for support and assistance.
- Some people have limited computer skills or literacy skills. How can they be expected to fill out application forms?
 - Many are reluctant to fill out provincial government surveys on paper especially from people they do not know.

- To best support people who are out on the streets, they need to be met where they are and on their level. Support services need to adapt to the individual and not the other way around.
- The B.C. government often implements programs rashly without having proper social programs in place to support those affected. An example is the recent decriminalization program that went into effect before social workers on the ground were able to prepare appropriately.
 - There is also too much focus on the statistics of a program. How many people counted in those statistics received the services? How many workers went above and beyond to reach out to people to try to engage them? The time has passed for documentation. The issues have been identified and now it is time to work with people directly to help solve them.
 - There also needs to be more social workers deployed with police officers.
 - People need to be met where they are, instead of pulling or pushing them to where you think they should be.
- There is a lack of dedicated support for teenagers who are no longer eligible under Jordan's Principle.
- Some people are completely overwhelmed after COVID-19 or have anxiety, they are employable but struggle to leave their homes.
- Indigenous Peoples still face racism in health care spaces.
 - The hospital union had representatives from their staff but not from the communities.
 - There are delays in notifying families of deaths: a patient at the hospital had passed away and the nurses did not know anything about him, so they were about to cremate him. An Elder who was visiting their family in the next bed went to the community herself to find the deceased's family.
 - More hospitals need to have a First Nation liaison.
- One of the biggest challenges the participants noted was regarding housing and homelessness:
 - If someone were working for minimum wage, rent for a 1-bedroom apartment is equivalent to almost their entire monthly income.
 - A lot of the homelessness in Vancouver is not caused by drugs and alcohol but by a disconnect from their lands and community, and they need land-based healing.
 - Some people are not able to access supports to be able to stay in housing and they end up on the street, support needs to come from the various ministries before someone becomes homeless and not afterwards.
 - Not everyone has family support nearby, and they need people to talk to, along with other wraparound supports (e.g., food, transportation, counselling, education).

- Some people choose to stay in shelters because they are afraid to move away from what they know. These people are usually in their late thirties but have not had the opportunity to grow. The shelter does not provide employment or next step services.
- There are Indigenous shelters available but there are still many others who are not Indigenous and cannot access their services. Many of these people are Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour (BIPOC) and there are not as many other services they can be referred to.
- Those struggling with drugs and alcohol may cycle in and out of treatment multiple times, and they need income assistance for that duration.
 - People travelling home from substance-abuse treatment need follow-up care and support to plan.
- Food and gas prices have been very high due to inflation.
 - While people had been able to traditionally harvest natural foods like fish and berries, the harvest has been dwindling due to climate change.
- There needs to be more holistic supports available, that take traditions and culture into consideration. This would include supports for education and training too.
 - ACCESS provides counsellors to support their clients in their search for employment, WorkBC needs to do the same. All Indigenous Peoples should have access to Indigenous employment counselling, like others do in major colleges and universities.
 - If you heavily invest in people before they get on income assistance, it will save money in the future.
- Some people who are on income assistance want to stay on it while they are doing their trades program because it is difficult to get back on income assistance if things do not work out well for them.
- Many people who are looking for employment have criminal records, and the expungement program from the John Howard Society can take several years. These people are struggling to find employment as many employers require criminal record checks.

Discussion 2: Supports and Actions to Promote Well-Being in Your Community

- Instead of telling people what they need, respect that they have the right to self-determination.
 - Rather than scheduling a meeting with a client, why not offer to meet over breakfast instead?
 - An employment assistance worker suggested having drop-in hours with breakfast provided instead of appointments so people can come whenever they need assistance.

- There is a lack of housing available for youth. A possible solution would be to establish a youth agreement or Indigenous housing agreement for those who are not yet of age.
- Sometimes client-facing workers do not have the right training to be working with people with mental health issues. While everyone heavily relies on mental health professionals, there needs to be more support and compassion for these people from within communities.
 - Some people may need extra care, and a little more support, understanding, and compassion can go a long way.
- Would it be possible to facilitate a program where people can come collect things that others want to give away for free? This may be able to minimize property theft.
- The B.C. government collects statistics and numbers on “Indigenous hires” but how many of those are kept on?
- There needs to be more summer opportunities for students and incentive work for anyone on income assistance.
 - Incentive work can also be a way to increase people’s work experiences and references that is outside of families.
 - Full-time or permanent opportunities may feel overwhelming for the youth, they need to offer more part-time or short-term opportunities.
- There needs to be more support for parents who are seeking to bring their children home. Children should not be taken from parents who cannot afford to feed them, but instead they should be provided with the necessary resources and kept together.
- People on income assistance need more time, they may not be ready or able to return to work right away.
- While some First Nations were able to bring their services to urban areas, not many communities are able to do this, and this results in a lot of disconnection and trauma.
- Education is a challenge from daycare up and the racism that exists in the education system. While the United States have educational opportunity grants, there is nothing equivalent to that here. There needs to be funding for youth to attend trade school, college, or university no matter how they did in high school.
 - The youth are encouraged to take the ‘easy’ classes and the schools do not care as long as these children graduate. Once these children graduate from high school, they are told that they do not have the right credits for their further education, and then they take entry-level jobs instead of going back to school.
 - More passionate counsellors and teachers are needed to start guiding the youth in Grade 10 or even earlier, so that they are set on a good path to achieve their potential.
- The transition from 18 to 19 years old can also be a challenge. Some communities have an education worker who can help guide youth through the transition from school to the work force.

