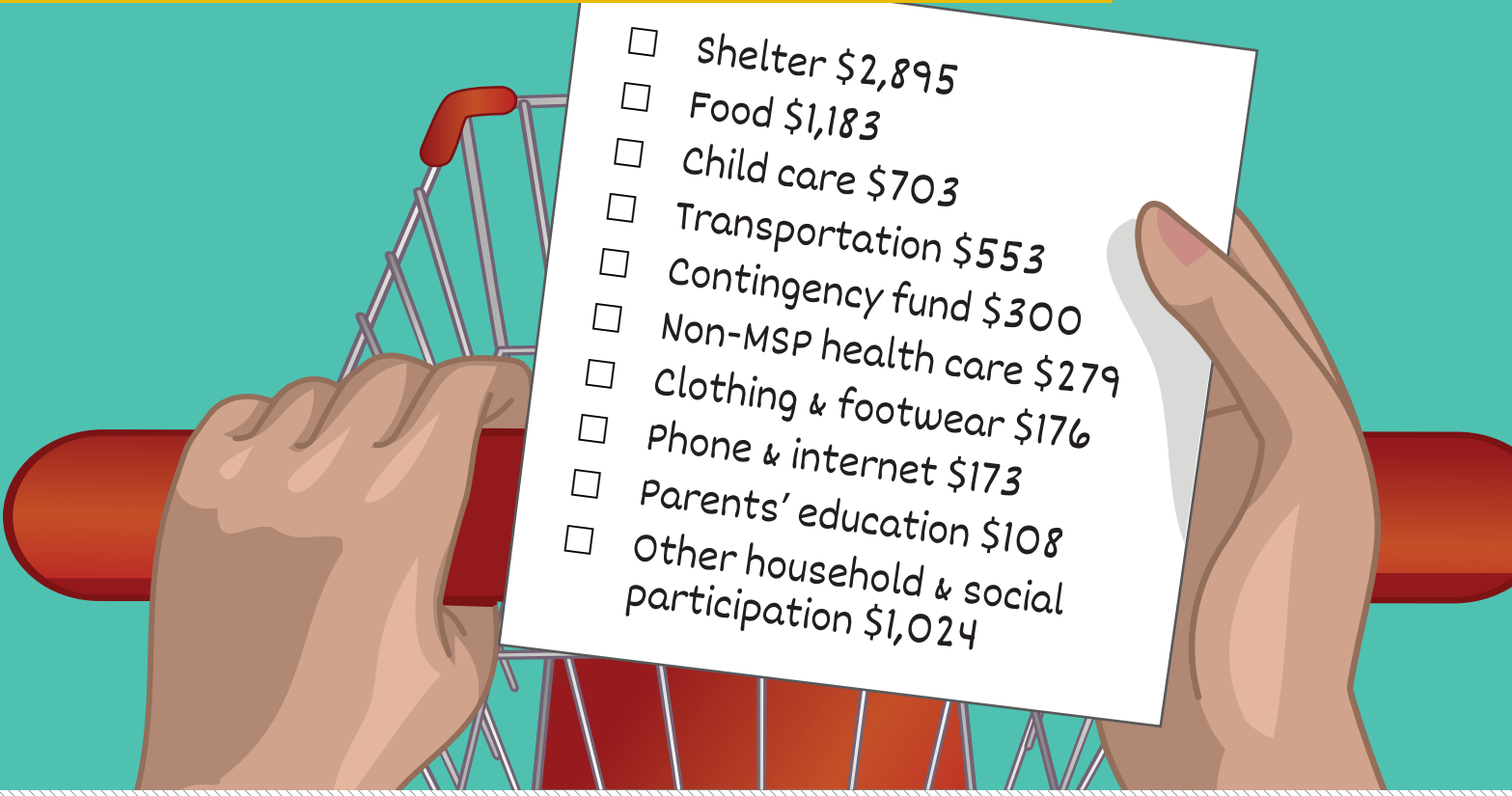


BC SOLUTIONS

News & Commentary from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' BC Office | FEBRUARY 2024

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- A stylized illustration showing two hands holding a red shopping cart. A white piece of paper is held in front of the cart, listing various household expenses with checkboxes. The list includes: Shelter \$2,895, Food \$1,183, Child care \$703, Transportation \$553, Contingency fund \$300, Non-MSP health care \$279, Clothing & footwear \$176, Phone & internet \$173, Parents' education \$108, and Other household & social participation \$1,024.
- Shelter \$2,895
 - Food \$1,183
 - Child care \$703
 - Transportation \$553
 - Contingency fund \$300
 - Non-MSP health care \$279
 - Clothing & footwear \$176
 - Phone & internet \$173
 - Parents' education \$108
 - Other household & social participation \$1,024

