

# What We Heard About Poverty in B.C.

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*Supplemental Report*



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# First Nations Leadership Council and First Nations Health Council – BC Poverty Reduction Consultation Report

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# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL



BRITISH COLUMBIA  
ASSEMBLY OF  
FIRST NATIONS

1004 Landooz Rd  
Prince George, BC  
V2K 5S3



FIRST  
NATIONS  
SUMMIT

1200-100 Park Royal South  
West Vancouver, BC  
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-926-9903  
Fx: 604-926-9923  
Toll Free: 866-990-9939



UNION OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA  
INDIAN CHIEFS

401 - 312 Main Street  
Vancouver, BC  
V6A 2T2

Ph: 604-684-0231  
Fx: 604-684-5726

## BC Poverty Reduction Consultation Report

### Meetings with First Nations Leadership Council and First Nations Health Council

By Cheryl Casimer, member of the political executive of the First Nations Summit and member of the BC First Nations Leadership Council

*Report presented on the Traditional Territory of the Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam and Squamish Peoples*

### Consultation Overview

The executive members of the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, collectively working together as the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), had the opportunity to meet with Shane Simpson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, on February 16, 2018, and the First Nations Health Council on March 20, 2018, to talk about the poverty reduction strategy, what they can do to support this work, to contribute to it, and to make sure the interests of First Nations in the province are reflected in this strategy.

### First Nations Leadership Council

The Government of BC has committed to implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. To have true, on the ground implementation of these important instruments, it is critical for this commitment to be reflected in all levels of the provincial government, as well as existing and future legislation, such as pending poverty reduction legislation.

There is one fundamental historical reality in British Columbia which cannot be ignored: that all Indigenous lands and resources in this province were wrongfully taken, without the knowledge, agreement or consent of Indigenous peoples, by colonial, and later, provincial authorities. This is the key "root cause" contributing to the disproportionate poverty, the serious social-economic gaps and the continued massive under-development in Indigenous communities. Our traditional territories are rich with resources; however, our communities continue to live in poverty. There is an inescapable economic component to our rights and our title within our territories and we need to ensure that we benefit; that the resources don't just get taken from our territories and we don't see any result. Through good faith negotiations, the legal, political and economic relationships between Crown jurisdictions and Indigenous authorities can be reconciled to support prosperity for all. Indigenous peoples will never accept managing poverty as an option, we will only accept

moving forward toward better education, improved health and prosperous communities.

At a political level, we're doing what is necessary to try to make substantive changes in those areas and we are calling on the federal and the provincial governments to make sure that First Nations have a strong voice in all issues that our people, our children, and our families face.

We've always been of the mind that "nothing happens about us, without us". We know there are a number of initiatives currently underway to review federal and provincial policies and laws, as well as to create new legislation in a number of areas. The FNLC wants to ensure that Indigenous communities are actively engaged at these tables – both provincially and federally.

We are also pushing for change in the areas of revenue sharing. One area in particular, is gaming, as BC is the only province in the country that does not have an agreement with Indigenous communities to share gaming revenues. Discussions on gaming revenue sharing are continuing in this area following a commitment by the Premier to undertake discussion on potential models.

### **Small Group Discussions in rural and remote First Nations and Indigenous Villages**

Large discussions took place throughout the province; however, this can often pose a challenge for remote communities, particularly in places such as the North. Some First Nations communities are isolated and don't necessarily have the resourcing to be able to attend larger forums. The FNLC appreciates the resources made available to facilitate smaller group discussions that took place in many communities, which assisted in helping some communities overcome the economic barrier and thereby ensured they could have a voice.

### **Engagement with the First Nations Health Council**

Key themes and observations that came out as a result of the conversation that took place with the First Nations Health Council and Minister Simpson included:

- Need for aligned federal and provincial poverty reduction strategies, to ensure that First Nations interests are addressed
- Homelessness is a critical priority for First Nations across British Columbia and a contributing factor to poverty
- A concerted effort and education awareness are needed to destigmatize poverty
- Respect for section 35 rights
- Fair compensation for resource extraction is required
- funding for travel, shelters and housing, coupled with culturally safe and non-judgmental services

- meaningful data required to inform transformation, ensure that First Nations interests do not get marginalized, and aggregated processes or data
- Social assistance does not account for regional variances and the cost of living
- poverty is a key determinant of children entering care, and families should be supported through prevention funding, to avoid the protection related issues
- new legislation should compel industry to support reconciliation and create a flexible community drive and prioritized investment framework, rather than programs, and strive towards a single standard and reciprocal accountability

# Metis Nation British Columbia – Poverty Reduction Conversation

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**REGIONAL CONSULTATION - WINTER 2018**

**SUBMITTED APRIL 16, 2018**

<sup>1</sup> *Aboriginal will be used over Indigenous throughout this document and is the preferred language of Metis Nation British Columbia. Aboriginal is defined in the Constitution of Canada as Indian (First Nations), Inuit and Metis; whereas, Indigenous has broader implications and there is a need to define Indigenous.* 1



# Métis Specific Poverty Reduction Consultation

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## BACKGROUND

Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) represents nearly 90,000 self-identified Métis people in British Columbia, of that, over 17,000 are provincially registered Métis Citizens with MNBC. Recognized by the Métis National Council, the Provincial Government of British Columbia and the Federal Government of Canada the Métis Nation British Columbia is the official governing body of the Métis in BC.

Métis Nation British Columbia was established in 1996, and continues to evolve today as an accountable governance structure, working on behalf of all Métis people in BC which equals approximately one-third (1/3) of the <sup>1</sup>Aboriginal population in BC. There are currently thirty-eight (38) identified Métis Chartered Communities with registered community members, in seven regions throughout BC. The provincial Board of Directors of MNBC, along with the Métis Women of BC (MW-BC) and the Métis Youth of BC (MY-BC) are elected by Métis Citizens through provincial mail in elections.

The Board of Directors consists of a President and Vice President, seven (7) Regional Directors, a provincial Women's Representative and a provincial Youth Representative. Métis Nation BC has three (3) levels of governance, which include: the thirty-eight (38) Chartered Communities, seven (7) Regional Governance Councils and the MNBC Board of Directors.

Metis Nation British Columbia and the Province of BC signed off on the Metis Nation Relationship Accord II in November of 2016, committing to specific objectives and priorities to close the gap on the quality of life between Metis people and other British Columbians. The MNRA II has been fully endorsed by the new Provincial Government.

Metis National Council and the Government of Canada signed the historic Canada – Metis Nation Accord in April of 2017, which provides for a government to government nation to nation relationship between Canada and the Métis Nation. Canada has acknowledged that its engagement with the Métis Nation is distinctions-based. The Accord was signed and witnessed by the elected leadership of Metis Nation of Ontario, Manitoba Metis Federation, Metis Nation – Saskatchewan, Metis Nation of Alberta, and Metis Nation British Columbia.

## INTRODUCTION

This document provides a summary of feedback received at seven (7) regional sessions for Metis Chartered Communities facilitated in the late winter of 2018. This was a first opportunity for Metis Nation British Columbia to formally discuss poverty issues for Metis people and was well attended in each of the seven (7) regions of Metis Nation British Columbia.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) was given the opportunity to engage with the Métis population for their perspective, guidance and suggestions on poverty reduction actions and recommendations for the Metis population in BC.

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The feedback contained in this summary was submitted, by email, mail, telephone conversations, online, and in person through seven (7) face to face regional engagement sessions in the seven (7) MNBC geographic regions across the province. Over two hundred (200) registered Métis Citizens representing the thirty-eight (38) Métis Chartered Communities in BC attended. These sessions were hosted in; Nanaimo, Abbotsford, Kelowna, Cranbrook, Terrace, Prince George and Hudson Hope. MNBC captured over nine hundred (900) statements of poverty reduction issues and/or concerns through the engagement with the Metis Nation.

The identified themes were similar from region to region. However, the identified issues and concerns shifted in priority from regions. A probable cause for the difference in priorities could be the economic status and overall demographic of the various communities in the regions.

Valuable information and recommendations were gathered and many innovative suggestions and remedies were shared to reduce the levels of poverty among the Metis people within their own Communities.

The prominent priority identified in each consultation session, was the importance of achieving cultural wellness and safety for our Metis Chartered Communities, Metis families and individuals. The need for Metis specific income based housing needs were also identified as a priority as there is currently no Metis housing in BC. Income assistance and disability rates along with a living minimum wage were of great concern, all rates need to reflect the cost of living. Our Metis citizens feel strongly that non-insured health benefits need to be covered as it is for the other Aboriginal populations. Post-secondary education funding for Metis people was also identified as a priority.

The need for the reclaiming of Metis culture and traditional holistic healing practices was noted in each and every region of the province.

## ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

A PowerPoint presentation and brief discussion occurred before the groups were placed into smaller working groups to discuss Métis specific poverty reduction action items. Following a buffet lunch, discussions continued to explore suggestion and ideas presented by the Métis Citizens in attendance. Travel was supported through gas cards to reduce barriers to participation. Elders were compensated for their knowledge and blessing through honorariums and a buffet lunch was provided to all that attended. Door prizes were also given out as incentives (MNBC toques, collectable Olympic sashes, MNBC pad-folios, and MNBC brief cases).



## REGIONAL SESSION - NANAIMO

Friday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018

Coast Bastian Hotel, 11 Bastion Street

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Thirty-three (33) Registered Métis Citizens from six of the seven Métis Chartered Communities located on the Island were in attendance. Métis elected officials, Métis Veterans, Métis Women’s reps, Regional, Provincial, and Métis Chartered Community members (grassroots) representing a very large cross-section of the Métis persons living on the Vancouver Island participated.

### Unique regional perspective

- Métis People at the Nanaimo session noted that Metis in the province have no funding for capacity development as other Aboriginal groups do. There is a lack of engagement from the provincial government for Metis needs and lack of understanding of Metis governance and presence in BC.
- Also, identified by the Nanaimo Metis consultation was the existence of predatory lending practices, which has to be regulated or stopped (payday loans, title loans, check cashing).

### REGIONAL SESSION - ABBOTSFORD

Saturday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Sandman Hotel Abbotsford Airport,  
3010 Mt Lehman Road.

Twenty-six (26) Registered Métis Citizens from all six of the Métis Chartered Communities located in the Lower Mainland region attended. Métis elected officials, Regional and Provincial Elected Representatives, and Métis Chartered Community members (grassroots) representing a very large cross-section of the Métis people living in the Lower Mainland.



### Unique regional perspective

- The need for Métis People to sit on various boards of Directors of the decision-making organizations and governments to bring the Metis lens (perspective) to the forefront in negotiations and planning.
- A secondary issue identified by the Abbotsford Metis consultation was the fact that “the forgotten people” the Métis, are behind First Nations and immigrants socially and economically. Metis are virtually “unknown”.

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## REGIONAL SESSION - KELOWNA

Saturday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
Sandman Hotel & Suites Kelowna -2103  
Harvey Avenue

Despite the terrible winter storm conditions; twenty-seven (27) of the thirty-four (34) expected registered Métis Citizens attended from all nine (9) of the Métis Chartered Communities located in the Thompson/Okanagan Region. Métis elected officials, Regional and Provincial Elected Representatives, and Métis Chartered Community members (grassroots) attended representing a very large cross-section of the Métis people living in the Thompson/Okanagan.



### Unique regional perspective

- The need for Métis People to acquire support from funding bodies for multilevel Metis cultural reclamation.
- A secondary issue identified by the Kelowna Metis consultation was the fact that the Métis have to be recognized as a distinct Indigenous people in our province and treated as such.

## REGIONAL SESSION - CRANBROOK

Saturday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Prestige Rocky Mountain Resort  
209 Van Horne Street South

In attendance were thirteen (13) Registered Métis Citizens confirmed from the Métis Chartered Community in Cranbrook. Weather played a significant factor in neighbouring Metis Chartered Community's attendance. MNBC's Regional Director and the Metis Chartered Community President as well as Community members represented Rocky Mountain Metis Society well.



### Unique regional perspective

- Métis People believe federal and provincial government agencies have minimal (to none) funding for capacity development or programming as other <sup>1</sup>Aboriginal groups do have this type of support.
- Support food programs in school, such as the breakfast and hot lunch opportunities. Metis people acknowledge the fact that our children are our future and are the ambassadors of future Metis governance and need the best start in school that we can provide.

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## REGIONAL SESSION - TERRACE

Saturday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018

Northwest Metis  
Association Office

In attendance were sixteen (16) of the eighteen (18) expected Registered Métis Citizens from the three Métis Chartered Communities located in the



Northwest Region of British Columbia. Métis elected officials, Regional and Provincial Elected Representatives, and Métis Chartered Community members (grassroots) attended representing a very large cross-section of the Métis people living in the Northwest region.

### Unique regional perspective

- Métis People in the Northwest believe federal and provincial government agencies have to recognize <sup>1</sup>Aboriginal rights of harvesting and gathering for Metis.
- The Northwest Metis consultation also identified the need for food cost reduction supports/similar to Northern Living Allowance and Northern Residents Deduction, that would significantly reduce the cost of food and living in northern communities.

## REGIONAL SESSION – PRINCE GEORGE

Saturday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Ramada Downtown, 444 George Street

In attendance were thirty-eight (38) Registered Métis Citizens of the forty-one (41) confirmed RSVP's in the North Central Region. Métis elected officials including MNBC's President and Vice President,



Community, Regional, and Métis Chartered Community (grassroots) members representing a very large component of the Métis population from the local communities of Prince George, Fort St John, Smithers, Hazelton, Kelly Lake, and Moccasin flats (Chetwynd).

### Unique regional perspective

- Métis People suffer from intergenerational trauma, stereotypical behaviors, systematic disassociation from community and society.
- Creation of a foundation, that is specifically funded to collaborate and support the social determinants of health (SDOH) such as; culture, health, employment, school, education, emotional, mental, spiritual and physical health and other important aspects of Metis life.

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## REGIONAL SESSION – HUDSON HOPE

March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018 10AM to 2PM

Pearkes Multi-purpose Centre

In attendance were thirteen (13) Registered Métis Citizens representing the four Métis Chartered Communities located on the Northeast Region. Métis elected officials, Regional and Provincial Elected Representatives, and Métis Chartered Community members (grassroots) attended representing a very large cross-section of the Métis people living in the Northeast Region.



### Unique regional perspective

- Pathways need to be created for Métis to reclaim their culture and cultural practices such as hunting and gathering and reestablishing traditional family practices and dynamics.
- Although Metis in the province of BC have no formalized land base as other <sup>1</sup>Aboriginal people in BC have, it does not mean Metis do not have inherent rights, as Metis people have developed unique Communities in BC as <sup>1</sup>Aboriginal people.

## KEY EMERGING THEMES

### Cultural Wellness and Safety

- Curriculum developed to reduce Metis discrimination and misunderstanding
- Metis people and MNBC Governance acknowledged fully by the provincial and municipal governments in BC.
- Lack of safety in Metis identity (internal and external).
- Need for a space for our people to meet and gather in each of MNBC's seven (7) regions.
- Government support for heritage and Michif language preservation
- Accessibility to Culture and Heritage Programs
- Traditional healing and wellness practices as a component of Métis culture and wellness
- Increase mentoring opportunities between Elders and Youth
- Need for ceremony to be shared and taught

### Harvesting as a Cultural Right

- Implement Métis cultural harvesting rights.
- Métis land based hubs located throughout the province associated with Métis Chartered Communities for Metis harvesting and Community freezers.
- Loss of connectedness to the land and loss of resources
- Implement Métis Harvesting right for sustenance.
- understanding that food is intrinsically and an important part of sharing Metis Culture

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## Health and Wellness

Metis Nation British Columbia recognizes that the social determinants of health (SDOH) affect our population in many ways, and each and every theme can be viewed as a SDOH that needs to be addressed within our Nation.

### Mental Health

- Acknowledgement of our unique identity as Metis people – distinct from First Nations
- Use of the word Metis by government – not First Nations and Indigenous / <sup>1</sup>Aboriginal
- Promoting connectedness to Community and to the land
- Addressing the impact of Residential / Day and Mission Schools and the “60’s Scoop”
- Immediate need for Métis specific drug and alcohol treatment facility/beds province wide
- Intergenerational trauma support needed
- Systemic disassociation from community, lack of identity-/shame/ stigma
- Continuum of care, treatment of mental health
- Métis specific mental health counseling /advocates
- Early youth diagnostics for mental health

### Accessible and Supplemental Health Care

- Reduce/delete health Insurance premiums for Metis
- Include dental as basic health care
- Métis Culturally safe advocate/support staff in each Community
- Metis Community Advocates helping navigate the health care system
- Extended health benefits, Full spectrum benefits: eye care, respite care, home support, dental, prescription costs, prescribed dietary supplements, prescribed medical supplies
- Need transportation to Health Care Services for rural Métis.
- Affordable or / no cost, medications.
- Affordable accessible Culturally safe treatment

## Affordable Safe Housing

- Métis Specific funding allocation to develop our own income-based housing
- Regional land based locations throughout the seven regions of MNBC within the province
- Board administered, Métis specific Seniors Housing.
- Metis specific beds/accommodation through all levels of residential Eldercare

## Children and Families

- Advocacy for Metis families
- Métis specific dollars to develop and administer Métis specific services
- Métis social workers as Roots Workers and Family Finders employed in Metis Child and Family service agencies and within the Metis Commission
- Life skill teaching for youth aging out of care
- Investments made in prevention and reunification services for Metis Youth and families

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- Increased support in place for grandparents and extended family in raising their grandchildren/relatives
- More parental support for child rearing education
- Invest in the family supports to enable them to remain within their family environment
- No cost parenting skills taught by Elders and professional educators
- Eliminating releasing kids to care due to poverty
- Priority based budgeting to align with resources to be applied to the need of Métis peoples; instead of administration
- Foster Homes – need to allow child/children to stay with in home community

### Income Assistance and Disability Rates

- Preventative support system as opposed to a crisis driven system, equal for everyone who requires it
- Educate /provide awareness of predatory lending. –increase income assistance to above poverty line
- Metis Seniors / Elders need to have adequate financial support
- Free financial counselling services
- Higher pensions/payout for Elders and people with disabilities

### Employment and Wages

- More financial assistance for working poor
- Living wage in line with cost of living
- Keep our successful people engaged and committed to Métis issues.
- Transportation assistance to access jobs and work sites.
- Access to contracts (economic development)-duty to consult not always recognized.
- Create incentive to employ temporary LOCAL seasonal workers rather than bringing in foreign labor
- Offer incentives to keep manufacturing jobs available, and incentives to hire Métis people.
- Employment inequities need addressing
- Create incentives for manufacturing business to keep their business in the province to create more job opportunities

### Education and skill training

- Metis specific head start programs for our children
- Funded post-secondary education at the Masters and Doctorate level - access to education funding need to be broadened (trades, advanced education)
- Métis history and culture to be included in curriculums at all levels of the education system
- Economic training, capacity building training
- Develop plan to support and reduce the drop-out rate among Metis students
- Financial literacy
- Promote entrepreneurial spirit through education

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- Targeted career counselling sessions for Metis youth in grades 8 and 9 so they choose the correct academic prerequisite classes for future studies
- Subsidized training opportunities for older adults and seniors
- Access to free life skills training for everyone
- Access to free economic development education
- Work ethic programs for youth and young adults
- Access and begin trades train at high school level
- Offer free training with a contract of payback with skill acquired for services (cost of education) by staying and working in your training as payback.
- Rural schools need better connection to land based heritage and cultural education.

### Strong Metis Governance

- Metis representation at the decision-making level
- Métis Lens included at decision-making tables; all levels of government, health care, education, economic development
- Legislate Métis lens in government programs
- Tax exemptions as other <sup>1</sup>Aboriginal people benefit from
- More government funding streamlined and shared to smaller communities
- Full recognition of Métis / <sup>1</sup>Aboriginal Rights from provincial and federal governments
- Foundation/to collaborate with Métis issues; culture, health, employment, school, education, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical aspects.
- Be recognized as a distinct Nation with a distinct Culture that we are.
- Economic development - duty to consult Metis not always recognized
- Introduce Métis History and Culture to all levels of education
- Implement awareness of racial profiling and work to eliminate it through Cultural Safety

### Other highlights

**Transportation** - Low cost transportation in rural/smaller communities and public transit subsidy

**Food Security** - Food banks providing healthy foods, development of community gardens for food and fellowship, Métis food kitchens and meal sharing, eliminate children attending school hungry – meal program in schools.

**Criminal Justice** - Reintegration skills are being taught for post release, Culture is incorporated in healing, racism and profiling needs to be addressed.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

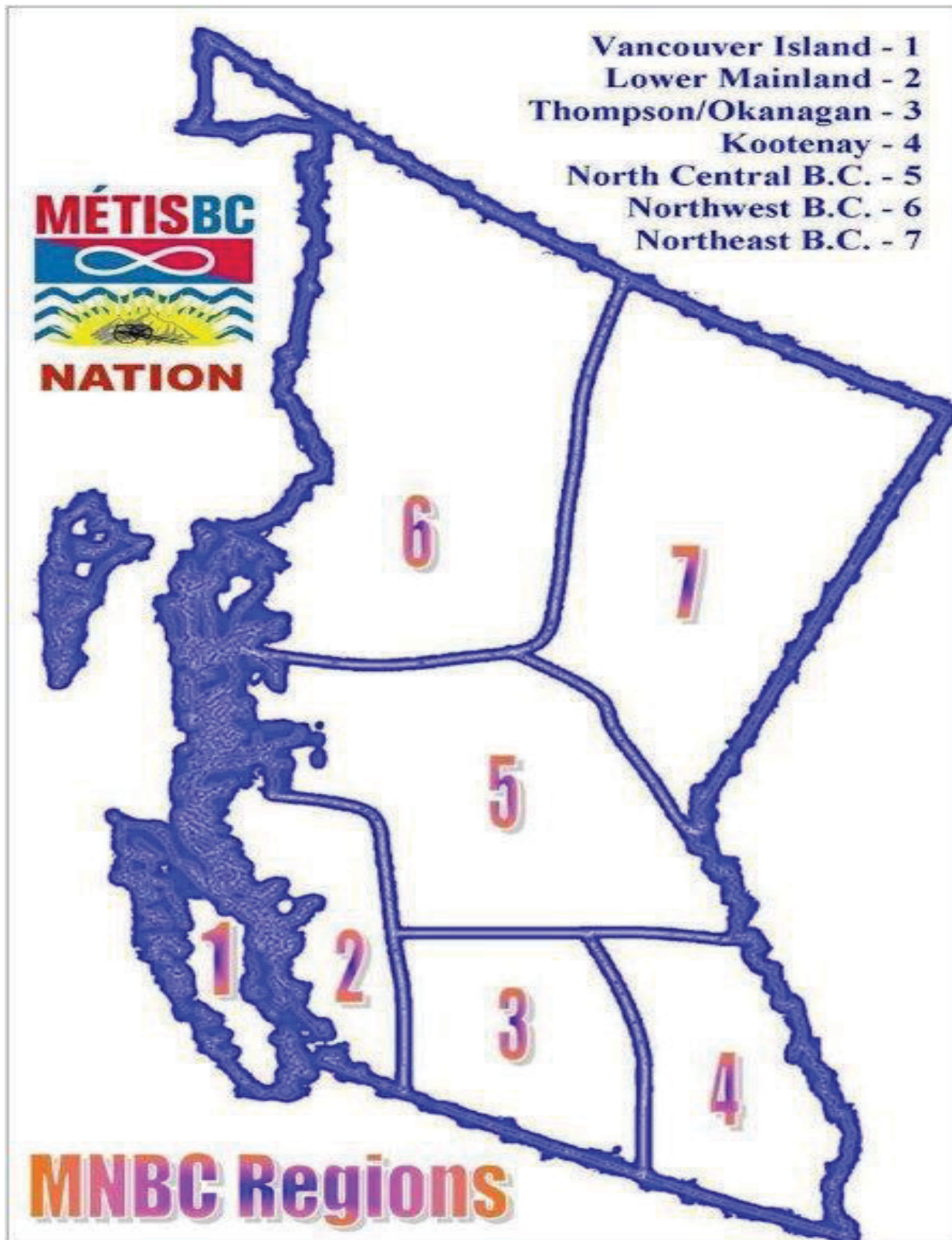
1. There is a need to address affordable housing for Métis people in British Columbia. It is recommended that the Provincial government provide funds to MNBC on an annual basis to create Métis specific housing that will offer income based rents. A housing project with a mixture of Elder's, families and singles will create a sense of Metis community.

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2. Métis people living below the poverty rate need additional funding assistance. It is recommended that the Provincial Government needs to ensure that the income assistance, disability and pensions rates meet the cost of living.
3. Métis people do not receive non-insured health benefits. It is recommended that the cost of non-insured health benefits need to be covered for Metis people as they are for other Aboriginal group. It is also recommended that the cost of MSP for Métis people be waived.
4. Métis people do not receive any funding when pursuing a Masters or Doctorate. It is recommended that the Provincial Government provide such funding.
5. It is recommended that the Provincial Government immediately fund MNBC to create a Cultural Wellness and Safety curriculum on the Métis population in BC. This curriculum will be a part of San'yas Indigenous Cultural Competency training, and Provincial Government employees and health authority staff will be taught Metis curriculum, to decrease the misconceptions and increase understanding of the unique and distinct Culture of the Métis people.
6. The price of food in some communities that are more remote is more expensive than in many communities that are located closer to bigger centres where choice and price competition exists. It is recommended that the Provincial Government consider implementing a food subsidy program for low-income families in more remote communities.
7. There is little support for grandparents raising their grandchildren. It is recommended that the Provincial Government provide more support for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.
8. There is little or no support for Métis families struggling to keep their families together. Métis children are being taken from their families and moved into the care of government because the family is in poverty. It is recommended that the monies currently spent by the Provincial Government to keep Métis children in care be utilized to invest in Métis families to enable them to remain within their family environment.
9. Children cannot learn on empty stomachs. It is recommended that the Provincial Government put in place healthy meal programs in schools.
10. Community gardens can be a valuable source of food for Community residents in need. It is recommended that the Provincial Government work with MNBC and other Aboriginal organizations, and with municipalities throughout the province to establish community gardens in every community.

\*Included within this document is a copy of the Consultation Session Agenda and map of MNBC's regions

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**MNBC Region Map defining the seven Region of MNBC.**

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Unit# 103-5668, 192<sup>nd</sup> Street  
 Surrey, BC, V3S 2V7  
 Tel: 604.557.5851  
 Fax: 604.557.2024  
 TF: 1.800.940.1150  
[www.mnbc.ca](http://www.mnbc.ca)

## Metis Poverty Reduction Conversation AGENDA

10:00 am – 10:30 am	Welcome Prayer Opening Remarks, Poverty Reduction Power Point
10:30 am to 11:15 am Breakout group discussion:	<b>Discussion Question #1</b> <i>What are the issues facing you and people in poverty right now?</i>
11:15 am to 12:00 am. Breakout group discussion:	<b>Discussion Question #2</b> <i>What are the aspects of poverty that impact Metis people more than other people either, culturally, socially, or economically?</i>
12:00 – 12:45pm	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>
12:45 pm – 1:30 pm Breakout group discussion:	<b>Discussion Question #3</b> <i>What would address these issues and help you and others out of poverty?</i>
1:30 pm to 2:00 pm	<i>.Review priorities for all questions</i> <i>Wrap up and thank –you</i> <i>Door Prize draw</i>

The Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) represents nearly 90,000 self-identified Métis people in British Columbia, of that, nearly 17,000 are provincially registered Métis Citizens with MNBC. Recognized by the Métis National Council, the Provincial Government of British Columbia and the Federal Government of Canada the Métis Nation British Columbia is the official governing body of the Métis in BC.

