

BRITISH COLUMBIA



2025 BC CHILD POVERTY REPORT CARD



IN COLLABORATION WITH



29TH ANNUAL REPORT CARD ON CANADA'S COMMITMENT TO END CHILD POVERTY BY 2000

2025 BC CHILD POVERTY REPORT CARD

November 2025

PRODUCED BY



IN COLLABORATION WITH



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A SPECIAL THANK YOU to Tristan Johnson for his help with data research, analysis, graphs, and maps and to Tom Wherrett for his mapping skills.

First Call acknowledges that we live and work on the traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and selílwitlh (Tseil-waututh) Nations. We also acknowledge First Nations across BC, and Métis and Inuit partners and friends.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REPORT CARD 2025

BC Low Income Families with Children Are Falling Further Behind

IN 2023, THE CHILD POVERTY RATE in British Columbia stood at 16.7% — that's 149,370 children and youth living in households below the low-income threshold. This is virtually unchanged from 2022 (16.7%; 147,570 children). However, while the overall child poverty rate changed little from the previous year, the actual number of children living in poverty rose by 1,800 — a reminder that even small shifts in percentage terms represent many families and children affected.

But that apparent statistical 'stability,' masks a far more troubling development: the depth of poverty is worsening, and families with children are losing economic resilience at a time of mounting cost pressure.

AN EVER WIDENING GAP

While the overall child poverty rate remained stable, the depth of poverty for all low-income families increased when it came to how far below the poverty line they were. Poor couple families with two children fell \$15,674 below the poverty line in 2023, more than the \$15,096 gap in 2022. Poor lone-parent families with two children fell \$17,109 below, a \$1,094 increase in a single year.

These gaps indicate that families are not just living in poverty — they are living further below the line than ever before.

1 out of 6
children in BC lived
in poverty in 2023.



LONE-PARENT FAMILIES: NEARLY FIVE TIMES THE RISK

Children in lone-parent families bore the sharpest risk of poverty. In 2023, 45.1% of these children lived in poverty — nearly five times the rate of children in couple families (9.5%). Although lone-parent families represent only 19% of BC children, they account for 53% of those living in poverty.

Most lone-parent households are female-led, and low wages and inadequate supports, such as child care, keep these families stuck in poverty.

WORKING HARD YET STILL FALLING BEHIND

Even full-time work no longer ensures security. A lone-parent working full-time at BC's 2023 minimum wage earned \$29,738 before tax — nearly \$19,500 below the lone-parent with one child poverty line of \$49,220. A two-parent family, with both parents working full-time at minimum wage, earned \$59,477 — still \$10,132 below the 2023 LIM-Before Tax poverty line for two parents with two children.

Low wages and precarious work continue to trap families in poverty despite full-time work.

CRISIS OF ESSENTIALS: HOUSING, FOOD, WAITLISTS

Families face mounting cost pressures for basic needs. In Metro Vancouver, on average, vacant two-bedroom rental units cost 36% more than occupied units, and three-bedroom vacancies cost 56% more. Families with children who struggle in the rental market, who have applied for subsidized housing, made up 37% of the BC Housing waitlist for Metro Vancouver alone, rising from 4,434 in 2019 to 7,864 in March 2024 — a 77% jump.

Food insecurity also rose sharply. In 2023, 33% of BC children, or 288,000 children, experienced food insecurity, up from 29% in 2022.

In March 2025, children accounted for 68,053 of 223,340 food-bank visits (30.5%), reflecting the growing strain on families.

EQUITY STILL ELUSIVE FOR INDIGENOUS, RACIALIZED, AND MANY RURAL FAMILIES

Child poverty is uneven across BC and deeply connected to systemic inequities. The highest rates in 2023 occurred in the Central Coast (37.8%), Mt. Waddington (30.3%), and Skeena-Queen Charlotte (26.2%) regional districts. Rural children overall faced a 21.1% poverty rate.

Indigenous, racialized, and newcomer families experience consistently higher poverty rates, highlighting persistent barriers that policy must directly address.

DEPTH OF POVERTY AND RISING COSTS

Families living in poverty are falling further behind. The median after-tax income for low-income couple families with two children in 2023 was \$37,210 — \$98,230 below the median for all couple families (\$135,440). Lone-parent families with two children earned a median \$62,460, \$72,980 less than couple families. Low-income lone-parent families earned \$28,690 — \$33,770 below the median for all lone-parent families.

Income inequality in BC continues to widen as the highest-earning families pull further ahead. In 2023, the average after-tax income of families in the top 10% was 23 times greater than that of families with the lowest incomes — a larger gap than the national average of 19 times.

The divide is even starker for lone-parent families. In BC, the highest-earning 10% of lone-parent families had average incomes 86 times higher than those with the lowest incomes — nearly triple the national gap (31 times). BC's inequality for lone-parent families was the highest in the country, well above Alberta, the next most unequal province, where the top 10% earned 50 times more than the bottom 10%.

These disparities illustrate growing inequality and the widening distance between families' incomes and the costs of daily life.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Falling deeper below the poverty line has lasting consequences for children. Poverty increases the risk of housing instability, food deprivation, poor health, and educational setbacks. Research shows that early childhood poverty can impede cognitive development and contribute to lifelong health burdens.

Families' eroding resilience makes temporary hardship more likely to become long-term disadvantage.

SUPPORTS ARE INSUFFICIENT AND STRETCHED

In 2024, a lone parent with one child on welfare had an income of \$29,084, which is – \$14,738 below the poverty line of \$43,822. A couple family with two children had an income of \$41,708 – \$20,266 below the \$61,974 poverty line. The withdrawal of pandemic supports in 2021 and 2022 exacerbated financial instability.

Without income supports, including the Canada Child Benefit and the BC Family Benefit, BC's child poverty rate would have reached 27.7% – impacting an additional 98,120 children.



A CALL TO RENEWED ACTION: The child poverty rate in BC, while not showing a significant spike from last year's report, should not lull us into a false sense of complacency. We must prevent the deepening of poverty and restore families' ability to live with dignity.

First Call recommends:

- **Raise family incomes** through living wages and enhanced targeted supplements.
- **Index income assistance** and child benefits to inflation.
- **Target supports** for low-income Indigenous, racialized, newcomer, and lone-parent families and families raising children with disabilities.
- **Improve access to universal systems** and services, including affordable housing, quality child care, health benefits, public education, and public transit.
- **Measure and reduce** the depth of poverty, not just the rate.

IN CONCLUSION, over two-and-a-half decades since Canada pledged to eliminate child poverty, one in six BC children still live in poverty. Many families face not just survival but entrenching disadvantage. Tackling deepening poverty today will shape the future for a generation of BC children.

One in Six BC Children Living in Poverty

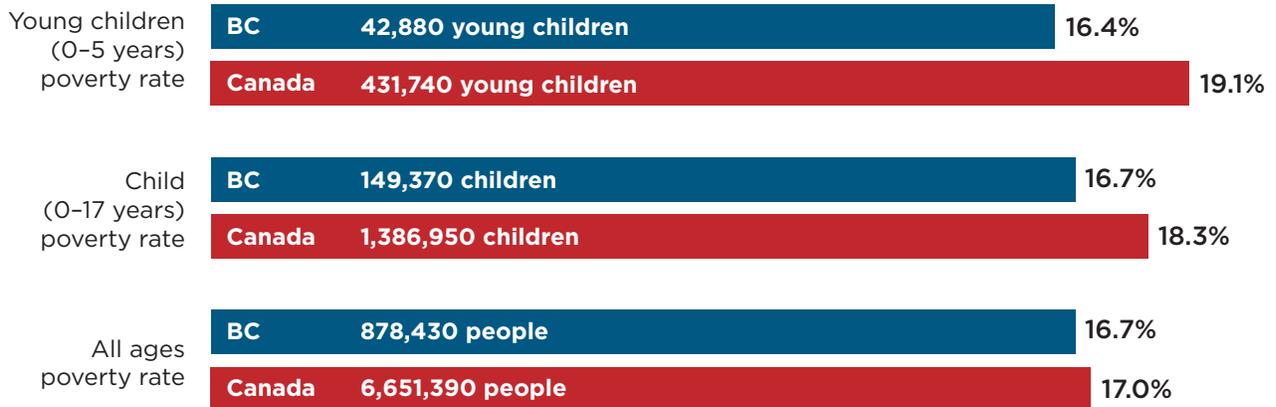
BC'S CHILD POVERTY RATES

In 2023, the child poverty rate in British Columbia was 16.7% as measured by Statistics Canada's Census Family Low Income Measure after income taxes (CFLIM-AT), using taxfiler data, a rate unchanged from 2022. This represents 149,370 children (0-17 years old) who lived in poor households in 2023. Because the population of children grew, there was an increase of 1,800 poor BC children from 2022. At 16.7% BC's child poverty rate was 1.6 percentage points lower than the Canadian child poverty rate of 18.3%.

BC's early years (0-5 years old) child poverty rate, at 16.4% in 2023, was up slightly from 16.3% in 2022. BC's poverty rate for young children was 2.7 percentage points lower than Canada's rate at 19.1%. BC's all-ages poverty rate, at 16.7%, was slightly lower than Canada's all ages poverty rate at 17.0%.

In total, 42,880 out of the 878,430 people living in poverty in BC in 2023 were young children under the age of 6. This was a decrease of 260 children from 2022.

All-Ages, Child (0-17) and Young Children (0-5) Poverty Rates, BC and Canada, CFLIM After Tax, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table I-13, Individual Data, 2023 and custom tabulations (2025)



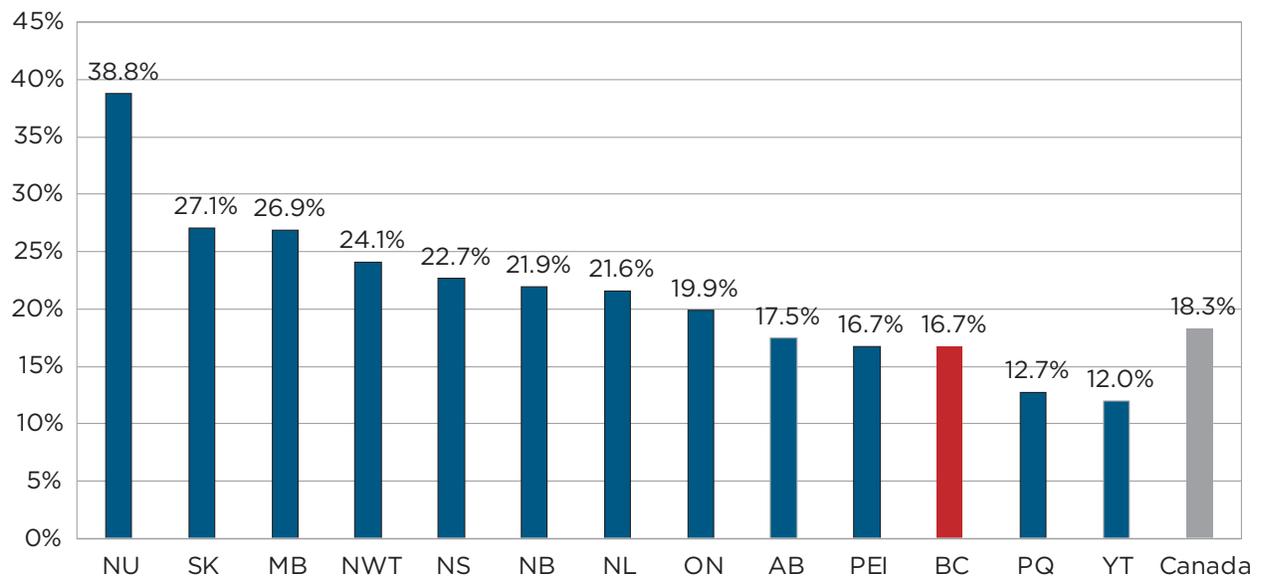
In BC, 149,370 children (0-17 years old) lived in poor households in 2023. Because the population of children grew, there was an increase of 1,800 poor BC children from 2022.

