

## **What Municipalities *Can* and *Can't* Do To Prevent and Reduce Poverty in our Communities**

You're seeing increasing levels of homelessness in your community and you are turning to your local government to take action. However, solving the challenges of poverty requires all three levels of government working in collaboration. Municipal councils cannot address these pressing social issues alone and yet they face them daily as they show up at the local level within our communities. This is why it is so important to align municipal commitments with provincial and federal strategies.

Government budgets show the scale of responsibility and investment each level of government should be taking:

- Municipal: \$1.8 billion<sup>1</sup>
- Provincial: \$50 billion
- Federal: \$340 billion

Local governments can play an important role in poverty reduction but much of that role must include strong advocacy to senior levels of government to impact their priorities and necessary investments.

**Now is an especially critical time to advocate to the provincial government because they are developing a poverty reduction plan for BC for the first time!**

Before the plan is launched in February 2019, municipal governments can join the call for the [ABC Plan](#), which highlights that an effective poverty reduction plan must be Accountable, Bold and Comprehensive.

We've developed this resource to share what Local Governments and School Boards can do to combat poverty in our communities; and what they can't do. You can use this to hold your newly elected officials accountable to bold action *and* advocacy after they have been elected.

*The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (BCPRC) is an alliance of over 400 organizations throughout the province that have come together in the call for the provincial government to implement a strong poverty reduction strategy with legislated targets and timelines to significantly reduce poverty, inequality, and homelessness in BC. Our work is grounded in the foundation of universal human rights. We advocate for an accountable, bold and comprehensive plan that will take action in seven policy areas: income assistance, employment, housing, child care, education, health, and equity.*

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<sup>1</sup> maximum, using Vancouver as example

