

BRITISH COLUMBIA



2017 BC CHILD POVERTY REPORT CARD



firstcall BC CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCACY COALITION

IN COLLABORATION WITH



WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF



21ST ANNUAL REPORT CARD ON CANADA'S COMMITMENT TO END CHILD POVERTY BY 2000

**2017 BC CHILD POVERTY
REPORT CARD**

NOVEMBER 2017

PRODUCED BY



IN COLLABORATION WITH



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putting children and youth first

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Contents

INTRODUCTION:	Looking for Action to Change BC's Child Poverty Story	4
FACT SHEET 1:	One in Five BC Children Living in Poverty	7
FACT SHEET 2:	BC's Child Poverty Rates Over Time	11
FACT SHEET 3:	BC Child Poverty by Family Type.....	13
FACT SHEET 4:	Depth of Family Poverty	17
FACT SHEET 5:	Child Poverty and Working Parents.....	20
FACT SHEET 6:	Children in Families on Welfare	23
FACT SHEET 7:	Child Poverty Across BC.....	26
FACT SHEET 8:	Growing Income Inequality.....	30
FACT SHEET 9:	Importance of Government Help: Public Policy Matters.....	32
RECOMMENDATIONS:	What Needs to Happen.....	35
APPENDIX 1:	Data and Measures of Poverty	38

Introduction

LOOKING FOR ACTION TO CHANGE BC'S CHILD POVERTY STORY



First Call has been tracking child and family poverty rates in BC for two decades. Our first BC report card showed that one in five (over 170,000) BC children were poor. It is profoundly disappointing that, 21 years later, the data still shows one in five (153,300) BC children are poor.

The latest figures from Statistics Canada (2015) once again show that too many BC children—153,300 or 1 in 5—are growing up in poverty. For the past sixteen years (2000–2015) an astounding half of all children in lone-parent families in BC, most of them female-led, have lived in poverty. Lone parents with a disability and children under 25 have an astronomical poverty rate of 53%. Equally alarming, 2015 statistics reveal that in BC nearly half (45%) of recent immigrant children were poor, one in three (31%) Indigenous children were poor (not counting children living on First Nations reserves), more than one in three (39%) children living with other relatives were poor, and one in four ‘visible minority’ (or racialized) children were poor.

The statistics on the depth of poverty show poor children in BC, including those living with parents working full-time or part-time, are being raised on median annual incomes more than \$10,000 below the poverty lines for their respective family sizes. Families on welfare, the majority of whom have disabilities or other health conditions, struggle to meet their basic needs, and frequently have to rely on foodbanks and other charitable sources to feed and clothe their children. Other data shows that renters are four times more likely to suffer food insecurity than homeowners. Homelessness is growing visibly in communities all around the province, including hundreds of young people and families with children.

This shameful situation is a result of growing income inequality in BC and across Canada. It reflects decades of allowing and facilitating the massive accumulation of wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer wealthy individuals, while thousands of children and youth are deprived of the security, supports and opportunities they need to thrive. It also reflects stagnating wages and precarious work as families face soaring costs for essential living expenses such as housing, food, child care and transportation, and a social safety net that has failed to respond to this growing unfairness and inequality.

Yet we know these statistics and trends can change through the application of strong public policies founded on the values of equity, dignity and respect for children’s rights, including the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (Article 27, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Recent developments in BC and Canada give us grounds for hope that we will see a reduction in both the incidence and depth of child poverty in the coming years’ statistics. Both the federal and British Columbia governments have



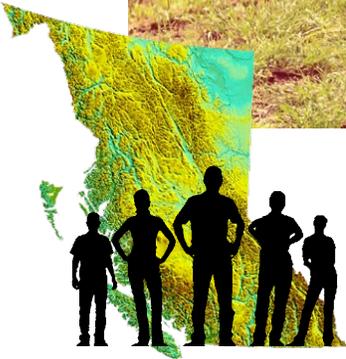
promised to adopt poverty reduction strategies. BC's new government has appointed a minister with responsibility for poverty reduction and promised a legislated poverty reduction plan with timelines and targets in 2018. They have also taken a number of initial poverty reduction steps, such as raising welfare rates by \$100 per month and restoring bus passes for people on disability assistance, restoring tuition-free access to adult basic education and English language classes, implementing post-secondary tuition waivers for youth from foster care, and promising to cut Medical Services Plan premiums by 50% in 2018.

Federal action to date has included the implementation in July 2016 of the new, more generous Canada Child Benefit (CCB), an addition to family incomes that is already having a beneficial effect on child poverty levels. The Governor of the Bank of Canada has called the CCB "highly stimulative," and credited it with strengthening Canada's economy.¹ First Call recommends BC follow the lead of other provinces and adopt a provincial child benefit that also covers children up to age 18 in order to keep even more children and youth out of poverty and enhance this stimulative effect within the provincial economy.

The breadth, severity and longevity of the crisis of child poverty in British Columbia and across Canada calls for an urgent, comprehensive and persistent response from our governments. As of 2015, BC's child poverty rate continued to exceed the Canadian average and we remained among the less effective provinces in reducing child poverty rates. In this report

These statistics and trends can change through the application of strong public policies founded on the values of equity, dignity and respect for children's rights, including the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (Article 27, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

¹ Payton, Laura. (July 2017). Bank governor credits Liberal stimulus with stronger economy. CTV News. ctvnews.ca/politics/bank-governor-credits-liberal-stimulus-with-stronger-economy-1.3500252



Thousands of families throughout BC are looking for action in both the federal and provincial 2018 budgets to bring them relief in the form of bigger investments in poverty reduction measures and a fairer sharing of the economic pie.

card we propose 21 recommendations, 16 of which fall within provincial jurisdiction. They address the root causes of child and family poverty — low wages, inadequate welfare rates and other income supports, an insufficiently progressive tax system, the housing and child care crises, the unaddressed discrimination and under-investments affecting Indigenous families and communities, gender discrimination affecting women raising children and many other systemic barriers trapping specific population groups in poverty. Together these recommendations form the start of a comprehensive provincial poverty reduction plan. Many of them are easily done, and some require more significant investments over a longer timeframe. All will save us money in the long run as children's lives and prospects are improved.

As the stories in this report card bring to life, families' experiences of raising children in poverty leave them struggling with rationing insufficient food, being unable to afford rent or to heat their homes, restricted mobility, and no way to return to work because of the cost and unavailability of quality child care. These families and thousands of others throughout BC are looking for action in both the federal and provincial 2018 budgets to bring them relief in the form of bigger investments in poverty reduction measures and a fairer sharing of the economic pie. Poor children and their parents or caregivers are counting on all of us to support the calls for urgent action contained in this report, so that their stories can change and their children can move from surviving to thriving.

One in Five BC Children Living in Poverty

BC'S CHILD POVERTY RATES

In 2015, the child poverty rate in BC was 18.3%, as measured by Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure (LIM) after income taxes using taxfiler data. This represents 153,300, or one in five, BC children 0-17 years old living in poverty. BC's child poverty rate was higher than Canada's child poverty rate of 17.4% in 2015. These rates are down incrementally from 2014 when BC's was 19.8% and Canada's was 18.5%. The number of BC poor children decreased by 9,960 from 2014 to 2015.

1 out of 5

BC children are poor - higher than the national average.

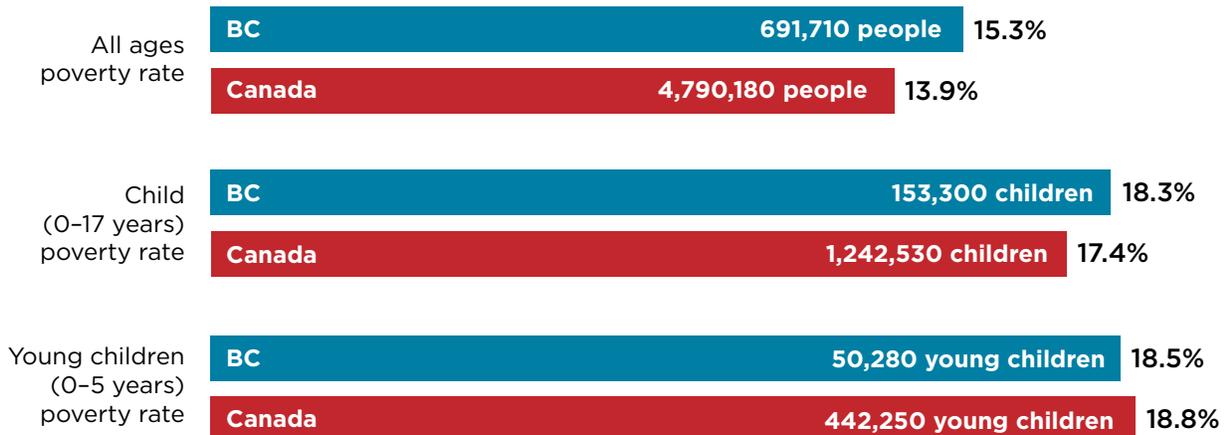


Once again this year, this one-in-five child poverty rate was higher than the poverty rate of 15.3% for BC's overall population. The same was true for the Canadian rates, with a child poverty rate of 17.4% that was higher than the all-ages rate of 13.9%. Child poverty rates are higher than overall poverty rates in every province and territory, an alarming fact that shows how urgently we need to improve financial and social supports for families with children across the country.

The graph below also illustrates that in Canada and BC the rate of poverty for very young children (0-5) is higher than the rate for all children (0-17). Because the first six years of life are especially critical for human development, the experience of poverty during this life

stage can be especially damaging. In 2015, 50,280 or 18.5% of BC's youngest children were still living in poverty. The only positive note is the movement of the under-6 poverty rate down from 20.1% in 2014, closer to the overall child poverty rate of 18.3% in 2015.

All Ages, Child (0-17 years old) and Children Under Age 6 Poverty Rates, BC and Canada, LIM After Tax, 2015



Source: For all ages and child poverty rates: Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0015. For early childhood poverty rates: Statistics Canada. Income Statistics Division. T1 Family Files 2015. Reference 17061. Custom data.

POOR CHILD CITY

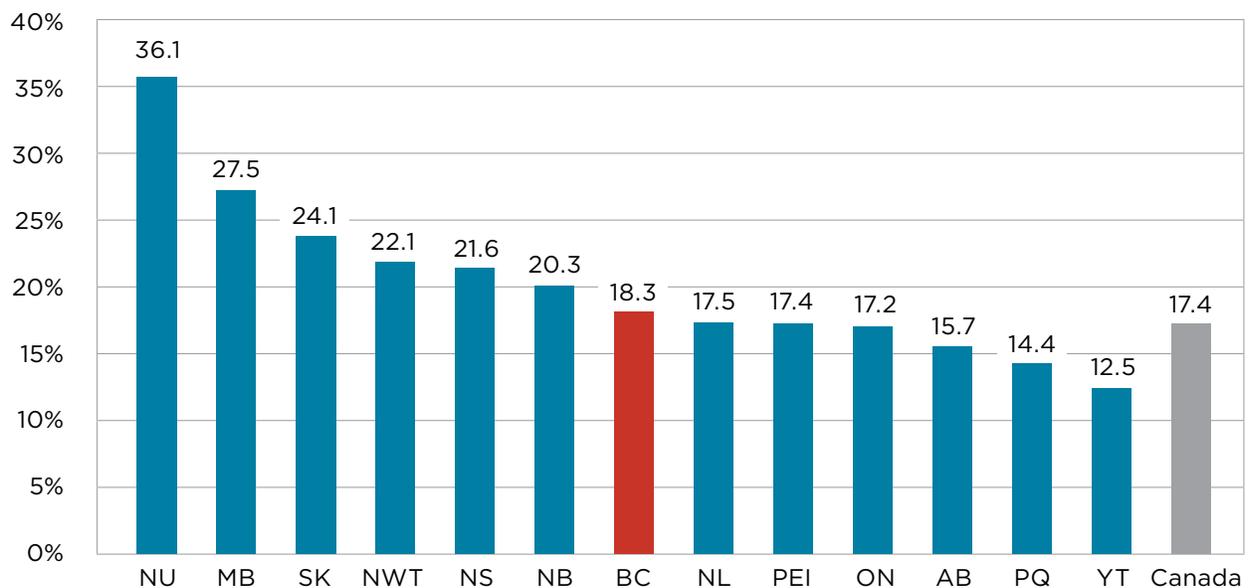
IMAGINE: A city composed only of BC's poor children would have had 153,300 residents and been the fifth-largest city in BC in 2014. Poor Child City's population size was almost as big as Nanaimo Regional District's size (155,698 residents).

In 2015, BC children made up 18% of the province's total population, yet they made up 22% of British Columbians living in poverty.