- A possible solution to the education piece can be community-based education, but the current school system would not let that happen, as they are not comfortable having the community come into the school and assist.
- Children should be taught cultural and traditional knowledge by their community from a young age. They can start with learning small things like how to make Bannock, or how to braid hair for powwows and potlatches.
- Funding needs to go to effective community-based programs, such as community gardens and food pantries, where no one is excluded.
- The Friendship Centre also has a great education team that supports the children and teaches them various life skills like tending the community garden. The harvest then goes to the elders and those with low income.
 - The education team is teaching kids in the way that works best for them.
- Services need to be more individualized: When people are put into programs, they can feel overcome or unmotivated. It is important to find out what they are passionate about and move forward from there.
- Homelessness is a recurring issue, and if money were the solution, then it would have been solved by now. There needs to be more support for people as early as possible, from workers who are as passionate as possible.
 - Housing occupancy levels for Indigenous and low-income people also needs to be higher.
- The B.C. government keeps trying to hire more Indigenous People, but they are making them jump through the hoops to get in. The system needs to change to bring down the barriers for Indigenous People over time.

Elders Gathering: August 15, 2023

Unlike the other engagement sessions, there were no breakout rooms utilized for the Elders Gathering. Participants were kept together during the discussion, and there was a strong focus on imaging their ideal future and wellness in communities. The discussion questions were informed by the Ktunaxa Investment Sector Practice Framework.

- **Children and Family**
 - Poverty is strongly tied to the foster care system, as Indigenous children that enter care are not being set up with the resources and supports, they need to live happy and healthy lives.
 - When in care, Indigenous children experience trauma (verbal, physical, and/or sexual). As a result, many Indigenous children end up homeless as they do not know where else to go for help and turn to substances because of this trauma. There needs to be safeguards in place in these situations to keep Indigenous children off the streets.

- Many Indigenous children are struggling to access the basic needs required for survival. We need to provide these children with basic life skills and knowledge to provide a fighting chance against poverty.
 - The government of B.C. needs to focus on prevention. Instead of spending resources on removing Indigenous children and supporting their foster homes, they should spend those funds to support the families better care for their own children, whether through trauma counselling, accessible housing, childcare, etc. It must be a priority to keep Indigenous children with their families and communities.
 - There is disparity between the services that are available to single fathers and mothers. There are next to no programs available to support single fathers and this disparity needs to be addressed.
- **Young Adults and Transitioning into the Workforce**
 - The foster care system sets people up for failure from the beginning. Many children who are in the system, exit the system with fragmented life skills.
 - Teenagers and young adults who need support face challenges with youth agreements. The rules and requirements are too strict, and the youth need to ask for permission to access anything. The system was made too complex and for them to even apply for the agreement, they need to find an advocate because they would not know how to navigate the process themselves.
 - Some young adults do not file their taxes, either because they do not know how, or are not aware that they should. Without filing their taxes, they are ineligible for any benefits or income support.
 - Often when workers are on vacation, the file is transferred or deferred, this can result in the benefits being significantly delayed when people need them.
- **Housing**
 - There needs to be a better definition of what constitutes safe housing. As an example, living in an RV could still be considered unsafe housing or homeless, because there is not uninterrupted access to water.
 - The regulated amount of people per household needs to be revisited as this does not align with Indigenous ways.
- **Access to Information and Services**
 - Individuals needing supports do not have access to basic communication devices, which makes it incredibly challenging to find information. This also creates challenges for individuals that are trying to retain employment, as potential employers have no way of contacting the individual.

- Access to basic communication tools must be provided.
- People that are victimized need to be able to easily access information on what supports are available.
- There needs to be greater awareness of Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS).
- **System Complexity**
 - The system is complex. This is particularly true for urban environments. Individuals do not know how to access services. There are multiple different organizations and parties responsible for unique areas of support.
 - The process of putting supports in place is overwhelming.
 - It takes time to access supports and often when people are trying to access these services they are already in dire need.
- **Rural vs. Urban**
 - Accessing supports in remote, rural, and urban settings presents a unique set of challenges for each environment.
 - Accessing support and services in urban environments is more complex in comparison to rural settings.
 - Those in remote areas have a challenging time accessing supports, as they are often located in neighbouring communities, which requires travel and creates a barrier for those that do not have the resources.
- **Cost of Living**
 - Supports do not reflect the cost of living. Rent and food cost more than the monthly benefits.
 - Inflation is surpassing the rate at which supports are being increased.
- **Equitable Supports**
 - Supports need to be equitable across all levels, whether living in community or in an urban setting, whatever status the individual has, or whichever parent is seeking it.
- **Trauma Counselling and Support**
 - There needs to be more trauma counselling and support offered.
 - We must focus on treating underlying trauma as a method of prevention instead of addressing homelessness, addiction, and other situations when they have already worsened.