CHILD POVERTY A CANADA-WIDE PROBLEM

Child poverty remains a Canada-wide problem affecting more than one million children. In 2023, for the third year in a row, BC's comparative position remained at the third lowest child poverty rate among the 13 provinces and territories at 16.7%. Quebec at 12.7% and the Yukon Territory at 12%, had lower child poverty rates than BC in 2023.

Between 2022 and 2023, four provinces (Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Ontario and Saskatchewan) saw their child poverty rates increase, while four provinces (PEI, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba) and two territories (Northwest Territories and Nunavut) saw their rates decrease. BC, along with New Brunswick and Yukon, saw no change in their child poverty rates, though they all saw an increase in the number of poor children.

Child Poverty Rates, by Province/Territory, CFLIM After Tax, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table I-13, Individual Data, 2023 (2025)



Child poverty remains a Canada-wide problem affecting more than one million children. In 2023, all provinces saw an increase in the number of poor children.

HIGH LEVELS OF ON-RESERVE CHILD POVERTY

The on-reserve child poverty data available for 2023 indicates significantly higher rates for most of the reserves counted compared to the provincial rate of 16.7%. 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 2023 was 33%, twice as high as the overall BC child poverty rate, representing 4,510 children living in poverty. This is a decrease from the 34.8% child poverty rate, representing 4,460 children, from 61 reserves with available data in 2022.

In this data set, rural reserves typically had higher poverty rates than urban reserves. Based on data from 31 rural reserves/First Nations communities, there were 2,050 children living in poverty, for a rural reserve child poverty rate of 39.2% in 2023. Nine of these rural reserves had child poverty rates of 50% or higher, including one reserve with a child poverty rate of 71.4%.

Data from 33 urban reserves/First Nations communities indicated there were 2,460 children living in poverty, for an urban reserve child poverty rate of 29.1%. Five of these urban reserves had child poverty rates of 50% or higher; however, it is worth noting that three of these five had child poverty rates lower than the BC average, ranging from 12.5% to 14.3%.



The overall child poverty rate for the 64 reserves counted was twice as high as the overall BC child poverty rate.

Child (0-17) poverty rate, 64 BC First Nations reserves, CFLIM-AT, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table I-13, Individual Data, 2023 (2025)

According to 2021 Census data based on the LIM after tax measure, Métis children (0-17) in BC had a child poverty rate of 12.7%, representing 3,240 children. In 2020, there were 980 poor Métis children under the age of 6 in BC, a 13.4% poverty rate.¹

¹ Statistics Canada, Table 98-10-0283-01, Individual low-income status by Indigenous identity and residence by Indigenous geography: Canada, provinces, and territories, www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810028301

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 greater at risk of living in poverty than others.

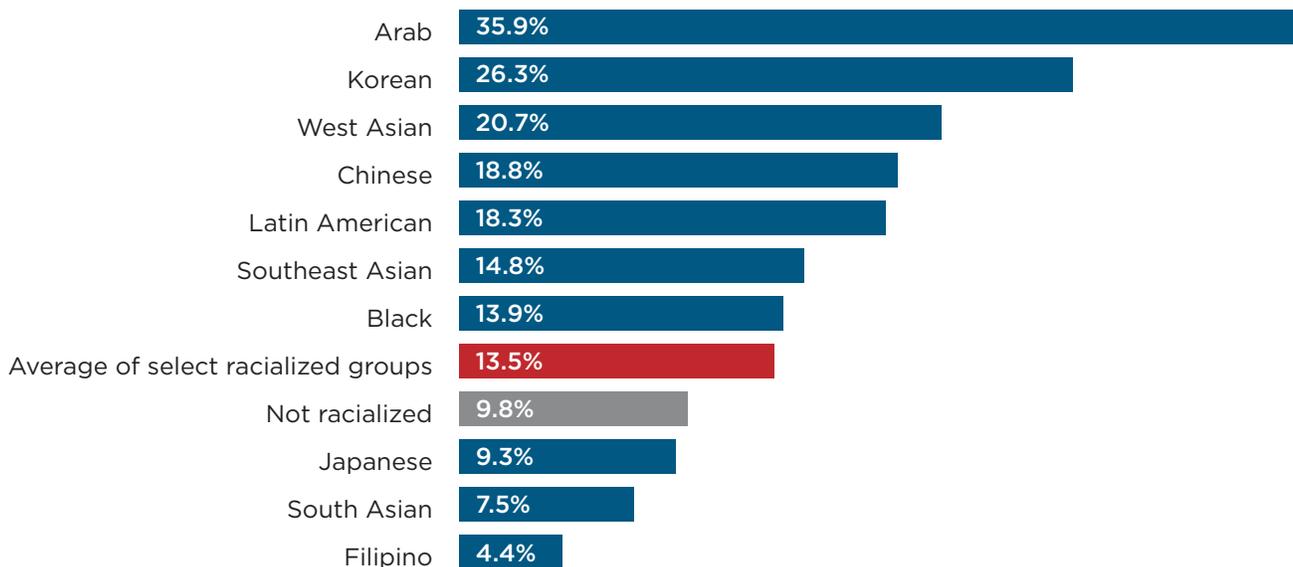
2021 Census data based on the LIM after-tax measure showed that the visible minority (racialized) child poverty rate of 13.5% was higher than the non-racialized child poverty rate of 9.8% in BC. Arab, Korean and West Asian children had more than double or triple the risk of poverty compared to non-racialized children in 2020. The lowest rates were among Filipino, South Asian and Japanese children. The census data also showed more than 1 in 5 (21%) of recent immigrant children lived in poverty in BC in 2020.

The 2021 Census, with data collected in 2020, coincided with the extraordinary provision of COVID-19 benefits provided by provincial and federal governments, which reduced poverty considerably. BC's child poverty rate increased after these income supports were withdrawn in subsequent years, making it likely that visible minority child poverty rates have also increased since this data was collected.



The overall statistics hide the fact that some children in BC are at greater risk of living in poverty than others.

BC Child (0-17) Poverty Rates (LIM-AT), Select Racialized Groups, 2020



As noted in the recent report on disability poverty in Canada, there is no current data on the number of children with disabilities living in poverty.²

2 Disability Without Poverty and Campaign 2000, (2023), Disability Poverty in Canada, A 2023 Report Card, campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/DWP-Report-Card-23-FINAL_compressed-English.pdf.

BC's Child Poverty Rates Over Time

PERCENTAGE OF POOR CHILDREN OVER TIME

BC's child poverty rate remained at 16.7% in 2023, the same as in 2022. Canada's child poverty rate increased slightly from 18.1% in 2022 to 18.3% in 2023.

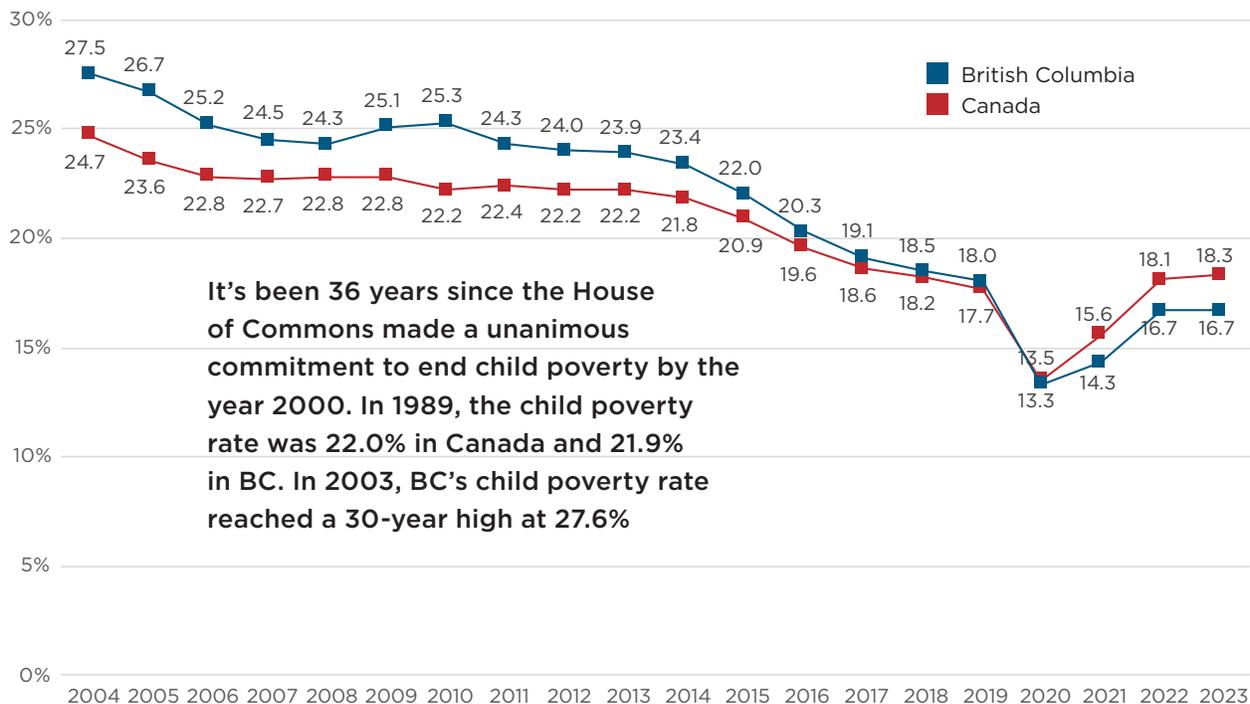
This leveling of the rate follows two years of sharp increases from 2020 to 2022, following the withdrawal of pandemic income supports that were largely responsible for the dramatic drop in the rates from 2019 to 2020.

For the fourth consecutive year, in 2023, BC's child poverty rate (16.7%) remained lower than Canada's child poverty rate (18.3%), whereas in the previous 16 years (2004-2019), BC had higher child poverty rates than Canada. However, one in six children in BC were still living in poverty in 2023, a number that calls for urgent action.



Between 2022 and 2023, the number of BC children living in poverty increased by 1,800.

