

BRITISH COLUMBIA

2023 BC CHILD POVERTY REPORT CARD



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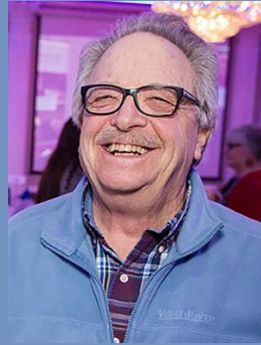
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27TH ANNUAL REPORT CARD ON CANADA'S COMMITMENT TO END CHILD POVERTY BY 2000

IN MEMORIUM

This year's BC Child Poverty Report Card is dedicated with love and gratitude to the memory of two of First Call's founding leaders: Michael Goldberg (1943-2023) and Ruth Annis (1947-2023). Michael was the author of our earliest annual child poverty report card. We remember him for his many years of leadership and commitment to reducing child and family poverty through improved public policy. We remember Ruth for her pioneering leadership in youth services in BC and her tireless advocacy for better systems of care for BC's children and youth. Michael and Ruth each served for many years as the chair of the First Call Steering Committee.



MICHAEL GOLDBERG



RUTH ANNIS

2023 BC CHILD POVERTY REPORT CARD

February 2024

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

putting children and youth first

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BC'S CHILD POVERTY RATE UP DESPITE POLICY CHANGES

While some federal and provincial policy changes and improvements to income support over the last twenty years in British Columbia have occurred, child poverty rates in our province increased in 2021, with 126,120 children living in poor households. The child poverty rate in BC was 14.3%, which is 1.3 percentage points lower than the national average of 15.6%. However, BC's early years (0-5 years old) child poverty rate was 13.8%, a 6.2% increase from the previous year.

1 out of 7

BC children in BC lived in poverty in 2021.



Our 27th annual BC Child Poverty Report Card found that 1 in 7 children, or 126,120 children, in BC lived in poverty in 2021.

Especially concerning is that, after a sharp decline in poverty rates due to CERB payments made from 2020-2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, we note a steep rise in numbers once again. Compounding the problem of inadequate and declining incomes for families at or below the poverty line, are the soaring costs of food and housing -- a trend we expect to continue in the near term.

The child poverty rate on some BC First Nations reserves continues to be substantially and unacceptably higher than the overall BC child poverty rate. In 2021, the child poverty rate on 67 BC First Nations reserves stood at 31% or twice as high as the provincial rate. Rural reserves had even higher on-reserve poverty rates than urban reserves, with a rural reserve child poverty rate of 35%.

The child poverty rate is predicted to rise again in 2022 due to falling incomes for the lowest-income families along with increases in necessary household expenses. This issue is not only present in BC, but also affects more than one million children across Canada. While BC's comparative position has improved in recent years, with the third lowest child poverty rate among the thirteen provinces and territories, there is still a need for renewed commitment and urgency to reduce child and family poverty.

The overall child poverty statistics hide the fact that some children in BC are at greater risk of living in poverty than others. According to the 2021 Census data, child poverty rates for selected visible minority (racialized) groups were 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, followed by Chinese and Latin American children. Recent immigrant children were also at a higher risk of poverty, with more than 1 in 5 (21%) living in poverty in BC in 2020.

The increasing child poverty rates in BC and across the country in 2021 underscore the need for renewed commitment and urgency to reduce child and family poverty. It is not just a

matter of statistics or something to be looked at merely on a year-to-year basis, but a systemic problem that affects real children and families, limiting their opportunities and potential. As we move forward, we must address the declining incomes for the lowest-income families along with increases in necessary household expenses, which are predicted to lead to rising poverty rates.

The 25 recommendations in this report include nine focused on raising family incomes, either through paying family-supporting wages or improving income supports through public policies such as indexed and more accessible benefits. Five recommendations focus on targeted initiatives to reduce inequities for children in groups with a documented higher risk of living in poverty, such as Indigenous and newcomer families and youth transitioning out of foster care. Another nine recommendations aim to lower barriers and improve lives through bolstering key universal programs, such as affordable and subsidized housing, child care, public education, and health care, among others.

We cannot continue to ignore the fact that some children in BC are at much higher risk of growing up in poverty than others. Urgent action is needed to ensure that every child has access to the basic necessities of life and the opportunity to thrive, as is their right. It is time to prioritize the well-being of our children and invest in their future. It is time for governments, communities, and individuals to come together to find solutions that create a brighter future for all children in BC.

CHILD POVERTY RATE PREDICTED TO RISE

Urgent action is needed to ensure that every child has access to the basic necessities of life and the opportunity to thrive, as is their right.



One in Seven BC Children Living in Poverty

BC'S CHILD POVERTY RATES

In 2021, the child poverty rate in British Columbia was 14.3% as measured by Statistics Canada's Census Family Low Income Measure after income taxes (CFLIM-AT), using taxfiler data. This represents 126,120 children (0-17 years old) who lived in poor households in 2021, an increase of 7.5% and 9,620 children from 2020.

At 14.3% BC's child poverty rate was 1.3 percentage points lower than the Canadian child poverty rate of 15.6%. The 2021 rates were up from 2020, when BC's child poverty rate was 13.3% and across Canada the child poverty rate was 13.5%.

BC's early years (0-5 years old) child poverty rate, at 13.8% in 2021, was a 6.2% increase over the previous year when it was 13%. BC's poverty rate for young children was 2.3 percentage points lower than Canada's rate at 16.1%, while BC's all-ages poverty rate, at 15.2%, was closer to Canada's all ages poverty rate at 15.5%.

In total 37,010 out of the 754,360 people living in poverty in BC in 2021 were young children under the age of 6. This was an increase of 1,780 from 2020, when 35,230 young children were growing up in poor households.

