



MAKE POVERTY PUBLIC

JOIN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN!

A call is building across British Columbia for a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. You've heard the call and joined the call, and now you want to pass it on to your local MLA candidates. The lead-up to May's provincial election is a window of opportunity for you to get the attention of candidates in your riding.

BC has the second highest poverty rate in Canada, but is now the only province without a poverty reduction plan.

The basic necessities of housing and food are out of reach to many in our province. Almost 600,000 British Columbians live below the poverty line and 122,000 of those are children. We need to make the stats and the stories of poverty visible. We need to Make Poverty Public.

Now is the time to let candidates from all parties know that you want to vote for someone willing to make a commitment to a poverty reduction plan — a detailed and accountable strategy with concrete and legislated targets and timelines to dramatically reduce poverty, inequality and homelessness.

Just as we pool our resources to provide public health care and education to all, we must work together to provide public poverty reduction. We need to Make Poverty Public.

You can be more effective if you take some time to prepare and this guide is designed to help you do that.

It will give you some tips for **Getting Started**, provide you with a brief overview of the **Political Context**, the **Breakdown** of poverty in BC, and offer suggestions for some engaging questions.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Over 400 organizations representing hundreds of thousands of people have joined the call for a poverty reduction plan.

A 2016 poll commissioned by the BC Federation of Labour found that 78% of British Columbians think it is important for political leaders in BC to address poverty with a provincial poverty reduction plan.

The Union of BC Municipalities, BC's Chief Medical Health Officer, BC's Child and Youth Advocate, and the government's own finance committee have also repeatedly advocated for such a plan.

Every other province or territory in Canada has implemented or made commitments to a poverty reduction plan, and many have seen success. They're saving lives and money by tackling the issue of poverty head-on.

In most places it was community pressure that convinced the government to take action. That's why we need you to take action today.

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GETTING STARTED

Set yourself up for success in getting your candidates' attention and get a concrete commitment to poverty reduction.

- ◆ **Find your candidates.**

You can locate your candidates by riding using the Elections BC website: elections.bc.ca/2017-provincial-general-election

- ◆ **Pick one or two points about poverty reduction that you believe in and understand.**

Decide on one or two points for advocacy, especially during an election. The breadth of the issue of poverty in BC is a lot to pack into a limited time. Identify the particular elements of the issue that you can speak to most confidently. Political representatives must review and evaluate a great deal of information and often consider competing priorities. It is important that you believe in and understand the specifics of the issue you want to address with candidates.

- ◆ **Provide perspective. Introduce yourself.**

Before launching into the issue with a candidate, tell them a little bit about who you are and how poverty impacts your life and your community so they know why a comprehensive poverty reduction plan is a priority for their constituents.

- ◆ **Focus on the issue.**

Frame the issue so your candidate can relate. Describe how the issue affects people, and how many people it affects. Use personal stories to illustrate your concerns; link the personal stories to the general issue. Tell them clearly what will happen if your issue is not addressed during the next government mandate. Be ready with solutions. Outline what's working now and what changes would make a difference.

- ◆ **Be ready to press for a concrete commitment.**

Many candidates may try and side-step the call for a poverty reduction plan by simply outlining a few policy initiatives their government has done or would do with respect to poverty and homelessness. Acknowledge good steps. But insist that BC needs a comprehensive plan with legislated targets and timelines. Press for that commitment.

◆ **Make the call public.**

- ◆ Attend or host All Candidates Meetings (see separate guide for hosting your own).
- ◆ Meet with each candidate in your riding.
- ◆ Talk to candidates or volunteers when they knock on your door or telephone you.
- ◆ Send an email to the candidates in your riding outlining your issue.
- ◆ Call in to a radio or TV phone-in show when candidates are on the air.
- ◆ Write a letter to the editor (it's the most read section of the paper).

◆ **Go online.**

- ◆ Sign the We Can't Afford Poverty Vote Pledge at www.nopovertybc.ca
- ◆ Share our social media posts through [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). Use [#MakePovertyPublic](#) to join the conversation.
- ◆ Send a message to your candidates' Twitter feed, Facebook page or other social media platforms.
- ◆ Use isupportcause.com to add a banner to your Facebook profile picture to show your support for a Poverty Reduction Plan in British Columbia.
- ◆ Print and fill out the "Reduces Poverty" sign and send us a photo of you holding it. Share on Social Media with [#MakePovertyPublic](#).



