

BC SOLUTIONS

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



People in poverty need policy solutions, not a report card

BY ROWAN BURDGE, ANASTASIA FRENCH AND VÉRONIQUE SIOUFI

The CCPA-BC has advocated for a comprehensive BC poverty reduction strategy since 2008, co-founding the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and Living Wage for Families BC to champion policies to address the root causes of poverty in the province.

British Columbia was one of the last provinces to implement such a strategy in 2019. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act mandates the government to develop and update this plan every five years—this year saw the first update.

The 2024 Poverty Reduction Strategy presents a comprehensive picture of the cycle of poverty, its systemic causes and key areas of interventions to break the cycle. It includes the need to address racism, discrimination and colonialism as essential components of poverty reduction. It pays increased attention to Indigenous sovereignty, food security, issues faced by people with disabilities and the role employment can play in lifting people out of poverty.

We hoped to see this new plan outline clear measures to achieve these goals, unfortunately it reads more like a report card than a strategy.

This year, the government announced targets to reduce overall poverty by 60%, child poverty by 75% and a prescient new target for reducing seniors' poverty by 50% by 2034. These targets are not ambitious and the plan is vague on how to achieve them.

Although social assistance rates were raised over recent years, they remain well below →

IN THIS ISSUE ↘

- 3 Meet the CCPA-BC's new Director
- 4 Thanks for a great ride
- 6 BC's tax system has become fairer since 2017
- 8 New community partnership research project: racial inequality in the housing crisis
- 9 Trapped in the wage gap
- 10 Cedar LNG: Chronicles of a petro-state in the age of climate change
- 11 Thank You! A simple word with a big impact
- 12 Annual Rosenbluth Lecture with Dr. Katharina Pistor plus the Annual Fundraising Gala with Dr. Vandana Shiva



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IN BRITISH COLUMBIA:



1 in 3 workers earns less than a living wage



1 in 9 people lives in poverty



Half of the people living in poverty live in **deep poverty**



1 in 5 **children** is growing up in poverty



1 in 3 **single** adults (18 to 65 years old) lives in poverty



1 in 12 **seniors** lives in poverty



1 in 5 **seniors living alone** lives in poverty

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/1110013501-eng>.

the poverty line. People on assistance still navigate complex income restrictions that make exiting poverty nearly impossible. Half of Canadians living in poverty are in deep poverty, yet there is no target to reduce it. The strategy also underserves single individuals without children, who represent the largest group in poverty.

Half of Canadians living in poverty are in deep poverty, yet there is no target to reduce it.

We welcome tying the minimum wage to inflation, but it remains far below a living wage. The strategy's promised pathways to employment must pay a living wage and provide stability. This is vital to address child poverty and confront racism and misogyny as the majority of workers earning less than a living wage in BC are women and racialized.

The plan acknowledges ongoing violence of settler colonialism at the core of disproportionate poverty rates for Indigenous

people and reaffirms a commitment to Indigenous self-determination. However, promises to adhere to the recommendations of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) reports, as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), need more specific targets and timelines.

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PEOPLE IN POVERTY CAN'T AFFORD TO WAIT

The strategy's listed accomplishments should not be understated: they have lifted many individuals out of poverty and prevented others from slipping into it. These include reforms to stigmatizing welfare rules that delayed and denied access to assistance, free transit for children 12 and under, improved legal aid access and substantial investments in childcare affordability.

However, several key measures remain absent from this year's strategy:

- Raising social assistance to the poverty line.
- Removing earnings exemptions and other clawbacks to disability supports.
- Making public transit available across BC and fare-free for teens.
- Closing the gap between the minimum and living wage.
- Setting clear timelines to fulfill commitments to UNDRIP, MMIWG and TRC report recommendations.

Without these measures, hundreds of thousands of people in BC will remain trapped in a cycle of poverty, unable to afford the basics for themselves and their families.

In a province as wealthy as BC, eliminating poverty is possible and people in poverty deserve no less.



Rowan Burdge is provincial director of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition.



Anastasia French manages Living Wage for Families BC.



Véronique Sioufi is the racial and socio-economic equity researcher at the CCPA-BC.