All-Ages, Child (0-17) and Young Children (0-5) Poverty Rates, BC and Canada, CFLIM After Tax, 2021



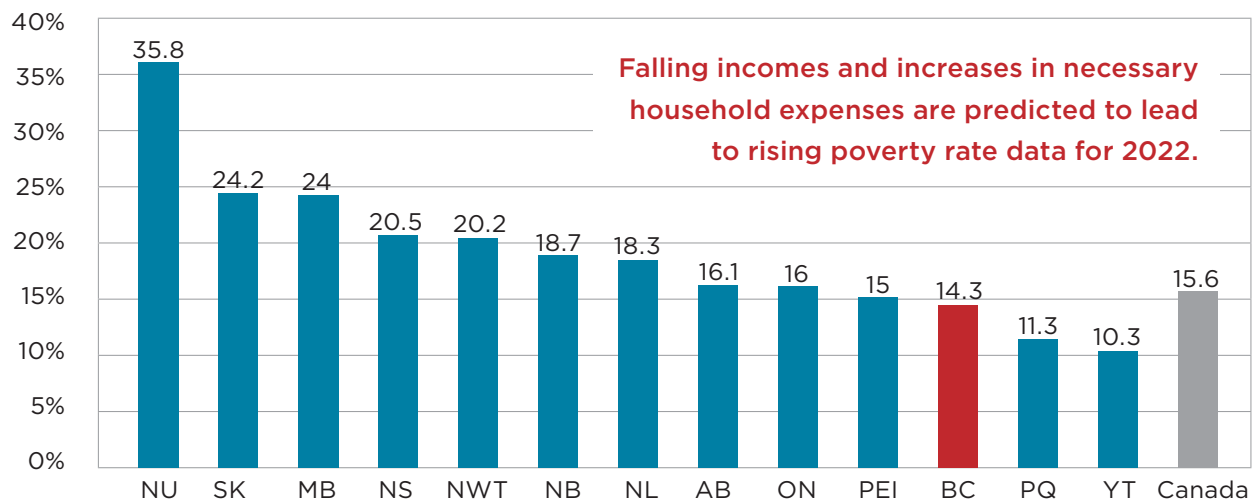
Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table I-13, Individual Data, 2021 and custom tabulations (2023)

CHILD POVERTY A CANADA-WIDE PROBLEM

Child poverty remains a Canada-wide problem affecting more than one million children. In 2021, BC's comparative position continued to improve, moving to the third lowest child poverty rate among the thirteen provinces and territories at 14.3% from the fourth lowest in 2020. Quebec at 11.3% and the Yukon Territory at 10.3% both had lower child poverty rates than BC in 2021.

The increases in the child poverty rates across the country in 2021 underscore the need for renewed commitment and urgency to reduce child and family poverty. Statistics Canada research predicts declining incomes in 2022 for the lowest-income families along with increases in necessary household expenses will lead to rising poverty rates in 2022.¹

Child Poverty Rates, by Province/Territory, CFLIM After Tax, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table I-13, Individual Data, 2021 (2023)

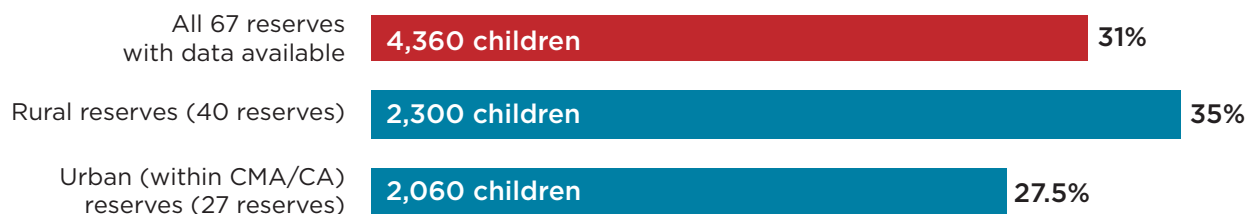
HIGH LEVELS OF ON-RESERVE CHILD POVERTY

On-reserve child poverty data available for 2021 indicates significantly higher rates compared to the provincial rate of 14.3%. The following data is based on only 67 First Nations reserves with child poverty data available through taxfiler data; there were many without data available.

The overall child poverty rate on 67 BC First Nations reserves in 2021 was 31%, more than twice as high as the overall BC child poverty rate, representing 4,360 children living in poverty. The 2021 child poverty rate for these 67 BC reserves was 1.8 percentage points higher than the 29.2% rate for the 59 BC reserves captured in the 2022 BC Child Poverty Report Card.

Child poverty on reserve was more than twice as high as for all of BC.

Child (0-17) poverty rate, 67 BC First Nations reserves, CFLIM-AT, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table I-13, Individual Data, 2021 (2023)

Rural reserves typically had much higher on-reserve poverty rates than urban reserves (defined as within Census Metropolitan Areas/Census Agglomerations). Based on data from 40 rural reserves/First Nations

¹ Statistics Canada, *Market Basket Measure poverty thresholds and provisional poverty trends for 2021 and 2022*, (2023).

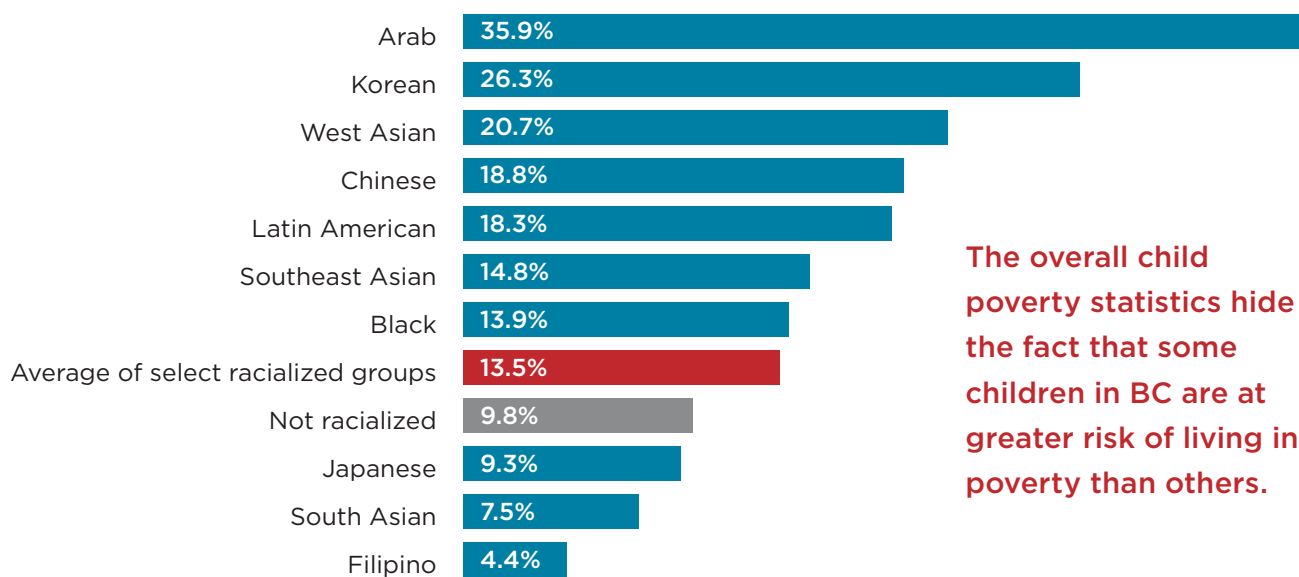
communities, there were 2,300 children living in poverty, for a rural reserve child poverty rate of 35% in 2021 in BC. Data from 27 urban reserves/First Nations communities indicated there were 2,060 children living in poverty, for an urban reserve child poverty rate of 27.5%. According to 2021 Census data based on the LIM after tax measure, Métis children (0-17) in BC had a child poverty rate of 12.8%, representing 3,275 children. There were 990 poor Métis children under the age of 6 in BC, a 13.4% poverty rate.²

