



Will you implement a poverty reduction plan for BC with legislated targets and timelines?

Our BC Liberal government is implementing our plan, “LIFT: A Plan to Support People and Reduce Poverty”, available at <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/organizational-structure/ministries-organizations/social-development-social-innovation/lift-strategy.pdf>

1. Providing adequate and accessible income support for the non-employed

A. Would you increase and index welfare benefit rates in all categories, including the Expect to Work and Persons With Disabilities category?

B. What other rule changes do you plan for social assistance?

Today’s BC Liberals have made jobs and economic growth a priority to ensure that we are able to take care of the people that we love. It’s because we are a leader in economic and job growth that we are able to make significant investments in things like health care, education, and programs to help people in need.

Changes we have made to support persons with disabilities include:

- Became the first province to fully exempt child support payments for families on income or disability assistance.
- Became the first province to introduce annualized earning exemptions of \$9,600/year for persons with disabilities.
- Increased asset limits for people on disability assistance.
- Extended the Home Renovation Tax Credit to include persons with disabilities.
- Created the WorkAble internship program for new graduates with disabilities to enter the BC Public Service - 75% of first year interns still work for the Public Service.
- Established a network of business leaders to engage with employers to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Modernized the Guide Dog and Service Dog Act to strengthen the rights of those with service dogs.
- Cut red tape by simplifying the disability assistance application process.

We also created the Single Parent Employment Initiative (SPEI) to support single parents who want a job. The SPEI was created in response to hearing of a series of practical barriers within the government’s system of supports that created a disincentive to single parents on income or disability assistance who wanted to find work or improve their training for a job.

This program removed many obstacles, and has cleared the way for 4,600 parents to sign up with over 900 now working. On average, 40-50 new single parents join each week and 47 are finding a job each month. That is real progress –we know that the best thing for any family is a job.



Today's BC Liberals will also develop a Low Income Families in Transition (LIFT) pilot program that will provide temporary assistance to low-income single working parents so they can take time away from their current employment or reduce their hours without financial penalty, and assist with training, childcare and transit costs while upgrading or acquiring new skills.

In addition, Today's BC Liberals will:

- Provide an additional \$199 million to increase the assistance rates for about 100,000 people with disabilities by \$50 per month.
- Work to become the province with the most generous child benefit exemptions for the calculation of income and disability assistance.
- Increase the net income threshold for low-income individuals to \$19,749 to qualify for the BC Tax Reduction Credit.
- Encourage charitable giving with a substantial increase in the value of the tax credit for charitable donations to a maximum value of \$500 on the first \$1,100 of donations.
- Permanently implement the BC Farmers' Food Donation Tax Credit to encourage farmers and farming corporations to donate certain agricultural products they produce to registered charities such as food banks or school meal programs.
- Create a Minister responsible for accessibility who will work to make BC the most accessible jurisdiction for disabled people in North America.

2. Improving earnings and working conditions for low-wage workers

A. Will you increase the minimum wage to \$15/hour, and index it to inflation?

B. Do you propose any improvements to employment standards?

C. Will you introduce or enhance any other forms of income support for low income British Columbians?

D. Would you help to encourage the payment of Living Wages for Families throughout BC?

Today's BC Liberals' goal is to help people get good, well-paying jobs. A strong British Columbia with a bright future starts with a job – it's the foundation of a strong economy, thriving communities, as well as healthy families and individuals. A good job is the best way to look after the people we love.

In 2011, our government introduced the BC Jobs Plan – our strategy to drive economic growth across the province. And it's working. Since the BC Jobs Plan was introduced, British Columbia leads Canada in job creation with 222,200 jobs.

In 2015, only 5% of our workforce was earning minimum wage. Of those, almost 60% were youth aged 15-24, more than half living with their parents. BC's average hourly wage is trending upwards at over \$25 an hour, and the average youth wage is over \$15 an hour.

Our government's focus is on growing the economy and encouraging investments that lead to higher-wage careers, not minimum wage jobs.



