CCPA–BC Submission on the Development of a BC Poverty Reduction Plan

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Submitted to: bcpovertyreduction@gov.bc.ca

MARCH 2018

Thank you for this opportunity to share our recommendations regarding the development of a British Columbia Poverty Reduction Plan. We hope our contributions are useful for your deliberations.

We are grateful to see the BC government finally moving to develop and then implement a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. We have followed the consultation process and are impressed with how thorough it has been. Now it is time to deliver with a plan that is bold and ambitious, that will produce meaningful results, and that will stand the test of time. Having been national laggards on this file for years, BC now has a chance to lead.

The CCPA–BC has a long track record producing research and policy recommendations on this issue, detailing both why BC needs a poverty reduction plan, and what should constitute core elements of such a plan. In particular, we would highlight these reports:

- *Long Overdue: Why BC Needs a Poverty Reduction Plan* (2017)
  https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/long-overdue

- *Poverty and Inequality Among British Columbia's Seniors* (2017)
  https://www.policyalternatives.ca/SeniorsInequality

- *Working Poverty in Metro Vancouver* (2016)
  https://www.policyalternatives.ca/van-working-poverty

- *The Costs of Poverty in BC* (2011)
  https://www.policyalternatives.ca/costofpovertybc

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- *A Poverty Reduction Plan for BC* (2008)
  https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/poverty-reduction-plan-bc

The CCPA–BC is a founding organizational member of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition. As such, this submission is rather short, as **we strongly support the detailed submission and policy recommendations of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (PRC)**, which can be found here:
http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BCPRC_SubmissionPRConsultation_Mar15_2018.pdf

As the CCPA, the PRC and others have long noted, a comprehensive plan must include:

1. Legislated targets and time-lines, along with clear accountability mechanisms to ensure these targets are met.

2. A human rights foundation.

3. A whole-of-government approach (wherein all ministries must show how they are contributing to poverty reduction).

4. Bold action across a number of core pillars, including:

    - Significant increases to social assistance rates and an end to rules and requirements that discourage, delay and deny access to social assistance. Seeking assistance should not harm a person's dignity.

    - Increasing the earnings of those in the low-wage workforce through rapid and significant increases in the minimum wage, adoption of living wage policies by government ministries and agencies, and strengthening employment standards.

    - Large-scale expansion of social and co-op housing (we have called for 10,000 units per year), and strengthening rent controls.

    - Universal, affordable and quality public child care.

    - Expansion of community health services for seniors, people with disabilities, and those with mental health illnesses and addictions, and enhancements to dental and eye care for low-income people.

    - Greater access to post-secondary education and training for low-income people, and improved services for special needs students in the K-12 education system.

    - Targeted actions to reduce poverty among populations where poverty rates are most acute.

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We are pleased to see that the BC government has started to take important steps in some of these areas, notably with respect to child care, new housing, dental care, and of course the minimum wage.

Among the many and urgent actions called for in the PRC submission, there are two issues we would like to highlight of utmost importance:

1. It is vital that the legislated targets tackle the *depth* and not merely the breadth of poverty. Meaning, we need targets that get all British Columbians out of deep poverty, as we also significantly reduce the overall poverty rate.

The depth target long advocated by the PRC and ourselves has been to commit that: Within two years, every British Columbian has an income that reaches at least 75% of the poverty line.

Targets aimed at eliminating the most extreme and severe forms of poverty—such as homelessness and hunger—are also necessary.

Failure to include depth targets such as these in the BC plan risks leaving the poorest and most vulnerable behind, and would absolve the government of necessary action in the areas over which it has the most direct responsibility, namely social assistance and housing.

2. While the government has begun to take needed action to cool the housing market and build new low-income housing, more is urgently needed to control rent increases.

This issue arguably represents the greatest threat not only to the poverty reduction plan, but to the government's overall policy agenda. Given escalating housing costs, there is a grave risk that all the improvements and gains experienced for low-income people due to minimum wage increases, welfare rate increases, child care fee reductions and more will be wiped out by rent increases.

The government was quick to end the fixed-term lease loophole last fall. But other reforms are urgently needed to the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA). Currently, the RTA only limits rent increases for existing tenants. Once a tenant moves or is evicted, landlords are free to increase the rent as they wish. Moreover, even when rent control is in place, the current RTA allowance of annual increases of CPI plus 2%, compounded, means rents have been far out-stripping inflation in recent years.

Given this, we strongly recommend, as does the PRC, that the provincial government introduce stronger tenant protections including tighter limits on annual rent increases,

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tying rent control to the unit (not the tenant), and strengthening the application and enforcement of the Residential Tenancy Act.

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Thank you again for your consideration of our views on this important subject.

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living wage
employer