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, followed by Chinese and Latin American children. 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.

Visible minority child poverty rates are only collected during the Census cycle and the 2021 Census coincided with the extraordinary provision of COVID-19 benefits provided by provincial and federal governments, which reduced poverty considerably. However, as the 2021 Taxfiler data shows, the overall child poverty rate has since increased after the removal of many of these supports in 2021. Therefore, it is likely that visible minority child poverty rates have increased since the time of the 2021 Census (2020 data).

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



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2021, custom tabulations (2023)

As noted in the recent report on disability poverty in Canada, there is no recent data on the number of children with disabilities living in poverty.³

² 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

³ 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

After hitting its lowest child poverty rate of the 2002-2021 period of 13.3% in 2020, BC's child poverty rate rose slightly to 14.3% in 2021. This reflects the impact of the withdrawal of pandemic income supports that were largely responsible for the dramatic drop in the rate from 2019 to 2020. BC's 7.5% increase from 2020 was less than the 15.6% increase in Canada's child poverty rate between 2020 and 2021.

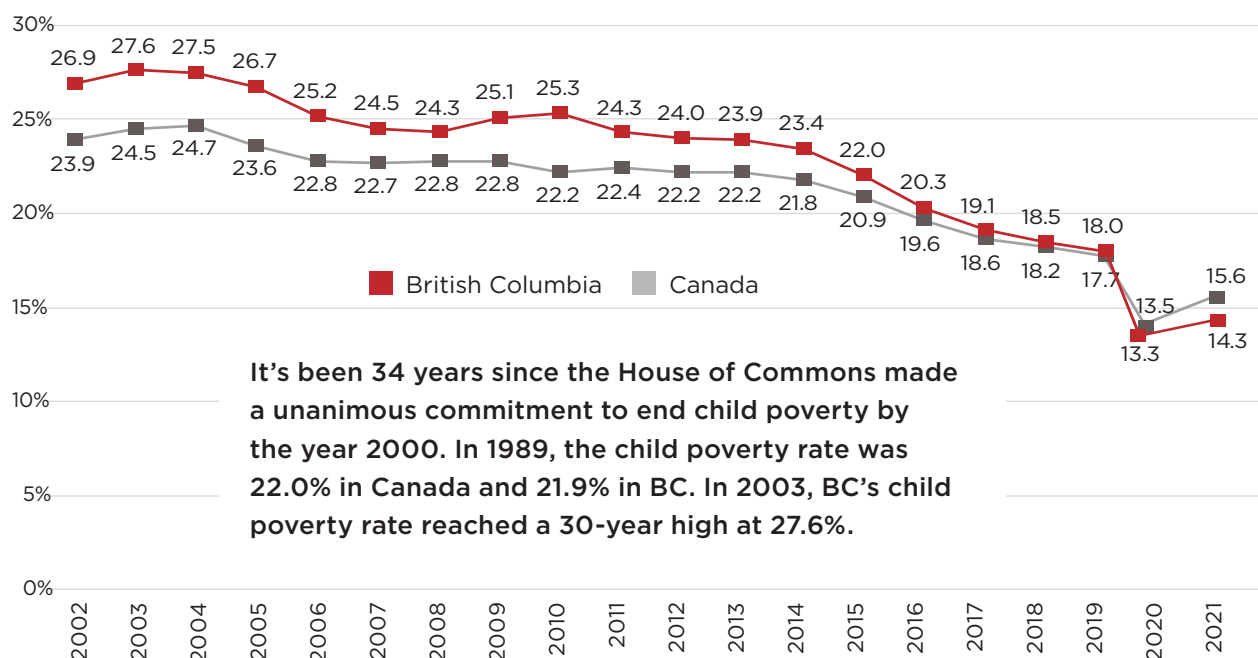
For the second consecutive year, in 2021, BC's child poverty rate (14.3%) was lower than Canada's (15.6%), whereas in every year from 2002 to 2019, BC had higher child poverty rates than Canada.

BC and Canada have both made significant progress in lowering child poverty rates over the last two decades, but BC has done better than the national average. The BC child poverty rate in 2021 of 14.3% was 47% lower than the rate of 26.9% two decades ago in 2002. Canada's 2021 rate of 15.6% was 35% lower than the rate of 23.9% in 2002.

As temporary pandemic supports have been withdrawn, we are seeing child poverty rates on the increase in BC and Canada. One in seven children in BC were still living in poverty in 2021. The upward trend is expected to continue in 2022. There is still much work to be done to fulfill both the federal and provincial governments' promises and our obligation to children and their families to end child poverty in Canada.

Between 2020 and 2021, the number of BC children living in poverty increased by 9,620.