◆ **Get out the vote.**

Only 55% of eligible voters voted in the last provincial election so encourage more voters by organizing Get Out the Vote activities in your community. Focus on getting out the poor vote. Download Samara Canada's [Vote PopUp guide](#) and [contact them](#) to order your free Vote PopUp toolkit, which includes a mock voting booth and ballot box to set up at community events and all candidates meetings.

◆ **Share your results with local media.**

After you contact your candidates, let your local media know about the responses you get. Write in to your local papers and tell them about your meeting and what candidates in your riding have to say about the need for a poverty reduction strategy in this province and their party's position on it.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Liberals

While the Liberals have introduced some good initiatives, like launching the Single Parents Employment Initiative, they tend to be isolated efforts. A laundry list of actions doesn't constitute a plan (as the BC Auditor General and BC's Representative for Children and Youth have said). When asked about the call for a poverty reduction plan, the Liberals point to their Jobs Plan. However, about half of those living in poverty are either the working poor or children of the working poor, so jobs alone are not the answer. While each community has its own challenges, there are policy measures that would make a significant difference throughout BC, such as raising the minimum wage and income assistance rates.

NDP

In February 2017, the NDP introduced a private member's bill for the sixth time, the Poverty Reduction and Economic Inclusion Act, which proposed establishing poverty reduction targets and measures, as well as government accountability. Unfortunately, this bill has never gained the support of the government. The NDP has also made commitments to raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and implementing the \$10 a day child care plan. However, we need to push them to include other concrete measures that would reduce poverty significantly, such as raising income assistance rates and building social housing.

Greens

The BC Greens support a "comprehensive anti-poverty strategy that includes low-cost housing and increased employment opportunities." To address income insecurity, they recommend a guaranteed annual income. However, we need to ensure that this would be implemented well with an adequate income and continued investment in other public services.

Conservatives

There is no mention of poverty reduction in the Conservatives' policy platform.

THE BC POVERTY REDUCTION COALITION has written to all four parties to challenge them to meet our call for a poverty reduction plan. We will be posting an assessment of their responses and their platforms a few weeks before the election.

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GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- ◆ BC is the only province without a poverty reduction plan. Is your party ready to adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines?
- ◆ A solid plan must deal with the multiple dimensions and causes of poverty and homelessness. Policy measures must aid those in the low-wage workforce and those who cannot work in paid labour, as well as enhance the social programs/public goods that are relied upon by everyone. How will your party take leadership in addressing the breadth and depth of poverty in BC?
- ◆ Voters all over BC have signed on to an open letter calling for a poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines. Is your party ready to commit?

THE BREAKDOWN

Break down the issue of poverty in BC with some questions to bring it home for your candidate.

We all pay for poverty

An argument you may hear from candidates is that they cannot afford it but the fact is that paying for the negative effects of poverty costs much more than dealing with it directly.

Poverty is not just a hardship for those who experience it. It is costly to us all as a province. Poverty costs society \$8-9 billion per year in higher public health care costs, increased policing and crime costs, lost productivity, and foregone economic activity.

In contrast, the estimated cost of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan in BC is \$3-4 billion per year. Let's stop mopping up the floor and fix the hole in the roof.

Q: Can we afford not to reduce poverty?

Income Assistance

The current rate of \$610 per month for a single "employable" person is far less than the average rent for a bachelor suite in BC. Single people on assistance are expected to rent homes with a mere \$375 per month, and receive \$7.58 per day for everything else. Welfare rates have been frozen since 2007. Disability benefits are also still far too low at \$1033 as recent government increases have been inadequate.

Visit Make Poverty Public at www.makepovertypublic.ca to read stories from people struggling to survive in the income assistance system.

Q: Is \$375 per month an adequate allowance for rent in your neighbourhood? Will you increase and index welfare and disability rates?

