

June 7, 2023

Via e-mail

Dear Member of Parliament:

Earlier this year, First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society released the 26th annual BC Child Poverty Report Card. This report found that during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, BC's child poverty rate dropped significantly largely due to the enhanced income supports from the federal and provincial governments.

In 2020, the year this report covers, 13.3% of BC children and youth (0-17), or 116,500 kids, were living in poor households, down from 18% in 2019.

Additional key findings from 2020 include:

- The poverty rate for BC children in lone-parent families overall was 38%, down from 49% in 2019, but still very high. Eighty percent of lone parents in BC were women in 2020.
- BC's early years (0-5 years old) child poverty rate, at 13%, was lower than Canada's at 14.2%.
- The average child poverty rate on fifty-nine BC First Nations reserves in 2020 was 29.2%.
- Many of the regional districts with the highest child poverty rates were located in coastal areas, particularly along the north and central coast, with rates as high as 20-26%.
- 10% of BC's richest families with children have nearly as much of the income pie as the combined incomes of the lowest income 50% of families with children.
- 153,630 BC children were kept out of poverty thanks to government help in 2020.
- 94% of BC families with children received some sort of government pandemic benefit in 2020.

The report also contains 25 child poverty reduction recommendations for the provincial and federal governments. Some key recommendations for the federal government include:

- Ensure the Canada Child Benefit, in combination with other income measures, raises all families with children above the CFLIM after tax poverty lines.
- Enhance Employment Insurance to expand access, duration, and level of benefits to reduce inequity for lower-income workers, including establishing a minimum benefit floor.
- Ensure maternity and parental leave benefits are universally available to all parents (regardless of work status), increase the duration of leave and ensure the benefit levels are not less than the CFLIM after-tax poverty lines.

putting children and youth first

- Collaborate with First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments and Indigenous organizations to address the factors leading to child and family poverty and 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 children.
- 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.
- Replace the Market Basket Measure with the Census Family Low Income Measure After Tax (CFLIM-AT), calculated with annual tax filer data, as Canada's and BC's official measure of poverty. The CFLIM-AT is a broad, comprehensive, and relative measure of poverty.

While it is apparent that government support played a critical role in reducing child poverty in 2020, in 2022-23 families have been facing record high inflation rates. Progress made towards decreasing both the rate and depth of family poverty in 2020 may be all but wiped out by increasing costs in subsequent years.

Now, more than ever, it is critical for governments at all levels to ensure that public services are robust and reach those most in need, that families can access affordable housing and that inflation is curbed.

The 2022 BC Child Poverty Report Card, maps and other materials are posted on our website at www.firstcallbc.org.

I would be pleased to meet with you to discuss these findings and any questions you may have, so don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Adrienne Montani
Executive Director