- **Case Studies/Examples of Working Models**
 - A community had hired individuals on welfare. The band members started getting paid and had a sense of purpose and were able to contribute to their local community.
 - Cultural supports in communities are required to encourage and support people in believing in themselves and aid in overcoming barriers to employment.

- **Support for Elders**
 - There is a lack of support and resources available to assist those transitioning from welfare to pensions and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). Seniors do not receive a courtesy notice and may not have income for a period until someone can guide them through the paperwork. It is unacceptable that people can lose their standard of living simply because of paperwork.
 - More funding needs to be made available for supports required by seniors, such as vision care, mobility aids, and medication. There are fees charged for chiropractors, dental care, and other medical services that make them unattainable for people experiencing poverty. People should not have to spend their pension on medical expenses.
 - Food sovereignty and access to funds and services for transportation is key to supporting this population.

- **Income Assistance and Other Supports**
 - Income assistance is not meant for people to thrive, it is meant for people to survive.
 - Individuals on income assistance are docked for any supplementary funds (such as incentives or monetary support from their families), which prevents them from getting above the poverty line. This is incredibly discouraging and results in them losing hope.
 - Income assistance is not enough for one individual to support themselves, let alone a child too. This puts the child on a pathway to poverty from an early age.
 - A lot of support is confined to a certain time frame and then taken away, even though the problem persists. This is not a long-term solution.
 - A participant noted that it can be even more expensive to get a job than to stay unemployed, and there is not a lot of incentive to seek employment to begin with. The more money they make, the more that their support benefits are taken away from them.

- **Colonial History of Poverty and Access to Resources**

- Poverty is a created history. It was created to keep Indigenous Peoples from practicing their cultural practices and feeding into and contributing into a more colonial way of living.
- If you give Indigenous Peoples back their land, then poverty will go away. Indigenous Peoples were confined to 0.02 of their traditional land mass and that is helping keep Indigenous population in poverty.
- Indigenous People are over policed when it comes to accessing the resources (fishing, hunting, timber, land) that they should have an inherent right to access.
- Having to pay for food fish and other resources is disabling Indigenous People financially.
- Reconciliation needs to include resource distribution to help address the causes of poverty.

Virtual: August 22, 2023

During this engagement, participants joined and represented 11 different regions across Canada. These included Vancouver Island, Sunshine Coast, Lower Mainland, Nechako, Northeast, Cariboo, Thompson-Okanagan, and the North Coast of British Columbia, along with representation from Eastern Alberta, Northern Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia. This session was also attended by Honourable Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

Discussion 1: Understanding Challenges in Your Community

- Some of the big issues are safe housing and food security, i.e., with grocery prices rising by 10% it is becoming less possible to afford groceries. This has a direct impact on health because when prices rise, healthy food becomes less accessible.
- The cost of groceries does not seem to fluctuate like the cost of fuel though. The price of fuel has gone up and down, but the cost of groceries has not decreased.
- People are paying unreasonable prices and will be left deeper in poverty as they struggle to make all their payments on top of rising grocery prices.
- The government (federal and provincial) must control taxes or else it will turn out just like the housing crisis.
- Mortgage, rent, and property taxes are all increasing significantly. It is becoming impossible to afford anywhere to live.
- Indigenous youth has been deeply affected by COVID-19 and being shut in that now they are avoiding going to public places due to fear and low self-esteem.
- It has been a year since COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, but it is still affecting children, families, and education.
- There should be more transportation available, especially to hospitals. This is especially difficult in more remote or coastal locations, where traveling to a hospital may involve hours-long drives and ferry rides.

- This does not even consider the long wait-times for medical appointments, or the reality that many communities do not have adequate medical care to begin with.
 - If there is a medical emergency after business hours, it becomes difficult to contact emergency services and get the help a person needs.
- Existing mental health and substance abuse challenges have only been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the isolation endured from lockdowns.
- Many communities are struggling with high drug-use and the aftermath of losing community members to their addictions – especially as the rates of overdose increase in the younger generations.
- There should be more supports for youth, as many pre-teens are turning to self-harm, suicidal thoughts, alcohol, and drugs.
- The government of B.C. needs to step in and do something about the growing rates of drug-use and crack down on drug dealers that seem to be operating with impunity.
- Non-profit organizations are receiving funding, but there is systemic racism at play that prevents Indigenous Peoples from reaching out to receive support from them. There are also no formal agreements regarding the care for Indigenous Peoples, so there is no hope for enforcement.
- In rural and remote communities, there are substantial financial barriers with accessing resources because of how expensive it is to transport anything to the communities.
 - Some First Nations must utilize ferries for grocery trips, which speaks to the complex logistics that families must deal with to simply feed themselves.
- It is challenging to find the right source of funding to help community members. It is difficult to access emergency management money, along with figuring out which funding streams are even available to communities.
- The reality of living in chronic poverty is that families will do whatever is necessary to survive, and they will sometimes have to get creative to make ends meet – such as accessing multiple conflicting funding opportunities.
- The root causes of poverty and well-being need to be addressed, otherwise there will just be more of the same.
- Poverty is a state of mind, so how do you empower people to have self-worth and self-esteem? How do you address that and empower people to move beyond that?
- It is difficult when a community does not have a land base. One Nation has been waiting many years for their addition to reserve to become status. No one has lived on their reserve since the 50's-60's when children were being taken away to residential school. There needs to be a better housing continuum with proper cultural supports, especially in urban areas. The SDPR also needs to look at multi-generational homes, with occupancy standards (people are being kicked out in urban areas because of over/under housing). Indigenous youth in care are also being pushed out of the system and do not have the right tools to survive, so they end up on the streets.