PROVINCIAL RANKINGS

British Columbia's child poverty rate of 18.3% in 2015 was a mediocre, middle of the pack seventh out of Canada's thirteen provinces and territories. Though BC's child poverty rate was much better than the disturbingly high child poverty rates of 36.1% in Nunavut and 27.5% in Manitoba, it was also much higher than the child poverty rates of 12.5% in the Yukon Territory and 14.4% in Quebec.

Child Poverty Rates, by Province/Territory, LIM After Tax, 2015

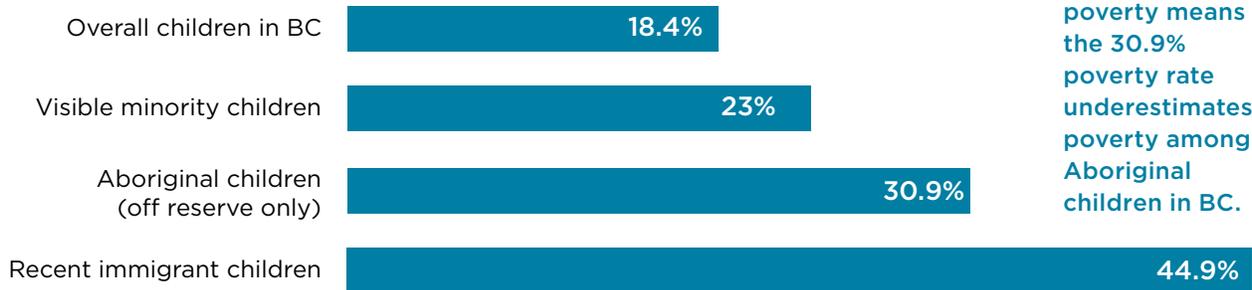


Source: Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0015

SOME CHILDREN ARE AT MUCH HIGHER RISK OF GROWING UP IN POVERTY

The overall child poverty statistics hide the fact that some children in British Columbia are more at risk of living in poverty than others. 2016 Census data based on the LIM after-tax measure show that in 2015 in BC recent immigrant children had a poverty rate of 44.9%, followed by off-reserve Aboriginal children at a rate of 30.9% and ‘visible minority’ (or racialized) children at a rate of 23%.

Child Poverty Rate for Different Population Groups, LIM After Tax, BC, 2015 (based on 2016 Census)¹



The failure of the census data to capture on-reserve poverty means the 30.9% poverty rate underestimates poverty among Aboriginal children in BC.

Source: Statistics Canada. 2016 Census

Children in lone-parent families are another group at high risk of poverty, as described in Fact Sheet 3.

Another group not shown in the census data that is over-represented in poverty statistics is people with disabilities. Data from a 2014 Statistics Canada study show that people with disabilities, with or without children, have a 23% poverty rate.² Lone parents with a disability and children under 25 have an astronomical poverty rate of 52.9%.

We also know youth transitioning out of government care without adequate financial and social supports are at high risk of ending up in poverty and homelessness, as are LGBTTTQ youth.³

We know all these groups have higher risks of being poor primarily due to systemic factors such as racism and discrimination in employment and other areas, the destructive legacy of colonialism for Indigenous people, the lack of affordable quality child care for parents who need to work, the lack of supports for families raising children with disabilities or affected by disabilities themselves, inadequate settlement supports (such as sufficient ESL classes) for newcomers, the lack of post-majority support for youth from care, and discrimination directed against LGBTTTQ and gender-creative youth.

1 Aboriginal, visible minority, and recent immigrant children statistics were not available from taxfiler data, so census data was used instead. Recent immigrant refers to children that immigrated to Canada between 2011 and 2016. Statistics Canada notes that “estimates associated with this variable are more affected than most by the incomplete enumeration of certain Indian reserves and Indian settlements in the 2016 Census of Population.” This means this figure likely underestimates poverty among First Nations people in Canada.

2 Wall, Katherine. (11 August 2017). *Insights on Canadian Society: Low income among persons with a disability in Canada*. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2017001/article/54854-eng.htm>

3 First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2016 BC Child Poverty Report Card, p. 24.



Suzanne's Story

The dangers of unlicensed, low quality child care she knows all too well. Suzanne arrived one day, accompanied by a social worker, to find her toddler daughter and the other children alone in dirty diapers in play pens. An elderly relative was out of sight on the fourth floor. The caregiver had left them unattended to run an errand at the local drugstore.

INDIGENOUS SINGLE MOTHER SUZANNE, 31, is raising four children — including 2 twin boys — far below the poverty line. She says racism against Indigenous people is one of the biggest issues facing her family.

Raised in foster care by a “racist white family” who rejected her Indigenous identity, her foster parents threw her out at age 13. They dropped her off one night at a youth shelter and drove away. Abandoned to the streets throughout her youth, Suzanne says she didn’t feel helped or supported until she was a single mother and disaster struck. “They wouldn’t help me until they apprehended my child because of her dad,” she says, “and then I fought for her.”

To secure the support they need to access transit and child care, single mothers often have to keep a family support file open with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Suzanne says. Her oldest daughter has mental health challenges, and other than some counselling, she will not get the real support she needs until she is fully diagnosed. She has been waiting 1.5 years for a full assessment. Suzanne gets the transportation support she needs to take her daughter to counselling every week on the bus through her support file.

“So basically, I have to have social workers in my life who judge me and my kids and my life to get the supports I need.”

The dangers of unlicensed, low quality child care she knows all too well. While accessing a home-based unlicensed child care setting, Suzanne arrived one day, accompanied by a social worker, to find her toddler daughter and the other children alone in dirty diapers in play pens. An elderly relative was out of sight on the fourth floor. The caregiver had left them unattended to run an errand at the local drugstore. “They [social workers] told me I couldn’t leave her there anymore, of course, but then there was zero help for me to find other child care, so then I had none. Then they come down on you for being a crappy parent when you have no break.”

Pursuing yoga teacher training full time now, Williams feels the racism she experienced early in life is what needs to change the most. “People need to start believing we [Indigenous people and parents] can make it in life.”

Read this and other stories at stillin5.ca

BC's Child Poverty Rates Over Time

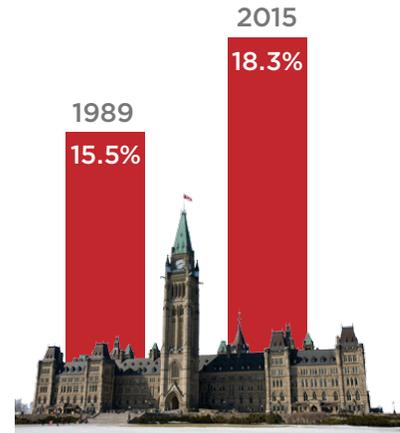
PERCENTAGE OF POOR CHILDREN OVER TIME

Since the passage of the 1989 House of Commons all-party resolution to eliminate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000, British Columbia's child poverty rate has risen from 15.5% in 1989 to 18.3% in 2015. Many generations of children have continued to grow up in poverty due to Canada's failure to fulfill this pledge.



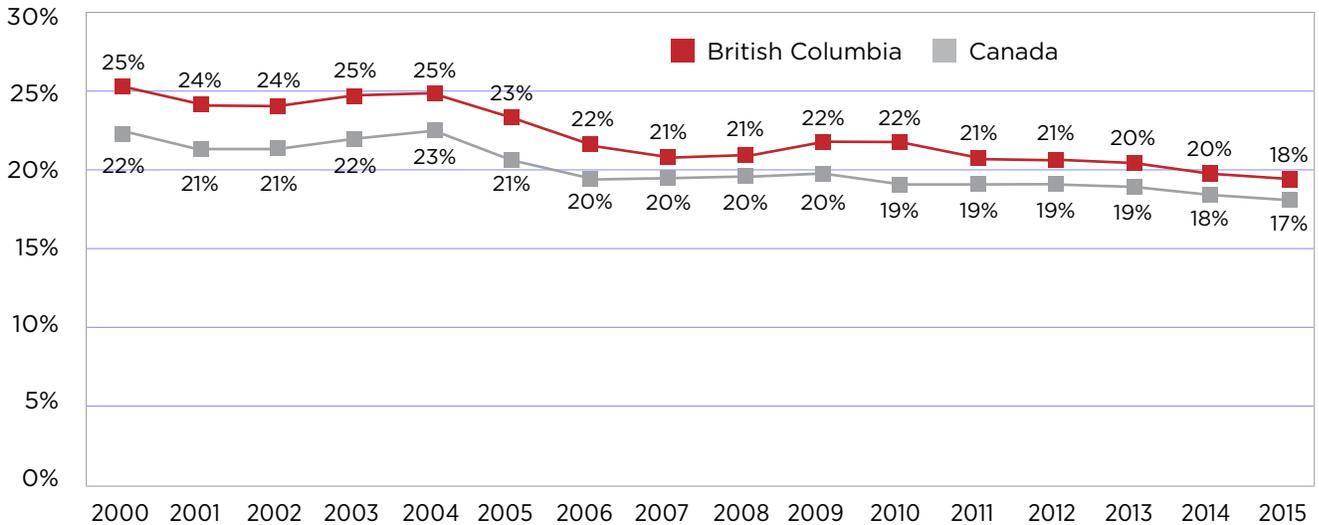
BC's child poverty rate from 2000 to 2015 remained consistently higher than the Canadian average.

BC's child poverty rate (based on the Low Income Measure (LIM) After Tax) has decreased over the past 16 years from 25.3% in 2000 to 18.3% in 2015. However, despite being a wealthy province, our child poverty rate has exceeded Canada's for every one of those years. One in five children lived in poverty in British Columbia and nearly one in five Canada in 2015—disturbingly high numbers.



Since the House of Commons passed a resolution in 1989 to eliminate child poverty in Canada, BC's child poverty rate has risen from **15.5%** to **18.3%**.

Child Poverty Rates for Canada and British Columbia, LIM After Tax, 2000–2015

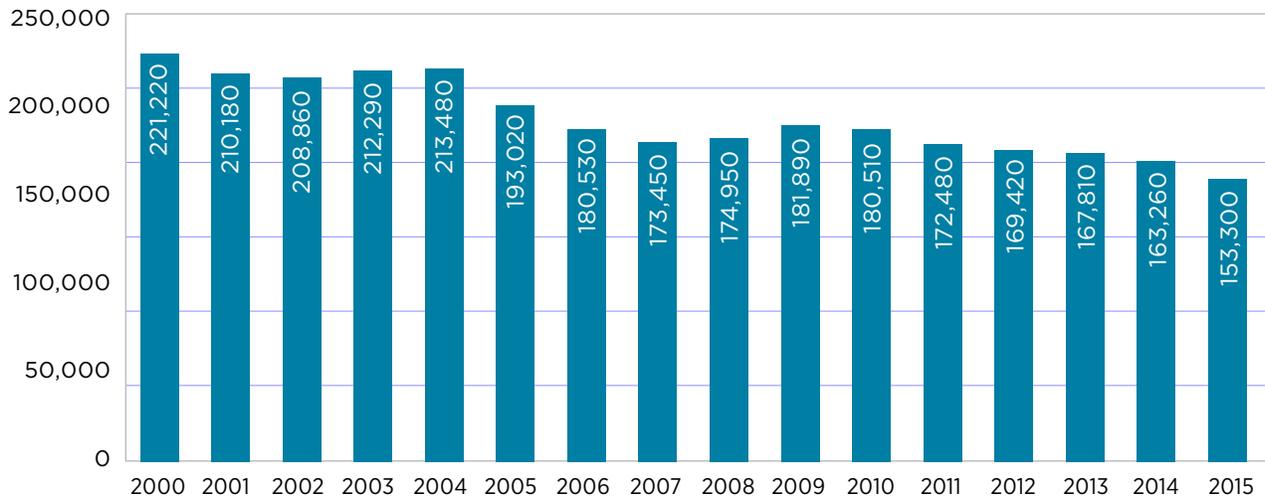


Source: Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0015.

NUMBER OF POOR CHILDREN OVER TIME

The number of poor children in British Columbia decreased by 67,920 children over the past 16 years, from 221,220 in 2000 to 153,300 in 2015. The decline in the number of poor children has been steady for six consecutive years, from 2009 to 2015. However, this trend is too slow to help eliminate child poverty in the province. At this rate of child poverty decrease (an average of 4,528 fewer poor children each year from 2000 to 2015), it would take until 2049, or 34 years, to eliminate child poverty in BC. We can't afford to wait for government to act on known solutions while generations of children experience the harmful impacts of growing up in poverty.

Number of Poor Children in British Columbia, LIM After Tax, 2000–2015



Source: Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0015.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION — A PATH INTO OR OUT OF POVERTY?

Low- and middle-income young people in BC know they need a post-secondary education as a path to a job or career that will, hopefully, pay a living wage and allow them to support a current or future family. But many are asking themselves if their post-secondary journey will actually be a path into poverty.