Child Poverty Rates, Canada and British Columbia, CFLIM After Tax, 2002-2021



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

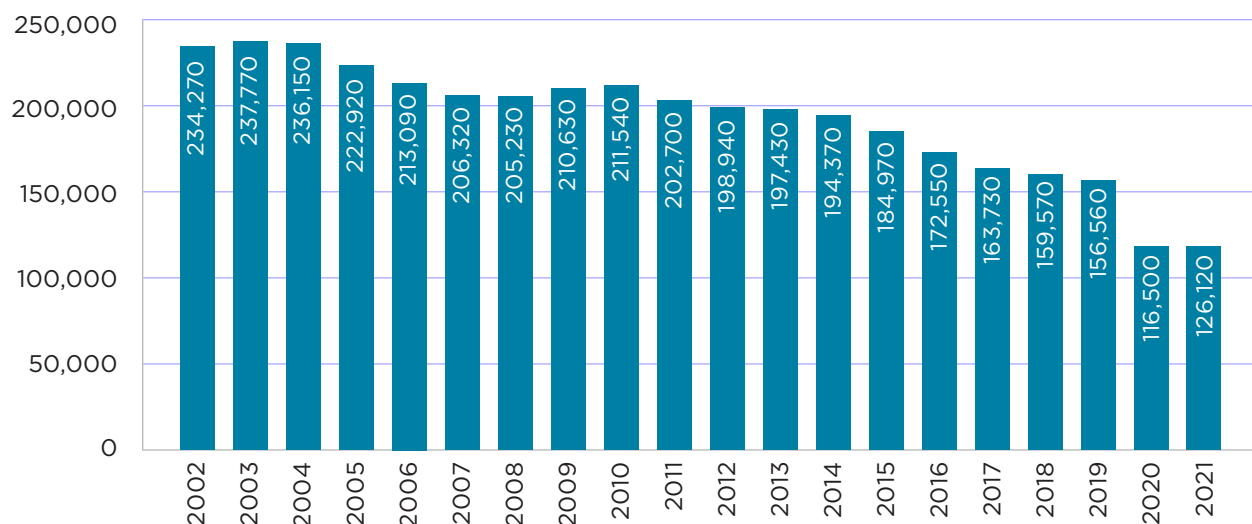
NUMBER OF POOR CHILDREN OVER TIME

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 2021, there were 126,120 poor children in BC, an increase of 9,260 children from 2020. The number of poor children in Canada increased by 163,350 for a total of 1,162,460 poor children in 2021.

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 death, and this elevated risk persists even if they experience improvements in later life circumstances.¹

Number of poor children, British Columbia, based on CFLIM-AT, 2002-2021



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



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

BC Child Poverty by Family Type

CHILD POVERTY IN LONE-PARENT AND COUPLE FAMILIES

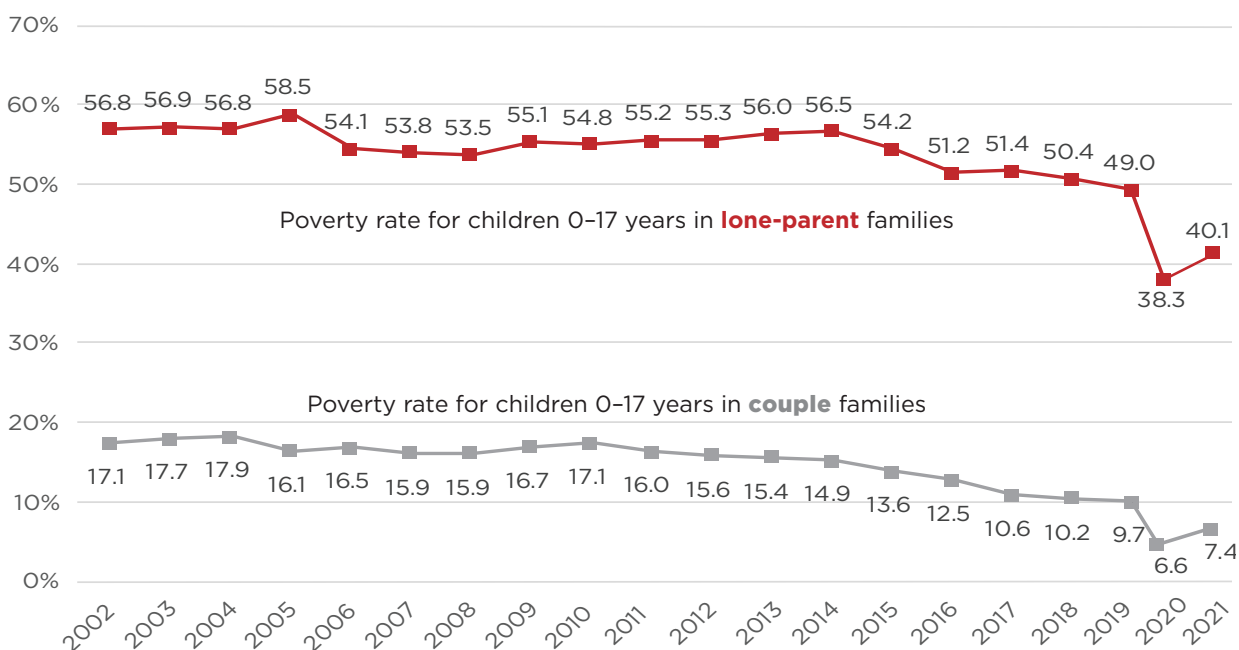
Children in lone-parent families in British Columbia have consistently suffered much higher poverty rates than their counterparts in couple families. In 2021, the child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families was 40.4%, five and a half times higher than the 7.4% rate for their counterparts in couple families.

The poverty rate for BC children in lone-parent families between 2020 and 2021 increased by 5.5% (from 38.3% to 40.4%). The one-year increase in the poverty rate for BC children in couple families was larger, from 6.6% to 7.4%, representing a 12.1% increase from 2020.

Over these last nineteen 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 56.7% between 2002 and 2021 (from 17.1% to 7.4%), while the child poverty rate among children in lone-parent families decreased only 28.9% (from 56.8% in 2002 to 40.4% in 2021). BC's new supplement for lower-income single parent families, which started in July 2023, is a small but positive step to help narrow this gap.

"I live in subsidized family housing. I need family support to help me raise my kids while I work, because there's no affordable daycare available to us, but I'm not allowed to have my sister move in with us to help out. I feel like I can't win." — Single mother

Child Poverty Rate by Family Type, CFLIM-AT, British Columbia, 2002-2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0018-01, 2021 (2023)

Although BC's overall child poverty rate in 2021 was lower than Canada's (14.3% vs 15.6%), the child poverty rate for children in couple families in BC (7.4%) was nearly the same as the child poverty rate for children in couple families in Canada (7.7%).