Affordability crisis will persist until we get a handle on runaway housing costs

BY IGLIKA IVANOVA & ALEX HEMINGWAY

In November, the CCPA-BC and Living Wage for Families BC released the 2023 living wage for Metro Vancouver as we do every year. Although inflation has come down from the historic highs recorded in 2022, the cost of living in Metro Vancouver continues to increase rapidly. It now takes an hourly wage of \$25.68 in Metro Vancouver for two parents each working full-time to support a family of four.

The Metro Vancouver living wage is \$1.60 higher than last year because of skyrocketing rents and soaring food costs. New public investments to reduce child care fees and provide a dental benefit for children and increases to the Climate Action Tax Credit and BC Family Benefit have put some money in workers' pockets, but the savings are entirely consumed by rising prices.

Across the province, unaffordable rents and high food costs are driving increases in local living wages. In Greater Victoria, the living wage is now \$25.40, a 4.6% increase from →

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2022; in Kelowna, \$24.60, a 7.5% increase; and in Prince George, \$22.09, a 4.2% increase.

Many BC employers have stepped up to pay both direct and contract employees family-supporting wages, with nearly 400 certified Living Wage employers across the province.

However, the thousands of BC workers who earn less than the living wage in their community continue to face impossible choices—buy groceries or heat the house, keep up with bills or pay the rent on time. The result can be spiraling debt, constant anxiety and long-term health problems. In many cases it means working long hours, often at multiple jobs, just to pay for basic necessities.

/// The Metro Vancouver living wage is \$1.60 higher than last year because of skyrocketing rents and soaring food costs.

You don't have to be an economist to spot the strikingly large gap between BC's minimum wage and the living wages across the province. In the last two years, this gap has grown significantly and it's now close to \$9 per hour in Metro Vancouver.

Rent is the most expensive item in the Metro Vancouver living wage family budget and the fastest growing as the housing crisis continues to deepen. To have any hope in tackling the affordability crisis, BC needs to get a handle on runaway market rents.

First, governments must massively increase investment in public and non-profit housing. Creating deeply affordable housing requires public subsidies, grants and land contributions. Increased taxes on wealthy landowners can help fund these. But public investment in non-market housing can also be funded in part through the rental income it generates, as our research has demonstrated.

Second, policymakers must address the shortage of homes. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation estimates that BC needs to build 610,000 more homes by 2030 above trend, which is consistent with findings of independent analysts. Addressing the shortage requires, among other things, dismantling exclusionary municipal zoning policies that effectively ban new apartments on the vast majority of residential land. The BC government

recently stepped in to allow small-scale multiplex housing across most cities and high-rises near rapid transit, but much broader mid-rise apartment zoning is still needed.