Continual cuts to education funding, soaring tuition fees, high interest loans and a lack of a comprehensive up-front, needs-based grants program are leading many young people to have trouble beginning or completing their post-secondary education and trapping them in debt during their lowest-earning years.

- Average tuition fees for undergraduate students in BC have increased by more than 200% in a single generation, from \$1,808 in 1990 to \$5,635 in 2017.
- In 2015, one in two students graduated university in debt and the average BC undergraduate in a four-year program graduates with a debt load of \$34,866.
- Interest charged on a student loan of \$25,000 adds an additional \$6,000 during a 10-year repayment period.¹

First Call supports the BC Federation of Students call for reduced tuition fees at public colleges, institutes and universities, interest-free student loans, and more non-repayable grants for low- and middle-income students. For more information see: www.wearebcstudents.ca.

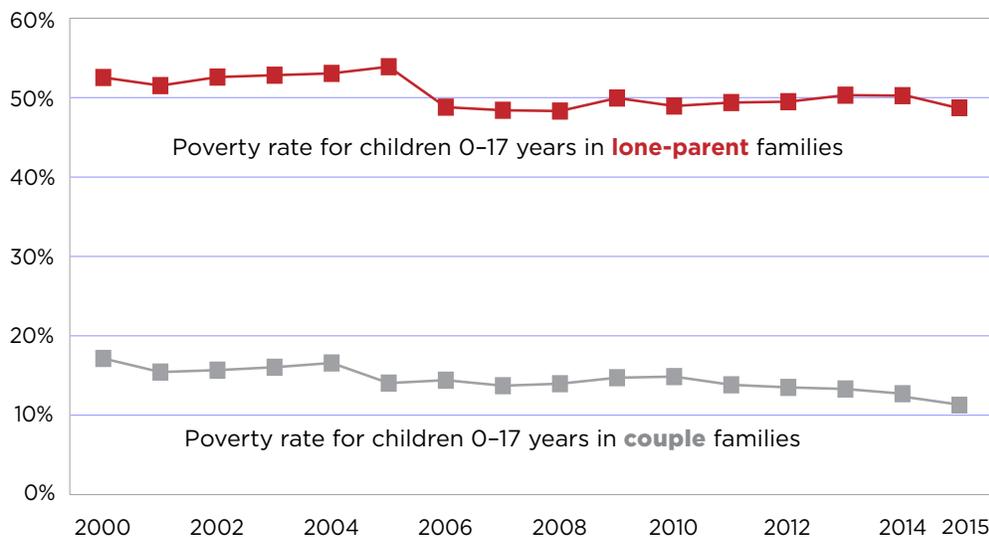
¹ BC Federation of Students, *Connecting the Dots, 2018 BC Budget Submission*. <http://www.wearebcstudents.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/GR-BC-Budget-2018-Submission-1.pdf>

BC Child Poverty by Family Type

CHILD POVERTY IN LONE-PARENT AND COUPLE FAMILIES

Children in lone-parent families in BC have consistently suffered much higher poverty rates than their counterparts in couple families. For the past sixteen years (2000–2015) approximately half of all children in lone-parent families in BC have lived in poverty. In 2015, the child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families (47.7%) was more than four times the rate (11.2%) for their counterparts in couple families.

BC Child Poverty Rate by Family Type, LIM After-Tax, British Columbia, 2000–2015



One in every two BC children of single parents were poor in 2015.

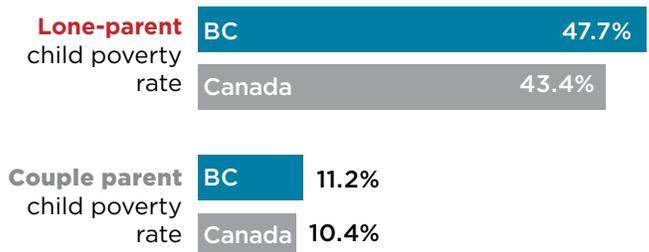


Source: Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0015.

For children in large (3+ children) lone-parent families in British Columbia in 2015, the situation was even worse: almost three in five children (59.4%) in large lone-parent families lived in poverty.

BC's child poverty rate did decrease between 2014 and 2015 for both children in couple families (from 12.4% in 2014 to 11.2% in 2015) and children in lone-parent families (from 50.3% in 2014 to 47.7% in 2015). Yet in 2015, BC's child poverty rates were still higher than Canada's for children in both these family types: for lone-parent families, 47.7% in BC vs. 43.4% in Canada, and for couple families, 11.2% in BC vs. 10.4% in Canada, as illustrated in the graph to the right.

Child Poverty Rates by Family Type, Canada and BC, LIM-AT, 2015



Source: Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0015.

The number of poor children in couple families in BC decreased by 7,010 between 2014 and 2015, while the number of poor children in lone-parent families decreased by 2,950. Nonetheless, British Columbia had far too many poor children in both couple families (75,540 poor children) and lone-parent families (77,770 poor children) in 2015.

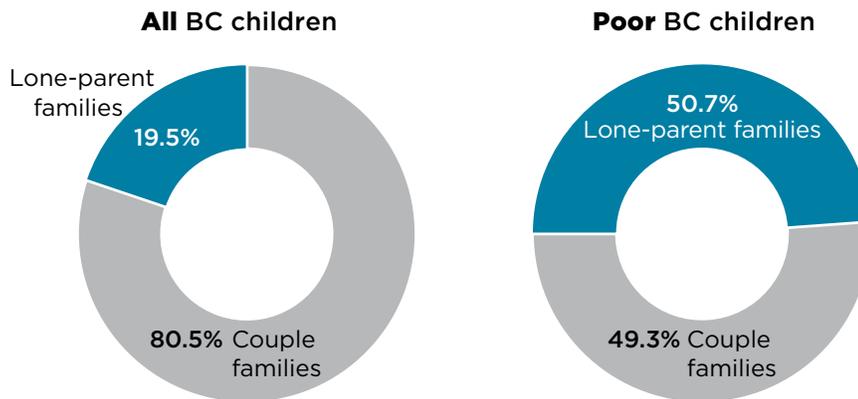
BC's child poverty rate of 11.2% for children in couple families was twice the rate for children in couple families in Yukon (5.6%). Additionally, the median income of poor couple families with children in BC was the lowest of all provinces and territories for this family type at only \$24,056 per year.

Lone-parent families had a median after-tax family income of \$40,100 in BC in 2015, less than half (43.9%) of the median after-tax family income of \$91,356 for couple families with children. Poor lone-parent families had a median after-tax family income of only \$17,710, less than one-fifth (19.4%) of the incomes of couple families with children.

PROPORTIONS OF BC CHILDREN IN DIFFERENT FAMILY TYPES

While one in five children (19.5%) in British Columbia were in lone-parent families in 2015, over half (50.7%) of all children living in poverty in BC were in lone-parent families, up from 49.4% in 2014. In fact, in 2015 the number of poor children in lone-parent families exceeded the number of poor children in two-parent families for the first time since 2005. This is despite the fact that children in lone-parent families make up a decreasing proportion of BC's child population—from 20.7% of all children in 2010 to 19.5% in 2015.

Proportion of BC Children 0-17 in Couple Families and Lone-Parent Families, 2015



Source: Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0015.

GENDER MAKES A DIFFERENCE

In BC in 2015, 80% of lone-parent families were female-led. These families' median annual income was \$39,440, just 66% of the male lone-parent median income of \$59,490.¹ For many lone mothers, the difficulty of finding affordable child care—so they can sustain employment—is one of the most common obstacles that leaves them raising their children in poverty.

¹ Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0011 (taxfiler data)





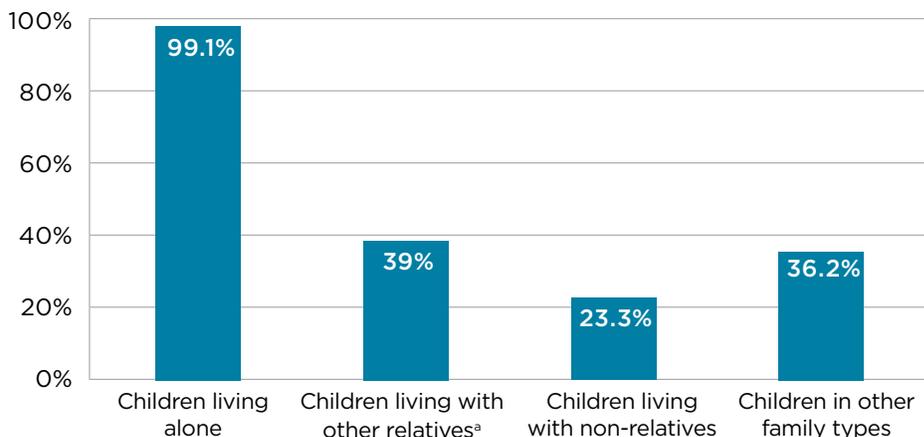
“Since raising our precious grandson we’ve faced considerable challenges, financial strain being one of them, but the joys far outweigh the struggles and we wouldn’t hesitate to do it all over again.”

CHILDREN LIVING IN OTHER FAMILY TYPES

According to the low-income data published in the 2016 Census, in 2015 there were 14,490 BC children 0-17 years old not living in census families, a category that includes children living with their grandparents or other relatives without their parents present, living with non-relatives, and those living in foster care. 5,245 of the children in these family types were living in poverty, for a poverty rate of 36.2%, or more than one in three. However, children living on First Nations reserves were not included in this count.

Within this family type in BC were 3,605 poor children living with relatives, including those in foster care, with a poverty rate of 39%. A second sub-group of 1,090 poor children were living with non-relatives, with a poverty rate of 23.3%. The third sub-group of 550 poor children were living alone, and their poverty rate was near total at 99.1%.

BC Child Poverty Rates for Children not Living in Census Families, LIM After-Tax, 2015



In 2015, the data showed 550 poor children living alone, and their poverty rate was near total at 99.1%

Note: ^a Includes foster children. Source: Statistics Canada - 2016 Census. Catalogue Number 98-400-X2016124.



Gloria's Story

Grandparents raising grandchildren face complicated bureaucracies — legal, financial and governmental — that are difficult and often expensive to navigate. With two different and complicated legal situations, an ongoing court process, and a challenging relationship with one of her daughters, Gloria needs an enormous amount of support.

INDIGENOUS GRANDMOTHER GLORIA BONNER faces an uphill battle as a grandparent raising two grandsons with special needs. Gloria has raised her two daughters' sons since they were little. Now 7 and 11, she is coping with diagnoses of mild autism and FASD between them, and raising the boys in poverty on her low welfare income.

Long waiting lists for her two grandsons are a fact of life for Gloria — a fierce advocate for her grandchildren. In order to secure a child care space, Gloria had to conceal their special needs or risk waiting out the early years on waiting lists.

Grandparents raising grandchildren face complicated bureaucracies — legal, financial and governmental — that are difficult and often expensive to navigate. With two different and complicated legal situations, an ongoing court process, and a challenging relationship with one of her daughters, she needs an enormous amount of support.

Securing enough food for the family every week and accessing public transit are some of the family's key challenges.

"Both the boys are growing fast, and when you are trying to manage the groceries — we do a lot of rationing. They might want more, but we have to save it to have some for later too," Gloria says.

Gloria and her grandsons access free meals at community based charities three nights a week to get by. Yet when it comes to transit, Vancouver lacks any discounts or supports for low income families or children to get out to community centres with swimming pools and visits to the doctor.

"We get bus passes in a good month, nothing other months." Unable to afford transit often, Gloria and her grandsons say they have to "hop it" to get to the library or the park.

"When we see security, we hop off."

