

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

### Broken Promises

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the broken House of Commons promise “to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000” and three years after the entire House of Commons voted to “develop an immediate plan to end poverty for all in Canada.” Neither the promised poverty elimination nor plans have materialized. Twenty-three years later (using 2012 data) one of every five children in Canada and in BC still live in poverty.

Canada has repeatedly drawn criticism from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child for failing to live up to our obligations to uphold and promote children’s rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). As recently as 2012, the UN review committee, made up of knowledgeable representatives from countries around the world, again chastised us for the level of inequality and the resulting inequities we not only tolerate, but sustain among different groups of children through our lack of investment and lack of remedial action. BC is also a signatory to the UNCRC.

### Recommendations

First Call’s overarching recommendation for BC is for government to adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines and a cabinet minister with the authority and responsibility to ensure government is achieving its targets on time. We recommend the plan contain a goal to reduce BC’s child poverty rate to 7% or lower by 2020.

Recognizing that children of recent immigrants, Aboriginal children, children of female lone-parent families, children in racialized families and children with a disability, are at greater risk of living in poverty, efforts should also be targeted to achieve major reductions in poverty levels for these populations.

There are many specific changes that can help governments achieve these targets:

1. The BC government should raise the minimum wage to make sure that the lowest paid workers earn more than a poverty wage if they work full-time, full-year. The minimum wage should rise to \$15 an hour as soon as possible and be indexed annually thereafter to increases in the cost of living. All workers in BC should be covered by minimum wage legislation, including workers who serve alcoholic beverages and agricultural workers who are currently paid using piece-work rates. **P**
2. Governments at all levels should ensure their regular and contract employees are paid a living wage that allows them to meet their basic needs, properly support their children and avoid chronic financial stress. **F P L**

This year marks the **25th anniversary** of the broken House of Commons promise “to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children **by the year 2000**” and five years after the entire House of Commons voted to “develop an immediate plan to end poverty for all in Canada.”

3. The BC government should significantly raise welfare and disability rates and index them to inflation. P
4. The province should exempt the full amount of child support payments received by lone parents on welfare from any clawback, allowing their children to benefit from the payments made on their behalf. The provincial government should also rescind the rule that does not allow welfare recipients to retain benefits while attending a post-secondary institution. P
5. The federal government should increase the combined Canada Child Tax Benefit/National Child Benefit to a maximum of \$5,600 per child. F
6. For children being raised by grandparents on CPP Disability, the federal government should continue to pay the children's benefit to these grandparents after they turn 65. F
7. The federal government should implement immediate increases to funding for First Nations child welfare services, education and community health services and services for urban Aboriginal people, and develop a long-term poverty eradication strategy in coordination with First Nations, urban Aboriginal communities and provincial governments. F
8. The province should adopt and start implementing the Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning, put forward by the Early Childhood Educators of BC and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, to establish universal access to high quality child care for children that is affordable for families at \$10 per day for full-time care, \$7 per day for part-time care, and free to families with incomes under \$40,000. The federal government should support this initiative with a national early care and learning program that includes the transfer of adequate and sustained resources to the provinces and territories to create quality, affordable child care spaces and services available to all children (0–12). P F
9. The federal government should enhance maternity and parental leave to enrich the benefit value, and extend the total duration to 18 months, reserving additional months for fathers. F
10. The federal government should scrap the new income splitting provisions for families with children and invest the projected cost of this tax reduction for mostly high income families in the other federal program enhancements recommended above. F
11. The federal and provincial governments should intensify their efforts to help immigrants and refugees adjust to life in Canada by improving employment assistance, removing long-standing barriers to qualification for professionals trained abroad, making more language training available, and improving employment standards and human rights protections and enforcement. P F

Area of responsibility:

- F Federal
- P Provincial
- L Local

12. The federal government should immediately cancel all outstanding refugee transportation loan debt and cease seeking repayment of transportation costs for new refugees coming to Canada. F
  
13. Provincial and federal support for access to post-secondary education should be increased both to remove financial barriers for low-income students and to lower student debt levels. Specific policy options include tuition fee reductions, providing lower income students with grants instead of loans and making student loans interest free. P F
  
14. The province should extend and enhance supports for youth transitioning out of government care at age 19 and permit the extension of foster care for some youth up to the age of 25. P
  
15. The province should provide additional funds to social service agencies and non-profit housing societies to provide housing and other supports to queer and transgender youth at risk of homelessness and social exclusion due to the loss of family support. P
  
16. Cuts in Employment Insurance made by successive federal governments should be rescinded, so that most workers are protected during a temporary loss of wages and receive a benefit they can live on while they look for new employment. F
  
17. The federal and provincial governments should increase their efforts to provide housing for low-income people. This should include building more social housing to reduce the “core housing needs” of families and to eliminate homelessness. There is also a need to enhance and expand rental subsidies and other income supports to families living in or near poverty to reduce housing insecurity. P F
  
18. Introduce universal coverage for all British Columbians/Canadians for prescription drugs, dental care and eye care. While some workers already have access to extended medical and dental benefits through their work, universal public plans would expand and stabilize coverage for all and reduce costs through economies of scale. P F
  
19. The provincial government should create an independent commission on tax reform to study taxes levied in BC and to recommend ways to make the tax system fairer. Reducing income inequality should be one of the commission’s mandates. P