<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal will be used over Indigenous throughout this document and is the preferred language of Metis Nation British Columbia. Aboriginal is defined in the Constitution of Canada as Indian (First Nations), Inuit and Metis; whereas, Indigenous has broader implications and there is a need to define Indigenous. 14

## Métis Nation Relationship Accord II

[https://www.mnbc.ca/app/webroot/uploads/About Us/MNRA II Relationship Renewal Nov 16 2016 .pdf](https://www.mnbc.ca/app/webroot/uploads/About%20Us/MNRA%20II%20Relationship%20Renewal%20Nov%2016%202016.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> *Aboriginal will be used over Indigenous throughout this document and is the preferred language of Metis Nation British Columbia. Aboriginal is defined in the Constitution of Canada as Indian (First Nations), Inuit and Metis; whereas, Indigenous has broader implications and there is a need to define Indigenous.* 15

# BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres – Indigenous Poverty Reduction Consultations

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BRITISH  
COLUMBIA



**BCAAFC** | BC Association  
of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

# *Indigenous Poverty Reduction Consultations: A Summary Report*

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*Prepared By*

*The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres  
April 2018*



## Background

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition has called for a comprehensive plan to address poverty in British Columbia with legislated targets and timelines and since 2008 more than 400 organizations have signed on to the call. Calls have also been issued by the Union of BC Municipalities and by the BC Legislature's own finance committee.

While BC is one of the wealthiest provinces in Canada, it also has one of the highest poverty rates in the country. The Government recognizes that previous efforts to reduce poverty were narrow in scope and failed to address the issue. They are now prepared to take a more multi-pronged, evidence-based approach.

Last fall, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction initiated BC's long awaited plan to examine the issue of poverty and developing a strategy to address it. A 28-member advisory committee has been tasked with gathering input from across the Province and provided a budget of \$1.2 million to support a province-wide engagement process.

Twenty-one (21) of the twenty-five (25) Friendship Centres hosted 'Indigenous Poverty Reduction Consultations' through February and March of 2018, with some Centres hosting two sessions. Over 1500 respondents participated in the consultations through in person interviews, surveys and facilitated sessions. Indigenous perspectives will be critical to the success of the Province's poverty reduction agenda given the disproportionately high number of Indigenous families living in poverty in the province. More than a quarter million Indigenous people (First Nations, Inuit, and Metis) call BC their home; one in six Indigenous people in Canada live in the region.<sup>1</sup>

This paper provides a high level summary of the feedback received from Indigenous participants at these sessions and offers recommendations for consideration by Ministry officials as they move forward on the development of BC's first-ever Poverty Reduction Plan. Twenty Friendship Centres contributed to the consultations engaging more than 1500 people in conversations about issues that prevent poverty reduction.

## Poverty, in Context

Defining and measuring poverty is complex, and for that and other reasons, Canada has yet to establish an official definition for it. Poverty can be measured using both absolute and relative terms, but in developed countries like Canada, it is relative.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-656-x/89-656-x2016011-eng.htm>

Poverty is generally defined as the lack of sufficient income to provide for the basic necessities of life, consistent with the norms of the society in which one lives.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, while many poor people in Canada have full time jobs (often called the “working poor”) and can make more in one week than people in developing countries make in a year, they can still be living in poverty. Relative poverty is poverty just the same, and it can have devastating long-term impacts on community, family, and individual health and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

The Conference Board of Canada uses low-income measures, which are *relative* measures of income, to assess how people fare compared with the general population. The poverty line is calculated as 50% of the national median income. The poverty rate is calculated as the share of the population with disposable incomes (after taxes and government transfers) below this poverty line.<sup>4</sup>

The Conference Board conducted an analysis of how Canada performs and released a *Society Report Card* last year that measured social performance or quality of life in Canada relative to that within peer countries.<sup>5</sup> Canada received an overall “B” grade, ranking us 10th among 16 peer countries. Canada ranked high on life satisfaction but poorly relative to top-ranked peers on poverty, income inequality, gender wage gap, and voter turnout.<sup>6</sup>

The Society Report Card also gave British Columbia a “B” grade overall placing the province 12th among 26 comparator jurisdictions. On income inequality and poverty however, BC scored “C” grades. The province’s lowest grade, a “D,” was recorded for its gender wage gap.<sup>7</sup>

Had their report card been based solely on Indigenous peoples’ realities, it is safe to assume that both BC and Canada would receive failing grades overall. This assumption is based on the poor overall health and socioeconomic status of Indigenous peoples nationally, but also, on other report cards, like the United Nations’ Human Development Index (HDI).

The HDI is a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income per capita indicators. A country scores higher HDI when life expectancy at birth is longer, the education period is longer, and the income per capita is higher.<sup>8</sup> When the HDI was applied to Indigenous peoples only, Canada placed 63rd out of 185 countries, a significant drop from its eighth place ranking, where it had placed as a whole (2016).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/heapro/article/14/4/355/708255>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/international/news-and-education-magazines/poor-developed-countries>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/provincial/society/poverty.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/provincial/society.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.conferenceboard.ca/press/newsrelease/17-04-05/British\\_Columbia\\_Earns\\_a\\_“B”\\_On\\_Conference\\_Board\\_Of\\_Canada\\_s\\_Society\\_Report\\_Card.aspx#](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/press/newsrelease/17-04-05/British_Columbia_Earns_a_“B”_On_Conference_Board_Of_Canada_s_Society_Report_Card.aspx#)

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_Development\\_Index](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index)

## The Friendship Centre's Role in Addressing Poverty

Friendship Centres have been economic, social and cultural hubs in cities and towns across Canada for more than 60 years. They are safe, open places where Indigenous people and others gather to support and learn from each other, and connect or reconnect with their cultures, kin, and languages. Centres offer a broad continuum of holistic, client-centered, culturally based and linked supports that assist urban Indigenous peoples and their families through life's many transitions. The primary purpose of the Friendship Centre Movement is to assist and support people, and youth in particular, in their efforts to access the services they need to facilitate their equitable engagement in the Canadian economy. This work fundamentally includes poverty prevention and reduction.

The Friendship Centres' unique and extensive service delivery network facilitates horizontal cross collaboration among community-based organizations and both the private and public sectors. This approach allows them to align and channel multiple facets of local poverty reduction endeavours into effective programming to meet the needs of urban Indigenous peoples.

*Some of the BC Friendship Centres provide housing supports for youth in care, singles housing, supportive housing for youth aging out of care, family housing, shelters, and some provide a combination of these types of housing supports.*

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One key strength of the Friendship Centre network's poverty reduction approach is that they are brokers in their communities, building partnerships between like-minded organizations, leveraging community presence and support, strengthening connections and breaking down barriers between the general public and the urban Indigenous community.

The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) acts as a central coordinating body that communicates and negotiates with government and other stakeholders on behalf of its 25 member Centres across the province. With over 1000 employees, the BC Association is one of the largest Indigenous community-based service providers in BC, and an integral part of the longest standing Indigenous service-delivery network in the country.

The Association plays a key role in ensuring community members' voices are heard and their perspectives integrated into plans intended to resolve long-standing issues like poverty. Great care was taken to see that those who took part in consultations felt safe, included, and respected. Discussions were opened in a good way, often with prayer and song, with local Elders and knowledge keepers offering supportive words. Every meeting included good wholesome food and snacks.

Indigenous people who access services through Friendship Centres manage poverty largely as an outcome of colonization and the many forms of Indigenous specific racism; systemic, structural, institutional, and individual. These racism encounters have impacted Indigenous lives every day, over generations, resulting in intergenerational traumas, economic and social exclusion, and poverty. Centres have recognized the complex nature of poverty and the linkages to colonization and exclusion, and are uniquely positioned to ensure Indigenous peoples are not left behind as the province moves forward on poverty reduction. In honour of those who so generously contributed to these proceedings, one Friendship Centre offered the following words to set the stage for what some considered to be a difficult topic of discussion:

**We acknowledge the historical trauma and losses of Indigenous people. We acknowledge the loss of traditional rights, cultural practices, food harvesting, economic and land exclusion and marginalization that has brought our people to points of despair, homelessness, and extreme poverty. It is the hope and the will of the people that participated in the poverty reduction engagements, that their willingness to step forward, to share, and to create hope, will lead to significant and ongoing positive change.**

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## **Consultation Outcomes: an Overview**

While we have attempted to put the issues we heard into general categories, it's clear that these issues are deeply intertwined and should be considered within a larger context. In order to adequately demonstrate the intersectional linkages between issues based on state supported Indigenous specific systemic racism and oppression and economic and social exclusion and that has driven previous and current generations of Indigenous people into poverty, we provide a few examples of people who have told us their experience.

### **Housing**

Participants were asked to identify and prioritize barriers to addressing poverty. The number one barrier overall was affordable, safe housing. There is simply not enough affordable housing to meet the need. In addition, where affordable housing exists, it tends to be located in unsafe neighbourhoods, and the units themselves are inadequate or in a state of disrepair, and in

some cases, health hazards. Participants provided multiple examples of racist experiences with housing. Some were not provided with the basic privacy and dignity by landlords with surprise inspections, no locks on doors, limits on visitors, no overnight visitors, etc. These comments were not just coming cities, we hear this from communities throughout the province, where only indigenous people (desperate to get any kind of housing) would apply for such substandard housing. These units are described as mouldy, infested dumps without proper locks, with a hot plate for cooking, a small fridge, that doesn't enable any purchasing in bulk, and with slumlords who don't respect the privacy of the tenants.

*In the North West region of the province the local friendship centres report the homeless population increased with the influx of the pipeline and gas terminal crews from the south who have been buying houses and taking the mid and high range renting housing stock. This has resulted in a negative cascading effect, reducing housing availability for people in poverty who can now access only the very worst housing. The rental rates have become inflated with few rental units available. For many more Indigenous people who access and rely on the lower end of the rental housing market, there is nowhere to live.*

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Many participants reported living in unsafe conditions and environments and called for concerted efforts by their municipalities to conduct housing inspections. Indoor air quality is impacted by over crowding (an issue raised at more than one session). Black mold can easily take hold when housing units are overcrowded and not properly ventilated. People also complained about bed bug infestations in their rental units and were concerned about the potential health hazards. Children and seniors are particularly vulnerable in these types of situations.

Participants called for more rent controls and subsidies, and for cities and towns to build more affordable housing units. They recommended affordable housing developments be integrated into the community, not segregated into their own areas creating more "low income hoods".

In the context of rent control, participants talked about possible implications of calling for property owners and landlords to do their part. They expressed concern that there might be less affordable housing overall if landlords were forced to accommodate their needs, and feared that it would result in more homelessness. They pointed to provincial incentives as one way to ensure landlords "don't walk away". Some participants cited their fear of landlords who could threaten to put them out on the street. They felt there was no effective recourse to the control that 'slumlords' had over their lives.

Participants referred directly to provincial and other policies they perceived as being either unfairly applied or inadequate and insufficient. Further, while some called for more financial literacy and essential skills programming to assist in managing their households, they were painfully aware that their circumstances would not change unless they made or received more money per month.

Participants pointed to a lack of shelter beds available in their communities. They talked about their concern for seniors and disabled people on fixed incomes who are at greater risk of losing their homes when their rent is increased. Urban groups in particular talked about “renovictions” as an ongoing concern. It is a reason landlords are increasingly using to evict tenants so that they can raise the rent exponentially.

There was a general sentiment that the cycle of poverty is perpetuated by social assistance policies: in order to address poverty social assistance policies would need to change. Participants consistently called for increases in social assistance to keep pace with the cost of living, but in a manner that protects them from the landlords taking any increases in social assistance rates.

### **Utilities**

There were numerous suggestions put forward related to capping or subsidizing utilities like hydro and gas as one way to alleviate hardship people are experiencing. In the north the hydro rates have increased substantially and people speculated the replacement of hydro meters were the reason. One participant notes her hydro rates have gone up since the installation of smart meters, to the point where hydro is unaffordable. In parts of the province where it is colder in winter there was a correlative discussion about the high costs of utilities, especially hydro.

### **Cost of Living**

Several groups (Lillooet, Houston, Vernon, and Victoria) raised the issue of the rising cost of living as the number one barrier to addressing poverty. They reported having to choose between paying the bills or making rent and putting food on the table. Some reported having to skip meals to pay the bills. Others reported an increased dependence on food banks in order to make ends meet.

At one poverty reduction workshop we were fed a good filling meal that included bread and a communal dish of butter. Participants eyed the bread and butter and one of them finally asked, “Are you going to eat that?” The women talked about how they can’t afford food. They wrapped up the butter and bread to take home.

She said. ‘I had to pay Hydro this month so I can’t afford to eat. Now at least I have breakfast tomorrow. I wish for a decent house with a fridge and stove and laundry. I worry about being kicked out on the street. Our landlord is horrible, but living in a shelter is worse than the dump I rent. I’d quit the drugs if I had a decent home.

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## Food Security

Participants said that food security is a key concern and increasingly, a barrier to addressing poverty. Urban participants accessing charitable prepared foods such as soup kitchens associated poverty with poor health, particularly with access to little more than salty high carbohydrate foods and deli meats, with little access to fresh fruit or vegetables and no access to their historical cultural diet of wild game, seafood, wild berries and greens.

Some of the more innovative suggestions were put forward to address food security issues including on-line food banks, more community gardens, more “specials” offered by local grocery stores during welfare week, and support for more food hamper and school lunch programs. Food insecurity is a public health concern, and is linked to higher rates of obesity in low-income homes.<sup>9</sup> Obesity is a risk factor for a variety of serious health problems such as type 2-diabetes and cardiovascular disease, conditions disproportionately carried by the Indigenous population.<sup>10</sup>

*One participant stated, “Folks like to blame our people for our poverty, not understanding the Indian Act and Residential School system was designed to socially and economically get us out of the way. These policies and law, make it an exception for Indigenous people to escape poverty. Indigenous people are also blamed for not taking care of their health. It must be noted that Indigenous health and wellness was superb 100 years ago when we had unfettered access to our traditional lands and seas that blessed us with housing, medicines, reasons for living, and foods. Indigenous health has gone from excellent to deplorable in*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.ca/&httpsredir=1&article=6275&context=etd>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2008001/article/10487/4060770-eng.htm>

*less than one hundred years. Our poverty and poor health is an outcome of the lack of Indigenous land and food security.”*

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Parents were frustrated they couldn't afford healthy breakfast and lunches for their children. They usually give their kids cheap high carbohydrate meals such as cereals and noodles to satiate their hunger. In the north the high cost of transporting fresh food makes milk, vegetables and fruit unaffordable.

### **Universal Child Care**

Some called for more affordable childcare (universal childcare). Some stated it wasn't worth it to work if you had to pay most of your wages to a child care provider. Childcare issues affect peoples' ability to access employment opportunities in an equitable manner.

### **Transportation**

Participants wanted more supports for transportation (i.e., free bus passes). Some participants talked about hitchhiking along the Highway of Tears to get groceries for the family even though it was well known to be unsafe for Indigenous women. Others said they didn't have money for the transit and would sometimes resort to trying to get on board. Some bus drivers would let it slide, and others will make a comment which participants found humiliating, or ask them to leave if they don't have the bus fare.

### **System Navigation**

Participants seemed to be aware of how funding for supports and services are allocated and felt that their municipalities were not contributing enough. Some of the solutions proposed by participants can be described as short term fixes (i.e., more subsidies, more food banks, more rent caps, more flexible rent restrictions and more second chances with damage deposits, to name a few), but these calls illustrate that participants are most concerned about meeting their immediate and basic needs. It is difficult to talk about addressing this issue in broad, comprehensive terms when you are worried about the essentials.

Others, who were less aware of the services available, felt that there should be a provincial navigation system or resource guide developed so that people could better access the services they need. During the consultations, facilitators noticed participants, especially youth sharing system *hacks* with those who didn't know how to navigate the service system. There was



agreement on the lack of coordination of resources for available services, and suggested “social service centres” in communities as a rational solution.

### **Child Welfare**

A participant referred to the federal and provincial child welfare systems as abductors of Indigenous children, and many described the child welfare system as the having the same intention as the Residential School system. They were well aware the provincial child welfare system pays foster parents more than it supports the actual parents to look after their own children, essentially penalizing parents for their poverty. These systems need to be revamped with a focus on keeping kids at home and supporting the parents.

### **Friendship Centres**

Some solutions brought forward built upon what is already working in communities. Participants felt that in order for Friendship Centre programs and services to be more effective, they simply needed to be expanded or enhanced. Not all Friendship Centres offer the same services; however, if support was provided to build upon established best (wise) practices, and what is working in community, there might be less people in crisis. Friendship Centres have been in the business of poverty reduction for decades; with more funding directed towards the work Centres do, participants felt that the issue of poverty would be alleviated.

### **On/Off Reserve Jurisdictional Issues**

People talked about the loss of access to First Nations supports services. The migration of on-reserve people to urban cities and towns has an impact on service access. On –reserve services are not generally portable. Housing on reserve has never met the increasing needs of the population. Some participants said they have been on their First Nation housing list for 25 or more years and have given up hope of getting a home in their home community.

**An Indigenous woman living in the north, with a child with highly specialized needs was refused (health and specialized support) services by her First Nation because she was living in another First Nations community. The community in which she lives refused her service because she is not a member of that First Nation. She is unable to find housing in the nearby towns with hospitals and support services the child needs. Industry has taken up all available rental housing. The family has gone without hydro in order to provide food for the**

children. She hitchhikes from her community to the local town to get groceries and is often reprimanded by the police for doing so when there is a bus available. However the circuitous route of the bus means she spends all day making what would normally be a two hour trip to get groceries. Her child wishes for a warm and safe home for the family.

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When moving off reserve becomes the only option, the nation member with their name on the housing list generally moves to the bottom of the list for all services from that First Nation. One woman said she would never get a house on reserve because she wasn't from the right family. The reality of many First Nations is the on-reserve population elects the leaders, and the leaders are naturally expected to prioritize services to those living on reserve. Participants have said they are counted as part of their nation population for funding purposes, but they don't receive any supports if they live off reserve.

A man living in the downtown eastside of Vancouver said, "I heard the Chiefs referring to us as their people "Away from home" as if I have ever actually lived on the reserve it says I am from on my Status Card. I'm second generation urban, with grown kids that have never been 'home'. I know me and my kids aren't welcome to go 'home' and ask for a house or an education grant or a job. Not that I would ever consider moving to a place that has never been my home. People always tell us to go to our Band for help. I'm not asking anymore."

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### **Intergenerational Racism, Exclusion and Oppression**

Participants expressed frustration with being racialized and judged for their socio-economic status. They said landlords, employers, and others were quick to dismiss them based on their racial appearance. Sadly, some participants seemed to be humbly asking for help to better manage their oppression. For them, being Indigenous, and in poverty is a fact of life. They would be satisfied if there was less judgement and more support and understanding.

Participants expressed frustration with the on/off reserve differentiations in social assistance rates and the accessibility of services. Participants expressed frustration with services that were set up without being able to serve them in the town where they were living. For example, in a small northern BC community, participants said their First Nations based services agency was no longer available in their community. To use the service they had to find a way to get to the

service agency which had moved to a community over one hour's drive along the highway with no public transportation system between the two communities.

## Violence and Oppression

Youth talked moving to the city and towns due to experiences of violence and oppression, at home and in the child welfare system. Young people said chronic abuse precluded them from health and from safety, and from achieving their education goals and a decent life. Some stated they have had to steal, lie, and provide sexual favours to survive. They talked about having poor mental health and that they self medicate, engage in survival sex, and drug use.

**A youth, living in a southern urban centre said that every single day her main focus, as soon as she wakes up, is finding a safe place to sleep at night. She is very thin, and her energy stores are limited. She doesn't have the energy to focus on much else but shelter and food.**

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Many people reported feeling hopeless, overwhelmed and depressed because of their situations. The linkages between poverty and mental health and addictions in adults are well documented;<sup>11</sup> some session participants argued that poverty and addictions exist in tandem. Due to the complex nature of this relationship, it was agreed that poverty cannot adequately be addressed without attending mental health and addictions issues.

Participants told us they moved off reserve and into increased poverty in rural and urban communities due to domestic violence and sexual assault, lack of housing, lack of education and work opportunities, and fear for their physical safety.

Indigenous specific poverty, coupled with state entrenched oppression and exclusion has been experienced over many generations. Addressing this will require a complex, multi-pronged response, particularly due to its impacts on children. According to the Centre of Excellence for Children and Youth, there is a strong association between poverty and child and youth mental health issues. The odds of a child or youth from a family living in poverty having a mental health problem are three times that of a child from a family that is not living in poverty. This relationship is stable and consistent across countries, measures of poverty, methods of determining diagnosis and different times.<sup>12</sup> The research also shows that poor children tend to experience higher levels of antisocial behaviour.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <http://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/poverty-and-mental-illness/>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.excellenceforchildand youth.ca/sites/default/files/resource/policy\\_poverty.pdf](https://www.excellenceforchildand youth.ca/sites/default/files/resource/policy_poverty.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Long-Term Poverty Affects Mental Health of Children, *Science Daily*, February 9, 2006

BC may be faced with more serious poverty related problems in the near future given that one in five poor people in the province are under the age of 18; the poverty rate for children in single mother-led households in BC is a shocking 49 per cent.<sup>14</sup>. These demographics and associated trends may see the cycle of poverty and addictions continuing unabated, well into the future, if sufficient focus and resources are not strategically targeted.

### **Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault**

Women talked about violence and abuse as a norm. Some don't always feel welcome to use existing mainstream domestic violence services, particularly the shelters, because they felt racialized and judged. Some state they have bigger families that make it a difficult and unwelcome fit for a mainstream shelter service.

**A Woman in a small town said she didn't report sexual assault and physical assault because her trust of the justice system was low. She stays in an abusive relationship because she has no safe housing to escape to.**

Street entrenched women and girls talked about the risk and difficulty of being a woman on the street, trying to find safe places to be while they were out of the shelter, walking extra long distances to find a place to sleep for the night if they couldn't find a shelter, and trading sex for favours such as sleeping on a couch.

In the north, women stated they were still putting themselves at risk of sexual assault by hitchhiking along the highway to get groceries because there are few safer choices and some choices were simply not practical.

Women said they moved off reserve due to domestic violence and sexual assault in order to find safe family housing. Participants talked about a First Nations community they had recently left where it was the norm for women and girls to use the buddy system; never be without your buddy at a party, one has to agree not to drink, and they must agree to see each other safely home.

**One Indigenous woman wondered when the sexual violence and oppression would be over, when the "Me Too" issues would finally expose the culture of domestic violence and sexual assault where Indigenous women and girls are the last to get help of any kind. She left her home to get away from violence and now lives in poverty off reserve. She wondered when things would change for**

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<sup>14</sup> [https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2017/01/ccpa-bc\\_long-overdue-poverty-plan\\_web.pdf](https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2017/01/ccpa-bc_long-overdue-poverty-plan_web.pdf)

## Indigenous Women. “They should have spent the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Enquiry funding on housing”.

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Some of the discussions that occurred were more emotional than others were and in one session, people reportedly expressed anger and resentment at their situations. Again, solutions were not as readily available as they might have been given how overwhelming their realities are. People simply want relief.

### **The cycle of poverty within a state of systemic racism**

BCAAFC notes the many pathways out of poverty are filled with trip lines, snags, and traps that discourage success for Indigenous people. There are few substantial and long term commitments to addressing Indigenous specific poverty. The federal funding is supplied at a rate enabling Indigenous people to manage their poverty, there isn't enough support to climb out of poverty. Funders often cross purposes, and use non-indigenous measures

Mainstream education and training systems for example is often a poor cultural fit for Indigenous people. The costs to get into advanced education programs are too high, loans are often inaccessible, and the Indigenous student often goes without the latest technology required for classroom success. Repaying student loans becomes challenging and keeps Indigenous students in poverty. This is particularly the case when they don't get the return on their education investment with a good paying job.

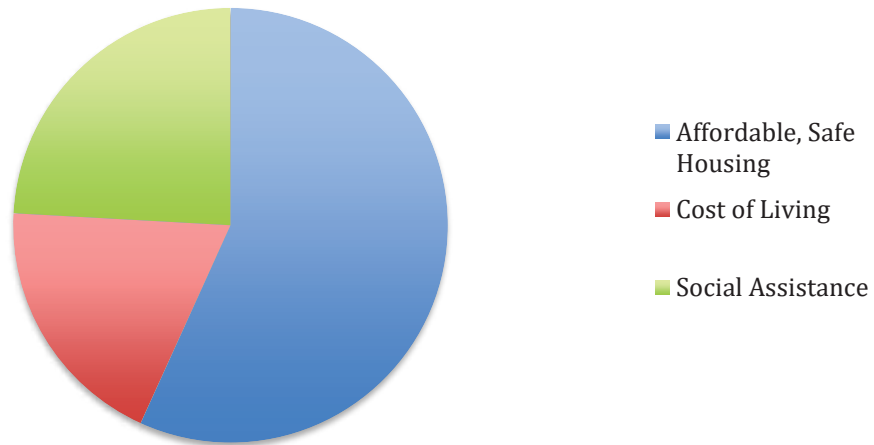
A student explained that for him to succeed in school he made a choice every day to endure further colonial ignorance and lack of cultural safety in order to get his accreditation, hoping he could shake off the offensive colonial experience once he finished his training. “None of the other brothers in my class made it through to the end. It was tough, day by day, for me too.”

