



BRITISH COLUMBIA'S CHANGING FAMILIES

Family Roots

Executive Summary – January 2011



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The nature of family life in British Columbia has changed significantly over the last fifty years, both reflecting and helping to bring about changes in our society as a whole.

Families are the cornerstone of B.C.'s society, but the nature of what a family looks like has changed dramatically over time.

RISING INCOMES, INCREASING CHALLENGES

Over the past fifty years, British Columbian families have seen an increase in the level of family incomes, thanks to both increased wage levels and a dramatic increase in the proportion of women in the workforce.

In more than two-thirds of families headed by a couple, both parents now work, and where there are children under three, both parents work in more than 75% of families.

In more than one-in-five dual-earner families, it is the woman who earns more.

The increased number of dual-earner families, additional time spent at work, and increased child care needs, have led many families to report feeling severe time stress.

Government has helped families by:

- Reducing MSP premiums for low and middle income families.
- Providing HST tax relief for residential rent and basic groceries, so that a family of four with an income of \$30,000 will pay \$535 less because of the HST credit.
- Introducing the Rental Assistance program which provides an average of \$350 per month in subsidies to lower income families.

EARLY CHILDHOOD **— A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE**

Historically, families and communities have shared responsibility for raising children, but fifty years ago few Canadian children would have participated in formal early learning programs. In the 1950s, only 1% of eligible Canadian children were enrolled in kindergarten; by 2009, this number had increased to 95%. Organized child care was only starting to develop in the 1960s; by the end of the 1980s, half of young children of working parents were cared for by a non-relative, and almost one in five was in a child care centre.

Government has tried to ease families' burden by focusing on child care and early childhood development:

- Funding more than 97,000 licensed child care spaces, a significant increase over the last decade.
- Providing more than 52,000 child care subsidies in 2009, increasing subsidy rates by an average of twenty-five percent since 2001; and allowing parents to choose the child care setting which works best for their family.
- Increasing new funding for child care by \$26 million over the next three years, bringing the total child care budget to \$300 million — a 42% increase since 2001.
- Launching StrongStart BC programs, school-based, high quality early learning programs for children five and under. Government recently committed to creating more StrongStart BC programs where needed, in addition to the over 300 already operating throughout the province.

FEWER CHILDREN, STAYING HOME LONGER

Our families have grown smaller in B.C. — almost half of B.C. families now only have two members. Although we have fewer children, they are staying at home for a much longer time: 58% of 20–24 year olds and more than one in ten 30–34 year olds still live with their parents in B.C. There are also more “boomerang” children, who leave home and then return. The most common reason they do so is help with their pursuit of education, which has become more and more important to B.C. families.





In 1961, only 68% of B.C. youth aged 15–19 attended school; by 2006 only 12% of those aged 25–64 had less than a high school education.

Government has responded by:

- Increasing funding to the Skills Development and Skills Development Apprentices programs. There are now almost 40,000 apprentices, youth and pre-apprenticeship training participants, more than double the number in 2004.
- Since 2001, investing \$2.1 billion in capital expansion at public post-secondary institutions, the largest post-secondary expansion in history.

THE RISING PROPORTION OF ABORIGINAL FAMILIES

Since the 1960s, B.C.'s Aboriginal population (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) has grown at a faster rate, and been much younger, than the non-Aboriginal population. In 2006, Aboriginal people accounted for almost 5% of the population of B.C. and 28% of the Aboriginal population was under 15. Roughly one third (35%) of Aboriginal children in Canada live in lone parent families, compared to 17% of non-Aboriginal children.

Government has responded to increasing proportions of Aboriginal children and youth and to ongoing inequities and challenges faced by these children, by:

- Developing a New Relationship with First Nations and implementing a vision for improved government-to-government relations founded on respect, reconciliation and recognition of First Nations rights and title.
- Working to deliver services through Aboriginal managed organizations. For example, Canada's first-ever Tripartite First Nations Health Plan ensures First Nations are fully involved in decision-making regarding the health of their peoples.
- Signing Aboriginal enhancement agreements with more than 50 school districts to improve Aboriginal student success through curriculum that reflects Aboriginal culture and better engages Aboriginal students.

- Supporting programs like the award-winning *BladeRunners*, which helps at-risk youth gain essential skills, reconnect with community and transition to long-term employment.

IMMIGRATION FUELS OUR POPULATION GROWTH

In the past fifty years, British Columbia's population has grown from 1.6 million people to 4.5 million. Immigration accounts for 70% of our population growth and about three-quarters of immigrants to B.C. come from Asia.

Almost one in four British Columbians is a visible minority and almost one in five speaks a language other than English or French in the home. Thousands of B.C. children are navigating dual cultures and languages in addition to the learning and development all children experience.

Until the 1980s, most immigrants quickly matched and exceeded the incomes of similarly skilled native-born Canadians but recent immigrants face challenges relating to the recognition of credentials, lack of proficiency in official languages, and a declining value placed on foreign work experience.

Government recognizes the challenges that immigrant families face, and has:

- Increased investments in English as a Second Language through Welcome BC.
- Funded 87 Welcoming and Inclusive Communities projects which help communities support newcomers.
- Targeted programs, such as the Early Childhood Development Refugee Pilot Project, to reach families who had traumatic experiences before arriving in Canada and need additional support to adapt to life in their new communities.
- Supported programs like Skills Connect, which has assisted over 6,500 skilled immigrants find jobs, and has a success rate of more than 78%.





AN AGING POPULATION, REQUIRING DIFFERENT MODELS OF CARE

B.C.'s population is older than the Canadian average and increasing rapidly, with 17 per cent expected to be 65 or older by 2021.

While the poverty rate for seniors has dropped considerably, from one in five in 1980, to one in ten in 1989 and one in twenty by 2007, caring for seniors has becoming a bigger challenge for B.C. families, particularly the generation “sandwiched” in the middle.

An estimated 75% of those caring for aging or elderly parents are women, and Aboriginal and immigrant families tend to rely on informal supports more than other Canadians, who are more likely to look to long term care for their parents.

To address the needs of seniors and their families, government has:

- Committed \$137 million this June to further strengthen B.C.'s primary care system and support patients and doctors.
- Established 18 ActNowBC community parks, specifically designed for seniors to help them stay mobile, physically active and healthy.
- Built 13,780 new and replacement beds and supportive housing units since 2001. Wait times for residential care have dropped from a full year in 2001 to 15-90 days today.
- Restructured our residential care system so that the lowest income seniors are now paying \$29.40 per day, the lowest rate in Canada.
- Expanded the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program for independent-living seniors, which now reaches over 15,400 households each year, 3,250 more than 2001.
- Improved housing options by creating around 1,300 new housing units in smaller communities under the new Seniors' Rental Housing initiative in partnership with the Government of Canada.

LOOKING FORWARD

We know that time spent with families is a key indicator of personal health and happiness, yet all indications are that Canadian families will continue to work more.

B.C. will continue to support children and families as they negotiate their work/life balance, through a range of supports over a family's life course including parenting supports, primary health care, Early Childhood Education programs, rental assistance subsidies, income tax reductions, culturally appropriate services, and supports for aging seniors.

Government is developing outcomes that will act as a baseline on the health and well-being of children and youth in the province. Once a baseline is established, we will report regularly on the status of these outcomes and our progress in improving them. Look for our initial Children's Lens report outlining these outcomes.





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