Child Poverty Rates, Canada and British Columbia, CFLIM After Tax, 2004-2023



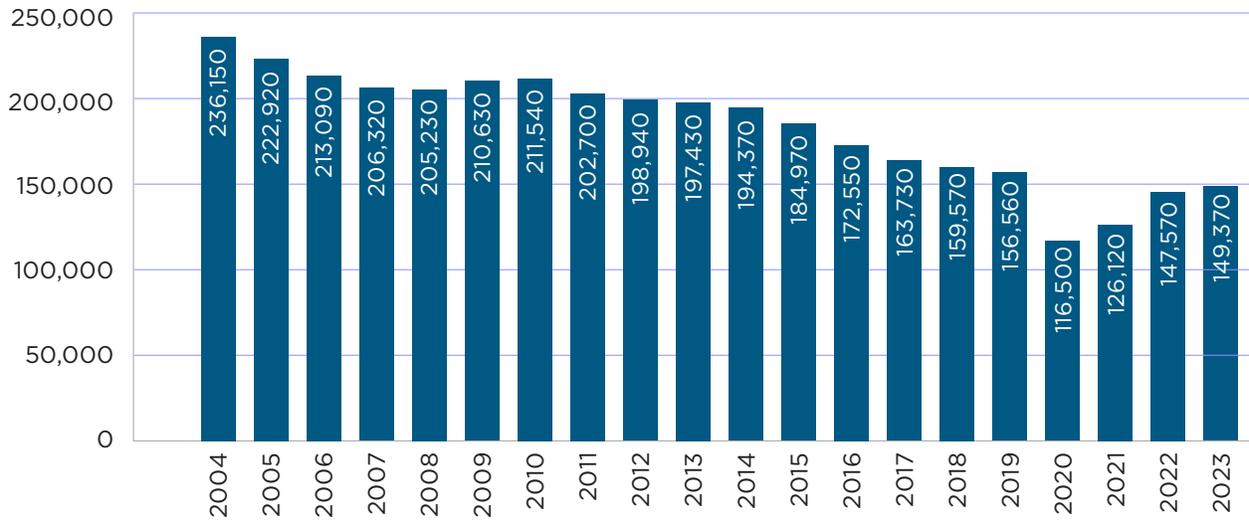
Source: Statistics Canada, Table: 11-10-0018-01 (2025)

NUMBER OF POOR CHILDREN OVER TIME

The number of poor children (0-17) in British Columbia based on the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM), after tax, declined every year from 2010 to 2020, but this trend was reversed in 2021.

In 2023, there were 149,370 poor children in BC. Even though the rate of child poverty didn't change from 2022, there was an increase of 1,800 poor children in the province. The number of poor children in Canada increased by 29,320, for a total of 1,386,950 poor children in 2023.

Number of poor children, British Columbia, based on CFLIM-AT, 2004-2023



Source: Statistics Canada, Table: 11-10-0018-01 (2025)

ESCAPING POVERTY HARDER FOR LONE-PARENT FAMILIES

From 2016 to 2023, on average, for BC families with at least one child under 17, exiting poverty was more difficult for lone-parent families than for couple families.¹

From one year to the next, only 29% of lone-parent families escaped poverty in Year 2, while 43% of couple families were able to escape poverty in Year 2.

This meant, on average over these seven years, 71% of lone-parent families remained poor in Year 2, compared to 57% of couple families who remained poor in Year 2.

This matters because the experience of living in poverty in a wealthy society impacts children's health and well-being with lifelong consequences. Children who experience poverty are at a higher risk in later life of adverse health consequences, including cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes and early death, and this elevated risk persists even if they experience improvements in later life circumstances.²

1 Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0024-01, Low income entry and exit rates of tax filers in Canada.

2 D. Raphael, (2011), Poverty in childhood and adverse health outcomes in adulthood, *Maturitas*, 69(1), 22-26, doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2011.02.011

“MOMS DON’T COMPLAIN BUT THIS IS HOW IT IS FOR MANY OF US”

Justine relocated to a rental she could afford, but had to leave her support behind.



Justine's story

Justine is a single parent with one child who struggles with the financial burden of providing for her baby and herself.

She finds that covering the expenses required for her 15-month-old, like diapers and milk formula, on a low income is very challenging. She accesses food bank services to help her with making sure she has the basic needs for her household.

Justine relocated from Richmond to Surrey to live in a rental that she could afford but found that she had to leave all her friends and support behind her and now needs to connect with the community services and community around her. This makes her feel isolated. She finds that she needs

to spend so much time commuting on the transit system now, and this is the trade-off for more affordable rent.

Since her parents passed away, Justine doesn't have any familial support, and she is nervous about the supportive community programs that only support families until the baby is two years old, as she knows children cost more as they grow and take part in more activities.

Justine feels anxiety and stress daily and fights with feelings of depression.

“I make a lot of sacrifices. I can't do what I want to do, and my son will always eat first. Moms don't complain, but this is how it is for many of us.” ●

BC Child Poverty by Family Type

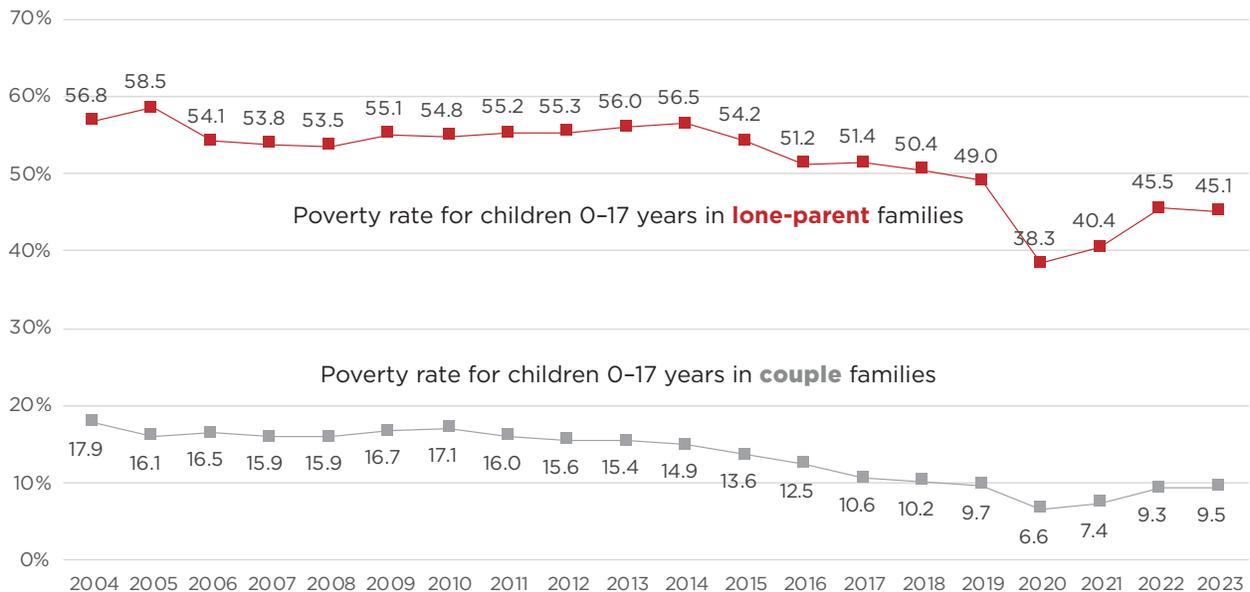
CHILD POVERTY IN LONE-PARENT AND COUPLE FAMILIES

Children in lone-parent families in British Columbia have consistently suffered much higher poverty rates than their counterparts in couple families. In 2023, the child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families was 45.1%, nearly five times higher than the 9.5% rate for their counterparts in couple families.

Between 2022 and 2023, the child poverty rate increased slightly for children in couple families (from 9.3% in 2022 to 9.5% in 2023) and decreased slightly for children in lone-parent families (from 45.5% in 2022 to 45.1% in 2023).

Over these last twenty years, there has been more progress 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 47% between 2004 and 2023 (from 17.9% to 9.5%), while the child poverty rate among children in lone-parent families decreased only 21% (from 56.8% in 2004 to 45.1% in 2023). For the last five years, the couple family child poverty rate has remained below 10% and the lone-parent child poverty rate as remained below 50%, but still very close to one in two children at risk of poverty. BC's supplement to the BC Family Benefit for lower-income single-parent families, which started in July 2023, is a good step to help narrow this gap, but needs to be increased from the current annual maximum of \$500.

Child Poverty Rate by Family Type, CFLIM-AT, British Columbia, 2004-2023



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0018-01, 2023 (2025)

BC's overall child poverty rate in 2023 was significantly lower than Canada's (16.7% vs 18.3%). The child poverty rate for children in couple families in BC (9.5%) was slightly lower than the child poverty rate for children in couple families in Canada (10.1%). However, the child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families in BC (45.1%) was nearly the same as the child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families in Canada (45.2%).

PROPORTIONS OF BC CHILDREN IN DIFFERENT FAMILY TYPES

Although the majority of BC children in 2023 lived in couple families (81%), more than half of poor children in BC in 2023 lived in lone-parent families (53%), indicative of the disproportionate burden of poverty shouldered by lone-parent families. In Canada the percentage of poor children in lone-parent families was even higher at 55%.

In 2023 in BC, there were 76,110 children living in poor lone-parent families and 68,470 children living in poor couple families. Between 2022 and 2023, the number of children in poor couple families increased by 2,080 children and the number of children in poor lone-parent families decreased by 80 children.

Proportion of BC Children 0-17 in Couple Families and Lone-Parent Families, 2023

Source: Statistics Canada, Table 39-10-0041-01 and Table 11-10-0018-01, 2023 (2025)



INEQUALITY FOR DIFFERENT FAMILY TYPES IN URBAN AREAS

Child poverty rates for children in lone-parent families across 28 BC cities and towns ranged from a low of 34.9% in Trail to a high of 56% in Prince Rupert, a 21.1 percentage point difference. The 9.5% provincial poverty rate for children in couple families in 2023 included a range from a low of 3.8% in Trail to a high of 11.1% in Metro Vancouver, a 7.3 percentage point difference.

In 2023, every urban area in BC had more children in poor lone-parent families than in poor couple families, except for the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area, which had more children in poor couple families than in poor lone-parent families.

The child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families in BC rural areas in 2023 was 50.6%, significantly higher than the BC child poverty rate of 45.1% for all BC children in lone-parent families, which is concerning as rural areas tend to have fewer social services available to assist families challenged by poverty.

The 4,800 BC children under 18 who were not living in census families in 2023 had the most challenging situation of all, with a poverty rate of 98.2%. The data definition indicates "They may be living alone, with a family to whom they are related or unrelated or with other persons not in census families."

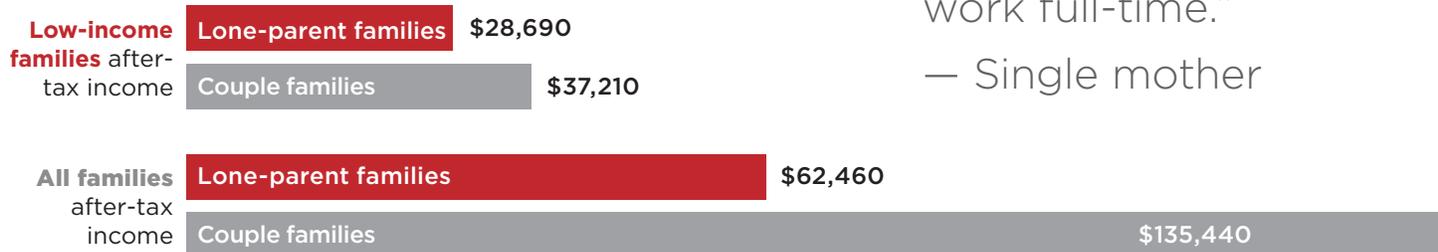
INCOME INEQUALITY IN MEDIAN INCOMES BY FAMILY TYPE

In BC in 2023, lone-parent families with two children (median after-tax income of \$62,460) made \$72,980 less than couple families with two children (median after-tax income of \$135,440).

