



November 21, 2018

Via e-mail

Dear Members of the Legislative Assembly:

Please find attached the 2018 BC Child Poverty Report Card from First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. It can also be accessed, along with provincial and local maps, at www.still1in5.ca.

We are disappointed to report that 20.3% (1 in 5) of BC's children were living in poverty, using the most recent data from 2016. This represents 172,550 children. BC's child poverty rate remains higher than the Canadian average of 19.6%. However, between 2015 and 2016, BC's child poverty rate decreased slightly from 22% to 20.3%, representing 12,420 fewer children living in poverty.

Other key findings in the report include:

- More than half (51.2%) of all children living in lone-parent families, the vast majority of them (82%) single mother families, were living in poverty in 2016, compared to 12.5% for children in couple families.
- Other over-represented groups with higher rates of poverty include Indigenous children, new immigrant children and children in visible or racialized minority groups.
- Contrary to popular belief, the majority of poor children have parents in paid work. The median annual income for a low-income single parent with one child was \$22,000 – over \$13,000 below the poverty line. For a family of four, the gap between income and the poverty line was almost \$12,000.
- Inadequate welfare rates meant incomes in 2016 for a couple with two children on assistance were over \$16,000 below the poverty line and single parents with one child on assistance had an income nearly \$10,000 below the poverty line.
- 24 out of BC's 29 regional districts had at least 1,000 children living in poverty. The highest rate was found in the Central Coast Regional District, with a 44% child poverty rate.
- Half of BC's poor children lived in Metro Vancouver in 2016 (86,480 children).
- 1,000 youth age out of government care in BC each year and 50% of homeless youth counted in the 2018 Metro Vancouver youth homeless count reported having been in government care at some point in their lives.
- Income inequality continues to grow in BC. Between 1989 and 2016, the total incomes of the richest 10% of BC families increased by 38%, while the incomes of the poorest 10% of families grew by only 9.4%.

[putting children and youth first](#)

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First Call acknowledges that the provincial government has taken important steps to start addressing BC's child poverty rate, not least of which is the unanimous passage of the BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Act which includes a target to reduce child poverty by 50% over a five year period beginning on January 1, 2019. We look forward to the plan that will set out the strategies to achieve, or exceed, this target.

Other important investments in child care, housing, post-secondary education and a small increase in welfare rates are also encouraging developments. The impacts of these investments are not captured in this report. However, we know, for example, the new child care initiatives will greatly assist low-income families with preschool aged children, in many cases allowing parents to work.

The report's full list of recommendations can be found on pages 33-35. They propose a range of solutions that fall within the scope of both provincial and federal government policies. These are all proposals that have strong support within our broad, cross-sectoral coalition and among the general public. Many of them have been echoed in the recommendations made in recent reports on budget consultations from the Legislature's Finance Committee.

We urge government to act on all of the provincial government recommendations included in the 2018 BC Child Poverty Report Card and highlight some of them below.

One of the most important things the provincial government can do is to **redesign the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit**.

- BC is the only province that cuts off the benefit for parents with children over the age of six. Every other province that offers this benefit, extends it to families with children up to their 18th birthday.
- By increase the maximum annual benefit, indexing it and increasing the age eligibility, this could be a cost-effective way for government to lift families out of poverty.

Government has to **do a better job of being the parent to youth in and from care**. That means income and other supports beyond the age of 19 so youth do not become destitute and homeless.

- It means providing the same support other people their age might expect to attend post-secondary school, learn how to drive, become self-sufficient.
- It also means preventative action. Let's support families so children are not taken into care in the first place.

Government must **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.

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.

We also recommend that governments work together to offer **universal coverage** for prescription drugs, dental care, vision care and hearing aids. Too many families are making hard choices every month between health care and paying the rent.

Governments and transit authorities must work together to provide **free public transit** for minors and free or reduced-fee transit access for low income families.

- This is crucial. People have to be able to get to work, school, health care appointments. Transit fines are saddling poor people with debt and it's a safety issue when the costs deters children and youth from taking transit.
- Many, many jurisdictions have figured out how to do this so, we know it's doable.

Our coalition members are interested in responses from all parties and legislators to the facts, stories and recommendations in this report and look forward to working together to eliminate child, youth and family poverty in British Columbia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Adrienne Montani". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Adrienne Montani
Provincial Coordinator