

BRITISH COLUMBIA

2021 BC CHILD POVERTY REPORT CARD



firstcall CHILD AND YOUTH
ADVOCACY SOCIETY

IN COLLABORATION WITH

 **sparc bc**
people. planning. positive change.

CAMPAIGN **2000**
END CHILD & FAMILY
POVERTY

25TH ANNUAL REPORT CARD ON CANADA'S COMMITMENT TO END CHILD POVERTY BY 2000

**2021 BC CHILD POVERTY
REPORT CARD**

NOVEMBER 2021

PRODUCED BY



IN COLLABORATION WITH



WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF



putting children and youth first

328 – 3381 Cambie Street, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4R3

604 288 8102 Toll free 1.800 307 1212 info@firstcallbc.org

firstcallbc.org



Contents

INTRODUCTION: BC's Child Poverty Rate Remains High	4
FACT SHEET 1: One in Five BC Children Living in Poverty	6
FACT SHEET 2: BC's Child Poverty Rates Over Time	9
FACT SHEET 3: BC Child Poverty by Family Type.....	11
FACT SHEET 4: Depth of Family Poverty	15
FACT SHEET 5: Child Poverty and Working Parents.....	17
FACT SHEET 6: Children in Families on Welfare	20
FACT SHEET 7: Child Poverty Across BC.....	23
FACT SHEET 8: Growing Income Inequality	26
FACT SHEET 9: Importance of Government Help: Public Policy Matters.....	29
FACT SHEET 10: COVID-19 Magnifies Inequities.....	31
RECOMMENDATIONS: What Needs to Happen.....	34
Appendix: Measuring Poverty Reduction.....	37



Introduction

BC's CHILD POVERTY RATE REMAINS HIGH

First Call has been publishing the BC Child Poverty Report Card for twenty-five years. It is profoundly disappointing that in 2019, the most recent year for which data is available, one in five BC children still lived in poverty.

We had hoped when this work began that by now we would be well beyond the point at which child poverty had been virtually eliminated in BC and across Canada. But in 2019, there were 156,560 children living in poor households in BC with many living in deep poverty.

At 18.0%, BC had a slightly higher child poverty rate than Canada at 17.7%. We are encouraged to see the rate was down slightly from 2018 when BC's child poverty rate was 18.5%. This follows the trend of gradual improvement since 2010 but progress is not fast enough for children whose health and development are at risk because they are poor.

It is profoundly disappointing that our 25th annual BC Child Poverty Report Card still shows one in five (156,560) BC children are poor.

A big surprise in the data this year was the growth in the income of the families with children in the highest income decile, compared to the incomes of low-income families. In 2019, the disparity between the average total incomes of the richest and poorest 10% of BC families with children was dramatic.

The families in the highest income decile collected 24 times what the families in the lowest income decile made. This was a larger disparity than the Canadian average ratio of 20. The disparity for lone-parent families in BC was more than twice as high, with the average income for the top 10% of lone-parent families at 54 times the average income for lone-parent families in the lowest decile.

This year's BC Child Poverty Report Card is published as the country begins the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and weeks after the federal government ended pandemic-related financial benefits.

While the data in this report do not reflect the current, pandemic recovery situation for families, they give us a good understanding of which children were at greater risk of living in poverty before the pandemic began.

Arab, Korean, and West Asian children had more than double or triple the risk of poverty compared to non-visible minority children. The last Census also recorded a 44.9% poverty rate for new immigrant children in BC.

The on-reserve child poverty rate in 2019 was also higher. The average child poverty rate on sixty-four BC First Nations reserves in 2019 was 40.9%, with at least 5,510 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate was much higher on rural reserves (47.3%) than on urban reserves (35.4%), with 2,980 children on rural reserves living in poverty and 2,530 children on urban reserves living in poverty.

The continuing legacy of colonialism is still very apparent in these numbers. First Call also recognizes that reserves do not reflect the larger traditional territories of BC's First Nations where many First Nations children and families live.

Governments at all levels must meaningfully collaborate with First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments and Indigenous organizations to develop plans to prevent, reduce and eradicate child and family poverty in Indigenous communities.

In 2019, the child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families was 49.0%, virtually unchanged from 2018, and 5.1 times higher than the 9.7% rate for their counterparts in couple families.

And we know that most poor kids grow up in households where one or more adults are working. As of June 2019, the minimum wage in BC was \$13.85 an hour. A lone parent with one child working full-time, full-year at minimum wage would have only earned \$25,207 per year, leaving them \$15,566 below the Low-Income Measure (LIM) before-tax poverty line of \$40,773.

In recent years, both the Canadian and BC governments have claimed the dubious achievement of meeting targets set in the federal Poverty Reduction Act and the BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Act. These achievements can be claimed because the Market Basket Measure (MBM), the official measurement of poverty, is a subjective measure of a basic standard of living. Using the MBM, government can report there are far fewer children living in poverty.

First Call, Campaign 2000, and our provincial partners all use the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM). The LIM is the international standard as it allows us to measure income inequality within Canada and to compare across nations.

We know the improved Canada Child Benefit that was implemented in 2017 has helped to lift some families out of deep poverty but many eligible families are not receiving the benefit. The federal government must ensure that all families who are entitled to the benefit receive it by reducing barriers related to tax filing and other administrative tests.

We can predict the improved BC Child Opportunity Benefit that families started receiving in October 2020 will have a positive impact for families and look forward to seeing the data in 2022.

While the full and long-term economic effects of the pandemic on children and youth in BC are still not known, we do know that government income benefits are crucial to child and youth well-being along with safe and affordable housing, food security, online access, child care, public education, mental health supports and other social services.

Lifting families out of poverty in the COVID-19 recovery period will require coordinated efforts between all levels of government. This year's 25th Annual Child Poverty Report Card highlights stories from struggling families shows we still have a long way to go in BC to ensure all children and youth have what they need to thrive.

In recent years, both the Canadian and BC governments have claimed the dubious achievement of meeting targets set in the federal Poverty Reduction Act and the BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Act. These achievements can be claimed because the Market Basket Measure (MBM), the official measurement of poverty, is a subjective measure of a basic standard of living. Using the MBM, government can report there are far fewer children living in poverty.

One in Five BC Children Living in Poverty

BC's CHILD POVERTY RATES

In 2019, the child poverty rate in British Columbia was 18.0% as measured by Statistics Canada's Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM) after income taxes, using taxfiler data. This represents 156,560 children who lived in poor households in 2019.

At 18.0%, BC had a slightly higher child poverty rate than Canada at 17.7%. The 2019 rates were down slightly from 2018 when BC's child poverty rate was 18.5% and across Canada the rate was 18.2%.

BC's early years (0-5 years old) child poverty rate, at 17.5% in 2019, was slightly lower than Canada's early years child poverty rate at 18.5%, while BC's all ages poverty rate, at 17.9%, was higher than Canada's all ages poverty rate at 16.5%.

In total 47,830 out of the 866,500 people living in poverty in BC in 2019 were young children (0-5 years old). This a decrease of 11,170 from 2018, where data found 59,000 young children were growing up in poor households.

For only the second time in the past 20 years, in 2019, the child poverty rate in BC at 18.0% was similar to the all-ages poverty rate at 17.9%. In the other 18 years, the child poverty rate was higher than the all-ages poverty rate in BC.

In 2019, there were no significant changes to benefits for families with children. Possible reasons include the government's move to index the Canada Child Benefit to inflation in July 2019. The incremental improvement to the child poverty rate between 2018 and 2019 may also reflect greater uptake of the improved Canada Child Benefit among eligible families and/or changes in the economy.

All Ages, Child (0-17) and Children Under Age 6 Poverty Rates, BC and Canada, CFLIM After Tax, 2019

Young children (0-5 years) poverty rate	BC	47,830 young children	17.5%
	Canada	433,740 young children	18.5%
Child (0-17 years) poverty rate	BC	156,560 children	18.0%
	Canada	1,313,400 children	17.7%
All ages poverty rate	BC	866,500 people	17.9%
	Canada	5,986,860 people	16.5%

Source: Statistics Canada. Table: 11-10-0018-01, 2019

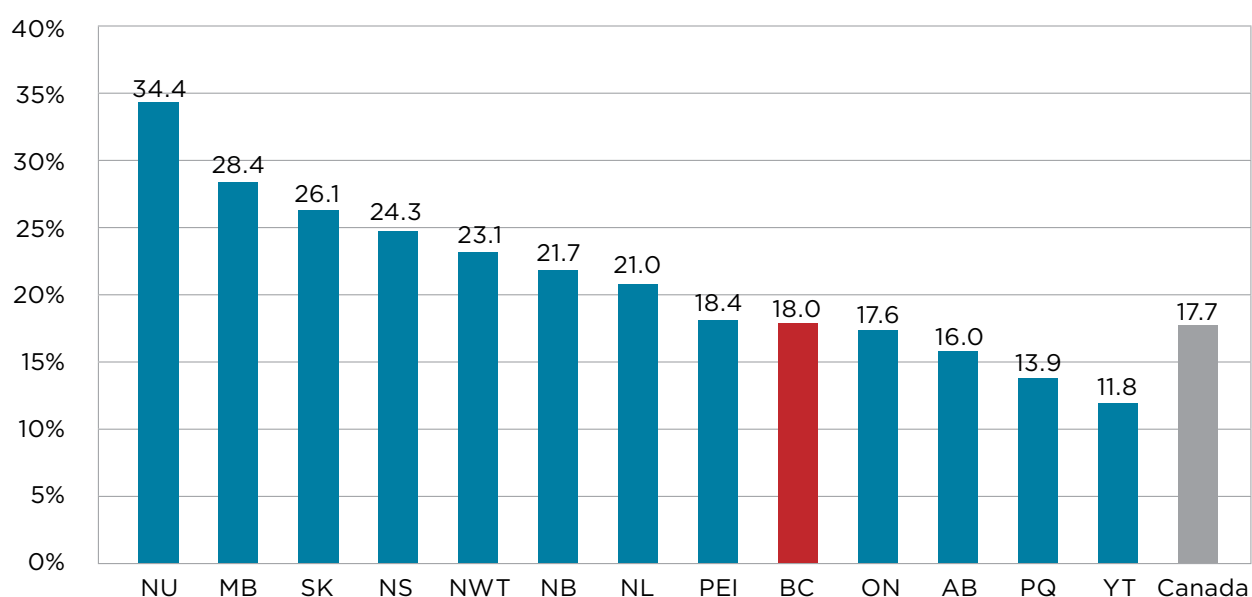
CHILD POVERTY A CANADA-WIDE PROBLEM

From coast to coast, child poverty remains a Canada-wide problem. In 2019, BC had the 9th highest child poverty rate among the 13 provinces and territories (18.0%). Ontario, Alberta, Quebec, and the Yukon Territory all had lower child poverty rates than BC in 2019.

Child poverty rates remain higher than overall poverty rates in 11 provinces and territories, showing how urgently we still need to improve financial and social supports for families with children across the country.

The high child poverty rates across Canada demonstrate that the provincial and federal governments still have a lot of work to do to eliminate child poverty.

Child Poverty Rates, by Province/Territory, CFLIM After Tax, 2019



Source: Statistics Canada. Table: 11-10-0018-01, 2019

HIGH LEVELS OF ON-RESERVE CHILD POVERTY

As high as the overall rates of child poverty were in British Columbia in 2019, on-reserve child poverty data available for 2019 indicates even higher rates. The following data is based on only 64 First Nations reserves with child poverty data available through taxfiler data. There were many First Nations reserves in BC without child poverty data available.

The overall child poverty rate on 64 BC First Nations reserves in 2019 was 40.9%, with at least 5,510 children living in poverty.

The child poverty rate was much higher on rural reserves (47.3%) than on urban reserves (35.4%), with 2,980 children on rural reserves living in poverty and 2,530 children on urban reserves living in poverty. Rural is defined as being outside of a Census Metropolitan Area or Census Agglomeration.