Low-income families with children had much lower incomes than families with children in general. For example, in BC in 2023, the median after-tax household income for low-income couple families with two children was only \$37,210, \$98,230 less than the median after-tax income for all couple families with two children.

The median after-tax household income for low-income lone-parent families with two children was just \$28,690, \$33,770 less than the median after-tax income for all lone-parent families with two children.

Median After-tax Incomes for BC Couple Families (with two children) and Lone-Parent Families (with two children), 2023



Source: Table 11-10-0017-01, 2023 (2025) and Table 11-10-0020-01, 2023 (2025)

“Those of us doing low-wage work desperately need to pay for housing and food but without after school care for our children, we are unable to work full-time.”
— Single mother



WOMEN'S POVERTY

In 2023, almost four out of every five lone-parent families in BC (79%) were female-led. These families' median before-tax annual income was \$59,920, just 74% of the male lone-parent median income of \$81,200. 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, 2022, (2024)

“MY ELDEST KNEW THAT WAS BECAUSE I COULDN’T AFFORD TO FEED US BOTH”

Renee considers her job a blessing, but also a risk to her mental and physical health.



Renee's story

Renee is a single mom who works in the health care industry. She has a contentious relationship with her children’s father, who becomes verbally abusive when she asks for money. Her children’s father makes a lot of money, and sometimes he doesn’t want to pay child support. He threatens to quit his job if she says she will take him to court. This adds stress to the already unmanageable costs of housing and living.

In her job in the hospital ER, Renee witnesses people in pain seeking health care treatment, and is exposed to germs and illnesses. She considers her job a blessing, but also a risk to her mental and physical health.

Renee describes the emotional labour required to be a tough parent to ensure her children are disciplined, but also aware that they are well loved.

“Parents will do whatever it takes to feed their children. I’ve gone without dinner many nights to make sure my children eat. I’ve been evicted because I couldn’t afford rent. I’ve been homeless with my children.”

“My eldest knows all my struggles. He remembers watching me have coffee for dinner while he had supper, and he knew that was because I couldn’t afford to feed us both.” ●

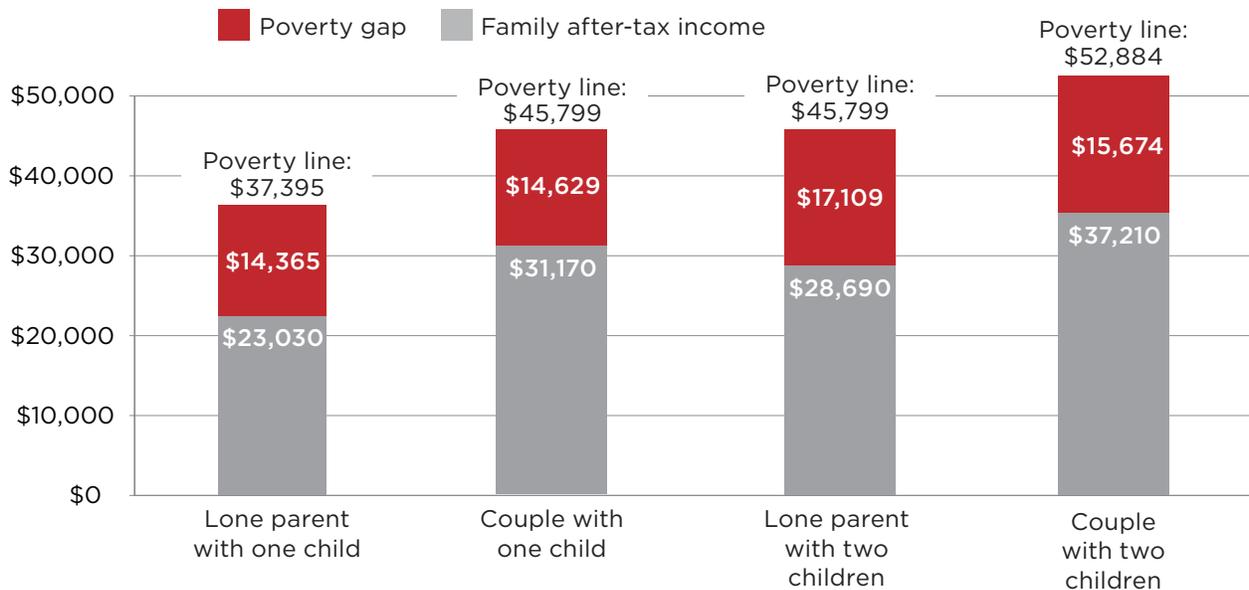
Depth of Family Poverty

POOR BC FAMILIES LIVING FAR BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

Living at the poverty line is a challenge, but many poor families live far below the poverty line. Not only were many families with children in British Columbia living in poverty in 2023, these families were typically living far below the poverty line, based on the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM) after tax. **Between 2022 and 2023, the gaps between the median after-tax family incomes of poor families in BC and the poverty line increased substantially for all family types and sizes.**

- The median after-tax income of a poor lone-parent family with one child in BC in 2023 was \$23,030, or \$14,365 below the \$37,395 poverty line for this family size. **This family would need to earn \$1,197 more per month to reach the poverty line.**
- The median after-tax income of a poor couple family with one child in BC in 2023 was \$31,170, or \$14,629 below the \$45,799 poverty line for this family size. **This family would need to earn \$1,219 more per month to reach the poverty line.**
- The median after-tax income of a poor lone-parent family with two children in BC in 2023 was \$28,690, or \$17,109 below the \$45,799 poverty line for this family size. **This family would need to earn \$1,426 more per month to reach the poverty line.**
- The median after-tax income of a poor couple family with two children in BC in 2023 was \$37,210, or \$15,674 below the \$52,884 poverty line for this family size. **This family would need to earn \$1,306 more per month to reach the poverty line.**

Depth of Low Income for Poor Families in British Columbia, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table 11-10-0020-01 and T1FF Tech Reference Guide, Final Estimates, 2023 (2025)

In 2023, the gaps between the after-tax median family incomes of poor families and the poverty line were larger in BC than in Canada for all family types except for lone-parent families with one child. These gaps grew substantially between 2022 and 2023, ranging from an increase of \$304 per year to \$1,094 per year for the different family types.

Median incomes are in the middle of the income range for these poor BC families, meaning half of them are living on even less than the income figures shown above and have poverty gaps much greater than \$14,000 to \$17,000 per year.

IMPACT OF LIVING IN DEEP POVERTY: PAYING THE RENT

The difference between market rents for vacant units compared to occupied ones continued to widen between 2023 and 2024. In 2024, new renters paid, on average, 36% (or \$825/month) more than the previous tenant for a 2-bedroom unit in Vancouver, up from 20% more in 2023. For a 3-bedroom unit, the vacant vs. occupied difference in rent was 56% (or \$1,523/month) more, up from 21% in 2023. As noted in the CMHC's Rental Market Report,¹ "Affordability worsened for low-income households: vacancy rates for the most affordable units were lower than average, and these households already spend a greater share of their income on rent."

The most recent statistics, from 2021, showed low-income families with children were much more likely to be spending 30% or more of their before-tax household income on shelter costs than the overall population of families with children. In BC, 73% of low-income couple families with children were spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs compared with 18% of all couple families with children, while 72% of low-income lone-parent families were spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs compared with 33% of all lone-parent families.

The lack of affordable housing means that many low-income families are trapped living in substandard housing with landlords who are not following their legal requirements, and/or actively violating regulations around housing standards and repairs.

For families unable to afford market rents, many apply for subsidized housing. In March 2024, families with children made up 37% of the households on the BC Housing waitlist in Metro Vancouver alone. There were 7,864 families waitlisted, an increase of 3,430 households, or 77.4%, between 2019 and 2024. This is an underestimate of family demand for non-market housing in BC, as it doesn't include other parts of BC, other waitlists, and families removed from the list for not updating their application.²

“ As a single parent, rent takes 50-70% of my wages, and the condition of some of the available rentals is disgusting.”

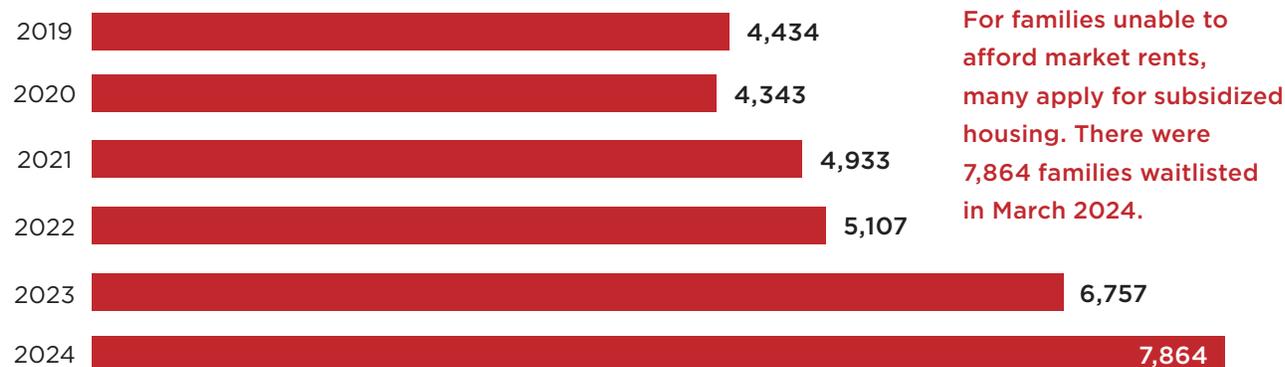


In 2024, new family renters of 2BR units paid, on average, 36% more than the previous tenant.

1 CMHC Rental Market Report, January 2024, p. 13, cmhc-schl.gc.ca/-/media/sites/cmhc/professional/housing-markets-data-and-research/market-reports/rental-market-report/rental-market-report-2023-en.pdf

2 Metro Vancouver Housing Data Book, February 2024, metrovancover.org/services/regional-planning/Documents/metro-vancouver-housing-data-book-2025.pdf

Number of Family Households on BC Housing Waitlist, Metro Vancouver, 2019 to 2024



Source: Metro Vancouver Housing Data Book, February 2024

IMPACT OF LIVING IN DEEP POVERTY: FOOD INSECURITY

High child poverty rates, combined with inflation in the cost of food and other essential expenses, is leaving many low-income families struggling to meet the nutritional needs of their children.