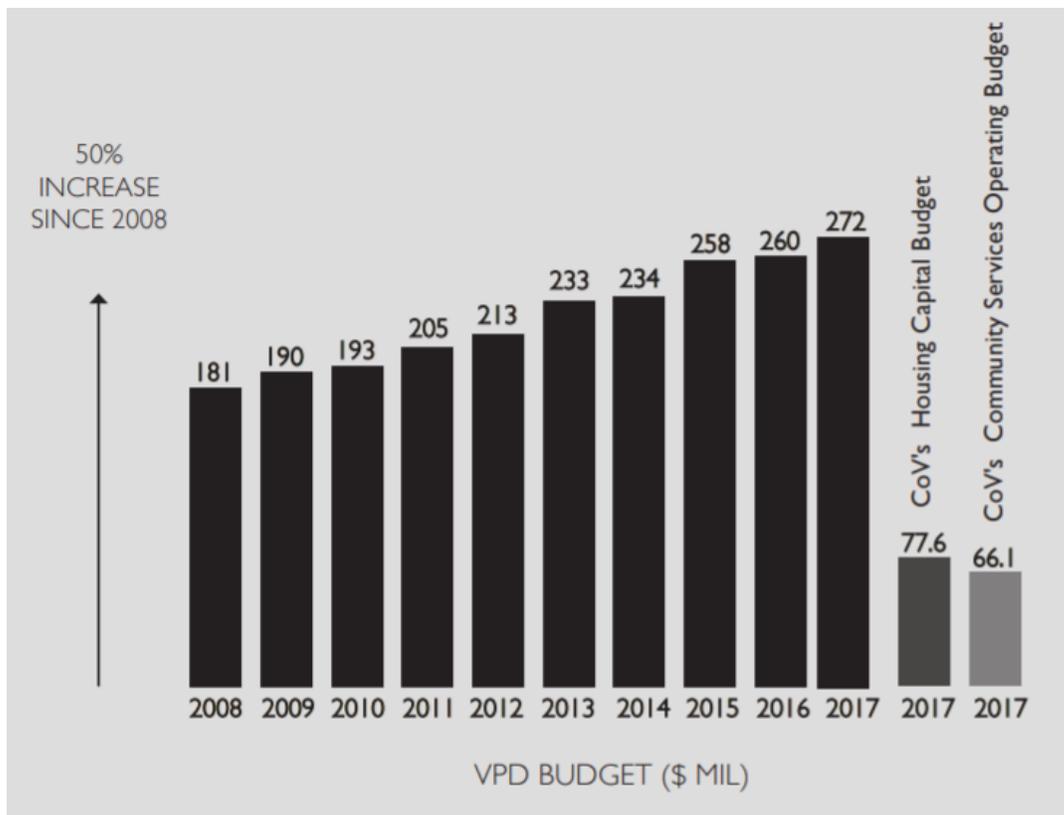
## Human Rights

### **Municipalities are primarily responsible for the criminalization of poverty.**

Many local governments across British Columbia have bylaws and local law enforcement practices that violate the human rights of people living in poverty. They have the potential to criminalize people who live in public space, increase stigma and restrict the delivery of harm reduction programs, emergency shelter, and other services for marginalized people. Local governments should listen to people living in poverty and address the ways that their bylaws infringe on their human rights and increase stigma and discrimination.

### **We recommend that municipal governments stop criminalizing poverty by revoking laws that penalize or discriminate against people for engaging in behavior necessary for survival because of homelessness and poverty, such as sleeping and erecting shelter in public spaces.**

The best way to see government priorities is not by what politicians are saying but what they are spending our money on. That's exactly what the Carnegie Community Action Project did in their analysis of the Vancouver Police Department funding within the City of Vancouver's budget.<sup>2</sup> Here you can see the dramatic increase of almost \$100 million over 10 years, and the comparison to the City's housing investment and community services budget, which is far below public spending on the police.



<sup>2</sup> Carnegie Community Action Project, *No Pill For This Ill: Our Community Vision of Mental Health*, <http://www.carnegieaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/MH-REPORT-FINAL-1.compressed.pdf>

In addition to stopping the criminalization of poverty, municipal governments have an important role to play in combating discrimination against people in poverty. In particular, improperly managed public municipal consultations have become a forum for inappropriate language, harassment and the silencing of marginalized people. Having monitored and learned of countless attacks at public hearings against people with addictions and other disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness, Pivot Legal Society argues that “it is incumbent on municipalities to ensure that all people feel safe and welcome at public hearings on issues that matter to them and they have duties to protect people from discriminatory statements and ensure hearings do not become forums for abuse.”

Municipal planners and human rights advocates have developed special procedures for how councils should carry out public consultations concerning new affordable housing projects including:

- Layout clear ground rules.
- State that the only issues open for discussion are legitimate land use issues such as location, size, setback and parking requirements.
- Advise attendees that the meeting will not be a forum to make negative comments about the people who will be living there.
- Be clear that they will actively interrupt and object to discriminatory language or prejudicial comments.

**We recommend local governments take these proactive measures to ensure that everyone is treated with respect.**

Read more:

*Pivot Legal Society submission on Human Rights in Canada*

[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/pivotlegal/pages/1850/attachments/original/1455843171/UN\\_submission.pdf?1455843171](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/pivotlegal/pages/1850/attachments/original/1455843171/UN_submission.pdf?1455843171)

*“Community outcry should not block health and safety measures for people who are homeless” Pivot Legal Society Blogpost*

[http://www.pivotlegal.org/community\\_outcry\\_should\\_not\\_block\\_health\\_and\\_safety\\_measures\\_for\\_people\\_who\\_are\\_homeless](http://www.pivotlegal.org/community_outcry_should_not_block_health_and_safety_measures_for_people_who_are_homeless)

*“In the zone: Housing, Human Rights and Municipal Planning” Ontario Human Rights Commission*