3. Addressing the needs of those most likely to be living in poverty

What specific measures do you plan to introduce to reduce poverty (rates and depth) among children, lone-mother households, single senior women, indigenous people, people with disabilities (including mental illness), recent immigrants, refugees, and temporary foreign workers, and queer and transgender people?

Today's BC Liberals know that the most effective way to reduce poverty is to create jobs and opportunity through a strong economy. And we've done exactly that – leading Canada with over 222,000 new jobs since 2011.

The number of children living in low income in our province fell by 50% between 2006 and 2014 – that's approximately 79,000 fewer children living in low income. No other province has matched BC's declining child poverty numbers.

BC has some of the most comprehensive supports for low-income individuals and their families in Canada, including subsidized housing, child-care subsidies, dental and optical care for children, free MSP and Pharmacare, child and seniors benefits, and employment services. Just as importantly, we're making record investments in skills training and programs like the Single Parent Employment Initiative to get people out of poverty and into training and work. 92% of participants in this program are single mothers and, so far, we've helped 4,400 moms and dads get off social assistance.

Today's BC Liberals will continue to invest in the success of the Single Parent Employment Initiative with a goal of having 10,000 single parents apply for the program and 5,000 starting jobs. We will also develop a Low Income Families in Transition (LIFT) pilot program that will provide temporary assistance to low-income single working parents so they can take time away from their current employment, or reduce their hours without financial penalty, and assist with training, childcare and transit costs while upgrading or acquiring new skills.

Moving forward, Today's BC Liberals will continue to focus our efforts on growing the economy, creating jobs, and investing in targeted supports for families that need them.

4. Implementing initiatives to end homelessness and the lack of affordable housing

A. What plans do you have for the construction of new social housing and the introduction of other measures to increase the supply of low-income housing to fulfill the need of 10,000 social housing units per year?

Since 2001, our government has committed to spend more than \$6.3 billion to provide affordable housing for individuals, seniors and families. More than 104,000 households benefit from a diverse range of provincial housing programs and services. We have completed close to 24,000 new units of affordable housing. And we provide financial assistance to more than 30,000 family and senior households renting in the private market.

The key to improving affordability over the long term is creating new supply. Our government is acting to help the market respond to increasing demand for homes. We have committed an additional \$920 million over the last year to ensure more British Columbians have access to some 5,300 units of new, affordable rental housing.

And to help low income earners, the BC Liberal government has rent assistance programs for senior households and working families to make renting in the private market more affordable. Monthly cash assistance gives low-income households more options, allowing them increased flexibility to choose the neighbourhood they want to live in while keeping their housing costs within their budgets.

Some 35,000 low income families have received Rental Assistance Program (RAP) benefits since the BC Liberal government introduced the program and 20,000 low-to-moderate income senior households a year receive assistance (SAFER)

B. Do you plan to improve tenant protections and rent controls?

The Residential Tenancy Act was established to provide a fair and balanced approach to tenancies for landlords and tenants. Rent controls are currently in place, set at 2% plus CPI each year – in 2017, the allowable rent increase is 3.7%. When disputes about rent increases can't be resolved between the parties, the Residential Tenancy Branch has independent arbitrators who will assess the matter after giving both the tenant and the landlord an opportunity to be heard. The arbitrator will give a formal, binding decision about the individual circumstances of the complaint. Arbitration fees are waived for eligible, low income applicants.

Fixed-term tenancy agreements balance the needs and interests of landlords and tenants, providing security of tenure for tenants and guaranteed income for landlords.

We understand that some landlords are using fixed term tenancies as a way to increase rents beyond the annual allowable rent increase for regular tenancies (2% plus CPI – for 2017 is 3.7%) by using short-term lease renewals.



Our government has consulted with both landlord and tenant organizations and there is no clear agreement between them as to changes that would be fair and balanced. As a result, we will be conducting a broader consultation in the coming months.

