

Post-engagement Session Summary: Nanaimo Minister’s Roundtable

Session date:	March 21, 2023, 3:00-4:30pm
Attendees:	12
Lead facilitator:	Andrea Manchon/ Minister Malcomson
Notetakers	[name removed]

Discussion: What are some of the biggest challenges your clients and their families are experiencing in terms of covering their day-to-day expenses or moving out of poverty?

What is working well in your community to address poverty and why?

What is not working, or where do you see change most needed?

Factors contributing to poverty:

- Increasing costs of housing. Many participants discussed issues with housing costs, noting that even city staff are accessing housing supports. It was emphasized that these are the people needed for communities to function and they are struggling with housing.
- Increased food insecurity due to high cost of living and lack of access in rural communities. Participants shared that there are more working adults accessing food banks and cost of living is cited as a top reason for why people are turning to food banks.

Funding for Non-profits

- General theme covering comments about lack of funding leading to difficulty in retaining staff and maintaining programs.
- Discussions surrounding barriers to accessing funding. Participants expressed frustration about the application process for different funding and that it is often a waste of time.

Newcomers facing difficulty:

- International credentials are not recognized in Canada for working professionals.
- International fees are high for education, and these students contribute to the economy but do not qualify for financial aid.
- International students are accessing food banks as they cannot afford to live or eat.

Challenges in accessing supports

- The impacts of earning exemptions/clawbacks (when accessing one type of income assistance results in having one’s existing income assistance reduced) were also described in this meeting — when combined with the impacts of inflation and associated increases in cost of living, earning exemptions can result in people having to choose between spending their money of daily necessities.

- Related to earning exemptions, participants expressed that there should be an increase on earning limits while people are on assistance. People want to work and do more but fear that they will lose their assistance if they pass the limit.

What more can be done to reduce poverty?

- Simplify the system of supports, particularly for annual amounts; people should not have to prove they are still experiencing a medical condition.
 - Streamline application processes and reduce the amount of paperwork people must complete to access supports on an annual basis.

What is working to reduce poverty?

- Working Opportunities Fund was really good. Two streams that met people where they were at in their work abilities. People would move between the streams, and it was really successful for people. This helps them understand where their employability is and what works for them.

Comments on income and disability assistance legislation

Themes:

- General need to increase income assistance rates.
 - The costs of basic needs have gone up but assistance rates have not increased accordingly.

Post-engagement Session Summary: Downtown Eastside Minister’s Roundtable

Session date:	April 17, 2023 1:00-3:00 pm
Attendees:	17
Lead facilitator:	Landon Hoyt/Minister Malcomson
Notetakers	[name removed]
<p>Discussion:</p> <p>Understanding Challenges that you or your family are experiencing in covering day-to-day expenses or moving out of poverty?</p> <p>What is working well in your community to address poverty and why?</p> <p>What is not working or where do you see change most needed?</p>	
<p>Housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with SROs was a dominant theme in this session. Participants spoke about how important it is to maintain the existing SROs. It was noted that these places were being lost at a fast pace and that they need to be protected through rent control. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Many participants stressed that housing should not be lost in the Downtown Eastside. • The impact of climate change on housing conditions was also discussed by several participants. The main point stressed was that aging buildings are hard to manage and are not adaptable to growing issues due to climate change like poor air flow, improper heating and cooling, and insufficient electricity. People stated that extreme heat in SROs were deadly. • Rental subsidies would alleviate some strain and help people remain in their units. <p>Challenges in accessing supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impacts of earning exemptions/clawbacks (when accessing one type of income assistance results in having one’s existing income assistance reduced) were also described in this meeting — when combined with the impacts of inflation and associated increases in cost of living, earning exemptions can result in people having to choose between spending their money of daily necessities. • Related to earning exemptions, participants expressed that there should be an increase on earning limits while people are on assistance. People want to work and do more but fear that they will lose their assistance if they pass the limit. As it is now, there is no benefit to working. <p>Collaboration</p>	

- Non-profits want greater collaboration with the ministry. Non-profits continually work around the policies and barriers that are put up by the ministry so it would be better to have a mechanism for ongoing conversations between non-profits and the SDPR.
 - This worked well during COVID as there was open dialogue between non-profits and ministry which led to changing policies.
 - Non-profits want to have an opportunity to co-create policies and legislation.
- Peer to peer support. There were a few comments around embedding a “peer pay” program. This helps to address to issue of unpaid labour in the Downtown Eastside.