Child (0-17-year-old) Poverty Rate, 64 BC First Nations Reserves, CFLIM-AT, 2019



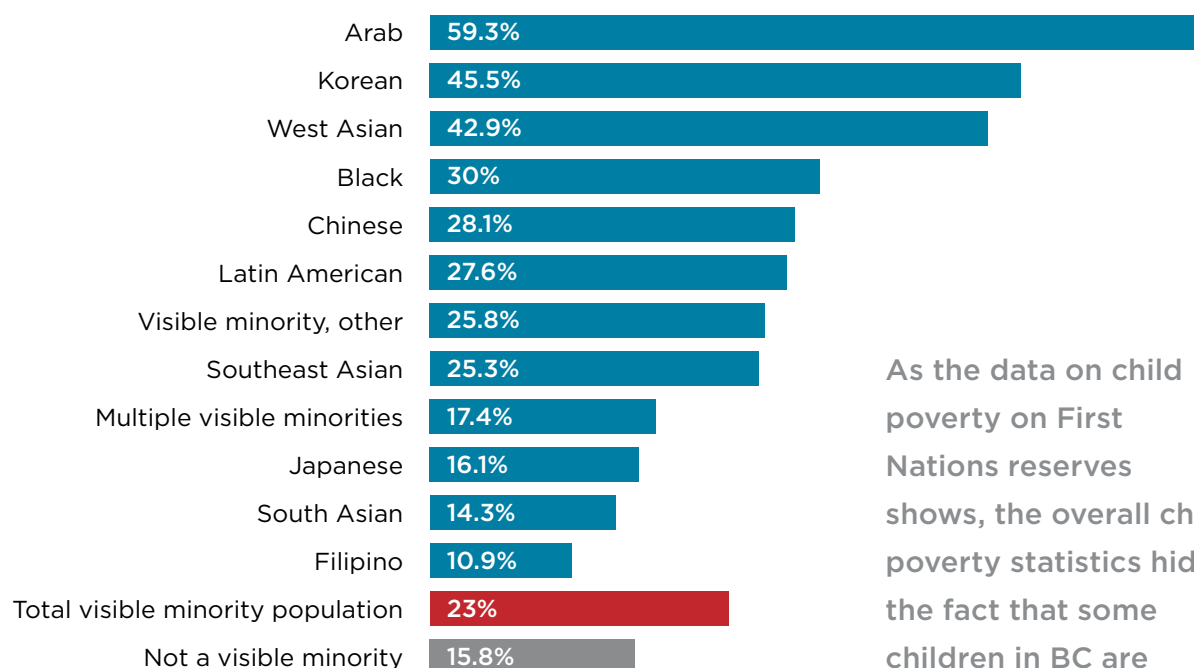
Source: Statistics Canada. Table I-13, Community Data Program, 2019

SOME CHILDREN ARE AT MUCH HIGHER RISK OF GROWING UP IN POVERTY

As the data on child poverty on First Nations reserves shows, the overall child poverty statistics hide the fact that some children in BC are more at risk of living in poverty than others.

2016 Census data based on the LIM after tax measure showed that most visible minority (racialized) children's poverty rates in BC were higher than the poverty rate for non-visible minorities. Arab, Korean and West Asian children had more than double or triple the risk of poverty compared to non-visible minority children. The census also recorded a 44.9% poverty rate for new immigrant children in BC.

BC Child Poverty Rates for Different Population Groups



Source: Statistics Canada. 2016 Census

As the data on child poverty on First Nations reserves shows, the overall child poverty statistics hide the fact that some children in BC are more at risk of living in poverty than others.

FACT SHEET

2

BC's Child Poverty Rates Over Time

PERCENTAGE OF POOR CHILDREN OVER TIME

It's been 32 years since the House of Commons made a unanimous commitment to end child poverty by the year 2000. In 1989, the child poverty rate was 22.0% in Canada and 21.9% in B.C. In 2000, B.C.'s child poverty rate reached a 30-year high at 27.6%.

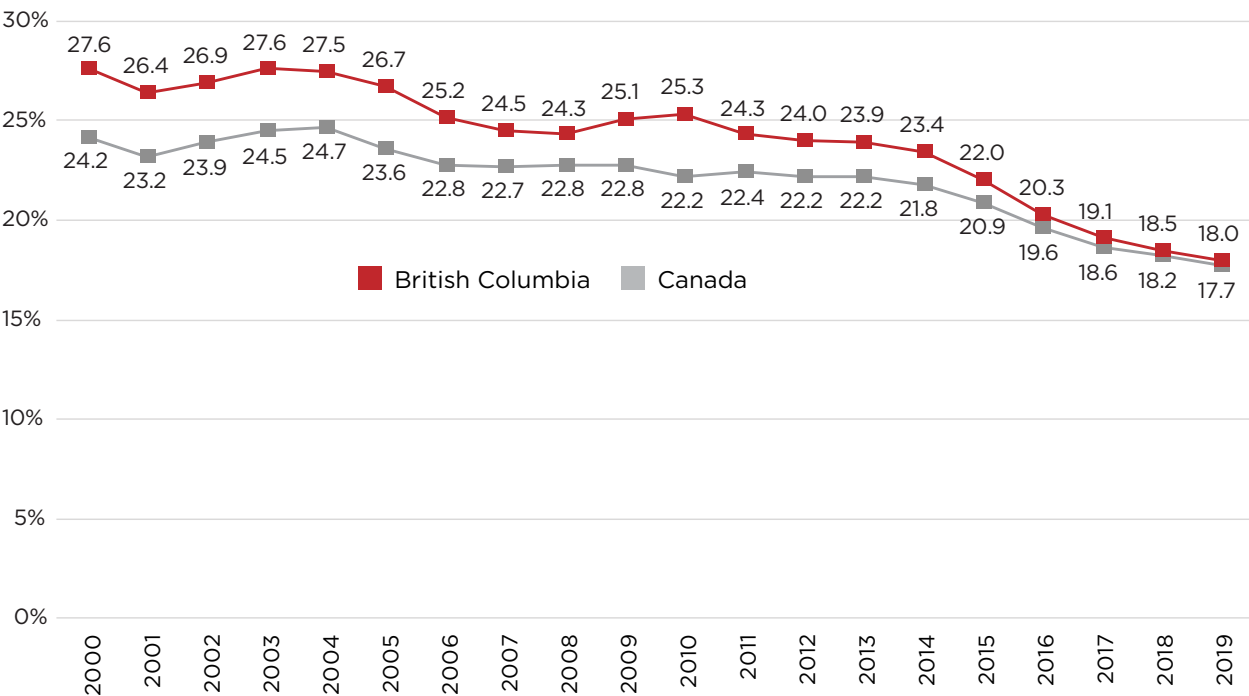
It is encouraging to see the child poverty rate decrease steadily every year since 2010, with 54,980 fewer children living in poverty between 2010 and 2019.

For every year out of the past 20 years (2000–2019), British Columbia has had a higher child poverty rate than Canada, based on the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM), after tax. However, the gap between the two poverty rates has been narrowing. In 2019, BC's child poverty rate was 18.0%, 0.3 percentage points higher than Canada's rate of 17.7%. This is the smallest gap between the federal and provincial rates during the 2000–2019 period.

While progress has been made, one in five children in B.C. were still living in poverty in 2019. There is much work to be done to fulfill both the federal government's promise and our obligation to children and their families.

Between 2010 and 2019, the number of BC children living in poverty dropped by 54,980.

Child Poverty Rates, Canada and British Columbia, CFLIM After Tax, 2000–2019



Source: Statistics Canada, Table: 11-10-0018-01

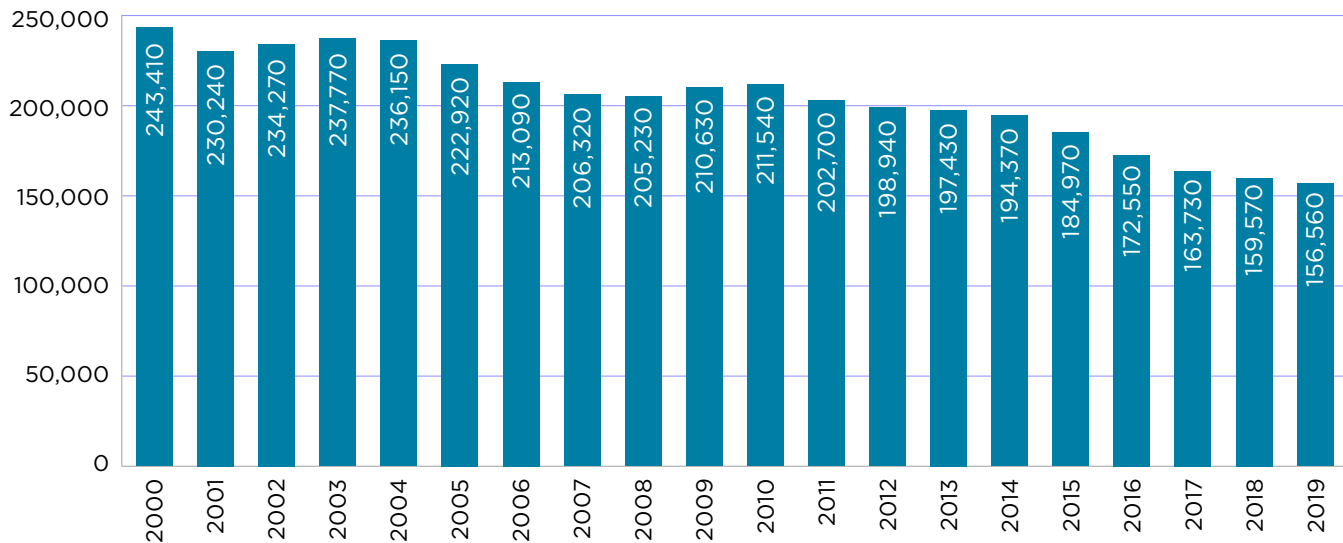
NUMBER OF POOR CHILDREN OVER TIME

The number of poor children (0-17 years old) in British Columbia, based on the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM), after tax, declined every year from 2010 to 2019. However, the number of BC children living in poverty in 2019 remained unacceptably high at 156,560.

There were 3,010 fewer children living in poverty in 2019 than in 2018. This one-year reduction is much lower than the average reduction of 10,000 fewer poor children in each year from 2014 to 2017.

There were 3,010 fewer children living in poverty in 2019, but this reduction is much lower than the average yearly reduction from 2014 to 2017.

Number of Poor Children, British Columbia, Based on CFLIM-AT, 2000-2019



Source: Statistics Canada, 2019 Table



PHOTO DENIS KUVIAEV/NOUN PROJECT

BC Child Poverty by Family Type

CHILDREN IN LONE-PARENT AND COUPLE FAMILIES

Children in lone-parent families in British Columbia have consistently suffered much higher poverty rates than their counterparts in couple families. For the past nineteen years (2000–2019), half of all children in lone-parent families in BC have lived in poverty. In 2019, the child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families was 49.0%, 5.1 times higher than the 9.7% rate for their counterparts in couple families.

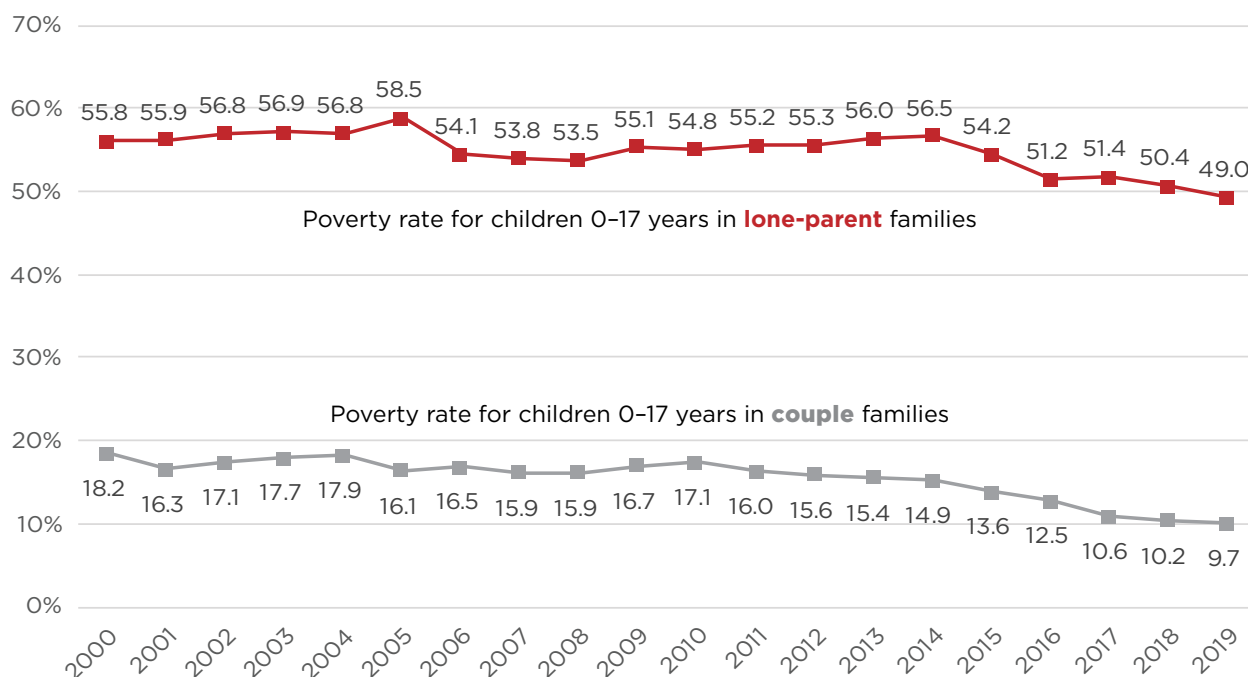
2019 was the first time during the 2000–2019 period that the poverty rate for children in lone parent families in BC inched slightly below 50% and slightly fewer than one in ten children in couple families in BC were living in poverty.

Over these last nineteen years, there has been more success in reducing child poverty rates among children in couple families in BC than in lone-parent families: the child poverty rate among children in couple families decreased by 8.5 percentage points between 2000 and 2019 (from 18.2% to 9.7%), while the child poverty rate among children in lone-parent families decreased by only 6.8 percentage points (from 55.8% in 2000 to 49.0% in 2019).