While this work is ongoing, landlords and tenants will continue to be subject to the existing process for fixed-term tenancy agreements. If the parties willingly enter into a legally binding agreement that spells out the terms and agreements for the rental agreement, they must abide by those terms.

C. What level of new funding to you plan to commit to addressing homelessness and housing issues?

Our BC Liberal government is providing more than \$200 million this year for 14,000 emergency shelter spaces, subsidized units and rent supplements to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness across British Columbia. And we just announced a new, \$65 million commitment to buy, renovate and construct another 360 units of housing for those people experiencing mental health or addictions issues, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

But it's not just about bricks and mortar. Homeless outreach teams provide one-on-one support in nearly 65 communities across our province, connecting homeless people with permanent housing and a range of community services they may need.

Last year, outreach and shelter workers connected more than 7,100 homeless people across British Columbia to housing, income assistance and a variety of support services, tailored to each individual's needs. Together, we believe we can and are making a difference.

We also recently provided \$10 million to help foodbanks distribute fresh, healthy food to those in need. Much of this funding will be used to add refrigeration capacity, giving vulnerable people more consistent access to a greater variety of nutritious foods. This builds on the Farmers' Food Donation Tax Credit, connecting families needing food supports with healthy, fresh food by encouraging producers and farmers to donate fresh vegetables, meat, grain and dairy to local foodbanks and charities.



5. Providing universal publicly-funded child care

A. Do you support the \$10 a Day Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning proposed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC?

B. If yes, on what timeline will you phase its implementation?

C. What level of new funding do you plan to commit to addressing BC's current child care crisis?

The priority of Today's BC Liberals is creating more childcare spaces. And that's what we are doing. Since 2014, we've added 4,300 more childcare spaces through our BC Early Years Strategy. And we have committed to create another 5,000 new spaces in the 2017 budget, putting us on track to fulfill our goal of 13,000 new spaces by 2020.

The real challenge is making sure there are enough spaces to cut through waitlists, and making sure there are enough child care workers to provide a safe environment for kids to thrive. Artificially subsidizing this process damages the system parents rely on. In addition to the high cost of more than \$1.5 billion dollars a year, the NDP's plan would subsidize people who can already afford to pay. Imagine – a child care system where people making a million dollars a year qualify for a handout from your tax dollars. What's worse, under the BC Greens' plan, even millionaires would pay nothing at all.

We believe in helping out those who need help the most. That's why our Single Parent Employment Initiative has helped over 4,600 single moms and dads with the cost of childcare and other expenses while they get trained and transition from income assistance into rewarding careers.

Finally, the federal government in their recent budget prioritized spaces for their childcare investment and we would look to work with them to maximize the number of new spaces we can in BC.

Today's BC Liberals will continue investing in childcare programs designed to provide the greatest assistance to the families that need it most while ensuring that we keep taxes low and create jobs through a strong, diverse economy.

6. Providing support for training and education

A. How do you propose to increase access for people on social assistance and low wage workers to post-secondary education, training and apprenticeships?

We're committed to increasing access for low income individuals to improve their skills. Today's BC Liberals will develop a Low Income Families in Transition (LIFT) pilot program that will provide temporary assistance to low-income single working parents so they can take time away from their current employment or reduce their hours without financial penalty, and assist with training, childcare and transit costs while upgrading or acquiring new skills.



We also support persons with disabilities with the Single Parent Employment Initiative (SPEI). The SPEI was created in response to hearing of a series of practical barriers within the government’s system of supports that created a disincentive to single parents on income or disability assistance who wanted to find work or improve their training for a job.

This program removed many obstacles, and has cleared the way for 4,600 parents to sign up with over 900 now working. On average, 40-50 new single parents join each week and 47 are finding a job each month. That is real progress – we know that the best thing for any family is a job.

B. Would you reduce post-secondary tuition fees by 50% and increase the availability of post-secondary grants for low-income students?