Read this and other stories at stillin5.ca

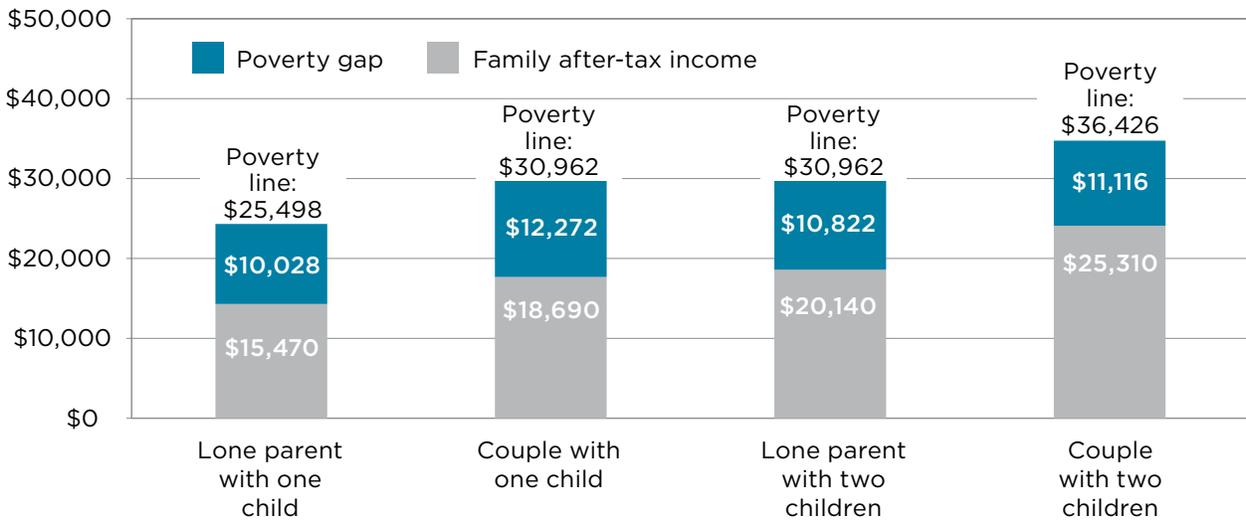
Depth of Family Poverty

In 2015, poor families in British Columbia struggled with deeply inadequate incomes. All the low-income family types profiled in the graph below had median annual incomes that were more than \$10,000 below their respective poverty lines:

- The median after-tax income of \$15,470 for poor lone-parent families with one child was \$10,028 below the LIM (Low Income Measure) after-tax line of \$25,498 for this family type.
- Poor couple families with one child had a median after-tax income of \$18,690, \$12,272 below the poverty line of \$30,962;
- Poor lone-parent families with two children had a median after-tax income of \$20,140, \$10,822 below the poverty line of \$30,962; and,
- Poor couple families with two children had a median after-tax income of \$25,310, \$11,116 below the poverty line of \$36,426.

Living at the poverty line is a challenge, but many poor families actually live far below the poverty line.

**Poverty Gap for Poor BC Families with Children
Based on Median After-Tax Income and LIM After Tax (Poverty Line), 2015**



Source: Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0015.

Median incomes are in the middle of the income range for these poor BC families, meaning half of them are living on even less than the income figures shown above and have poverty gaps well above \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year.



BL's Story

Larson says it took 12 years—8 years on her own and four with her first daughter—before she found a unit in BC Housing with rent tied to income. Yet aging BC Housing stock is impacting her ability to meet the basic needs of her family to stay warm and fed. “It’s cold, my son is cold, I want to have the heat up but I can’t. You shouldn’t have to turn your heat off just to make sure you can pay your bill.”

A FORMER YOUTH IN CARE WHO RAN AWAY AT AGE 13, B.L. Larson lived on her own from ages 15 to 18, working at McDonalds every day after school to support herself. In Grade 11, she had breast tumors removed and other serious health issues began to emerge including depression, early osteoporosis, and kidney disease.

Now, Larson is a single mother raising two children, 4 and 15, on disability assistance in a drafty BC Housing unit in Surrey. She knows all too well the challenges of low welfare rates, poor quality child care, and aging housing stock that drives up the energy bills. Too often she has had to approach welfare and ‘beg’ for an emergency food voucher to feed her family. “They [welfare staff] belittle me so terribly...I have nothing to fall back on. When unforeseen things happen, you are stuck. I had to beg and cry for two hours for a \$20 food voucher for my kids.”

Larson says it took 12 years—8 years on her own and four with her first daughter—before she found a unit in BC Housing with rent tied to income. Yet aging BC Housing stock is impacting her ability to meet the basic needs of her family to stay warm and fed.

“It’s cold, my son is cold, I want to have the heat up but I can’t. You shouldn’t have to turn your heat off just to make sure you can pay your bill.”

Larson is on the BC Hydro equal payment system, paying \$135 per month year round. From December to spring, it costs \$250 a month to heat her home. Just when she needs to keep her family warm, she turns the heat off to ensure her bills do not surpass the fixed monthly amount. “I keep the heat off as much as possible to balance my bill...my suite has windows, skylights and sliding doors, the cold air comes right in.”

Larson says the recent \$100 raise to welfare only amounts to \$10 a year, since the rates had not gone up in a decade. Raising the earnings exemption without a way for her to access a job that works for her unique situation is ‘pointless’. “My doctors said ‘no’ when I asked them if I could work. I can’t access the SPEI [Single Parent Employment Initiative], it is too much for me.”

Previously, Larson worked 4-8 hours a week at \$10 an hour, which brought in crucial extra income to feed her kids. Then, the company went out of business and she has not been able to find something to replace it ever since. Even if she could find suitable work, lack of quality, affordable child care is a huge barrier. “I can’t afford child care anyway, so what is the point?”

Read this and other stories at stillin5.ca

IMPACT OF LIVING IN DEEP POVERTY: HOMELESSNESS

The 2017 homelessness count in Metro Vancouver tallied 386 homeless children and youth under 25 years, 52% of them (201 children) under the age of 19. Children accompanied by their parents accounted for 119 (59%) of the under-19-year-olds, leaving 82 children or youth who were unaccompanied homeless. The report divides respondents into sheltered and unsheltered, and 157 children and youth under 25 years were unsheltered.¹

For the first time, the count asked people if they are or have in the past been “in Ministry care” and found that 21% of respondents reported this experience. One hundred under-25-year-olds (41% of this age group) reported having been in care, including 18 youth in the current care of the ministry.

IMPACT OF LIVING IN DEEP POVERTY: FOOD INSECURITY

Unfortunately, in 2013 and 2014, the Household Food Security Survey Module was optional on Statistics Canada’s annual Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), and BC chose not to include the measurement of food insecurity for their populations.² However the data from the 2011-12 survey indicates that many thousands of children in BC are going hungry.

In 2011-12, data from the CCHS showed nearly one in 6 (15.6%) or 135,000 children 0-17 in BC were living in food insecure households, representing 28% of food insecure people in the province. In all of the health authorities, households with children had higher rates of food insecurity compared to those without. Female lone-parent families with children under 18 had the highest rate of food insecurity by family type at 34.2%. Male lone-parent families with children under 18 had a food insecurity rate of 17.1%, and couple families with children had a rate of 11.4%. The rate for Aboriginal families with or without children was 29.4%.³

The CCHS report also stated: “About three quarters (76.0%) of households whose main source of income is social assistance are food insecure; however, working households comprise the majority of the food insecure households in BC (65.0%).”

A Dietitians of Canada report pointed out that households with a greater risk of food insecurity included “households living in market rental accommodation (up to double the risk of household food insecurity, compared to subsidized rental housing); household food insecurity among renters was four times greater than among homeowners (26.1% versus 6.4%).⁴

The evidence in these reports of the impacts of hunger and food insecurity on the physical and mental health of children and their parents calls out for government action. Acting on the recommendations in this report would go a long way toward addressing the root causes of the growing levels of hunger and insecure housing in our very wealthy province and country.

1 B.C. Non-Profit Housing Association and M. Thomson Consulting. (2017). 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver.

Prepared for the Metro Vancouver Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Entity. Burnaby, BC: Metro Vancouver.

2 Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2016). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014*. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <http://proof.utoronto.ca>

3 Provincial Health Services Authority and Proof Food Insecurity Policy Research, *Priority health equity indicators for British Columbia: Household food insecurity report*. (Aug 2016). http://www.phsa.ca/population-public-health-site/Documents/Household%20food%20insecurity%20in%20BC_full%20report.pdf

4 Dietitians of Canada. *Addressing Household Food Insecurity in Canada: Position Statement and Recommendations*. (2016) Executive Summary, p. 3.

Child Poverty and Working Parents

MINIMUM WAGES NOT ENOUGH FOR FAMILIES RAISING CHILDREN

Parents relying on minimum wage incomes to support their families have a difficult time in British Columbia. In 2015, a single parent with one child working full-time for the whole year for minimum wage would have only earned \$18,761 in employment income, leaving them \$10,111 below the \$28,872 LIM before-tax poverty line for this family type and size. A two-parent family with two children with both parents working full-time for the whole year for minimum wage would have only earned \$37,522 in employment income, leaving them \$3,724 below the \$41,246 LIM before-tax poverty line for this family type and size.

While the BC government has raised the minimum wage since 2015 by 50 cents to \$11.35, what is needed is a minimum wage of at least \$15 an hour.

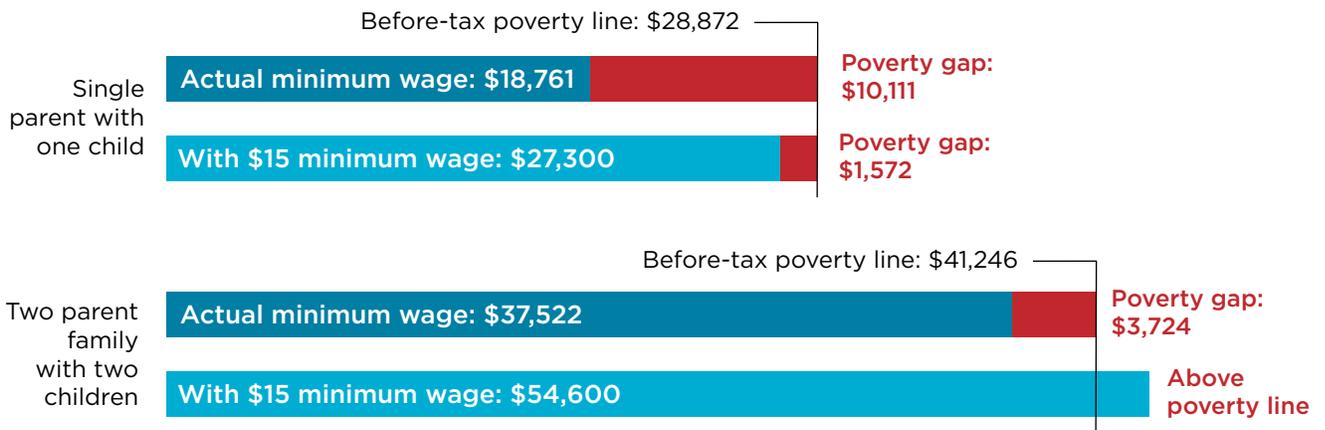
A \$15-an-hour minimum wage would have made a huge difference for these families. If the minimum wage had been \$15 an hour in 2015 in BC, that single parent with one child working full-time, full-year for minimum wage would have earned \$27,300 in employment income, only \$1,572 below the poverty line instead of \$10,111 below the line. That two-parent family with two children with both parents working full-time, full-year for a \$15 an hour minimum wage would have earned \$54,600 in employment income, putting them \$13,354 above the poverty line, instead of \$3,724 below the line.



A single parent working full time, full year for minimum wage in 2015 earned only **\$18,761**.



Before-Tax Employment Incomes for Different Family Sizes and Minimum Wage Levels, Full-Time, Full-Year Work at Minimum Wage, Compared with LIM Before Tax, BC, 2015



Source: 2016 minimum wage based on Service Canada, Minimum Wage Database.

WORKING POOR INC.

IMAGINE: If all 188,870 workers in BC considered “working poor” (LIM After Tax) worked for one corporation. It would be the biggest employer in British Columbia, with almost four times the number of employees for HQ2 that Amazon plans to build (up to 50,000 workers).



British Columbia’s minimum wage rose from \$10.25 an hour to \$10.45 an hour on September 15, 2015, to \$10.85 an hour on September 15, 2016, and then to \$11.35 an hour on September 15, 2017. However, this is still short of the \$15 an hour that will be implemented in Alberta by October 2018 and proposed by Ontario for implementation by January 2019.

The BC NDP made an election promise to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2021 and government has since appointed a Fair Wage Commission to make recommendations “for a pathway forward to raise the minimum wage to \$15-an-hour and on a process for how the minimum wage should be regularly reviewed and increased once \$15-an-hour is achieved.” For the working poor, struggling to raise children on minimum wages, this increase can’t come soon enough.

LIVING WAGES

Although a \$15 an hour minimum wage would greatly improve the lives of BC’s working poor, it would still be a struggle for families earning this wage to meet their basic living expenses. This is why First Call hosts the Living Wage for Families Campaign to raise awareness about the negative impact of low-wage poverty on families and communities.