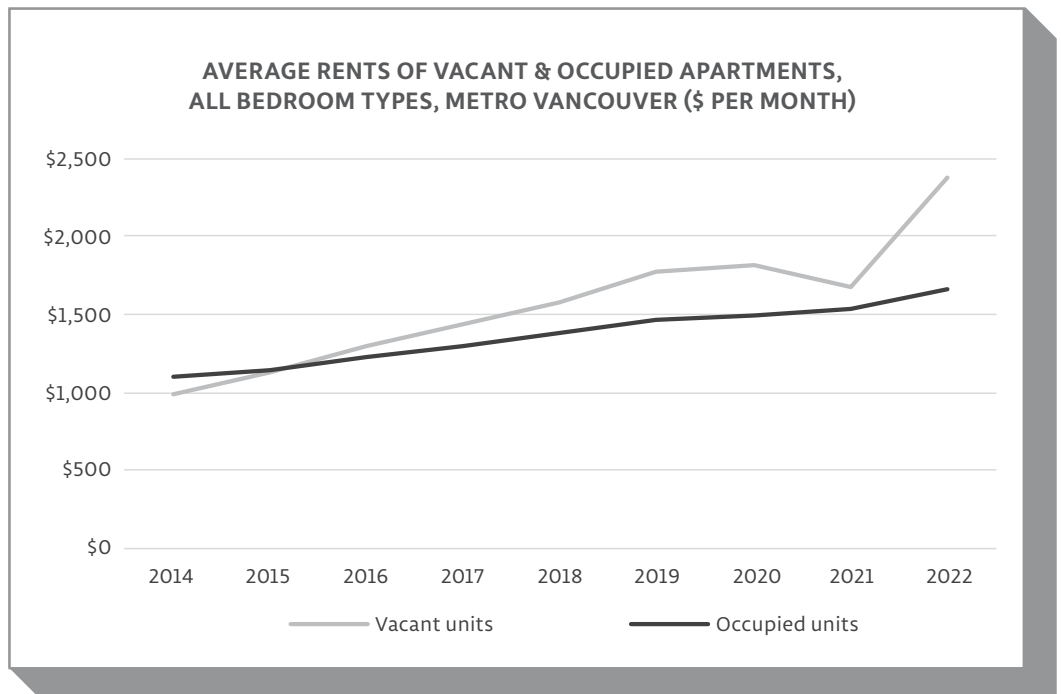
Third, these efforts should be complemented by stronger rent controls since easing the overall housing shortage will take time. Today, when rental homes are vacated, landlords are free to raise rents to whatever rate a new tenant is willing to pay. And they do. This creates an enormous gap between the rents that new and long-term tenants are paying. According to CMHC data, in 2022, the average asking rent for vacant units was 43% higher than the average for occupied units in Metro Vancouver.

Bringing in a vacancy control policy would mean capping rent increases even when tenants move out and a unit is re-rented. This can help curb spiking rents and reduce landlords' incentive to evict tenants. Some fear vacancy control would suppress investment in new rental housing, but this can be avoided if it exempts new buildings and is paired with ambitious zoning reform.

BC's lowest-wage workers need a raise but the labour market alone can't solve all economic insecurities. Governments can and should do more to address the cost-of-living crisis that people are facing across the province.



Iglia Ivanova and Alex Hemingway are senior economists at the CCPA-BC. Iglia is the lead author of the 2023 update of Working for a Living Wage (policyalternatives.ca/living-wage2023) and supports local living wage calculations across the province. The 2023 living wage rates for different BC communities can be found at www.livingwageforfamilies.ca/living_wage_rates.



Time for change: A farewell message from CCPA–BC Director Shannon Daub

Dear friends,

It is with mixed feelings that I share my decision with you to move on from the CCPA. Mixed because I am ready for a change in my career, but that doesn't spare me the heartache of saying goodbye to an organization I've had the honour of helping to build over the past 25 years.

I am leaving with a tremendous amount of pride in what we've created—a thriving, mature research institute that sparks with energy, curiosity and ideas. Where people come together from so many different communities and movements to plot a better world. Where we ask, what is possible if we think big?

I also leave full of gratitude to the huge community of people who have been part of what is very much a collective effort. The founding progressives who mentored me along with Seth Klein and Marc Lee in the organization's early days. The wonderfully talented staff colleagues I've had the privilege of working alongside day to day. The board members, research associates and community partners who equally shape CCPA–BC priorities and work. The thousands of donors who make that work possible with contributions large and small.

I mean, how could I possibly walk away from all that? But my own mixed feelings aside, this is one of the CCPA–BC's greatest strengths; it's a much larger organization than you'd think looking at our annual budget or staff complement. We've convened or been part of dozens of coalitions and major projects over the years—bringing people, organizations and movements together in common cause and having a vastly greater impact than we could in isolation.

Leadership at the CCPA–BC is also highly distributed within the staff team. The Director shares management responsibilities with two fantastic Associate Directors—Mariwan Jaaf (finance and operations) and Lisa Akinyi May (communications). Intellectual leadership is shared with the brilliant researchers who are the public face of the CCPA–BC: Igluka Ivanova, Ben Parfitt, Marc Lee, Alex Hemingway and our newest recruit Véronique Sioufi. Behind the scenes, talented communicators make sure our work gets out in the world—Terra Poirier, Marianela Ramos Capelo and Jean Kavanagh. Rav Kambo brings grace and warmth to her leadership of fundraising and engagement with donors. Bojan Stanojlovic coordinates major projects (involving



dozens of partners, researchers and funders) and Sylvan Korvus keeps all manner of technical systems running smoothly with the utmost skill and professionalism.

All of which to say: the CCPA–BC is in excellent hands going into this leadership transition. It will continue to be a high profile, credible, independent source of analysis and ideas. It will continue to speak truth to power fearlessly—and with all the facts.