In 2023, the rate of food insecurity among BC's children increased sharply to 33%, from 29% in 2022. This represents an alarming 288,000 BC children living in food insecure households in 2023.³ Over the last 5 years, from 2018 to 2023, the number of food insecure children in BC increased by 78%. In 2023, the food insecurity rate for lone-parent families was even higher at 52%.⁴

Statistics Canada reports that First Nations children living in urban areas were significantly more likely to experience food insecurity than those living in rural areas. In BC, 38% of First Nations children living off reserve and 30% of Métis children were food insecure in 2022. They also reported that 46% of BC First Nations parents living off reserve reported their income could not cover an unexpected expense of \$500. The figure for Métis parents in BC was 33%.⁵

In March 2025, there were 223,340 visits to food banks in BC, including 68,053 visits by children, making up 30.5% of all visits. Between 2019 and 2025, food bank visits by children increased by 79% in BC.⁶

According to PROOF, an interdisciplinary research program at the University of Toronto which studies household food insecurity, "Research has repeatedly shown that household food insecurity can be reduced by policy interventions that improve the financial circumstances of households at the bottom of the income spectrum."⁷

“ We buy the cheapest food and eat the same meals over and over. This is demeaning and not good for children’s health. Fresh foods are extremely expensive.”
— Parent

3 Statistics Canada, Table 13-10-0835-01 Food insecurity by selected demographic characteristics.

4 Statistics Canada, Table 13-10-0834-01 Food insecurity by economic family type.

5 Statistics Canada, *First Nations children living off reserve, Métis children, and Inuit children and their families: Selected findings from the 2022 Indigenous Peoples Survey*, www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-653-x/89-653-x2024001-eng.htm#n21-refa.

6 Food Banks Canada. Hungercount 2025, 2024, and 2019.

7 *What can be done to reduce food insecurity in Canada?*, PROOF, proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-can-be-done-to-reduce-food-insecurity-in-canada/.

Child Poverty and Working Parents

LOW WAGES AND PRECARIOUS WORK

The majority of poor children in British Columbia live in families with parents who work in the paid labour force. Some of these parents work full-time, full-year, and others work part-time and/or part of the year. Whether earning low wages, or stuck in precarious or insufficient work without benefits, all of these parents are not earning enough to lift their families out of poverty.

For families with children, low wages mean they often have to take on multiple jobs and work more than full time to earn enough to support their families. This leaves them little time to spend with their children or to participate in community life outside of work.

MINIMUM WAGES NOT ENOUGH FOR FAMILIES RAISING CHILDREN

As of June 2023, the minimum wage in BC was \$16.75/hour. For the first 5 months of 2023, the minimum wage was \$15.65. A lone parent with one child working full-time (35 hours/week), full-year at minimum wage in 2023 would have only earned \$29,738 per year before tax, leaving them \$19,482 below the Low Income Measure (LIM) before-tax poverty line of \$49,220, for this family type and size. This lone parent would have had to work 56.5 hours per week at the \$16.75 minimum wage to reach the before-tax poverty line minimum threshold.



A lone parent working full time, full year for minimum wage in 2023 earned only **\$29,738**.

A couple family with two children with both parents working full-time, full-year for minimum wage would have made \$59,477 per year, or \$10,132 below the LIM before-tax poverty line of \$69,608 for this family type and size. Each parent in this couple family would have had to work 40 hours per week at the \$16.75 minimum wage to reach the before-tax poverty line minimum threshold.

Income Gaps for Parents Working Full-Time, Full-Year at BC's Minimum Wage in 2023, Compared to LIM Before Tax, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0232-01 Low-income measure (LIM) thresholds, (2025)

LIVING WAGES

Not only is the BC minimum wage too low to bring family incomes up to the poverty line, it is also far below living wage levels in BC that would allow families to meet their basic living expenses. As inflation has continued to push essential household expenses such as housing and food higher in 2024 and 2025, the Metro Vancouver living wage is now calculated at \$27.85 per hour. Across the province, living wages range between \$21.55 in Grand Forks and \$29.60 in Whistler.

In 2023, over 400,000 BC workers earned less than \$20 an hour —about 18% of all paid employees; 59% of these workers were women.¹ Bringing the BC minimum wage up to \$20 an hour would help close the gap with living wages.

Many people raising children who manage to find jobs that pay living wages continue to experience poverty because their jobs are part-time, casual or short-term, leaving them with an annual income below the poverty line.

“ As a single parent, I have to drive my kids to different schools before work. They wait outside until school opens. I rush from work to pick them up because I can’t afford to pay someone.”

\$10ADAY CHILD CARE 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 rising costs for basic living expenses.

In 2018 — in response to the \$10aDay campaign — the BC government committed to universal \$10aDay child care. Seven years into its 10-year plan, BC is not close to delivering on its promise. Many child care programs are losing more early childhood educators than they can hire. Too many children with disabilities are turned away because child care programs lack the capacity to support them. Too many families are stuck on waitlists and can’t return to work while their children are young.

Urgent advocacy is needed now calling on the provincial government to:

- Expand \$10aDay to all licensed programs with a quality funding formula
- Ensure school-age care exists in every elementary school to meet demand
- Implement a fair wage grid for educators of at least \$30–\$40/hour plus benefits
- Develop a province-wide expansion plan to build new programs

Government must continue to ensure the rights promised in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework are implemented and Indigenous leadership is meaningfully consulted.



¹ Igluka Ivanova, *Trapped in the Wage Gap: Who earns less than the Living Wage in BC?*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Office, May 2024.

Children in Families on Welfare

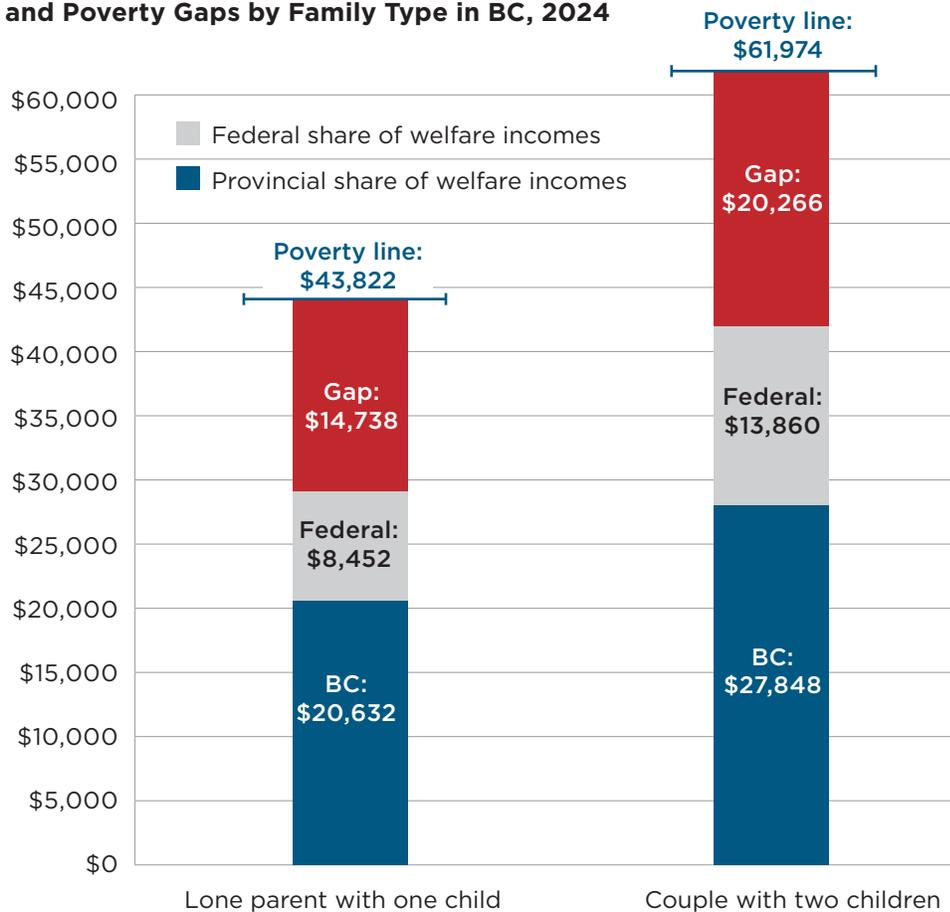
WELFARE INCOMES WELL BELOW POVERTY LINES

For the dependent children in families on welfare in 2024, which was an average of 52,622 children, the inadequacy of welfare income remained a significant concern, as their family incomes remained below the poverty line. These families struggled to meet their basic needs.

The income for a single parent on welfare with one child in BC in 2024 was just \$29,084 which fell \$14,738 short of the poverty line. For a couple on welfare with two children, their income was \$41,708, which was \$20,266 short of the poverty line.

The inadequacy of welfare income remained a significant concern in 2024.

Federal and Provincial Shares of Welfare Incomes and Poverty Gaps by Family Type in BC, 2024



In 2024, a couple on welfare with two children had to get by on \$41,708. That's \$20,266 below the poverty line.

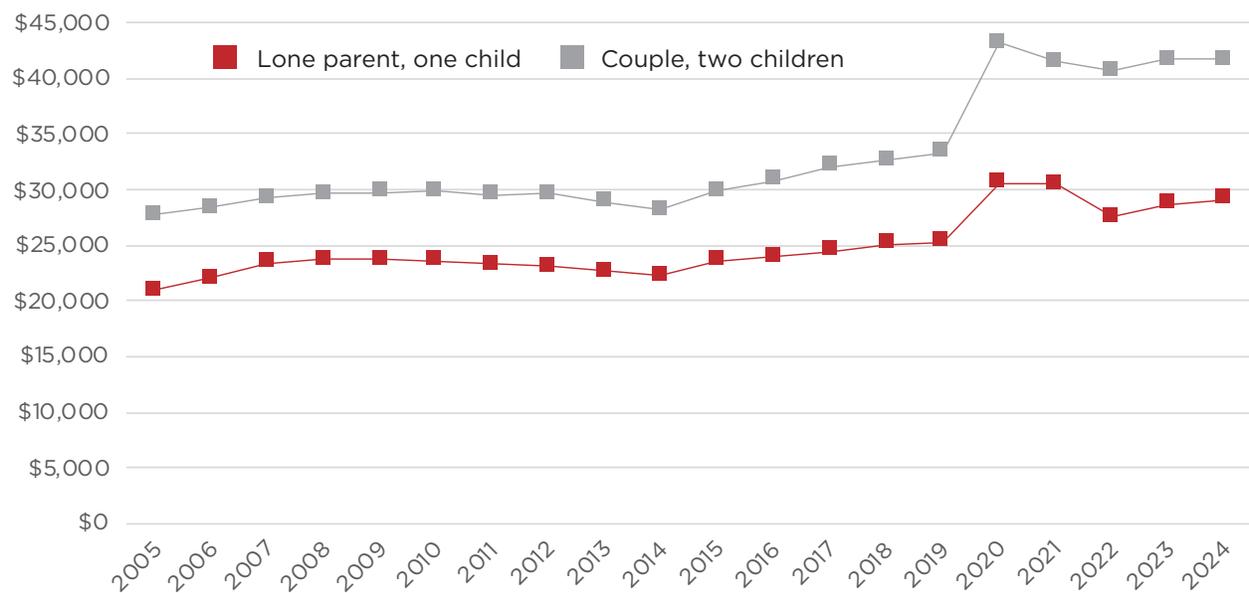
Source: Jennefer Laidley and Tania Oliveira, Welfare in Canada, 2024, July 2025, Maytree [maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2024.pdf](https://www.maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2024.pdf)

WELFARE INCOMES OVER TIME

Based on 2024 constant dollars, the total welfare income (including various federal and provincial benefits and programs) for a single parent with one child in BC increased from \$28,679 in 2023 to \$29,084 in 2024, an increase of \$406. The total welfare income for a couple family with two children in BC decreased from \$41,744 in 2023 to \$41,708 in 2024, a decrease of \$36.