- With public education, there appears to be a disconnect between the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and the SDPR. Everyone is pointing the finger at different areas and people, and nobody is stepping up to offer direct support that the students need. If students are not getting through the system with a quality education, the cycle of poverty repeats itself. It would be nice to see a little more engagement of the four Ministers with each other and bringing in organizations like FNHA, FN Education Steering Committee, and the Ministry of Education, to dial in a little more with the school boards. Rather than providing band-aid fixes, provide a stitched approach with a strategic goal to address this. Students are walking their own paths outside of the school day too, and the experiences they have at home and elsewhere, they bring that back Monday to Friday, 10 months out of the year.
- Another challenge is that certain school districts and school boards misinterpret data about what success looks like for students. If they have seen huge improvements with grad rates, then why is it that incarceration rates have not decreased? Why have homelessness and poverty rates not decreased? Why are more Indigenous students not getting into employment, post-secondary courses, and training? There is a disconnect between what they are claiming with the data and reality.
- The Ministries need to find a way to hold school boards accountable to the actual data they are sharing. For example, some school boards have claimed that over the past 10 years their rates of Indigenous students graduating has increased – but what is the quality of those graduations? Did they graduate with C's? Were they able to enter the workforce? That data is not presented accurately and makes the situation sound different than it is.
- There are some housing providers in BC that have housed urban Indigenous Peoples for many years and made sure that they have culturally safe, appropriate, and affordable housing. It is important to prioritize making those partnerships happen, because it needs to be replicated more in community and in an urban setting.
- Many communities are faced with inflation. However, a lot of community members are survivors of residential schools, so they never learned how to properly live, and they have a lot of healing to do.
- When it comes to education, there have historically been two streams – one that academically prepares students for post-secondary training, and the other that does not and focuses on general education. First Nations students always seem to get pushed into this general stream, so school boards need to be held accountable in many ways.
- There are mental health repercussions from not having basic needs met. It is especially difficult for young people that are trying to make ends meet, and it is hard for children that witness this too. Signs of anxiety and depression are being seen in younger and younger generations.
- These struggles are affecting every community at this point, and there is just not enough to go around between the lack of support, funding, transportation, etc.

Discussion 2: Supports and Actions to Promote Well-Being in Your Community

- When asked what was already working that could be built upon, participants discussed food support, safe housing, and assistance with utility bills. One major thing would be assistance with skills training as people need skills to be employable.
- While some communities have food banks and food delivery programs in place to help low-income families and Elders, it is not enough and there should be more grants and funding to ensure that everyone has enough food to eat.
 - The SDPR could fund this, as they previously offered grants during COVID-19. It would be nice for grants like this to become standard, rather than exceptional.
- The provincial and federal government should review their current levels of taxation, as this would be one effective way of reducing the cost of living.
- Even though the results will not be seen immediately, the government of B.C. must start investing in the youth and ensuring that they have all the help they need.
- At the community level, people need to feel loved and cared for, no matter what state of mind they are in. There needs to be enough funding to support Indigenous Peoples living in community. There needs to be an increase in funding, especially in remote areas, as these areas cost more to maintain due to travel and transport.
- Working collaboratively with the government of B.C. to come up with new solutions to old problems is key to helping Indigenous communities. There are no conversations between governments, organizations, and communities to help find solutions that work for everyone.
- There are many people who fundraise and write proposals to help their communities. However, there are not enough people with the necessary experience or education to perform these roles.
- It is important to build rapport with First Nations and nurture that trust. Normalize talking about mental health and emotions. Due to COVID-19, people are now scared to get out of their homes and put themselves out there.
- From a lens of education, it would be nice to see more resources, funding, and supports that provide youth with the opportunities for land-based healing, medicine, and access to traditional foods. School systems have opportunities to meet components of curriculum and mandates of UNDRIP that address shortcomings of public education. They could incorporate these types of supports for all students, especially those who are disadvantaged or dealing with mental health and poverty. Shortcomings of resources and funds that can accommodate and target these areas for these students dealing with poverty and well-being challenges. Creating supports so they can overcome these later in life.
 - There could also be a lot more opportunities for co-op if there was funding or some sort of grants out there where local businesses could apply to have youth take part in different industry employment opportunities.