As for me, I don't know what comes next. These are fractious times and confusing in many ways. But whatever I take on, it will be driven by the same certainty—that a better world is worth fighting for—that drew me to the CCPA all those years ago.

A few special thank yous...

Bill Kilgannon for stepping in as Interim Director this summer so I could take a sabbatical leave. And for taking the news that I won't be coming back in stride.

Ken Novakowski, who founded the CCPA–BC along with Marjorie Griffin Cohen, for coming out of retirement to help negotiate important changes to the national structure of the CCPA.

Emira Mears for her partnership, grace and phenomenally competent leadership as Associate Director from 2019–2022.

Sussanne Skidmore, who took on the CCPA–BC Chair role at the time I became Director—thank you for your support and solidarity over the last five years, pandemic and all...

And many more but I'll leave it there for now.

—Shannon



What would it take to meet Canada's 2030 climate targets?

BY HADRIAN MERTINS-KIRKWOOD & MARC LEE

When Canada first signed the Paris Agreement way back in 2015, the deadline to reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030 seemed far away.

So far away, in fact, that in 2021 the federal government doubled down, promising a 40–45% reduction in emissions by 2030. And while the federal government didn't yet have a plan to achieve that goal in full, it at least had the time to come up with one.

Now, halfway to 2030, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions are not falling fast enough—we achieved only a 7% reduction between 2015 and 2021. And time is running short.

Is it still possible for Canada to cut emissions by 30, 40 or even 45% by 2030? If so, what would it take?

Those are the questions that Canada's Net-Zero Advisory Body (NZAB) recently posed to climate policy experts across the country, including the CCPA. Our submission to NZAB made clear that, while Canada's Paris commitment is not yet out of reach, setting ourselves on the path to carbon neutrality will require much bolder policies than the federal government has entertained so far.

Two elephants stand in the way of decarbonizing the

Canadian economy. The first is the fossil fuel industry. The extraction and processing of coal, oil and gas accounts for more than a quarter of Canada's domestic emissions. The second is the nebulous world of "negative emissions" or "carbon credits," which refers generally to the idea that we don't have to stop burning fossil fuels as long as we suck up the same amount of pollution somewhere else.

In practice, that means deploying carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS) technologies for industrial processes, expanding natural carbon sinks like forests and wetlands, and counting on as-yet-uninvented technologies to pull carbon dioxide directly out of the atmosphere.

In its latest modeling, the Canada Energy Regulator relied heavily on the assumption of negative emissions for its net-zero scenarios to the extent of being wildly unrealistic. Despite the oil and gas industry's marketing, CCUS has not been developed at a scale commensurate with the problem. And it is prohibitively expensive, which is why those same companies

are demanding enormous public subsidies.

Looking to nature to fix our problems is not going to work either. After a summer of record wildfires across the country, it is clear that Canada's forests are no longer a carbon sink. Forest carbon offset projects can burn down, releasing all of the carbon they were supposed to store. Moreover, carbon offsets are notoriously difficult to validate and the industry is beset by fraud.

Allowing for negative emissions introduces significant moral hazard into the climate policy discourse. When every industry and jurisdiction believe that it alone will be able to offset its emissions in the future, none feels responsible for cutting emissions at the source.

Two elephants stand in the way of decarbonizing the Canadian economy. The first is the fossil fuel industry and the second is the nebulous world of "negative emissions" or "carbon credits."

Even where negative emissions are viable and valid, delaying necessary investments in lower-carbon alternatives increases the risk of stranded assets in the economy and raises the cost of transitioning over the long term.

Achieving our Paris Agreement target in the next seven years will require specific, rapid government actions. Many of the usual climate solutions, like major green infrastructure projects, simply cannot be finished fast enough to bend the emissions curve down by 2030. Here's what will help meet Canada's climate targets:

- A stringent oil and gas sector emissions cap.
- The phase-out of the output-based pricing system, in which large industrial polluters, especially the oil and gas industry, are not required to pay the full carbon price on their emissions.
- The phase-out of carbon offsets. Nature conservation and reclamation is vital in its own right, and it can also support Indigenous rights, but it is no substitute for reducing fossil fuel emissions.
- Attaching climate conditions to all federal funding. Without strong "green strings," major programs like the \$8 billion Net Zero Accelerator or the \$15 billion Canada Growth Fund risk subsidizing continued oil and gas production.
- An ambitious public transit investment plan with both capital and operational funding. In addition to major new transit infrastructure, we can improve service levels and reliability for existing transit systems in the short term.