Comments on income and disability assistance legislation

Themes:

- General need to increase income assistance rates.
 - The costs of basic needs have gone up but assistance rates have not increased accordingly.

Post-engagement Session Summary: Surrey Minister's Roundtable

Session date:	April 19, 2023
Attendees:	26
Lead facilitator:	Andrea Manchon
Notetakers	[name removed]
Discussion 1: What are the main factors contributing to child, youth and family poverty in your community today? What government supports, and programs are having the biggest impact in addressing poverty and why?	
Factors contributing to poverty: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The impacts of government 'claw backs' when accessing one type of funding results in having one's existing income assistance reduced (i.e., CPP) and can result in people having to choose food over housing.• Lack of access to reliable transportation for people with disabilities (i.e., Handydart buses are often delayed and are not covered under PWD assistance).• Lack of access to shelters and medical treatment beds (i.e., shelters are at capacity, medical treatment for addiction and mental illness).• Services and staff are working at their maximum level and do not have the capacity to meet existing demand.• Increased cost of living (i.e., lack of affordable housing).	
Supports that have the biggest impact in addressing poverty: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food security and accessibility (i.e., food banks).• Mental health and medical support.	
Additional theme (experiences of poverty): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The stigma associated with poverty can deter people in need of assistance from seeking support programs.	
Discussion 2 - What gaps still exist in improving poverty reduction policies and services? From your experience, what more could be done to reduce poverty in your community and the province? What opportunities are missed?	
Challenges in accessing supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refugees, immigrants, and international students are especially vulnerable to food accessibility challenges (i.e., language and cultural barriers, employment restrictions).	

- Lack of information and awareness about assistance program availability and how to access them further compounded by lengthy complex application processes.
- Reluctance from certain support services to complete extensive paperwork for recipients to receive assistance (i.e., medical portion of PWD).
- Work permit restrictions that prevent people from accessing certain supports (i.e., without MSP walk-in doctors want to charge refugee claimants).

What more can be done to reduce poverty?

- Simplify and streamline required processes (i.e., services often require government issued identification, which not everyone has).
- Provide long-term core funding to food banks and other community organizations.
- Connecting people to support services (i.e., meeting people where they are, increase awareness about various assistance support, community clinics).
- Better support resources for employers to accommodate employees with disabilities.
- Update legislation to improve tenant safety and increase landlord accountability.

Additional themes:

- Lacking fundamental tools and technology to access support services (i.e., do not have a phone, lack of digital literacy).
- Increase the number of nurse practitioners and community integrations specialists in the community.

Comments on income and disability assistance legislation

Themes:

- The impacts of government ‘claw backs’ when accessing one type of funding results in having one’s existing income assistance reduced. (i.e., CPP) and can result in people having to choose food over housing.
- Lack of access to reliable transportation for people with disabilities. (i.e., Handydart buses are often delayed and are not covered under PWD assistance).
- Reluctance from certain support services to complete extensive paperwork for recipients to receive assistance. (i.e., medical portion of PWD).

Post-engagement Session Summary: Prince George Minister’s Roundtable

Session date:	April 27, 2023
Attendees:	22
Lead facilitator:	Landon Hoyt
Notetakers	[name removed]

Discussion 1: What are some of the biggest challenges you and your family are experiencing in terms of covering your day to day expenses or moving out of poverty?

Factors contributing to poverty:

- High cost of living overall.
 - Rates/bills for everything have gone up with income not keeping up.
- Stigma and racism
 - Banks look down on people receiving income assistance - Suggestion to work with banks to resolve challenges with access to IDs and address stigma.
 - Limited to no access to mental health and other services because of stigma
- Lack of access to safe, affordable housing.
- Lack of primary care, acute care, and support services. (i.e., childcare, medical and drug addiction treatment), especially in rural areas.
- Lack of accessible harm reduction/addiction support services.
 - Limited to no physicians available to prescribe OAT treatment in rural areas.
 - Leads to desperate and deadly circumstances.
 - Limited education and availability of safe supply – doctors being “bullied” out of prescribing.
 - Need more emphasis on treating addiction as a health care crisis rather than ‘criminal’ behaviour.
- Lack of accessible childcare.
- Lack of mental health and counselling services that are trauma-informed.
- Concerns about care for youth, especially young women.
- Limited peer-led supports in the north.