One in every two BC children of lone parents were poor in 2019.



Child Poverty Rate by Family Type, CFLIM-AT, British Columbia, 2000–2019



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0018-01, 2019

BC's child poverty rate did decrease slightly between 2018 and 2019 for both children in couple families (from 10.2% to 9.7%) and children in lone-parent families (from 50.4% to 49.0%). Yet in 2019, BC's child poverty rates were still higher than Canada's for children in both these family types, as illustrated in the following graph.

Child Poverty Rates by Family Type, Canada and BC, CFLIM, After-Tax, 2019



Source: Statistics Canada: Table: 11-10-0018-01, 2019

PROPORTIONS OF BC CHILDREN IN DIFFERENT FAMILY TYPES

While only one in five children (20%) in British Columbia were in lone-parent families in 2019, over half (55.2%) of all children living in poverty in BC were in lone-parent families. In 2019, there were 83,080 poor children in lone-parent families in BC, compared to 67,520 poor children in couple families. Between 2018 and 2019 there was a small decrease in the number of poor children in both family types in BC: 2,550 fewer in couple families and 1,350 fewer in lone-parent families.

Proportion of BC Children 0-17 in Couple Families and Lone-Parent Families, 2019



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 39-10-0041-01 and Table 11-10-0018-01, 2019

While the poverty rate for BC children in lone-parent families overall was 49% in 2019, the rates varied widely depending on family composition and location. The poverty rate for BC children in large (3+ children) lone-parent families in 2019 was extremely high at 57.8%.¹

¹ Source: Table: 11-10-0018-01; File name: BC Child Pov Families w 3+ kids 2019 Table 11-10-0018-01.

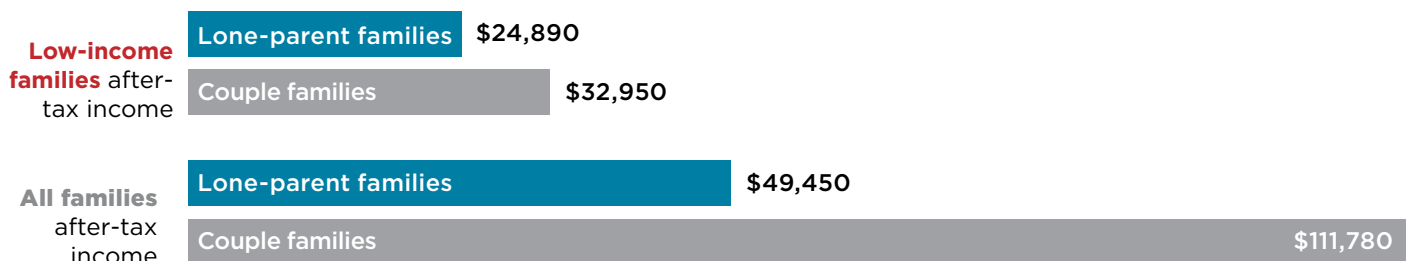
Child poverty rates for children in lone-parent families across 26 BC cities and towns ranged from a low of 41.6% in Victoria to a high of 57.3% in Duncan, a dramatic 15.7 percentage point difference. The 9.7% provincial poverty rate for children in couple families in 2019 included a range from 5.3% in Kamloops to 13.3% in Port Alberni, an 8 percentage point difference.

The 5,960 BC children under 18 who were not living in census families in 2019 had the most challenging situation of all, with a poverty rate of 99%. While the data definition indicates “they may be living with a family to whom they are related or unrelated, or living alone or with other non-family persons,” we know very little about the children, or likely youth, captured in this statistic.

INCOME INEQUALITY IN MEDIAN INCOMES BY FAMILY TYPE

Couple families in BC had much higher incomes than other families in 2019, with a median after-tax income of \$111,780 for all couple families with two children compared with \$49,450 for all lone-parent families with two children, \$32,950 for low-income couple families with two children and \$24,890 for low-income lone-parent families with two children.

Median After-tax Incomes for BC Couple Families (with two children) and Lone-Parent Families (with two children), 2019



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0020-01, 2019



WOMEN'S POVERTY

In BC in 2019, 80.4% of lone-parent families were female-led. These families' median annual income was \$46,990, just 70% of the male lone-parent median income of \$66,830. For many lone mothers, the difficulty of finding affordable quality child care—so they can sustain employment—remains one of the most common obstacles that leaves them raising their children in poverty.

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0011-01, 2019

CATHERINE'S STORY

“WHEN YOU LIVE ON A FIXED INCOME you have to decide what to buy or not buy. The cost of groceries and gas going up because of COVID-19 has been very hard on me. Not having enough money means that I have to say no to more things than I like.”

Catherine lives in Mission, BC with her 6 year old grandson. Her grandson has extra support needs, and Catherine has looked after him on her own, all his life. She retired from her job to care for him. Initially, she had a home business doing sewing and dress-making, however, the pandemic made it impossible to continue.

Catherine and her grandson currently live in a small two-bedroom basement suite. A bigger space for her grandson's sensory equipment and storage is needed, but Catherine cannot afford it. It took three months of searching and 56 applications before she found this apartment. The apartment is close to her grandson's school. “They provide him with excellent care.” She receives support with her rent from Tikva Housing Society's rent subsidy program. “Without the help I receive from Tikva, I would not be able to pay my rent — they are a godsend.” Catherine has been on the waitlist for BC Housing for seven years.

Catherine has found that the pandemic has pushed up the price of groceries. There are special supplies and dietary items that her grandson requires, and so Catherine must limit what other things to purchase. As a result, Catherine will often go without food to ensure that her grandson has enough to eat. “I know that this is not good, but he is growing and I am not.”

There are special supplies and dietary items that her grandson requires, and so Catherine must limit what other things to purchase. As a result, Catherine will often go without food to ensure that her grandson has enough to eat.

The social isolation caused by the pandemic is impacting Catherine and her grandson's mental health. There are days when he becomes aggressive because he cannot see his cousins or friends. Several of the activities that her grandson enjoys doing such as swimming lessons and his birthday party have been cancelled which made him upset and angry. If he is having a bad day, Catherine keeps him home from school to avoid him taking his anger out on another child. Catherine understands the need for social support during stressful times. “Having people around you is important.”

Catherine would like the government to provide families with more income. “They set the poverty level and yet they leave seniors and others living well below it.”

Depth of Family Poverty

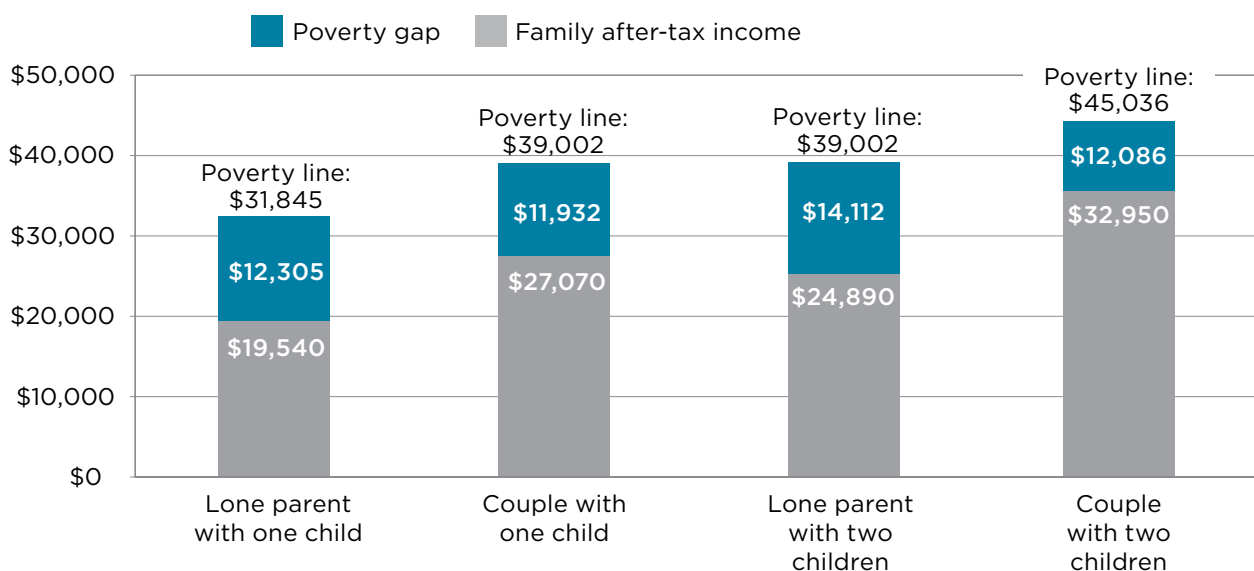
POOR BC FAMILIES LIVING FAR BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

Living at the poverty line is a challenge, but many poor families actually live far below the poverty line. Not only were many families with children in British Columbia living in poverty in 2019, these families were typically living far below the poverty line, based on the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM) after tax.

- Poor lone-parent families with one child had a median after-tax income of \$19,540 in 2019 in BC, or \$12,305 below the \$31,845 poverty line for a family of this size. They would have to increase their after-tax income by \$1,025 per month to meet this threshold.
- Poor couple families with one child had a median after-tax income of \$27,070 in 2019 in BC, or \$11,932 below the \$39,002 poverty line for a family of this size. They would have to increase their after-tax income by \$994 per month to meet this threshold.
- Poor lone-parent families with two children had a median after-tax income of \$24,890 in 2019 in BC, or \$14,112 below the \$39,002 poverty line for a family of this size. They would have to increase their after-tax income by \$1,176 per month to meet this threshold.
- Poor couple families with two children had a median after-tax income of \$32,950 in 2019 in BC, or \$12,086 below the \$45,036 poverty line for a family of this size. They would have to increase their after-tax income by \$1,007 per month to meet this threshold.

Between 2018 and 2019, for all four family types, the gap between their median income and the poverty lines grew. This deepening of child and family poverty is evidence of growing income inequality.

Depth of Low Income for Families in British Columbia, 2019



Source: Statistics Canada. Table: 11-10-0020-01, 2019

“The combination of rent and utilities devours the majority of the budget for people living with the lowest incomes in Canada...” — *Hunger Count 2019*

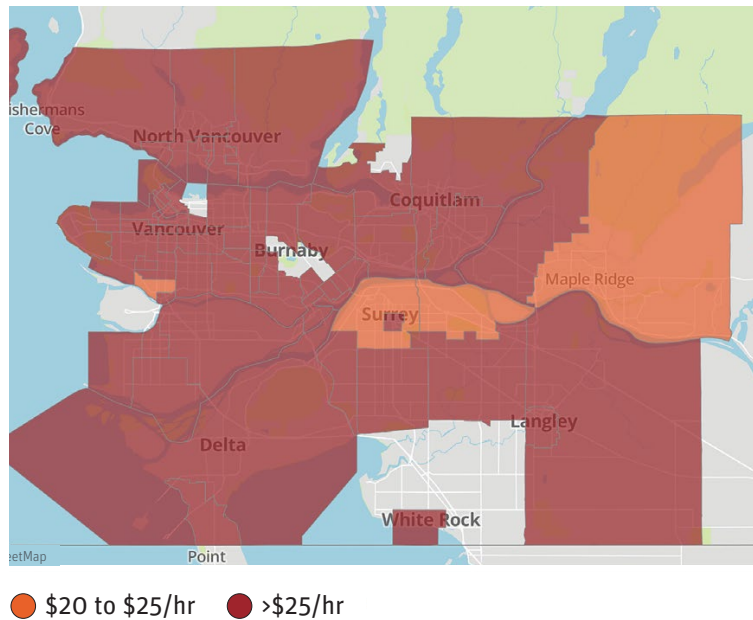
IMPACT OF LIVING IN DEEP POVERTY: PAYING THE RENT

In 2019, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a report¹ calculating a rental housing wage—the wage a full-time, full-year worker would need to make to be able to afford an average-priced two-bedroom apartment with no more than 30% of their income.

The report found a full-time worker in Vancouver would need to make \$35.43 per hour to afford an average-priced two-bedroom apartment. At minimum-wage earning Vancouverite would have to work 84 hours weekly in 2019 to afford a one-bedroom, or 112 hours for a two-bedroom.

In BC, housing is the single largest expense for most families and has the greatest impact on family budgets for families living in poverty.

Map from *Unaccommodating Rental Housing Wage in Canada* (CCPA 2019), which found that full-time worker in Vancouver would need to make **\$35.43 per hour** to afford an average-priced two-bedroom apartment.



IMPACT OF LIVING IN DEEP POVERTY: FOOD INSECURITY

In 2019, 38,074 children accessed a BC food bank². Lone-parent households comprised 15.7% of food bank visitors while two-parent households comprised 15.4% of visitors.

The number of children dependant on food banks has been declining since 2010, likely due to improved federal benefits. Children are still overrepresented as food bank users compared with their numbers in the general population. In 2019 children comprised almost 30% of all people served by BC food banks while making up about 19% of the population.

Even with the incremental decline in food bank use, food insecurity for BC's children continues to be shockingly high in a wealthy province such as ours.