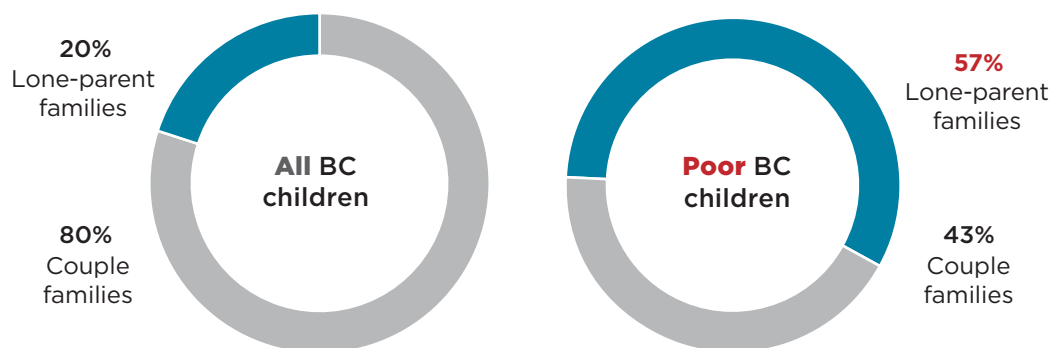
The child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families in BC (40.4%) was slightly lower than the child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families in Canada (41.3%).

PROPORTIONS OF BC CHILDREN IN DIFFERENT FAMILY TYPES

Although the majority of BC children in 2021 lived in couple families (80%), more than half of poor children in BC in 2021 lived in lone-parent families (57%), indicative of the disproportionate burden of poverty shouldered by lone-parent families. In Canada the percentage of children in lone-parent families was even higher at 60%.

In 2021 in BC, there were 68,300 children living in poor lone-parent families and 52,550 children living in poor couple families in BC. Between 2020 and 2021 there was an increase in the number of poor children in both family types: 6,420 more in couple families and 3,070 more in lone-parent families.

Proportion of BC Children 0-17 in Couple Families and Lone-Parent Families, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 39-10-0041-01 and Table 11-10-0018-01, 2021 (2023)

Child poverty rates for children in lone-parent families across 28 BC cities and towns ranged from a low of 34.1% in Victoria to a high of 48.0% in Prince Rupert, a 13.9 percentage point difference. The 7.4% provincial poverty rate for children in couple families in 2021 included a range from 2.7% in Trail to 9.1% in Port Alberni, a 6.4 percentage point difference. The child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families in BC rural areas in 2021 was 46.1%, significantly higher than the BC child poverty rate of 40.4% for all BC children in lone-parent families.

The 5,280 BC children under 18 who were not living in census families in 2021 had the most challenging situation of all, with a poverty rate of 98%. 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.”

“Children in BC are being raised in poverty due to our Family Court and Family Maintenance systems’ failures to collect child support. My child’s father hides income and lives a comfortable lifestyle while we barely get by on my single income. I can’t afford to pay \$10,000 in legal fees to go to court again. Legal Aid is of no help, as they only deal with emergencies. In my opinion, children needlessly living in poverty is an emergency.” — Single mother

INCOME INEQUALITY IN MEDIAN INCOMES BY FAMILY TYPE

Couple families in BC had much higher incomes than other families in 2021, with a median after-tax income of \$123,620 for all couple families with two children, \$65,970 more than the median after-tax household income of \$57,650 for lone-parent families with two children.

Low-income families with children had much lower incomes than families with children in general. For example, in BC in 2021, the median after-tax household income for low-income couple families with two children was only \$34,810, \$88,810 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 \$28,580, \$29,070 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), 2021

Low-income families after-tax income	Lone-parent families	\$28,580
	Couple families	\$34,810
All families after-tax income	Lone-parent families	\$57,650
	Couple families	\$123,620

Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0017-01, 2021 (2023)



WOMEN'S POVERTY

In BC in 2021, 80% of lone-parent families were female-led. These families' median before-tax annual income was \$55,140, just 74% of the male lone-parent median income of \$74,550. 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, 2021 (2023)

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 2021, these families were typically living far below the poverty line, based on the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM) after tax.

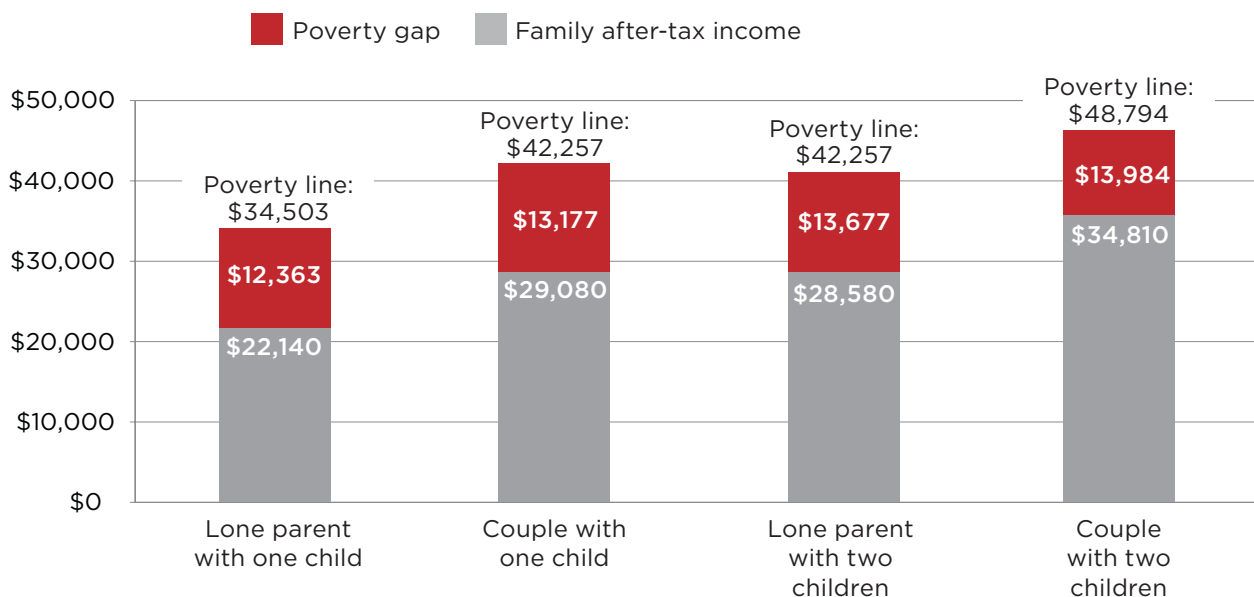
The after-tax median family income for a poor lone-parent family with one child was \$22,140, \$12,363 lower than the \$34,503 poverty line for this family size. **This family would need to earn \$1,030 more per month in order to reach the poverty line.**