The additional pandemic benefits in 2020 increased the buying power of the total welfare incomes of these two family types significantly, though they were still below the poverty line. Since those benefits were withdrawn, the poverty gap for both family types has almost doubled. In 2024, the welfare income for single parents with one child was 34% below the poverty line and 33% below the line for couple families with two children.

Welfare Incomes (Adjusted for Inflation, 2024 Constant Dollars), by Family Type, BC, 2005-2024



Source: Maytree, Welfare in Canada, 2024, (2025)

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

In 2024, for the majority of these families on assistance (58%), working was not an option. These families did not fall under the “expected to work” category and had multiple barriers, disabilities, and other challenges that prevented them from working. Within this not-expected-to-work group, the majority were on disability assistance.

Low welfare incomes are especially tough on single parent families, as 81% of the families with children on welfare were single parent families in 2024.¹ 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.

For the majority of these families on assistance (58%), working was not an option; they did not fall under the “expected to work” category.

¹ BC Government, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, BC Employment and Assistance Summary Report, July 2025.

Child Poverty Across BC

BY REGIONAL DISTRICTS

The regional districts of BC had large numbers of children living in poverty in 2023. Twenty-two out of 28 regional districts with child poverty data available had at least 1,000 children living in poverty and 12 districts had at least one in five children living in poverty, down from 13 districts in 2022. Regional districts on the outer coast and parts of Vancouver Island had the highest child poverty rates.

The three with the highest child poverty rates were:

- Central Coast Regional District (37.8%);
- Mount Waddington Regional District (30.3%);
- Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District (26.2%)

The three lowest were:

- Capital (13.0%);
- East Kootenay (13.4%);
- Comox Valley (13.9%);

The number of children living in poverty by regional district ranged from 230 children in the Northern Rockies to 75,590 children in Metro Vancouver in 2023.

% 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), 2023



Source: Statistics Canada
Table I-13 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependents (census family low income measure, CFLIM-AT) for couple and lone parent families by family composition, 2023

Prepared by: sparc bc

CHILD POVERTY IN BC'S URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

Fifteen out of 28 urban areas in BC had at least 1,000 children living in poverty in 2023, with especially large numbers in Metro Vancouver (75,590), the Victoria Census Metropolitan Area (7,610), the Abbotsford-Mission Census Metropolitan Area (7,360) and Kelowna Census Metropolitan Area (5,990).

There were 19,810 poor children living in rural areas in BC in 2023. On average, 21.1% of all children in rural BC lived in poverty, considerably higher than the BC child poverty rate of 16.7%.

The three urban areas with the highest poverty rates were Prince Rupert (25.9%), Port Alberni (23.2%), and Duncan (22.5%). The urban areas with the lowest child poverty rates were Squamish (11.3%), Victoria (12.4%), tied with Trail (also 12.4%).

Metro Vancouver Census Tracts

There were 75,590 children, or 16.5% of all children in the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2023. Out of the 519 Vancouver CMA census tracts with child poverty data available, 382 of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate in Vancouver CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 4.4% to 74.3%. The number of poor children in Vancouver CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 20 to 500. The highest child poverty rates were found in census tracts in and around Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in 2023.

Victoria Census Tracts

There were 7,610 children, or 12.4% of all children in the Victoria Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2023. Out of the 81 Victoria CMA census tracts with child poverty data available, 26 of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate in Victoria CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 5.5% to 66.7%. The number of poor children in Victoria CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 20 to 400. The census tracts with the highest child poverty rates were found in North and Central Saanich and Metchosin.

Abbotsford-Mission Census Tracts

There were 7,360 children, or 16.6% of all children in the Abbotsford-Mission Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2023. Out of the 40 Abbotsford-Mission CMA census tracts with child poverty data available, 32 of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate in Abbotsford-Mission CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 5.8% to 40.0%. The number of poor children in Abbotsford-Mission CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 20 to 450. The census tracts with the highest child poverty rates were clustered around Downtown and West Abbotsford.

Metro Vancouver was home to 75,590 poor children in 2023.



ONLINE MAP

To view and download

maps of child poverty rates in BC urban areas, visit

www.firstcallbc.org

7,360 children were located in the Abbotsford-Mission CMA.

Chilliwack Census Tracts

There were 4,710 children, or 17.7% of all children in the Chilliwack Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2023. Out of the 34 Chilliwack CMA census tracts with child poverty data available, 19 of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate in Chilliwack CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 6.3% to 75%. The number of poor children in Chilliwack CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 20 to 420. The census tracts with the highest child poverty rates were clustered around Downtown Chilliwack, with a few others spread out through the CMA.

Kamloops Census Tracts

There were 2,880 children, or 13.6% of all children in the Kamloops Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2023. Out of the 29 Kamloops CMA census tracts with child poverty data available, 12 of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate in Kamloops CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 4.9% to 38.5%. The number of poor children in Kamloops CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 20 to 260. The census tracts with the highest child poverty rates were clustered near the North Shore and Downtown Kamloops, with a few others spread out through the CMA.

Kelowna Census Tracts

There were 5,990 children, or 15.6% of all children in the Kelowna Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2023. Out of the 45 Kelowna CMA census tracts with child poverty data available, 30 of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate in Kelowna CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 9.2% to 35.7%. The number of poor children in Kelowna CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 40 to 390. The census tracts with the highest child poverty rates in the Kelowna CMA in 2023 were spread out throughout the Kelowna CMA, with some clustering around Downtown Kelowna.

Nanaimo Census Tracts

There were 3,470 children, or 17.3% of all children in the Nanaimo Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2023. Out of the 22 Nanaimo CMA census tracts with child poverty data available in 2023, 16 of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate in Nanaimo CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 5.6% to 55.6%. The number of poor children in Nanaimo CMA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 20 to 460. The highest child poverty rate census tracts were concentrated in Downtown Nanaimo and South Nanaimo.

Prince George Census Tracts

There were 3,080 children, or 16.6% of all children in the Prince George Census Agglomeration (CA), living in poverty in 2023. Out of the 24 Prince George CA census tracts with child poverty data available, 14 of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate in Prince George CA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 7.7% to 41.1%. The number of poor children in Prince George CA census tracts in 2023 ranged from 40 to 390. The highest child poverty rate census tracts were concentrated in and around Downtown Prince George.

**3,080 children were
living in poverty in
Prince George in 2023.**



Growing Income Inequality

INCOME INEQUALITY AMONG BC FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

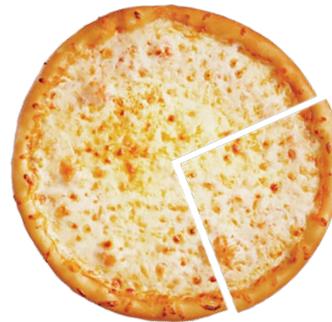
In 2023, the richest 10% of British Columbia families with children had 26% of the total after-tax family income pie, slightly more than the entire combined incomes of the poorest 50% of families at 25%.

The poorest 10% of families with children had just 1% of the total family income pie. The richest 50% of families held a total of 75% of the family income pie.

BC Average After-Tax Family Income Shares – Top and Bottom Halves, 2023

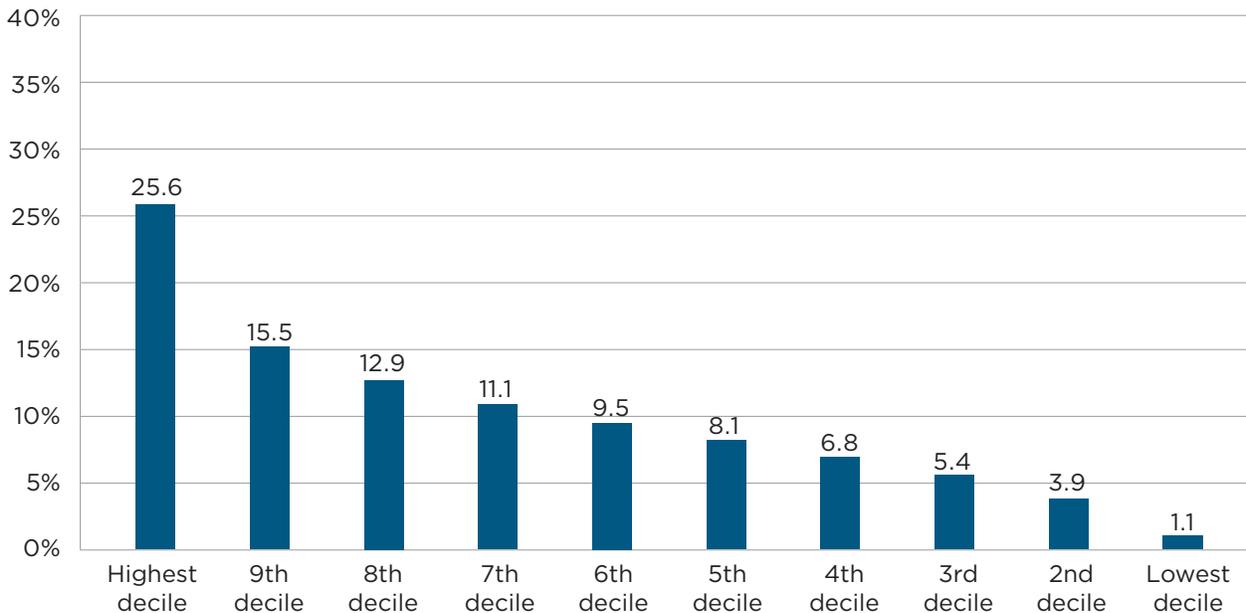
In 2023, the richest 10% of BC families with children had 26% of the total after-tax family income pie, slightly more than the combined incomes of the poorest 50% of families.

Richest half of BC families' share: **75%**



Poorest half of BC families' share: **25%**

BC Average After-Tax Family Income Shares, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada, custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2023 (2025).

BRITISH COLUMBIA – A MOST UNEQUAL PROVINCE

Growing income inequality is driven by the growth in the income of the families in the highest income decile, compared to the incomes of low-income families. In 2023, BC families in the highest income decile collected 23 times what the families in the lowest decile made, based on their average after-tax income. This was a larger income inequality ratio than the Canadian average ratio of 19 times in 2023.

The disparity for lone-parent families in BC was significantly higher, with the average after-tax income for the top 10% of lone-parent families at 86 times the average income for lone-parent families in the lowest decile, almost triple the Canadian ratio (31) for this family type. BC lone parents had the highest inequality ratio among all provinces and territories, much higher than the second most unequal province of Alberta at 50 times.

Gap Between Poorest and Richest 10% of BC Families with Children, in 2023 Constant Dollars

BC families with children under 18 years old, 2023	Average after-tax income			
	Lowest income decile	Highest income decile	Difference between highest and lowest deciles	Average after-tax income ratio: highest to lowest decile
All census families	\$13,239	\$301,662	\$288,423	22.8 times
Couple families	\$28,758	\$322,874	\$294,117	11.2 times
Lone-parent families	\$1,628	\$140,028	\$138,400	86.0 times

Source: Statistics Canada, custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2023 (2025)

The disparity between the incomes of female and male lone-parent families persists as well, especially for the poorest 10% of families. The average after-tax income for the poorest female lone parents in BC in 2023 was only 41% of the income of the poorest male lone parents. In the higher income brackets the female lone parents' incomes averaged 82% of the male lone parents' incomes.