- With trauma and its root causes around physical, mental, sexual abuse, etc., workers need to get training on how to refer members and provide peer support or have additional workers to help assess and triage.
- Regarding addictions, there needs to be more counsellors in community to build a rapport with the Elders and youth and have that joint connection. Some people do not have certain things – like a vehicle or phone – because there is not enough money to pay for it.
- Another educational component. A lot of students, when they do graduate and if their grades are good enough to get into university, are competing with only so many seats. Some universities and colleges say on paper that they reserve some seats for Indigenous students, but they need to do better and give all Indigenous students priority for certain programs. Also, they should start moulding programs based on interests, traits, skill sets (with strong supports throughout their education). Or if we have a high number of students going into nursing, mental health, etc., no matter what they are automatically in. Also funds or incentives from the Province to help support them. The federal government only provides so much money to support education. A living allowance does not really help. It reinforces poverty because it is not enough to help students get through.
- Poverty is a state of mind. Well-being is a state of mind. Schools need to help students develop self-esteem and self-worth. How do we become worthwhile contributors? One of the social determinants of well-being is ability to contribute. You contribute, and it changes how you feel and how you look at the world.
- Making someone feel seen, heard, and understood is the loudest way to support and love them.
- One of the challenges is that many Indigenous communities have all these different programs locally and are sometimes locked in our own little silos and not interacting with each other. Make sure all components of the individual are having blankets wrapped around. Meeting youth where they are on their current journey, and asking what they would like to be. It takes a lot of different resources to wrap around that child.
- We are rebuilding our community food garden and investment into food sovereignty would be beneficial. Not grant-based but ongoing, set funding would be great for such initiatives.
- Healing workshops to help work on the heart and mind. Being flexible and patient with the youth and meeting them where they are at – making genuine connections and building trust.
- Youth, families, Elders, need to be invited to the table and have their voices heard, along with getting involved in the solution and not just talk on their behalf.

- One of the programs in a community is opening their kitchen and showing how to prepare and preserve food. Many community members stepped up to show them how to make Bannock, a simple meal that costs less than \$10, and including Elders' input.

Virtual: August 29, 2023

Since this engagement was the validation session of the series, participants from past sessions were invited back. They were then presented the above themes before being asked to build upon what had already been heard.

During this engagement, participants joined and represented 12 different regions across Canada. These included Vancouver Island, Sunshine Coast, Lower Mainland, Kootenay, Nechako, Northeast, Cariboo, Thompson-Okanagan, and the North Coast of British Columbia, along with representation from Eastern Alberta, Northern Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia.

Discussion 1: Understanding Challenges in Your Community

- There is a lack of support for kids to be able to participate in sports and recreation, and a lack of freedom to move around the country should they wish to do so. Children also are not encouraged to attend university or pursue additional training. They are kept in community and not given extra funding to do these activities.
- There are fears and threats that are unique to Indigenous women.
- Affordable rent may exist in the outskirts of cities, but there is not sufficient public transportation in place for people to travel to work.
- There needs to be additional support in place for childcare and transportation, especially at late hours for parents (particularly single mothers) who need to work to support their families.
- There are communication gaps with the SDPR regarding funded and unfunded programs.
 - Clients have found it difficult to access a SDPR worker when they need to report that they no longer require income assistance and would like to transition to a different program. The SDPR pays out rent assistance at the end of the month for the following month's rent, and a letter cannot be issued until the following month when they are legally off assistance.
 - It is also difficult for service providers to liaise with the SDPR, and to communicate their client's intentions to leave income assistance.
 - Is there a portal available for Indigenous service providers to inform the SDPR about changes to their employment status (like the portal available for EI)?
 - Has the SDPR considered how to better facilitate the transition from income assistance to other service providers?

- For those in rural areas, some of the barriers can stem from deaths in the community due to mental health and addictions. There is no support in place for the extended family or friends who are also dealing with a death in the family.
 - There have been situations where Social Services takes too long to place the children of deceased parents with a new family.
 - When services move slowly, it hinders families from moving forward in their own life or employment plans.
- There needs to be an overhaul of the way that social services policies are designed in the first place. We need to move past the outdated social development envelope and look at the program with a more progressive and supportive perspective.
 - Why should people be limited to one source of assistance? If someone is on income assistance (IA) and want to enroll in training, they should be able to receive \$400 a week *in addition* to their IA as encouragement for them to seek further career development that will lead them to sustainable employment.
 - There should also be a direct relationship and transfer of authority between the Province and service providers like Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) agreement holders, so people are not getting caught in a web of policy between different agencies.
 - The participant noted that there is a Memorandum of Understanding between them and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction that allows them to assist their clients with a smoother transition. A similar agreement needs to be in place across more organizations to better accommodate people's individual needs and circumstances.