Discussion 2 - Discussion 2: What is working well in your community to address poverty and why?

Capacity building:

- Community Integration Specialists help to meet people where they are at within community. Need more of this to help build community capacity and provide peer-training.
- Providing people with opportunity works.

- Work experience grant (with more steady employment opportunities).

Community collaboration and partnerships:

- Working together/partnerships work well. Having a common goal within the community helps groups collaborate and be on the same page, rather than competing with one another.
- Moccasin Flats is a community within Prince George that is helping to address some housing, community safety, and support service issues. Community/peer-driven. Need more community-collaborative efforts like this. It is saving lives.

Discussion 3 – What is not working, or where do you see change most needed?

Data collection:

- Skewed cost of living data. (i.e., private rentals, food costing guide).
 - This is especially important when assessing cost of food in the north (data is collected seasonably when food is most abundant, but in winter there is less availability and cost is higher – not a good indicator).

Challenges in accessing supports:

- Compounding program application barriers. (i.e., lack of government issued ID).
- Social stigma that is associated with PWD and Poverty Reduction supports. (i.e., Indigenous specific racism, drug use).

Most change needed:

- Proactive support programs focused specifically on youth poverty reduction.
- Increased funding for all support services and related service providers.
- Addressing stigma and racism.

Comments on income and disability assistance legislation

Themes:

- Stigma associated with income assistance is real. Leads to discrimination from banks.
- Lack of CLBC and PWD services and funding.

Post session summary – Townhalls

Inputs:

Session Location:	Vancouver Island/Gulf Islands
Session Date	March 23, 2023
Number of Attendees	Participants: 45
Lead Facilitator	Landon Hoyt,
Breakout room Facilitators	[names removed]
Notetakers	[names removed]

Session Location:	Northern B.C and Cariboo/Chilcotin
Session Date	April 1, 2023
Number of Attendees	Participants: 9
Lead Facilitator	Landon Hoyt,
Breakout room Facilitators	n/a
Notetakers	[name removed]

Session Location:	Kootenay/Rockies
Session Date	April 3, 2023
Number of Attendees	Participants: 22
Lead Facilitator	Rhianne Fiolka,
Breakout room Facilitators	Landon Hoyt
Notetakers	[names removed]

Session Location:	Thompson/Okanagan
Session Date	April 4, 2023
Number of Attendees	Participants: 19
Lead Facilitator	Landon Hoyt
Breakout room Facilitators	n/a
Notetakers	[name removed]

Session Location:	Mainland/Vancouver Coast
Session Date	April 13, 2023
Number of Attendees	Participants: 183

Lead Facilitator	Landon Hoyt
Breakout room Facilitators	[names removed]
Notetakers	[names removed]

Overall Summary

<p>Question 1: Understanding Challenges</p> <p>What are some of the biggest challenges you and your family are experiencing in terms of covering your day-to-day expenses or moving out of poverty?</p> <p>What is working well in your community to address poverty and why?</p> <p>Factors contributing to poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to family doctors is a barrier to submitting documentation to gain PWD status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of access to specialist doctors ○ Lack of vision, dental care ○ Lack of subsidies for medical devices ○ Lack of access to complementary and alternative medicine • Lack of affordable housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Housing is unachievable for young people • Ensuring housing to people transitioning out of prison • Lack of on-reserve housing for Indigenous people • Disabilities/medical and mental health issues contribute to poverty • Women staying in unsafe relationships because there is nowhere else to go • Individuals/households in precarious financial situations who are unable to handle unexpected bills • Lack of valid identification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Challenging to replace ID • Rising cost of living (Especially housing, transportation and food) • People with special diets can't get their food of choice at food banks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Give people a card to buy their own food • 'Period poverty' – i.e. lack of access to free feminine hygiene products • Spousal income cap <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creates dependency and inequality in relationships • Long waitlists for BC Housing • Lack of affordable/free public transportation • Wages are not keeping pace with inflation • Higher inflation negatively affects soup kitchens' ability to provide food • 'Non-sufficient funds' fees at banks are an added cost on people experiencing poverty • Monthly income reporting is onerous

