

Get informed: Where the major BC political parties stand on poverty reduction

We asked the three major political parties to tell us where they stand on committing to a poverty reduction plan for BC. We've analyzed the responses to our survey, their election platforms, and their media responses to share with you below so that you can make an informed choice on May 9.

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



***The Greens commit to implementing a poverty reduction plan with benchmarks for progress.***

“The B.C. Green Party is committed to reducing our persistently high rates of poverty and will implement a poverty reduction plan. Reducing poverty is one of our central priorities and we will act on this issue immediately upon forming Government. We will determine the most appropriate benchmarks for progress in consultation with expert groups. We will work collaboratively with anti-poverty groups to support their work and determine best practices. A B.C. Green Government will take action on multiple fronts to reduce poverty and enable people to escape the poverty trap.”

View the Green Party's full response at:

<https://makepovertypublic.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/bc-poverty-reduction-coalition-election-questions-bcgp-response.pdf>

View the Green Party's Platform at:

<https://d3n8a8pro7vhnmx.cloudfront.net/greenpartybc/pages/2300/attachments/original/1493054476/2017-platform-bcgreenparty-print.pdf?1493054476>



***The Liberals have rebranded their existing programs as a project called LIFT, which starts with their Jobs Plan as “the best social program.” There are no targets and timelines, and it does not commit to any specific objectives. The significant reductions in child poverty cited within LIFT and within public debate during the election have been fact-checked and challenged here.***

“Our BC Liberal government is implementing our plan, “LIFT: A Plan to Support People and Reduce Poverty.”

View the Liberals' full response at:

<https://makepovertypublic.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/bc-liberals-responses.pdf>

View the Liberals' Platform at:

<https://www.bcliberals.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-Platform.pdf>



***The NDP commit to implementing legislation to bring in a poverty reduction strategy with targets and timelines.***

“BC's New Democrats have repeatedly introduced private member's legislation to bring in a poverty reduction strategy, but each time the BC Liberals have ignored it. Government policies can either reduce poverty or increase it, and a New Democrat government would choose to reduce it. We believe it is past time to move forward on a plan that will reduce poverty and homelessness in our province, so we have committed to passing legislation that includes targets and timelines to decrease poverty and create economic inclusion in BC.”

View the NDP's full response at:

<https://makepovertypublic.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/bcndp-letter.pdf>

View the NDP's Platform at:

<https://action.bcndp.ca/page/-/bcndp/docs/BC-NDP-Platform-2017.pdf>



## Would you increase and index welfare benefit rates in all categories?



***The Greens commit to an immediate increase of 10% and then, by 2020, income assistance will increase to \$915/month and disability rates will increase to \$1,549/month. The Greens will also pilot a basic income project.***

“A B.C. Green government will take immediate steps to begin the transition to liveable incomes with an increase in all income assistance rates, including in the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) and Expected to Work categories. Rates will increase by 10% effective October 1, 2017, and rise to 50% above the current level on April 1, 2020. This increase will be supplemented by other programming to support those on assistance programs. Under this increase, a single person on income assistance will receive \$671/month as of this October, up from the current rate of \$610/month. By April 2020, they will receive \$915/month. An individual with a PWD designation will receive \$1,136/month as of this October, up from the current rate of \$1,033/month. By April 2020, they will receive \$1,549/month.”

“In addition to raising social assistance rates, we will also design a basic income pilot project that will test its ability to reduce poverty, and improve health, housing and employment outcomes. We believe that basic income has the potential help us alleviate poverty and foster healthier families and more resilient communities. It could reduce the stigma and complexity of our current social assistance system, and provide people enough income security that they are able to escape the poverty trap and take care of their families.”

***Not for basic income assistance, which is currently only \$610 per month for a single person and has been frozen since 2007; but for disability rates, the Liberals commit to another increase of \$50 per month.***

“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... We also created the Single Parent Employment Initiative (SPEI) to support single parents who want a job.”