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### **Barriers to Poverty Reduction**

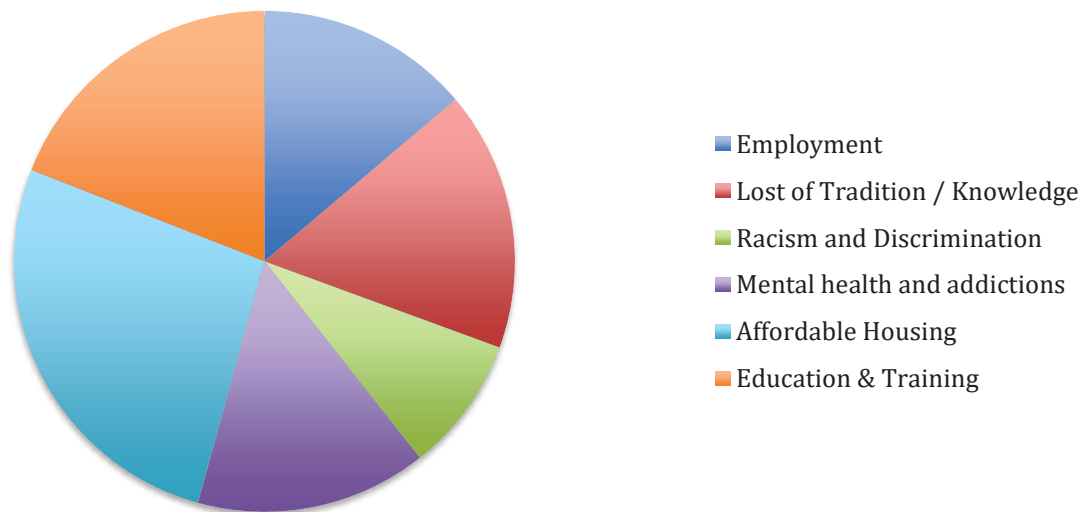
The following pie charts provide an overall picture of outcomes recorded at all of the sessions that were hosted by Friendship Centres in BC. When asked what the number one barrier to poverty reduction was, three issues emerged. Affordable, safe housing was by far the issue identified at all sessions, as creating the biggest barriers to poverty reduction:

## Number 1 Barrier to Poverty Reduction

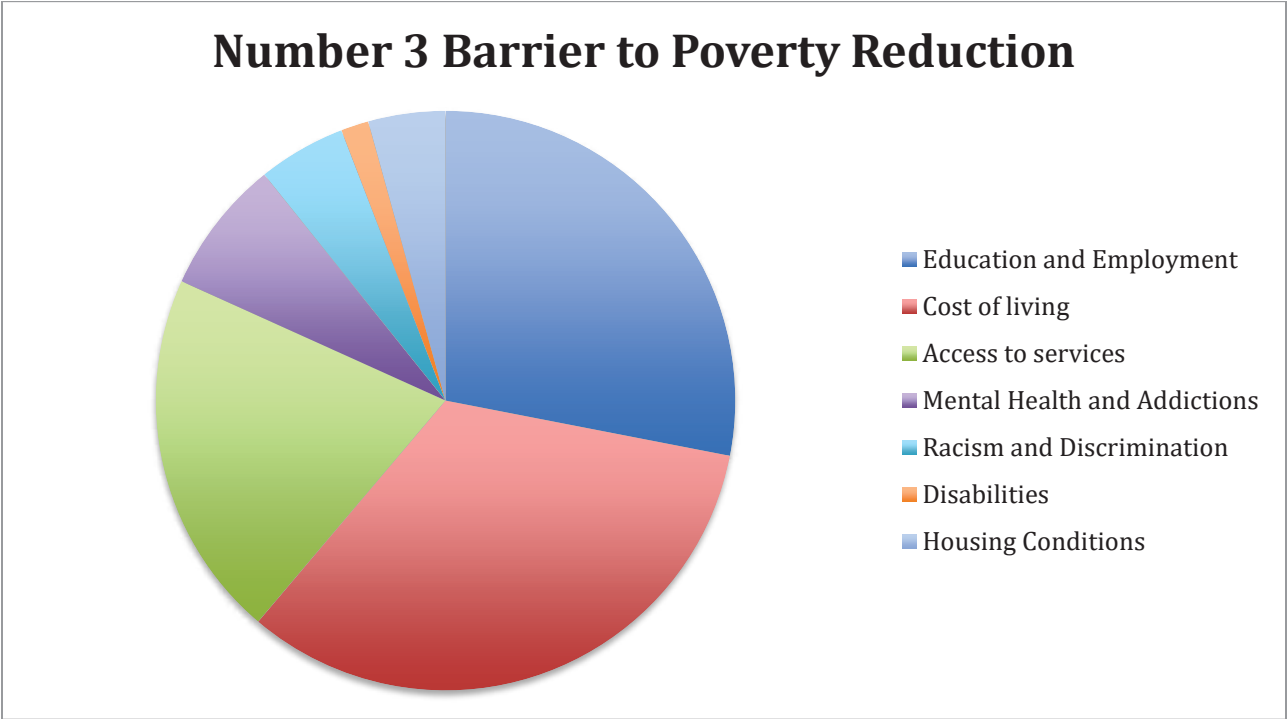


When asked what the second biggest barrier was, six issues emerged. Employment issues, affordable housing, and education and training were key outcomes:

## Number 2 Barrier to Poverty Reduction

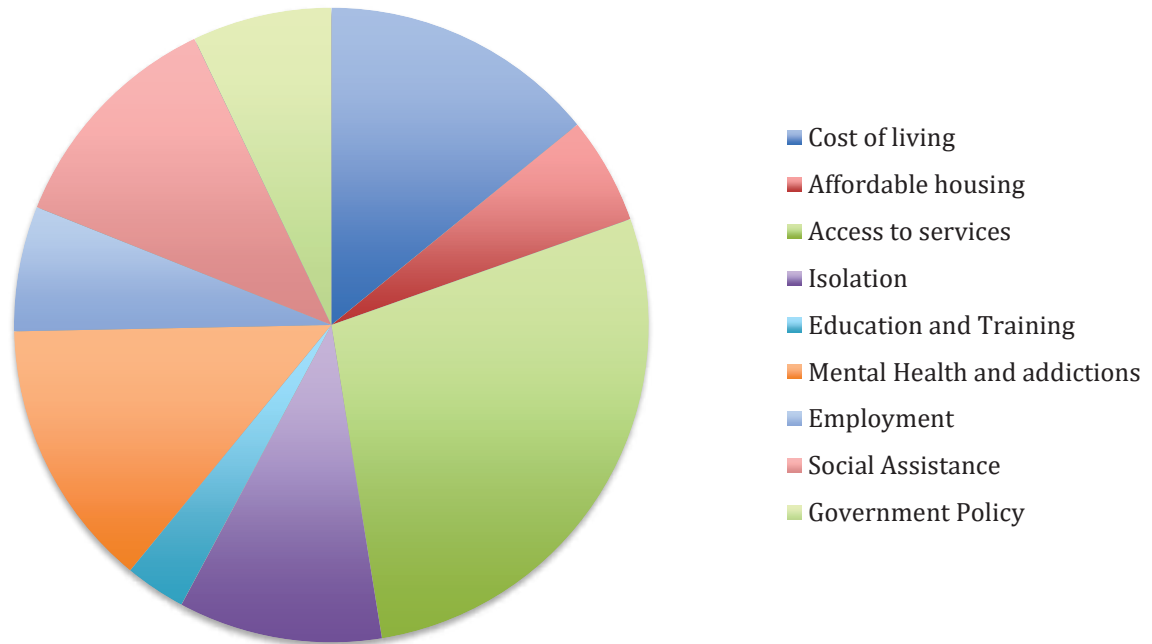


The third biggest barrier question brought forth the issue of education and employment, followed closely by cost of living issues, and access to services:



The fourth biggest barrier question highlights issues related to access to services:

## Number 4 Barrier to Poverty Reduction



## Concluding Remarks

**The outcomes of the Friendship centre community engagement sessions demonstrate that housing is the most immediate need.**

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Addressing Indigenous specific poverty may be one of the most complicated and multifaceted issues of our time, and how we go about doing so will be a direct reflection on us as a society. Poverty affects crime rates, health and mental wellness, substance abuse rates, and poor educational outcomes, which, in turn, affect the economy. It is in everyone's best interests to eradicate it.



Poverty has changed the nature of the urban landscape; it has also changed the country's basic societal makeup. It is responsible for the widening socioeconomic gap between rich and poor, and carries a stigma that isolates us from one another. Those struggling with poverty are often forced to the fringes of society and experience discrimination and social exclusion daily.

Reducing Indigenous specific poverty will require more than incremental increases in social assistance, subsidies, and minimum wage, or the imposition of rent controls. It will require significant policy change in the education, employment, justice, and the health and child welfare systems; it will require attitude and behaviour shifts within the bureaucracy and among decision-makers, employers, teachers, and property-owners; and, it will require a collaborative, collective commitment by all community members in all sectors to examine and understand the underlying root causes of Indigenous specific poverty. Of course, it will require consistent and sustained political will.

The Friendship Centre consultations consistently revealed that existing programs and services are not meeting the need as it relates to making meaningful progress to reducing poverty.

Participants noted that racism and discrimination were barriers to addressing poverty and called for cultural competency training. While it has been well documented that Indigenous peoples' poor health and socio economic status is a result of colonization and systemic racism, it is understandable that participants spoke little about these broader issues or how to address them.

**This report demonstrates how challenging, and perhaps unfair it can be for marginalized and excluded people who are living in crisis to identify solutions to their intergenerational poverty and systemic oppression when most of their focus cannot extend beyond meeting their immediate daily survival needs; shelter, food, and warmth.**

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There was however, a lot of discussion around the "cycle of poverty" and how it is perpetuated. More specifically, how poverty leads to increased rates of addictions and mental health issues and similarly how ongoing addictions and mental health issues can in turn, lead to increased poverty rates. A deeper analysis of the cyclical characteristics of poverty and addictions sees a call to address the issues simultaneously.

As part of the whole-person wellness model for service delivery, many Friendship Centres offer either formal mental health / addictions counselling or work closely with partner organizations

to link individuals to appropriate alternate services. With increased support to do this important work, Friendship Centres could play a valuable role in breaking the cycle.

## Recommendations

1. Increase housing stock for Indigenous people in both urban and rural communities, on and off reserve, including safe secure housing for women, women as single parent families and men.
2. Commit to developing an Indigenous specific poverty reduction plan, within a decolonizing anti-racist lens, complete with specific goals, targets, timelines and accountabilities.
3. Identify and systematically remove the structural, racialized barriers of social and economic exclusion of Indigenous people. Set out specific targets, timelines and accountabilities.
4. Provide funding for culturally appropriate anti-violence and anti-oppression programs for Indigenous girls, women, and families.
5. Provide funding for effective, results-producing culturally appropriate anti-violence and anti-oppression programs for men and boys.
6. Adopt rent controls and social housing health inspection processes.
7. Place the community at the centre of the poverty reduction plan and build the suite of wraparound services around the clients' needs, where they live.
8. Enable Indigenous food security by enabling Indigenous access to traditional land, and water based cultural food and medicine resources.
9. Establish standard breakfast and lunch programs in schools.
10. In communities with no public transit and where people need to drive long distances for services, establish community based passenger van and car share programs
11. Increase access to jobs, trades, skills training and development for Indigenous people.
12. Develop equitable and inclusive hiring policy and standards for BC that rectifies indigenous exclusion from the economy.
13. Implement and implement an urban Indigenous economic development strategy to increase Indigenous inclusion and long term attachment to the Canadian economy.

14. Increase access to culturally relevant human rights services to address racism and other systemic factors leading to the cycle of Indigenous specific poverty.
15. Adopt cultural competency training requirements and establish cultural safety, decolonizing and anti racist policy standards for provincial officials, local decision makers including property owners (landlords), private sector employers, social workers, and others in order to increase awareness of the historical and current impacts of colonization.
16. Increase culturally appropriate community based and accessible services for Indigenous people including decolonizing employment, education and life skills training and supports, mental health and substance use, and child and family supports.
17. Conduct an analysis and identify best practices in poverty prevention and reduction programs for the purpose of enhancing and expanding them to be delivered in other parts of the province. Friendship Centres are the organization of choice for Indigenous people seeking supports and are uniquely positioned to play a key role in addressing the issue with more support. Greater consistency in the types of programming/services offered by Friendship Centres will ensure that clients can access the same services regardless of where they live.
18. Immediately begin the process of collecting baseline data on the outcomes of poverty (such as homelessness) in order to include concrete realistic goals and milestones in the poverty reduction plan.
19. Recognize the cyclical relationship between poverty and addictions and take measures to ensure that they are addressed simultaneously.
20. Evaluate provincial policies and practices related to social assistance and child welfare for the purpose of improving them to meet community needs.
21. Expand and improve emergency/crisis services across the province.

# SPARC BC – Summary Reports Community Meetings on Poverty Reduction

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BRITISH  
COLUMBIA



# Summary Report: Community Meetings on Poverty Reduction

June 2018



## Introduction

Poverty is one of the biggest societal challenges of our time. This initiative started an important conversation in British Columbia about what poverty looks like in communities across the Province, and about the type of solutions and actions that are needed. This report provides an overview of the issues that were identified along with the feedback on possible ideas and activities received through a series of 28 community meetings held from November 2017 to March 31, 2018.

People from all different walks of life came out to participate in these meetings –both to share their stories and to learn from others. Through the series of meetings held, participants shared an intensity of purpose and a belief that we all have a stake in the decisions that are made. Through the process, it became clear that the issues are complex and that whatever solutions are developed, they must respond to both the complexity of the challenge, as well as to the diversity of communities and regions in the Province.

This report provides a high-level overview of the insights gained and the lessons learned from across the 28 community meetings. It is one of a number of different reports and sources of information that will be used by the Province to help shape the development of British Columbia’s first Poverty Reduction Strategy.

## Participants

Across each of the meetings, people spoke about the challenges of poverty. Many offered compelling portraits of poverty drawn from their own lives and personal experience as well as the lives of their families and others in their community. Some participants represented agencies and service providers who work with families and individuals living in poverty and who understand from their frontline experiences the devastating human and social consequences of poverty and the enduring effects that it can have on families and individuals over their life course. Participants also included, academics, educators, students, politicians, public policy-makers and decision-makers, government agencies, businesses, unions, and concerned citizens.

## Questions

All of the meetings focused on the same two (2) questions:

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?
2. What would address these issues and help you and people out of poverty?

Over the course of each of the meetings, all of the participants engaged in conversations around these two (2) questions both in terms of sharing their own experiences and perspectives and in terms of identifying the types of policies or decisions that they felt could help lift people out of poverty and that

should be considered by the Province in the course of developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy for British Columbia.

The information contained in this report is based on the notes that were taken at each of the community meetings and the thoughts and reflections shared by the meeting participants. In addition to the summary level details provided in this report, the transcripts from each of the meetings are also included as an Appendix.

## Understanding the Broader Themes

Far too often, policy starts in the abstract and tries to capture and remedy as much as it can. This report seeks a different approach, starting with a deep dive into the experiences and circumstances of those living in poverty, including insights and stories shared about the daily struggle and the types of policies and actions needed to address the underlying issues and challenges.

This report looks at the different realities of poverty, both in terms of the need to strengthen the social safety net and system of income support as well as the different points of intersection with other policy areas such as housing, childcare, health, education, transportation and employment. The stories shared through the community meetings draw attention to the fact that too many families and individuals in British Columbia are struggling to meet even their most basic needs such as housing, food and basic health care. Related to this is the issue that many of these individuals and households have incomes that are well below the level needed to have a decent quality of life.

Other concerns include issues around access to employment, education, transportation, as well as mental health support and addiction services. For many low income families access to affordable childcare was seen as part of the solution, while for tenants and renter households who were precariously housed, strengthening the system of tenant protections and rent control were viewed as part of the answer.

Within Canada and British Columbia the issue of poverty cannot be separated from the impact of racism and cultural discrimination, as it relates to Indigenous people. In particular, it is necessary to recognize and acknowledge the enduring effects of colonization, the legacy of the residential school system and the impact of intergenerational trauma. Many of the stories shared through the community meetings highlighted the deeply rooted prejudices which persist and which continue to affect the daily experience of many Aboriginal people and families today. Furthermore, it is this experience of racism and lack of opportunity which continues to contribute to the high rates of poverty among Aboriginal people.

The sense of marginalization, isolation and exclusion that many people living in poverty face was a powerful and frequently observed theme along with the social and economic barriers these practices invariably impose. The different personal stories that were shared and reflections offered paint a compelling and often heartbreaking picture of the challenges that many people living in poverty face as they struggle to navigate the complex and often fragmented system of services and supports that is available and look for help that is not always there.

## Key Themes and Challenges

This section provides some additional details about the specific themes and challenges that were identified across the 28 community meetings:

**Housing:** Lack of affordable housing was one of the key concerns identified across all of the community meetings. Participants noted that the cost of their housing is high and that it consumes a significant proportion of their household income. Participants also expressed concerns about the potential risk of losing their housing as the cost of their rent continues to increase. Many of the participants were homeless, with a number of participants noting that they have been homeless for some time because of their inability to find suitable and appropriate housing with the resources they have available. Many of the participants also talked about the housing and shelter challenges faced by individuals who rely on income assistance, and the fact that various segments of the housing continuum including affordable rental housing, social housing and emergency shelters have not kept pace with the rapid changes in the housing market.

**Landlord Pressure:** Many of the participants noted that, in too many cases, landlords operate outside of the *Residential Tenancy Act*. As a consequence, individuals often felt that they were forced from their housing without any access to legal recourse. In other cases, participants noted that they faced significant increases in the cost of their rent often with very short notice. Many participants also noted that the last increase in income assistance resulted in an increase in their rent and that, in a significant number of cases the landlords were the only ones who benefited for the change. Many participants also noted that they faced challenges in getting their security deposits back with some participants reporting that landlords would move people in only to take advantage of their situation and to get their security deposit. Most felt powerless to address even grossly inadequate housing conditions and felt that they had no recourse within the current landlord-tenant power dynamic.

**Vacancy and Market Conditions:** Many participants talked about the impact of ongoing tight rental market conditions in their community in terms of the affordability of the rents as well as the potential for longer-term renters to face economic eviction. Participants also noted that the ongoing tight rental market conditions contributed to increased competition for the units that are available. Individuals who have a break in their rental history and/or who cannot produce a strong landlord reference or survive a credit check were particularly vulnerable and are often unable to compete for the housing that is available. In some communities, participants reported that some landlords have been using the tight rental market conditions to their advantage through the introduction of steep rent increases and/or through refusing to make the types of investments and upgrades needed to improve the quality of housing that is available with many lower income renter households. In particular, participants raised concerns about the quality of their housing including issues related to mould, bedbugs and other pests as well as lack of heat (i.e. the need to wear their coat in their unit, heat their unit with their oven) as well as lack of access to other key services and amenities including a functioning laundry room. All of this adds to the stress that many low income households living in poverty are experiencing.



**Cost/Affordability:** The cost of rents was also a significant factor, with some longer-term renters noting that they have seen significant rent increases in recent months and years. As well, there were a growing number of individuals who reported concerns about the potential for displacement through “reno-victions” and “demo-victions”. One participant noted that their landlord had increased their rent by more than 30%. For families and individuals including seniors living on a fixed income, these types of challenges have left them feel financially vulnerable and nervous about the choices available. Many of the participants noted that because of the high cost of their housing, they have had to rely on foodbanks and other supports to get by. The tight rental market conditions have also resulted in a situation where there are “bidding wars” for the housing that is available, with some landlords taking cash payments as a deposit. These types of situations have the potential to push low-income and vulnerable families to the margins and deeper into poverty.

**Prejudice and Discrimination in the Housing Market:** Participants also talked about the discrimination and prejudices exhibited by some landlords. This included discrimination against people receiving income assistance or PWD benefits, as well as against people of certain races and ethnicities. Families with children or pets were among those who reported challenges in finding landlords who were willing to rent to them. Indigenous participants talked about the discrimination and racism they face in the housing market and the effects that this has on Aboriginal families and individuals, including the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people who are homeless. Many of the participants talked about the lack of fairness in the system and the fact that they would be told that a unit is available only to learn that “it is already rented” once they go to view the unit. Some families also felt that they had been “blacklisted” by local landlords and that they have very limited options available.

**On-going Housing Market Pressures:** Many of the participants talked about the general failure across the housing system from the “shelter shuffle” (i.e., circulating from one shelter to the next), to living in unsafe and inadequate housing, to the cost of their housing and the compromises and trade-offs that they have had to make to secure a roof over their head. In addition to finding suitable and appropriate housing that they could afford with the resources they have available, a number of the participants also talked about the increased potential for “reno-victions” and “demo-victions” as property values continued to increase. In addition, the impact of AirBnB and other short-term vacation rentals have further eroded the pool of available rental units in many communities. All of these factors have placed even greater pressure on families and individuals in low-income. A number of participants also noted that they were forced to live in illegal or poor quality housing often in need of major repairs because that is all that is available to them with the resources that they have available.

**Homelessness:** For those who are displaced, it is a long and difficult process to find suitable and appropriate housing, resulting in an increasing number of families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Often the type of housing that is available is of poor quality or substandard, with many individuals feeling vulnerable and at risk. In some cases, people have to live in shared living arrangements, illegal suites or overcrowded conditions. Participants reported a range of health and safety issues in terms of the quality of their housing, while expressing reluctance or an inability to complain because they knew they would likely face eviction and the risk of losing their security deposit along with their housing. Many participants noted that they have been without a place to live for a

number of months or even years, with individuals with pets often facing greater challenges in finding a place that they can call home. The shelter services were themselves often deemed to be inadequate in terms of the safety and security of person and possessions, and in terms of the availability of beds for different demographic groups. Many shelters were not open during the day which means that there was often no place where homeless people could go to relax or stay in a warm dry place during the day. Participants also talked about the fact that there is very little to do to help to relieve the boredom of homelessness and the sense of loneliness and isolation that this creates.

**Health Care:** Participants talked about the difficulties that they experienced accessing health care and medical coverage, including a number of medical and dental procedures and expenses that are not covered through existing programs. Working poor households who do not have access to benefits were also among those who face specific challenges, as well as seniors living on a fixed income and who are experiencing increasing health-related concerns as they age. People also talked about some of the challenges that they experienced in accessing medical services or seeing a doctor in their community, as well as the need to leave their community for specialist treatment. In addition to dental work, it was noted that coverage for some medications, eyeglasses and other medical services was also insufficient. Many of the participants also noted that there are significant and on-going needs for stronger mental health and addictions-related treatments and services and that many people have to travel out of their community to get this type of support (if it is available at all).

**Food Security:** Participants reported that they faced challenges in accessing nutritious food for themselves and their families. In particular, they noted healthy food costs more or is harder to get and that lower-cost food is often unhealthy. Many of the participants also reported that they spend so much money on rent that they have very little left over for food and other expenses. In some cases, this translates into kids going to bed or school hungry. Participants also noted that there is a lot of hunger in schools, with parents sometimes keeping their kids out of school with the cascading fear that school administrators or teachers could learn that they cannot feed their children and take steps to have their children removed from their care. The rising cost of food was also identified as an issue resulting in greater pressure being placed on household budgets. Foodbanks, while widely appreciated and used by many in poverty, often provide a limited and/or insufficient supply of nutritious food and were often seen as only a partial, stop-gap response to the on-going high level of food insecurity faced by people living in poverty.

**Income Assistance:** Many of the participants noted that they struggle to make ends meet and that the assistance provided is not enough. In addition, many of the participants talked about the challenges they face in finding someone within the Ministry that can help them to understand the different types of supports that might be available and to help them to complete the documentation and paperwork needed to access the services they are entitled to. Some of the participants observed that at times the Ministry's rules seem somewhat arbitrary and that one often had to know the answer in order to ask the right question. Others noted that you often have to go back 2 or 3 times before an issue is resolved and that there is a sense among some that the Ministry is more intent on saving money rather than providing service.

**Program Rules and Regulations:** Many of the participants also talked about changes to the Ministry’s rules and guidelines that could help to strengthen the system of supports available to families and individuals who are trying to succeed. This included changes in the level of assistance provided as well as greater flexibility in terms of the application of the rules and the funding available. In particular, it was noted that changes to the earnings exemption policies, the provision of education support as well as a review of the current asset limits were all possible measures that could help to provide better support to families and individuals as they work to improve their situation. Improvement in the coverage of basic medical and dental support was also identified as an issue for some as well as the need to re-visit the Ministry’s different rules around “claw-backs”.

**Assistance with Basic Essentials:** Additional assistance with food, transportation and clothing support were also identified as a need among many of the participants with a large number of participants speaking to the high cost of their housing and the fact that once they have paid their rent there is very little left over. A number of the participants talked about the difficult choices and trade-offs that they have to make including “choices” between housing and other basic needs such as heat, hydro, food, and medication going unmet as a result. Those who were homeless talked about the cost of keeping their belongings in storage while they look for housing and that in many cases they have had to leave their belonging and memories behind because they did not have the resources that they needed to cover these types of costs.

**Navigating the Complexity of the System:** Participants talked about the difficulty in knowing what funding is available and about the difference in the level of assistance across different groups. In particular, a number of participants observed that the current Ministry policies penalize families (i.e. the level of funding available to families is lower than the funding available to singles). As well, there was confusion about how to access “crisis grants”. Many of the participants reported that they found it difficult and discouraging to try to navigate the Ministry’s services and the technical challenges of using online services or the 1-866 phone line. Lack of access to a computer, internet and phone were other common challenges or barriers identified, with some participants noting that they were required to remain on-hold for 30, 40 or 50 minutes. Participants also voiced the concern that the process can be overwhelming for some people including seniors who are often not fully comfortable with technology, or with asking for help. It was also noted that the services were not meeting the needs of people with mental illness or addictions-related challenges, as well as people who suffer from anxiety or who are in crisis. Participants also talked about the trauma of having to tell and re-tell your story in the hope of getting some help.

**Community-Based Services and Supports:** Many participants reported that they were not able to access the services and supports they needed and that so many of the services were based on a crisis response rather than on preventative strategies. They also expressed the concern that the current system of supports was overly complex and impersonal and that people were becoming trapped in the “cracks in the system.” Many supports were deemed to be insufficient or inadequate, or were simply not available in the communities in which people needing to access those services lived.

Many individuals talked about the difficulty of looking for employment without support for transportation or decent clothes. As well participants talked about the struggle that they faced in being able to access healthy and nutritious food for their families as well as the inability to access the different social and recreational opportunities that are available to others. The need for additional affordable childcare spaces across different communities was also identified as a priority with the cost of childcare and the difficulty in finding suitable and appropriate spaces being an issue. Flexibility in the hours that childcare services are available were also identified as an issue with many families reporting that the employment opportunities that are available fall outside of traditional work hours. Cost is also a factor inasmuch as many low-income families face precarious employment or have low wage jobs. As a result, both the cost and availability of childcare can become insurmountable barriers and even modest employment opportunities can be lost.

A number of participants also talked about the need to strengthen the current community-based response, including providing additional and stable funding for non-profit and community-based service providers with these services being seen as an important part of the current system of support for people living in poverty. Some participants felt that there was a place for increased funding for local advocacy as well as funding for peer-based navigation and support to help ensure that families and individuals were able to access the services and supports they need and to respond to gaps in services available in the community. A number of the participants also talked about the need for increased coordination across services including the potential for creating different types of service hubs or “one window” access. Some participants also talked about the need for a shift in thinking at both the Ministry level and community level that “every door is the right door”.

**Transportation** was also identified as a significant barrier for many individuals, both in terms of cost and access, as well as in terms of the number of stops and the amount of time that it takes between buses. It was noted that, in some cases, transit does not run late enough or might not go to where the jobs are. Weekend bus service was at times non-existent. People with disabilities or health and activity limitations reported facing specific challenges in accessing public transit and the HandyDART service. Concern was high in many Northern communities regarding the impending cessation of the intercity Greyhound bus service, which provided essential transportation service for accessing medical and other appointments. Others noted that they could not even afford these services and that they were dependant on family or friends to help them get to where they needed to go. Others hitchhiked which added time, complexity, uncertainty and risk into peoples’ lives. Most participants noted that it is too expensive to own and operate a vehicle, including the cost of insurance, maintenance, gas and upkeep and that, for people with low incomes, access to reduced transit fares and a wider range of transportation options is essential.