As government, Today’s BC Liberals are proud of the investments we have made in our post-secondary system. Operating grants provided to public post-secondary institutions have increased by 45.5% – from \$1.3 billion in 2001-02 to more than \$1.8 billion in 2016-17. And we have invested more than \$3.3 billion in capital and infrastructure projects at public post-secondary institutions in BC since 2001, including 1,900 capital projects throughout the province.

We have been able to make these investments by building the fastest growing economy in the country. By sticking to our plan, we will continue to make post-secondary education a priority, putting British Columbians first in lines for jobs.

With up to one million job openings expected by 2025, Today’s BC Liberals’ plan is focused on taking full advantage of our growing economy by ensuring that the right training is available at our post-secondary institutions in different regions of the province. From trades to tech, we are re-engineering the way our post-secondary system works to ensure British Columbians can take full advantage of the jobs of today, and tomorrow.

Today’s BC Liberals are determined to ensure British Columbians are first in line for the job openings to come. Which is why we introduced the Skills for Jobs Blueprint, which is designed to provide supports for students to pursue in-demand careers.

We are proud of what we’ve accomplished:

- More \$3.3 billion in capital and infrastructure projects at public post-secondary institutions since 2001, including more than 1,900 capital projects throughout the province.
- Invested more than \$1.8 billion each year in public post-secondary education – about \$5M a day, an increase of over 45% since 2001.
- Added more than 32,000 student seats, including 2,500 graduate student spaces, as well as seven public university campuses since 2001.
- The BC Training and Education Savings Program provides a grant of \$1,200 to eligible children born in 2006 or later that can be used toward the cost of their post-secondary education.



- We've capped tuition increase at 2% since 2005. BC undergrads currently pay the fourth-lowest tuition in Canada.
- We've lowered the interest rate on student loans from prime-plus-2.5% to just prime, starting this August – saving people around \$45 million over the next 3 years.

Going forward, Today's BC Liberals will:

- Invest \$2.6 billion in capital spending by post-secondary institutions for new buildings and renewal of infrastructure at campuses across the province.
- Work with post-secondary institutions to develop new student housing financing rules that allow student housing to be built without impacting the provincial debt load or credit rating.
- Match qualified students with available seats across the province with a coordinated management of excess capacity in our public post-secondary schools.
- Change how student eligibility is assessed to exclude assets for students not residing with their parents or a spouse which will allow the loan limit to be increased for almost 25% of borrowers.
- Provide a 50% tuition rebate for Canadian Armed Forces veterans to help them upgrade their education at B.C. public post-secondary institutions and transition into civilian life.

C. Would you increase funding to K-12 education to address inequality among students and schools?

Education is the pathway to a successful, just, and prosperous society. Our education system enables students to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.

BC's total education budget for public and independent schools is \$5.9 billion in 2017-18 – this is a record \$314 million (5.6%) increase from the 2016-17 school year. Annual education funding is up 44% since 2000/01, or more than \$1.8 billion, at a time when there are fewer students in the school system. This historic funding has contributed to BC students consistently achieving high scores in international studies. Our Grade 10 students were recently ranked first in the world for reading, second in science, and sixth in math by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Our graduation rates have also improved:

- 83% of high school students are graduating now – 8% more than in 2001-02.
- 66% of students with special needs are graduating now – 103% more than in 2001/-02.
- 65% of Aboriginal students are completing high school now – 51.5% more than in 2001-02.
- 87% of English language learners are completing high school now – up 10% since 2001-02.

The record level of investments we are making in our schools today is only possible because we have been able to get to yes on economic development. BC Liberals will continue to deliver a well-funded system that supports students and helps them achieve their full potential.



D. Would you increase funding for children with special needs and ELL students in the K-12 system?

Today's BC Liberals believe collaboration and flexibility are key when determining staffing levels and expertise in school classrooms. We know that school districts are best able to determine student needs across our community.

A critical consideration to meeting diverse needs is students with special needs. This year, funding for students in B.C. with special needs is close to \$1 billion – including basic student funding and targeted supports. Since 2001, total funding for students with designated special needs has gone from \$521 million to \$993 million - a 91% increase. Budget 2017 provides an additional \$10 million in funding.