***The NDP will immediately raise all income assistance and disability rates by \$100 per month, restore the bus pass program for people with disabilities, and increase the earnings exemption by \$200.***

“We will reduce the depth of poverty in BC by acting immediately to raise all income assistance and disability rates by \$100 per month. We will encourage and support assistance recipients as they re-enter the workforce by allowing them to keep an additional \$200 a month in earnings exemptions. We will end Christy Clark’s disability bus pass clawback, fully restoring the BC Bus Pass program for people with disabilities.”



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



*The Greens will establish a fair wages commission to determine a new minimum wage.*

"We recognize that an important part of income security is ensuring that those on minimum wage are earning enough. Growing levels of working poverty reflect the fact that the current minimum wage is inadequate to cover the rising cost of living. In response, a B.C. Green government will establish an arm's-length fair wages commission, that will be tasked with establishing a new minimum wage and overseeing regular rate reviews."



**Today's BC Liberals**

*The current minimum wage is set to increase to \$11.35 in September but this will still keep a worker below the poverty line.*

"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."



*The NDP will bring in a \$15/hour minimum wage by 2021, with increases each year. Once it reaches \$15/hour, they will index the minimum wage to inflation.*

"We have also committed to increasing the minimum wage to \$15.00 per hour over our first term of government."



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?



*The Greens will launch a Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions; provide basic income support for youth transitioning out of foster care; and adopt the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

"In a society as rich as ours, it is shameful that our government allows persistently high levels of poverty to exist, particularly for multiple marginalized sectors of society. In addition to significantly raising social assistance rates as detailed above, we will implement a basic income pilot project that will test its ability to reduce poverty, and improve health, housing and employment outcomes, particularly among marginalized groups."

"A B.C. Green Government will also introduce a basic income support for youth aged 18 to 24, who are transitioning out of foster care. This will help these youth avoid the range of adverse outcomes they currently experience, including intergenerational poverty, criminal activity, substance abuse, lost educational opportunities, and homelessness. Research shows that establishing a basic support fund for these youth would actually save the Provincial Government \$165-\$201 million per year."

*The Liberals have introduced a targeted employment support program for single parents; and will create a Minister responsible for accessibility for people with disabilities and establish an accessibility lens on regulations and legislation.*

"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."

*The NDP will launch a Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions; develop an all-party Select Standing Committee on Seniors; eliminate the collection of illegal recruitment fees from Temporary Foreign Workers; and adopt the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

"We will bring in a Temporary Foreign Worker registry similar to Manitoba's to give government the information it needs to protect workers. We will end the collection of illegal recruitment fees from Temporary Foreign Workers by requiring recruiters and employers to register to recruit Temporary Foreign Workers."

"We have also committed to adopt the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and implement the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, another step with First Nations which Christy Clark and her government refuse to take. We can carry on with the current path the BC Liberals have set of limiting, denying and ignoring the reality and opportunity of First Nations people, or we can seize those opportunities together. New Democrats believe we can grow together, prosper together and build a better province together."



What plans do you have for the construction of new social housing to fulfill the need of 10,000 social housing units per year?

Do you plan to improve tenant protections and rent controls?

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



***The Greens commit to building 4,000 new units of affordable housing per year, investing \$100 million per year to renovate existing social housing units, and enhancing the Residential Tenancy Act.***

“A B.C. Green government will introduce a comprehensive housing strategy that recognizes that the primary purpose of housing must be to provide homes first, and a means of investment second. We believe that every person has a right to reasonable accommodation and will enact policies to make this a reality... A B.C. Green government will invest up to \$750 million per year in to support the construction of approximately 4,000 new units of affordable housing per year.”

“Ensuring adequate protection for renters in the context of the tight rental market is also essential. A B.C. Green government will enhance the provisions of the Residential Tenancy Act to control rent increases, and to protect tenants from tenure termination that will result in the loss of affordable accommodation.”



**Today's BC Liberals**

***The Liberals promise 5,300 units of affordable, social housing over 3-5 years but projects include repurposing and renovations in addition to new stock.***

“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).”