Food bank use in Canada is an important indication of the gap between income and expenses with many families spending too much on housing. In BC in 2019, 72.5% of food bank users lived in market rental housing, with only 8.9% reporting living in social housing.



1 David Macdonald, *Unaccommodating Rental Housing Wage in Canada*, July 2019, CCPA, policyalternatives.ca

2 *Hunger Count 2019*, foodbank.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Hunger-Count-2019-Report-1.pdf

Child Poverty and Working Parents

MINIMUM WAGES NOT ENOUGH FOR FAMILIES RAISING CHILDREN

After the lost decade between 2001 and 2011, when BC's minimum wage remained stagnant at \$8.00/hour, minimum wage has increased in recent years and reached \$15.20/hour in June 2021. This is still well below the living wage in most parts of BC (see page 18).

As of June 2019 (the time when the most recent poverty line data was available), the minimum wage in BC was \$13.85/hour. A lone parent with one child working full-time (35 hours/week), full-year at minimum wage would have only earned \$25,207 per year, leaving them \$15,566 below the Low Income Measure (LIM) before-tax poverty line of \$40,773, for this family type and size. At the June 2019 minimum wage, the lone parent with one child would have had to work 56.6 hours per week to reach the before-tax poverty line minimum threshold. This would involve either working seven days a week at 8.1 paid hours per day or working five days a week at 11.3 paid hours per day.

Full-time, full-year work at BC's 2019 minimum wage left parents raising their children in deep poverty.

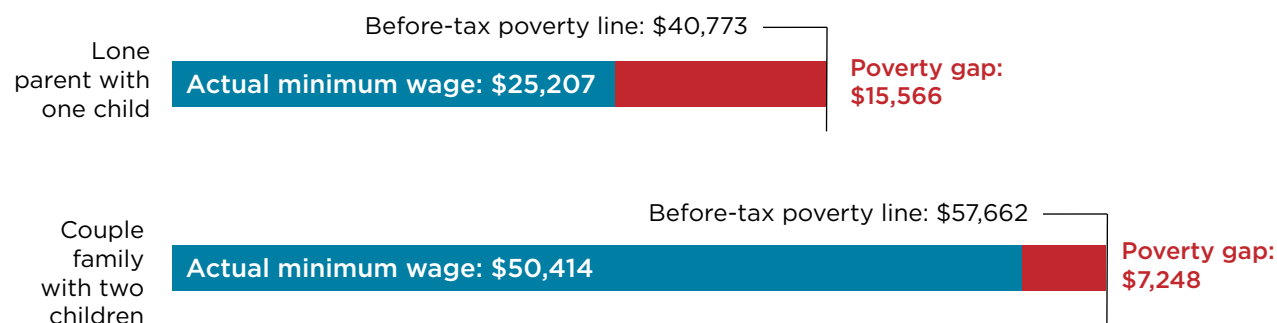
A couple family with two children with both parents working full-time, full-year at the 2019 minimum wage of \$13.85/hour would have made \$50,414 per year, or \$7,248 below the LIM before-tax poverty line of \$57,662 for this family type and size. At the June 2019 minimum wage, both parents in this family would have had to work a 40-hour week to reach the before-tax poverty line minimum threshold.



A lone parent working full time, full year for minimum wage in 2019 earned only **\$25,207**.



Income Gaps for Parents Working Full-Time, Full-Year at BC's 2019 Minimum Wage, Compared with LIM Before Tax, 2019



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0232-01 Low income measure (LIM) thresholds

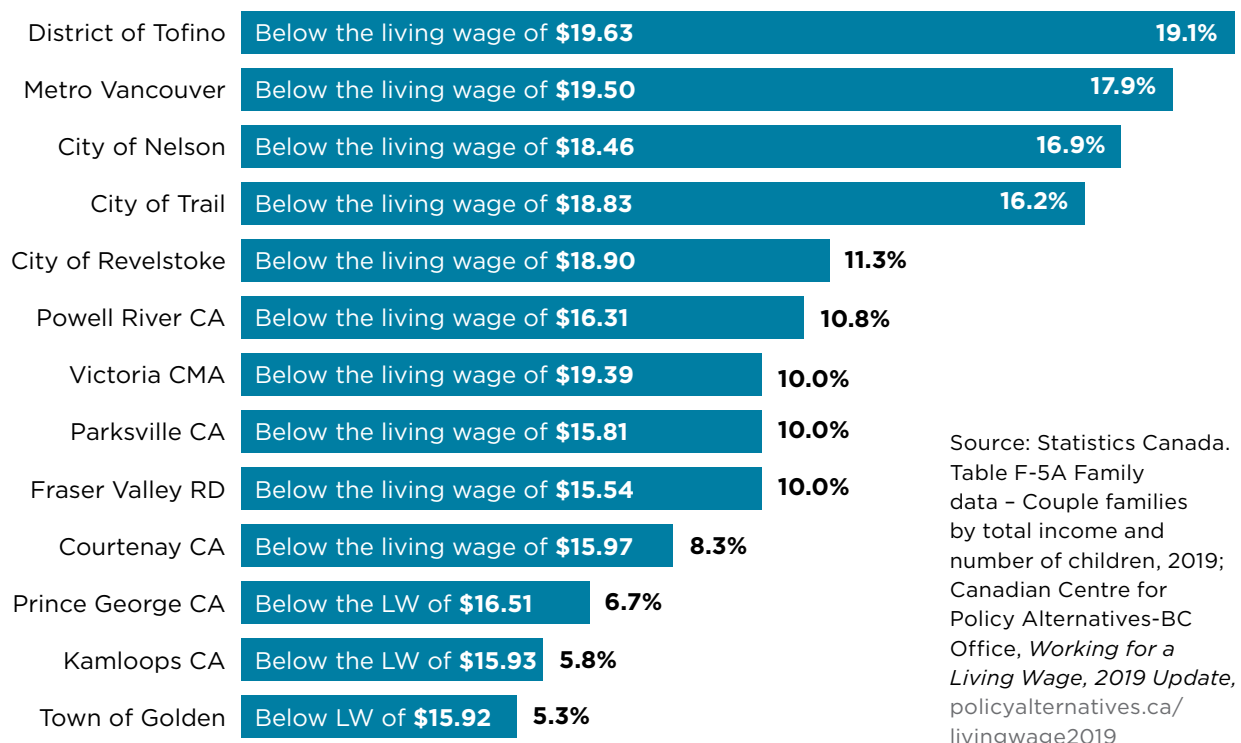
LIVING WAGES

Poverty income thresholds are too low to allow families to meet their basic living expenses. This is why First Call works with employers through the Living Wage for Families BC program to commit to paying living wages to their employees and contracted workers. Living Wage Employers are contributing to a key solution to the problem of child and family poverty.

Living wage calculations¹ are based on the annual budget a two-parent, two-child family would need to meet their basic needs (food, clothing, child care, shelter, transportation, health care, etc.). The living wage is calculated annually and is well above the poverty line. However, it still only provides a bare bones budget without room for savings or paying off debt.

Many families have before-tax household incomes below the regional living wages in their areas, even though they are working full-time, full-year. As shown in the graph below, in 2019 significant proportions of couple families with two children were earning less than the 2019 regional living wage in these thirteen communities. For instance, in Tofino 19.1% of these families were earning less than the regional living wage, followed by 17.9% in Metro Vancouver and 16.9% in Nelson.

Percentage of Couple Two-Child Families with Total Incomes Below Regional Living Wages, 2019



As of November 2021, the Living Wage for Families program has certified 300 living wage employers in British Columbia, including municipalities, First Nations governments, non-profit organizations and companies. For up-to-date living wage calculations for BC communities and a list of living wage employers in the province, visit www.livingwageforfamilies.ca.

¹ Working for a Living Wage: Making paid work meet basic family needs in Metro Vancouver 2021 Update, policyalternatives.ca/livingwage2021

PAID SICK LEAVE

An estimated 50% of BC employees do not have access to paid sick leave. The BC Government will establish paid sick leave as of January 1, 2022, which could benefit one million British Columbians.²

Access to paid sick leave varies by employment earnings. According to a survey in 2019 by Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in BC, only 7% of employees with annual employment earnings of less than \$20,000 and 16% of employees who earned \$20,000 to \$29,999 had access to paid sick leave, compared with 62% of employees who earned \$80,000 to \$99,000 and 63% of employees who earned \$100,000 or more per year.³

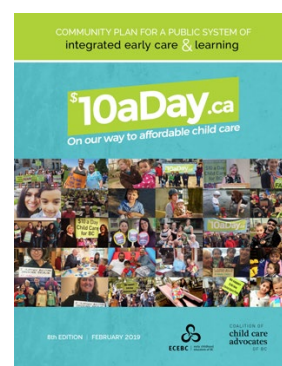
10ADAY PLAN

Access for families to a public system of affordable, high-quality child care is key to an effective poverty reduction strategy. This is even more urgent now, as families struggle with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

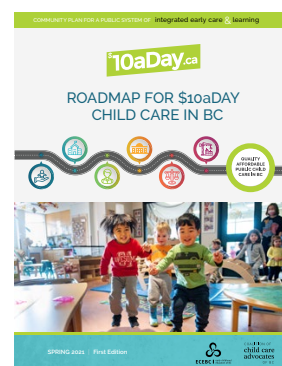
BC is fortunate to have the \$10aDay Child Care Plan and Roadmap developed by experts with broad public support. BC has achieved measurable progress in recent years on lowering parent fees, raising educator wages, and funding new spaces. And BC's new bilateral child care agreement with the federal government will contribute to the achievement of many of these goals.

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC is calling for increased provincial investments to:

- Confirm the move of child care to the Ministry of Education and continue to shift public funding into non-profit, public and Indigenous facilities, with a capital planning budget;
- Implement a province-wide, publicly-funded competitive wage grid for positions within the child care sector;
- Provide on-site school-age child care to meet community needs; and
- Work with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples to ensure Bill 41 and the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework are implemented and Indigenous leadership is meaningfully consulted where child care decisions impact Indigenous families on and off-reserve.



BC is fortunate to have the \$10aDay Child Care Plan and Roadmap developed by experts with broad public support.



2 BC Gov News, Ministry of Labour, Sept. 22, 2021, news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021LBR0030-001831.

3 Iglia Ivanova, Kendra Strauss, Policy Note, May 27, 2020, CCPC-BC Office, policynote.ca/paid-sick-leave/.

Children in Families on Welfare

WELFARE INCOMES WELL BELOW POVERTY LINES

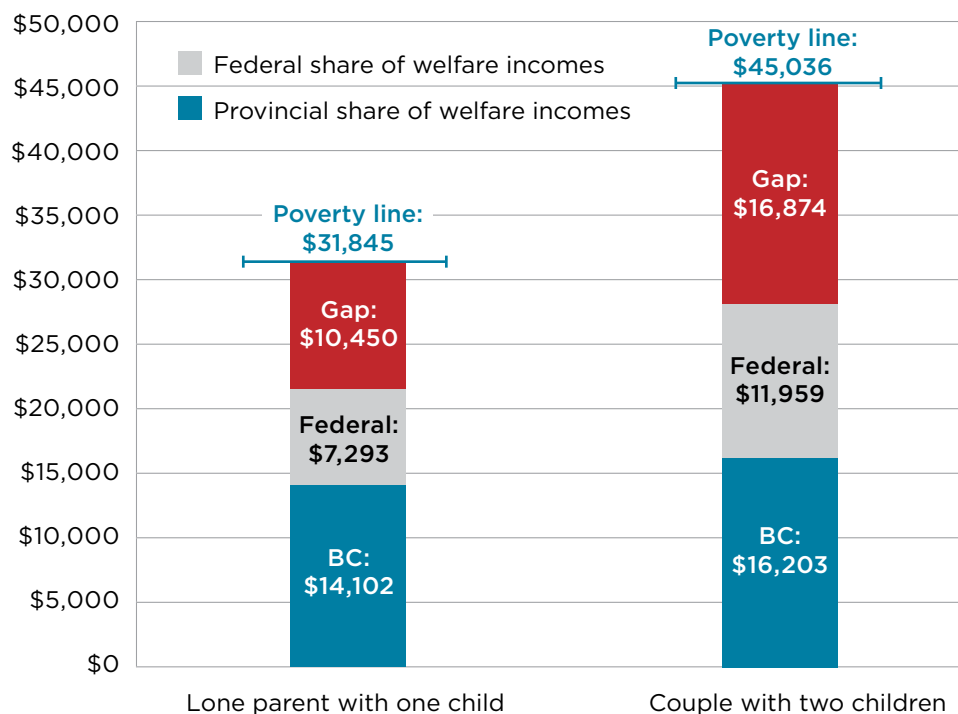
It is a major struggle for families on welfare in British Columbia to meet their basic needs. Welfare benefits and transfers from the federal and provincial governments provided just \$21,395 in total income for a lone parent with one child in BC in 2019, which was only 67% of the \$31,845 poverty line for this family type. This family's total welfare income left them \$10,450 below the poverty line.

For a couple with two children on welfare in 2019, their total income was \$28,162 which was 63% of the \$45,036 poverty line, leaving a poverty gap of \$16,874.