- An international agreement on fossil fuel supply. Because the Paris Agreement only focuses on territorial emissions, it creates a loophole for fossil fuel-producing countries to continue to promote fossil fuel exports.

Even if we hit our aspirational 2030 target of a 45% reduction below 2005 levels, there is still serious work to do to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Here are the biggest pieces we need to get right over the long term:

- Transformational green infrastructure spending. In our 2023 report *Spending What it Takes*, we present a \$287 billion, five-year public investment plan that would amplify climate action.
- Dedicated support for Indigenous-led climate solutions. Advancing reconciliation and unleashing the potential of Indigenous Peoples to advance decarbonization requires dedicated funding for climate initiatives that are developed and owned by Indigenous communities themselves.
- A robust just transition framework. The federal government must adopt a mission-oriented transition strategy that prioritizes public planning and job-creating public investments. It should also empower communities and regions to chart their own path forward.
- More ambitious interim targets. Even 45% by 2030 is not enough. To do our fair share, given Canada's historical contribution to climate change and our capacity as a rich country to act, we would need to reduce emissions by closer to 60% by 2030.

Canada's target under the Paris Agreement is not out of reach. Nor is our hope of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. But the federal government's current, incrementalist approach will not get us there.

We need to dream bigger and adopt much more aggressive climate policies. And we need to do it while avoiding the pitfalls of oil and gas extraction and the false promise of negative emissions.

It won't be easy. But the longer we wait, the harder it gets.



Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood is a senior researcher at the CCPA, where he focuses on federal and provincial climate change policy in Canada. Marc Lee is a senior economist at the CCPA's BC office. *Spending What it Takes: Transformational climate investments for long-term prosperity in Canada* is available at: policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/spending-what-it-takes.

Fires & farmworkers: Climate justice means improving protections for migrant farmworkers

BY VÉRONIQUE SIOUFI

As wildfires burned in BC last summer, environmental leaders from around the world came together in Vancouver to call for a “holistic” approach to the climate crisis, but an earnest uptake of this call means we need to redress the legislated racism of migrant work in this province.

The impacts of the climate crisis are socially and geographically uneven: the wealthiest regions contribute disproportionately to the destruction of the planet while the poorest regions suffer the heaviest consequences. In this context, migrant farmworkers find themselves doubly displaced, facing droughts and inundations in their home countries, then heatwaves, fires and floods where they come to work.

In the week of the conference, more than 1.7 million hectares of land burned in BC and more than 27,000 British Columbians were displaced from their homes, with another 54,000 placed on evacuation alert. Among the displaced were migrant workers from Mexico, Guatemala, Jamaica and other countries of the Global South here through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) to work BC farms’ high season.

During the 2023 wildfires, migrant workers found themselves stranded in evacuation zones due to a lack of transportation, some were sent to overcrowded housing, some were left without food and some were brought to work on other farms in ongoing smoky conditions.

BC’s agricultural sector has steadily increased its dependence on migrant labour since it began leaning on the TFWP two decades ago, going from under 1,000 workers admitted through the program in 2005 to over 10,000 temporary foreign workers brought in annually by 2021. The BC Fruit Growers’ Association estimates temporary foreign workers now make up 50%–66% of the seasonal workforce on BC fruit farms.

Yet during the fires, and not for the first time, migrant farmworkers had to rely on community organizations to fill in the gaps of the province’s emergency response efforts, much as they had at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the wake of BC’s 2021 floods. This summer, WorkSafeBC failed to provide any support to migrant farmworkers during the wildfires, suggesting instead that it was employers’ responsibility. Some workers found themselves stranded in evacuation zones due to a lack of transportation, some were sent to overcrowded housing, some were left without food and some were brought to work on other farms in ongoing smoky conditions. As in previous crises, the challenges were exacerbated by a lack of Spanish translation of emergency notices, barriers to accessing emergency supports, lost wages and deportations.

The same week of the conference, a UN special rapporteur visiting Canada reported being disturbed by the policies that regulate migrant farmworkers’ immigration status, employment and housing in this country, warning that “the agricultural and low-wage streams of the TFWP constitute a breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery.” He was “particularly concerned that this workforce is disproportionately racialized, attesting to deep-rooted racism and xenophobia entrenched in Canada’s immigration system.”