We have a far more inclusive approach to education today. How we describe, assess, and support students with special needs has changed significantly over the years. And the results speak for themselves – we've seen dramatic improvements, with completion rates more than doubling under our government.

E. Would you restore Adult Basic Education and provide free ELL for adults?

We need to ensure adult upgrading courses remain sustainable and affordable so our government introduced tuition for these courses offered at post-secondary institutions, while providing grants to eligible, low-income students. High-school courses in school districts remain free for students who have not graduated and who are working toward an Adult Graduation Diploma. The federal government continues to fund tuition-free ESL for eligible immigrants through not-for-profit agencies and some post-secondary institutions.

7. Promoting the health of all British Columbians

A. 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?

BC has some of the most comprehensive supports for low-income individuals and their families in Canada, including subsidized housing, child-care subsidies, dental and optical care for children, free MSP and Pharmacare, child and seniors benefits, and employment services.

PharmaCare is one of the most comprehensive prescription drug programs in Canada. Coverage is available to every British Columbian. The Canadian Institute for Health Information reports B.C. has the lowest per-capita drug spending among the provinces at \$807 per person. The province's Fair PharmaCare plan provides B.C. families with coverage for eligible prescription drugs and designated medical supplies, based on their net income. Deductible levels are set up to reflect patients' ability to pay. Seniors born in or before 1939 receive enhanced assistance.

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A. Would you eliminate MSP premiums?

For families looking for help making life more affordable, Today's BC Liberals will provide a billion dollar tax cut by making dramatic reductions to Medical Service Premiums (MSP). With two million low-income British Columbians already exempt from MSP, two million more will see their premiums cut by 50% in January – the first step towards eliminating MSP entirely. That means a typical family of four earning less than \$120,000 will save \$900 per year in 2018.

In the meantime, in Budget 2017, Today's BC Liberal government immediately raised the income threshold below which households are fully exempt from MSP by \$2,000. This means individuals with net income up to \$26,000 will pay no premiums, and couples with two children and family net income up to \$35,000 will pay no premiums.

B. What are your plans to improve the quality and accessibility of community care for seniors and people with disabilities (including home care and residential care)?

Seniors built this province. They have been there for us, and now we need to be there for them. BC has a growing, aging, and active population and we need to invest in making sure our healthcare system takes care of seniors with the dignity and respect they deserve, no matter how complex their needs. We have increased the number of clients receiving home health services 36% between 2001 and 2016 but we know we can do more. Over the next four years, Today's BC Liberals are committed to a \$500 million funding boost to improve care for seniors across the system.

Included in this is \$275 million over the next four years for home and community care services as part of the recent health funding agreement with the federal government. In addition, health authorities will keep increasing their budgets for home and community care – reaching approximately \$200 million above current levels by 2020-21. To further improve the quality of care, Today's BC Liberals are committed to hiring about 1,500 additional staff including health-care assistants, nurses, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists.

We are also providing \$90 million over the next three years to help create new teams of primary care providers in communities throughout BC, starting in those with the greatest need for enhanced primary care services. This team-based primary care model will particularly benefit seniors and those with complex health needs – helping to keep them healthier, more independent, and out of hospital. We're able to make this investment because of the strong economy British Columbians have built, and a solid plan that invests in the services people count on.

We are also committed to increasing funding for an additional 500 nurses per year across the province by 2022. We will also train and place an additional 100 nurse practitioners across British Columbia and create more spaces for in-demand professions, such as physiotherapists and speech therapists. Finally, we will identify retention programs to ensure these health care providers remain in rural and northern communities.



To ensure seniors can live healthy, active lives within their communities, Today's BC Liberals will:

- Invest \$1 million in grants to communities across British Columbia to build activity areas that are appropriate for seniors suffering from dementia.
- Provide an additional \$2 million to the Union of BC Municipalities to fund our age-friendly communities program and expand access for seniors across our province.
- Introduce an Active Seniors Credit to support and promote seniors leading active healthy lifestyles.