Average After-Tax Incomes by Decile Group, Families with Children in BC, in 2023 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	\$13,239	\$28,758	\$1,628	\$3,369	\$1,388
2nd decile	\$45,827	\$65,201	\$17,105	\$20,963	\$16,484
3rd decile	\$63,879	\$82,921	\$28,985	\$32,791	\$28,471
4th decile	\$80,173	\$97,872	\$37,300	\$43,705	\$36,509
5th decile	\$96,062	\$112,249	\$45,650	\$54,176	\$44,545
6th decile	\$112,332	\$127,421	\$53,960	\$64,086	\$52,557
7th decile	\$130,509	\$144,589	\$62,631	\$74,822	\$60,919
8th decile	\$152,541	\$165,532	\$73,119	\$87,216	\$70,765
9th decile	\$183,298	\$195,874	\$89,036	\$104,264	\$85,979
Highest decile	\$301,662	\$322,874	\$140,028	\$168,282	\$134,224

Source: Statistics Canada, custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2023 (2025)



In 2023, the average annual income of the poorest 10% of BC lone-parent families was an appalling \$1,628 per year, the lowest in the country, and only 38% of the Canadian average for this family type.

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 course.¹ 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.

The life-long stepwise association between income and a range of children’s developmental health outcomes is so strong and consistent that it has been termed a “gradient effect” and serves as a powerful illustration of inequalities in children’s health and well-being within and between societies.² BC studies also show the impacts of poverty on people’s vulnerability to chronic disease and the effects on their life span.³

The impacts of income inequality on children’s development shows up in data collected by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP). A third of BC’s young children are vulnerable on a number of developmental measures. Lower income young children’s more limited access to outdoor play or play with other children, early literacy activities, healthy nutrition, adequate sleep and supportive neighbourhood connections, are related to increased vulnerability. Similarly, the data show lower income young children are spending more time on screens, risking negative influences on their development as well.⁴

Allowing income and wealth inequality to continue to grow in B.C. also erodes social cohesion, empathy and compassion, leading to increased social isolation, stigmatization and marginalization of the poor, distrust, crime, stress and despair. Inequality also reduces social mobility, undermining the promise of a fair society and increasing social alienation for those left behind.

Beyond the negative effects on children’s health and development, growing socioeconomic inequality 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 Enns, Brownell, Janus, & Guhn, *Early Childhood Development in Canada: Current State of Knowledge and Future Directions*, 2019. mchp-appserv.cpe.umanitoba.ca/supp/mchp/projects/media/Early_Childhood_Development_in_Canada_EN_20200106.pdf
- 3 Health Officers Council of BC, 2008 and 2013, healthofficerscouncil.net/positions-and-advocacy/publications/poverty-and-health-inequities/
- 4 earlylearning.ubc.ca/reports/

“MY EX SAYS HE WILL QUIT HIS JOB IF I TRY TO TAKE HIM TO COURT FOR CHILD SUPPORT”



Tamara's story

It takes a village, but we should be afforded that support without having to hand our child over to someone else.”

After splitting up with her husband of 15 years, all the responsibilities of Tamara's children's care — dentist/doctor appointments, school, food, etc. — became only her responsibility. Her son has a complicated developmental diagnosis that is on-going, with changing needs.

It's been very difficult for Tamara to make ends meet. She sees all the financial stress falling on her as a mother, when women make less money than men.

“My ex says he will quit his job if I try to take him to court for child support.”

She describes the normalization of single mothers operating at full capacity, and how unexpected injuries and sicknesses makes it especially difficult to parent.

Tamara points out that just as our children witness and feel our struggles and healing, they also witness the compassion that the world has for their mothers and themselves through difficult times. Society has the opportunity to inspire and create positive cycles, rather than negative ones, in how we respond to the expectations and supports that we have for single mothers.

“The stigma of being ‘a welfare case’ or judged for why my marriage didn't work out makes it harder to feel proud when I already cannot give my kids everything that they need.”

“It does take a village to raise a child, but we should be afforded that support without having to hand our child over to someone else.” ●

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, provincial social assistance (or welfare) benefits, provincial refundable tax credits and family benefits, and other government transfers.

In 2023, without government transfers to family incomes, Canada's child poverty rate would have been 32%, based on the CFLIM-After Tax. Nearly two and a half million Canadian children (2,426,570) would have been poor without these government programs and benefits. With federal and provincial transfers, the Canadian child poverty rate was reduced to 18.3%, lifting 1,039,620 children out of poverty in 2023.

Eliminating child poverty in BC and Canada is achievable in the short term if we muster the political will to act on the lessons learned over the past many years.

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS REDUCE CHILD POVERTY IN BC

In 2023, without government transfers to family incomes, British Columbia's child poverty rate would have been 27.7%, leaving 247,490 children poor that year. Government income supports for low-income families through government transfers succeeded in lowering the BC child poverty rate to 16.7%, keeping 98,120 children out of poverty.

98,120 BC children were kept out of poverty in 2023 thanks to government help.



Over **two million** Canadian children would have been poor using family market income alone. With federal and provincial transfers, the number of poor children was lowered to **1,386,590**.

Since its inception in 2016, the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) has proven to be the most effective government transfer for families with children. For BC families, since October 2020 the amount of this benefit includes the BC Family Benefit. This combined federal and provincial benefit contributed 57% of the reduction of child poverty in BC for 2023, lifting 64,610 children out of poverty.

BC Child Poverty Rates (CFLIM-AT) With and Without Government Transfers, 2023



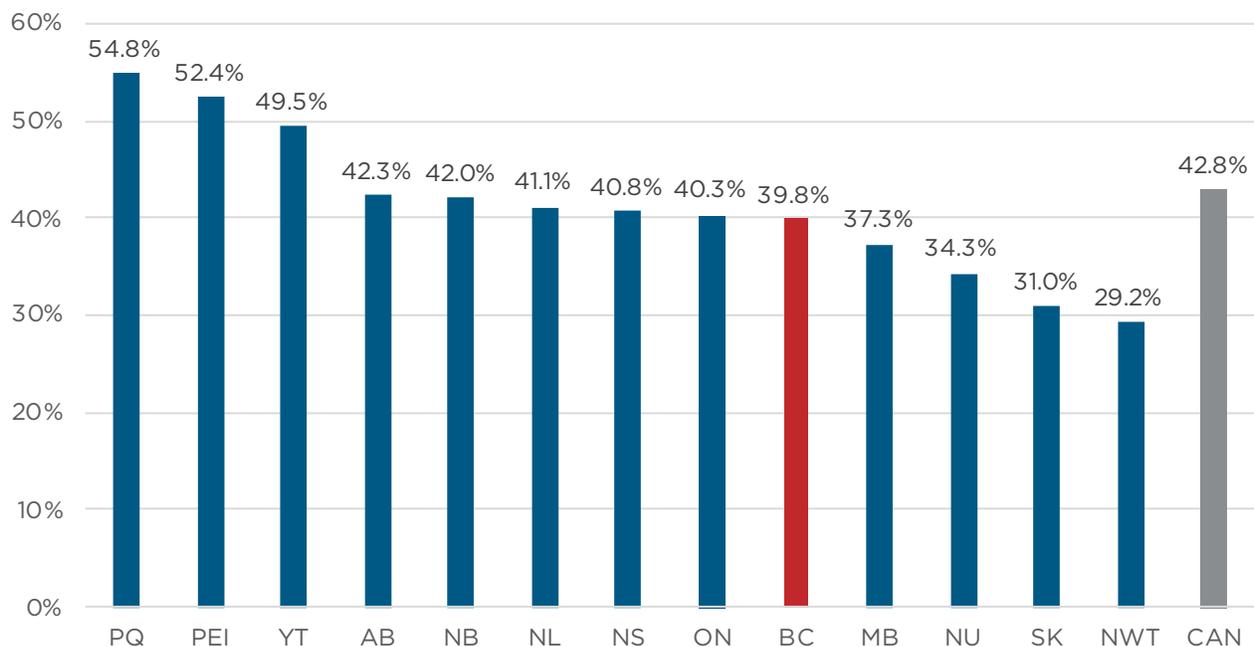
Source: Statistics Canada, custom tabulation, data from T1 Family File, 2023 (2025)

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS BY PROVINCE – HOW DOES BC COMPARE?

The graph below shows the rate of child poverty reduction by government transfers in 2023 in Canada and individual provinces and territories. Thanks to government transfers, the overall Canadian child poverty rate was reduced by 42.8%, from 32% to 18.3%, keeping 1,039,620 children out of poverty. Support for low-income families through government transfers lowered the 2023 after-tax BC child poverty rate from 27.7% to 16.7%, a 39.8% reduction, less than the national average.

Eight provinces/territories had higher rates of child poverty reduction by government transfers (i.e., more effective government transfers) than BC in 2023, with Quebec (54.8%) and PEI (52.4%) having the largest reductions thanks to government transfers.

Rate of Child Poverty Reduction by Government Transfer Payments, by Province/Territory, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada, custom tabulation, data from T1 Family File, 2023 (2025)

This data reinforces the power of using targeted direct income supports in government poverty reduction strategies at the federal and provincial levels. Eliminating child poverty in BC and Canada is achievable in the short term if we muster the political will to act on the lessons learned over the past many years.

BC FAMILY BENEFIT CUT IN 2025

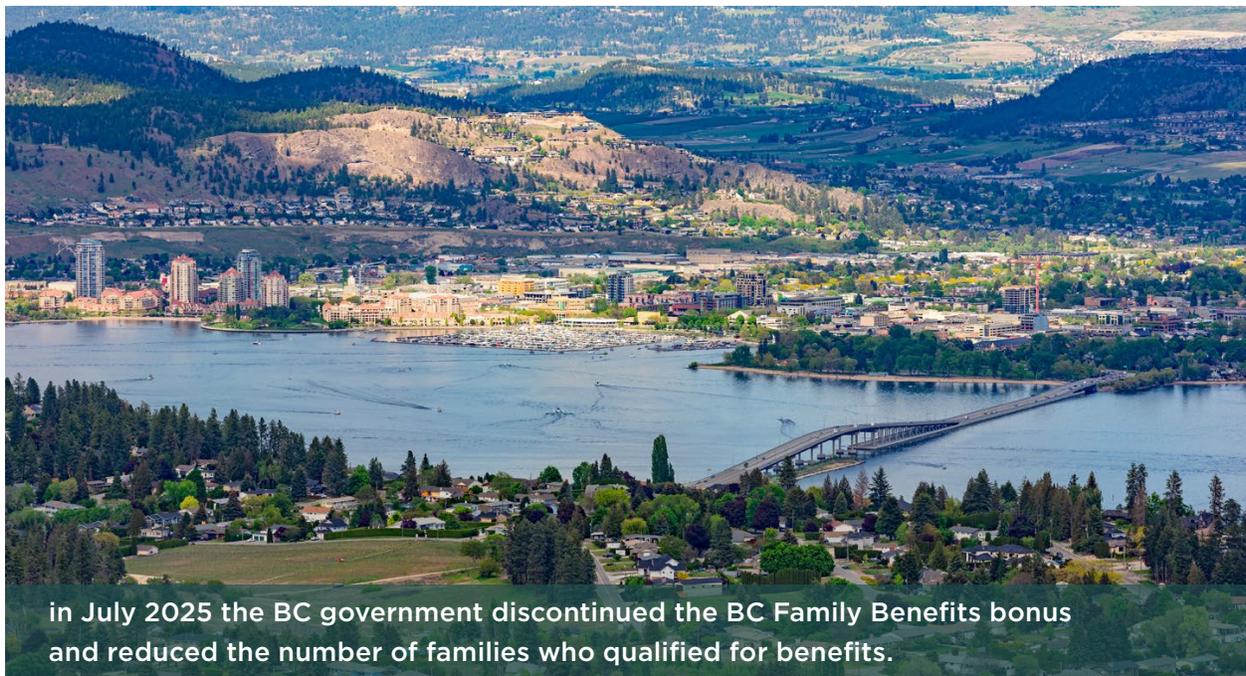
After giving families a one-year boost to BC Family Benefit payments from July 2024 to June 2025 and increasing income thresholds so more families could qualify for the maximum or partial annual benefits, in July 2025 the BC government discontinued the bonus and reduced the number of families who qualified for benefits.