The after-tax median family income for a poor couple family with one child was \$29,080, \$13,177 lower than the \$42,257 poverty line for this family size. **This family would need to earn \$1,098 more per month in order to reach the poverty line.**

The after-tax median family income for a poor lone-parent family with two children was \$28,580 \$13,677 lower than the \$42,257 poverty line for this family size. **This family would need to earn \$1,140 more per month in order to reach the poverty line.**

The after-tax median family income for a poor couple family with two children was \$34,810, \$13,984 lower than the \$48,794 poverty line for this family size. **This family would need to earn \$1,165 more per month in order to reach the poverty line.**

Depth of Low Income for Poor Families in British Columbia, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table 11-10-0020-01 and T1FF Tech Reference Guide, Final Estimates, 2021 (2023)

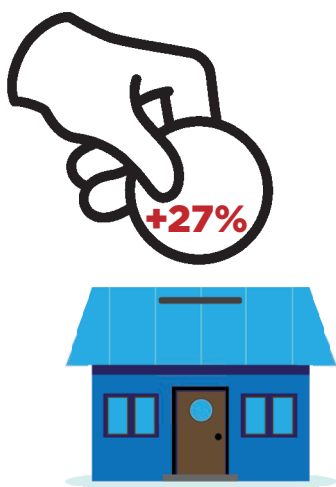
Between 2020 and 2021, the gaps between the after-tax median family incomes of poor families in BC and the poverty line increased substantially for all family types and sizes (unadjusted for inflation):

- From \$10,797 to \$12,363 (up \$1,566) for poor lone-parent families with one child;
- From \$11,968 to \$13,177 (up \$1,209) for poor couple families with one child;
- From \$12,108 to \$13,677 (up \$1,569) for poor lone-parent families with two children; and
- From \$11,972 to \$13,984 (up \$2,012) for poor couple families with two children.

In 2021, 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 and sizes.

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 2022 and 2023. In 2023, new renters paid, on average, 27% more than the previous tenant. 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."



In 2023, new renters paid, on average, 27% more than the previous tenant.

In 2021, 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, 73.4% of low-income couple families with children were spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs compared with 17.8% of all couple families with children, while 72.3% of low-income lone-parent families with children were spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs compared with 32.8% of all-lone parent families with children.

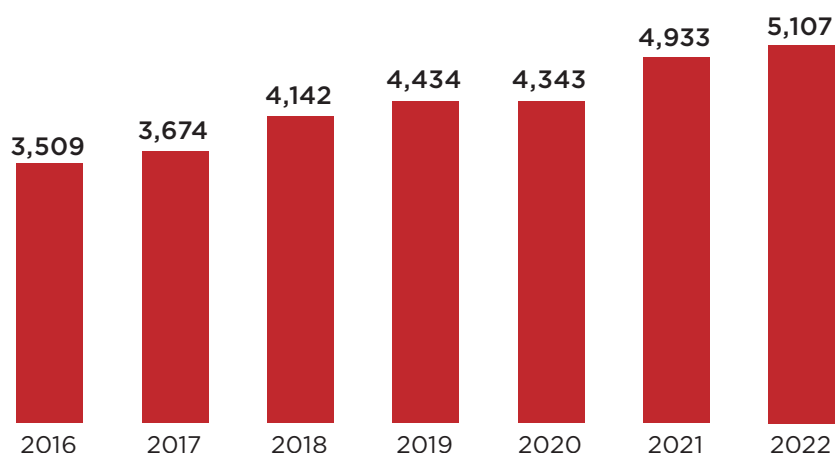
The lack of affordable housing means that many low-income families are trapped living in substandard housing with landlords who are not following their legal requirements, and/or actively violating regulations around housing standards and repairs.

For families unable to afford market rents, many apply for subsidized housing. In 2022, families made up 34% of the households on the BC Housing waitlist in Metro Vancouver alone. There were 5,107 families waitlisted, an increase of 1,598 households, or 46%, between 2016 and 2022. This is a low estimate of the number of families in need of non-market housing, as some non-market housing providers use other housing wait lists instead of the BC Housing wait list.²

1 CMHC Rental Market Report, January 2024, page 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, December 2022, metrovanancouver.org/services/regional-planning/Documents/metro-vancouver-housing-data-book-2022.pdf

Number of Family Households on BC Housing Waitlist, Metro Vancouver, 2016 to 2022



“The heat wasn’t working and overnight temperatures were near zero. My children had to sleep in my bed. It took two weeks for the landlord to replace the furnace. When your rent is below market value, you keep quiet and make yourself agreeable.” — Single mother of three

Source: Metro Vancouver Housing Data Book, December 2022

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.

“Research into what it means to be food insecure helps explain why interventions centred around food have such limited impact — they fail to address the underlying problem of inadequate income.” — PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research

In 2021, the rate of food insecurity among BC’s children (0-17) increased sharply to 22% from 17% in 2020. This represents an alarming 193,000 BC children living in food insecure households in 2021.³

Judging by the increase in children’s food bank visits in recent years, food insecurity for low-income families has increased even more since 2021. The number of food bank visits in BC increased by 20% between 2022 and 2023. There were 62,481 visits by children in BC to food banks in 2023, with children making up 31% of BC food bank clients in that year.⁴

According to PROOF, an interdisciplinary research program at the University of Toronto which studies household food insecurity, “Research into what it means to be food insecure helps explain why interventions centred around food have such limited impact — they

fail to address the underlying problem of inadequate income. Food-insecure households do not only make compromises to food but also to other basic needs. The health consequences of food insecurity extend far beyond poor nutrition.”⁵

“I regularly buy only half of the items on my grocery list due to increasing food costs. It’s quickly becoming impossible to make healthy choices.” — Single mother

³ Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey, Table: 13-10-0835-01.