Meet the CCPA–BC’s new Director

My name is Kevin and I’m the new/old guy at the BC Office. New, in that I joined this September as Director, and old in that I served on the BC Office steering committee for nearly 10 years, about 8 of those as Chair, and I’ve rented desk space from the BC Office over the years as well.

In fact, during my first Zoom call with the BC Office team this summer, I was sitting at my old desk with the same view into senior economist Marc Lee’s office. That desk was piled high, as it always was, with reports Marc has been working through, showing the same commitment to deep analysis, research and understanding.

In short, I have some roots with this wonderful organization.

One thing that the other projects I’ve worked with over the years—Katimavik, Check Your Head, Next UP, the Vancouver School Board, the BC Libraries Co-op and the Columbia Institute—have had in common is an element of capacity building. They all aim to support and help build the capacity of others, who are working to better their communities.

That same throughline of capacity building applies to the BC Office: building the capacity of those working for social and environmental justice by providing the research, analysis and policy pathways that those on the front lines can use to build a more just and sustainable society.

For the last few years I’ve been working in the library and co-operative sectors. That work has seen some strong results in terms of enhanced investments from the BC government, including \$56M in one-time funding for public libraries and related services, and a new federal funding program committing \$21M over three years for services for people with print disabilities. These successes only came about through the focused and joint efforts of different organizations working in coalition for a higher purpose.

Collective effort also underpins the work of the BC Office—one organization working in concert with others to advance bold and progressive ideas and agendas that ultimately help us to better care for one another and the planet.

Some questions I hope to explore in my work with the BC Office include: What sort of impact does the BC Office have and how can we enhance that impact? What’s the role of a shop like this in a time of growing instability and uncertainty, with multiple crises demanding bold and rapid action? As the need for bold action increases, how do we respond with thoughtful research that keeps both long-term needs and shorter-term concerns in mind? Where can we push more and how can we best do that? And finally, how do we support and build cooperative efforts to tackle our most pressing issues?

It’s an honour to be here, working with this great group of people, in service to this work at this time.

In 2006, I went to Denmark to visit an alternative business school called KaosPilots. The school’s tagline at the time was “Navigators for turbulent times.” The more I think about it, the more I believe that line also applies to the work of the BC Office—trying to help us collectively map paths forward through a time of deepening uncertainty, in ways that enhance justice, equity and ecological sanity.

It’s an honour to be here, working with this great group of people, in service to this work at this time.

Thanks for taking the time to give this a read and thank you for the work that you do. I look forward to connecting with you.

Best to all,
Kevin Millsip, BC Office Director



Thanks for a great ride

BY BEN PARFITT

Twenty years ago, an insect attack of biblical proportions in British Columbia's forests became a hot-button topic.

Thanks to unusually warm winters (guess why), mountain pine beetles exploded in number in the province's interior forests killing millions upon millions of lodgepole pine trees.

The provincial government responded by approving huge increases in logging so that economic value might be "salvaged" from the dead trees. But that decision was bound to come with a high price tag—vastly diminished forests in future years.

It was a fortuitous time to be writing about the topic and I was extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to do so in my new capacity as resource policy analyst with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Office.

My first report for the organization flagged significant concerns with the government's approach and I built on it with further research that raised alarm bells about the fundamentally



unsustainable nature of the turbocharged extractive enterprise then well underway.

Those reports—like the work my super-talented and devoted fellow researchers do week in, week out—became part of the public conversation, were amplified in media reports and distributed widely by our allies.

I quickly appreciated that the CCPA's work reached a wide and diverse array of people who regarded it as go-to information, be it on anti-poverty issues, job precarity, climate change, housing, fair taxation, racial inequality, transit or other fronts.

For me—and I venture to say for my fellow researchers Marc Lee, Iglia Ivanova, Alex Hemingway and Véronique Sioufi—our proudest moments are when our work helps to bring individuals and organizations together in common cause.

For a number of years, Marc Lee was project director of the Climate Justice Project, a multi-year research initiative in partnership with the University of BC that was devoted to tackling two of the great challenges of our time: climate change and rising inequality.

An incredible body of work was generated under the auspices of that project thanks in no small measure to Marc's jaw-dropping research output—what can the guy *not* do—and the efforts of many others at the CCPA-BC office, including then-director Seth Klein and Shannon Daub, whose communications skills helped to significantly amplify the work.