**The Impact of Poverty and the Rising Cost of Living:** A number of participants noted that families and individuals are continuing to fall further behind, as the cost of living for basic essentials increases while incomes remain relatively unchanged. In particular, participants noted that the costs of housing, food and transportation have all increased, as well as the cost of basic utilities including heat and hydro. At the same time, minimum wage, income assistance and basic household incomes have not kept pace. Participants noted that the challenges can be particularly acute for households and individuals who face

precarious employment especially service sector, entry-level, part-time, “labour ready,” seasonal, and those who are part of the informal job market. A number of participants also noted that the cost of living for households living in smaller, rural or Northern communities can be even higher, resulting in a growing number of families and individuals having to make difficult choices and trade-offs. For seniors or others on fixed incomes, this can often mean having to make the choice between paying their rent or the cost of their medication. Many single-parent families face high daycare costs, the challenge of providing healthy food for their family, all while seeking to ensure that their children are able to access the different social and recreational opportunities that are available to other children in the community. Some participants also talked about the need to cover the cost of basic expenses (i.e. school fees and music lessons) through the use of credit or “payday loans” and money market services. What this means is that the financial challenges that many families and individuals living in poverty face will only get deeper, darker and wider.

**The “Criminalization” of Poverty:** Some participants noted that the severe circumstances they endure can force them into homelessness or compel them to make unwelcome choices merely to survive. For example, those who are forced into homelessness can run into regular conflict with police and security personnel, often simply by their sheer physical presence rather than through any actual “criminal” act. Their belongings can be taken from them or their basic rights can be ignored. As people in poverty face hunger, depression, deprivation and other concerns, some take drugs to numb the physical or psychic pain and can become criminalized in that way. Some noted that living on the street during the winter can force them to commit a crime simply to get arrested in order to be provided with a warm jail cell and food. Petty theft for food or other urgently needed basics can also tip some people living in poverty into unwanted criminalization. Those with a criminal record later face extreme challenges in re-integration into society, the labour force and the housing market in that many employers and landlords are unwilling to provide them with an opportunity to re-establish themselves.

**Racism, Discrimination and Judgment:** Many of the participants spoke of the stigma and judgement that they feel, both at a societal level and in terms of the access to the services that they need to successfully break the cycle of poverty that they face. At a societal level, this includes the increasing gap between the richest and poorest members of society and the resulting inequality and stigma that follows. Participants frequently talked about the sense of desperation and isolation that many people living in poverty face, and the sense that they have nowhere to turn. Many participants reported feeling alone in their circumstances and afraid to reach out for help for fear they will fall even further behind. Members of the Indigenous community talked about the impact of racial and cultural discrimination and the fact that “naturalized racism” stemming from colonialism continues to influence how Aboriginal people are viewed and treated today with the impacts cascading negatively into the housing and employment opportunities available, as well as other areas of social and economic engagement and activity. The findings from the community meetings also speak to the importance of continuing to pursue the path of reconciliation and the recommendations set out in the report prepared by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

**Employment and Training:** Participants talked about the high rates of unemployment or the absence of employment opportunities that are available to help them to support their households. Many of the participants talked about their previous employment experience and that through a mix of different circumstances they had been pushed out of the job market and were having difficulty in getting back in. Many of the participants talked about the need for access to meaningful training opportunities as well as support in helping to identify suitable and appropriate opportunities including help with identifying additional training or support that could help. This is especially true for many of the trades, where you need a license as well as proof of training in order to access the opportunities that are available.

It was also noted that there are many costs associated with finding work and that people need assistance in terms of access to an appropriate wardrobe as well as the basics of personal care. In addition, people need supports that go beyond help with work clothes, especially if they have been unemployed for a long time. Many people talked about the challenges of not having a phone or address where they can be reached and the difficulties presented by gaps in their resume. Many talked about the need for a vehicle and drivers' license to get a job as well as the need for affordable and accessible childcare.

**Education:** Many people saw access to education as a pathway out of poverty. However, many people indicated that individuals need help in knowing the types of opportunities that are available, how to apply for different training programs, upgrading their current skills, as well as gaining new skills in an evolving employment market. People also talked about the cost of accessing the training that they need, including, in some cases, the need to move out of the community where they live. Upgrading skills or recertification was also seen as a challenge for many of the participants, including those who may have lost their jobs through a downturn in the economy. This was a particular concern expressed in communities which face "boom and bust" economies. Interest in subsidized or free post-secondary education and to student loan relief were also themes which occurred at many of the community meetings.

## Conclusions

No matter how you look at it, there are far too many individuals and families both in British Columbia and across Canada who are struggling to make ends meet. Finding ways to strengthen the social safety net and bridge the divide of income inequality is one of the most critical issues of our time. SPARC BC is indebted to all the individuals who came out to the community meetings and who shared their stories in the hopes that by sharing they could help to make a difference and create a better future for themselves and others. It is our hope that the notes that have been compiled have been successful in capturing their voices and their spirit of generosity and determination. We would also be remiss if we did not thank the members of the Minister's Advisory Forum for their support throughout the process and for their feedback on earlier drafts. It is our true hope that the stories and insights shared will help to lay the foundation for lasting and positive change.

## Overview of the Issues Identified

The tables in the following section provide an overview of the issues that were identified across the different community meetings. Included in the table is information on the number of instances that specific issues were mentioned. As well, the “dots” on the table highlight the extent to which the different issues were identified within the context of the different community meetings. As noted on the table, while each of the communities will be different in terms of the experiences and circumstances, there is also a significant degree of alignment in terms of the issues that were identified.









## Community Level Feedback

This section provides highlights of some of the ideas that were identified by the different individual and organizations who participated in the community meetings in terms of the types of potential solutions or actions that would have the greatest impact in terms of helping to lift families and individual out of poverty.

### ABBOTSFORD

#### **Housing:**

Housing was identified as one of the primary challenges within Abbotsford with concerns about the high cost of housing as well as the need for more affordable housing being the primary priorities identified. People also identified the need for more supportive housing as well as the need to strengthen the current tenant protections for renter households.

#### **Homelessness:**

Homelessness was also identified as one of the top issues in Abbotsford among the meeting participants, with individuals identifying the need for an expanded range of housing options, from additional emergency shelter spaces to better communication and access to services during cold wet weather. Individuals also identified the need for additional supports, both for individuals who are homeless and who are living on the streets as well as for those who have been successful in finding housing.

#### **Children and Youth:**

A number of participants identified the need for programs and services that can help to strengthen families and individuals who are living in poverty, including children and youth. The particular needs of youth who are part of the foster care system were also identified as a concern, with the need to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to feel safe and valued and have the chance to grow up and realize their full potential. Many of the participants also talked about the need that families to succeed, there is the need for access to suitable and appropriate child care including more affordable child care spaces.

#### **Education:**

Participants also identified access to education and other opportunities to be a critical part of the equation with lack of access to education being identified as a potential barrier for families and individuals who are living in poverty and who are working toward a better life. Participants in Abbotsford felt strongly that, by allowing people to gain access to education and by providing training, families and individuals who are currently trapped in poverty will have a greater chance to succeed.

**Health Care:**

Many people who are living in poverty also face other challenges in their lives, including poor health. Furthermore, a number of participants made the observation that many families and individuals living in low income are unable to access the services and supports that they need. There was also a sense among many of those who participated in the conversation that there should be better access to dental care, vision care as well as better support around access to medication and other supports. Concerns were raised around a number of specific groups, including families and individuals who are receiving income assistance, as well as persons with disabilities including those receiving PWD benefits and those who have been identified as having persistent and multiple barriers. Low-income seniors and the working poor were also identified as two (2) vulnerable and “at-risk” groups.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

People with mental health and addictions-related challenges were also identified as facing specific hardships in terms of accessing the services and supports that they need in order to meet their basic day-to-day and survival needs, including the need for better access to harm reduction. Many of the participants also talked about the need for an expanded range of treatment options to better support those who are in crisis and who need some help in breaking the cycle of poverty and addictions that they face and to gain the stability that they need to move forward in their lives.

**Employment:**

People also talked about the importance of gaining access to employment and opportunities that would help them to be able to make the transition to work. Many people talked about their previous employment history and expressed an interest in gaining access to opportunities that would help them to get the experience they need to successfully gain access to employment.

**Transportation:**

Transportation was also identified as a critical issue for Abbotsford, both in terms of the cost of transit as well as the critical importance that it plays in allowing individuals to access the full range of services and supports that they need in the community. This was particularly crucial given the geographic area that a community like Abbotsford covers. People also talked about some of the challenges in terms of the transit schedule, referring to both the frequency of buses and the hours of service.

**Food Security:**

Many people talked about the challenges that they face accessing food, both in terms of the cost of food as well as the quality. People recognized the invaluable role played by the food bank, but noted that, even with this service, there are so many other challenges they face in terms of being able to find good quality food that they can afford.

**Government:**

People also talked about the need to increase income assistance rates and/or explore other alternatives, including raising minimum wage as well as introducing a guaranteed annual income. People also talked about the need for indexing income assistance rates as well as looking for ways to strengthen and

improve the services provided through the Ministry. People also talked about the fact that both income assistance and pensions are not keeping up with the cost of living and that this is creating a significant level of pressure on families and individuals who rely on this form of support.

#### **Income and Income Support:**

Participants felt that there was the need for an increase in income assistance rates as well as the need for the Ministry to review some of the basic rules and guidelines and their appeals process. Some participants also thought that there would be merit in moving toward a basic guaranteed annual income in addition to an increase in minimum wages. Some participants also expressed concern about the fact that income assistance and pensions are not keeping pace with the rising cost of living.

#### **Services and Supports:**

People also talked about the need to strengthen services and supports in the community, including the need to look at ways to help strengthen and improve access to critical services. There is also the need to ensure that the community response to poverty and homelessness is strengthened. Among the specific service needs that were identified in Abbotsford was the need for more outreach services, wrap-around services and a service hub. The need for advocacy services was also identified as a critical need in the community, in order to better support people who are on the margins and who are unable to access the services and supports that they need.

#### **Discrimination and Stigma:**

People also talked about the discrimination and stigma that many individuals living in poverty face, as well as the sense of opportunity to work to change this. As part of the conversations held in Abbotsford, there was the sense that “the narrative starts here and the change and culture shift can start here too.” People felt it was important to spread the message that everyone should be treated as an equal citizen and that everyone should be entitled to have a chance to succeed.

## **BURNABY AND NEW WESTMINSTER**

### **Housing**

Participants talked about the cost of housing and the need for local government measures to help preserve and protect the existing rental housing stock, as well as the need for measures to increase the supply of affordable rental housing. This includes the adoption of inclusion housing policies to increase the number of affordable rental housing units that are available to households, with low-to-moderate incomes. Participants also talked about the need to put a cap on rents, the development of measures to support the development of co-op housing, more mixed income housing and the introduction of measures to strengthen current tenant protections. Some of the participants also talked about the need to limit foreign ownership, as well as other measures designed to improve housing affordability over the longer term.

**Children and Youth:**

Participants identified improvements to child care as a priority for low-income families living in poverty. This includes access to affordable child care and daycare spaces, as well as support for daycare operators and early childhood educators struggling to provide the best services possible. Participants also recognized that single-parent families face particular challenges in finding suitable child care arrangements. Participants also identified the specific challenges that impact children and youth who are part of the foster care system and some of the challenges that they face.

**Education:**

Participants highlighted the importance of access to education and the role that it plays in helping families and individuals living in poverty. This includes access to post-secondary education for free or at reduced rates, as well as other types of supports, including grants and bursaries.

**Health Care:**

Participants discussed the importance of working to ensure that people get the support that they need through the health care system. This includes better access to medical services and supports in the community, as well as access to support for prescription drug coverage, dental care and vision care. Some participants spoke of the importance of access to free dental care, while others talked about the need for better access to medical services and supports, including counselling and other types of services.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

People felt that there was the need for better access to addiction and recovery programs, as well as access to mental health and addictions treatment counselling. There was also the sense that there is a greater need to focus on prevention, as well as the need to ensure that appropriate supports and interventions are in place in order to help those who need this type of support.

**Employment:**

Participants talked about the need to make work pay, including the need for flexibility, in terms of the types of employment opportunities that are available to low-income households living in poverty. This includes increased access to part-time employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, as well as increased flexibility in terms of the opportunities available for single-parent family households and others in order to provide for improved access to child care services, in addition to lower child care or daycare costs. Participants also talked about the need to accelerate the work permit process for recent immigrants and newcomers to Canada. At the same time, participants emphasized the importance of ensuring individuals have access to sustainable employment opportunities that provide a living wage and that workers get the support they need to find better-paying jobs. Participants also talked about the number of lower-income families and individuals who face unstable or precarious employment and who continue to be trapped in poverty as a result.

**Transportation:**

Transportation was identified as an important concern for many families and individuals living in poverty. This included both the affordability of transit as well as the role that access to transit can play in helping lower-income families and individuals gain access to employment and other opportunities. A number of participants saw the cost of transit as being a significant barrier for many. Related to this, a number of participants talked about the need for access to transit at reduced fares, including free transit or discounted transit for children and youth.

**Food Security:**

Many participants spoke about the difficulty and challenges that they faced in accessing healthy and nutritious food. Some of the participants noted that many of sales offered through local businesses and grocery stores do not benefit lower-income families and individuals. In particular, lower-income families are often unable to buy the quantity needed to achieve the savings available to others. Several participants also felt that some businesses were taking advantage of lower-income families by “fixing” the price of bread and other staples that many households rely on. A number of participants also talked about the potential benefits of community gardens and the opportunities that they provide, in terms of ensuring that lower-income families and individuals have dignified access to healthy food.

**Government:**

People talked about the need to ensure improved access to government programs and services, including the need for one-to-one contact in the delivery of government services. This includes additional support in helping individuals navigate the current system, as well as assistance in ensuring that they are able to access the services that they need. Participants also talked about the need to ensure that all levels of government are working together so that citizens have access to the services they need. This includes the need to ensure that information on available services is well-communicated and easy-to-access. This could include information on changes in Ministry benefits, EI training, as well as services and supports available through BC Housing. Participants also talked about the need for more one-on-one contact to help people navigate the system and complete the necessary application forms. Participants also talked about the potential benefits of exploring different potential service delivery models, including the introduction of an integrated case management approach across government, as well as the development of community service hubs.

**Income and Income Support:**

Participants talked about the potential benefits of adopting a guaranteed minimum income and/or exploring the potential of adopting a living wage. Participants also talked about the need to allow for greater flexibility within the current system of supports, including the need to eliminate some “claw backs” that are part of the current system. Most of the participants also saw the need to increase income assistance rates and PWD benefits, both in terms of the level of assistance provided and in terms of indexing them to inflation, with some participants suggesting that the minimum level of assistance provided should be set at around \$1,500 per month. A number of participants also felt that there is the need to look at longer-term changes to the income tax system to allow for greater equity and equality across groups.



**Services and Supports:**

Participants talked about the range of services and supports that are needed in the community to help better meet the needs of low-income families, immigrants, seniors and individuals living in poverty. This includes a range of services, from increased supports for seniors to an expanded range of services and supports for families and individuals, including access to universal child care. A number of the participants also talked about the stress that recent immigrants and refugees face in knowing how to navigate the system and in accessing the services and supports that they need as they seek to re-establish themselves and start their new life in Canada.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

A number of the participants talked about the attitudinal barriers that so many lower-income families and individuals face as they struggle to get by. This includes negative attitudes and beliefs about the different reasons why individuals are living in poverty from the belief that they are “lazy” or “made bad choices” through to the belief that individuals living in poverty are not capable of helping themselves. Participants talked about the need to work to remove the judgement and stigma that goes with living in poverty including the need for the broader community to develop a clearer understanding of the difficult choices and day-to-day realities faced by those living in poverty.

### **Housing:**

Housing was identified as a critical need in Campbell River, including the need for more affordable housing both within Campbell River as well as the broader region. In addition to the immediate need for more affordable housing, the conversation also stressed the need to look at potential strategies and actions for providing an expanded range of housing choices across the full continuum.

### **Community Social Infrastructure:**

In addition to providing an expanded range of housing choices, participants also identified the need for additional child care spaces, as well as the need for better access to transportation services. They also expressed the need for better access to other services that can help to strengthen families and individuals living in the region and provide them with the support that they need to escape poverty. Participants also talked about the need for access to education including free post-secondary education

### **Food Security:**

People also talked about the challenges that many families and individuals face in finding suitable and appropriate access to food, including access to nutritional food. People also talked about the importance of providing support to families in gaining education, both around nutrition and around cooking and preserving food.

### **Income and Income Support:**

A number of the participants identified the need to increase income assistance to families and individuals with a large number of participants expressing an interest in exploring the possibility of introducing a guaranteed annual income across the province.

### **Services and Supports:**

People talked about the need for a diverse range of services and supports in the community, from outreach workers to community navigators to peer-based support. People also talked about the importance of public education and the need to build increased public awareness and support around the needs of those living in poverty. They talked about the importance of creating a community hub which includes a full range of services and supports for families and individuals living in poverty, including access to basic health care services as well as social and recreational opportunities. People also talked about the need to recognize the diverse range of groups living in poverty including families with children, single-parent families, seniors and single men. In looking at the diversity of needs to be addressed, people spoke of the need to look for ways to bring families together and provide the much-needed supports to ensure their success.

### **Housing:**

Large numbers of people talked about the fact that social housing programs need to be fully reinstated and that more affordable housing needs to be built, including affordable housing for seniors, single people and families and which allows people to have pets. Housing was expressed as necessary to improving one's circumstances and one's mental/spiritual wellness. Respondents expressed an interest in rent controls, a rent cap or a rent freeze. More rental subsidies, as well as an increase in the rental allowance, were also reported. The provision of more low-barrier housing was also expressed, as was the desire for landlords to be more accountable. Interest in a shorter wait list at BC Housing was a concern with some favouring the establishment of a local housing authority. The creation of a rent-to-own program also received support.

### **Homelessness:**

Support was offered for the concept of a mentorship or volunteer program for the homeless. The construction of modular shelters and units for groups including youth, women, families and seniors was expressed, and the need to create and offer facilities such as washrooms, showers and laundry facilities was important to some respondents. The need for low-barrier supports and more funding for non-profits who provide supports for the homeless was expressed. The provision of more drop-in services for people who are homeless was identified as a priority, as was the provision of dedicated camping areas for people who are homeless. Finally, some participants simply wanted community members to understand that being homeless was not a choice but that homelessness is a condition that is forced on individuals as a result of trauma and difficult life circumstances.

### **Children and Youth**

Strong interest for affordable, subsidized child care was expressed, partially to allow parents to be able to work to support themselves. Participants also favoured free social programs and parenting classes for low income families. The high level of children living at, or below, the poverty line was noted by participants.

### **Health Care:**

Participants talked about the need for better health care coverage including the need for better access to doctors and much-needed medical services. The need for better health care coverage, including dental care, vision care, as well as improved access to medical care and services, was also identified, as was support for the cost of some medication and counselling. Participants also talked about the need for more supportive services for people with addictions and issues around substance use, including better access to treatment beds. People also talked about the need for longer hospital stays, as well as better communication with those who are relying on these services. Participants also expressed a need for more doctors and nurse practitioners in the community, as well as enhanced support for PWD recipients.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

Strong support was expressed for the idea that enhanced treatment services for those with addictions could reduce the street population by half. There was further agreement that there needs to be an increase in mental health services, harm reduction supports, safe injection sites, detox and trauma services, outreach supports and long-term treatment beds for those with mental health or addictions issues. People also talked about the importance and need for post-treatment services in order to continue to support individuals in their recovery.

**Employment:**

Participants talked about the need for labour-ready services in Chilliwack, as well as the need to look at ways to better support low-income families. In particular, participants spoke about the need to ensure that appropriate supports are in place to help the working poor. This could include an increase in minimum wage, although participants also talked about looking at changes in the current earnings exemption requirements around income assistance recipients, as well as the need to allow youth in low-income households to work even if their parents are unable to find suitable appropriate work and continue to have to rely on income assistance as a way of supporting their families.

**Transportation:**

Participants talked about the need for an expanded range of transportation options in Chilliwack, both in terms of having more consistent bus services available as well as ensuring that people can afford the transit options that are available. People also talked about the fact that access to transit plays a critical role in helping vulnerable families and individuals access the full range of services available in the community, with transportation assistance to the Salvation Army being identified as a priority. As well, participants talked about the need for better, more consistent transit options and for a higher transportation allowance or subsidies.

**Food Security:**

People also talked about the need for a food bank in Chilliwack, as well as the need to build and strengthen partnerships in the community. These partnerships could be strengthened in terms of access to food donations and improving the current distribution network for food. Interest in donations from grocery stores was noted and greater access to food via delivery service was expressed.

**Education:**

Participants supported increased access to educational opportunities and for adult education programs. Funding and access to work and job skills training programs was important to some meeting participants. Some emphasis was also placed on life skills training, including financial literacy, cooking, life coaching, daily living and social skills. Free post-secondary education also received support.

**Government:**

Better instruction and help when filling out application forms was strongly expressed, as was the need for forms to be simplified. Other concerns and needs included a more effective intake and referral process for government clients, more in-person services at government offices and access to a complete

list of what programs/advocacy groups are available to people in need. More advocates and assistance navigating the government support system was also expressed as a priority.

### **Income and Income Support:**

The need for a higher level of income assistance, including support for seniors, was strongly expressed. The end of claw backs to disability supports, especially to women, and the notion of equal pay for women received support. The idea of a guaranteed annual income - for example, where every BC resident receives an income at 75% of the poverty line - garnered support, with some respondents indicating that the Ontario model needs careful consideration.

### **Services and Supports:**

In addition to more fully responding to the service needs of the general population living in poverty, the service needs of various demographic groups including seniors, children and youth, and women were addressed. Interest was expressed in a poverty awareness campaign for churches and other service organizations. Many basic needs were noted, such as the provision of fresh water, and access to washrooms and fresh food. Interest in a drop-in centre was strongly noted. The lack of mentorship or life skills training and work experience was expressed, while some respondents supported the creation of a society to address homelessness. There was support for having those with lived experience be given positions on Boards and Committees, both to amplify those voices but also as a way to allow people to give back to the community. Subsidized recreation and activity programs received support and the need for storage for those without stable housing was also a concern.

### **Discrimination and Stigma:**

Similar to the conversations in other communities, people talked about the need to address the discrimination and stigma around poverty and the need to ensure that communities come together to build a higher level of understanding and support. People also talked about the importance of working to ensure that the public understands the type of hardship that poverty creates, both on individuals and families and that, as a society, we all have a role to play in coming together to find solutions. People also talked about the need to look at the public policies and strategies that have been adopted in other countries, and the role that they have played in leading to positive outcomes.

## **COQUITLAM**

### **Housing:**

People talked about the fact that the cost of housing is very expensive in the Lower Mainland and the cost of ownership is moving out of the reach of many. People also talked about the changes that have happened within the housing system and the fact that people have to move out of their community to find housing they can afford. People also talked about the need for increased funding for affordable housing including social housing, low-end-of-market rental housing, modular housing as well as co-op housing. People also talked about the importance of making assistance available to first-time homebuyers in order to provide families with a safe place to raise their children. Many of the

participants also expressed concerns for low-income and vulnerable families and individuals who are precariously housed and who are one paycheque away from becoming homeless.

### **Seniors:**

The hidden nature of poverty among low income seniors was also identified as an emerging concern. People talked about the growing number of seniors living in the community who are struggling to make ends meet and who do not have the income that they need to afford appropriate health and dental care, including glasses, hearing aids, wheelchairs and walkers. It was also noted that many seniors face a higher level of social isolation, as they face challenges in getting around their community.

### **Children and Youth:**

People talked about the specific challenges faced by children and youth living in poverty, including the pressures that it places on kids. When parents are holding down two or three jobs in order to make ends meet, children can get lost in the shuffle. Some of the participants noted that schools should stay open longer in order to ensure that kids have a safe place to go and activities they can do. Access to affordable child care was also identified as part of the solution.

### **Education:**

People also talked about the cost of education and the need to find ways to make education more affordable. As well, they talked about the importance of financial assistance and targeted training and outreach for people with disabilities and families and individuals receiving income assistance. People talked about the importance of financial literacy training or budget workshops. It was suggested that this training could be provided in school or through community centres and could be designed to help individuals gain the knowledge that they need to manage their money or credit.

### **Health Care:**

People talked about the need to ensure that access to the health care and the medical support that they need, including access to free dental clinics and eye clinics for people who cannot afford these services, is available. People felt that extending the level of care and benefits that are available is particularly important for seniors, as well as people on low income, including better access to dental care, pharma care and other types of supports.

## **CRANBROOK**

### **Housing:**

The need for more affordable housing or housing for low income families and individuals was identified as a priority for participants in Cranbrook, as well as the need to find ways to protect tenants living in the private market. This includes the need to find ways to cap rent increases and ensure that there is some oversight and monitoring of landlords. Homelessness was also identified as a significant concern in Cranbrook. This included the need for additional drop-in services as well as the need for a year-round shelter spaces.

**Health Care:**

People talked about the need for more health care services in the community, including better access to doctors and medical personnel. Concerns were also raised about the need for more support around key medical expenses, especially services and supports for seniors, including hearing aids, glasses and mobility aids. People also thought that there would be some benefit in having a walk-in clinic, more nurse practitioners on site, as well as specified hours where low-income families and individuals can access medical and dental services.

**Employment:**

Participants talked about the need to increase access to employment including the need for better working conditions and higher wages, including a living wage.

**Food Security:**

Participants talked about the need for dignified access to healthy and nutritious food and noted that food security is an issue in the community. Participants also talked about the potential benefits of providing supports to families and individuals as well as the need to provide education and training around food preparation and nutrition.

**Government:**

People talked about the need to improve government services including removing barriers that are preventing people from accessing the services and supports that they need. These barriers range from processing times to the level of paperwork involved.

**Services and Supports:**

People talked about the need for more awareness of the resources that are available in the community, as well as the need for meetings, similar to the one that was held, where people can reach out to each other and talk about shared needs and community priorities. Participants also talked about the need to find ways to better protect low-income seniors in the community, many of whom are hidden and are at increased risk of falling through the cracks. As well, participants identified the need for additional child care services, including the need for more early childhood educators in the community.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

People also talked about the attitudinal barriers and the level of discrimination and stigma that many low-income families and individuals face in their day-to-day lives. People talked about the need for communities to work together to help build increased awareness and understanding around the specific needs of individuals living in poverty, including the types of challenges and pressures that they face in meeting their basic daily survival needs.

### **Housing:**

A range of concerns were expressed in terms of the general housing situation in Duncan. Many respondents were concerned about the behaviour of landlords, including the appropriation of security deposit. People also talked about the need for increased investment in new social housing as well as the need to work in partnership with local governments to increase the supply of affordable housing across communities including the adoption of inclusionary housing policies (i.e. adopting the requirement that 15% to 20% of new developments in a community be affordable to households with low or low to moderate incomes). Others expressed an interest in getting more services attached to housing, more seniors housing. People also saw the need for more advocacy and support including the need to help to build the case that housing should be seen as a human rights issue.

### **Seniors:**

People talked about the hidden nature of seniors' poverty and the quiet desperation that many seniors face as they live in isolation. Participants talked about the need to reach out to lonely and isolated seniors to ensure that they know their needs are not going unnoticed and to ensure they feel included.