“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.”

“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.”



***The NDP commit to building 11,400 new “rental, non-profit, co-op and owner-purchase” units per year for the next decade, ranging from supported social housing to market rental. They will also provide a renters rebate of \$400 a year per rental household, and have pledged to reform the Residential Tenancy Act.***

“We will build 114,000 affordable rental, non profit, co-op and owner purchase housing units through partnerships over ten years. These homes will be a mix of housing for students, singles, seniors, and families and will range from supported social housing to quality, market rental housing...We'll get new student housing built by removing unnecessary rules that prevent universities and colleges from building affordable student housing.”

“We will close the BC Liberals’ “fixed term lease” loophole and ensure controls on rent increases are enforced. We will pass legislation requiring fair treatment during renovations and demolitions of rental properties. We will also tighten the rules that protect good landlords and tenants, and provide the necessary resources for the Residential Tenancy Branch to do its job and resolve disputes fairly and in a timely way.”

“We will partner with the federal government, local municipalities, agencies and community groups to create an immediate homelessness action plan, which includes a provincial poverty reduction plan. We will ensure that initiatives in other areas such as mental health, social assistance, justice, safety, health, and more are tied into the action plan. We will conduct a province-wide homeless count and commit to reduce the homeless population through permanent housing and services as part of our action plan on housing.”



## Do you support the \$10 a Day Plan?

(Summaries drawn from \$10 a day Election 2017 Child Care Report Card)



*The BC Greens incorporate elements of the Plan and promise significant funding, but their implementation details are less clear. Their platform offers free child care, with restrictions, but does not address the full-working day needs of families with 3 and 4 year olds. Nor does it address the education and wages of caregivers.*

“Our comprehensive program for early childhood education and childcare will provide: up to 25 hours free early childhood education per week for three and four year olds; free daycare for working parents with children under three; up to \$500 per month for families with children under three and a stay at home parent.”



**Today's BC Liberals**

*The BC Liberals continue to ignore the child care affordability crisis. Their commitment to add 8,700 more child care spaces by 2020 won't even keep up with BC's projected child population growth, which is expected to grow by 18,000 in the next 3 years.*

“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 BC NDP are committed to bringing in the \$10aDay Child Care Plan. Their platform includes sufficient funds over the next 3 years to begin the Plan's proposed implementation schedule, which will result in immediate action in all three areas: parent fees, licensed spaces, and caregiver wages and education.*

“We will invest in safe, affordable, universal childcare and move towards a \$10/day plan to make life more affordable for families, create jobs and grow the economy.”



How do you propose to increase access for people on social assistance and low wage workers to post-secondary education, training and apprenticeships?  
Would you reduce post-secondary tuition fees by 50% and increase the availability of post-secondary grants for low-income students?  
Would you increase funding to K-12 education to address inequality among students and schools?

***The Greens will re-instate free adult basic education (ABE); implement needs-based grants for post-secondary students; and review the funding model for K-12 education.***

“Our public education system is chronically underfunded. This isn’t just tough on kids and families, it also ignores that education is the best investment society can make. A B.C. Green government will make historic investments into education at all stages of life to ensure all British Columbians receive the educational support they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives...We will also re-instate free adult basic education, reversing the BC Liberals’ funding cut in 2014. Adults wanting to upgrade their high school courses in order to pursue postsecondary studies should not be burdened with tuition.”

“A B.C. Green government will implement needs-based grants for post-secondary students so that they can afford their tuition and cost of living. A B.C. Green government will offer tax forgiveness of up to \$2,000 a year for up to five years to assist qualifying graduates to repay outstanding debt incurred for tuition fees.”