Both levels of government have a part to play in increasing welfare incomes; for example, both the federal contribution of \$7,293 and the provincial contribution of \$14,102 for a lone-parent family with one child were inadequate for raising these families out of poverty.

Both levels of government have a part to play in increasing welfare incomes; the federal and provincial contributions were inadequate for raising families out of poverty.

Federal and Provincial Shares of Welfare Incomes and Poverty Gaps by Family Type in BC, 2019



In 2019, a family of four on welfare had to get by on \$28,162.

That's 37% below the poverty line, leaving a poverty gap of \$16,874.

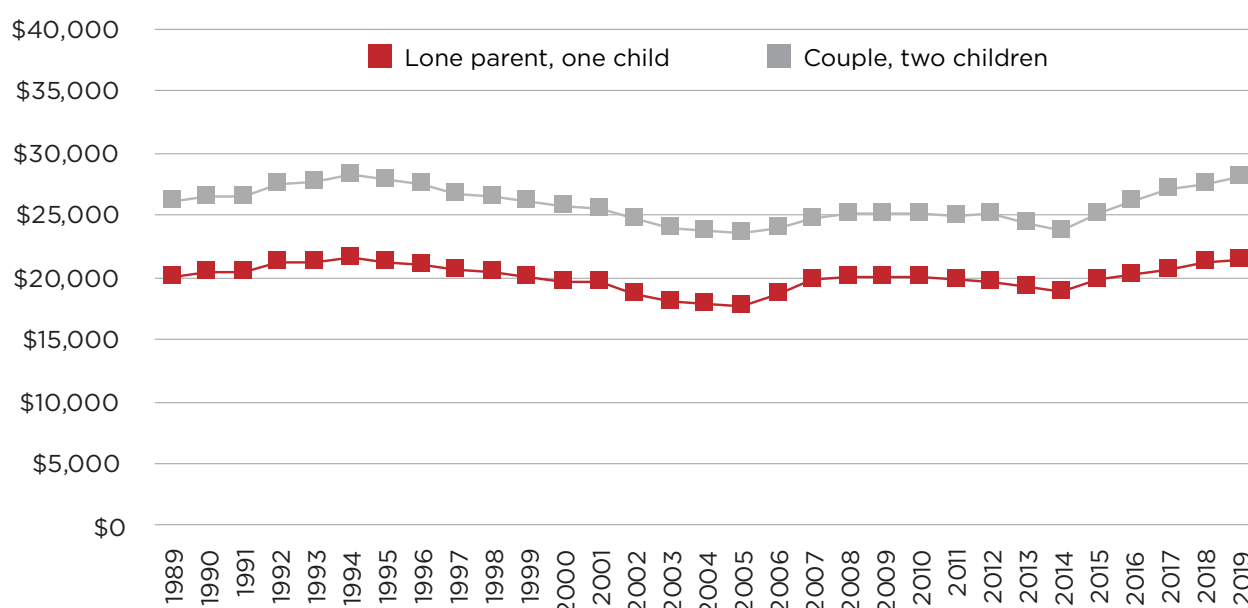
Source: Maytree, *Welfare Incomes in Canada* (2019)

WELFARE INCOMES LOSING VALUE OVER TIME

Welfare incomes in BC have consistently been very low for decades. Welfare incomes for families dropped for 11 consecutive years (1994–2005) and have not regained much of the lost ground. Accounting for inflation, welfare incomes for families decreased during the late 1990s and early to mid 2000s, and remained fairly steady in the late 2000s to the mid 2010s. It wasn't until 2015 that BC's welfare incomes started to increase.

The 2019 welfare income of \$21,394 for a lone-parent family with one child was the second highest welfare income during this 1989–2019 period, but still fell well short of the after-tax poverty line. Welfare incomes for a couple family with two children in 2019 (\$28,162) were slightly higher than in 1989 (\$26,066) but \$175 lower than in 1994 (\$28,337). These figures are adjusted to 2019 dollars.

Welfare Incomes (Adjusted for Inflation, 2019 Constant Dollars), by Family Type, BC, 1989–2019



Source: Maytree, *Welfare Incomes in Canada* (2019)

CANDICE LIVES WITH HER 7-YEAR-OLD CHILD in a one-bedroom basement apartment. She depends on social assistance to pay for essentials for her and her child. She has moved home four times in the last five years, fleeing abuse and addiction. Candice is currently being supported by the

CANDICE'S STORY

Reaching Home team, but worries about how she's going to afford rent. "I'm constantly worried about how I'm going to pay for rent."

She is also concerned about the impact that living in poverty has on her son. He goes to school with children who can participate in activities and classes that as a low-income lone parent she can't afford. She fears that instead he will get involved with gangs or selling drugs.

Candice would like the government to support by providing more community activities for low-income families.

“I'm constantly worried about how I'm going to pay for rent.”

LOW WELFARE RATES ARE CONDEMNING TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN BC TO POVERTY

In 2019, there was an average of 40,255 children and youth in families receiving welfare during a typical month in BC. This was an increase from the 2018 average by over 1,700 children. The number of dependent children in families receiving social assistance increased every year from 2016 to 2019.

In 2019, for most of these families (65%), working was not an option. These families did not fall under the “expected to work” category and had medical conditions, multiple barriers, disabilities and other challenges that prevented them from working.

Low welfare incomes are especially tough on lone-parent families, as 78% of the families with children on welfare were lone-parent families in 2019. Families living below the poverty line are frequently forced to rely on food banks and other sources of charity to feed and clothe their children.

In 2019, government increased the welfare rate by \$50 per month. While this was a step in the right direction, and there was a subsequent \$175 per month increase in 2021, the depth of poverty for people on welfare remains unacceptable. First Call is calling for major increases in welfare rates for all recipients, and the annual indexing of the rates based on increases in the cost of living.

Government could also expand the Single Parent Employment Initiative to include two-parent families and allow people to take post-secondary programs that are longer than 12 months.



JESSICA LIVES WITH HER THREE CHILDREN in a hotel. She is Indigenous and is originally from Saskatchewan. Jessica depends on the provincial disability assistance benefit to pay for food and rent for her family.

JESSICA'S STORY

Living in poverty impacts the mental health of Jessica and her children. When her children ask for things, she always has to say no because she can't afford anything. “I have low self esteem and my kids always feel that other kids are better than them. I have no hope; I am always stressed about not having enough.”

Paying rent is Jessica's biggest struggle every month. The shelter allowance in her disability benefit is too low for Vancouver's rental rates and the BC Housing wait list is very long. Jessica has moved over 15 times over the last five years. She and the children are now homeless and living in a hotel, being supported by the Reaching Home program. Jessica has struggled with addiction, harassment, and discrimination.

Jessica would like the government to provide more realistic support to help her with her rent.

“ I have low self esteem and my kids always feel that other kids are better than them. I have no hope; I am always stressed about not having enough.

Child Poverty Across BC

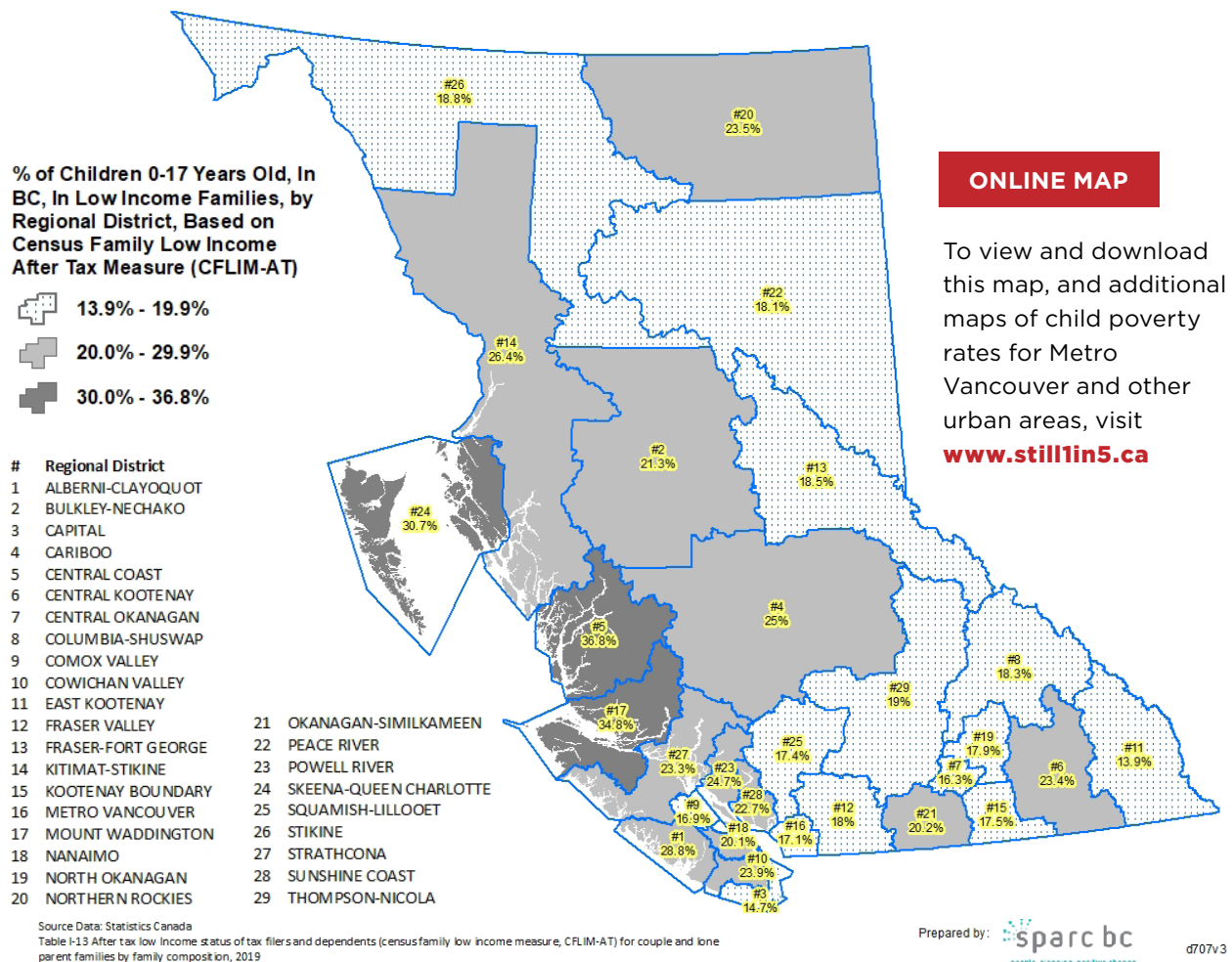
CHILD POVERTY BY REGIONAL DISTRICTS

Thousands of children in each of British Columbia's regional districts were living in poverty in 2019. Regional districts on the outer coast and parts of Vancouver Island had the highest child poverty rates. Twenty-three out of 29 regional districts had at least 1,000 children living in poverty and 15 out of 29 regional districts had at least one in five children living in poverty. The regional districts with the highest child poverty rates included:

- Central Coast Regional District (36.8%);
- Mount Waddington Regional District (34.8%); and
- Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District (30.7%).

23 out of the 29 regional districts in BC had at least 1,000 children living in poverty.

% of Children 0-17 Years Old in British Columbia in Low Income Families, by Regional District, Based on Census Family Low Income After Tax Measure (CFLIM-AT), 2019



It is worth noting that in all three districts with the highest child poverty rates, those rates were lower than in 2018.

CHILD POVERTY IN BC's URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

In BC's urban areas 16 out of 26 urban areas had at least 1,000 children living in poverty in 2019, with especially large numbers in Metro Vancouver (76,660 poor children), the Victoria Census Metropolitan Area (8,510 poor children) and the Abbotsford-Mission Census Metropolitan Area (6,870 poor children).

There were 23,390 poor children living in rural areas in BC in 2019. Twelve out of 26 urban areas had child poverty rates of 20.0% or more (i.e., 1 in 5 or more children living in poverty). Urban areas with high rates of child poverty were spread throughout the province. The highest child poverty rates were in the Port Alberni Census Agglomeration (28.2%), the Prince Rupert Census Agglomeration (26.9%), and the Duncan Census Agglomeration (26.3%). 23.0% of all children in rural BC lived in poverty.

Metro Vancouver Census Tracts

There were 76,660 children (or 17.1% of all children) in the Vancouver CMA living in poverty in 2019. One in 10 or more children lived in poverty in 428 out of 461 Vancouver CMA census tracts (92.8% of Vancouver CMA census tracts). One hundred or more children lived in poverty in 364 out of 461 Vancouver CMA census tracts (79.0% of Vancouver CMA census tracts). Areas with clusters of high child poverty rate census tracts included Northeast/Northcentral Vancouver, Central Richmond, South Burnaby and North Surrey.

Metro Vancouver was home to 76,660 poor children in 2019.



ONLINE MAP

To view and download maps of child poverty rates in BC urban areas, visit www.stillin5.ca

Victoria Census Tracts

There were 8,510 children (or 14.2% of all children) in the Victoria CMA living in poverty in 2019. One in 10 or more children lived in poverty in 59 out of 76 Victoria CMA census tracts (77.6% of Victoria CMA census tracts). One hundred or more children lived in poverty in 39 out of 76 Victoria CMA census tracts (52.0% of Victoria CMA census tracts). There was a cluster of high child poverty rate census tracts surrounding Downtown Victoria and southern Saanich.