I was able to make a small contribution to the overall output of the project's research by writing a report that looked at how BC's forests and forest product streams could be managed in ways that placed a priority on carbon storage.

Managing BC's Forests for a Cooler Planet: Carbon Storage, Sustainable Jobs and Conservation was endorsed by the three unions representing workers in the province's forest industry as well as prominent environmental organizations.

Today, a new and exciting multi-year research effort is underway: Understanding Precarity in BC, co-led by Iglia Ivanova, a whip smart economist with one of the greatest laughs out there, and Dr. Kendra Strauss, director of Simon Fraser University's Labour Studies Program.

Under the auspices of that ambitious project, we can expect a body of work tackling the rise of precarious work in BC and how the trend might be reversed through policy change.

I leave the CCPA both excited at the prospect of new adventures and secure in the knowledge that my many CCPA comrades will continue to do the great work that they do.

As 2023 gave way to 2024, I entered my 20th year at the CCPA and decided it was time to retire and take some time off before resuming writing again. Fittingly, my last report for the CCPA closes a circle begun in 2005. *Log it and burn it: Wood pellets, climate and BC's deepening forest crisis*, paints a picture both of a forest crisis underway and the tangible things we can do to set a new course.

I leave the CCPA both excited at the prospect of new adventures and secure in the knowledge that my many CCPA comrades will continue to do the great work that they do, work made possible by the thousands of people like you who call BC home and who have given so generously of time and funds to ensure that this great enterprise continues.



Ben Parfitt was the CCPA-BC's resource policy analyst.



BC's tax system has become fairer since 2017

BY ALEX HEMINGWAY

Provincial governments made substantial changes to BC's personal tax system over the past 25 years.

The BC Liberal government that took power in 2001 and the NDP government that took power in 2017 reshaped the tax system, but with very different effects on inequality and fairness.

The good news is that tax changes enacted since the NDP formed government have benefitted low- and middle-income earners the most, while the richest 1% saw their provincial tax rate increase. This is an improvement in tax fairness though the system remains less fair than it was in 2000.

In contrast, tax changes from 2000-2016 under the BC Liberal government overwhelmingly benefitted the richest 1% of

British Columbians who saw their tax rate fall sharply, while modest- and middle-income households benefitted the least. Tax fairness was diminished.

These are among the findings of our report that tracked changes to BC taxes paid by households, including income tax, provincial sales tax, Medical Services Plan premiums (eliminated in 2020), carbon tax, tobacco tax and property tax. We compare the effective tax rate—tax paid as a share of total income—for BC households at different income levels at different points in time.

In a fair tax system, people pay based on their ability to



IMAGE: 3DMANIA / CANVA PRO

contribute—the higher your income, the higher your overall tax rate. When that doesn't happen, high inequality levels take hold, which hurts economic growth, distorts our democracy and worsens health and social outcomes.

Under changes to BC's personal tax system since 2017, the effective provincial tax rate for the majority of households has fallen, while it has risen for the top 1%.

For the bottom 99% of households, the effective provincial tax rate fell from 12% to 10.3%, whereas for the richest 1% it rose from 10% to 11.1%. The further down the income ladder you go, the larger the tax rate reduction, indicating improved tax fairness.

A key policy change driving the decrease in effective tax rates for middle- and modest- income earners was elimination of Medical Services Plan (MSP) premiums in 2020. MSP premiums were a regressive health care tax in place for decades—and significantly increased during the 2000s—which cost individuals up to \$900 a year and families up to \$1,800.

Another important change was creation of new top income tax brackets—16.8% on individual taxable income over \$181,232 and 20.5% over \$253,752—accounting for the increased effective tax rate for the richest 1% of households.

In contrast, changes to BC's tax system between 2000-2016 show the opposite pattern. Across-the-board income tax cuts

in the early 2000s—and hikes to MSP premiums—benefitted the top 1% most and middle- and modest-income earners least.

By 2023, the richest 1% paid a substantially lower effective tax rate than in 2000 (11.1% from 14.4%). Adding two new top tax brackets recently only partly undid the huge tax cuts the richest received in the early 2000s.