Discussion 2: Supports and Actions to Promote Well-Being in Your Community

- In addition to collaboration with First Nations, the SDPR should also actively collaborate with other service providers. Some service providers have decades of experience and have been able to establish best practices and have been supporting Indigenous communities throughout their existence. The SDPR should utilize those established networks and enable them to reach further, whether by providing more funding to these organizations or other means.
 - The participant acknowledged that there has been some work done by WorkBC, as they have now been referring Indigenous clients over to Indigenous service providers so that they are in a culturally supportive environment.
- The four distinct model approach did come from Indigenous leadership. However, one participant noted that their rural communities do not participate in the BCAFN, First Nation Leadership Council, and other political circles.
- Urban Indigenous voices need to be included in these discussions. Organizations that have provided support for both Indigenous urban populations, and First Nations find

that they are being left out as they aren't being invited to participate in the Indigenous portions of these discussions, and there is no one present to represent them.

- Another participant recommended rewording the initial point to “Collaborate with Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Modern Day Treaty (MDT) Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Urban Communities.)”
- Of the actions listed above, most of them focus on promoting well-being, but there are not enough actions that focus on overcoming poverty. Actions to promote wellbeing and actions to overcome poverty are two separate streams and should be treated as such.
- Overcoming poverty will require a mass overhaul of the programs, policies, and procedures that are currently in place. This will likely also require a broader social development policy that also encompasses housing.
 - Every policy currently in place will need to be reviewed and assessed as to whether it is archaic and need to be replaced entirely. Some policies in place are keeping people in poverty while they are seeking employment.
 - It would be great if policies were changed to allow people to receive additional support while on income assistance, as IA alone is not enough especially in places like Vancouver where the cost of living is high.
 - Some ISETs holders have the resources to provide top-ups, but at present they can only provide a small amount per month for transportation.
 - A community member had mentioned that although they owned a dwelling-place, they did not qualify for income assistance.
- The Poverty Reduction Strategy needs to have a broader perspective, as each community will have their own specific circumstances and challenges, and the language used in the Strategy needs to be able to accommodate these differences.
- Service providers understand how to work with their clients and community members, as opposed to organisations like WorkBC, which are very bureaucratic and take much longer to accomplish the same work that other service providers can do quickly. There needs to be more trust and resources for Indigenous service providers to better support their communities, instead of asking them to accommodate for the bureaucratic processes.
- If there is a small error in the paperwork, a SDPR worker can stop all social assistance until it is corrected. There needs to be more compassion and better communication between the organizations to best support the people in need.
- There are still people in the streets that need help. These people may not realize they need help because their circumstances are ingrained into them, and no one is there to support them. At the same time, social workers may feel intimidated because they are unaccustomed to meeting people at their level.

- These people ended up impoverished because of the residential school system, among other policies that cut out generations of Indigenous culture taught Indigenous People how to be poor.
- People who do live away from home have no way to go back, and they cannot identify as a First Nations person because they may have forgotten their roots as First Nations people. Even if they have forgotten, they still have rights as a human being, and we need to emphasize and reinforce their rights. We need to take a step backward and bring them with us as we move forward. They are our relations and our people, no matter where they come from.
- Poverty does not just exist on the street, it also exists at home, wherever people come from. The occurrence of natural disasters like the forest fires are also an additional barrier for people to overcome poverty.
- Even if it feels overwhelming, everyone needs to keep pushing to make B.C. government change its mind, and to make social assistance change the way it thinks.
- There is a lot of duplication of services, and that there is a preferred vendor system in place wherein organizations can apply to be recommended to offer their services. In the past, everybody had their own mandates, and that system worked better than the current system.
 - Friendship Centres did and still do great work in social development, while ISETs' mandate was focused on employment, skills, education, and training.
 - Newer organizations may need to be collaborated with, but long-running organizations know their people and their communities well and should be empowered to better support their communities in the way they find best.
- It is frustrating when the government of B.C. changes and establishes new programming. By the time social workers are familiar with the new programs, the funding for it has been depleted and the program is no longer available.
 - There also needs to be high-level conversations with Knowledge Keepers to be able to build on experience.
- Everyone has the same goal: for people to be independent from social assistance. There must be an avenue out of poverty, and this cannot continue to be a zero-sum game. The SDPR needs to work *with* other service providers who work with the clients.
- The actions for poverty reduction and the actions for better support need to be two separate processes moving forward, so that the important aspects of each stream are not lost.