We have also provided \$31 million in funding to enhance the Better at Home program in more than 100 communities, helping seniors stay in their homes longer. To ensure individuals seniors can continue to live in their homes, Today's BC Liberals will double the Home Renovation Tax Credit to \$20,000 for improvements to accommodate family members with disabilities. We will introduce a Respite Tax Credit of up to \$2,500 for people caring for seniors or family members with disabilities. And we commit to dedicating all funds provided by the federal government in the recent BC-Canada health agreement to incremental home care and mental health supports.

C. What are your plans for improving community-based mental health and addiction services?

Our BC Liberal government is committed to providing the best supports for people facing challenges associated with mental illness and problematic substance use, and has made it a priority to build a comprehensive system of these services throughout the province. Our government spends about \$1.5 billion per year in mental health and substance use services, including programs for children and youth.

There was a time when those with mental health and substance use problems would be forced to suffer in silence because of the shame and stigma associated with these treatable disorders. While we're making progress to prevent, treat and support people on their path to recovery, there is always more to do.

This is one of the reasons we moved to secure a new, long-lasting funding agreement with the federal government that will invest new money into critical mental health supports across the country.

Today's BC Liberal's will work with the federal government to begin flowing these additional investments as quickly as possible so British Columbians have easy and effective access to these programs and treatment options.

2016 was a year of needless deaths from opioid overdoses, particularly with the rise of illicit fentanyl and carfentanil across Canada. Every one of these preventable deaths reminds us that no one is spare from the danger of these toxic drugs, or the suffering of addiction. Here in B.C., we have led the country in our response to this crisis with the following actions:

- Invested \$100 million to fund a comprehensive acute and long term strategy to combat the overdose crisis, spearheaded by our health and criminal justice Expert Joint Task Force

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- Established a first of its kind BC Centre on Substance Use, to provide world-class research and clinical guidance under the direction of leading addictions expert, Dr. Evan Wood.
- Increased access and coverage for opioid substitute treatments like suboxone so addicts can safely transition off of illicit drugs
- Met our 500-treatment bed commitment and provided an additional \$10 million to give up to 240 people residential and intensive out-patient recovery services
- Distributed over 30,000 no charge Naloxone kits, a key antidote that immediately reverses an overdose
- Worked with the federal government on a national approach to public safety and law enforcement, included the regulation of pill presses and enhanced border controls to intercept and block toxic drugs like fentanyl and carfentanil
- Driving forward – Fully utilize the additional \$10 million provided by the federal government to continue to prevent fentanyl and carfentanil deaths.

We will build on these initiatives with the following actions dedicated to youth:

- Confirm \$165 million for youth mental health needs and substance abuse issues with the following investments:
 - \$45 million to provide resources to allow for more mental health counselling and treatment for children.
 - \$12 million to provide up to 28 highly specialized addiction treatment beds for youth.
 - \$9 million for the expansion of youth service centres at up to five sites, each expected to reach 1,200-2,500 more clients annually.
 - Up to \$5 million to support mental health services for post-secondary students.
 - \$2 million annually for the BC Centre on Substance Use, largely for clinical research in support of evidence-based addiction treatments.
 - \$10 million to reduce wait lists for substance use treatment services incremental to those provided by the Health Authorities.
 - \$65 million over two years for the acquisition and renovation of buildings to house some of our most vulnerable, including those with mental health and substance use issues.
- Launch five integrated youth service centres in Abbotsford, Campbell River, Kelowna, North Shore, and Prince George through Foundry.
- Reopen the Crossing at Keremeos near Ashnola, a 22-bed program to provide intensive residential substance use treatment for youth young adults aged 17-24.
- Fund an additional 250 mental health and problematic substance use beds by 2022.



D. Would you commit to full implementation of the BC Ombudspersons' report on seniors care in a reasonable time frame?

In Fall 2014, the Ministry of Health advised the Ombudsman that it has developed a four-year work plan to implement the remaining recommendations.