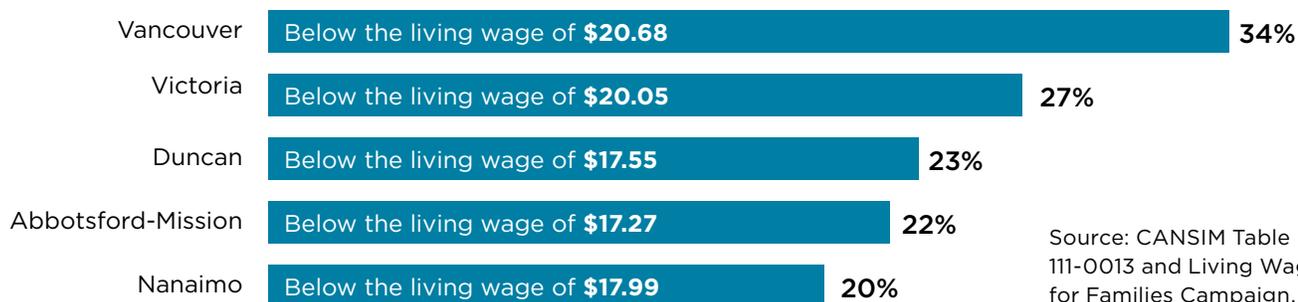
When employers pay a living wage, they are contributing to a key solution to the problem of child and family poverty. The living wage is well above the poverty line, but still only provides a bare-bones budget without room for savings or paying off debt. It is recalculated annually to take into account family expenses.

Living wage calculations are based on the annual budget a two-parent, two-child family would need to meet their basic needs (food, clothing, child care, shelter, transportation, health care, etc.).

When employers pay a living wage, they are contributing to a key solution to the problem of child and family poverty. The living wage is well above the poverty line, but still only provides a bare-bones budget without room for savings or paying off debt. It is recalculated annually to take into account family expenses.

As shown in the graph below, in 2015 significant proportions of two-parent families with children were earning less than the 2015 regional living wage in these five communities.

Percentage of Couple Families with Children with Total Incomes Below Regional Living Wages, 2015



Source: CANSIM Table 111-0013 and Living Wage for Families Campaign.

Dozens of municipalities, non-profit organizations and companies in British Columbia have become certified Living Wage Employers. For up-to-date living wage calculations for BC communities and a list of living wage employers in the province, visit the Living Wage for Families campaign website at www.livingwageforfamilies.ca.

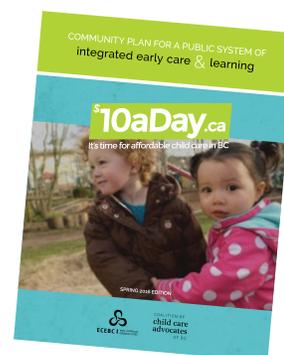
BC'S CHILD CARE CRISIS — SOLUTION ON THE HORIZON?

Access for families to a public system of affordable, high-quality child care is key to an effective poverty reduction strategy. BC families face a crisis in accessing quality, affordable child care:

- Fees are too high—BC has the second-highest child care fees in Canada.
- Wait lists are too long, with a regulated space for less than 20% of children.
- Too often, families are forced into unregulated care, with no safety standards.
- Lack of affordable, accessible child care keeps women out of the work force.
- The median wage for early childhood educators in BC is 19% lower than BC workers overall, making staff recruitment and retention difficult.¹

BC's new government has pledged to implement a universal child care plan. First Call supports the \$10aDay Child Care Plan which would cost families \$10 a day for a full-time program, \$7 a day for part-time, and no user fee for families with annual incomes under \$40,000. Learn more and endorse the plan at www.10aday.ca.

1 <http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/BC-Select-Standing-Committee-2017-FINAL.pdf>



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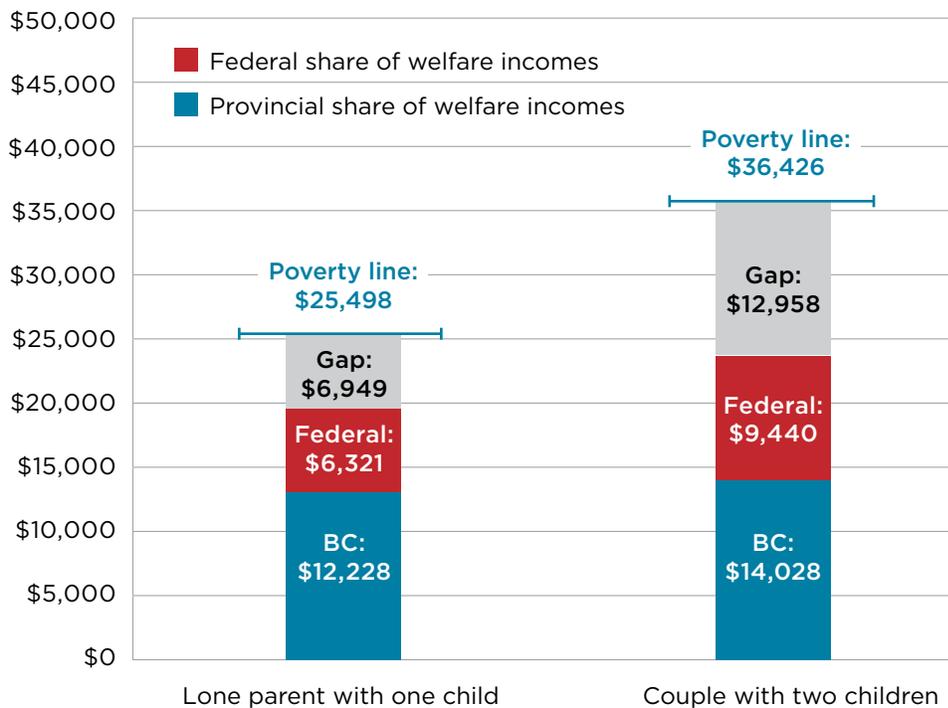
Children in Families on Welfare

WELFARE BENEFITS FALL WELL SHORT OF POVERTY LINES

With welfare incomes well below the poverty line, it is a major struggle for families in British Columbia to meet their basic needs. Welfare benefits and government transfers from the federal and provincial governments provided just \$18,549 in total income for a lone parent with one child in BC in 2015, which was only 73% of the \$25,498 LIM (Low Income Measure) after-tax poverty line for this family type. This family's total welfare income left them \$6,949 below the poverty line.

For a couple with two children on welfare in 2015, their total income was \$23,468, just 64% of the poverty line income of \$36,426, leaving a poverty gap of \$12,958.

Federal and Provincial Shares of Welfare Incomes and Poverty Gaps by Family Type in BC, 2015



For a couple with two children on welfare in 2015, their total income was \$23,468, just 64% of the poverty line income of \$36,426, leaving a poverty gap of \$12,958.

Source: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Welfare in Canada, 2015. LIM after-tax poverty lines from Statistics Canada.

Welfare benefits are not indexed or increased automatically with the cost of living, so benefits have lost value over time. Over the long-term from 1989 to 2015, after adjusting for inflation, welfare incomes in BC for lone-parent families with one child were still \$33 per year below what they were 26 years ago. For couple families the loss since 1989 was \$806 per year. There was also a dramatic shift over these



What gets cut when there is not enough?



A family of four on welfare has to get by on only \$23,468 a year.

26 years in the proportionate shares of welfare incomes contributed by the federal and provincial governments. The federal share of welfare incomes tripled, while the provincial share declined dramatically.

Punitively low welfare incomes made life difficult for the average 33,482 children in BC families on welfare in 2015. Welfare was often the only option for these families, 84% of which were led by lone parents. Over two-thirds of these parents or caregivers were on welfare temporarily or permanently exempted from work expectations due to disabilities, persistent multiple barriers, medical conditions and other temporary exemptions. Welfare recipients living below the poverty line are frequently forced to rely on food banks and other sources of charity to feed and clothe their children.

WELFARE POLICY REFORMS AND FAMILY INCOME CHANGES BEGINNING IN 2015

While provincial welfare rates did not increase in 2015, the introduction of the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit in April 2015, along with an increase in the federal child benefit, and the exemption of these benefits from clawback, meant that for the first time since 2009 the buying power of the total welfare income for lone-parent families with one child under 6 years actually increased by \$1,082 per year (adjusted for inflation) between 2014 and 2015. Couple families on welfare with two children over 6 years old also saw their total income increase between 2014 and 2015 by \$1,303 per year (inflation adjusted), due to the increase in the federal child benefit rate. This trend should continue when the impact of the new, more generous Canada Child Benefit (CCB) shows up in the 2016 income statistics. First Call and Campaign 2000 were happy to hear the federal government is now committed to indexing the CCB to inflation in 2018, rather than waiting until 2020.

In September 2015, after a long community-led advocacy campaign, the BC government stopped clawing back child support payments from families on welfare. This doesn't show up in the 2015 statistics based on benefit rates and other government transfers, but we know this one policy change immediately reduced the depth of poverty for over 5,400 children. Another 50 to 100 children benefited in fall 2015 from the elimination of the clawback of

the Canada Pension Plan orphan's benefit from widowed welfare recipients when their disabled partners died. However, parents are still fighting to stop the clawback of the CPP survivor's benefit for spouses.

September 2015 was also the month the new Single Parent Employment Initiative (SPEI) was implemented. This initiative allows single parents to continue to receive income and disability assistance benefits for a year while they attend an approved education or training program. Their tuition and school-related transportation costs can be paid for while they are in the SPEI. Importantly, child care costs can also be covered for a year while they are in school, and for a second year if they transition into work. Single parents on welfare are now also allowed to keep bursaries and grants related to education costs.

Two more clawbacks from welfare benefits were eliminated in 2016, allowing families to keep the Workers' Compensation orphan's benefit and, very significantly, Employment Insurance maternity and parental leave benefits earned by women with spouses on disability benefits.

There have been a number of other positive policy changes including an increase in earnings exemptions for families with children and allowing these families to retain health supplements (dental, optical and premium-free Ministry of Health Medical Services Plan and PharmaCare programs) for up to 12 months after leaving assistance for employment.

Effective October 1, 2017, the new provincial government finally increased the basic benefit rate for all welfare recipients by \$100 per month. Rates had been frozen for 10 years. While this is a good first step in reducing the depth of poverty for people on welfare, First Call is calling for major increases in welfare rates for all recipients, and the annual indexing of the rates based on increases in the cost of living.

The introduction of the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit and increases to federal child benefits show the power of public policy to reduce the depth of poverty for families on welfare, as long as they are allowed to keep these payments.



Sabrina and Shawn's Story

“It is a scramble to try to get anywhere,” says her husband, Shawn. “There is so much around that is out of reach — community centres, the PNE, Grouse Mountain — but we can’t afford the bus rides after food, paying rent, paying the bills.”

MARRIED COUPLE SABRINA AND SHAWN MOREAU are raising their three children in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside neighbourhood on a fixed welfare income. They speak passionately of the benefits to their family of being able to travel around their city, if only they could. Instead, they struggle to glimpse horizons beyond the busy streets of the Downtown Eastside.

“I can only access what we can walk to,” Sabrina says, “we really don’t travel on transit — we have to walk everywhere.” She says they would have to take the bus to access the swimming pool or the skating rink, so they rarely do; the walks are too long with their young elementary school aged children and new baby girl. The fresh air and lush green of Stanley Park is frustratingly out of reach.

“If we had access to public transit for the whole family, we’d go to cool events in Stanley Park, or out in Surrey, you hear about these free events for families,” she says.

“It is a scramble to try to get anywhere,” says her husband, Shawn. “There is so much around that is out of reach — community centres, the PNE, Grouse Mountain — but we can’t afford the bus rides after food, paying rent, paying the bills.” They know how much their kids lose out. If they access transit, though, the kids would have less to eat, and there is already scarcity in the kitchen.

Accessing health care for the whole family is also a major struggle due to their mobility crisis. They are currently searching for a family clinic within walking distance that can take them all. They find little room for families, however, as local supports respond to the addictions crisis in their neighbourhood.