Notably, the big personal tax cuts of 2000-2016 were not offset by increases in other revenue sources like corporate taxes (which were cut, too) but rather “paid for” through devastating cuts to public services and through increases to the unfair MSP premiums.

In a fair tax system, people pay based on their ability to contribute—the higher your income, the higher your overall tax rate.

From 2016-2023, however, the loss of revenue from eliminating MSP premiums—one of the largest personal tax cuts in the province's history—was offset by introducing an Employer Health Tax (as in other large provinces) as well as by a one-point increase to the corporate tax rate, new top income tax brackets and taxes on vacant and high-end real estate.

Therefore, the current provincial government could lower the effective tax rate of most BC households and improve personal tax system fairness while reinvesting in—rather than cutting—public services like health care, education and child care.

Still, more action is needed to improve tax fairness, tackle inequality and raise revenue for vital services. Despite progress on tax fairness in BC since 2017, we are still living in an era of extreme economic inequality. The richest 1% control 25% of the wealth in Canada, CEO pay has hit new heights and the 87 richest families hold more wealth than the bottom 12 million Canadians combined.

Moreover, BC invests a smaller share of our economic pie in the public good than we did a quarter-century ago. As a share of our total economic output, provincial government revenue has fallen from 21.4% of GDP in 1999/00 to a projected 18.9% in 2023/24 and operating spending fell from 21.5% of GDP to 20.4%.

To improve tax fairness and raise more revenue, BC should look to tax increases on large corporations, wealthy landowners and the highest incomes. We face big challenges today—unaffordable housing, a strained health care system, toxic drug deaths and the climate crisis. Further action to tax the rich and invest in the common good can help us meet those challenges head-on.



Alex Hemingway is a CCPA-BC senior economist.



New community partnership research project: racial inequality in the housing crisis

BY VÉRONIQUE SIOUFI

This fall we are launching a community partnership research project, Metro Vancouver's Colour-Coded Housing Market, to better understand racial inequality in the housing crisis, with funding from the Real Estate Foundation of BC and Vancity.

The housing crisis—while widely recognized—has not been adequately addressed in terms of its uneven impact on racialized and Indigenous communities.

Our project has been collaboratively conceptualized with our community partners of diverse advocacy organizations, community leaders, unions and academics who currently lack sufficient data, research and policy analysis to advocate effectively for their communities' needs. The project will deliver the substantive new data and analysis that will empower them to speak to housing equity issues in the public arena.

Analyzing quantitative data on the availability, affordability, suitability and geographic distribution of housing is a central focus of the project. This will be combined with qualitative insights from community-based research on experiences of housing discrimination, displacement and eviction of racialized and Indigenous peoples, particularly those at the intersections of multiple modes of exclusion such as status, gender, age and ability.

This project recognizes that the challenges faced by racialized communities and the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty are not separate issues but are intertwined in the context of colonialism. We will look at Indigenous housing projects as

solutions to multi-modal problems of housing inequality and work to encourage governments to address housing rights and land rights together in an urban context.

We recognize the urgency to bring an intersectional, decolonial lens to understanding housing inequality in the province. In the context of the BC government's commitment to addressing racial inequality on the one hand, and to the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) on the other, housing policies need to be put in place that are informed both by decolonial practice and better data on racial inequality.

We hope the policies we co-develop with our community partners will help bring housing equity to BC.

We look forward to working with our growing list of community partners on this project over the next two years, including the BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), MOSAIC, the Migrant Workers Centre (MWC), West Coast LEAF (WCLEAF), the Canadian Union of Public Employees BC (CUPE-BC) and the BC Federation of Labour (BCFED).



Véronique Sioufi is the racial and socio-economic equity researcher at the CCPA-BC.

Trapped in the wage gap: Metro Vancouver

BY IGLIKA IVANOVA

On June 1, BC's minimum wage went up to \$17.40 per hour. Despite this welcome pay raise for the lowest-paid workers in the province, the minimum wage remains \$8 per hour lower than the living wage in Metro Vancouver (\$25.68 per hour).

The living wage is the hourly rate that full-time workers need to earn to support a family, including covering the necessities, escaping severe financial stress and participating in the social, civic and cultural lives of their communities. It is based on the actual costs of living in a particular community and affords a decent if still very modest standard of living without the extras many of us take for granted. The living wage does not cover credit card, loan or other debt payments, savings for retirement, or for a downpayment on a home or the extra costs of caring for a disabled, seriously ill or elderly family member.