### **Children and Youth:**

Responding to the needs of children and youth living in poverty was identified as a priority with many participants expressing the concern that the needs of so many children and youth living in poverty seem to go unnoticed. People also talked about the need for more affordable child care spaces and options including the potential opportunities that are available through the \$10 a day child care plan.

### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

People talked about the need for mental health and addictions-related support, including the need for more immediate intervention for individuals who are in crisis as well as the need for an expanded range of services, supports and improved coordination. People also talked about the need to ensure that services are available for those who need it when they need it, including appropriate supports to help individuals leaving jail - many of whom are more likely to end up back on the street without adequate supports.

### **Transportation:**

People talked about the need for better access to transit, including assistance for low-income families and individuals. In particular, participants felt that many income assistance recipients would benefit from having a bus pass or transit pass.

### **Food Security:**

People talked about the need for better access to food, both in terms of the quality and quantity of the food available as well as in terms of expanding the network of donations. People also talked about the need and importance of introducing a zero waste program.



**Government:**

People also talked about the need for improved access to Ministry services, both in terms of ensuring that clients receive information about the services they are entitled to as well as assistance in accessing those services.

**Income and Income Support:**

People talked about the need for an increase in the level of assistance that is available through Ministry programs, including the need for a guaranteed livable income. Concerns around the need for increases to minimum wage were also identified as a priority.

**Services and Supports:**

People talked about the need to ensure that there are appropriate services and supports available in the community – supports that help to empower people to take control of their lives and access the opportunities that they need. This includes access to training and employment, affordable child care and health care as well as education. People also talked about the need for increased funding for non-profit organizations, including increased funding for advocacy.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

Participants also talked about the need to change societal attitudes and to erase the discrimination and stigma that people living in poverty face. This includes working to address issues of racism, as well as working to ensure that people living in poverty get the support that they need from government.

**FORT NELSON****Housing:**

People talked about the need for funding to help provide for an expanded range of housing in the community, including increased funding to help fix and replace existing housing in the community. People also recognized that there is the need for more subsidized housing as well as more affordable housing in the community and that, by working with the community to improve the quality of the existing housing it might help to achieve a number of potential objectives. These could include increasing the supply and range of housing choices available as well as expanding the range of employment opportunities in the community.

**Child Care:**

People talked about the need for more affordable child care spaces and supports for families in the community. Not only are all of the child care spaces in the community full, but there are not enough child care operators or educators in the community, with wages being a factor.

**Education:**

People talked about the need for, and importance of, education - especially for people in the community who have lost their employment and who need access to re-training and other opportunities to

reintegrate into the workforce. People also felt that members of the community would benefit from life skills training as well as access support in updating their current training tickets.

### **Health Care:**

Participants talked about the need to have better access to health care and medical services as well as better use of the facilities in the community. Too many people have to leave the community to access basic medical and health care services, including women who are giving birth. People also talked about the type of burden that leaving the community places on low-income families and individuals, as well as the need for basic assistance with dental care, eye care and medication support.

### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

People also talked about the need for basic mental health and addictions support, especially for families and individuals who are struggling with the implications of the economic downturn that has affected that community and taken away the sense of optimism and hope for so many. People also talked about the need to help families and individuals get back on track, including the need for supports as they work to re-build their lives.

### **Employment:**

People talked about the significant impact that the economic downturn has had on the lives of families and individuals in the community, including the sense of hopelessness that many people are facing from the lack of employment and opportunities. People also talked about the need to get people back to work in the community through re-opening the Canfor Lumber Mill through to working to re-build jobs and industry. People also talked about the need for incentives to encourage the development of new businesses, as well as higher earnings exemptions for people who are relying on income assistance to help them get by.

### **Transportation:**

People talked about the need for transportation in the community with the loss of the Greyhound bus service being on the hearts and minds of many of the participants. People also talked about the cost of operating a vehicle in Northern communities including the cost of gas as well as the cost of flights to and from the community. For Fort Nelson, isolation is also a big factor with people having to travel great distances to reach other communities and with only limited transportation choices being available.

### **Government:**

People talked about the fact that so many Ministry services are no longer available in the community and the types of challenges and upheaval that this is having on people's lives. Not only are there not enough basic services and supports in the community but people do not have access to different types of Ministry services -from parole officers to basic mental health and community support. People talked about some of the challenges that this is creating both in terms of the individual trauma and the inability to move forward in their lives as well as real safety issues as the accused and victim are often forced to live in the same community with little opportunity for escape. Lack of direct access to Ministry services and the challenges associated with the 1-800 service were also identified as issues.

**Services and Supports:**

People talked about the need for services and supports in the community from access to internet services through to providing people with basic supports. People also talked about the need for access for funding for basic services to sustain the community like the food bank, as well as clothing and drop-in centres. Concerns were also raised about lack of access to basic health care services including the fact that women have to leave the community when they give birth. People also talked about the need for access to basic transportation, affordable flights and housing as well as the need for access to public showers and free laundry. In spite of all the challenges that the community is facing, there was a sense of resilience and optimism in the room, including a willingness to work with others to find the types of solutions and opportunities that can make a difference.

**FORT ST JOHN****Housing:**

People expressed a need for more funding to address and provide affordable housing. The need that the available housing be accessible for those with disabilities as well as being financially accessible was underscored. A particular need that manufactured home units be affordable was expressed.

**Health Care:**

Support for services including visual care, hearing, sleep aids, flu shots, and for children to have health check-ups was noted. An interest in services for special needs children was also expressed. A shift from a crisis management approach to a preventative approach to health care was suggested. Greater general financial support for health care was noted.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

Participants talked about the need for an expanded range of mental health and addictions-related services. This included the need for more mental health supports and workers in the community as well as the need for a detox centre in the community. People also talked about the need for access to basic services and amenities including drop-in services and facilities where people can have a shower.

**Food Security:**

Participants expressed the need for supports for those facing food insecurity including access to affordable food, meal supplements and grocery vouchers. Food supports for those who are homeless such as sandwiches provided through outreach services was also identified as a need as well as the need for more formalized food supports in the community including a subsidized lunch program for low income workers.

**Employment:**

People indicated that there should be more dual trades programs and apprenticeships available to those who need further training. Incentives to local employers to hire local workers was noted. Stronger supports for those seeking employment was also expressed. Benefits for part-time workers was noted.

**Transportation:**

People indicated that the Greyhound was a lifeline for those living and working along the Alaska Hwy. People also saw that the removal of this service would have a major impact on the lives of residents with few transportation options. The use of smaller transportation companies or government transportation subsidies to maintain adequate service was suggested.

**Income and Income Support:**

People expressed support for the idea that Income Assistance and Disability should be increased and then indexed to the rate of inflation. Support for a guaranteed income was offered, with some participants suggesting that income assistance rates should be increased to \$1,970 per month and indexed. People also talked about the need to increase the shelter portion of income assistance, with a number of participants noting that it is not possible to even get a hotel room in Fort St. John for less than \$400 per month.

**Education:**

Interest in diversifying educational opportunities away from the trades was expressed. Training and using local residents who understand local contexts received support. Support for single mothers to access education in order to break the cycle was also identified as an important need in the community.

**Government:**

Interest in having Ministry staff work with clients in a one to one setting was expressed. As well, people talked about the need for an expanded range of services and supports in the community, including the need for more computer access.

**Services and Supports:**

The idea that people need greater computer access in various public locations received strong support. Support for non-profits and a reversal of government cuts to their funding was expressed. A need for more supports for men was expressed. Respondents expressed a strong interest in a legal advocate for those in poverty. Life skills and financial literacy for young adults received support from some respondents. Involvement of the business community was also identified as an important outcome. As well, people felt that there was the need for more homeless outreach workers who could help to provide an expanded range of services and supports for those who are homeless.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

People talked about the fear and stigma associated with poverty including some of the unconscious bias held by employers. People talked about the need for more education and outreach, with employers to help to break down the barriers that exist and to work to help build a more positive experience and increase understanding for both sides.

### **Housing:**

People talked about the importance of housing and the role that it plays in helping to promote an increased sense of inclusion. People talked about different possible housing options from modular housing on Crown land through to improved access to housing in the private market. This includes the need to build relationships with private landlords as well as possible incentives or subsidies to provide for an expanded range of choices for lower-income renter households.

### **Homelessness:**

People also talked about the need to provide for an expanded range of housing choices for individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless including providing a designated area that included access to basic services and amenities like washrooms, showers and laundry services, as well as the need to work to reduce the stigma around homelessness.

### **Children and Youth:**

People talked about the need to ensure that children and youth living in poverty and their families have access to the supports that they need. People talked about the fear of losing their children that many families face if they admit to needing help. People also talked about the impact that this instability has on children and youth, from poor performance in school through to acting out and experimenting with drugs. People talked about the need to be able to do more to help families facing this type of stress and the need to provide the necessary supports to families that would provide increased stability and break the cycle of poverty that they face. People also talked about the importance of school meal programs as well as nutrition in schools to help children in their early years.

### **Education:**

Participants talked about the importance of investing in people as well as the need for strategies and initiatives to help remove the barriers preventing low income families and individuals from accessing education and other opportunities. This includes on-going support for children of families living in poverty to help them remain in school and find a stable pathway forward, as well as increased funding from programs like the SPEI program.

### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

People also talked about the need for mental health and addictions support in the community including the need for better access to mental health services. In particular, people were concerned about youth who are caught up in the law enforcement system because of a lack of access to the services and supports that they need.

### **Transportation:**

People talked about the importance of transportation and access to transit for people living in poverty especially in communities where services tended to be more geographically dispersed. People also

talked about the need to bring services to people, as well as providing access to transportation support in order to better enable people to get the services that they need.

### **Government:**

People talked about the need for a cross-government/cross-Ministry approach. This includes the need for funding and partnerships with other levels of government as well as the need for different government Ministries and agencies to work together to help prevent people from continuing to fall through the cracks. People also talked about the importance of, and need for reducing the amount of “red tape” and bureaucracy that so many individuals living in poverty face. People also talked about the need for all Ministries to work together to meet the collective needs of all clients who are struggling to meet their needs and the needs of those in their family. Recognizing the critical lifeline that the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction plays, people talked about the need to strengthen the responsiveness of the services and supports provided through the Ministry.

### **Income and Income Support:**

People talked about the need to create a living wage, a \$15 minimum wage, or to develop a guaranteed annual income. Other concerns expressed included an interest in raising the PWD and ID rates, studying the welfare and support system in other countries, adjustments to the number of days people with complex living arrangements need to work, as well as a need to make the entire income system more equitable to all members of society.

### **Services and Supports:**

People expressed the need to have local community based solutions to the challenges of receiving services and supports, including a community or regional hub for such services as employment and training. Making the tax system more transparent and accountable was a concern as was the need for addressing the downloading of services. Specific concerns such as better training for service providers, more flexible or mobile services (e.g., a mobile injection site) or ensuring that benefits be calculated more fairly (i.e., on current income), were also expressed.

### **Discrimination and Stigma:**

People expressed the basic but urgent need that all members of the community be treated with respect and that it is important to work to build an increased understanding that the similarities that we all share are far greater than the differences that divide us, and that it is important to work to continue to ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

## **KELOWNA**

### **Housing:**

Among the suggestions offered to address housing issues, more group homes and co-ops tailored to specific needs received a high level of support as did interest in more generous rent subsidies to larger numbers of people. Encouraging affordable housing through incentives to developers and landlords was a popular idea. A Housing First approach with community supports was suggested. Cohousing with units

integrated into wider community was noted. Some felt that building a “tiny home” community would help address the housing problem. Partnership with agencies was seen as necessary by some participants, as was placing fees on developers to create an affordable housing fund. Allowing pets in affordable housing was seen as important for those who value their pets.

Some felt that a comprehensive affordable housing strategy would offer greater stability or that a sustained commitment from government to provide affordable housing would help address the housing crisis. Rent regulations to prevent landlords from taking advantage of tight rental market conditions, along with decisive action against real estate speculation were popular ideas. Congregate and multigenerational housing options such as students boarding with seniors received some support. Home share opportunities, caps on rental increases, inclusionary zoning of 30% affordable units, municipal bylaws for taxes on empty homes, decreased wait times for affordable housing, a focus on affordable rather than luxury housing by local governments, and the co-ownership of “tiny homes” were other strategies and approaches suggested. Treating high hydro costs as a serious housing issue were also noted.

#### **Children and Youth:**

People noted that guaranteed affordable child care with well trained staff, and/or child care subsidies and improvements would help parents. People also mentioned that many single moms are working so much to feed their family that there is not enough time to teach or parent their children as they would like. More funding for early childhood years to prevent the cycle of poverty for families was requested.

#### **Education:**

Free or subsidized post-secondary education and life skills coaching were key strategies for addressing the education needs of people living in poverty. People also requested that medical benefits, child care and transportation subsidies be provided while returning to school after receiving assistance.

#### **Health Care:**

Universal or extended coverage for dental, medications and hearing aids (in this case, a reinstatement of what existed before previous government) was mentioned by some participants. Coverage of alternative medications and chiropractor services/massages also received some support. Interest in long term recovery homes and enhanced programs and supports for people once they have been released from treatment were also identified as important priorities.

#### **Employment:**

Emphasis on job creation and government subsidies for business that are willing to pay a living wage to employees were offered as potential solutions in the area of employment. Work BC should provide assistance more readily with return to work programs being improved.

**Transportation:**

People indicated that a free or low cost public transit model (based on ability to pay), a reliable transit system with increased hours of operation and frequency of service, and a transit model that reflects need to travel between communities would be of great value to the community.

**Food Security:**

Greater access to more healthy food and public fruit parks and gardens were suggested as strategies for addressing food security. The cost of housing and utilities were seen as cutting into peoples' ability to buy nutritious food.

**Government:**

Priority was given to having the government look at all legislation through a poverty-reduction lens to consider how the current system keeps people in poverty, and to look at what is working in other jurisdictions. Government should establish measureable targets and goals while writing client-centred policies. Improved cooperation and communication between provincial ministries and various levels of government and First Nations was suggested. People also wanted to see more exemptions on unearned income. An increase in social assistance rate and PWD rates was requested. Easier and clearer information and access to, and greater flexibility of services -such as "bridging" support during major life changes-was also discussed.

**Income and Income Support:**

A guaranteed annual income, an increase in the minimum wage, a living wage indexed to inflation and income support programs were all supported as strategies to address the challenges of people with low incomes. Increases to Income Assistance and PWD rates were also suggested.

**Services and Supports:**

People suggested a range of strategies to enhance services and supports for people with low incomes. These included supports to assist people trying to get off assistance without the fear of being penalized, follow-up with people after finishing treatment or leaving incarceration, advocacy and mentoring programs, micro-lending, the design and provision of safe spaces for women to prevent dependence on unsafe relationships, enhanced life skills training and coaching and the provision of social spaces and places for people to interact and socialize. A community based, inter-generational approach where knowledge and skills are shared within the community was also seen as a priority in the provision of services. People also supported a wrap around centre with a "one stop shop" for services.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

The provision of a public education strategy to address the stigma of poverty, which starts in the school system, was expressed as a priority as was the need for greater awareness of the shame and stigma that people living in poverty face. People talked about the shame and embarrassment that is felt from being kicked off the bus due to lack of funds and the impact that it has on one's self-esteem. People talked about the need for a cultural and social shift in the way we think about issues of poverty and the need to build a stronger degree of empathy and compassion into our approach.



### **Housing:**

The discussion focused on issues including the need for more affordable housing, and alternatives such as co-housing, and “tiny houses” and 3D printed homes. The expiration of social housing operating agreements was seen as a threat to the stability of the affordable housing stock. Rent controls were suggested by some participants. Participants also identified the need for more low-barrier shelters and for a specific location for where homeless people can camp. Concern was also expressed about the current practices of the police or bylaw enforcement officers that allow for the removal and destruction of the belongings of homeless campers.

### **Children and Youth:**

Some respondents noted that many people are unable to afford child care and support was expressed for the provision of daycare supplements to enable single parents to work. Interest in a universal school lunch program was expressed. An interest in a youth shelter/supportive housing for youth was also identified as an important need in the community.

### **Education:**

Interest in free post-secondary education was expressed as well as greater opportunities to access education. Some participants favoured the provision of more low-barrier trades training programs and the provision of access to job training and education while people are working. Free life skills education was suggested by some participants.

### **Health Care:**

Participants identified the need for more affordable pharma-care as well as assistance with the cost of some medications. A number of participants also identified the need for more services and supports for people with mental illness and addictions-related challenges including the need for more supportive housing. As well, participants talked about the need for access to treatment and other types of supports, especially given the high rate of addictions and mental health-related challenges within the community.

### **Income and Income Support:**

An increase in shelter rates received strong support as current rates were seen as keeping people homeless. Higher disability and IA rates would help seniors and others in low income keep above poverty line. It was noted that OAS/GIS levels are no longer near LICO. A guaranteed income (suggested by some at \$27,500 per annum) received significant support. An end to clawbacks of CPP and WCB was expressed. It was felt that Income Assistance could be made more accessible (eg., by fast-tracking).

### **Services and Supports:**

People expressed a need for greater access to services and assistance with getting their ID replaced or stored within a safe place. A number of participants supported the idea that the community needed more drop-in centers and for the provision of basic services in these centres, such as food, laundry and bathing. People saw a need to invest in seniors housing and a need for partnerships in areas like safe

housing and corporate partnerships. Better communication between service providing organizations and government was deemed necessary. Finding ways to address predatory lending practices was also noted. A number of participants also saw the need for additional supports for parent raising children on their own. Participants also talked about the need for universal programs whenever possible as well as the benefits of creating a community hub or one-stop access to services. People also supported the provision of counselling services to support families and prevent family breakdown.

### **Discrimination and Stigma:**

A media and public education campaign to increase awareness of poverty and acceptance of poor people was noted. Changes in policies and attitudes were suggested such as the establishment of a culture of respect for those living in poverty including the need for training for front-line workers.

## **MAPLE RIDGE**

### **Housing:**

The discussion focused on both housing and homelessness, including the need to increase the supply of affordable housing, as well as the need to work to address some of the pressures within the existing rental housing market. People talked about the need for a mix of solutions from rent controls through to expanding the range of existing housing options to include “tiny homes” more co-op housing stock, as well as more manufactured homes and mobile home parks. People also talked about the specific needs of low income and vulnerable seniors and the need to provide for an expanded range of seniors’ housing options.

### **Child care:**

People talked about the specific needs of children and youth and some of the pressures that they face. In looking at possible solutions, the focus included consideration of an expanded range of affordable child care options including \$10 a day child care as well as better supports for children and youth in both the early and middle years (10 to 14). Included in this was a discussion around the need for increased investments in strengthening the supports that are provided to vulnerable and “at risk” youth with many of the participants making the observation that investments in children and youth today will continue to show significant rewards and pay-back downstream.

### **Education:**

People talked about the importance of access to education as a way to help families and individuals to break the cycle of poverty. This included access to free post-secondary education as well as the targeted training and supports, including training for local trades. People also talked about the benefits of life skills and parenting courses and the types of support that this can provide.

### **Transportation:**

Participants talked about the importance of transportation not only in terms of getting around the community but in terms of the role that it plays in providing access to opportunities. Within Maple Ridge, people talked specifically about the need for an expanded range of transportation opportunities and some of the barriers and constraints within the current system.

**Government:**

People talked about the need for increased investments in the social and physical infrastructure to support people living in poverty from the need for improvements in the existing array of programs and services that are available through to the need to look at new models of taxation as well as other alternatives. People also talked about the need for political will to help to ensure that change can happen.

**Income and Income Support:**

People talked about the need for increased income support, including changes in the level of assistance for low-income families and individuals who are relying on income assistance, as well as people receiving PWD benefits. People have made the observation that the cost of living has continued to increase while income assistance rates have remained relatively flat over the years. People also made the observation that there is the need to look at the current rules and regulations around income assistance in order to help individuals who rely on this form of assistance to build some equity and gain some financial stability such that they are able to move forward in their lives.

**Services and Supports:**

People talked about the need for an expanded range of services and supports in the community including financial literacy training as well as free or subsidized after-school programs for children and youth and an expanded range of shelter and drop in services for individuals who are living on the streets including vulnerable and “at risk” youth. People also talked about the need for increased funding for the non-profit sector including the need for better integration of the different services, such as the creation of a network of regional services.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

People also talked about the negative attitudes, blame and lack of empathy that is often shown to individuals who are homeless or living in poverty, and the importance of the community coming together to work to change this. People also talked about the hidden nature of seniors’ poverty as well as the need to invest in children and youth as a way of helping to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness that so many individuals face.

**NANAIMO****Housing:**

People talked about the need to increase the supply of affordable housing, including the need to work to build an expanded range of partnerships across all levels of government. People also talked about some of the challenges and pressures within the current system including the need to strengthen existing rent controls and tenant protections. A number of the participants talked about the homelessness crisis and the need to explore the full range of options available to begin to address these needs from building and investing in more affordable housing through to increasing the supply of modular housing that is available, as well as exploring the use of “tiny homes” and army tents on vacant lands as well as other means to address the challenges. People also talked about the importance of

ensuring that individuals have access to the services and supports they need to maintain their housing or as they make the transition from the hospital back into the community.

### **Children and Youth:**

Participants talked about the need to provide support for children and youth, including an expanded range of child care options. This included access to subsidized education and child care spaces through to exploring the introduction of “\$10 a day child care.” People also talked about the need to look at other successful models in other jurisdictions including Quebec as a way of learning more about what can be done.

### **Education:**

People saw the importance of access to education and the role that it can play in helping to break the cycle of poverty that many individuals face. Among the ideas that were discussed was access to subsidized education including free post-secondary education for individuals based on merit. People also talked about the need for more financial literacy training to be taught in schools as well as looking at different models of education and support that is available in other countries such as Australia, Norway and Finland.

### **Health Care:**

People talked about the need for expanded access to health care services including increased medical and dental coverage for low-income families and individuals. As well people talked about the need for increased funding for chiropractic services, podiatry, as well as dental and vision care.

### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

People talked about the long waiting lists for addictions and mental health services as well as the need for consistent funding for education and prevention. This included the need to work to reduce the long waiting times for access to mental health services, as well as the need for increased funding for education and supportive services for people facing mental health and addictions-related challenges.

### **Employment:**

People talked about the barriers that many people face in accessing employment including the need to provide access to education and training. People also talked about the importance of working to reduce the barriers to accessing employment, as well as the need to ensure that employment standards are maintained.

### **Transportation:**

During the meeting participants talked about the need to provide access to transportation including the importance of the connecting and linking role that it plays in helping to facilitate access across the region. This includes the need for increased investments in building the transportation infrastructure to provide for an expanded range of transit options and to improve the overall accessibility of the system. Some people also talked about the need to explore opportunities to strengthen the connection between Nanaimo and Ladysmith.

**Food Security:**

Participants talked about the challenges that many face in terms of access to affordable, nutritious and healthy food as well as the need for an expanded range of local partnerships and initiatives designed to provide for an expanded range of food options.

**Government:**

People talked about the need to look at government policies for the current system of taxation through to increasing the level of tax paid for luxury items as well as through to limiting foreign ownership of property. People also talked about the need to look at changes in the current level of support for individuals receiving income assistance and PWD assistance with a view to making the system more responsive to the needs of the people it serves, including making it more fair and equitable. Participants also talked about the need to strengthen the current service delivery model within government, including the need to look at ways to ensure that the people who depend on the system are supported.

**Income and Income Support:**

There was strong support among meeting participants around the need to strengthen the system of support for low income and working poor families and individuals. This included the need to look at the possible introduction of a Guaranteed Annual Income through to the introduction of a living wage, as well as changes in minimum wage. Some participants also felt that it was necessary for the Ministry to look at some of the current rules and regulations including making it fairer for married couples by providing them with the same level of support as single person households. As well, people felt that there was the need to look at some of the issues and challenges around payday loans and predatory lending practices and the need to strengthen consumer protections in this area.

**Services and Supports:**

People spoke of the need for an expanded range of services and supports in the community, including more outreach workers as well as increased access to advocacy and other types of services. Some participants also spoke of increased funding for legal aid clinics as well as other types of community-based programs and services (non-profit and volunteer-led). Other participants suggested that there is the need to look at community resource boards, as well as other possible strategies and approaches designed to put into place locally responsive solutions.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

People talked about the need for human rights training as well as other potential strategies and actions to respond to the discrimination and stigma that people living in poverty face. This includes education for the general public about what it means to live in poverty, and the type of “chaos” and challenges that it represents on a daily basis as individuals struggle to meet their basic survival needs, as well as the need to work to reduce barriers to employment and other opportunities that so many individuals living in poverty face.

**Housing:**

An increase in the level of investment in affordable housing was given strong support, as was the idea of guaranteed affordable housing for residents. People felt that more housing co-ops should be built in Nelson and that no such housing has been built for decades. A wider range of affordable housing and housing providers would decrease the level of discrimination people face and different types of housing across the housing continuum should be available. BC Housing could offer a subsidy that provides people with housing without dictating the type of housing people must live in. Support for people living in substandard housing or in housing in need of repairs was also identified as a need. This includes seniors who may be ageing in place and who are unable to repair or maintain their current housing. More affordable housing for families and more supportive housing was also identified as a need as well as the need to explore potential partnerships to increase the supply of affordable housing that is available.

**Children and Youth:**

Support existed for the idea that early education, adequate housing and food for children should be ensured to provide for a strong life start for children and that many children fall behind because they lack opportunities. Strong support was expressed for universal, affordable and accessible child care as well as additional supports for stay at home parents. The idea of \$10 a day child care was also well supported.

**Education:**

Strong support was offered for the idea of accessible, universal post-secondary education, particularly as many low income families and youth cannot currently afford the cost of education. Improvements to the public education system was suggested, including adequate supports for children with disabilities and more civics courses to educate children about values and social issues. The need for stronger and better supports for trades as well as training in the trades was also suggested.

**Health Care:**

People offered strong support for the creation of fully-staffed, one-stop community health care centres with an array of health care services. Understanding the linkages in the extended health system (physio, advocacy, social work, triage, etc.) was felt to be important as was the idea of universal health care, which included an expansion of services to include dental, vision, medication, mental health counselling and physio. A greater focus on fully-funded prevention care instead of a reactive health care model, was supported by some participants. Ending MSP fees was seen as an important initiative.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

People expressed strong interest in adequate funding and support for mental health and substance use programs and supports as well as the idea that these supports should be easier for people to access, and with shorter wait times when they need to access those supports.

**Employment:**

Participants talked about the need to attract more industry to Nelson area. This included the need to look for opportunities that fit with the profile of the local demographics as well as the general community and employment profile. Participants talked about the high level of creativity and motivation that exists among people living in the community as well as some of the positive employment-related partnerships and initiatives that have already been put into place. Participants felt that there was the need to look for ways to build on these successes.

**Transportation:**

Participants also felt that in order to access the employment market as well as the different services and supports available in the community there is the need for a better more robust transportation system. In some cases this might include free bus passes while in other cases the community might want to look at smaller buses or other options that might help to provide for better access to services.

**Government:**

The need for ministries and departments to conduct business and policy through a poverty reduction lens like in Newfoundland was suggested. Increased support for teachers, arts and recreation, children's play spaces and other initiatives was noted. The need for a local ministry office with more compassionate staff and shorter wait times for services was mentioned. A restructured and fairer tax system was also suggested. More transparency and cooperation/collaboration between ministry and community service providers, and efforts to reduce working in Ministry silos was recommended.