Read this and other stories at stillin5.ca

Child Poverty Across BC

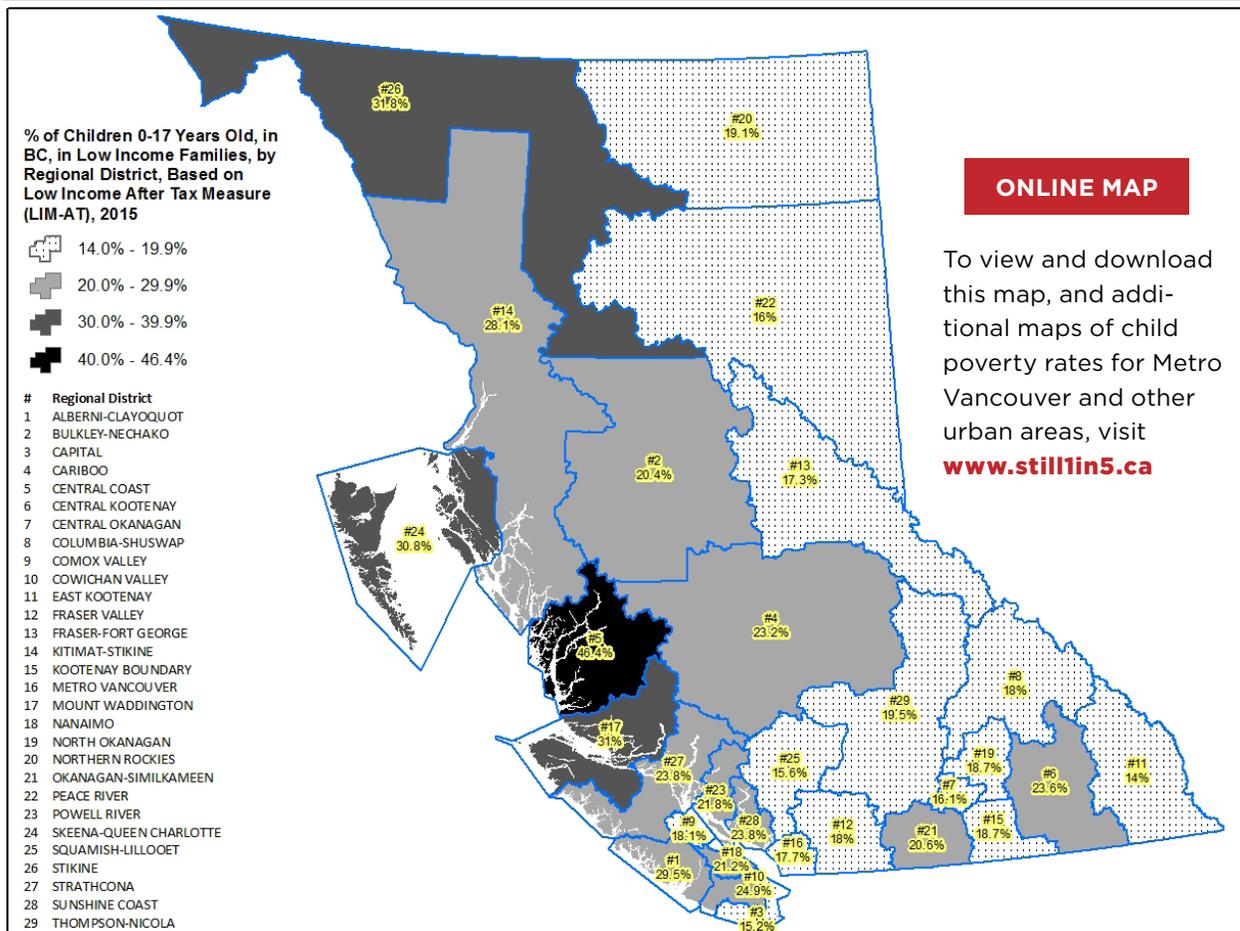
CHILD POVERTY BY REGIONAL DISTRICT

Child poverty remained a serious problem throughout British Columbia in 2015. Child poverty was most severe in the coastal regional districts, with almost one in two children (46.4%) in the Central Coast Regional District living in poverty based on LIM (Low Income Measure) After Tax. The Stikine (31.8% child poverty rate), Mount Waddington (31.0%) and Skeena-Queen Charlotte (30.8%) Regional Districts all had at least three in ten children living in poverty in 2015.

23 out of the 29 regional districts in BC had at least 1,000 children living in poverty.

Even in the regional districts with the lowest child poverty rates, at least one in seven children lived in poverty in 2015. The regional districts with the lowest child poverty rates were the East Kootenay Regional District (14%), followed by the Capital (15.2%) and the Squamish-Lillooet (15.6%) Regional Districts.

% of Children 0-17 Years Old in British Columbia in Low Income Families, by Regional District, Based on Low Income After Tax Measure (LIM-AT), 2015



Source Data: Statistics Canada
Table F-18 Family data - After tax low income status (based on census family low income measures, LIMs) by family type and family composition, 2015

URBAN AREAS: CENSUS METROPOLITAN AREAS (CMA) AND CENSUS AGGLOMERATIONS (CA)

Approximately 85% of the poor children in BC live in the 25 urban areas. Child poverty was a reality in all of British Columbia's urban areas in 2015. Every urban area in the province had at least 500 poor children (based on LIM After Tax) in 2015. The only exception was Dawson Creek CA, which had 460 poor children. Many urban areas had at least 1,000 poor children.

Child poverty rates were especially severe in some of the coastal urban areas, with almost three in ten children living in poverty in the Port Alberni CA (28.5%), Duncan CA (28.4%) and Prince Rupert CA (27.3%). There were only three urban areas where fewer than 15% of children lived in poverty: Fort St. John CA (12%), Squamish CA (13.2%) and Victoria CMA (14.8%).

With a child poverty rate of 23.3% for children living outside of urban areas (compared with 18.3% for BC as a whole), things were especially tough for children in rural areas.

Metro Vancouver Census Tracts

Child poverty was prevalent in every municipality in Metro Vancouver in 2015. In fact, every medium or larger sized Metro Vancouver municipality (population of 10,000 or more) except for Langley Township, Port Moody and Pitt Meadows, had at least one census tract where at least one in five children lived in poverty.

There were many clusters of census tracts with high child poverty rates around Metro Vancouver, notably around Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, along the Kingsway Corridor in Burnaby, in Central Richmond and in North Surrey. In three Metro Vancouver census tracts, more than half of all children lived in poverty in 2015:

- Downtown Eastside, Vancouver - 73.5% child poverty rate
- Austin Heights, Coquitlam - 55.2%; and,
- Chinatown, Vancouver - 54.5%.

Another six Metro Vancouver census tracts had between 40% and 50% of children living in poverty and 38 tracts had rates between 30% and 40%.

Victoria Census Metropolitan Area Census Tracts

Despite having one of the lowest child poverty rates (14.8%) of any urban area in BC in 2015, child poverty was still a problem across many Victoria CMA census tracts, and especially concentrated in City of Victoria census tracts. The northern part of the City of Victoria had a child poverty rate of 42.6%, the highest rate in the Victoria CMA. Two other census tracts had rates between 30% and 40%.

Approximately 85% of the poor children in BC live in the 25 urban areas. However children living outside urban areas had a 23.3% poverty rate, higher than the provincial child poverty rate of 18.3%



ONLINE MAP

To view and download maps of child poverty rates in BC urban areas, visit www.stillin5.ca

Metro Vancouver was home to 76,880 poor children in 2015, representing 50% of the poor children in BC.



Surrey, BC / PHOTO ROBERT LINDELL

ONLINE MAP

To view and download maps of child poverty rates in BC urban areas, visit www.stillin5.ca

Abbotsford-Mission Census Metropolitan Area Census Tracts

Although child poverty was prevalent across almost all of the Abbotsford-Mission CMA in 2015, it was especially concentrated in a swath of census tracts stretching along South Fraser Way from West Abbotsford to Central Abbotsford. Two census tracts had child poverty rates between 30% and 40%. West Abbotsford, with a child poverty rate of 36.8%, had the highest rate in the Abbotsford-Mission CMA.

Kelowna Census Metropolitan Area Census Tracts

As with other urban areas, child poverty was widespread across the Kelowna CMA in 2015. There was a large concentration of census tracts with at least one in five children living in poverty stretching from Downtown Kelowna to Rutland. The Kelowna CMA had three census tracts with child poverty rates between 30% and 40%. West Kelowna had the highest rate in the Kelowna CMA: 35.3%.

Chilliwack Census Agglomeration Census Tracts

The Chilliwack CA had four census tracts with 50% or more of all children living in poverty in 2015, two with child poverty rates between 40% and 50% and one with a rate between 30% and 40%. Downtown Chilliwack and its surrounding census tracts had very high child poverty rates, but the rate for the Soowahlie 14 First Nations Reserve was a shocking 80%, a reminder of the crushing poverty faced by many Indigenous families in BC and across Canada.

Kamloops Census Agglomeration Census Tracts

In 2015 there was a definite divide in the child poverty rates between the more affluent and poorer parts of town within the Kamloops CA. While the South Shore (with the exception of Downtown) had relatively lower child poverty rates, the North Shore had a concentration of high child poverty rate census tracts. One census tract had a child poverty rate between 40% and 50% and another three had rates between 30% and 40%. The Kamloops's North Shore census tract had the highest child poverty rate at 40%.

Prince George Census Agglomeration Census Tracts

Child poverty in the Prince George CA was concentrated near Downtown Prince George in 2015. One census tract had child poverty rate between 50% and 60%, a second had between 40% and 50% of children living in poverty, and a third between 30% and 40%. Census tract 8.00 just south of Downtown had a child poverty rate of 56%, the highest rate within the Prince George CA.

Nanaimo Census Agglomeration Census Tracts

In 2015 at least one in ten children lived in poverty in every Nanaimo CA census tract. One census tract had a child poverty rate of between 40% and 50%, while three census tracts had child poverty rates between 30% and 40%. All four of these census tracts were in and around Nanaimo's Downtown. Nanaimo's Downtown census tract had the highest child poverty rate at 40.7%.



Lynda's Story

Lynda would like to go back to school, but the cost of child care is discouraging. The Single Parent Employment Initiative for welfare recipients leaves couples out.

“I HAVE FACED LOW INCOME MY WHOLE LIFE,” says Lynda Nickerson, who lives in Nanaimo BC with her husband and four children, ages 3 1/2, 6, 16, and 18. Raising her family on her disability assistance (PWD), they struggle to make ends meet.

“The impact of low income and the lack of supports for mental health are the big problems,” she says. Lack of quality affordable housing in Nanaimo, child care struggles and minimal extended drug coverage are key issues facing her family right now.

“After covering our basic needs—that is what is left for my medications that aren’t covered or approved. I needed a sleeping aid recently, but they told me it wasn’t approved...so forget it.”

Lynda would like to be able to work, but with her depression and anxiety there are many days an eight hour shift would be impossible.

Effective September 1st, 2017, the province raised the earnings exemption for people on disability assistance. A family with two adults with one person on PWD can now make \$14,000 per year. Lynda would like to go back to school, but the cost of child care is discouraging. The Single Parent Employment Initiative for welfare recipients leaves couples out.

The family is being renocted from their current affordable rental at \$1,350, and must move by the end of the month. Listings in their unit size are topping \$1,850—a monthly price tag impossible on their income.

“There is deep discrimination against families,” Nickerson says, “an agent told me they would rather rent to someone with 20 cats than to someone with four kids.” Renting lodgings that leak heat and need to be retrofitted, much of their income goes into a \$130/month hydro bill, plus another \$130 for gas.

In fall 2017, Nanaimo made public transit free for up to two children under 14 accompanying an adult pass-holder—welcome relief for the family. However kids have to travel with a parent and there is no discount for low income adults.

With the BC Housing waiting list very long and faced with rents they cannot afford, they have no idea where they can afford to live at the end of the month.

Read this and other stories at stillin5.ca

Growing Income Inequality

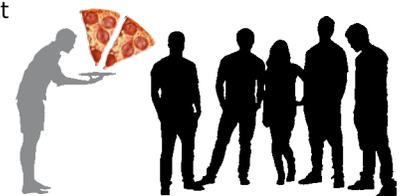
In the past 26 years, income inequality in Canada has increased dramatically. The richest group of Canadians has increased its share of total national income, while the poorest and middle-income groups have been losing ground. International studies have shown that high rates of income inequality negatively impact both the rich and the poor on a range of health and wellness measures.

In 2015, in British Columbia, the richest 10% of families with children received 24% of the total income of all families with children. This is nearly two and a half times what their share would be in a province with income equality. The richest half of BC families collected 73% of the total income of families, while the other 50% of families made do with only 27% of the income pie. The poorest 10% of families shared only 2% of the total income collected by all families.