- SROs in Vancouver are degrading places to live in

Supports that have the biggest impact in addressing poverty

- Free transit for those under 12 years old has been a great start – but should be expanded to those under 18
- Access to housing
- Access to affordable and healthy food
 - Food banks
 - Food sharing programs
- Access to mental health and addictions support
- BC Rent Bank is a helpful support
- Non-profit organizations
- The increase to shelter support is helpful, but not enough
- Integration Specialists program
- Food recovery programs
- Rent subsidies through BC Housing
- 10 dollar a day childcare
 - Increase number of childcare spots
- Universal school meal programs
- More trades training programs

Question 2: Identifying opportunities and next steps

What is not working, or where do you see change most needed?

Gaps preventing improved poverty reduction policies

- Complicated and lengthy process to receive PWD status
- Social stigma and discrimination against people experiencing poverty
- Lack of collaboration and integration between non-profits
- Lack of collaboration and integration between provincial ministries
 - Collaboration can become negative when intercommunication between public service agencies (MCFD and SDPR) results in stigma (e.g. sharing documentation on someone's file)
- Lack of information/promotion about new support programs

What more can be done to reduce poverty?

- Rent control – measures to keep housing affordable
- Government funded non-profit housing
 - Housing co-ops
- Community navigators/peers to advise individuals and non-profits about available support programs
- \$50 transportation allowance doesn't cover the full cost of daily transit use for recipients
- Inclusionary zoning – e.g. rental-only zoning
- More stable operational funding for non-profits
 - Applying for funding and grants detracts from dealing with immediate issues

- Lack of stable funding prevents consistent staffing
- Immediate access to mental health and addictions care
- Guaranteed basic income/universal basic income
- Living wage
- Providing financial benefit for people to volunteer – ‘Community Volunteer Program’
- Expanding SAFER to include seniors near or at the poverty line
- Streamlined application and service delivery – a “one stop shop”
 - Currently, people who experience poverty have to retell their personal and financial situation every time they want to access supports. It would be more trauma-informed to streamline this process so client didn’t have to retell their stories.
 - Clients have to fill out numerous forms for every subsidy they want to apply for
- Trauma-informed training for people who work in frontline service delivery (e.g. at WorkBC, SDPR offices or at food banks)
- Subsidies for fuel and utilities
- Fund BC211 as a tool to navigate available supports
- Design poverty reduction to guide people to free educational programs that will help them get out of poverty
- Home care for seniors
- Bring back mental Health facilities that have been closed in recent years (such as Riverview Hospital)
- De-incentivize Airbnb to encourage rentals
- Add ‘social condition’ to B.C. Human Rights Code

Comments relating to Income and Disability Assistance legislation

- Increase income and PWD assistance to the poverty line
- Tie income and PWD assistance to match the cost of living
- Index seniors supplement to match increases in inflation
- Increase shelter supplement to meet the current housing market
 - Shelter rate is too low
- Raise earnings exemption limit
- End clawbacks due to CPP or other forms of income

Topics unique to regions

- Vancouver Island/Gulf Islands
 - Helpful local organizations: Comox Valley Affordable Housing Society, Dawn to Dawn, Nourish Cowichan, The YES Summer Camp, Victoria Disability Society, Lush Valley Food Action Society

- Helpful programs: BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program, Hydro Assistance Support Program
- Northern BC and Cariboo/Chilcotin
 - Helpful local organizations: The Link, Foundry
- Kootenay/Rockies
 - Between Trail, Nelson and Castlegar, there are vast differences in the level of available services and community capacity
- Thompson/Okanagan
 - *No unique topic were heard in this session*
- Mainland/Vancouver Coast
 - Helpful organizations: Community Action Network, Langley Food Bank, Salvation Army Gateway of Hope, Quest grocery store, Food Stash, Vancouver Aboriginal Health Society, Handydart,