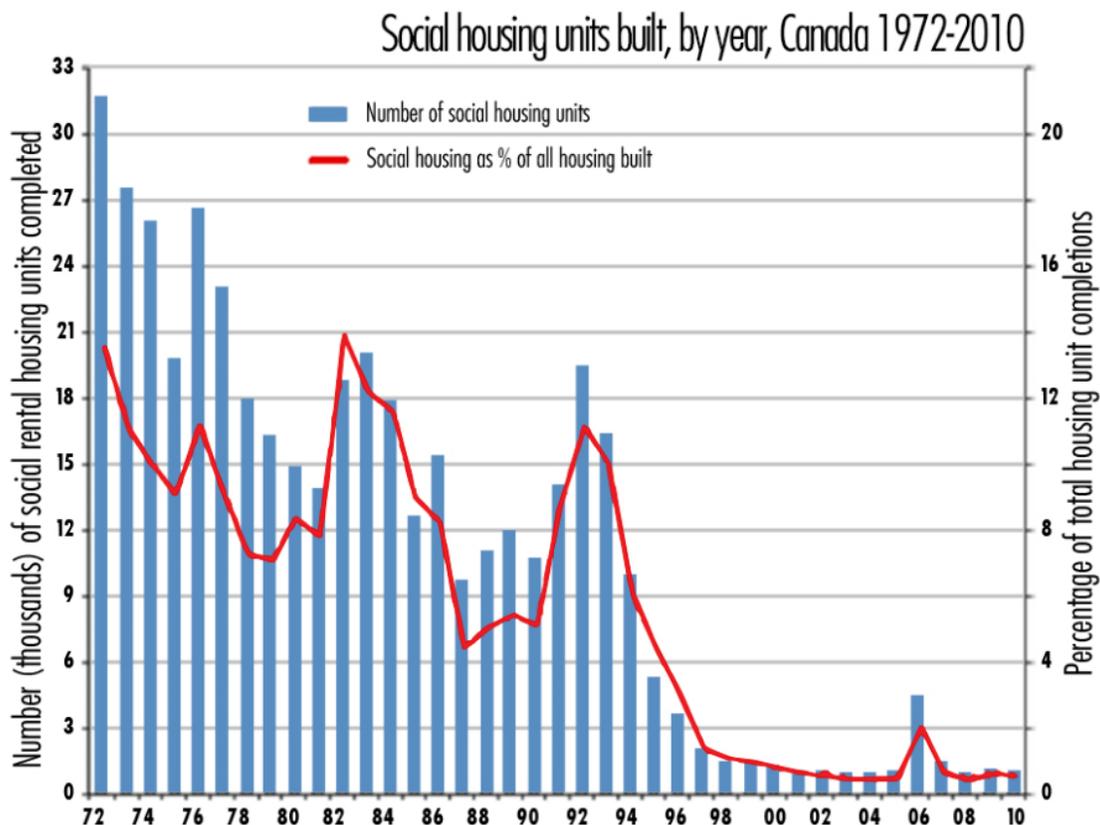
<http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/26002/315300.pdf>

## Housing

BC has a housing crisis throughout the province with thousands of homeless and people facing housing insecurity struggling to survive in our communities, spending a huge share of their income on rent and/or living in sub-standard, over-crowded housing. According to the BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 45% of renters in BC are living in housing insecurity, spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent; and 1 in 5 renters are spending more than half their income on rent leaving them with little left over to support themselves and their families.

Much of the focus is on municipal governments at the moment as we are seeing increasing levels of visible homelessness within our communities and we look to our closest level of government for action. However, the root causes of homelessness and the responsibility primarily lies with senior levels of government, which have not invested the resources they have over the last decades. The graph below shows the dramatic decline in federal housing investment since the 1970s.<sup>3</sup>

**This level of federal funding in partnership with provincial funding provided between 1500-2000 new housing units per year in BC, and the number of homeless people was much lower.**



<sup>3</sup> Calculated by Walks, Alan from CMHC Canadian Housing Observer, various years; Figure 2 in Walks, Alan and Clifford, B. (2015), "The Political Economy of Mortgage Securitization and the Neoliberalization of Housing Policy in Canada," Environment and Planning A. 47(8): 1624-1642

**Local governments can still play an important role in building and protecting affordable housing through partnerships with local non-profits, co-operatives, and, in particular, other levels of government, which have the necessary resources.** Municipal contributions can include:

- providing public land and funds toward the creation of non-profit affordable housing
- protecting existing affordable housing supply through retention and replacement policies including policies that protect against the demolition of existing affordable housing and replacement with more expensive homes
- zoning specifically to retain and encourage rental housing in their communities, and through inclusionary zoning, they can require developers to create non-market housing as a condition for new development sites
- streamlining permitting and rezoning processes specifically for non-profit affordable housing

In all this work, it is important to emphasize that affordable housing must meet a diversity of needs. A set percentage of the housing to be built should be at welfare shelter rates and another set target should be tied to the senior shelter level. There also is a dire need for specific units for accessible, adaptable housing options and 3 and 4 bedroom units suitable for families with children.

