
Conference Proposal 2017 - 01

Proposal Name	Poverty Reduction Plan for BC
Source	St. Andrew's United Church, Nanaimo, B.C.
Recipient	BC Conference
Type of Proposal	For Decision (I want the court to make a decision or take an action)
Proposal	That British Columbia Conference endorse the Poverty Reduction Plan developed by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition.
Funding Implications	None

Actions of Intervening Courts:

Presbytery (if applicable)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concurrence	(Agree with Proposal)
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Background The Congregation of St. Andrew's United Church, Nanaimo, B.C. recognized that many people in British Columbia suffer from poverty and that the existence of poverty in the midst of wealth is not simply an economic issue but an important moral and spiritual issue which relates to the way we live out our Christian faith.

The Poverty Reduction Plan takes a comprehensive approach to poverty in British Columbia. The seven basic policy areas are as follows:

1. Improve the adequacy and accessibility of welfare.
Welfare and disability benefits are far too low at \$610 for a single person and between \$931 and \$983 per month for a person with a disability (with and without a bus pass respectively). And the eligibility rules and procedures make income assistance far too inaccessible for many.
Significantly increase welfare and disability rates, and index them to inflation.
2. Increase wages and protect the rights of vulnerable workers.
Most adults living in poverty have a job, and almost half the poor children in BC live in families with at least one parent working full-time. The employment standards protections for vulnerable workers, which cover such areas as overtime hours and vacation pay, are far too lax.
Increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and index it to inflation, encourage employers to adopt the living wage for families, and restore the coverage and enforcement of employment standards.
3. Invest in affordable housing.
BC has the worst record of housing affordability in Canada, and the numbers of homeless and under-housed people are increasing.
Recommit to building thousands of new social and co-op housing units per year. BC should be bringing on stream 10,000 such units per year.
4. Create a public child care system.
The high cost of child care is a huge burden for many families and makes it completely inaccessible to others. Moreover, there is a shortage of child care spaces and the quality of care available is inconsistent across providers.

Adopt the \$10 a day child care plan, which will provide free child care for those earning less than \$40,000 per year, increase the number of child care spaces, support high-quality programming and ensure early childhood educators are paid a living wage.

5. Promote population health.

Poverty is a fundamental determinant of health, and the health care costs of poverty add up to \$1.2 billion per year.

Expand essential health services in the public system, such as dental and optical care and community mental health services, and enhance community health care for seniors and people with disabilities.

6. Support training and education.

Without meaningful long-term training and education, people cannot access stable and well-paying jobs.

Adequately fund public schools, and make post-secondary education and apprenticeship training more accessible. Allow welfare recipients to pursue post-secondary education, and make adult basic education and English-language education free.

7. Focus on the most marginalized.

Indigenous people, people with disabilities and mental illness, recent immigrants and refugees, single mothers, single senior women, and queer and transgender people (particularly youth) have higher rates of poverty and homelessness.

The poverty reduction plan must focus its efforts on the structural barriers faced by these groups.

“Long Overdue: Why BC Needs a Poverty Reduction Plan,” produced by The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition in co-operation with The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Region (BCPA:BC) and available on the BCPA:BC website gives a helpful 40 page overview of the many facets of poverty in British Columbia. Because BC poverty is not a simple problem it requires a comprehensive approach. Following are some of the facts from this report:

Statistics on Poverty are calculated using the MBM (the MBM-Market Basket Measure) which is based on the costs of a modest basket of goods and services including shelter, food, clothing and footwear, transportation and basic household needs.” This captures variations in local prices esp. housing.

* Although with 13.2 % of our population living in poverty, making BC’s poverty rate the 2nd highest in Canada, we are the only province or territory in Canada that has not developed a poverty reduction plan.

Over 100,000 (1/3 of them children) used foodbanks in March 2016.

* About half of those living below the poverty line are either the working poor or the children of working poor. While over 13% of British Columbians live in poverty only about 4% rely on social assistance at any given time. (The balance is mainly seniors or those relying on other forms of income assistance).

* One out of five people living in poverty is under 18 years. While in two parent families 15.1% of children live in poverty, in single mother-led households a shocking 49% live in poverty. The poverty rate for indigenous children in Vancouver is 33% and 52% of on-reserve indigenous children live in poverty.

* “Poverty rates are also disproportionately high for marginalized groups including indigenous people, people with disabilities and mental illness, recent immigrants and refugees, single mothers, single senior women and queer and transgender people.”

* Basic welfare for a single person is only \$610 per month and this has not increased since 2007. BC’s current minimum wage is \$10.85 an hour. Nearly half a million British Columbians earn \$15.00 or less. 58% of these people have to support a household on this.

* The CCPA has calculated a living wage scale—for a family of four, both parents working full time with two young children “to meet a bare bones budget with virtually no financial wiggle room.” In Nanaimo that has been calculated at \$17.99 per hour, in Port Alberni \$17.22. per hour, Parksville \$16.76 per hour and in Clayoquot Sound \$19.27 per hour.

On the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition’s Website, there is a list of over 400 organizations, including the Union of BC Municipalities, which have endorsed this plan. This list includes a number of churches and faith groups, from Jewish, Catholic, Anglican, Quaker, Lutheran, Mennonite and United Churches as well as a number of KAIROS groups. Among United Church organizations endorsing this plan are Vancouver-Burrard Presbytery and Vancouver South Presbytery.