Relying on migrant labour is supposed to be a “last resort for employers to fill jobs for which qualified Canadians are not available,” according to Employment Canada, but BC has ensured that farm work remains untenable for Canadians. This seasonal, physically demanding work, subject to extreme weather conditions, is among the lowest-paid in the province



as the BC government long ago eliminated vacation pay and overtime and maintains stagnating piece-rates in the industry. These practices foster vacancies that can be filled with foreign workers whose status is too precarious to challenge the sector's low pay and poor working conditions.

/// The provincial and federal governments need to reform the programs that perpetuate racist colonial relations of power, starting with the Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

The TFWP takes in workers under captive and insecure conditions. Workers are hired for limited stints and they are bound to the employer named on their work permit. Workers pay rent for shared, often dilapidated and overcrowded housing on farmers' properties, making their employers their defacto landlords. The power this gives to employers combined with the lack of oversight by either the federal or provincial government leaves workers vulnerable to mistreatment and deportation should they try to stand up for their rights.

Migrant farmworkers in BC are pressured to continue working in unsafe conditions rather than lose wages that their families depend on: employers are not obligated to pay lost wages

during natural disasters; workers' temporary status means they don't have access to employment insurance benefits despite paying into the program; workers don't feel they can depend on provincial emergency funds because they have been unable to access them in the past; and if farmers decide the crops are too damaged to farm, workers face forced repatriation and the loss of thousands in anticipated income, as was the case for many workers this wildfire season.

The TFWP provides a legal framework for the province to extract value from people whose labour has been systemically devalued on a global scale without having to share the spoils of its own colonial economy. This concurrently produces a disciplinary effect on BC's domestic agricultural labour market, which is primarily made up of racialized recent immigrants. Financial contributions to UN environmental funds don't excuse Canada from benefiting from the economic devastation in the Global South that undergirds workers' migration to BC. If we are serious about tackling the climate crisis, the provincial and federal governments need to reform the programs that perpetuate racist colonial relations of power, starting with the TFWP.



Véronique Sioufi is the CCPA-BC's Racial & Socio-Economic Equity Researcher.

Growing toll of COVID-19 on hospitals and population health should concern us

BY ANDREW LONGHURST

New data from Statistics Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) paint a troubling picture of the growing toll of COVID-19 on population health and provincial health systems. These findings come as public health authorities and governments have rolled back most measures that reduce SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) transmission.



For the third year in a row, life expectancy at birth declined in Canada, from 81.6 years in 2021 to 81.3 years in 2022. Changes in life expectancy are influenced by a number of factors, including COVID-19 and the toxic drug poisoning crisis.

The data also show that the number of COVID-19 hospitalizations increased 19% in Canada (excluding Quebec) and 7% in BC, length of hospital stay for COVID-19 patients increased 52% in Canada and 64% in BC, and the estimated total cost of hospitalizations increased 16% in Canada and 5% in BC (from \$477.3 million in 2021–22 to \$501.9 million in 2022–23). Increased workload demands on hospitals contributes to health workforce burnout measured in sick time, overtime and use of contracted private agency staff.

These measures of COVID-19's burden on health systems are moving in the wrong direction in most provinces.

The long-term effects of COVID-19

Over the last three years, attention has focused on the acute phase of COVID-19, which can lead to hospitalization and death. Research tells us that COVID-19 presents as a respiratory infection in the acute phase, but is a multi-system disease that can cause organ damage and long-term complications (or long COVID which is a risk with each reinfection.)

The risk of vascular and neurologic complications should be

reason enough to improve efforts to reduce transmission. And, long COVID research points to a range of abnormalities in the nervous system, brain, heart and lungs.

Provinces need COVID-19 public health strategies

In a welcome move on September 28, BC Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry and Health Minister Adrian Dix announced the return of universal masking in hospitals and health authority facilities. This will help protect patients and health care workers from COVID-19 infection and reduce the potential for health care facilities to amplify community transmission.

However, the return of mandatory hospital masking is not sufficient to blunt COVID-19 surges. We need a paradigm shift in how government and public health officials respond to the ongoing burden of COVID-19 through a “vaccines-plus” strategy, including:

- Clear public education that COVID-19 is airborne and spreads like cigarette smoke.
- Education that tight-fitting masks and respirators like N95s are superior to surgical and cloth masks.
- Improvement and regulation of indoor air quality in workplaces and high-risk congregate settings like schools, daycares and health care facilities.
- Increased availability of rapid testing to prevent spread.
- Legislation that requires employees have access to at least 10 days paid sick leave.
- Education on the importance of staying up to date on vaccination.