⁴ Food Banks Canada, Hunger Count 2023, fbc.blobstorage.blob.core.windows.net/wordpress/2023/10/hungercount23-en.pdf

⁵ October 2022, PROOF, proof.utoronto.ca/resource/food-insecurity-a-problem-of-inadequate-income-not-solved-by-food/

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 2021, the minimum wage in BC was \$15.20/hour. For the first five months of 2021, the minimum wage was \$14.60. A lone parent with one child working full-time (35 hours/week), full-year at minimum wage in 2021 would

Full-time, full-year work at BC's 2021 minimum wage left parents raising their children in deep poverty.

have only earned \$27,287 per year, leaving them \$17,344 below the Low Income Measure (LIM) before-tax poverty line of \$44,631, for this family type and size.

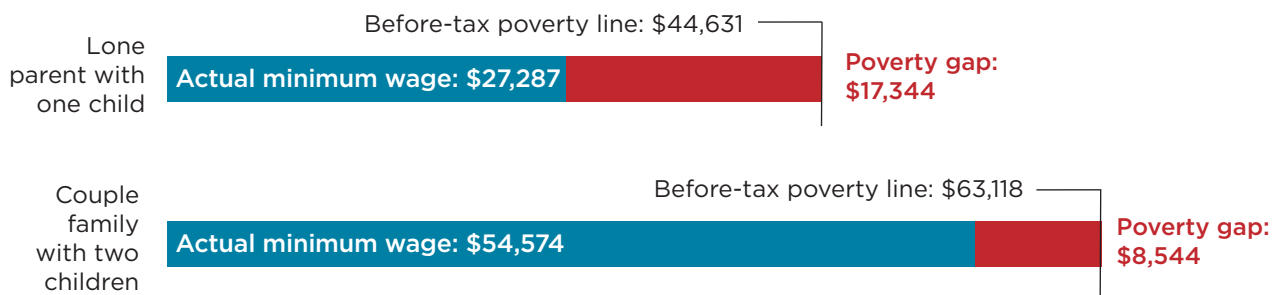
A couple family with two children with both parents working full-time, full-year for minimum wage would have made \$54,574 per year, or \$8,544 below the LIM before-tax poverty line of \$63,118 for this family type and size.



A lone parent working full time, full year for minimum wage in 2021 earned only **\$27,287**.



Income Gaps for Parents Working Full-Time, Full-Year at BC's Minimum Wage in 2021, Compared to LIM Before Tax, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0232-01 Low-income measure (LIM) thresholds (2023)

LIVING WAGES

Poverty income thresholds are too low to allow families to meet their basic living expenses. As inflation continued to push essential household expenses higher in 2023, such as housing and food, the calculation of living wages in different parts of the province for a family of four that would lift them above the poverty line ranged from \$20.64/hour in Dawson Creek to \$25.78/hour in Golden. The Metro Vancouver living wage was calculated at \$25.68 per hour.

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.

“My family takes transit. By the time I take my children to school and daycare in different locations, and then bus to work, it takes me about two hours. I’m spending four hours a day commuting on transit because there are no daycare spots available close to home or work.” — Mother in a two-parent family with two young children

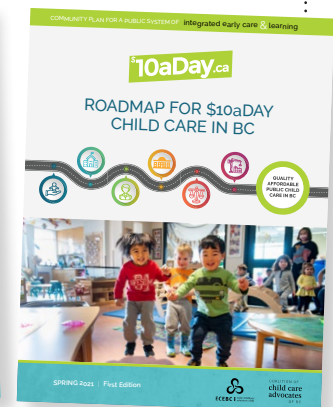
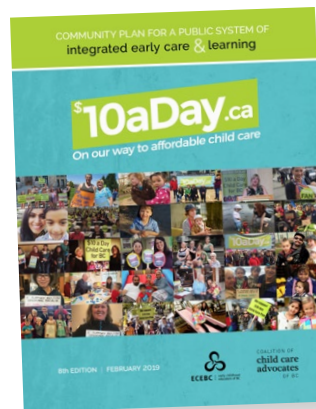
\$10ADAY CHILD CARE PLAN

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.

BC has achieved measurable progress in recent years on creating \$10aDay programs, lowering parent fees, raising educator wages, and funding new spaces. BC’s bilateral child care agreement with the federal government is contributing to the achievement of many of these goals.

However, many child care programs are losing more early childhood educators (ECEs) than they can hire. Too many children with disabilities are turned away because child care programs lack the capacity to support them. Urgent advocacy is needed now calling for a province-wide, publicly-funded fair ECE wage grid of at least \$30 to \$40/hour and increased funding for specialized ECE education to support inclusive practices. Major improvements are also needed in the way child care is funded and new spaces are built by creating a single unified public funding model and provincially planned expansion in collaboration with public, non-profit and Indigenous partners.

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.