Abbotsford-Mission Census Tracts

There were 6,870 children (or 16.2% of all children) in the Abbotsford-Mission CMA living in poverty in 2019. One in 10 or more children lived in poverty in 33 out of 37 Abbotsford-Mission census tracts (89.2% of Abbotsford-Mission CMA census tracts). One hundred or more children lived in poverty in 32 out of 37 Abbotsford-Mission CMA census tracts (86.5% of Abbotsford-Mission CMA census tracts). The area along South Fraser Way from West Abbotsford to Downtown Abbotsford had some of the census tracts with the highest poverty rates in the Abbotsford-Mission CMA.

Of those, 6,870 children were located in the Abbotsford-Mission CMA.

Chilliwack Census Tracts

There were 4,780 children (or 19.6% of all children) in the Chilliwack CA living in poverty in 2019. One in 10 or more children lived in poverty in 31 out of 32 Chilliwack CA census tracts (96.9% of Chilliwack CA census tracts). One hundred or more children lived in poverty in 20 out of 32 Chilliwack CA census tracts (62.5% of Chilliwack CA census tracts). The area around Downtown Chilliwack had a concentration of high poverty census tracts.

Kamloops Census Tracts

There were 3,320 children (or 16.1% of all children) in the Kamloops CA living in poverty in 2019. One in 10 or more children lived in poverty in 23 out of 29 Kamloops CA census tracts (79.3% of Kamloops CA census tracts). One hundred or more children lived in poverty in 17 out of 29 Kamloops CA census tracts (58.6% of Kamloops CA census tracts). High child poverty rate census tracts were clustered around Downtown near the Thompson River and the North Shore near Tranquille Road.

Kelowna Census Tracts

There were 5,930 children (or 16.3% of all children) in the Kelowna CMA living in poverty in 2019. One in 10 or more children lived in poverty in 39 out of 40 Kelowna CMA census tracts (97.5% of Kelowna CMA census tracts). One hundred or more children lived in poverty in 28 out of 40 Kelowna CMA census tracts (70.0% of Kelowna CMA census tracts). High child poverty rate census tracts were clustered along Highway 97 from Downtown Kelowna to Rutland.

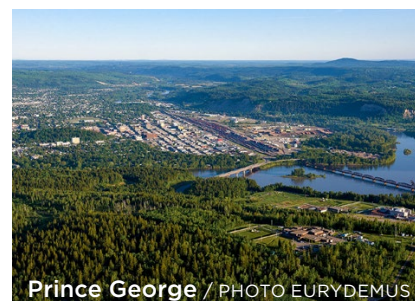
Nanaimo Census Tracts

There were 3,820 children (or 20.1% of all children) in the Nanaimo CA living in poverty in 2019. One in 10 or more children lived in poverty in 22 out of 22 Nanaimo CA census tracts (100.0% of Nanaimo CA census tracts). One hundred or more children lived in poverty in 16 out of 22 Nanaimo CA census tracts (72.7% of Nanaimo CA census tracts). High child poverty rate census tracts were clustered in and around Downtown Nanaimo.

Prince George Census Tracts

There were 3,380 children (or 18.2% of all children) in the Prince George CA living in poverty in 2019. One in 10 or more children lived in poverty in 20 out of 25 Prince George CA census tracts (80.0% of Prince George CA census tracts). One hundred or more children lived in poverty in 15 out of 25 Prince George CA census tracts (60.0% of Prince George CA census tracts). High child poverty rate census tracts were clustered in and around Downtown Prince George.

**3,380 children were
living in poverty in
Prince George in 2019.**



ONLINE MAP

To view and
download
maps of child poverty rates in
BC urban areas, visit

www.still1in5.ca

Growing Income Inequality

INCOME INEQUALITY AMONG BC FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

In 2019, the richest 10% of British Columbia families with children had 29.1% of the total pre-tax family income pie, a larger share than the combined incomes of the poorest 50% of families.

The poorest 10% of families with children had just 1.2% of the total family income pie. The richest 50% of families held a total of 77% of the family income pie.

BC Average Total Family Income Shares — Top and Bottom Halves, 2019

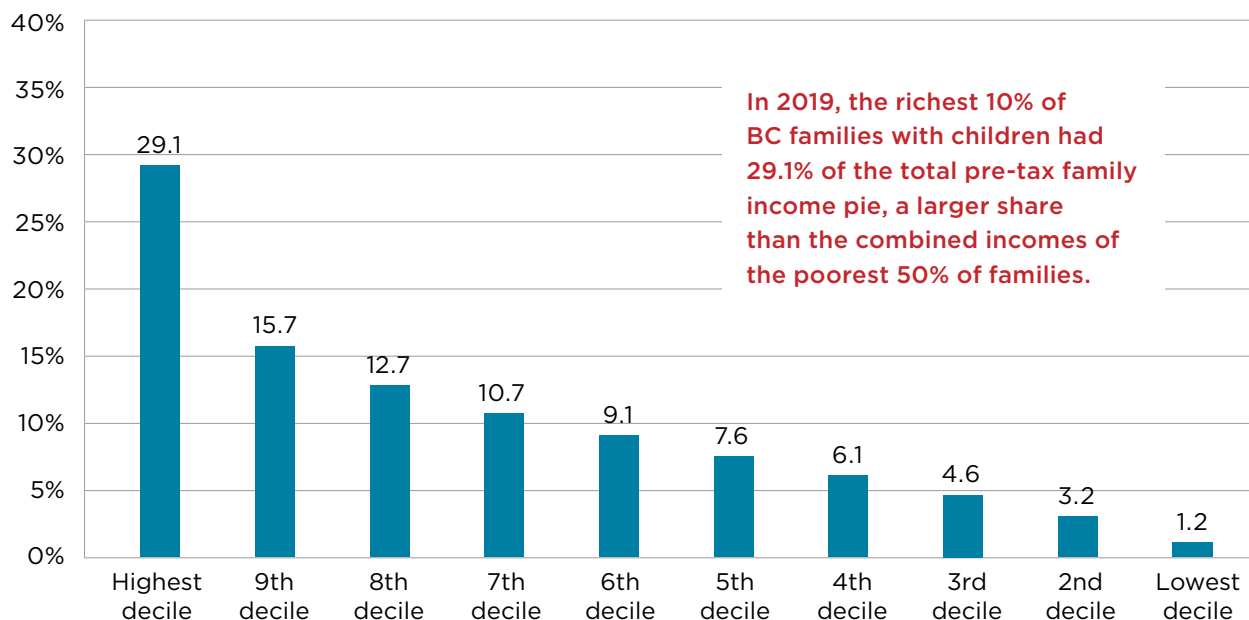
10% of BC's richest families have a larger share of the income pie than the combined incomes of the lowest income 50% of families with children.

Richest half of BC families' share:
77%



Poorest half of BC families' share:
23%

BC Average Total Family Income Share, 2019



Source: Statistics Canada custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2019

INCOME INEQUALITY BY FAMILY TYPE

Growing income inequality is mainly driven by the growth in the income of the families in the highest income decile, compared to the incomes of low-income families. In 2019, the disparity between the average total incomes of the richest and poorest 10% of BC families with children was dramatic. The families in the highest income decile collected 24 times what the families in the lowest income decile made. This was a larger disparity than the Canadian average ratio of 20.

The disparity for lone-parent families in BC was more than twice as high, with the average income for the top 10% of lone-parent families at 54 times the average income for lone-parent families in the lowest decile. This was the highest income inequality ratio for lone-parent families of all provinces and territories.

In dollar terms, in 2019, the gap between high and low average total incomes was \$314,524 per year for all BC families with children, \$329,371 for couple families, and \$129,638 for lone-parent families.

Average Total Incomes by Decile Group, Families with Children in BC, in 2019 Constant Dollars

	All census families with children <18	Couple families with children <18	All lone-parent families with children <18	Male lone-parent families with children <18	Female lone-parent families with children <18
Lowest decile	13,830	29,640	2,432	3,527	2,296
2nd decile	35,999	56,703	12,800	15,114	12,480
3rd decile	52,419	74,308	22,196	24,800	21,879
4th decile	68,909	89,473	28,682	33,494	28,218
5th decile	85,589	104,056	35,100	43,547	34,354
6th decile	102,426	119,557	41,993	53,849	40,833
7th decile	121,173	137,077	49,941	65,188	48,271
8th decile	143,977	158,976	59,921	78,698	57,533
9th decile	176,926	192,071	75,710	97,543	72,013
Highest decile	328,353	359,010	132,070	171,971	124,543

Source: Statistics Canada custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2019



In 2019, the disparity between the average total incomes of the richest and poorest 10% of BC families with children was dramatic.

The families in the highest income decile collected 24 times what the families in the lowest income decile made. This was a larger disparity than the Canadian average ratio of 20.

Gap Between Poorest and Richest 10% of BC Families with Children, in 2019 Constant Dollars

BC families with children under 18 years, 2019	Average total income, highest decile	Average total income, lowest decile	Annual income difference between highest and lowest deciles	Average total income ratio: highest to lowest decile
All census families	\$328,353/yr	\$13,830/yr	\$314,524	24 times
Couple families	\$359,010/yr	\$29,640/yr	\$329,371	12 times
Lone-parent families	\$132,070/yr	\$2,432/yr	\$129,638	54 times

Source: Statistics Canada custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2019

WHY INCOME INEQUALITY MATTERS

There is ample evidence that socioeconomic position is one of the most important social determinants of health. Children who are raised in poverty face risks to their health over their life course¹. In contrast, healthy, well-supported children and youth are more likely to become the engaged and contributing citizens that are essential for creating a healthy, sustainable society.

International studies have shown that high rates of economic inequality negatively impact both the rich and the poor on a range of health and wellness measures.² B.C. studies also show the impacts of poverty on people's vulnerability to chronic disease and the effects on their life span.³ The vulnerability of children is underscored by the research demonstrating a direct correlation between a large gap between the rich and the poor in wealthy societies and reduced child well-being.⁴

Allowing income and wealth inequality to continue to grow in B.C. brings with it increased health and social costs related to higher rates of many chronic diseases, obesity, mental illness, suicide, violence and addictions. Beyond these negative health effects and the widespread suffering that accompanies them, growing socioeconomic inequity erodes social cohesion, empathy and compassion, which leads to increased social isolation, stigmatization and marginalization of the poor, distrust, crime, stress and despair.

Inequality reduces social mobility,⁵ undermining the promise of a fair society and increasing social alienation for those left behind.

Beyond the negative health effects and the widespread suffering that accompanies them, growing socioeconomic inequity erodes social cohesion, empathy and compassion, which leads to increased social isolation, stigmatization and marginalization of the poor, distrust, crime, stress and despair.

1 World Health Organization, Commission on Social Determinants of Health, Closing the Gap in a Generation, Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health, 2008.

2 The Equality Trust, The Spirit Level, equalitytrust.org.uk/about-inequality/spirit-level.

3 Health Officers Council of BC, 2008 and 2013, healthofficerscouncil.net/positions-and-advocacy/poverty-and-health-inequities/.

4 Equality Trust, equalitytrust.org.uk/child-well-being.

5 "A tale of two Canadas: Where you grew up affects your income in adulthood," *The Globe and Mail*, Doug Saunders and Tom Cardoso, June 2017, theglobeandmail.com/news/national/a-tale-of-two-canadas-where-you-grow-up-affects-your-adult-income/article35444594/.

Importance of Government Help: Public Policy Matters

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS REDUCE CHILD POVERTY IN CANADA

Federal and provincial government income support programs play a significant role in reducing child poverty in Canada. Government transfers include payments such as Employment Insurance benefits, Goods and Services Tax (GST) credit, Canada Child Benefits, Old Age Security and Canada Pension Plan benefits, social assistance (or welfare) benefits, provincial refundable tax credits and family benefits, and other government transfers.

In the absence of these types of government transfers to family incomes, Canada's child poverty rate in 2019 would have risen to one out of three (33%), based on the CFLIM-After Tax. Nearly two and a half million Canadian children (2,450,070) would have been poor without these government programs and benefits. With federal and provincial transfers, the child poverty rate was reduced by 46.4%, from 33% to 17.7%, keeping 1,136,670 children out of poverty.

In the absence of these types of government transfers to family incomes, Canada's child poverty rate in 2019 would have risen to one out of three.

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS REDUCE CHILD POVERTY IN BC

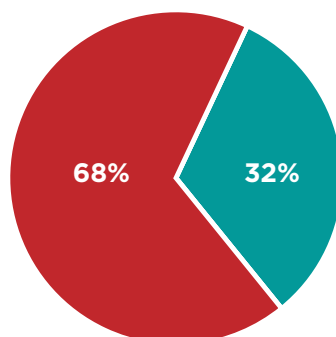
Support for low-income families through government transfers lowered the 2019 after-tax BC child poverty rate from 28.8% to 18.0%, a 37.5% reduction, meaning 93,780 BC children were kept out of poverty in 2019 thanks to government help. For BC children under 6 years old, the reduction was even more significant, lowering young children's poverty rate from 29.6% before government transfers to 17.5%, a 68.8% reduction impacting 32,890 children.