T'it'q'et: September 26, 2023

Discussion 1: Understanding Challenges in Your Community

- The social assistance amount is not enough, there are not just youth but also Elders living in poverty.
 - There had been a study done by the federal government that placed the recommended social assistance amount at \$1,200 per month. But that isn't even enough to cover rent.
- People feel like they can't keep up with the economy: Housing rates are increasing, and everyone is in poverty.
 - How can you help others when there isn't enough for yourself?
 - Helping others also drains your own resources.
- We need to advocate for more childcare and fair wages. \$10 per day that was provided was helpful.
 - There are not enough childcare facilities in town, and those who need it cannot afford it.
 - The local Friendship Centre has over 50 staff and they cannot afford to pay everyone a living wage. Even average workers are struggling to get by.
 - People need to work two jobs to get by, and companies are struggling to keep up and everyone is short-staffed.
- Everything feels like a challenge, from housing to food security.
 - There needs to be more accommodations on reserve, like tiny homes. Community members have been moving away due to funding.
 - Children do not know what it takes to grow food. With the prices being so high, people need to rely on what can be grown.
 - A participant shared their experience with being on welfare, where they were forced to choose between necessities because the amount they were given was not enough.
- Shelters and other similar facilities need to be fully staffed.
- People need to be more aware of politics and political roles, as well as which candidates have their best interests in mind.
 - It took the NDP and the Liberals working together to give people \$10 a day for childcare.
 - Things have changed a lot, and we need to make sure that the right people are in the right places.
- Interest rates are too high.
- There needs to be more funding availability and partnerships available for students on social assistance, and an increase in the amount that students can receive before assistance is cut off.
 - ISET did not have enough resources to provide more post-secondary funding. These students need more support, some are only getting \$1,000 monthly, which is not even enough for rent.

- While it is good that interest is no longer charged on student loans, there still needs to be more incentives for students to stay instead of moving away.
 - Some students have almost graduated but cannot afford to go back to school to finish their degree.
 - Youth aren't attending college/university because they can't afford to.
- There needs to be more social assistance for people with temporary jobs.
- People from remote and rural areas need more transportation support. Sometimes, clients looking for jobs must hitchhike to town to fill out a work search form, and then they need five signatures in order prove they're looking for work.
- There needs to be more mental health support.
 - People fail because they can't manage their mental health on their own. Even a small daily reminder would help, but the local facilities don't have the capacity to provide that. There is no in-home support available.
 - Some people refuse to ask for support out of pride or the fear of someone else to have that control over their daily lives.
- There should also be more mental health support available for children, especially as social media has made it easier to learn about self-harm.
- Some communities are not aware of the available programs and supports. These programs were not advertised.
 - Information is not shared with some communities, which is difficult for those who need that information.
 - There is a lot of misinformation surrounding the available systems and programs.
- While shelter rates have increased, these are still not enough. People are still struggling.
- The earning exemption for people with disabilities isn't high enough.
 - PWD with working spouses can lose their benefits, and this can leave them trapped in unhealthy relationships.
- Pension rates are too low, some people are receiving even less than what others on income assistance get.
 - There needs to be more earning exemptions for working people.
 - Criteria, guidelines, and policies make it difficult for anyone to come out of poverty.
 - Some people are eligible for pensions that are much less than what they were receiving on IA/DA, which was already insufficient for their daily living expenses.
- Many retirees who worked low-income jobs did not have extended health benefits and ended up paying for many of their health needs out of pocket.
- The EI system is meant to keep people living at income assistance rates, and it makes people choose not to seek employment since EI is only a little bit above the Income Assistance/Disability Assistance level.
 - The process to apply for EI feels demeaning, especially as the amount received is barely enough to live on.
- Housing is one of the biggest challenges that people face:

- The rate one can receive if they're single is too low, and people are forced to live with others to afford rent.
- There is a lack of available housing.
- The local community has too small of a land base to look at any type of development.
- Old houses were built to meet the bare minimum of housing codes at the time and are deteriorating quickly. Houses should be built better at the beginning.
- There is no off-reserve housing strategy, although most of the local community members live off-reserve.
- People on disability assistance fear having to declare that they have a spouse who has employment, as they lose their benefits and cannot contribute to the home. This is humiliating and discriminatory against those with disabilities.
- There are programs that only cover the medical costs of non-status individuals. If these individuals have spouses who are status, that spouse's medical expenses cannot be covered under the program.
- The federal and provincial government authorities need to address the health impacts of residential schools and the sixties scoop. These victims, especially those of old age, have developed multiple health conditions and the authorities need to be more mindful that these are the effects of federal and provincial government actions.
- Mental health is severely underfunded, and the Ministry needs to offer more mental health support.
 - Communities need more people who are properly qualified to deal with mental health. People with mental health challenges do not get any support and end up left behind. These people end up getting kicked out of their housing.
 - There also needs to be housing for youth specifically, as young adults are facing barriers like gang activity and drugs that weren't as common in the past.
- The First Nations Health Authority only provides funding for eyeglasses every two years. The \$200 given has not been increased to keep up with inflation, and it is not enough to cover the actual price of eyeglasses.
 - The FNHA only provides coverage for generic medications. It feels like First Nations clients are at the bottom of the barrel.
- There needs to be more support for education and training, local organizations need more partnerships and resources to be able to provide support.
 - A participant shared that they had taken on \$30,000 in student loan debt to be able to get their education and provide for their family. After this participant graduated, they were placed on short-term contracts that didn't contribute to their pension.
- Guardianship support needs to be identified and supported more. While some people don't want to be foster parents, they are necessary. Fostering needs to be encouraged and culturally supported and made less threatening for Indigenous People.
 - Going through all the hoops to foster is intimidating and many people just give up. People want to take care of their own, but they fear going to the office and being judged for the cleanliness or niceness of their home.