**Income and Income Support:**

People were highly supportive of the idea of a guaranteed annual or basic income. Participants also talked about the need to increase minimum wage or to introduce a living wage as one of the possible solutions. Similarly, participants also talked about the need to look at increasing income assistance rates as well as making changes to the earnings exemptions and other provisions as a way of helping to lift families and individuals out of poverty and as a way of putting more money back into the hands of community members.

**Services and Supports:**

People suggested free public programming and universal social service and education supports along a Swedish model. A "one-stop shop" and a community service hub to have questions answered was offered by some participants. More support staff, social workers and debt counsellors to assist people directly was a priority, as was more stable core funding for social programs and services. Support for local government to create community space and to provide opportunities for engagement was also a priority. Assistance in helping people leave social assistance by providing medical supports and transition wages was suggested, as were debt relief strategies for those with debt concerns. The importance of social responsibility, as well as fiscal responsibility, was another important priority.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

Respondents noted that peoples' human rights are violated as a result of living in poverty and that there is the need for changes to social perspectives about people living in poverty need to occur if the Province is going to be able to move forward in a more equal fashion. Participants also talked about the importance of political will as being instrumental in helping to change public attitudes.

**NORTH VANCOUVER****Housing:**

Participants talked about the housing challenges that people are facing, both in terms of finding and keeping affordable housing as well as the impact that it is having on the people who live there. People talked about the fear of displacement through economic eviction, including the concern that many of them will have to move out of the community that they have known and loved for years because of the rising cost of rent.

**Children and Youth:**

People talked about the specific challenges of children and youth living in poverty and the need to ensure that they get the support that they need both through the school system as well as from the community. This includes the need for early intervention and assessment, as well as the need to ensure that there are the appropriate services and supports available in schools. Access to safe, affordable child care was also seen as part of the solution.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

Respondents offered strong support for the idea of more community-based detox services, including rehab and resources in the community, as well as an increase in access to community based (non-hospital) mental health supports.

**Transportation:**

People talked about the need for an expanded range of transportation options in the community including the need to ensure that low-income families and individuals are able to access the transportation services and supports that they need.

**Income and Income Support:**

An increase in the minimum wage to a living wage and an increase in income assistance and PWD rates, were priorities for meeting participants.

**Services and Supports:**

People talked about the importance of the government's efforts to create a legislated poverty reduction plan for BC including a commitment to targets and timelines. People also talked about the need to address the discrimination and stigma associated with poverty and the importance of restorative justice as families and communities work to move forward. People also talked about the need for increased investments in communities, including the need for more resources and investment in both outreach



and advocacy. People also talked about the importance of collaboration and coming together as the whole community including the need to continue to work to bring businesses and other key community stakeholders and partners on board. This includes the need to look at the introduction of a progressive tax system—one that begins to help address the growing issues around income inequality and unequal access to opportunities that so many individuals living in low income and poverty are facing in their lives.

## **PORT ALBERNI**

### **Housing:**

Housing was identified as one of the key challenges that needed to be addressed, including the need for an expanded range of housing options across the continuum through to the provision of access to rent supplement assistance for households living in housing in the private rental market. In addition to challenges related to the overall cost of housing, participants also talked about the need for better and stricter policies around the quality of housing that is available to renters in the private market. Participants also talked about the need to look at a broad range of solutions from “tiny homes”, through to container housing as well as providing individuals with their own homes on Crown land. Some participants also talked about the need to look at an expanded range of low barrier housing options, from supportive housing through to pet-friendly housing.

### **Education:**

Participants talked about the importance of access to education and the role that it can play in helping to provide for an expanded range of employment options and opportunities.

### **Health Care:**

People talked about the need for improved access to health care services, including the need for a comprehensive wellness centre that provides a range of services from mental health care through to long-term and preventative care. People also talked about the need for increased funding for medical and dental services and some of the challenges that families and individuals face in having their basic needs met.

### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

People talked about the need to address the root causes of, and the role of trauma, in the lives of individuals with mental health and addictions-related challenges. To this end, participants saw the need for more counseling and addictions services including an expanded range of alcohol and drug treatment resources as well as the need for counseling to help individuals begin to deal with past trauma and work to move forward in their lives. People also talked about the need for an expanded range of harm-reduction options in the community, including the need for a safe injection/overdose prevention site.

### **Employment:**

People talked about the need to work to provide for an expanded range of employment opportunities in the community including the need to help provide individuals with the education and training they

require to access these opportunities. When thinking about the role of employment in helping to break the cycle of poverty, people talked about the need for living wage jobs as well as the need to provide for an expanded range of opportunities for individuals receiving income assistance.

### **Transportation:**

People talked about the need for an expanded range of transportation options to get around the community including the need for an affordable “shuttle bus” service. In particular people talked about some of the challenges that they face in getting to medical appointments getting groceries, or accessing other services such as the Ministry office on cheque day. By having an affordable shuttle bus service available, people felt that it would help to make it easier for many families and individuals to better meet their basic survival needs, as well as help to reduce some of the challenges and barriers that they face in their lives.

### **Food Security**

People talked about some of the challenges that they face in terms of their overall access to healthy, nutritious food as well as their inability to find enough food to sustain themselves over the week. A number of participants saw Port Alberni as having a strong agricultural land base that could be used to help sustain the community through community-supported agricultural initiatives, including different potential social enterprise models.

### **Government:**

People talked about the need for government to play a more active role in ensuring that the agricultural land, fishing and natural resources that are available in the community benefit the community. This includes the need to put a tax on raw logs as well as the need to prevent foreign ownership and land speculation. People also talked about the need for more government support for social enterprise as well as the need to ensure that there are safe spaces and services available for people outside of the tsunami zone. Also discussed was the need to look for ways to strengthen the current delivery of income assistance and support, including the need for better communication and more face-to-face services from Ministry staff.

### **Income and Income Support:**

People talked about the need for improvements in the standard of living for people living in poverty including the need for improved access to education and other opportunities. People also talked about the potential benefits of having access to a guaranteed annual income as well as the need to ensure that income assistance rates keep pace with the cost of living.

### **Services and Supports:**

Respondents talked about the entrepreneurial nature of some many of those who are living in poverty and the potential benefits of simply providing a metalworking or woodworking workshop or space where people can share their skills and invent stuff. People also talked about the need for a space where people can store their tools and other belongings. People also talked about the potential opportunities and benefits of establishing a social planning commission, as well as the need for more community

gatherings and activities where people can access nutritious food, connect with each other, engage and heal.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

People talked about the need to work to remove prejudice and address the discrimination and stigma that so many individuals living in poverty face. This included the important role of community, both in terms of inviting individuals to share their talents and contributions as well as working to change the mindset of the general public.

**PRINCE GEORGE**

**Housing:**

People talked about some of the challenges that they face in finding safe, affordable housing in the community and the need to increase the supply of affordable housing that is available. Low income families as well as people with mental health and addictions-related challenges were identified as some of the groups that are facing real difficulty in finding suitable and appropriate housing in Prince George with the resources that they have available. As well, people talked about the need to look at ways to expand the continuum of housing choices available from the financial security and sense of stability that comes from access to ownership through to the need for increased protections through the Residential Tenancy Act for low –income renter households. People also talked about the significant variability in terms of the quality of housing and the quality of neighbourhoods in Prince George, with many lower-income renter households being constrained in their choices about where to live.

**Children and Youth:**

People talked about the need to support families including children and youth including the need for early intervention on schools.

**Education:**

People talked about the role that access to education can play in helping to break the cycle of poverty with participants suggesting that there is the need for more life skills training in schools at an early age, as well as the need to explore more cooperative training opportunities.

**Health Care:**

People talked about the need for better access to health care including the need for an expanded range of medical services with no fee for MSP, additional coverage for glasses and vision care as well as increased coverage for chiropractic services, physiotherapy, counseling, massage therapy and eye examinations. People also felt that there is the need to encourage doctors and other professionals in the community to reduce their fees or provide pro-bono services as a way of helping to ensure that everyone in the community is able to access the services that they need. People also felt that there should be the elimination of user fees, which can prevent individuals from accessing the services that they need.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

Participants saw the need for an expanded range of addictions and mental health services in the community including an increase in supportive housing options as well as an expanded range of alcohol recovery or drug treatment beds for women and families with New Hope in the North being identified as a positive model for change. People also recognized that there is a shortage of mental health services in the community and felt that, with the right type of supports, many of those who are suffering from mental health and addictions-related challenges could gain the stability that they need to move forward in their lives.

**Employment:**

People talked about some of the challenges faced by low-income seasonal workers, including the need for Work BC to help ensure that they get the support that they need.

**Transportation:**

People talked about the importance of transportation and the role that it plays in helping individuals to access employment, housing and other opportunities. At the same time, people talked about the cost of transportation as being a barrier for many individuals living in poverty and felt that people living in poverty should have access to subsidized transportation which would better support them in finding employment and meeting their basic day-to-day needs.

**Food Security:**

Respondents talked about the challenges that people living in poverty face in finding access to healthy and nutritious food. One of the participants made the observation that a lot of the food available and that is more affordable is not healthy. Therefore, there is the need to look for ways to ensure that children living in low-income families have access to high quality nutritious food to help support their growth and development with school meal programs being identified as one of the potential solutions that should be considered as a way to help to achieve this outcome.

**Government:**

Those present underscored the role that government plays in helping break the cycle of poverty that many families and individuals face and the importance of working across all levels of government to work to address the gaps in the system. This includes adopting legislation that can help to lead to lasting and permanent change as well as introducing changes to address issues of income inequality and to help strengthen the current social safety net, like increasing the level of income assistance that is available.

**Income and Income Support:**

People talked about the need to look at ways to strengthen the current system of income support from indexing rates to inflation, to a guaranteed annual income through to changes in the current tax structure as well as helping to provide increased assistance with the cost of basic essentials such as housing, hydro, child care and transportation. People also talked about the potential of providing assistance for individuals with addictions-related challenges in order to help them re-connect to the job market. The high cost of utilities was also identified as a specific issue within the North.

**Service and Supports:**

Participants highlighted the importance of having a strong network of community-based services and supports, including services and supports for people with addictions-related challenges. Participants also talked about the need for more funding for mental health services in the community as well as the need for more emergency shelter spaces for individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. People also talked about the need for an expanded range of meal programs as well as other types of supports in the community including the possibility of starting a clothing closet. People also talked about the need for the community to work together including the need to look at ways to strengthen the existing community and social infrastructure in order to better meet basic needs.

**Discrimination and Judgement:**

People talked about the need to work to address issues of discrimination and judgement, including the need to build bridges between different cultures. People also talked about the need to establish a service hub or to provide for “one stop services” in the community. People also talked the need to look for ways to change the stereotype and negative perception of individuals living in poverty as well as the need to work to remove barriers that prevent participation with the underlying goal being to promote greater equality and access to opportunities across the entire community.

**PRINCE RUPERT****Housing:**

Housing was one of the top concerns raised in Prince Rupert, particularly the need for more affordable and co-op housing. The need for housing, both for elders and for singles, was underlined. The need for rent controls and restrictions on landlords was a priority. People noted the need for better quality housing, the low vacancy rate, better rent assistance programs (including for those who work), rent-to-own programs, the low supply of housing, high housing costs and the need to update the Tenancy Act. Interest was expressed in tiny housing projects, programs to address the cost of hydro, and in cities providing land for housing development. Assistance with moving costs and bed bugs, or in addressing unforeseen life circumstances, was suggested.

**Homelessness:**

Along with a general desire to address homelessness, interest was expressed in having more doctors in the north to address homelessness. They also expressed interest in providing affordable phones to people to help them keep their jobs and stay out of homelessness.

**Children and Youth:**

Participants expressed interest in subsidized daycare facilities, including at workplaces such as hospitals. Housing, supports and group homes for youth were suggested, along with a redefining of youth to a higher age to address the “aging out of care” issue. Ways to better keep families and kids together and methods for making more resources available for children were other important priorities.

**Education:**

Participants noted the lack of training programs including life skills training, the lack of on the job training, and the high cost of education and many programs. Some found it difficult or impossible to take time off work to further their education. High debt loads were also noted as a barrier to education. Interest was expressed in better access to educational opportunities, more skills and training programs, the need for life skills training including training for children in school, more culturally appropriate educational opportunities, and ways to address the high cost of education. The debt load that students carry was a concern that was expressed while the expansion of supports and services for those pursuing further education was offered as a helpful strategy in addressing poverty and education issues.

**Health Care:**

There was concern expressed about the lack of extended care for dental and visual care as well as for services such as physiotherapy and health care services for women. Participants also noted the need for more doctors, specialists and greater access to clinics and other care options. Poor access to a doctor cascaded quickly into difficulty in getting referrals to address a condition, and the need to go to Emergency to address every health concern. Associated employment challenges were noted as a concern in that, as one participant noted, `you can't work if you're sick`. Some of the suggestions for improved health care included a new walk in health clinic, an increase in the number of family doctors, wider coverage for medications, and for dental and visual care.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

Important priorities that were noted included the need for more, and better, access to mental health supports, including a treatment centre with family program options, a local detox centre for both men and women with a safe house, addictions and alcohol transition programming, a detox/treatment home as day program services are inadequate, immediate care with no waitlist, and support groups in addition to counselling support.

**Employment:**

People expressed concern for more and better, well-paying jobs capable of supporting families, and for opportunities beyond the "who you know" employment network. On-site mentorship was suggested as well as more affordable or free certificate training for relevant work opportunities that are accessible to all members of the labour force. A labour office for casual labour pickup was suggested as well as finding other ways to utilize the talents of people in poverty. EI hours which lasted for two years and greater flexibility in the calculation of EI hours to prevent traps within the system were recommended. Participants also favoured job share opportunities and more retraining opportunities. Finally, the adaptation of the adjacency principle, which would allow fish caught in local waters to be processed locally, was suggested.

**Transportation:**

Participants noted the poor local transit service including the lack of bus service in the early morning, late evening and on Sundays. Some found this service limitation had an impact on their employment prospects as many jobs could not be accessed via transit. The closure of the Greyhound service was a

concern for many participants needing to travel for medical appointments or other reasons while cost was also a barrier. The cost of public transit and the inability to afford the bus was also noted. Access to a range of services in spread out locations was difficult while accessible taxis were often not running. People recommended extending hours for transit, the introduction of special buses to work sites during shift changes, more shuttles and more drop off and pick up points to help facilitate better and more viable transit connections. A transit subsidy for the working poor was also suggested.

### **Food Security:**

Participants noted the lack of choice at the foodbank, and the reliance on a narrow band of non-nutritious food options. The rising cost of staples such as meat was noted. Price fixing at grocery stores when assistance cheques are sent out was identified as a concern as was the inability to take advantage of sales of multiple items due to having a limited budget. Hungry children and the lack of school lunch programs, the need to eat `throwaways` and the lack of food share opportunities were also concerns. The need for increased hours at the soup kitchen including the dinner hour was noted. Greater access to the food bank including the opportunity for those in need to be able to return more frequently was noted. A plan to support or subsidize the food needs of people travelling for medical reasons was suggested. More community gardens and community food-based gatherings were also recommended. Greater access to healthier and more nutritious food was another concern that was expressed.

### **Government:**

Access to government services was identified as a problem, including the lack of service availability when people need them, a challenging online process, a need for a more centralized access to services and information, and a need for more simplified application forms and more in-person support for navigating an often difficult system.

### **Services and Supports:**

Among the service and support improvements that were suggested were the need for the City to help address social issues, increase communication about available programs, re-examine ID requirements for accessing various supports as it can act as a barrier to access, enhance compassion and empathy in society, provide help with the use of computers, and provide an adult drop-in centre. More targeted services for men, and an increase in access to clean, safe facilities and healthier living environments were other priorities noted. Some indicated it was important to address social isolation. The sharing of wealth was recommended by some as a way of seeking greater social equality. Finding ways to help people access housing, employment and food was also a priority, as was creating a safe environment for everyone and decreasing vandalism in public areas.

### **Discrimination and Stigma:**

Participants noted that children were bullied and shamed at school if they did not have nice clothes. Discrimination on the basis of racial and economic grounds was noted. Prejudice in renting or hiring or obtaining loans was also cited as examples of discriminatory behaviours. Some reported that priority for health services were sometimes given to `white people`. Shaming was seen as pushing the issues of poverty underground as people were reluctant to tell their stories for fear of being socially ostracized.

Participants suggested education programs, particularly for landlords, service staff and those who make decisions impacting the lives of those in poverty. Greater emphasis on qualities such as dignity and respect were also noted and government should be directly involved in addressing discrimination and ensuring that society is more inclusive.

## QUESNEL

### **Housing:**

People discussed the need for more subsidized housing as well as supportive service. People talked about the foundational role that housing plays and that, without access to safe, secure and affordable housing, people have no way to go to school, go to work, or live properly. People also talked about the need for improved access to rent assistance for housing in the private rental market. People also talked about the need for more housing outreach workers to assist people in navigating the housing system and help them gain access to the services and supports that they need. People also talked about the need for more supported seniors housing and the fact that there is currently a 1 to 2 year wait list for this form of housing.

### **Children and Youth:**

People talked about the needs of children living in poverty and the fact that too many children living in poverty fall through the cracks in the system. In particular, people talked about the fact that there are not enough services available to meet the needs of families and youth living in the community. Participants also talked about the specific challenges of families and children in care. People talked the need to find ways to remove the barriers that are keeping families and children apart. They also talked about the fact that so many of the programs available are over capacity. People also talked about the need for increased investments in children and families, including an expanded range of child care resources, such as more affordable child care spaces as well as access to after-hours spaces available for individuals who do shift-work or work irregular hours.

### **Education:**

Participants talked about the need for increased funding for education and supports, including an expanded range of supports for individuals who have a range of challenges. A number of the participants talked about the struggle that many single-parent families face when trying to upgrade their education or to go through school on their own. People talked about the need for additional funding for women, including increased funding in the LIFT program, as well as the need for funding and apprenticeship programs to help people gain access to meaningful employment and other opportunities. In particular, people talked about the different types of training opportunities available in the community, including training to help to provide access to employment opportunities at the mill, local restaurants (cooks), as well as the local Safeway (meat/butcher).

People also talked about the potential role that the local library or other community programs and services could play in helping to provide access to opportunities for training. People also talked about the need for access to basic skills training, including parenting, food preparation and cooking skills, as



well as financial management training. People also talked about the need for increased investments in early childhood education as well as the need for supports for students living in poverty.

### **Health Care:**

People talked about the need for improved access to health care services, including the expense of out-of-town appointments. People also talked about the need for an expanded range of basic health care supports in the community, including the need for an expanded range of preventative services. People highlighted the need for more family doctors in Quesnel, as well as the need for increased assistance in terms of access to basic prescriptions and medical supports, including increased funding for mobility aids and other types of medical supports like hearing aids, vision car, physiotherapy and dental care.

### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

Participants also talked about the need for improved access to counselling services, including trauma counselling. Participants also talked about the need for additional resources for vulnerable and at-risk families, as well as low-income singles - both women and men. People also talked about the need for an expanded range of wrap-around services in the community as well as better access to treatment services. People also talked about the need for an expanded range of harm reduction programs and services, including ones surrounding the implications of the fentanyl and the opioid crisis on Quesnel. People also talked about the increasing level of homelessness in the community as well as the growing level of desperation among those who are homeless. People also talked about the need for detox and recovery and treatment services in the community and the fact that people have to leave the community in order to access these services.

### **Employment:**

Participants talked about the need for improved access to employment, including the need for a “labour-ready” agency or temp that can help link people to jobs in the community. Within this context, people talked about an enhanced role for Work BC, as well as simple strategies like a white board in the community where people can put up temporary notices about the jobs that are available. People also talked about the need to diversify the employment opportunities that are available, with a number of participants expressing that there is currently too much of a dependency on forestry and lumber. People also talked about the specific challenges faced by working poor families and individuals and the fact that there are so many more families and individuals who are simply one paycheque away from becoming homeless. People also talked about the need to be able to attract professionals and skilled workers to the community.

### **Transportation:**

Those present talked about the need for improved access to transportation, with many participants reporting that they are unable to get around the community. This includes an inability to get to medical appointments as well as other services that are critical to their overall quality of life and survival. Some of the participants talked about the fact that there are only limited transportation options available for individuals who rely on the use of a wheelchair. People also talked about the fact that there are only a

limited number of transit routes available in the community and that, in many cases, the hours of services are also very limited, especially on weekends.

Some of the participants noted that they do not feel welcomed on public transit and that transit drivers will say that they can have only “one bag of groceries” on the bus or that “Christmas hampers are not allowed on transit.” People also talked about the fact that, previously, they were able to get some transportation assistance through different agencies in the community. However, over the years, it has become increasingly more difficult to access this type of assistance, resulting in additional barriers. People also talked about the loss of the Greyhound bus service and the significant implications that this will have for people living in the community.

### **Food Security:**

Participants talked about some of the challenges that people living in Quesnel face in accessing food. In particular, participants noted that there is only one food bank available in the community and that the hours are limited. People talked about their different coping strategies, including the fact that they can get pasta sauce, macaroni and other types of basics from the food bank and then they buy hamburger or other key ingredients with their cheque. However, no matter how carefully they ration their food and their cheque, there is not enough money to get by. They also talked about the fact that the food bank is over-subscribed and that the different meal programs in the community help to play a critical role in ensuring that families and individuals get the sustenance that they need. People also talked about the importance of the different food programs that are available in the schools and the need to ensure that these programs continue.

### **Government:**

Participants discussed the difficulties that many individuals face in applying for the types of services and supports that they need. This includes the complexity of many of the application forms and processes, as well as the inability to find anyone to provide assistance in responding to questions and in helping to complete those forms. People also noted that many of those who rely on income assistance do not have access to a computer, internet, email and scanner; all of which are needed in order to successfully complete and submit the forms that are needed. Accordingly, the need for increased assistance for individuals to navigate the system and gain access to important services and supports was suggested. People also talked about the fact that literacy can be a barrier and that many people do not have the experience or training to use online services. The need to build a cross-governmental approach, including the need to work to build and strengthen relationships with First Nations communities was another priority. Participants talked about the critical role that municipal governments need to play in helping to identify local needs and priorities.

### **Income and Income Support:**

Participants talked about the need for income assistance rates to increase as well as the need to look at ways to provide increased supports and supports to low income seniors. Some of the participants talked about the need to supplement their income through pan handling and binning and the tension that this can create with local businesses. At the same time, many of the participants could not see an alternative

or way to get by if they were not able to supplement their income by between \$20 and \$50 to help cover additional costs, including food, shelter and laundry services. People also talked about the fact that so much of poverty is both systemic and multi-generational, and that there is the need to work to remove the types of barriers that are preventing families and individuals from getting ahead no matter how hard they try. This includes the need for a livable wage for families.

### **Services and Supports:**

People talked about a range of services and supports that are needed in the community, including the need for better coordination of services, including “one-stop” access. People also talked about the need for support in navigating the current system of services and supports to ensure that people are able to access the different types of services that they need in their community. Different participants also identified the gaps in services in Quesnel when compared to other communities, including the need for clothing vouchers, access to furniture as well as other types of supports. People talked about the critical role that these types of services help to play in enabling families and individuals to “get back on their feet.” People also talked about the need for more social and recreational programs and services in the community. Participants also talked about the specific challenges which families and individuals living in Northern communities experience, especially during the winter months, in accessing the different services and supports they need and that, in many ways, Northern communities are disadvantaged by. People also talked about the impact that the wildfires over the past summer had on many families and individuals living in the community, and the fact that people who had previously not known poverty were now living in poverty because they lost everything.

### **Discrimination and Stigma:**

People talked about the discrimination and judgement that goes with living in poverty. This includes the fact that many individuals living in poverty feel a sense of shame and an inability to escape. People also talked about the need to find ways to break the judgement and stereotype that goes with poverty, including the need to help build a sense of connection and belonging that enables individuals to feel a part of the community. At the same time, people talked about the need to address the discrimination and racism that is part of poverty and that holds so many people back.

*“People ask me where I’ve been and what I’ve seen.  
I say I’ve been here, I’ve been there, I’ve been everywhere  
I’ve lived in a hostel, a hospital, and even jail in the city of Quesnel.  
Hoping to get well and to erase the spell.  
It’s like we’re in chains - doing everything all over again.  
Day in, Day out.  
Like a cage full of rage.  
Like a vicious game. I just don’t want things to be the same”*

## RICHMOND

### **Housing:**

The top priority in the area of housing was for the provision of more affordable housing. Some participants emphasized the role the speculation and “commodification” had on the housing market including the rental housing market. Strong restrictions, controls and/or a freeze on rents (including as new tenants move into a suite) were offered as a solution, which would give people greater security of tenure. Housing should be there to meet the needs of all community members, with the City accepting various forms of housing, including modular housing.

### **Homelessness:**

More shelters for the homeless including shelters free from drugs and drug abuse, were a priority for some participants. People noted the difficult struggle they face between working, dealing with addictions and finding a stable place to live without facing eviction.

### **Children and Youth:**

People placed a high priority on the provision of subsidized and affordable universal daycare that includes a hot meal. Child care that was available on weekends and evenings and that is linked to schools were other priorities. People also supported strategies such as having more family support workers, more funding for early childhood education, a universal child bonus, and the creation of programs for low-income and struggling children.

### **Education:**

Emphasis was placed on ensuring that immigrants can access proper training in English. More support for those returning to school or employment while on assistance was noted by some participants. Greater access to free, or more affordable, post-secondary education was also suggested.

### **Health Care:**

Issues and concerns which received support from participants included the need for medications to be covered, greater access to a family doctor and the desire for dental care and orthotics to be covered. Others suggested that universal benefits for all basic health needs of life be covered. Shifting to an illness prevention model was also considered a priority. The ability for people to make their own medical decisions was another suggestion.

### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

People talked about the sense of hopelessness that many individuals living in poverty face as they try to cope with their day-to-day realities. People also talked about the compounding nature of the problem and the fact that some individuals turn to drugs as a way to escape or deal with difficult situations. People also talked about the important role that access to mental health and addictions-related services can play in helping individuals to break the cycle of poverty that they face or exit homelessness.

**Employment:**

Strong support was given to the idea that the needs to be a fair system for people entering the employment and housing markets. The need for access to job and skills training was noted, as was the need for people to have more stable, secure full-time employment with benefits (i.e. sick leave protection). The need to help immigrants have their credentials recognized was also seen as a high priority.

**Transportation:**

Participants talked about the cost of transit, including the cost of the compass card and the strain that the purchase of the compass card can have on a household's budget. As well, participants talked about the need for more accessible transportation/transit options and the fact that it is difficult to get around the region. There was also talk about individuals with mobility-related limitations and the implication this has in terms of finding and keeping employment. People also expressed general concerns that transit connections should be strengthened across the region and that people who live in the outer areas of the region can have greater difficulties in accessing transit.

**Food Security:**

Support was given to the introduction of a nutritious food program in every school in BC. Others noted that food at the Food Bank is often past the expiry date, that people in low income need access to fresh and healthy food choices, and the importance of making it easier to donate food prior to a "best before" date. Education around how to cook nutritious food at a low cost was suggested. The City could offer community gardens and free groceries while government could find ways to reduce the amount of food waste.