The good news is that these measures are low-burden and low-cost for government relative to the growing cost of inaction.



Andrew Longhurst is a CCPA-BC research associate and Simon Fraser University PhD candidate.

New protections for platform workers: Are they fair?

BY VÉRONIQUE SIOUFI & IGLIKA IVANOVA

In November, the BC Ministry of Labour announced new employment standards that claim to “bring fairness” to the estimated 40,000 ride-hail and food-delivery workers in BC who currently face low and unpredictable wages and lack basic workplace protections like minimum wage and workers’ compensation.

So far, the BC government has only passed a preliminary bill that enables further regulation to be developed for the industry. We analyzed the proposed employment protections to see how they measure up against the government’s claim of fairness for these workers. The checklist on the right shows our assessment.

As we argued in our submission to the ministry in September, bringing fairness to platform work means platform workers must receive all the rights and protections that other BC workers have and platform companies must fulfill all the responsibilities that other BC employers are required to fulfill.

We are disappointed that this group of predominantly racialized workers will not get the full range of workplace rights and protections available to all other workers.

Unfortunately, the BC government is planning to extend only a subset of employment rights to platform workers. While this is better than nothing, it is hardly fair: it entrenches them as a second tier of largely racialized workers, perpetuating racist economic hierarchies and leaving these workers vulnerable to further exploitation. It also lets platform companies offload the normal costs and risks of doing business onto workers, consumers and taxpayers.

It’s great to see the BC government deliver on its election promise to extend much-needed protections to platform workers. However, we are disappointed that this group of predominantly racialized workers will not get the full range of workplace rights and protections available to all other workers, including paid sick leave.



Véronique Sioufi is the CCPA-BC’s Racial & Socio-Economic Equity Researcher. Iglika Ivanova is a senior economist, the CCPA-BC’s Public Interest Researcher and Co-Director of

the Understanding Precarity in BC project. Full analysis and recommendations are available at: policynote.ca/unfair-platform-work.

THE GOOD

- ✓ Platform workers defined as “employees” under the Employment Standards Act (ESA) and the Workers Compensation Act (WCA).
- ✓ Platform companies defined as “employers” under ESA & WCA.
- ✓ Platform companies must contribute to WorkSafeBC.
- ✓ Platform companies must follow Occupational Health and Safety regulations.
- ✓ Inclusive definition of platform work protects more workers.
- ✓ Tip protections.
- ✓ Pay transparency.
- ✓ Destination transparency.
- ✓ Protections from unfair suspensions and terminations.
- ✓ Notice of termination or pay in lieu.
- ✓ New wage floor: 120% of minimum wage for “engaged time.”

THE BAD

- ✗ No paid sick days.
- ✗ No vacation pay.
- ✗ No statutory holidays.
- ✗ No overtime pay.
- ✗ No compensation for work-related expenses.
- ✗ No access to EI or CPP.
- ✗ Platform companies don’t have to contribute to EI or CPP or pay the Employer Health Tax.
- ✗ No confirmation of right to unionize.
- ✗ No transparency on algorithmic controls.
- ✗ No guaranteed minimum wage for total work time.
- ✗ No guaranteed protection by WCA in between assignments.

Reality check: The BC government can afford more investments in urgent social and environmental priorities

BY ALEX HEMINGWAY

BC has the economic means to increase public investments and tackle big challenges facing British Columbians in areas like poverty, housing, health care and the climate crisis.



While some big business lobby groups and commentators are raising alarms about BC government spending, the latest numbers show there is room to do substantially more. In fact, spending levels haven't recovered after huge cuts by the previous BC Liberal government, despite the growing need for social investments.

The latest report on provincial finances shows that provincial government operating spending, as a share of our overall economic output (or GDP), remains well below levels of 25 years ago.

At the turn of the century, provincial operating spending hovered around 21.5% of GDP. This plummeted to around 18.5% after the BC Liberal government took office in 2001, rapidly made deep cuts to social spending and brought in tax cuts that disproportionately benefited the rich.

Despite a partial recovery after the BC NDP took office and a real need to increase spending at the height of the pandemic, spending as a share of GDP remains well below levels at the turn of the century. In the current fiscal plan, provincial operating spending as a share of GDP is projected to be 20.4% this year and is expected to fall further to 19.6% by 2025/26.