- Single parenthood is now much more difficult and expensive than it was in the past.
- The local school system is one of the worst provincially, and they have tried many things to improve their standing and they were all ineffective.
- There is a significant gap around childcare. There is a lack of workforce and facilities.
- The Ministry of Childcare and Family Development is not providing sufficient financial support for low-income families.
 - A participant shared that they and their partner both work full-time jobs and can only afford \$1,500 for rent between the two of them if they live off-reserve. They have been waiting a month to get papers from the Ministry for the child subsidy.
- One of the biggest challenges for Indigenous Peoples is generational poverty. Anyone in poverty also faces discrimination. When they seek medical attention, they are asked if they smoke or use drugs, and are not believed if they say they don't.
 - There is a lack of accountability for support and advocacy groups, it is hard to see exactly what they have done for the communities, especially in areas like Vancouver's Downtown East Side.
- The community offers only basic services and supports, there is a lack of advocacy, and no one meets people where they're at.
- Bureaucracy is a significant barrier for those seeking support, particularly the complexity of the processes and the slow speed of their processing timelines.
- For people who are focused on surviving, they have no time to think about things that are outside of their experience.

Discussion 2: Supports and Actions to Promote Well-Being in Your Community

- Information can be missed, and communication plans can fail. Would it be possible to distribute physical mail-outs?
 - Government of B.C. representatives need to come to communities to share information.
- Currently, there are medical staff that visit the community centre regularly.
 - They also offer massage therapy for community members.
- Some communities can transport their members to appointments in the big city.
 - There needs to be shuttle services year-round.
- A participant suggested building pod-homes that had shared kitchen and living spaces that other communities had started to implement.
 - There also needs to be an Elders' complex for every community. Elders need to be kept as independent as possible. There have been plans in place for the local one however they have to jump through hoops to get funding.
 - The local Friendship Centre had plans for more housing, but their plans were rejected for the first round of funding, which could have been due to the lack of construction crews in the area.

- The community needs someone to write proposals as they currently do not have enough capacity or expertise available.
 - It would help if there was a way for the local organizations to share a grant writer and share the resulting funding.
- There is a 10-year project upcoming with BC Hydro.
 - Participants expressed their concerns regarding outside workers being brought in who can negatively impact the rental market.
 - Some families have vacated their homes to rent them out at higher prices.
 - Outsiders have also been buying up local properties in advance of the 10-year project.
 - The local committee has been prioritizing beautification projects over more medical services.
- Winter utilities are still very expensive.
- Elders are afraid of the costs of making changes to their homes or lifestyles, and their pensions are not enough to cover their living expenses.
 - Even if someone is at the age to receive OAS and pensions, they may be ineligible if their spouse is still earning income.
 - Some people can be proud and reluctant to ask for assistance.
- The Friendship Centre offers day treatment sessions that have been helpful for the community, but these have limited slots.
 - Another beneficial program in the community is the drumming in the local park that has brought people together.
- The Income Assistance and Disability Assistance system reform was a good idea, but the administrative costs to do all the tracking for the money made it not worth it.
- There is no authority policing how employers are treating their employees, many local employers are horrible to their staff, and they get away with it.
- Participants identified the following suggestions they would like to see:
 - Mental health and substance use supports services.
 - Culturally appropriate food.
 - Help with utilities.
 - Safe and adequate housing.
 - A review of income and earning exemptions (such as EI and pensions)
 - A change to the system for PWD with spouses that earn income to be able to receive their benefits and be able to stay financially independent from their spouse.
 - Include those of status in medical, dental, and optical coverage.
 - More collaboration and dialogue between the Ministry and ISC, as well as local communities.

- It takes months of time for someone to make little steps to acquire a home and make commitments, these need to be taken into consideration when addressing homelessness.
 - Many people who are homeless could be on PWD due to mental health issues. People who are homeless have no time to even consider training or employment because they just don't have that capacity. Simply giving them homes would not address the mental health component.
- The local homeless shelter is not meeting the needs of the homeless people in town. The shelter kicks people out from 8 am to 8 pm and it is difficult to see people out in the cold with nowhere to go. Some people would prefer to be out in the cold because they feel like they are being treated poorly in the shelters.
- Information is not passed on effectively, it would help to have news bulletins about available programs.
 - People in poverty may not have phones or computers to be able to access services.
- We need to look after our own first, why can't the money to look after refugees be given to local homeless first?
- The local climate is almost like a desert, so they need greenhouses to grow food.
- On-reserve wages need to match off-reserve wages.
- There needs to be more childcare facilities.
- A participant shared that the FNHA has provided funds to seek a counsellor once a month and it has really helped them.
- Support workers need to be more trauma-informed and understand where they come from.
- Funding should be provided unconditionally.
- The waiting period to go on EI should be reduced, and we need to find other ways to bridge that gap, so people are not left without income for a time.
- Churches and Friendship Centres offer free meals once or twice a week.