**Government:**

People suggested that government could reduce "red tape," fees and strict timelines, while also providing clear language and easier, person-to-person access to services from Ministry staff who care about their clients. A desire for government to work towards longer-term solutions to the problems of poverty was also a priority. Support for tax increases on wealthy households also received strong support.

**Income and Income Support:**

Strong support for a guaranteed annual income was noted by participants at the meeting. People in low income are living paycheque to paycheque and even working full time at minimum wage is insufficient to cover the cost of rent. Raising income assistance rates was another priority item. The poverty and low income cycle was noted by some participants.

**Services and Supports:**

The idea that helping people out of poverty will save on services was recognized as an important priority. People also supported the idea of counselling for budgeting and other life skills. A resource centres that provides a range of services and which offers more hours/availability and more staff received support. Free community centre programs for people with disabilities or in low income were

underlined. Rehabilitation programs for offenders, in lieu of a prison sentence, was suggested. Support for seniors in dealing with medication and housing costs, and in home support, was noted, as was a better support network for recent immigrants and refugees.

### **Discrimination and Stigma:**

People noted that some community members make assumptions and hold unfair attitudes towards others and that, by expanding community engagement, more people would take ownership of the problem. In particular, people noted discrimination against people receiving disability assistance.

## **SMITHERS**

### **Housing:**

Participants talked about the housing challenges that they face including the need for more affordable housing for low-income families and seniors living in the community. Participants also talked about the high cost of housing (and utilities), and the low vacancy rates in the community. Participants also identified the need for an expanded range of supportive housing options as well as the need for more “pet-friendly” rental housing. A number of the participants also noted that there is a high level of homelessness in the community and only a limited number of housing and shelter options available. A number of the participants also noted that there is the need to strengthen the *Residential Tenancy Act* in order to offer low-income renter households greater protection, as well as the need to provide landlords with training around tenant rights. Participants who were homeless talked about the need for access to basic services and amenities including laundry services, shower facilities as well as a place to store their belongings.

### **Children and Youth:**

Participants talked about the needs of children and youth living in the community including the need for a youth centre, and the large number of youth who are “couch-surfing” and living in unstable and insecure accommodation. Some of the participants talked about the fact that there are a high number of youth who are forced to spend the night in hospital or stay in jail because they have nowhere else that they can go. A number of participants also spoke about the need for subsidized child care in the community as well as the need for more social and recreational programs directed at youth.

### **Education:**

Participants talked about the need for better access to education including the ability to access opportunities within the community. A number of the participants suggested that there should be a travelling school system that could go from community to community in the North. Most of the participants recognized that access to education determines many of the future opportunities that are available to children and youth and identified the need for better services and supports including wrap around services in schools. Participants also talked about the importance of lifelong learning and the fact that education is something that should be available to everyone, regardless of their age.

**Health Care:**

Participants talked about the need for an expanded range of health care services including improved access to medical care in the community. Participants also talked about the shortage of doctors in Smithers and the fact that in some cases medical appointments have to be “cut short” (i.e. 5 minutes). A number of participants also talked about the need to travel outside of the community in order to access a number of different services, and the fact that the need to travel can result in additional costs for many families and individuals. Participants also noted that having to travel outside of your community can be intimidating, especially if family members or others are not able to travel with you. There were a number of participants who also talked about the fact that the cost of some medications and prescriptions are not covered, nor the cost of dental care, vision care and other supports. This means that many low-income families and individuals are unable to access these services. A number of participants also talked about the loss of different services even when they have proven to be beneficial such as cutbacks in the number of nursing hours available in the community. Participants also noted the need for walk-in health care services including the need to re-open the walk-in health clinic in Smithers.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

Participants talked about the broad range of needs in the community including the need for more detox and recovery services as well as the need for more counselling and support in the community. Participants talked about the fact that many of the addictions and mental health challenges in the community are rooted in the history of racism and trauma. Participants also talked about the need for an expanded range of services and supports in the community including culturally-responsive programs and services that recognize the deep and troubling history of colonialism and the impact that it has had on so many Indigenous people in the community. People also addressed the reduction in mental health services and supports that were previously available.

**Employment:**

Participants talked about the need for an expanded range of employment opportunities in the community including the need for more full-time jobs with benefits. A number of the participants talked about the difficulties that many individuals face in finding suitable employment opportunities including the prevalence of part-time jobs that offer little opportunity for advancement. A number of the participants talked about the need for more flexible employment opportunities that allow for a wider range of opportunities for participation in the work force as well as the need for greater awareness about the different training programs and opportunities that are available. Participants also talked about the challenges of seasonal employment and the need for additional training and opportunities for Indigenous people in the community.

**Transportation:**

Participants talked about some of the challenges that they face in getting around their community in winter including the specific challenges faced by seniors and people with disabilities who find their mobility severely compromised in snowy conditions. A number of participants also voiced an interest in more frequent and more extensive bus service with longer hours. The cost of transportation was also

identified as an issue by some of the participants with some expressing an interest in free bus passes for people on income assistance. The cost of maintaining a vehicle in the North was also identified as a challenge for some with the distance between communities being identified as a major consideration. A number of the participants also talked about the potential loss of the Greyhound bus service in the North and the implications (safety and otherwise) that this will have on the community. A number of participants also identified the need for additional transportation supports for children and youth in order to provide them with the opportunity to participate in the different social and recreation programs that are available.

### **Food Security:**

Participants talked about the fact that after families pay for the cost of housing and utilities, they often lack the resources needed to cover the cost of food. Participants also talked about the different coping strategies that they have adopted from “dumpster diving” through to accessing the different food programs and meal programs available in the community. A number of the participants expressed concern about the fact that there are a number of children in the community who are going to school hungry, and that there is the need for a universal school lunch program or breakfast program. As well, some of the participants noted that while there are a number of local businesses who are willing to help, there is a lot of food in the community that goes to waste. Participants also made the observation that the availability of nutritious food would lead to healthier outcomes and less stress on the health care system.

### **Government:**

Participants talked about the need for an expanded range of services and supports in the community including better support for seniors, people with disabilities and those receiving income assistance. A number of the participants also talked about the need to build bridges with the First Nations communities including working to address the legacy of colonialism. Participants also felt that there is the need to look at some of the administrative structures within local Band offices, and the need for Ministry staff and others to look to engage First Nations on their terms, including efforts to learn First Nations cultures and languages.

### **Income and Income Support:**

Participants talked about the fact that income assistance rates are too low and that the current limits around earnings exemptions make it difficult for families and individuals to get ahead. A number of the participants also talked about the fact that a minimum wage is not sufficient to cover the cost of rent, child care, hydro and food. As a result, people are forced to try to find different ways to survive. Higher minimum wage or a guaranteed annual income were suggested as ways to address the income shortfall. Many talked about some of the specific challenges faced by Indigenous people living on reserve and the fact that income assistance rates both on and off reserve need to be increased. Some participants also talked about the need to ensure that there are appropriate supports are in place to help families and individuals to move forward in their lives.



**Services and Supports:**

Participants talked about the need for a broad range of services and supports in the community from social and recreational programs through to services to better support individuals with a range of health and activity limitations. Participants also talked about the need for programs like a Northern Development Initiative Trust as well as the need for an expanded array of community-based programs and services for those in low income. In looking at some of the service gaps in the community, participants identified the need for more supports for families and children including maternal support, as well as the need for greater cultural accessibility to services, a safe and warm place for street adults to relax, more funding for library programs in the community, more affordable social and recreational opportunities, and an expanded range of home care services and supports for seniors and people with disabilities.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

Participants talked about the history of colonialism and the impact that this has had on the Indigenous community, as well as the fact that disenfranchisement, racism, and discrimination continues to exist today. Participants also talked about the history of inter-generational poverty and the need to work to break the cycle. Participants also talked about the need to address historical inequities and to work to end discrimination and racism against people living in poverty which can come from landlords, police, local employers and businesses, the health care system and service providers, and members of the general public. In particular, participants felt that there is the need to build increased awareness and support around the needs of people living in poverty and that efforts to combat discrimination and racism within the current system must be taken.

**SURREY****Housing:**

The need for more affordable housing, including social and co-op housing was a high priority for many participants. Interest was also expressed for supportive housing, inclusionary zoning, portable rent subsidies, a rent bank, rent controls or rent caps, funding for non-profits to create housing, using empty lots for housing, and holding landlords accountable. The need to address the long wait lists for affordable housing and the lack of both subsidized housing and rental units in general was underscored. Forgiving development charges could stimulate the production of more low income housing, as could reducing taxes on landlords according to some participants.

**Homelessness:**

More long-term funding for shelters was suggested, as well as the creation of a pathway for shelter users to obtain permanent housing. More peer support for homeless people was noted.

**Children and Child care:**

People placed top priority on subsidized or free daycare and after-school care to allow parents an opportunity to return to work. Others expressed an interest in increasing childcare supports for low-

income households or those on income assistance. Providing programs and supports for “latch-key kids” and children from disadvantaged households was another strategy which was noted.

#### **Education:**

A need for programs to offer life skills training including budgeting, empowerment, self-esteem and equal rights received strong support. Some added that the budgeting programs should be provided in schools. People also suggested the idea of free or subsidized post-secondary education.

#### **Health Care:**

Participants supported an increase in health care funding, the provision of free vitamins, more preventative approaches to health care, and the idea that those released from hospital have a home or a place to return to.

#### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

People wanted to see a better array of treatment options for people dealing with addictions. There was also interest in more access to recovery houses, mental health and abstinence programs and funding for prevention services.

#### **Employment:**

People talked about the challenges that many individuals face in finding and keeping employment. This included the observation that, in some cases, technology is replacing humans. Some participants felt that the instability in their housing situation has also contributed to instability in their employment situation, resulting in a vicious cycle where individuals are unable to find a place to stay so they are unable to find or keep a job. Others observed that, while British Columbia has been experiencing positive economic growth, the benefits have not necessarily reached lower income families and individuals. People also noted that greater access to employment insurance and training opportunities would play an important role in helping people improve their circumstances.

#### **Transportation:**

Participants talked about the high cost of a three-Zone fare and the implications that this has for families and individuals living in Surrey. A one day transit pass can cost as much as \$9, while a monthly transit pass costs \$180 for one person. Participants also noted that many working poor families and individuals move to Surrey because the rents are more affordable than in other parts of the region, but that this affordability is eroded by the cost of transit. A number of participants also talked about the need for subsidized transit or lower transit fares for working families and individuals. Many participants also noted that some transit stops are not accessible and that people living in Surrey who rely on transit can face long waiting times or long commutes.

#### **Food Security:**

People suggested that a policy be devised in which waste/excess food from grocery stores be legislated to be given to food banks and service agencies. There was also support for creating community gardens from empty lots, and making the food bank a government-funded organization.

**Government:**

A high priority was placed on ensuring that services be accessible to those unable to navigate the application process, including the income assistance and the disability application processes. This included dedicated advocates and system “navigators.” A more progressive taxation system was suggested, with higher taxes on the 1% and lower or no taxes on those in low income. Better integration between ministries and community services was also suggested. Lower government wages, pensions and bonuses were noted.

**Income and Income Support:**

People suggested raising the minimum wage to a living wage and then indexing it to the rate of inflation. Others more simply suggested putting more money directly into peoples’ hands. Raising disability rates was another strategy which had support. Others expressed interest in ending the clawback on couples receiving support.

**Services and Supports:**

An array of programs for residents to address medical, food, community connection, hygiene and other support needs received widespread support. Better access to legal aid was suggested. More funding to address social isolation and more mentorship programs were also given consideration. Some participants saw value in a “train the trainer” program and the need for an active volunteer community was underscored. Community engagement, collaboration and resources were suggested. Strategies and viable solutions for paying fines were recommended. Addressing crime in areas of high poverty and concerns for the attendant’s safety were also topics of discussion.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

Participants talked about the impact of societal attitudes toward people living in poverty, including the stigma of receiving income assistance. Participants also talked about the sense of shame and exclusion that individuals living in poverty face. Those present noted that attitudes of racism and discrimination can also play a role in the way people view those living in poverty. Recognition of the fundamental humanity of all individuals, as well as the need for dignity and respect, were some of the key themes explored amount participants.

**TERRACE****Housing:**

People talked about the need for more affordable housing, including more co-ops and more supportive housing. The need for affordable housing for various demographic groups, including families, seniors and people with pets, was addressed. People also spoke about housing subsidies, housing advocates, more programs to help with down payments on homes, a wider and more accessible range of housing options, and some cap on rental costs.

**Children and Youth:**

The need for youth shelters and activities and programs for youth were identified as priorities. Affordable child care with adequate spaces and free after school care also received support. The need for affordable family law services addressing child support, parental access and divorce issues was also identified. Interest in a \$10-a-day child care program was expressed, particularly since poverty leads to an ongoing cycle of poor children.

**Education:**

The high cost of post-secondary education was noted by participants as well as the related challenge that low income parents face in supporting their childrens' educational needs. The lack of information advertising training programs, the need for more apprenticeship and career track programs, and the need for these programs to be subsidized were other concerns expressed. The programs that do exist are too few and, all too often, over-subscribed—more opportunities at various levels of training and expertise were of interest to participants. The size of student loans and student debt is something that discourages some people from pursuing education. Some participants noted that other training programs have been cut due to the elimination of funding. A role for cultural education for a better historical and social perspective was noted by some participants. Access to more life skills training was also noted.

**Health Care:**

Participants noted that travel to medical appointments outside of Terrace can be both difficult and expensive, with the costs often being passed on to family members. Medications can be expensive for those in low income. The lack of access to family doctors, specialists or even adequate medical care in walk-in clinics, was expressed, with some having no option but to go to Emergency for basic health care services. Some called this the “gap in health care in the north.” Greater ease in licensing foreign doctors and more nurse practitioners were suggested as ways to expand medical services. The lack of extended benefits for dental and visual care and medications was a barrier to access for many in low income. Aboriginal participants noted that their medical expenses were not paid for by their Bands. The difficulty in being a self-advocate was underscored, and some felt that more care advocates in the system would be beneficial. A more accessible and affordable health care system was urged by some participants, including subsidies for travel and other costs.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

Strong support was expressed for funding to establish a treatment centre and a detox shelter in the Northwest. More mental health outpatient programs and transition support for people coming out of detox were recommended. People suggested that surplus buildings could be used for a recovery centre.

**Employment:**

People expressed that LNG could create employment in the region. Beyond the need for more employment and for companies to hire locally, people argued for more subsidized job training programs to address the local “boom-and-bust” economy. Some thought that the municipal government could also do more to encourage employment.

**Transportation:**

Participants noted that the public transit system is limited and too costly for those in low income. The bus schedule does not accommodate to all work schedules nor does it serve all places of employment. Many groups, including children, seniors, parents and others, are impacted by the poor transportation system. Many people cannot afford a vehicle, while cabs can be selective about who they pick up. The end of Greyhound service was noted by some participants as leading to unsafe or uncertain travel situations for those needing to travel. HandyDART service is difficult to obtain. Medical appointments are made more difficult to coordinate and access as a function of the poor transit situation. The winter climate makes using transit difficult, even locally, for seniors and other vulnerable groups.

**Food Security:**

After noting the high cost of food, people talked about opening soup kitchens in shelters daily. Community gardens, school lunch programs and legislation to compel supermarkets to donate used produce as it approaches its best before date were also discussed.

**Government:**

Higher taxes on corporations were noted, as were tax deductions which are fair and equitable. The removal of barriers and greater assistance for people on income assistance, especially during the application process, was suggested.

**Services and Supports:**

The need for drop-in services when shelters are closed during the day was noted. Assistance in helping people access or replace their ID was also identified as a priority. People also talked about the need to strengthen the current system of services and supports that are available in the community, including the need for better access to education and other types of supports that can help families and individuals to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness that they face. People also talked about the need to help to build increased awareness about the services that are available in the community as well as the need for restorative justice.

**Income and Income Support:**

People talked about the need to look at ways of introducing a living wage or guaranteed annual income, as well as the need to look at ways of reducing the current “claw backs” on earnings. People also talked about the need to increase income assistance and to provide for an expanded range of programs and services that are available to people in low income. Participants also talked about the need to explore local strategies and solutions like access to micro-financing and micro-loans that could be delivered through different non-profit agencies and groups in the community. As well, people talked about the need to provide families and individuals with basic financial literacy training and support.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

People also talked about the need to address the misinformation and stereotypes around people living in poverty including the need to ensure that there are appropriate measures in place to address real

issues of equity and to promote greater equality across all groups. Participants also talked about the importance of working to ensure that proactive and preventative measures are adopted to ensure that families and individuals receive the support that they need.

## VANCOUVER

### **Housing:**

Housing emerged as one of the single most important issues discussed by participants in the City of Vancouver. This included the need for more social housing including supportive housing for people with disabilities. Some of the participants also talked about the need to address the quality of the housing that is available as well as the need to work to close “loopholes” in the Residential Tenancy Act that favour landlords. This includes working to ensure that the rent control is attached to the unit, not the tenancy.

Some of the participants talked about the types of outcomes that are needed from an increased focus on *Housing First* to the need for at least 10,000 *new* affordable housing and social housing units per year. There was some discussion about the different types of potential partnerships and incentives that can be used to address the housing challenges that the community faces, from the use of community amenity contributions to help create new supply, as well as targeted investments and measures to preserve and protect the existing single-room-occupancy (SRO) stock. People talked about the need to work together to help build increased awareness and understanding around the housing needs that people living in poverty face, as well as the need to work to build neighbourhood and community-level support for different non-market housing options like modular housing. Participants also talked about the need to increase the inventory of accessible housing that is available.

### **Children and Youth:**

Participants talked about a focused strategy to address the needs of children and youth living in poverty, including specific strategies to meet the specific needs of youth in care. People also talked about the challenges that many low income families face in terms of finding suitable and appropriate child care. This includes the need for a mix of affordable and flexible child care options. Increased funding for grandparents raising their grandchildren was also identified as an important consideration.

### **Education:**

Participants talked about the cost of education and the barriers that this creates. Some talked about types of opportunities that could be created through providing access to more grants and loans, while others talked about the benefits of exploring free education similar to the models that have been adopted in Europe. People also talked about the importance of investments in the public school system and the need to ensure that the public system remains strong. People also talked about the need to provide help with school costs and allow people to have education and training while still continuing to receive income assistance. Regardless of the model or approach, there was agreement that access to education is central to breaking down the barriers that people living in poverty face.

**Health Care:**

People talked about the need to strengthen access to health care for individuals who are living in poverty. This includes changes pharmacare as well as improved access to the different types of services and supports that currently are not covered through income assistance including access to prescription drugs, dental care, physiotherapy, counselling and other types of mental health services and supports as well as podiatry. Participants also talked about the need to create a services hub or health interchange where people could get access to the services and supports that they need.

**Addictions and Mental Health:**

Participants talked about the need to strengthen the mental health and addictions services that are available while also focusing on prevention. People talked about the fact that too many of the services are focused on dealing with those who are in crisis, rather than providing the type of supports that are needed to help individuals break free. People talked about the stress of living in poverty or near poverty and the affect that it has on one's mental health. Participants also talked about the need for culturally-responsive programs and services, including trauma-informed practice.

**Employment:**

Many of the participants talked about the benefits of access to employment and the need to develop positive programming, including providing incentives designed to help create opportunities for marginalized youth and people living in poverty to gain the experience that they need. At the same time, many of the participants recognized that there is also the need to change our attitudes and our methods of how we value people. In particular, it was noted that, while many people living in low income could fully succeed if given a chance, others may need additional support in order to realize their full potential. People also talked about the need for meaningful employment.

**Transportation:**

The transportation services within the Lower Mainland are reasonably good in terms of the transportation network that it provides and the role that it plays in providing access to food, employment, and other services. Participants also talked about the need for an expanded range of accessible transportation options, including increased access to HandyDART services. People also talked about the need for access to free transit for those relying income assistance.

**Government:**

Participants talked about the need for changes in the current tax structure as well as the need to engage business and others partners in actively working to address poverty. People also talked about the need to increase income assistance rates, as well as the need to look at changes in some of the specific rules and regulations. Among some of the specific changes that were noted were changes in the level of earnings exemptions that were allowed.

**Income and Income Support:**

In addition to increasing income assistance rates, people talked about the need to increase minimum wage to a living wage. Some participants also talked about the need to look at establishing a guaranteed annual income or liveable income.

**Services and Supports:**

People talked about the need to help people to navigate the current health and welfare system. People also talked about the need for increased funding for advocates and community-based services, including improved access to legal aid services. They also talked about the benefits in thinking in a regional and integrated fashion. People also talked about the need for support in replacing identification that is lost or stolen. Participants highlighted the critical role that access to ID plays in utilizing so many of the services and supports that individuals living in poverty need.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

People talked about the discrimination and stigma that so many individuals living in poverty face including the criminalization of poverty and that fact that many low-income people end up with fines or criminal records because they are poor. People talked about the need for dignified access to services as well as the need to stop the criminalization of individuals living in poverty. Participants also talked about the need to use art and culture as well as engaging marginalized and vulnerable people, to build increased awareness and understanding of those living in poverty. People also talked about the need to adopt the Aboriginal/Indigenous perspective of Nuu-Chah-Nulth – no one left behind.

**VANCOUVER (DTES)****Housing:**

People talked about some of the specific challenges of living in the Downtown Eastside, including the need for more affordable housing for low-income families and individuals, including low-income seniors. People also talked about the need to continue to increase the number of modular housing units available and the role that having access to this housing has played in providing for better housing and a higher quality of life for those who have been lucky enough to access this housing. People also talked about the need to introduce stronger rent controls as well as the need to strengthen the protections available for low-income renters.

Many of the participants also talked about the fact that too many people cannot find suitable housing with the resources they have available and that this has resulted in a high level of housing instability among many households, as well as an increase in the number of individuals who are precariously - housed and living in conditions where there are mice, cockroaches and strangers in the building all of the time. People also talked about the need to respond to the specific challenges of low-income families in order to ensure that families can stay together, because a healthy environment and healthy home leads to good beginnings and good outcomes.

**Children and Youth:**



People also talked about the need to support families living in poverty, including children and youth. This includes support through the income assistance system for school supplies, clothing, bus fares as well as other basic expenses, as too many families and children are living with the stigma of poverty with no way out. People also talked about the need to ensure that families with children have access to social and recreational opportunities, including the assistance that they need to participate in different types of social programs as well as different types of sports activities and events. The need to create a safe environment for children was noted and the idea that families could choose where to live was seen as an important goal. People also talked about the need for access to child care including, universal and free child care.

#### **Education:**

People talked about the benefits of access to education and the need to look for ways to provide specific supports for low-income families, including single-parent families as well as people with disabilities. People also talked about the potential opportunities or benefits that could come from providing assistance to adults who are interested in going to college and university. Interest in free post-secondary education was noted. People also talked about the potential benefits of providing individuals with financial and literacy training in the early years. Expanded training opportunities in the DTES also received support. Participants also noted the need for service workers to be able to promote and connect people to education and training services and opportunities.

#### **Health Care:**

Participants noted the need for access to health care services, including access to free medical and prescription services for all. People also talked about the need for an expanded range of supports, including increased coverage for physio and chiropractic services as well as medical and dental services. People also talked about the need for more counselling and nursing services as well as better access to medical services.

#### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

People talked about the need for more addictions and mental health services, including the need for early intervention. They also talked about the need to ensure that the services and supports are available when someone is ready to get help and that, under the current system, too many individuals are not able to access these services. People also talked about the fact that too much money is being spent on dealing with the fentanyl and opioid crisis and the fact that there is the need for more funding on preventative services so that people can get help before they are in crisis. People also talked about the fact that the stigma and judgement around people with mental health and addictions challenges has created barriers to access in terms of ensuring that individuals with mental illness and addictions related challenges get access to the services and supports they need. It was also noted that the reality of living in poverty affects mental health.

#### **Employment:**

People talked about the importance of access to employment and the need to look at ways to help individuals build the necessary skills and training they need to access a range of different types of

opportunities. People also talked about the need to offer a range of different opportunities that would allow them to explore different types of occupations and areas of interest. People also talked the need for targeted strategies to help “at-risk” and vulnerable youth to gain the necessary knowledge and experience that they need.

### **Transportation:**

Access to transit was also identified as an important priority to the community, with the cost of transit being identified as a significant barrier for many people living in poverty. In particular, participants felt that access to free or subsidized transportation/bus passes should be available to all individuals receiving income assistance, PWD benefits as well as those who are receiving regular assistance. It was noted that transportation supports are available in some programs, but that those supports often end with the program.

### **Food Security:**

People talked about the need for better access to food, including better access to healthy and nutritious food. People also talked about the importance of providing individuals with an expanded range of choices, including access to food vouchers or other types of supports that would allow individuals to make choices that best meet their needs and the needs of their families while, at the same time, help to reduce the stigma of having to line up for food. People also talked about the need to ensure that families and individuals living in the DTES have access to crisis grants and other types of supports that help ensure they have enough food to meet their basic needs.

### **Government:**

Participants talked about the challenges they face in accessing government services and that individuals are frequently denied the services they need. Participants talked about the fact that they cannot access services if they do not have ID and that it is difficult to get help in replacing their ID once it has been lost or stolen. Participants also talked about the complexities of the system and the fact that a lot of people living in the Downtown Eastside do not have access to a phone or computer, and therefore they are unable to complete the application process or they simply give up. Participants also noted that the assistance they receive is too low and that there is not enough money for food, clothing, shoes and other basic needs. As well, a number of participants noted that people feel they need to jump through too many hoops in order to access even basic support and that the rules are not always applied the same and/or they do not always make sense. Participants also offered different ideas about the types of changes they would like to see to help strengthen the process, including greater flexibility to fit individual circumstances, as well as more face-to-face support.

### **Income and Income Support:**

In addition to increases in the amount of income assistance and PWD support that is available and then indexing those rates to inflation, people also talked about the need to look at increasing minimum wage as well as the possibility of introducing a guaranteed liveable income. People also felt that there is the need for changes in the Ministry’s processes and in specific regulations and guidelines, including an increase in the earnings exemptions that are available to different individuals and groups receiving

income support. Basic income assistance shelter rates were considered to be too low and that it is impossible to find housing that rents for \$375 per month. In fact, the majority of participants noted that the rent for an SRO unit (single-room-occupancy hotel unit) is more than \$400 per month.

### **Services and Support:**

Participants talked about the need to provide a range of services and supports to help individuals to escape poverty. Participants suggested that men have issues and need services and a “safe place” similar to women. Others noted that women experiencing violence should be granted income to allow them to leave bad domestic situations, and that poverty keeps women in vulnerable positions. The need for affordable businesses and grocery stores was addressed. Age caps for programs were discussed as a barrier to services. Some felt that more faith-based outreach would be beneficial. The need for services to be more supportive, integrated and prevention-oriented was noted. The needs of single parents and youth were underlined. A need for more and free drop-in services, for trauma advocacy, for more centralized programs was noted. Demand for more (weekly) outreach workers/support, and for more care in listening to the needs of people in poverty, was noted. Information and support in navigating the legal system and other service systems was another concern. Clothing or a clothing allowance was another need that was expressed. The lack of trauma advocacy was a concern. Opportunities for people to “express our voices” and to work as a true community were noted. The negative effects of gentrification were expressed. The sheer lack of resources for the complex issues people face was expressed. Ways to address the high levels of violence those in poverty face was a further concern.