Nearly half a million workers in Metro Vancouver earn less than the living wage of \$25.68 per hour. Far too many of these workers 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.

Data obtained through a custom tabulation from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey allows us to take a closer look at who earns less than the living wage in Metro Vancouver.



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**Living Wage
for Families BC**



495,600 Metro Vancouver workers earn less than \$25.68 per hour.



283,100 workers earning less than \$25.68 per hour are women (57%).



331,900 (67%) are over 25 — only 163,600 (33%) are under 25.

- ③ 184,900 workers earning less than \$25.68 per hour are between 25 and 44 years old (37%).
- ③ 125,000 workers earning less than \$25.68 per hour are between 45 and 64 years old (25%).
- ③ 22,000 workers earning less than \$25.68 per hour are 65 or older (4%).



Nearly two thirds of workers earning less than \$25.68 per hour are racialized — although only 55% of paid employees are racialized.

- ③ 317,200 workers earning less than \$25.68 per hour are racialized (64%).
- ③ Racialized workers are more likely to be paid less than \$25.68 per hour than their counterparts (44% of all racialized workers earn less than the living wage compared to only 30% of non-racialized workers)



Half of all racialized women working in Metro Vancouver earn less than the living wage of \$25.68 per hour.

- ③ 49% of racialized women working in Metro Vancouver earn less than the living wage, 181,500 people. In contrast, 38% of racialized men earn less than the living wage, as do 35% of white women and 25% of white men.

Read the full report here: www.policynote.ca/gap/



Iglika Ivanova is a senior economist, the CCPA-BC's public interest researcher and co-director of the Understanding Precarity in BC project.



PHOTO: FAHRONI / SHUTTERSTOCK

Cedar LNG: Chronicles of a petro-state in the age of climate change

BY MARC LEE

A final investment decision in June 2024 by Cedar LNG highlights the challenges and contradictions of BC's climate and energy policies.

For the BC government, this is the model industrial project: it creates jobs and development in the north, has a major Indigenous partner in the Haisla Nation and will meet the low-emissions target established last year for new LNG plants.

The main problem is the planet is burning.

Cedar LNG would lock in substantial carbon emissions globally for decades to come at a time when the world is reeling from climate change.

The ostensibly low-emissions profile of Cedar LNG is restricted to the LNG plant itself. By using cleaner BC Hydro grid electricity, Cedar LNG can mostly avoid burning gas to power its facility.

This points to another challenge: meeting new electricity demand from Cedar LNG and others. BC Hydro has issued calls for new electricity generation on First Nations lands and projects must have a minimum 25% stake from local First Nations.

New electricity supply will be costly and at rates higher than prospective LNG players will want to pay. A likely consequence is that other BC Hydro ratepayers will pay more so the province can provide subsidized electricity to LNG and mining operations.

Meanwhile, these projects will compete with the need to supply clean electricity for transportation, buildings and industry in the south.

Electrification of the LNG plant does not change the fact that Cedar LNG is a fossil fuel project. Outside the LNG terminal, there

will be carbon emissions and other environmental impacts in BC's northeast where fracked gas will be sourced.

Not counted in BC's GHG inventory are emissions from exporting LNG and its final combustion in another country. While it is plausible that LNG from BC could displace coal use in other jurisdictions like China, this is not guaranteed. In any event, over the lifecycle—from extraction through to final combustion—research suggests there is no benefit to transitioning from coal to gas.

Failing to challenge the growth of the oil and gas sector is a big part of why BC is set to miss its 2025 and 2030 targets by a wide margin. The extraction and processing of fossil fuels comprise more than one-quarter of BC's GHG emissions.

The final investment decision is historic for the Haisla Nation, which will own 50.1% of the Cedar LNG project. True economic development and reconciliation, however, does not need to be anchored in fossil fuel projects.

A stronger push towards clean energy supply projects (as in the case of BC Hydro) and regenerative economics could be truly transformative. To get there, the BC government needs to stop acting like a petro-state and instead be a true climate leader.



Marc Lee is a CCPA-BC senior economist.