Read more:

*BC Non-Profit Housing Association's Make Housing Central Campaign*

[https://housingcentral.ca/SITES/HousingCentral/2018\\_Civic\\_Campaign/HousingCentral/2018\\_Civic\\_Campaign.aspx](https://housingcentral.ca/SITES/HousingCentral/2018_Civic_Campaign/HousingCentral/2018_Civic_Campaign.aspx)

*BC Society of Transition Houses: BC Municipal Election Toolkit*

<https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/municipal-election-toolkit-2018-09-24.pdf>

*Vancouver Tenants' Union's Renters Report Card*

[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/vancouverrentersunion/pages/135/attachments/original/1538619170/Renters\\_Report\\_Card\\_-\\_Website\\_Information.pdf](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/vancouverrentersunion/pages/135/attachments/original/1538619170/Renters_Report_Card_-_Website_Information.pdf)

## **Health and Food Security**

Poverty is a fundamental determinant of health, and the health care costs of poverty add up to \$1.2 billion per year in BC. So, all of the other policy recommendations outlined here will have a direct impact on improving the health of low-income people.

However, local government can enhance and expand access to health initiatives, including:

- providing free or discounted recreational services and access to programs for low-income children, youth, families and individuals
- if people are not being housed, supporting them where they are, including developing public amenities like water fountains, public washrooms and public showers – careful consideration needs to happen to ensure these amenities are universally accessible and safe
- increasing food security through zoning that would ensure low-income neighbourhoods have access to reasonably priced, quality fruits and vegetables
- supporting community gardens and community kitchens to provide affordable, nutritious food; schools can also provide healthy meals and nutritional information to students

The epidemic of opioid overdose deaths, at a rate of 4-5 overdose deaths each day is a public health emergency. While federal laws often get the most attention, municipal bylaws and local law enforcement practices also have the potential to increase stigma and restrict the delivery of harm reduction programs, emergency shelter, and other services for marginalized people.

**Local governments need to ensure that they do not restrict access to health services including harm reduction programs and addiction treatment options in their communities.**

Read more:

*First Call Municipal Election Toolkit (See page 8)*

<https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Municipal-Election-Toolkit.pdf>

*Municipal Election Engagement Toolkit for Food Security Advocates*

<https://gateway2.phabc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/10/Municipal-Election-Toolkit-revised-Oct-1-2018.pdf>

*BC Poverty Reduction Letter about water fountains to the City of Vancouver*

<http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2016-COV-Water-Fountains.pdf>

*Open Letter to the Government of BC about the need for an Opioid Action Plan*

<http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/2017/11/bc-needs-an-opioid-action-plan-open-letter-to-the-government-of-bc>

## **Equity**

There are multiple ways that municipal governments can address the over-representation of poverty amongst particular groups to ensure equity. These are just a couple of examples:

1. Marginalized groups often rely on public transportation and face high costs and long travel times as unaffordable housing causes people to move further and further away from work. However, responsibilities for transit may vary depending on your local community. Your municipality may be one of the 60 local governments that pays into BC transit and shares responsibilities for developing and maintaining the province-wide transit system. Within Metro Vancouver, Mayors, the Chief of the Tsawwassen First Nation, and the elected representative of Electoral Area “A” sit on the Mayors’ Council on Regional Transportation, which provides accountability to Translink.

**We recommend that mayors advocate for provincial funding to ensure equitable access to our public transit system including affordable transit measures such as free transit for all children and youth and reduced transit fares for low-income individuals and families.**

2. Indigenous people are far more likely than non-indigenous people to live in poverty and experience homelessness. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has five Calls to Action that directly apply to municipal governments:
  - fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation
  - repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, and reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts
  - provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations
  - work with other levels of governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students and current landlords to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried
  - work collaboratively with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system, and provide these to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

These actions are just a starting point to address the ongoing effects of colonialism.

Read more:

*#AllOnBoard Campaign Website*

<https://www.allonboard.ca>

*Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*

[http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

## **Childcare**

Local governments are responsible for many local regulations, such as development zoning, and can require that child care spaces be included in new buildings. School Boards can ensure stability for the many child care programs that operate on school sites.