“A B.C. Green government will significantly increase funding for public schools, beginning in 2017/18 at \$220 million and rising to \$1.46 billion in 2020/21, to allow schools and school districts to invest in every child and prepare students for the emerging economy, and to invest in innovation and technology. This is in addition to the \$330 million committed by the B.C. Liberal government to address the recent Supreme Court ruling on class size and composition... A B.C. Green government will review the funding model for the K-12 public education system with a view to ensuring equitable access for students. This will address targeting funding to public schools with the greatest need and increasing local autonomy regarding funding priorities and distribution.”



***The Liberals will support low-income single working parents to access training; lower the interest rate on student loans; and comply with the Supreme Court ruling to increase the level of funding for K-12 education.***

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”



***The NDP will make ABE and ESL free again; make student loans interest free and provide a \$1,000 completion grant for graduates; and review the current funding model for K-12 education.***

“The BC Liberals have tripled tuition fees and dramatically increased student debt. John Horgan and the BC NDP believe that getting the skills you need shouldn’t be a lifelong debt sentence. After years of Christy Clark making it harder to get education and skills training, we’ll make sure low and middle-income students have help getting the education they need to succeed...We will make Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) free again.”

“We will make student loans interest free—current and future. We will provide a \$1,000 completion grant for graduates of college, university and skilled trades programs to help pay down debt when they finish their programs. We will keep a cap on tuition fees at colleges and universities.”

“After 16 years of BC Liberal neglect, it is time to examine our school funding formula to ensure it meets the needs of children and communities. A BC NDP government is committed to a comprehensive review of BC’s current K-12 funding formula to move BC’s school system to a better, stable and sustainable model for investing in education. Christy Clark’s current per-pupil funding model doesn’t work for the differing costs of education in BC’s rural, suburban and inner city schools.”



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?  
Would you eliminate MSP premiums?  
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)?



***The Greens commit to eliminating MSP premiums and investing \$35 million over four years in seniors' home care.***

“The BC Greens believe the highest priority of government should be to promote the health and wellbeing of British Columbians. We recognize the interconnected nature of health and wellness, including the importance of socioeconomic factors. We will therefore take an integrative approach to ensure the health and wellbeing of British Columbians, through making primary care more accessible, improving access to other essential health services.”

“A B.C. Green Government will roll Medical Service Plan (MSP) premiums into the payroll tax and personal income tax to ensure that they are administered in a more equitable and progressive manner.”

“There is growing consensus that supporting seniors to remain in their own homes and communities as long as possible is the most cost-effective and appropriate way of addressing the needs of BC's aging population. However, this requires the expansion of BC seniors' access to a full range of home supports including non-medical home supports such as transportation, housekeeping and yard work, and support for the construction of age-friendly communities.”



**Today's BC Liberals**

***The Liberals commit to reducing MSP premiums by 50% (having increased them significantly over the last 16 years); and providing \$500 million for seniors care, which will not bring service levels back up to meet population needs after sixteen years of underfunding.***

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”



***The NDP will work towards a national pharmacare program; eliminate MSP premiums within 4 years; and increase support for seniors home and residential care.***

“Health care that works for you includes being able to afford the medication your doctor prescribes. Under the BC Liberals, drug prices have risen and nearly one in five British Columbians report they cannot afford to take their medications as prescribed. Every day, people are forced to make unacceptable choices between paying for prescription drugs and putting food on the table... We will work with the federal government towards a national pharmacare program and we will support efforts to bulk purchase medication, bringing costs down.”

“John Horgan and the BC NDP will eliminate MSP fees and make sure low and middle-income families come out ahead. We will go ahead with the 2017 Budget's 50 per cent reduction and eliminate the fee within four years, saving families as much as \$1,800 a year.”

“Nine in ten seniors' care homes don't meet minimum government standards... We will increase the length of home support visits and expand the scope of services provided, helping seniors stay in their homes longer... We will increase support for residential care and demand accountability from providers to ensure that they meet staffing standards and provide seniors with the high quality, dignified care that they deserve. We will support relationship-based care, and ensure those care relationships are not disrupted by contracting out or contract-flipping. We will also conduct a systematic review to establish and maintain safe staffing levels going forward.”