Thank You! A simple word with a big impact

BY RAV KAMBO

For the past six years I've had the pleasure of working with the CCPA-BC. Throughout these years I've been lucky to get to know many of our supporters and learn why our work is meaningful to them.

Although I have not been able to speak to everyone, I want you to know how grateful I am for your support. The work we do here at the BC office would not be possible without the generosity we receive from our donors.

Showing how policy research affects people is not always easy, but I want you to know that your support is making an impact. With supporters like you we continue to hold governments accountable and offer them progressive solutions on issues from the environment to affordable housing, better senior's care to economic and racial inequality.

The decisions made by governments today will affect you and all of us for decades to come. This is why the CCPA-BC continues to speak truth to power and fights for the critical issues that you and I care about. And with supporters like you, I know together we will make change happen. THANK YOU!

Here's what some of our supporters have said:

- You are my voice and through you I am less alone.
- Keep doing the work you are doing and continue to be a major alternate viewpoint in the mainstream media. Several of my right wing-oriented friends who before never knew the CCPA existed now consider it an information source to be taken seriously. Thank you for all that you do in this regard.

- It is so necessary to have an organization like this to counter the right.
- Thanks for all your hard work. I am always pleased when I hear someone from CCPA on the radio...we can counter the aggressive right wing rhetoric that floods the air waves.
- I very much appreciate the work of the CCPA-BC. The Centre has addressed the need to improve the taxation system to make it more equitable so that wealthy individuals and corporations pay their fair share and are not able to shelter and hide money. Please continue this important work.
- I greatly appreciate the high quality work you do on important social issues.

When you donate to the CCPA-BC you join an important group of supporters who care about the future of our province. If you would like to donate, please complete the form included or go online to policyalternatives.ca/bc-give. Together we are making a positive impact.



Rav Kambo is the CCPA-BC's senior fundraising coordinator.

Thank you for
your support!

News and commentary from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' BC Office

tel: 604-801-5121
520-700 West Pender Street
Vancouver BC V6C 1G8

The CCPA-BC is located on unceded Coast Salish territory, including the lands belonging to the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ/Səlilwítlh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

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Editorial team

Marianela Ramos Capelo, Rav Kambo,
Jean Kavanagh, Bill Kilgannon & Lisa Akinyi May
Layout & production: Paula Grasdál
Original design: Paula Grasdál & Terra Poirier

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Annual Rosenbluth Lecture with Dr. Katharina Pistor

This year's Rosenbluth Lecture features Dr. Katharina Pistor discussing themes from her latest book, "The Code of Capital: How the Law Creates Wealth and Inequality." She explores how institutions of the legal system—like property law or taxation—are used to create private wealth.

Dr. Pistor is the Edwin B. Parker Professor of Comparative Law at Columbia Law School and director of the Law School's Center on Global Legal Transformation. Her work spans corporate law, corporate governance, money and finance, property rights, comparative law, and law and development. She is co-recipient of the Max Planck Research Award (2012).

Join us Wednesday, October 9 at 1 PM (PT) for this free webinar.

Missed it? Catch the recording from October 9 at ccpabc.ca/rosenbluth-recording.



Annual Fundraising Gala featuring Dr. Vandana Shiva

Join us for an evening of conversation, good food and celebration with world-renowned environmental activist, intellectual and feminist Dr. Vandana Shiva—this year's keynote speaker at our Gala, Thursday, November 7th.

Dr. Shiva is a trailblazer who has galvanized food sovereignty movements in India, advocating for the rights of farmers fighting against "seed monopolies" of the wealthy. Her work inspires change globally—particularly around food issues, agriculture, bioethics and genetic engineering.

"Food is a weapon. When you sell real weapons, you control armies. When you control food, you control society. But when you control seed, you control life on earth."

—Dr. Vandana Shiva in the documentary 'The Seeds of Vandana Shiva'

Get your tickets at: ccpabc.ca/gala or give us a call at 604-801-5121 ext. 231. Tickets are \$150 and a \$100 tax receipt will be issued for each ticket after the event.

Thursday, November 7, 2024, 5:30PM - 9:00PM
Fraserview Hall 8240 Fraser Street, Vancouver

Presenting Sponsor