**Given that senior levels of government have far more responsibility and potential to invest, local governments can also endorse the \$10aDay Child Care Plan calling on the provincial government to begin building a better child care system.** The \$10aDay Child Care Plan is the community's solution to BC's child care crisis. 32 local BC governments support the Plan but they do not have the resources or mandate to implement it alone. The provincial government has made significant investments in child care and needs to keep moving towards universal child care. Local governments who have already endorsed the Plan support the next steps the campaign is calling for at the provincial level.

Read more:

*First Call Municipal Election Toolkit (See page 4)*

<https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Municipal-Election-Toolkit.pdf>

*\$10aDay Child Care Plan Website*

<https://www.10aday.ca>

## **Education**

The under-funding of public education has meant an increase in school fees, such as those now collected for field trips, supplies, sports and arts, and specific course materials. This causes great family stress, and children from low-income families often exclude themselves from activities and programs. The role of public education in giving every child an equal chance is seriously undermined by the inequity created by school fees. Public school boards can reduce or eliminate fees that act as barriers to inclusion for low-income students as well as continuing to advocate to the provincial government for adequate funding.

Almost 1 in 4 LGBT youth in BC are forced out of their homes so, without guaranteed family support, school safety and inclusion can have a direct impact on reducing queer and trans homelessness and long-term poverty. **School Boards should publicly support the SOGI curriculum and implement strong gender identity and sexual orientation policies to allow schools to fully support queer and transgender students and ensure their safety and inclusion.**

Read more:

*First Call Municipal Election Toolkit (see page 8)*

<https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Municipal-Election-Toolkit.pdf>

*BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils Submission on Provincial Public Education Funding*

[https://bccpac.bc.ca/images/Documents/Resources/BCCPAC\\_SSC-Submission\\_Oct-11-2018.pdf](https://bccpac.bc.ca/images/Documents/Resources/BCCPAC_SSC-Submission_Oct-11-2018.pdf)

*Poverty is an LGBTQ Issue, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (see submission to Vancouver School Board)*

<http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/campaigns/lgbtq>

## **Low Wages**

Despite public perception, poverty in BC is primarily working poverty. The majority of poor children in BC live in families with parents in the paid labour force, many of them working full-time and often multiple jobs. Local governments have a responsibility to avoid contributing to the problem of low-wage poverty.

**We recommend that local governments and school boards becoming living wage employers to embed the responsibility to pay all their employees a living wage and only contract for services with companies that pay a living wage.**

However, the provincial government is responsible for legislating the minimum wage and exemptions to that wage (for example, piece rate farmworkers who harvest fruit and vegetables) so local governments should advocate to them to increase the incomes of low wage workers. The provincial government is also responsible for employment standards, which desperately need to be enhanced and adequately enforced; for example, BC is the only province without the provision of paid sick leave.

Read more:

*First Call Municipal Election Toolkit (see pages 8-9)*

<https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Municipal-Election-Toolkit.pdf>

*Living Wage for Families Campaign Website*

<http://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca>

*BC Employment Standards Coalition*

<http://bcemploymentstandardscoalition.com>

*Level the Playing Field campaign for paid sick leave*

[https://www.leveltheplayingfield.ca/sick\\_leave\\_petition](https://www.leveltheplayingfield.ca/sick_leave_petition)

## **Income assistance**

The current income assistance system in BC is fundamentally broken. People in desperate need are being denied assistance, and if lucky enough to navigate all the structural and administrative barriers to welfare and have their application accepted, they are subjected to a life of “survival,” struggling to meet the most basic needs of shelter and food.

**Local governments do not have jurisdiction over income and disability assistance. They should advocate to the provincial government for increased income and disability assistance rates as part of the [ABC Plan](#) for an effective poverty reduction plan.** Other measures suggested in this document can help reduce costs for people living on deeply inadequate income and disability rates.

Read More:

*First Call Municipal Election Toolkit (see page 7)*

<https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Municipal-Election-Toolkit.pdf>

*Raise the Rates Campaign Website*

<https://www.raisetherates.org>