### **Discrimination and Stigma:**

Participants talked about the discrimination, racism and criminalization of people living in poverty. Some of the participants talked about the fact that they are no different than others, but that they are treated differently, and this can have an impact on how they start to see themselves. A number of the participants also talked about the systemic racism that is a large part of our culture and society and the negative impact that it has had on Indigenous people over the years. In particular, participants talked about the lack of understanding about the lasting impact of the residential school system and the need for people to know what it was like. Participants also talked about the attitudes of the police and others, especially against individuals living in the Downtown Eastside, and the fact that the rights of people are violated daily. Participants also talked about the vicious cycle they face and the fact that “everything is working against you when you are living in poverty.”

## **VICTORIA**

### **Housing:**

The need for more safe and affordable housing was strongly expressed. Participants also noted the need for the housing to have supports. Respondents indicated support for a range of government subsidized housing, including co-op, rental housing and housing for students. Social housing in mixed neighbourhoods was expressed as a preference. Interest in lower hydro rates, an income-based hydro subsidy and fewer hydro-related evictions was noted. Restrictions on foreign ownership were expressed. Some expressed interest in rent supplements that were attached to the person, not the

building. Support for rent controls, more frequent inspections of rental properties, the review of fixed term rental contracts, rent-to-own options, and flexibility for renters with pets were noted. Strategies to lower the upward pressure on housing prices were encouraged. People felt that stronger regulations on short-term vacation rentals were in order. Support for “tiny homes” and temporary homes was expressed as well as housing to address the needs of young adults.

#### **Homelessness:**

Participants supported the need to house the homeless in long-term stable housing. Interest was also expressed interest in finding ways to shelter those with barriers. Others noted that safe camping options, shelter spaces for couples, heated spaces, and storage spaces for possessions were important.

#### **Children and Youth:**

Emphasis was placed on the need for early intervention to help at-risk kids. The need to provide ongoing care and support for kids in care who “age out” was another priority. Support for affordable, low-cost quality child care was expressed, as was the need to provide greater support for families.

#### **Education:**

Participants expressed interest in having free post-secondary education or free tuition for low-income youth. Others expressed interest in the reimbursement of student loans that have been paid. Interest in more financial literacy programs or support was also noted.

#### **Health Care:**

There was considerable support for providing universal dental care, pharmacare and to subsidize other extended health care costs, such as chiropractors, prescriptions, massages and counseling. The need for everyone to have a family doctor was noted, as was interest in better healthcare for seniors.

#### **Addictions and Mental Health:**

Participants supported the idea that housing with services and supports be available so those in need could obtain mental health services in a home setting. Grief and support counselling that was available immediately for those in need was a concern, as was interest in having addictions services be open on weekends and 24/7. Long-term intergenerational trauma treatment, and adequate treatment for chronic pain to prevent addictions, were noted. A treatment centre in Victoria with easier access to detox services was a priority. More dedicated mental health workers and less intersection with criminal justice (war on drugs, police) was expressed.

#### **Employment:**

Participants noted challenges in the area of employment such as the lack of employment opportunities in the community, the temporary nature of work, less worker protection or unionization, more low pay jobs, the growth of work that offers no benefits and the lack of employment security. The emphasis on training for all basic employment opportunities was also seen as a barrier. People suggested increasing subsidized and accessible training programs, a wider variety of employment programs, government control of Labour Ready services, job sharing, as well as greater support for social enterprises.

Participants also talked about the possibility of incentives for small businesses to hire local employees. Volunteer programs which pay workers a living wage for their sweat equity were also suggested. The importance of work to give people a sense of purpose and dignity was also noted.

### **Food Security:**

Among the concerns expressed were a lack of access to nutritious food, the high cost of food, and the challenge of feeding children who go to school hungry. Participants listed some limitations of local food banks including the limited food they offer to singles, the numerous 'hoops' and frequent line-ups that using the food bank and meal programs entail. Some noted the various health risks that can be associated with food insecurity including mental health issues, trauma, physical health issues, deep hunger and the use of drugs to dull the pain. Some suggested community gardens or community kitchens, Meals on Wheels programs and the provision of healthy food in schools. Those on special diets noted that they faced particular challenges.

### **Government:**

Frustration with poor access to government services was strongly noted including a large bureaucracy, a difficult application process, lack of knowledgeable staff, and the heavy reliance on automation which can act as a barrier to those who lack the resources or ability to engage via technology. Some participants admitted having to lie to be able to access services or expressed the belief that access to services was deliberately opaque to limit take-up. Participants suggested more training for government staff, better coordination of services between departments, streamlining of the application process, hiring people who bring lived experience, more advocates, as well as a more responsible and compassionate approach to those who are trying to navigate a complex system. Better access to information about the programs and services that are available was also suggested.

### **Income and Income Support:**

Among the top suggestions were a guaranteed living wage or income, an increase in the minimum wage, and increasing social assistance and disability rates while indexing them to the cost of living. Other suggestions include allowing couples to live together without clawbacks, more regular income assistance cheques (twice monthly), greater wage parity/equality, and allowing people to keep the money they earn without deductions (up to \$600/month).

### **Services and Supports:**

Participants identified a range of service and support needs. This included more supports for the working poor, more lived experience in decision-making, an increase in funding for non-profits and service agencies, more upstream interventions, and the need for more support workers. Some wanted to see the centralization, and better coordination, of services into one hub, as well as free access to public facilities. Access to prenatal and postnatal care, recreation and sport programs/facilities, community activities and events and trauma support programs were noted. The need for support services for those exiting prison and for seniors was expressed. More wrap around services and a more personable approach from workers and those running drop-in programs were recommended. Places for homeless

people to rest during the day and an end to the criminalization of poverty were other priorities. Others suggested an increase in prevention strategies.

### **Discrimination and Stigma:**

Participants identified the need to address racialized poverty and practice less discriminatory behaviour towards those in poverty. Making people experience poverty was seen as a way to teach them greater compassion. A quicker path to pardon for those subjected to a criminal record check was another strategy to decrease stigma.

## **WILLIAMS LAKE**

### **Housing:**

Housing, and the need for added supply of affordable housing, was one of the top concerns raised in Williams Lake. Issues of note included the quality of the housing available, as well as some of the tensions between landlords and tenants. People expressed concerns about some of the treatment that they had experienced from their landlord, both in terms of racism and discrimination, and in terms of an unwillingness to complete repairs in a timely manner. As a result, a number of the participants felt that there was the need for changes to the existing legislation to strengthen the current level of tenant protection and hold landlords more accountable. People also talked about the high levels of homelessness in Williams Lake and the need for additional rent subsidies/rent supplements to help people gain access to the housing that they need. A number of people also indicated that there is the need for storage and other support to help people who have to move.

### **Children and Youth:**

People talked about some of the specific challenges that children and youth living in poverty face, including some of the specific challenges of youth aging out of care. Participants noted that there is the need for life skills training and support for youth in care including assistance with financial literacy training. People also talked about the need for support to extend past the age of 19. Affordable child care, including daycare spaces for shift workers, was also identified as an important need in the community, with some participants indicating that they saw the need for a universal child care strategy.

### **Education:**

Participants talked about the importance of education as a pathway out of homelessness. As a result, people talked about the need to expand eligibility for the different programs and services to ensure that people can access the services and resources they need to pursue an education. People saw this type of support as essential for families and individuals in all age ranges. People talked about the importance of ensuring that Indigenous people also have access to education and that they receive the supports they need to move forward in their lives.

### **Health Care:**

People talked about the fact that there are many individuals in the community who have a range of medical needs that are not being met. They noted that this can be a challenge when you live in a smaller

community, where you do not have access to the full range of services and supports that might be available in other communities. People also talked about the fact that, because the costs of some medications are not covered, they are unable to access the health care choices that they need. People also noted that services like physiotherapy, chiropractic services and counselling are also not covered and that many of these services and treatments are therefore inaccessible. People felt that there was the need for an expanded range of treatment options in the community including better access to mental health supports.

#### **Addictions and Mental Illness:**

People talked about that fact that there is a lot of public drunkenness in the community resulting from trauma, and that many people have to leave the community to get the support they need. To help address these issues, people talked about the need for an expanded range of mental illness and addictions-related services in the community, including access to counsellors, as well as better access to early and timely assessments. People also felt access to these services and a greater emphasis on prevention strategies would allow them to better address the root causes and begin the healing that is needed. People also talked about the need for more family treatment centres for both First Nations and non-First Nations, with the belief that access to these types of services can help to address early childhood trauma.

#### **Employment:**

People talked about the fact that many individuals in the community do not have the education and training they need to secure meaningful employment. The shortage of well-paying jobs available in the community was also noted. People talked about the need to increase the number of living wage jobs available in the community and the importance of access to training opportunities and supports needed to secure these types of jobs.

#### **Transportation:**

People talked about the fact that while there is a bus service in Williams Lake, the distance between stops is quite far and that, sometimes, people have to walk more than 20 minutes just to get to a stop. People also talked about the fact that lack of access to transit can create specific issues for youth, and that it can make it challenging for people to get to work. In response to these challenges, people talked about the need for more transportation services in Williams Lake, both in terms of expanded hours of operation and in terms of the number and frequency of routes.

#### **Food Security:**

People talked about the fact that, the high cost of housing means that more families and individuals are facing a difficult choice between either paying their rent or buying food. This has put increased pressure on the food services in the community. People also talked about the fact that affordable food is not always healthy and that there is the need for an expanded range of healthy food choices in the community, including increased access and support for community gardens.

**Government:**

People talked about the need for increased funding and collaboration from across all levels of government, including the need to work to focus on reconciliation. People also talked about the fact that many people cannot get off income assistance and that the system can act as a “trap” from which people find it difficult to escape. Participants talked about the need for an integrated and holistic approach to dealing with the issues of poverty, including funding for training and education, as well as the supports needed to help people succeed.

**Income and Income Support:**

People recognized that, in addition to the basic supports, there is a need to look at how families and individuals living in poverty can be supported in their efforts to gain financial stability. This includes increasing the level of assistance that is available to families and individuals, as well as allowing for an increase in the earnings exemption to ensure people have the resources they need to meet the basic costs of living (food, housing and transportation). Some participants also talked about the need for a guaranteed annual income or a minimum wage, while others talked about raising the asset limits for PWD recipients in order to allow them to be able to own certain types of assets, such as a home or car.

**Services and Supports:**

Participants talked about the various needs which exist within the community, including the need for an expanded range of services and supports for vulnerable and “at-risk” youth, such as a youth shelter. A number of participants also talked about the specific needs of low income and vulnerable families, including the need for an expanded range of prevention programs and services, the need for more social workers and family outreach workers, and the need for more addictions and mental health-related services in the community. Participants also noted that many families or individuals living in poverty are at increased risk of violence. A number of participants also observed that those living in poverty have a deep sense of loneliness and isolation. The specific challenges faced by First Nation communities, including a history of racism and discrimination, was also discussed, as was the need to work to build bridges between the First Nations bands and the broader community. A number of the participants also talked about some of the specific challenges faced by smaller, rural and Northern communities. This includes limited access to medical care and other supports, as well as the need for improved access to housing, education and transportation.

**Discrimination and Stigma:**

Participants described the need to work to reduce discrimination and the stigma of poverty and to better understand the underlying social patterns and trends that lead to these challenges. Participants also talked about the importance of working together to build a sense of increased belonging and inclusion across communities, which could involve learning from the past while looking to make important changes to help shape a better future for everyone, including those living in poverty.



# Stakeholder Led Roundtables: SPARC BC - Summary Reports Small Group Discussions

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**Note:** Here is a link to the [website](#) where these same documents (as well as all the policy briefs, small group discussions, and notes from the community meetings) are available.



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# Summary Reports Small Group Discussions

June 2018



## Introduction

In addition to the feedback received through the 28 community meetings, the Ministry provided \$2,500 in convening grants to support 100 groups from across the Province to add their voices to the conversation on issues affecting people living in poverty in British Columbia today. Grants were provided to the following groups:

Abbotsford Community Services

Afro- Canadian Positive Network of BC

Association of Neighborhood Houses BC

BC ACORN

BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

BCPRC Community Action Network - DHH

Bridges for Women Society

Brightside Community Homes Foundation

Canadian Mental Health Association

Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division

Canadian Mental Health Association Vernon & District

Cariboo Family Enrichment Centre

Carnegie Community Centre Association

Carney Hill Neighborhood Centre Society

Cedar Cottage Neighborhood House

Cerebral Palsy Association of British Columbia

Chilliwack Community Services (Chilliwack Healthier Community)

Clayoquot Biosphere Trust

Collingwood Neighborhood House

Community Action Network

Community Connections (Revelstoke) Society

Community Futures Boundary

Comox Valley Elders Take Action

Connecting Community to Surrey Youth Leaving Care (Van City Community Foundation)

Desert Sun Counselling & Resource Centre

Downtown Eastside Women's Centre Association

DTES SRO

Eagle Valley Community Support Society

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition with The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

Fraser Regional Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association

Friends of the Grove/Cedar Bark Poet

Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society

Habitat for Humanity Kamloops Society

HollyBurn Family Services Society

Hupacasath First Nation

Ishtar Transition Housing Society

Jewish Seniors Alliance

Julie Rushton

Kamloops A Way Home Committee to End Youth Homelessness

Kitsilano Neighborhood House

Kiwassa Neighborhood House

Lakes Districts Family Society

Langley Community Services Society

Langley Seniors Community Action Table (LSCAT)/ Langley Senior Resource Society

Leq'á:mel First Nation

Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services

Living Wage Families Campaign

Lookout Housing and Health Society

Lookout Housing Society

Lower Kootenay Band

Lower Mainland Purpose Society - Burnaby Youth Hub

Migrant Workers Centre

Mission Community Services Society

Mom2Mom Child Poverty Initiative Society (Mom2Mom)

More Than A Roof Housing Society

Mount Pleasant Food Network(Mount Pleasant Neighborhood House)

Mount Waddington Health Network

North Shore Disability Resource Centre  
Oaklands Community Association  
Oliver Healthy Living Coalition (Oliver Parks and Recreation)  
One Straw Society  
Pacific Community Resources Society  
Phoenix Transition Society  
Port Alberni Friendship Center  
Positive Living BC  
Positive Living North  
PREP Society  
Prince George New Hope Society  
Raise the Rates  
Ray-Cam Community Association  
Renfrew Collingwood Community Response Network  
Restorative Justice Salt Spring Island and the Salt Spring Community Services Society  
Revelstoke Poverty Reduction Working Group  
Sea to Sky community services Pemberton  
Sea to Sky community services Squamish  
Seniors Advocacy Centre  
Single Mothers Alliance of BC Society  
Skeena Diversity Society  
Sources Community Resource Centre  
South Vancouver Neighborhood House  
Spinal Cord Injury BC  
Sunshine Coast Community Services  
Surpassing Our Survival - Prince George Sexual Assault Centre  
Trail Family and Individual Resource ( Fair) Centre Society  
TRRUST: Collective Impact for youth aging out of care in Vancouver  
Union Gospel Mission  
United Church Salmon Arm  
United Way  
Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users

Vancouver Rape Relief

Vibrant Abbotsford

Watari Research Association - Watari Counseling and Support Services

West End Seniors' Network

Westside Health Network Society

Whistler Community Services Society

Yellowhead Community Services Society Cache Creek

Yellowhead Community Services Society Clear Water

Youth for Chinese Seniors in the DTES

1Up Victoria Single Parent Resource Centre Society

The feedback received from the participants in the small group discussions added to the range of voices and ideas that were heard about the issues affecting people living in poverty and in terms of the potential solutions. The information presented here is intended to compliment the insights gained through the community meetings and through the other channels of consultation that were part of the process.

## Questions That Were Explored

All of the small group meetings were similar in structure to the 28 community meetings organized by SPARC BC in that they focused on the same two (2) questions:

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?
2. What would address these issues and help you and people out of poverty?

In addition, the groups and organizations that participated in the small group discussions were encouraged to explore different possible community-based responses including:

- Possible changes in policies or programs that could help to remove barriers for people living in poverty;
- Possible new programs or initiatives that should be considered as part of a broader poverty reduction strategy; and,
- Changes in service delivery models and approaches to better support people living in poverty including specific policy changes or considerations in the area of health, education, transportation, housing, income support or other program areas.

## Reporting Back on the Results

In keeping with the broader community meetings, all of the notes and feedback from the meeting were included in the report back that was prepared and submitted by each of the groups. This included information on:

- The # of individuals and organizations who participated;
- The types of experiences and stories they shared;
- The general demographic and age profile of participants; and,
- Other factors and key considerations.

Some of the reports also included individual stories or case study examples that came out through the discussions and that helped to build a more complete picture of the experiences and circumstances of people living in poverty.

## Key Findings and Outcomes

There is a richness and depth of understanding in the insights and the stories that were shared. The reports are written from a broad and diverse range of perspectives and draw attention to the fact that poverty touches each of us and our communities in so many different ways. As with the community meetings, the stories are both profound and compelling with the full compendium of reports providing important insight into the issues facing people living in poverty today and the need for change.

While each of the reports and communities are different in terms of their experiences and perspectives, there is one single unifying thread that goes throughout all of the reports – the belief that by working together it is possible to introduce real and lasting changes. The ideas noted in each of the reports provide a mix of both “big ideas” and practical examples when taken together present a picture where the sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts. In reading each of the reports, the need for action becomes clearer and the opportunities for change more evident with these reports providing an important baseline of information and a call to action.

# Letter from Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity

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Honourable Shane Simpson, Minister  
Ministry of Social Development and  
Poverty Reduction  
Room 247, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Simpson:

As a government, we have committed to advancing gender equity and to making choices that lift up women, transgender and non-binary people. This commitment is uniquely important in the development of British Columbia's first poverty reduction strategy.

It is clear that we cannot make meaningful progress on gender equity without addressing poverty, nor can we effectively reduce poverty without considering the gendered dynamics of this issue. In BC, as in Canada, women, transgender and non-binary people are disproportionately impacted by poverty and low income. In particular, Indigenous women, recent immigrants, refugees, people with disabilities, people with mental health and addictions challenges, as well as queer, transgender, non-binary and two-spirit people (especially youth) experience unusually high levels of poverty and homelessness.

In addressing poverty in B.C., it is vital that we listen to the voices of people with lived experiences. Many different organizations and individuals shared their stories and feedback through the poverty reduction consultation process, and I thank them for their courage and advocacy.

In their submissions, it is clear that the causes of poverty, as well as peoples' experiences of poverty and its impact on their lives, are determined in large part by gender. The intent of this submission is to highlight and amplify the insights I have heard from individuals and communities and, in doing so, demonstrate the importance of including a gender and

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Parliamentary Secretary  
for Gender Equity

Ministry of Finance  
Office of the Minister  
and Deputy Premier

Mailing Address:  
PO Box 9048 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria BC V8W 9E2  
Telephone: 250 387-3751  
Facsimile: 250 387-5594

Location:  
501 Belleville Street  
Parliament Buildings, Victoria  
website:  
[www.gov.bc.ca/fin](http://www.gov.bc.ca/fin)

intersectional lens in the development of a poverty reduction strategy for British Columbia. Structural inequalities contribute to increased poverty rates for women, transgender and non-binary individuals.

It is no surprise that issues such as affordable housing, access to services, and economic security were raised repeatedly throughout the sessions and in the submissions. However, in hearing directly from those affected, we see how systemic gender-based inequalities lead to higher levels of poverty for women, transgender and non-binary individuals.

For example, while B.C.'s housing affordability crisis impacts people across the spectrum, the lack of appropriate shelter spaces, transition housing, and family-friendly options mean that women and transgender and non-binary people are often unable to find housing that meets their needs. Cridge Transition House illustrated one piece of this issue in a discussion we had, when they spoke about the challenges of connecting women and their children with the resources they need to leave intimate partner violence. While organizations are able to provide short-term services, the crisis then becomes finding the women and children a permanent home. Without these long-term solutions, they are more susceptible to returning to the situation they were escaping in the first place. This type of story was highlighted over and over by service providers across B.C.

The gendered wage gap is a contributing factor to women's poverty and it has narrowed little in twenty years. On top of this, the wage gap for Indigenous, immigrant and racialized women, as well as women with disabilities and queer and transgender individuals, is substantially higher. Women are over-represented in the low-wage/minimum wage worker category in B.C., and there is a predominance of women in part-time and casual work. On top of this, transgender and non-binary people face additional barriers, including discrimination and transphobia in hiring practices and high rates of harassment. As a result, women, transgender and non-binary people are left vulnerable to dangerous and exploitative work situations, particularly in unregulated areas such as sex work, for fear of losing their source of income. For individuals looking to move away from these circumstances, social and economic barriers can prevent them from gaining the new skills or experiences that would allow them to transition into more secure forms of work. Furthermore, low wage and unregulated jobs offer little security or benefits, including a pension. Poverty is then entrenched as people age, with seniors facing disproportionately high rates of poverty.

A lack of affordable, accessible, culturally appropriate and high-quality child care was also raised as a major barrier for many. While child care accessibility is an issue for all families, it is of particular concern for low-income and single-parent families. As unpaid caregiving responsibilities also tend to fall disproportionately on women, many women sacrifice careers or

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leave secure employment in order to care for their family, which increases financial insecurity and the risk of poverty. These factors can prevent them from entering the workforce and leave women in precarious positions.

Another issue raised is that the lack of social services and health services provided by gender and trauma-informed practitioners leaves transgender, two-spirit and non-binary people at a greater risk of poverty and homelessness.

While I have touched on only a few examples here, they serve as valuable reminders for us to consider how structural inequalities are contributing to increased poverty rates for women, transgender and non-binary individuals.

### **Peoples' experiences of poverty are influenced by gender**

Experiences of poverty are complex and vary significantly based on a person's identities, such as race, class, age, sexuality, and gender. Accordingly, there are experiences of poverty that are specific to women, transgender people and non-binary people.

For example, I've heard repeatedly how individuals can be trapped in relationships, including abusive relationships, due to a lack of financial security and economic self-sufficiency. Often, women, transgender and non-binary individuals are faced with the impossible decision of staying in an abusive relationship or putting themselves and their children at risk of homelessness. This is compounded by barriers to legal services that are needed to enforce their legal and financial rights.

Racialized women in particular face an elevated risk of economic insecurity. In the case of Indigenous women, this is the outcome of social and economic discrimination rooted in the history and modern-day effects of colonization. Many of the participants pointed to the intergenerational impacts of colonialism and residential schools on Indigenous women's poverty. Systemic racism, and mental and emotional repercussions of the trauma experienced in residential schools, have impacted Indigenous lives for decades, resulting in marginalization, economic and social exclusion, and poverty.

At the same time, women, transgender and non-binary people face tangible challenges on a daily basis that stem from their experience of poverty, such as a lack of access to menstrual products, birth control, medications, bras, and similar basics that many take for granted.

For instance, menstruation can be particularly physically, financially and emotionally distressing for people living with low incomes, forcing women to rely on makeshift methods – including using socks or newspaper as pads - that put their health at risk.

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Support for women during pregnancy is another issue that was brought home by a meeting I had with Sheway, an organization which provides health and social service supports to pregnant women, and women with infants, who are dealing with drug and alcohol issues. Every child deserves a healthy start, yet many women experiencing poverty don't have access to the bare minimums for their children or themselves.

**Gender equity and poverty reduction are inextricably linked**

While this submission discusses only a handful of the issues brought to light by individuals and communities, a recurring theme throughout the consultation process was the interconnected nature of poverty and gender equity. To address poverty in B.C. we must tackle gender equity broadly and substantively, and I believe the poverty reduction strategy would benefit from the application of an intersectional analysis lens, with a focus on gender. This approach is critical to recognizing both the causes and the impacts of poverty that are specific to women and others experiencing gender-based discrimination, and would add strength to this important plan.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the development of British Columbia's first poverty reduction strategy and to highlight some of the insights that have been shared in this process. I look forward to continuing to work with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Parliamentary Secretary Mable Elmore, and fellow British Columbians as B.C.'s Poverty Reduction Plan is developed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Dean".

Mitzi Dean, MLA  
Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity

# List of Policy Submissions

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# List of Policy Brief Submissions

Sixty-eight organizations submitted policy briefs to the Poverty Reduction Consultation. The submissions are posted at: <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/bcpovertyreduction/read-public-and-stakeholder-input/>

1. Access Pro Bono
2. Alberni Clayoquot Health Network
3. Alberni Clayoquot Health Network #2 (2016)
4. BCANDS-DABC-PLAN Institute
5. B.C. Coalition of Nursing Associations
6. BC Poverty Reduction Coalition
7. BC Poverty Reduction Coalition #2
8. BC Alliance for Healthy Living Society
9. BC College of Family Physicians
10. BC Federation of Labour
11. BC Federation of Retired Union Members
12. BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre
13. BC Teachers' Federation (Letter and Submissions 2009, 2012 and 2013)
14. Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada
15. British Columbia Dental Association
16. Bulkley Valley Social Planning Council
17. Canadian Bar Association BC Branch
18. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Office
19. Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division
20. Canadian Union of Postal Workers (Pacific Region)
21. Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia
22. Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia Library Workers
23. Cariboo Chilcotin Partners for Literacy
24. Centre for Community Engaged Learning (UBC)
25. Check Your Head and Broadway Youth Resource Centre
26. Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
27. Continuing Education and Training Association of BC
28. Dietitians of Canada
29. Dixon Transition Society
30. 411 Seniors Centre Society
31. Federation of Post-Secondary Educators
32. First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
33. First Call: Comparison of Child Benefits with Recommendations for BC
34. Fraser Health Population and Public Health
35. Health Officers' Council of BC
36. Interior Health

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37. Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, and the Jewish Family Services</li> <li>38. Kamloops and District Labour Council</li> <li>39. Legal Services Society</li> <li>40. Livable Income Vancouver</li> <li>41. Living Wage for Families Campaign</li> <li>42. Local Economic Development Lab (LEDlab)</li> <li>43. Northern Women’s Forum</li> <li>44. North Okanagan Early Years Council &amp; City of Vernon</li> <li>45. Office of the Representative for Children and Youth</li> <li>46. Office of the Seniors Advocate</li> <li>47. Parent Support Services Society of BC</li> <li>48. PG Poverty Free Committee</li> <li>49. Prosper Canada</li> <li>50. Public Health Association of BC</li> <li>51. Quesnel Shelter and Support Society</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>52. Raise the rates</li> <li>53. S.U.C.C.E.S.S.</li> <li>54. School District 8 (Kootenay Lake) Board of Education</li> <li>55. Single Mothers’ Alliance BC</li> <li>56. Society Of St. Vincent De Paul</li> <li>57. South Granville Seniors Centre</li> <li>58. Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition</li> <li>59. “Sylvia” Think Tank</li> <li>60. The Advocacy Centre</li> <li>61. The Council of Senior Citizens’ Organizations of BC (COSCO)</li> <li>62. The Society To End Homelessness In Burnaby</li> <li>63. Together Against Poverty Society</li> <li>64. Union of BC Municipalities</li> <li>65. United Way of the Lower Mainland</li> <li>66. United Way of the Lower Mainland #2</li> <li>67. Urban Core</li> <li>68. West Coast LEAF</li> </ul> |
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