The most effective government transfer for families with children is the Canada Child Benefit (CCB). In 2019 the CCB alone protected 63,600 British Columbia children from falling into poverty, while other government transfers lifted 30,180 BC children out of poverty. The relative value of the CCB to child poverty reduction in BC is illustrated in the graph below.

Poverty Reduction in BC Due to the Canada Child Benefit, 2019

66,600 BC children lifted out of poverty

– government transfer poverty reduction due to Canada Child Benefit



30,180 BC children lifted out of poverty

– government transfer poverty reduction due to other government transfers



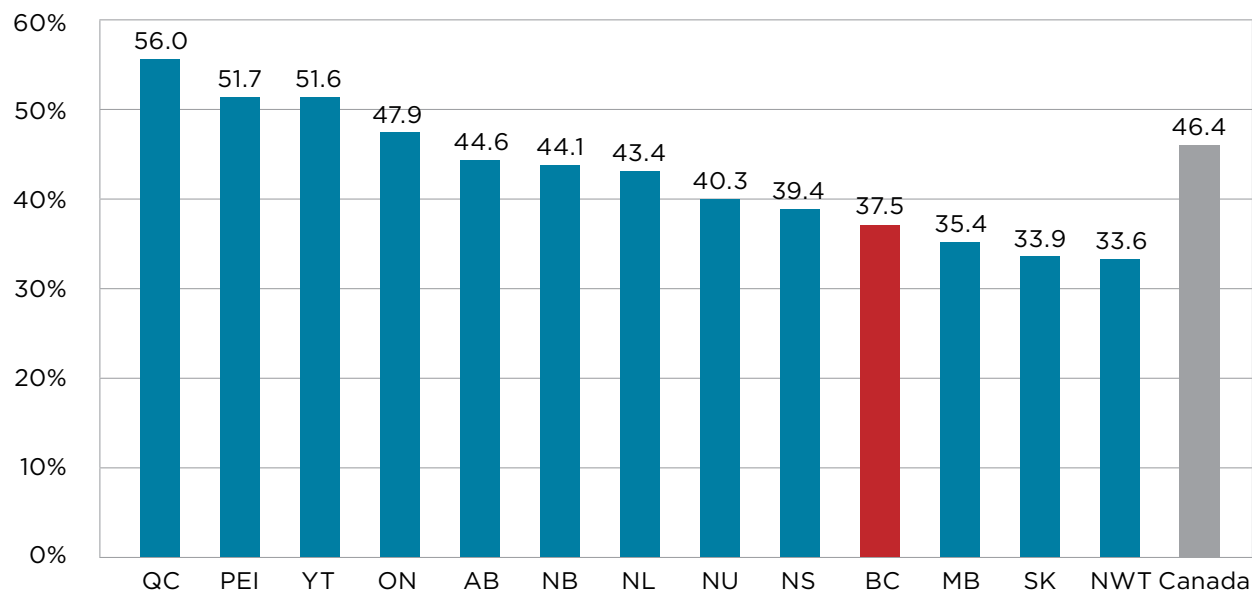
In total 93,780 BC children were kept out of poverty in 2019 thanks to government help.

Source: Statistics Canada custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2019

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS BY PROVINCE — HOW DOES BC COMPARE?

The graph below shows the percentage of children kept out of poverty by government transfers in 2019 in Canada and individual provinces and territories.

Percentage of Children Kept out of Poverty in 2019 by Government Transfer Payments



Source: Statistics Canada custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2019

Although government transfers in British Columbia have helped to reduce poverty, there were still many provinces and territories that used government transfers to make larger reductions in child poverty. The rate of child poverty reduction in BC (37.5%) due to government transfers ranked 10TH out of 13 provinces and territories and below the Canadian average of 46.4%.



NEW BC CHILD OPPORTUNITY BENEFIT

Families began receiving the new BC Child Opportunity Benefit in October 2020. Those already receiving it saw an increase in the amount of their payments. Families with children 6 years and older, who were no longer eligible for the previous BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit, have begun to receive this new benefit because it now includes children up to their 18TH birthday.

We will be able to see the impact of this enhanced and expanded benefit in the child poverty statistics for BC when they are released by Statistics Canada in 2022.

Families began receiving the new BC Child Opportunity Benefit in October 2020. We will be able to see the impact of this enhanced and expanded benefit in the child poverty statistics for BC when they are released by Statistics Canada in 2022.



COVID-19 MAGNIFIES INEQUITIES FOR LOW INCOME CHILDREN & YOUTH

“The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic highlight one key factor: children’s most basic rights to life, survival and development are in jeopardy and their best interests must be given paramount consideration in Canada’s recovery efforts.”¹

The economic, social and health impacts of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic on British Columbia’s children, youth and families have been profound. As numerous studies are documenting, pre-pandemic inequities, including the risk of experiencing poverty, are being magnified and deepened.

The inequitable impacts of the pandemic on families raising children and on young people themselves are showing up in indicators on job loss and income insecurity, housing insecurity, food insecurity, the digital divide, access to child care, education, health care and other social services, and mental health.

Commenting on the impact of the pandemic in their Fall Economic Statement 2020, the federal government noted:

Job and wage losses have been higher among young people, low-income workers, people living with disabilities, and women. (...) Lower-wage workers, who were already vulnerable to income shocks given lower savings and reduced access to credit, also lost jobs in disproportionate numbers.²

Many families raising children with disabilities and complex medical needs are among those whose economic security is even more threatened due to the loss of access to services, the need to provide 24/7 care for their children without respite and the resulting impacts on their employment.³

In addition to the stress of lost income and financial insecurity, children’s social environments have shrunk during the isolation measures, diminishing critical opportunities for co-regulation of emotion and stress through social connection and the support of broader families, communities, and culture. For example, 64% of respondents to the BC COVID-19 SPEAK Population Health Survey, Round 2, report young children lost access to child care. The survey respondents also report increasing disconnection for children from friends (89%) and family (69%) during the pandemic.

This 2021 BC survey also shows very high percentages of increased child stress (83%), worsening child well-being (65%) and increased screen time (91%) along with reduced physical (71%) and extracurricular (89%) activity.

1 Children First Canada, *Raising Canada 2020: The top 10 threats to childhood in Canada and the impact of COVID-19* (September 2020), p. 7, childrenfirstcanada.org/raising-canada.

2 Supporting Canadians and Fighting COVID-19 Fall Economic Statement 2020, budget.gc.ca/fes-eea/2020/report-rapport/toc-tdm-en.html.

3 “Parents of Kids with Complex Needs Are at the Breaking Point,” Katie Hyslop, TheTyee.ca, June 2, 2020, thetyee.ca/News/2020/06/02/Parents-Pushed-To-Breaking-Point/.

The damaging implications of this level of stress and deprivation for child development are known from years of research. Financial and family stress can have lasting impacts on children's physical and mental health and development.⁴ Household income in childhood is often a better predictor of health in adulthood than current income level.⁵

BC youth are also at risk as a consequence of the pandemic. Sixty-nine per cent of BC COVID-19 SPEAK survey respondents reported worsening mental health for post-secondary students and 43% reported students were experiencing financial distress. Sixty-nine per cent reported 18-29-year-olds felt a weak sense of community belonging.

Children's and youth's access to education, especially the shift to online learning during the pandemic, is strongly mediated by inequities related to family income, along with digital literacy and disability status. This threatens to have long-term impacts on their future employment prospects and earning potential.

Children's exposure to and risk of violence and abuse in their homes has also risen during the pandemic, as stay-at-home measures confined women and children in abusive homes and reduced their ability to leave. Already in pre-pandemic 2019, Canadian shelters and transition houses serving women and children leaving violence turned away 79% of potential residents on a typical single day.⁶ This crisis has only gotten worse during the pandemic.

Additionally, a 2019 research study documented high rates of exposure to violence and other serious adversities in BC for poor young mothers and their children.⁷ The urgency of addressing the needs of this vulnerable population of children and parents during and after the pandemic cannot be overstated.

The full and long-term economic effects of the pandemic on children and youth in BC are still not known or experienced, as emergency income and other supports have helped many families but are now expiring. Future child and family poverty data will help paint the picture.

All levels of governments have a duty to make sure their pandemic response and recovery efforts prioritize and protect the rights of children and youth. Pre-COVID-19 failures to uphold basic rights cannot be allowed to continue. Commitments to 'build back better' for young people and to address inequities need to show up in public investments and policy development.

All levels of governments in Canada have a duty to make sure their pandemic response and recovery efforts prioritize and protect the rights of children and youth to economic, housing, and food security, as well as access to health care, education, and other social services. Pre-COVID-19 failures to uphold these basic rights cannot be allowed to continue. Commitments to 'build back better' for young people and to address inequities need to show up in public investments and policy development.

4 "The Consequences of Financial Stress for Individuals, Families, and Society," Christopher G. Davis and Janet Mantler, May 2004, [researchgate.net/profile/Janet-Mantler/publication/229052873_The_Consequences_of_Financial_Stress_for_Individuals_Families_and_Society/links/Oc9605295f3d47acb9000000/The-Consequences-of-Financial-Stress-for-Individuals-Families-and-Society.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Janet-Mantler/publication/229052873_The_Consequences_of_Financial_Stress_for_Individuals_Families_and_Society/links/Oc9605295f3d47acb9000000/The-Consequences-of-Financial-Stress-for-Individuals-Families-and-Society.pdf).

5 "Dr. Michael Kobor, Dr. Candice Odgers, Dr. Kim Schmidt: The hidden costs of COVID-19 for children," Michael Kobor, Candice Odgers and Dr. Kim Schmidt, May 30, 2020, [theprovince.com/opinion/dr-michael-kobor-dr-candice-odgers-dr-kim-schmidt-the-hidden-costs-of-covid-19-for-children](https://www.theprovince.com/opinion/dr-michael-kobor-dr-candice-odgers-dr-kim-schmidt-the-hidden-costs-of-covid-19-for-children).

6 "Resetting Normal: Women, Decent Work and Canada's Fractured Care Economy," Canadian Women's Foundation, July 2020, p. 27, <https://fw3s926r0g42i6kes3bxg4i1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ResettingNormal-Women-Decent-Work-and-Care-EN.pdf>.

7 "British Columbia Healthy Connections Project: findings on socioeconomic disadvantage in early pregnancy," August 2019, <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-019-7479-5>.

CAROLINE'S STORY

“I am chronically stressed over bills and employment and managing my child’s needs.”

Caroline lives in New West with her 9-year-old son who has autism spectrum disorder. She and her partner broke up six years ago, but they continue to share parenting. In the past, she would work afternoon and night shifts and her ex-partner would work during the day, so that they could keep a consistent schedule for their son. “Every parent of an autistic child lives with heightened sense of anxiety. We fall through so many cracks.”

Caroline pays \$954 a month in rent for a two-bedroom co-op unit. “This [apartment] is a godsend, but I don’t know how I’m going to maintain it. I’m only paying half the going rent and I still don’t know if I can make it work.”

Before the pandemic, she was working full time — afternoon and night shifts in a manufacturing job. In November 2019, she was laid off and has struggled to find work ever since. During the pandemic, she applied for a job as a part-time driver for a grocery store, but because she needs flexibility to look after her son and couldn’t commit to work every single weekend, she didn’t get it. “Work often says it’s flexible when it’s not; even applying for part-time work needs full-time flexibility.”

Caroline’s Employment Insurance claim ended after three months. Since then, she has received two CERB payments and applied for the Canada Recovery Benefit. She is stressed about paying rent and fears her Internet might be cut off, which would seriously impact her ability to apply for jobs. Even being approved for income assistance still means she will have to find at least part-time work as assistance will only cover rent and very little else.

Caroline reports that the stress over bills and looking after her son is severely impacting her mental health. “It affects my state of mind. It’s very depressing and frustrating. I can’t be the only person who is in this situation where I want to work and pay my own way.”

“ It affects my state of mind. It’s very depressing and frustrating. I can’t be the only person who is in this situation where I want to work and pay my own way.”

Her son hasn’t been back to school since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. She finds that her son is better with online learning as he tends to amplify the energy of a high-energy classroom. However, she does struggle with elements of homeschooling. Even when attending school her son could never manage for more than half a day because of his anxiety. “We don’t qualify for respite as our need isn’t ‘great’ enough according to the ministry. I do not get much of a break as my child requires constant input.”

Before COVID-19, Caroline used to take her son for weekend outings on the bus to see people and go to the aquarium. However, because of the pandemic and her lack of income, they can’t do that anymore. “He’s missing out socially and he’s missing out on an education.”

Caroline would like more government programs to support parents like herself who are caring for and supporting a child with extra support needs. She would also like employers to be more flexible, offer guaranteed hours, and pay a living wage.

Recommendations: What Needs to Happen

For the 25TH year, the data and stories in this First Call annual report document the scope of growing income inequality in British Columbia and the resulting continued high levels of poverty. They also illuminate the causes of child, youth and family poverty and the policy solutions that are available to us to address these root causes.