In 2024–25, parents earning less than \$35,902 annually could receive the maximum \$2,188 for their first child, \$1,375 for the second and \$1,125 for each additional child. As of July 2025, parents earning less than the lowered \$29,526 annual threshold for the maximum will receive \$1,750 for their first child, \$1,100 for the second and \$900 for each additional child. For a family with two children, eligible for the maximum, that was a loss of \$713 for the year, or about \$60/month, which is significant for a low-income family on a very tight budget.¹

BC's Finance Ministry told The Tyee² the bonus had cost the province \$186 million in fiscal year 2024–25 and \$62 million in 2025–26, a cut of \$124 million from family incomes. According to the ministry, compared to the 340,000 families eligible for the benefit when the bonus was in place, just 281,000 continued to be eligible after it was eliminated, a reduction of 59,000 families.

Government did not respond to our call for this cut to be remedied, and First Call continues to recommend this benefit be indexed annually to keep up with inflation.

As of the July 2025 cuts, a family with two children eligible for the maximum benefit lost \$713 for the year, or about \$60/month, which is significant for a low-income family on a very tight budget.



in July 2025 the BC government discontinued the BC Family Benefits bonus and reduced the number of families who qualified for benefits.

¹ firstcallbc.org/bc-budget-cuts-family-benefit-bonus-advocates-sound-the-alarm/

² theyee.ca/News/2025/07/10/BC-Ends-Family-Benefit-Bonus-Poorest-Families-Lose/

“SOMETIMES IT FEELS LIKE I AM STANDING STILL WHILE THINGS ARE MOVING SO QUICKLY AROUND ME”



Phyllis had to leave an abusive relationship with the father of her children. He had a very well-paid job and covered all expense for the family while they were together. Now, as a single mom, she describes waking up feeling frozen, asking herself how she can improve things and make things better for her children.

Phyllis is grateful for her First Nation’s support in providing a hotel for her when she had to leave her partner. This helped her and her children to be safe. “My kids are aware that we just need a safe space to call our own.”

“I try not to feel inadequate or apologetic because my kids are so happy to wake up and spend their days with me. It doesn’t matter if they don’t have the things their friends have, because they have love and closeness, and that’s the only thing they really want.”

“Sometimes it feels like I am standing still while things are moving so quickly around me, like a blur, and there’s nothing I can do, but wait for the housing waitlists to get to me.” ●

Recommendations: What Needs to Happen

Thirty-six years after the passage of the unanimous all-party federal resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000, it is disappointing to see continued high child poverty rates in BC and the country. 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. The following recommendations target policy solutions that are available to us to address the root causes of child and family poverty. Each year we reexamine our recommendations in light of government actions and policy changes. This year we note BC and Canada beginning to cooperate on solutions we have been recommending, including access to some pharmacare products, the beginning of a federal dental benefit program, dedicated funding for school meals, and a promised automatic tax filing program for some people.

We cannot afford the cost of some many BC children and youth growing up in poverty.

Area of responsibility:

- F** Federal
- P** Provincial
- L** Local

FIRST CALL RECOMMENDATIONS

TAX FAIRNESS AND INCOME SUPPORT

- P** Increase the BC hourly **minimum wage** to \$20/hour by 2026.
- 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. This is a crucial issue for government-funded child, youth and family service organizations in BC.
- F 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. Federal investments must support social assistance adequacy through the Canada Social Transfer and tie investments to adequacy standards.
- F P** 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 taxfiler data and ensure access to this and other federal benefits for families in population groups with higher rates of poverty, such as lone parents and newcomer and Indigenous families.
- P** Index the **BC Family Benefit** to inflation to ensure the value of the benefit does not erode over time. Increase the upper net income threshold (\$29,526) to \$45,000 for the maximum annual benefit, while adjusting the benefit by both increasing its benefit reduction rate and having it vary with the number of children in the family to better target low-income single parents. In the short-term, double the amount of the annual low-income single parent supplement to \$1,000.

6. **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.
7. **F** Ensure **maternity and parental leave benefits** are universally available to all parents (regardless of work status) for at least one year, ensure a minimum benefit level of \$500 per week, and increase the maximum benefit level to \$1,000 per week.
8. **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, and taxing very high levels of wealth.

TARGETED INITIATIVES FOR GROUPS OVER-REPRESENTED IN POVERTY DATA

9. **F P** Collaborate with **First Nations, Métis and Inuit** governments and Indigenous organizations to address the multiple factors, such as food insecurity, lack of accessible services, and under-resourced schools, leading to child and family poverty in order to prevent, reduce and eradicate child and family poverty in Indigenous communities. The federal government must ensure the full application of Jordan's Principle for First Nations children, and the federal and provincial governments must ensure culturally safe supports and public services are also provided to Métis and Inuit children and to other Indigenous children living off-reserve in urban centres not covered under Jordan's Principle.
10. **P** Increase the amounts of the monthly SAJE income support and rental assistance benefits for **young people transitioning out of care** and revisit the eligibility requirements that exclude youth who left government care before age 12, e.g., through adoption or kinship care agreements.
11. **F P** Ensure 54.01/54.1 **kinship families** have access to the same benefits as all others in an out of care arrangement with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, including the Canada Child Benefit. Allow grandparents on CPP Disability who are raising their grandchildren to continue to receive the **CPP children's benefit** after they turn 65 and create a new category of **CPP child benefits for seniors** aged 60 and older who are raising children again.
12. **F P** Increase provincial 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, assessments, family respite, inclusive child care, medical care and in-home supports, including adjusting income and disability assistance rates for families with children with disabilities to recognize the additional costs associated with raising children with extra support needs. Increase the maximum monthly amount of the federal Child Disability Benefit to \$500.
13. **F P** Intensify efforts to help **immigrants and refugees** adjust to life in Canada by enhancing employment and housing assistance, removing barriers to foreign-trained professionals accessing jobs in their field, reinstating federal funding for immigrant settlement services serving families with children to improve access to language training with child care, and improving employment standards and human rights protections and enforcement.

LOWER BARRIERS AND IMPROVE LIVES THROUGH UNIVERSAL PROGRAMS

14. **F P** Prioritize new **early learning and child care** investments in 2026 federal and provincial budgets and beyond to expand access to \$10aDay child care for all families across the province, including low-income families, the inclusion of children with diverse needs and access to on-site school-age care in every elementary school through a province-wide expansion plan. Implement a province-wide, publicly-funded fair wage grid for early childhood educators of at least \$30-\$40/hour plus benefits and increase funding for specialized ECE education to support inclusive practices. Work with Indigenous leadership to ensure there are adequate resources and support for the implementation of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.
15. **P** Increase investment in public health initiatives aimed to support **maternal and parental health and healthy infant development**, as well as non-barriered, free, community-based programs and services for all families with young children to ensure these supports are available throughout the province and designed to reach families experiencing poverty and other threats to their ability to thrive.
16. **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. Ensure that new social and affordable rental units are affordable to families with very low incomes, including at social assistance rates, and there are sufficient units for larger families. Curtail the financialization of rental housing by Real Estate Investment Trusts through tax reform. Address the problem of unaffordable rents in the private rental market and the growing gap between occupied and vacant rental units and protect tenants from unjust evictions.
17. **P** Ensure **K-12 public education** funding is restored to be 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 and support for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. This includes enhancing funding to school districts for education assistants and concerted action to address the serious teacher shortage.
18. **F P** Federal and provincial government support for access to **post-secondary education** should be increased both to remove financial barriers for low-income students and lower student debt levels. Policy options include freezing or reducing tuition fees at public institutions and more non-repayable grants for low- and middle-income students.
19. **P L** Provide **free public transit** for minors ages 13-18, where this doesn't already exist, and free or reduced-fee transit access for low-income households.
20. **F P** Introduce **universal coverage** for all Canadians for prescription drugs, eye care, hearing aids, assistive devices/products and mental health care as essential aspects of health care. As a first step, reform provincial income assistance health benefits into generally-available, income-tested extended health coverage as a basic service across all low-income populations.

This report primarily uses data from Statistics Canada's T1 Family File (T1FF) to report on low income for children (0-17 years of age), the most comprehensive data source covering 94.5% of the population in 2023.

The poverty lines for different family sizes in the chart below are based on the after-tax Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT). The CFLIM-AT is a relative measure of poverty that determines poverty thresholds set at 50% of the median Canadian family income, which means a family is considered to have a low income if their income falls below the income amount that is positioned at the 25th percentile of all Canadian family incomes of the same size.

This measure captures income inequality which makes it a good 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.

Statistics Canada's 2023 Thresholds for After-Tax Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM)

Number of family members	Income Threshold
Single person (no child)	\$26,442
Lone parent with one child	\$37,395
Lone parent with two children	\$45,799
Couple with one child	\$45,799
Couple with two children	\$52,884

In 2018, the British Columbia and federal governments adopted the Market Basket Measure (MBM) as their official poverty measure. The MBM is an absolute measure of material deprivation, which compares income to the cost of goods and services that would allow a family to meet their basic needs and have a modest standard of living. Unlike the CFLIM-AT, a relative measure of poverty (capturing inequality) that compares income nationally, the MBM is sensitive to regional differences.

When poverty rates are reported using the MBM annually, data from the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) is used, as it is not possible to calculate the MBM poverty rate with tax filer data. The CIS is a voluntary survey which relies on a representative sample of respondents. Statistics Canada acknowledges that survey data risks under-reporting the disposable incomes of both the very wealthy and the very poor.



ABOUT FIRST CALL

First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society is a registered charity in British Columbia. Our purpose is to create greater understanding of and advocacy for legislation, policy, and practice so that all children and youth have the rights, opportunities and resources required to thrive.

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 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.

SUPPORT OUR WORK

If you are a British Columbia-based organization that believes in putting children and youth first, we invite you to join us by becoming an affiliate.

You can apply here: firstcallbc.org/join-our-affiliate-network/

DONATE TODAY!

We do the research and advocacy work that delivers insights, mobilizes communities and builds partnerships. As a CRA registered charity, we issue tax receipts and are grateful for all support for our research and advocacy efforts.

Please help us shape public policy by donating today at firstcallbc.org

putting children and youth first

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