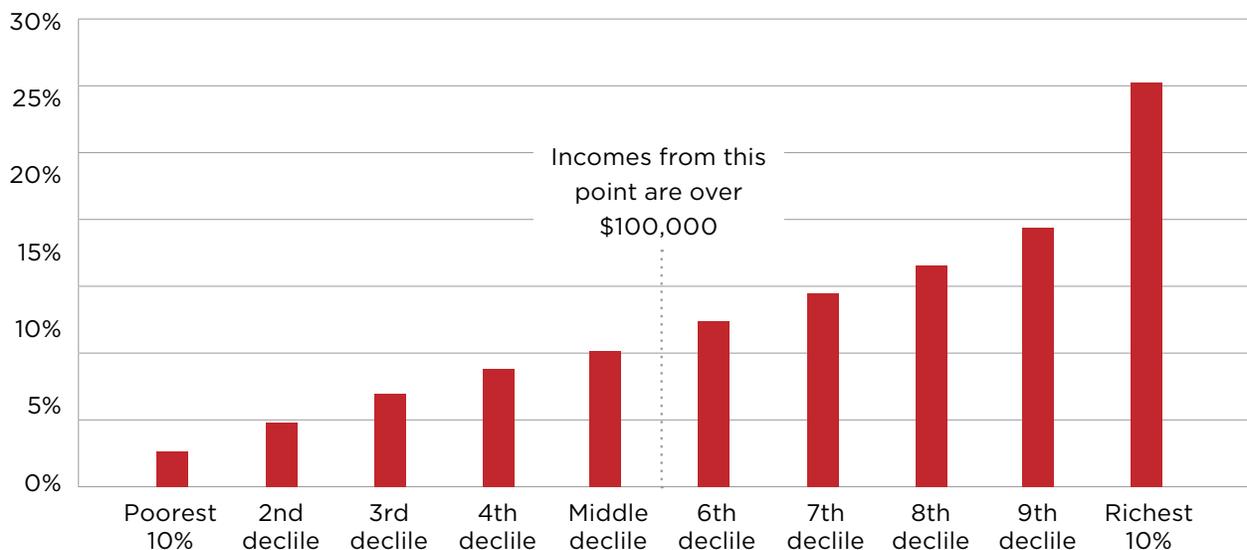
The graph below, using data from Statistics Canada prepared for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, illustrates the total income shares by decile of BC families with children. Total income refers to all income before taxes, including wages and salaries, and earnings from self-employment and investments. It also includes government benefits from the federal and provincial governments such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit, GST credits, Employment Insurance, and welfare payments.



The richest 10% of BC families with children received 24% of the total income, while the poorest half of families shared 27%.



Percentage of Total Income Among BC Families with Children, 2015



Source: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives based on Statistics Canada data.

INCOME INEQUALITY GROWTH OVER TIME

Growing income inequality is mainly driven by the growth in the income of the richest families. After adjusting for inflation, the income of BC's richest 10% of families with children increased by 56% between 1989 and 2015, while income for the poorest 10% of families increased by only 25%.

The table below shows how total income has changed for each of the deciles (10% groups) between 1989 and 2015. Families in the richest decile gained \$101,425 in annual income between 1989 and 2015, while families in the poorest decile gained only an additional \$4,984 in annual income. The income gain of the richest 10% of families between 1989 and 2015 is nearly double the income gain of the next richest decile of families.

Changes in Average Total Incomes by Decile Group, Families with Children in BC, in Constant 2015 Dollars

Decile	1989	2015	Gain in annual income	Rate of income growth
Decile 1: Poorest	\$19,800	\$24,799	\$4,894	25%
Decile 2: Second poorest	\$39,071	\$39,071	\$7,168	18%
Decile 3	\$55,447	\$65,772	\$10,324	18%
Decile 4	\$67,148	\$81,842	\$14,694	22%
Decile 5	\$76,827	\$96,318	\$19,490	25%
Decile 6	\$86,362	\$114,931	\$28,570	33%
Decile 7	\$97,995	\$132,932	\$35,937	37%
Decile 8	\$111,237	\$154,750	\$43,513	39%
Decile 9: Second richest	\$127,880	\$181,601	\$53,721	42%
Decile 10: Richest	\$182,202	\$283,627	\$101,425	56%
Average for families with children	\$86,408	\$118,381	\$31,974	37%

Source: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives based on Statistics Canada data.

Of the Canadian provinces, British Columbia has the third largest disparity between its richest and poorest families, behind Ontario and Saskatchewan. The richest 10% of BC families collect 11 times as much income as the poorest 10% BC families. Quebec is the province with the least disparity between its richest and poorest families.



Importance of Government Help: Public Policy Matters

62,070 BC children were kept out of poverty in 2015 thanks to government help.



Almost **two million** Canadian children would have been poor using family market income alone. With federal and provincial transfers, the number of poor children was lowered to **1,242,530**.

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS REDUCE CHILD POVERTY IN CANADA

Federal and provincial government income support programs play a huge role in reducing child poverty in Canada. If parents had been forced to rely only on earnings, income from investments and other sources of market income to make ends meet, the child poverty rate in Canada would have been 27.9% in 2015, based on the LIM (Low Income Measure) After Tax. Government transfers reduced the child poverty rate to 17.4%.

Nearly two million Canadian children (1,987,570) would have been poor using family market income alone. With federal and provincial transfers, the number of poor children was lowered by 37% to 1,242,530, keeping 745,040 children out of poverty.

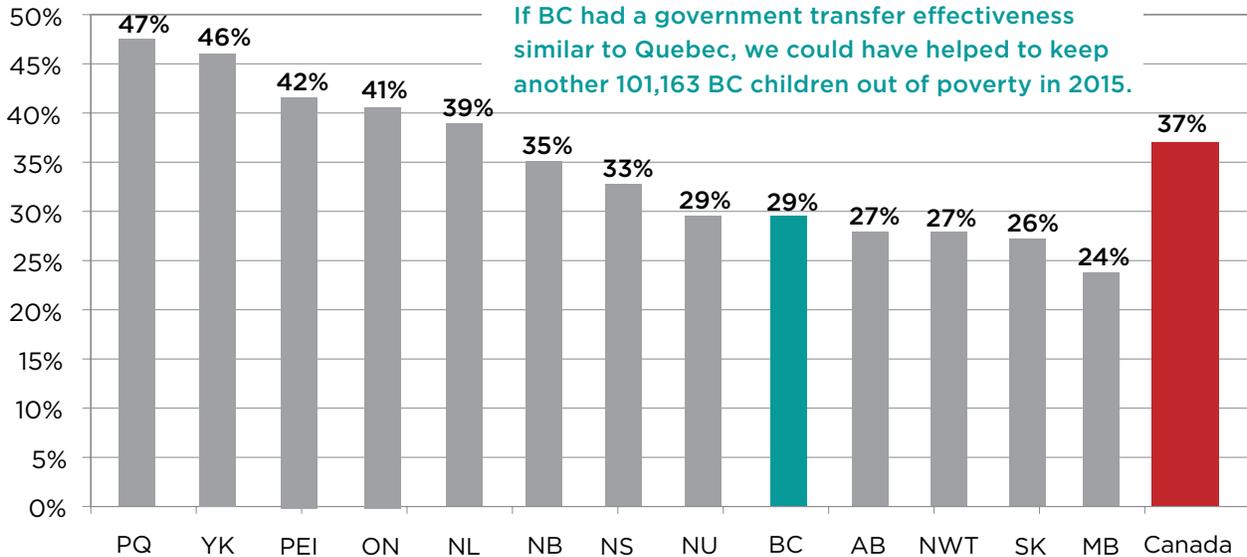
GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS REDUCE CHILD POVERTY IN BC

Without government transfers, using only family market income, British Columbia's child poverty rate was 25.8% in 2015. It came down to 18.3% after government transfers. A total of 215,370 BC children were poor using market income alone. Once transfers were added to family income the number of poor children was reduced by 29% to 153,300, meaning 62,070 BC children were kept out of poverty that year thanks to government help.

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS BY PROVINCE — HOW DOES BC COMPARE?

The graph on the following page shows the percentage of children kept out of poverty by government transfers in 2015 in Canada and individual provinces and territories. Quebec and the Yukon Territory kept the largest percentages of children out of poverty at 47% and 46% respectively. BC's government transfers were less effective than most provinces or territories at reducing child poverty, keeping 29% of children out of poverty, below the Canadian average of 37%. If BC had a government transfer effectiveness similar to Quebec, we could have helped to keep another 101,163 BC children out of poverty in 2015.

Percentage Reduction in Child Poverty Rates in 2014 Due to Government Transfer Payments



Source: Statistics Canada custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2014

BC'S PROVINCIAL EARLY CHILDHOOD TAX BENEFIT

The BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit (BCECTB) was implemented in April 2015. The BCECTB offers a maximum of \$55 per month per child under age six, or \$660 per year. The benefit is reduced if the family's net income exceeds \$100,000 and will be zero once the family's net income exceeds \$150,000.

As the chart shows, seven other provinces offer a provincial child benefit that lasts up to the child's 18th birthday, making a bigger lifetime investment in each child. Quebec's, Ontario's and Alberta's child benefits are all larger than BC's annual amount and are indexed to inflation. Ontario's is more than double and Quebec's more than triple the BC benefit amount.

COMPARISON OF PROVINCIAL CHILD BENEFITS

Province	Child's age	Annual benefit amount (max.) (one child)	Lifetime investment (one child)	Benefit indexed?
PQ	0-18	\$2,392	\$43,056	Y
ON	0-18	\$1,378	\$24,804	Y
AB	0-18	\$1,100	\$19,800	Y
NS	0-18	\$625	\$11,250	N
MB	0-18	\$420	\$7,560	N
NL	0-18	\$377	\$6,786	N
NB	0-18	\$250	\$4,500	N
BC	0-6	\$660	\$3,960	N

First Call recommends that the provincial government redesign the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit into a BC Child Benefit covering children up to age 18 and double the maximum benefit amount.

HOW GOVERNMENT HELPS

The federal government claims it has already lifted **300,000** children out of poverty in 2017.



Both federal and provincial governments have programs that reduce child poverty. One of the most powerful programs is the new Canada Child Benefit (CCB) which was implemented by the federal government in July 2016. It pays a maximum annual benefit of \$6,400 per child under 6 and \$5,400 for older children. The federal government claims it has already lifted 300,000 children out of poverty in 2017. In response to advocacy from Campaign 2000 and First Call, among others, government has promised to index the benefit starting in 2018, two years earlier than planned.

- The federal government also pays a quarterly GST credit to low-income families and individuals. Ottawa administers the Employment Insurance (EI) fund to assist Canadians who are temporarily out of work and to pay maternity and parental leave benefits. However, a declining proportion of the unemployed are eligible for EI. Additionally, the 55% benefit rate leaves lower-wage workers below the poverty line and means they have to return to work early from their allowed parental leave.
- The federal and provincial governments also provide a refundable Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) for eligible families who are in the workforce. The 2016 upper-income threshold for this benefit for a family of any size with children in BC is \$29,186 per year.
- The BC government provides welfare payments for people who have exhausted other sources of income. Part of the cost of welfare is covered by the federal government through the Canada Social Transfer (CST). The CST is a government-to-government transfer designed to defray the costs to provinces of welfare and social services, early childhood development and early learning and child care, and post-secondary education. In 2017-18, BC is expected to receive \$1.8 billion under the Canada Social Transfer.



Recommendations: What Needs to Happen

THE DATA AND STORIES IN THIS REPORT document the scope of growing income inequality in British Columbia and the resulting continued high levels of poverty. They also illuminate the causes of child, youth and family poverty and the policy solutions that are available to us to address these root causes.

Since the publication of last year's report card, both the federal and BC governments have now committed to developing poverty reduction strategies. In this context, we offer the following recommendations as concrete steps that federal, provincial and local governments can take to reduce income inequality and reduce child, youth and family poverty.

FIRST CALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The First Call Coalition recommends that the provincial government adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines. We recommend the plan contain a goal to reduce BC's child poverty rate to 7% or lower by 2020.

Recognizing that children of recent immigrants and refugees, Indigenous children, children of female lone-parent families, children in racialized families, children affected by disabilities, youth transitioning out of government care, and LGBTTQ youth are at greater risk of living in poverty, efforts should also be targeted to achieve major reductions in poverty levels for these populations.

There are many actions that federal, provincial and local governments can take to achieve this poverty reduction goal:

- P** The provincial government should raise the **minimum wage** to \$15 per hour and index it annually to the cost of living. All workers in BC should be covered by this minimum wage.
- F P L** Governments at all levels should ensure their direct and contract employees are paid a **living wage** that allows them to meet their basic needs, properly support their children and avoid chronic financial stress.
- P** The provincial government should significantly raise **income and disability assistance** rates to bring them in line with actual living expenses and index them to inflation.

First Call recommends that the BC government's poverty reduction plan contain a goal to reduce BC's child poverty rate to 7% or lower by 2020.