In the ten years between 2010 and 2019, the BC child poverty rate was only reduced by 29%, from 25.3% to 18.0%, using the CFLIM after tax measure and tax filer data. This slow rate of progress is unacceptable and when the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are accounted for, we are likely to see even this progress eroded, especially for the groups of children who were already overrepresented in these statistics and at highest risk of experiencing poverty. These groups include children in female lone-parent families, children of recent immigrants and refugees, Indigenous children, children in racialized families, children affected by disabilities, and youth transitioning out of government care.

Federal and provincial policy changes have helped make some progress in recent years. However, we cannot afford the cost of so many BC children and youth growing up in poverty. It's time for us to live up to our promises to respect children's rights and end child poverty in BC and in Canada.

**It's time for us
to live up to
our promises to
respect children's
rights and end
child poverty in BC
and in Canada.**

Area of responsibility:

F	Federal
P	Provincial
L	Local

FIRST CALL RECOMMENDATIONS

First Call offers the following recommendations as concrete steps that federal, provincial and local governments can take to reduce the depth and scope of child poverty.

- P** Make sure all workers in BC are covered by the hourly **minimum wage** by the end of 2021 and establish a permanent Fair Wages Commission with research staff to examine issues related to low wages in BC and to give advice to the government on increases to the minimum wage.
- P** Amend the BC *Employment Standards Act* to provide all workers, regardless of their employment status (full time, part time, casual) or length of service, with the right to **paid sick leave**.
- F P L** Governments at all levels should ensure their direct 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.
- P** Significantly raise income and disability assistance rates to bring total **welfare incomes** up to the CFLIM after-tax poverty thresholds and index them to inflation.
- P** Adjust income and disability assistance rates for families with a **child with disabilities** to recognize the additional costs associated with raising a child with extra support needs.

6. **P** Expand the **post-secondary program** options eligible for support under the Single Parent Employment Initiative and, in the absence of enhancements to BC's refundable post-secondary grants, allow all those on social assistance to retain benefits while attending a post-secondary institution.
7. **F** Ensure the **Canada Child Benefit**, in combination with other income measures, raises all families with children above the CFLIM after tax poverty lines calculated through tax filer data and ensure access to this and other federal benefits for families in population groups with higher rates of poverty.
8. **P** Index the **BC Child Opportunity Benefit** to inflation to ensure the value of the benefit does not erode over time.
9. **F P** Ensure **maternity and parental leave** benefits are universally available to all parents (regardless of work status) and that the benefit levels are not less than the CFLIM after-tax poverty lines.
10. **F** Enhance **Employment Insurance** to expand access, duration and level of benefits to reduce inequity for lower-income workers and prevent and reduce child and family poverty, including establishing a minimum benefit floor.
11. **F P** Collaborate with First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments and Indigenous organizations to develop and implement plans to prevent, reduce and eradicate child and family poverty in **Indigenous communities**. The federal government must comply with the rulings of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to provide adequate funding for child welfare services on reserve and ensure the full application of Jordan's Principle for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and implement The Spirit Bear Plan to end inequalities across public services.
12. **F P** Continue to prioritize new child care investments in 2022 budgets and beyond to establish universal access to a system of high-quality, inclusive **child care** for BC children and families that has no parent fee for families with annual incomes under \$45,000, creates enough licensed child care spaces for all who choose them, ensures early childhood educators are paid compensation that reflects their education and the importance of the work they do and ensures there are adequate resources and support for the implementation of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.
13. **P** Increase program funding and support for families raising **children with disabilities** and complex medical needs to ensure they have timely, universal access everywhere in BC to a core suite of early intervention therapies; timely assessments; family respite; inclusive child care; health, medical and in-home supports.
14. **P** Increase investment in public health initiatives aimed to support **maternal health** and **healthy infant** development, as well as non-barriered, free, community-based programs and services for all families with young children to ensuring these supports are available throughout the province and designed to reach families experiencing poverty and other threats to their ability to thrive.
15. **F P** Review and enhance supports to **grandparents** raising grandchildren and other kinship care providers. Allow grandparents on CPP Disability who are raising their grandchildren to continue to receive the CPP children's benefit after they turn 65 and remove administrative barriers to receiving the Canada Child Benefit for kinship care providers.

16. **F** **P** Intensify efforts to help **immigrants and refugees** adjust to life in Canada by enhancing employment assistance, removing long-standing barriers to qualification for professionals trained abroad, making more language training with child care available, and improving employment standards and human rights protections and enforcement.
17. **F** Immediately cancel all outstanding **refugee transportation loan debt** and cease seeking repayment of transportation costs for all new refugees coming to Canada. This budget adjustment should not reduce the number of refugees targeted for resettlement.
18. **P** Automatically enrol all **young people transitioning out of care** in an income support program that meets their basic living costs and ensures they have safe housing.
19. **F** **P** **L** Scale up funding to build thousands of new **social and affordable rental housing** units and maintain existing affordable housing stock to reduce the number of families in core housing need and to eliminate homelessness. This should include designating additional housing, created by BC Housing, for youth leaving care so they can find an affordable, safe dwelling as opposed to homelessness.
20. **P** Tie **rent control** to the unit to remove the incentive for evictions of current tenants to raise the rent for new tenants.
21. **F** **P** Contribute funding to establish a universal, cost-shared, healthy **school food program** for all K-12 students that is respectful of local contexts, connected to community and curriculum, health-promoting and sustainable.
22. **P** Ensure **K-12 public education** funding is sufficient to mitigate inequities between high- and low-income neighbourhoods, school districts and families and to ensure appropriate inclusion of students with diverse learning needs. This includes enhancing funding to school districts for special education assistants, arts programming, libraries, student support services, and deferred maintenance, among other areas that still require urgent attention in future provincial budgets. Schools need additional funds to implement the public health response measures during the pandemic.
23. **F** **P** Create universal access to **post-secondary education** by eliminating tuition fees. Increase the maximum amount of support given to low-income recipients of the Canada Student Grant and eliminate interest paid on the federal portion of student loans.
24. **F** **P** Work with industry to ensure lower income families and youth have **access to technology** (both hardware and Internet access) so that they are able to apply for financial assistance and access learning opportunities and other supports.
25. **F** **P** Introduce universal coverage for all Canadians for prescription drugs, dental care, eye care and hearing aids as essential aspects of **health care**.
26. **F** **P** Address growing **income inequality** and generate revenue for **poverty reduction** programs by eliminating or reducing highly regressive and expensive tax loopholes, closing tax havens, taxing extreme wealth and implementing an excess profit tax focused on corporate pandemic windfalls.

APPENDIX 1

MEASURING POVERTY REDUCTION

When announcing legislated poverty reduction goals in 2018, both the federal and BC governments set the Market Basket Measure (MBM) as the official poverty line. The MBM sets an absolute measure of material deprivation for a reference family of 4, 2 parents and 2 children ages 9 and 13.

The Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM) after tax captures income inequality which makes it a better predictor of child development and health outcomes. This is why the international community, including UNICEF and the OECD, use the LIM and why Campaign 2000 and its provincial partners have historically used the CFLIM in our Child Poverty Report Cards, and continue to do so.

In 2019, using the CFLIM and more comprehensive taxfiler data, there were 156,560 children living in poverty in BC. Using the recently updated MBM and Canadian Income Survey data, there were 58,000. Survey data relies on a representative sample of respondents, which is acknowledged to risk under-reporting the disposable incomes of both the very wealthy and the very poor. The MBM calculation also currently excludes people living on First Nations reserves and in the Territories.

First Call encourages government to avoid politicizing child poverty by overstating improvements in the poverty rate. Indeed, we agree that both levels of government have established better public policies—income transfers in particular—that have benefited children and their families. Evaluating the outcomes of policy initiatives becomes difficult when different methods of measurement and data sources produce conflicting results.

The following chart contains the Census Family Low Income Measure, after tax used in this report card for different family sizes based on the number of adults and children in each family type.

Statistics Canada's 2019 Thresholds for After-Tax Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM)

Number of family members	Income threshold
1	\$22,518
2	\$31,845
3	\$39,002
4	\$45,036

The First Call coalition of partners provides a unified, strong and respected voice for BC's children and youth.

ACT – Autism Community Training	British Columbia Federation of Students
Adoptive Families Association of BC	Burnaby Family Life
Affiliation of Multicultural Societies & Service Agencies	Cameray Child & Family Services
Alternate Shelter Society	Canadian Association for Young Children
Association for Community Education BC	Canadian Mental Health Association BC
Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia	Canadian Red Cross – Respect Education
Aunt Leah's Independent Life Skills Society	Capilano Students' Union
Autism Society of BC	Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs
Baobab Inclusive Empowerment Society	Cerebral Palsy Association of BC
Basics for Health Society	Child and Youth Care Association of BC
BC Aboriginal Child Care Society	Childhood Connections - Okanagan Family & Childcare Society
BC Association for Child Development & Intervention	Children's and Women's Health Centre of BC
BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs	Children's Hearing and Speech Centre of BC
BC Association of Social Workers	Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils	Columbia/Kootenay Advocacy and Education Resource Society
BC Council for Families	Council of Parent Participation Preschools BC
BC Council of the Canadian Federation of University Women	Deaf Children's Society of BC
BC Crime Prevention Association	Dedicated Action for School Health BC
BC Federation of Foster Parents Association	Developmental Disabilities Association
BC General Employees' Union	DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society
BC Play Therapy Association	Dr. C.J. Patricelli, Inc.
BC Recreation and Parks Association	Early Childhood Educators of BC
BC Retired Teachers' Association	East Kootenay Childhood Coalition
BC Schizophrenia Society	Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver
BC Society of Transition Houses	Family Resource Programs of BC
BC Teachers' Federation	Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland	Family Support Institute of BC
Boys and Girls Clubs of BC	Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
BRAVE Education for Trafficking Prevention	Federation of Community Social Services BC
Britannia Community Centre Child Care Hub	Foster Parent Support Services Society
	Five Family Place Partnership – MPFCS

Health Officers' Council of British Columbia
Helping Spirit Lodge Society
Health Sciences Association of BC
Hospital Employees' Union
Immigrant Services Society of BC
Inclusion BC
Indigenous Perspectives Society
Institute for Public Education – BC
Justice Institute of BC
Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society
Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
Learning Disabilities Association of BC
McCreary Centre Society
Métis Commission for Children & Families BC
Mom to Mom Child Poverty Initiative
MOSAIC
National Council of Jewish Women
of Canada – Vancouver Section
New Westminster Family Place
OneSky Community Resources
Options Community Services Society
Pacific Association of First Nations Women
Pacific Community Resources Society
Pacific Immigrant Resources Society
Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education
Parent Support Services Society of BC
PeerNetBC
Phoenix Human Services Association
PLEA Community Services Society of BC
Progressive Intercultural
Community Services Society
Provincial Association of Residential
& Community Agencies
Public Health Association of BC
Raffi Foundation for Child Honouring

Sea to Sky Community Services
Single Mothers' Alliance of BC
Social Planning & Research Council of BC
Social Venture Partners
Society for Children and Youth of BC
SOS Children's Village BC
St. Leonard's Youth and Family Services
S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
Summit Negotiations Society
Sunshine Coast Community Services Society
Take a Hike Youth At Risk Foundation
The Treehouse Vancouver Child
& Youth Advocacy Centre
Union of BC Performers/ACTRA
United Way of the Lower Mainland
University Women's Club of Vancouver
Vancity Community Foundation
Vancouver Coastal Health
Authority – Population Health
Vancouver Community College – Early
Childhood Care & Education, Cont. Studies
Victoria Child Abuse Prevention
& Counselling Centre
West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund
Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre
Westcoast Family Centres Society
Western Society for Children
Women Against Violence Against Women
YWCA Metro Vancouver

FIRST CALL LIAISONS

BC Representative for Children and Youth
Ministry of Children and Family Development
Human Early Learning Partnership, UBC
BC School Trustees' Association



ABOUT FIRST CALL

First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society works with a non-partisan, cross-sectoral network of partner organizations to put BC children and youth first in public awareness and public policy. We conduct research and analysis on child and youth rights and well-being, offer education and training events, and make policy recommendations to promote, strengthen and defend the rights of children and youth in BC.

First Call holds monthly partner meetings featuring presentations on emerging child rights issues. Together, we share information, provide our members with tools and resources and advocate collectively for BC's children and youth.

If you are a British Columbia-based organization that believes in putting children and youth first, we invite you to partner with us. For more information, please email us at info@firstcallbc.org.

SUPPORT OUR WORK

First Call's annual Child Poverty Report Cards have helped countless individuals and groups advocate for BC's children and youth. We thank all our individual donors, funders, and partner organizations for their ongoing support.

You can support our work by donating to the First Call BC Fund at Vancity Community Foundation. Visit our website firstcallbc.org.

Together, we will continue to put BC's children and youth first through our collective advocacy efforts.

putting children and youth first

328 – 3381 Cambie Street, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4R3

604 288 8102

Toll free 1.800 307 1212

info@firstcallbc.org

firstcallbc.org