Employment and the living wage

About half of those living in poverty are either the working poor or children of the working poor. The minimum wage of \$10.85 an hour does not lift workers above the poverty line. Visit Make Poverty Public at www.makepovertypublic.ca to read stories from low-wage workers struggling to make ends meet.

Q: Will you increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and apply it to all workers to lift working people above the poverty line?

Q: Will you commit to becoming a living wage employer to pay provincial government staff and contractors a living wage?

Housing and homelessness

BC has the worst record of housing affordability in Canada and increasing numbers of homeless and under-housed people. Unaffordable rents, low vacancy rates and renovations are issues throughout the province. Effective solutions to the housing crisis in this province must protect renters and tackle homelessness—those living on the street and in shelters as well as the “hidden homeless,” people who are couch-surfing, staying with family or living in very overcrowded, insecure situations.

Q: Will you commit to building 10,000 new social housing units per year to meet the housing need in BC?

Health and food security

According to the latest Food Banks Canada HungerCount, in March 2016, over 100,000 British Columbians used food banks. Approximately one in three of these individuals were children. The state of hunger in our province has dire consequences for the long-term health of British Columbians and for the sustainability and affordability of our healthcare system.

Q: How will you address food insecurity and ensure that all British Columbians can afford a nutritious diet?

Q: How will you ensure access to essential health services not included in the public health care system, such as prescription medication, dental and eye care?

Q: 9 in 10 seniors’ care homes are understaffed. How will you improve seniors care in BC?

Child poverty

BC has a very high child poverty rate with 1 in 5 children living in poverty. About 50% of children in single parent-led households face poverty. This has long-term health implications. Lack of healthy food can lead to poor growth and development in children, poor school performance, and increased illness and susceptibility to disease. Children of families with at least one member who is Aboriginal, a recent immigrant or has a disability are at even greater risk of poverty.

Q: What's your plan to eliminate child poverty?

Child care crisis

BC has among the highest child care fees in the country. The high cost of child care is a huge burden for many families and makes it completely inaccessible to others. International research demonstrates that a high-quality early care and learning system has immense benefits for children's development in all key areas. Providing this service publicly would remove a huge financial burden from thousands of low-income households. For more information on the \$10/day Child Care Plan, visit www.10aday.ca

Q: Will you implement the \$10 a Day Child Care Plan proposed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC?

Education

Schools are not adequately funded and rely on parent and teacher fundraising for core services, creating inequality within our public education system. Government funding to fulfil their obligations to the recent Supreme Court decision on class size and composition is not enough to counter years of underfunding.

Post-secondary education (PSE) is also underfunded. Taking into account inflation, PSE faced a cut in funding this year, and in 3 years, students will contribute more through tuition fees than the government does.

Q: How do you plan to address inequality in the education system and increase the accessibility of post-secondary education?

Q: Will you restore funding for Adult Basic Education and English Language Learners programs?

Equity

Poverty rates are higher among certain groups. As such, measures targeted toward those groups will have a significant impact on reducing overall poverty rates. The highest poverty rates in BC are found among Indigenous people, people with disabilities (including mental illness), recent immigrants, refugees and temporary foreign workers (including farm workers and live in caregivers), single mothers, single senior women, and queer and transgender people (particularly youth). The different needs of these groups necessitate different policy responses in order to address the underlying causes of their poverty.

Q: What specifically should be done to reduce poverty among Indigenous people / people with disabilities (including mental illness) / recent immigrants, refugees and temporary foreign workers (including farm workers and live in caregivers) / single mothers / single senior women / and queer and transgender people (particularly youth)?

For more election resources, visit:

makepovertypublic.ca
[#MakePovertyPublic](https://twitter.com/MakePovertyPublic)

For more background information, visit:

bcpovertyreduction.ca

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition is a coalition that includes community and non-profit groups, faith groups, health organizations, First Nations and Aboriginal organizations, businesses, labour organizations, and social policy groups. We have come together around a campaign aimed at seeing the introduction of a bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan from the government of British Columbia that would include legislated targets and timelines to significantly reduce poverty, inequality and homelessness. We seek to improve the health and well-being of all British Columbians. We have over 50 [Coalition Members](#) and over 400 [supporting organizations](#) that have joined the call for a poverty reduction plan.

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