Area of responsibility:

- F** Federal
- P** Provincial
- L** Local

4. **P** The provincial government should expand the **post-secondary** program options eligible for support under the Single Parent Employment Initiative and, in the absence of enhancements to BC's refundable post-secondary grants, allow all those on income assistance to retain benefits while attending a post-secondary institution.
5. **P** The provincial government should redesign the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit into a **BC Child Benefit** covering children under 18 and double the maximum benefit to \$1,320 per child per year.
6. **F** The federal government should ensure the new **Canada Child Benefit** reduces the child poverty rate by 50% in four years and ensure access to the benefit for families living at higher rates of poverty.
7. **F** The federal government should create a targeted **GST credit** top-up of \$1,800 per adult and child for those living below the poverty line.
8. **F P** Guided by the commitments in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People including their right to self-determination, the calls to action in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and in compliance with the rulings of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, the federal and provincial governments should immediately increase funding for **First Nations** child welfare, education and community health services and services for urban Indigenous people, and develop a long-term poverty eradication strategy in collaboration with First Nations and other Indigenous organizations and communities.
9. **F P** The provincial government should implement the **\$10aDay Child Care Plan**, put forward by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC, to establish universal access to a system of high-quality, inclusive child care for BC children and families that is fee free for families with annual incomes of less than \$40,000, will increase the number of new licensed child care spaces by 22,500 spaces in 3 years and will ensure early childhood educators are paid a living wage. The federal government should support this initiative with a national early childhood education and care program which includes a well-developed policy framework based on the same principles, is guided by targets and timelines and supported by long-term, sustained funding. Both the provincial and federal plans should respect the rights of Indigenous communities to be supported to develop and deliver their own culturally relevant and traditional language-based programs.
10. **F** The federal government should increase the **maternity and parental** leave benefit level to 70% of employment income and reduce qualifying hours to 300 over the best 12 weeks of the last 12 months of work. All new parents (regardless of work status) should be included, and a secondary caregiver benefit should be developed to address gender disparities in care work within households.
11. **P L** Working in collaboration with **youth in and from government care**, the provincial government should establish an inter-ministerial action plan to ensure all youth aging out of care can count on consistent financial support for basic living costs and needed supports and services, such as mental health services and connections to their cultures, and long-term relationships with caring, dependable adults for support, advice and references, until the age of 25. Their post-secondary education should be supported without limits on age or their time in care. Provincial and local governments should ensure all youth aging out of care have a chance to connect and contribute to their communities through creative, cultural and volunteer activities, so that they feel like they belong.

12. **F P** The provincial government should review and enhance supports to **grandparents raising grandchildren** and other kinship care providers. The federal government should allow grandparents on CPP Disability who are raising their grandchildren to continue to receive the children's benefit after they turn 65.
13. **F P** The federal and provincial governments should intensify their efforts to help **immigrants and refugees** adjust to life in Canada by enhancing employment assistance, removing long-standing barriers to qualification for professionals trained abroad, making more language training available, and improving employment standards and human rights protections and enforcement.
14. **F** The federal government should immediately cancel all outstanding refugee **transportation loan debt** and cease seeking repayment of transportation costs for new refugees coming to Canada. This budget adjustment should not reduce the number of refugees targeted for resettlement.
15. **P** The provincial government should ensure **K-12 public education** funding is sufficient to mitigate inequalities and to ensure appropriate inclusion of students with diverse learning needs.
16. **F P** Federal and provincial government support for access to **post-secondary** education should be increased both to remove financial barriers for low-income students and lower student debt levels. Policy options include reducing tuition fees at public colleges, institutes and universities, interest-free student loans, and more non-repayable grants for low- and middle-income students.
17. **F** The federal government should enhance **Employment Insurance** to expand access, duration and levels of benefits. Reduce the number of qualifying hours to 360 for all workers and enhance benefit levels over a longer benefit period of 50 weeks.
18. **F P L** The federal, provincial and local governments should scale up their funding to build thousands of new social and affordable **rental housing** units and maintain existing affordable housing stock to reduce the number of families in core housing need and to eliminate homelessness. The national housing strategy must include a long-term funding commitment to meet these goals and targets for specific low-income populations and those at risk of homelessness. Provincial government action must include enhancing and expanding rental subsidies and other income supports to families living in or near poverty to reduce housing insecurity, as well as providing additional funds to social service agencies and non-profit housing societies to provide housing and other supports to populations at higher risk of homelessness such as **LGBTQ youth** without family support and women with addictions who have young children.
19. **F P** The federal and provincial governments should work together to introduce **universal coverage** for all Canadians for prescription drugs, dental care, eye care and hearing aids as essential aspects of health care.
20. **P L** The provincial government should work with local governments and transit authorities to develop a plan that will provide free **public transit** for minors (ages 0-18) and free or reduced-fee transit access for low income families.
21. **F P** The provincial government should create an independent commission on **tax reform** to study taxes levied in BC and recommend ways to make the tax system fairer and reduce income inequality. The federal government should also address growing income inequality by continuing to restore fairness to the personal income taxation system and re-introducing the principle of taxation based on ability to pay.

This report uses data from Statistics Canada's T1 Family File (T1FF) to report on low income according to the Low Income Measure-After Tax (LIM-AT) unless otherwise indicated. The LIM is a relative measure of poverty set at 50% of median adjusted household income that takes household size into account. It is also internationally comparable. Statistics Canada data on low income always have a 2-year time lag, thus the data in the 2017 BC Child Poverty Report Card is for 2015.

The T1FF is built from personal income tax and the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) records, and is inclusive of reserves and children in institutional settings.¹ The T1FF provides limited demographic information about tax filers beyond age, gender and family composition. Therefore the data showing groups of children that are over-represented in poverty statistics in Fact Sheet 1 were taken from the 2016 Census, which also used 2015 data. The reason for the 0.1% difference between the BC child poverty rate using T1FF data (18.3%) and the Census data (18.4%) is explained by Statistics Canada: "1) T1FF uses a different methodology for constructing families. In T1FF, the family must be constructed using only information available from the tax files. In census, family and household formation is based on information gathered through the enumeration process. 2) T1FF groups individuals into census families for the purposes of computing a low-income threshold, while Census groups individuals into households. 3) T1FF has a different methodology than census for calculating low income thresholds. Briefly, Census defines the LIM threshold as 50% adjusted median household income of persons. T1FF was developed using a different approach where 50% adjusted median census family income of census families was used as the threshold."² The 2016 Census child poverty data does not include First Nations reserves.

Canada does not have an official way of measuring poverty, but Statistics Canada does produce three main measures of low income: the Low Income Cut-Offs (LICOs), before- and after-tax versions, the Low Income Measures (LIMs), before- and after-tax versions, and the Market Basket Measure (MBM).³

The following chart contains the Low Income Measure after tax used in this report card for different family sizes based on the number of adults and children in each family type.

Statistics Canada's Low Income Measures for 2014 (After Tax)

Number of adults*	Number of children less than 16 years of age				
	0	1	2	3	4
1	18,213	25,498	30,962	36,426	41,890
2	25,498	30,962	36,426	41,890	47,354
3	32,783	38,247	43,711	49,175	54,639
4	40,069	45,533	50,996	56,460	61,924

* Includes parents/spouses, children 16 years of age and over and the first child in lone-parent families regardless of age.

Source: Statistics Canada T1 Family File 2017 User's Guide

- 1 Statistics Canada (July 2017). Technical Reference Guide for the Annual Income Estimates for Census Families, Individuals and Seniors, T1 Family File) Final Estimates, 2015. Income Statistics Division. statcan.gc.ca/pub/72-212-x/72-212-x2017001-eng.pdf
- 2 Statistics Canada. Income Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016. www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/004/98-500-x2016004-eng.cfm
- 3 A detailed description of each measure can be found in the Statistics Canada publication, Low Income Lines, 2013-2014; statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2015001-eng.pdf

OUR MEMBERS



ACT – Autism Community Training

Adoptive Families Association of BC

Affiliation of Multicultural Societies & Service Agencies

Alternate Shelter Society

Association for Community Education BC

Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia

Autism Society of BC

Baobab Inclusive Empowerment Society

BC Aboriginal Child Care Society

BC Association for Child Development & Intervention

BC Association of Family Resource Programs

BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs

BC Association of Social Workers

BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils

BC Council for Families

BC Crime Prevention Association

BC Federation of Foster Parents Association

BC Government & Service Employees' Union

BC Play Therapy Association

BC Recreation and Parks Association

BC Retired Teachers' Association

BC Schizophrenia Society

BC Society of Transition Houses

BC Teachers' Federation

Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland

Boys and Girls Clubs of BC

Breakfast for Learning

British Columbia Federation of Students

Cameray Child & Family Services

Canadian Association for Young Children

Canadian Federation of Students – BC

Canadian Mental Health Association BC

Canadian Red Cross – Respect Education

Capilano Students' Union

Centre for Child Honouring

Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs

Cerebral Palsy Association of BC

Check Your Head: The Global Youth Education Network

Child and Youth Care Association of BC

Children's and Women's Health Centre of BC

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

Columbia/Kootenay Advocacy and Education Resource Society

Communities that Care – Squamish

Community Action Toward Children's Health

Council of Parent Participation Preschools BC

Deaf Children's Society of BC

Developmental Disabilities Association

Directorate of Agencies for School Health BC

Dr. Charissa Patricelli Inc.

Early Childhood Educators of BC

East Kootenay Childhood Coalition

Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver

Family Services of Greater Vancouver

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks	Phoenix Human Services Association
Federation of Community Social Services BC	PLEA Community Services Society of BC
Foster Parent Support Services Society	Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society
Five Family Place Partnership - MPFCS	Provincial Association of Residential & Community Agencies
Health Officers' Council of British Columbia	Public Health Association of BC
Helping Spirit Lodge Society	Single Mothers' Alliance of BC
Hospital Employees' Union	Social Planning & Research Council of BC
Immigrant Services Society of BC	Society for Children and Youth of BC
Inclusion BC	S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
Indigenous Perspectives Society	Summit Negotiations Society
Justice Institute of BC	Sunshine Coast Community Services Society
Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society	Take a Hike Youth At Risk Foundation
Kelowna Child Care Society	United Way of the Lower Mainland
Kiwassa Neighbourhood House	University Women's Club of Vancouver
Learning Disabilities Association of BC	Vancity Community Foundation
McCreary Centre Society	Vancouver Coastal Health Authority - Population Health
Métis Commission for Children & Families BC	Vancouver Community College - Early Childhood Care & Education, Cont. Studies
Mom to Mom Child Poverty Initiative	Victoria Child Abuse Prevention & Counselling Centre
MOSAIC	West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund
National Council of Jewish Women of Canada - Vancouver Section	Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre
Pacific Association of First Nations Women	Westcoast Family Centres Society
Pacific Community Resources Society	Western Society for Children
Pacific Immigrant Resources Society	Women Against Violence Against Women
Parent Support Services Society of BC	YWCA Metro Vancouver
PeerNetBC	
Penticton & District Community Resources Society	

JOIN THE FIRST CALL COALITION

If you are a British Columbia-based organization that believes in putting children and youth first, we invite you to join the First Call coalition.

We offer members the opportunity to be a part of a strong and effective cross-sectoral coalition of provincial and regional organizations who put children and youth first through public education, community mobilization and public policy advocacy. First Call coalition members are united in their commitment to the 4 Keys to Success for Children and Youth, which we welcome you to explore here: firstcallbc.org/about-us/our-approach

Together in the First Call coalition, we share information, provide our members with tools and resources and advocate collectively for BC's children and youth.

If you are interested in joining our coalition, see the **member registration form** at firstcallbc.org/our-coalition/join-the-coalition.

For more information, please **email us** at info@firstcallbc.org and we'll be in touch shortly.



“First Call is unique in Canada in bringing organizations and people from many sectors together to focus on advocacy for children and youth.

Since its inception in 1991, it has created a coalition of professional and community advocates in support of a prevention and investment agenda for children and youth including but not limited to health, education, social services, youth justice, child protection and anti-poverty groups.

The breadth and depth of these partnerships have provided comprehensive expert advice to successive provincial and federal governments about the needs of BC's children, youth and families and examples of best practices in service delivery.”

— Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, BC's Representative for Children and Youth (2006–2016)



SUPPORT OUR WORK



First Call's annual Child Poverty Report Cards have helped countless individuals & groups like YOU advocate for BC's children & youth.

Help support our work by making a **donation** at firstcallbc.org



First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition is a non-partisan coalition of over 100 provincial and regional organizations who have united their voices to **PUT CHILDREN AND YOUTH FIRST** in BC through public education, community mobilization and public policy advocacy.

OUR VISION is that all BC's children and youth have the rights, opportunities and resources required to thrive.

First Call's work is guided by the **4 KEYS TO SUCCESS** for children and youth:

1. A strong commitment to early childhood development
2. Support in transitions from childhood to youth to adulthood
3. Increased economic equality
4. Safe and caring communities

First Call puts children and youth first through **3 STRATEGIES**:

1. **Public Education:** First Call works to raise the public profile of child and youth issues through public education, including our weekly child and youth sector newsletter, public presentations, regular media commentary, and the publication of research reports.
2. **Community Mobilization:** First Call works to mobilize local and provincial support for children and youth through coalition and Early Childhood Development Roundtable meetings, campaigns for public policy changes, and developing advocacy tools.
3. **Public Policy Advocacy:** First Call advocates for public policies and the allocation of resources for the benefit of children and youth through annual provincial and federal budget submissions, regular correspondence and dialogue with government decision-makers, producing this annual BC Child Poverty Report Card and by hosting the Living Wage for Families Campaign.

First Call's charitable activities are hosted by the Vancity Community Foundation.

putting children and youth first

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