If provincial spending in 2023/24 returned to the levels of 25 years ago as a share of GDP, we'd have an additional \$4.3 billion available to invest in priority areas in this year alone (and rising each year).

Spending as a share of GDP is a useful measure because it tells us about our overall, long-term economic capacity for greater investment in the public good.

While it is true that the BC government is projecting deficits over the next three years, these are more than offset by the huge unallocated contingency funds and forecast allowances built into the fiscal plan, which amount to \$16.7 billion in fiscal padding over three years. Moreover, running deficits is appropriate amid a softening economic outlook.

BC is a prosperous but extremely unequal province. The decline in provincial spending as a share of GDP shows one of the reasons why: we're now harnessing significantly less of our shared prosperity for investment in the public good than we once did.

Any return to a balanced budget should come via increased revenue, not by neglecting public investment, which would be costly to BC's social and economic well-being in the long run. A good place to start would be increased tax rates on large corporations, ballooning land wealth and the highest incomes.

BC is a prosperous but extremely unequal province. The decline in provincial spending as a share of GDP shows one of the reasons why: we're now harnessing significantly less of our shared prosperity for investment in the public good than we once did. Rhetoric about "big spending" obscures this fact.

We have every ability to invest together to build a healthy, sustainable future for all British Columbians.



Alex Hemingway is a senior economist at the CCPA-BC.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

A conversation with Kirsten Krismer

The CCPA's Rav Kambo asked Kirsten Krismer to share why she decided to become a monthly donor.

Kirsten shared that she started objecting to unfairness in systems when she was 12, when she protested a boy getting the strap. She learned then that she could be scared of authority and still be determined. From that point on, she spoke up and started organizing within a few years. As she worked toward becoming a social scientist, she continued to be an advocate for numerous causes. For her, research and teaching are integral to activism, which is why she supports the CCPA-BC.

Rav: What social justice issues are you passionate about and why?

Kirsten: I can't choose a social justice issue or even a few—they're all part of a network of inequality. Still, I think the common issue that creates or worsens every aspect of our society is extreme wealth inequality. Having a few obscenely wealthy people manipulating the media, governments and all too often our understanding of why things aren't working leads to hopelessness and right-wing populism.

Rav: Why does the CCPA-BC's research on social, environmental and economic justice matter to you?

Kirsten: The CCPA-BC counters disinformation and clarifies the structures that need to be repaired or replaced in order to create a just society. This work is essential.

Rav: Has our work impacted you personally?

Kirsten: I talk about social issues with all kinds of people and I want to be able to share the kind of information and deeper understanding that helps me move forward. Younger people facing the huge challenges of this time feel more hopeful and energized when they know some of the history of social justice movements and the science that supports them. I've found that talking to them about the gains made in a particular fight, and how they were made, inspires them to take the next step. However, I believe in the power of a loud funny song too. Cheers, Raging Grannies!

Rav: Why did you decide to make your first donation to the CCPA-BC in 2023 and also become a BC Solutions Fund monthly donor?

Kirsten: I support the CCPA-BC because research and knowledge give the keys to power to people just starting to engage in activism. I hope my donations will help equip this generation's social justice warriors.



Rav: What would you say to encourage someone to become a monthly donor to the CCPA-BC?

Kirsten: I hope other passionate veteran campaigners who want to encourage a younger cohort will join me in supporting this invaluable work, this gift of knowledge and hope.

To stand with Kirsten and countless others, you can visit policyalternatives.ca/bcgive or return the slip in the envelope provided with this issue. If you have questions about becoming a monthly donor, please contact Rav Kambo at rav@policyalternatives.ca or 604-801-5121 x225.



Rav Kambo is the CCPA-BC's Senior Fundraising Coordinator.

The CCPA-BC's 2023 gala

Our 2023 annual fundraising gala marked a triumphant reunion after a pandemic-induced hiatus, uniting 400 dedicated supporters. The highlight was Sundance Chief Rueben George's inspiring speech that reignited our collective commitment to Indigenous and environmental justice in British Columbia. You can watch Rueben's talk at: vimeo.com/ccpa/2023gala.

This event wouldn't be possible without the hard work of our staff and volunteers, and of course the amazing CCPA supporters who attended or have otherwise supported our work.

Photos by Madhuraj Pandeya



BC SOLUTIONS

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