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

FACT SHEET

6

Children in Families on Welfare

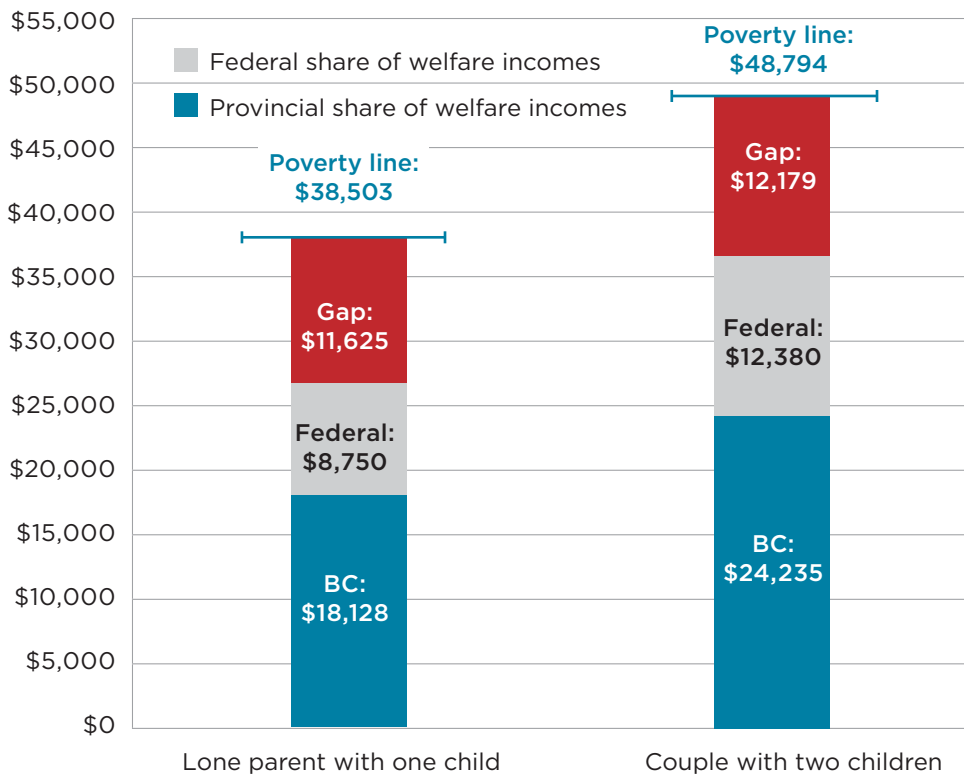
WELFARE INCOMES WELL BELOW POVERTY LINES

For the dependent children in families on welfare in 2021, which was an average of 42,305 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 2021 was just \$26,878, which fell \$11,625 short of the poverty line. For a couple on welfare with two children, their income was \$36,614 which was \$12,179 short of the poverty line.

The income for a single parent on welfare with one child in BC in 2021 was just \$26,878, which fell \$11,625 short of the poverty line.

Federal and Provincial Shares of Welfare Incomes and Poverty Gaps by Family Type in BC, 2021



in 2021, a couple on welfare with two children, had to get by on \$36,614. That's \$12,179 below the poverty line.

Source: Jennefer Laidley and Mohy Tabbara, *Welfare Incomes in Canada, 2021*, November 2022, Maytree, maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2021.pdf

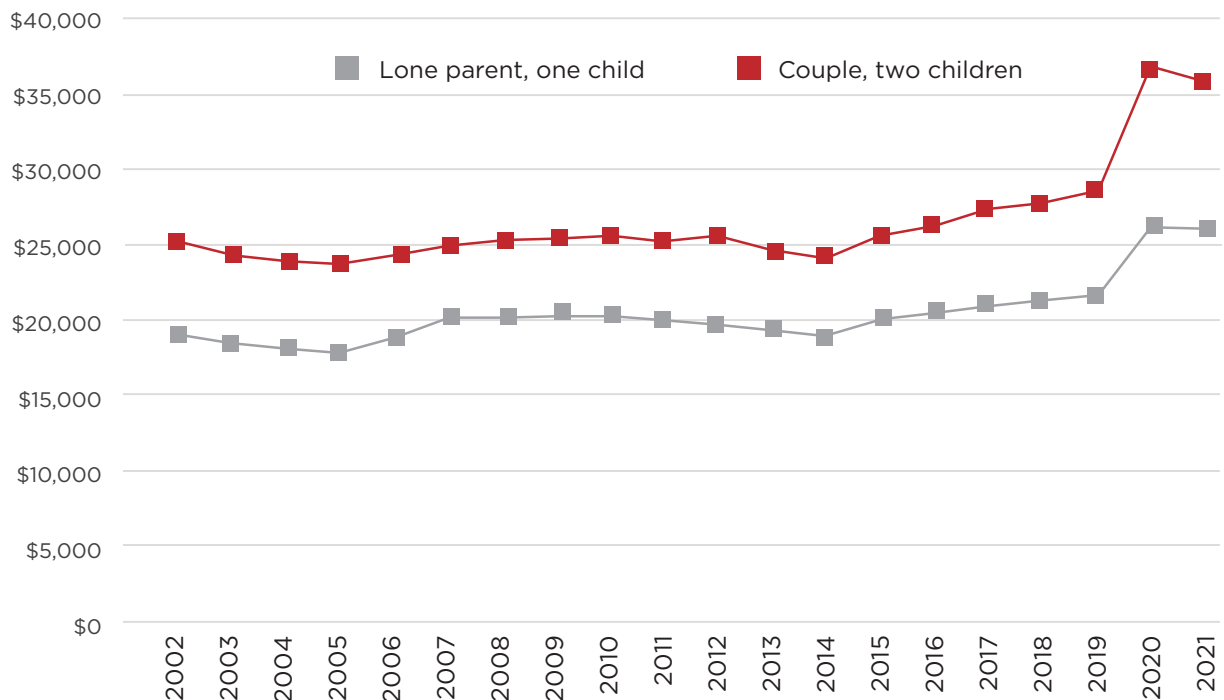
WELFARE INCOMES OVER TIME

After relatively large increases for both single and couple families between 2019 to 2020, in 2021, welfare incomes for BC families, adjusted for inflation, went down in value. This was the first time they lost value after six years of steady gains.

The income for a lone parent on welfare with one child decreased by \$46 between 2020 and 2021 (from \$26,924 to \$26,878). The income for a couple family on welfare with two children decreased by \$1,363 between 2020 and 2021 (from \$37,978 to \$36,614).

The main reason for the decline in welfare incomes between 2020 to 2021 was the reduction or elimination of some pandemic-related supports.

Welfare Incomes (Adjusted for Inflation, 2021 Constant Dollars), by Family Type, BC, 2002–2021



Source: Maytree, *Welfare in Canada*, 2021 (2022)

The main reason for the decline in welfare incomes between 2020 to 2021 was the reduction or elimination of some pandemic-related supports.



COMPONENTS OF WELFARE INCOMES IN 2021

Over the course of the year in 2021, total welfare incomes for BC families with children fluctuated as the provincial and federal governments raised welfare and child benefit rates for some months, as well as added temporary pandemic-related supplementary benefits.

As shown in the graph below, there were still significant COVID pandemic-related payments for BC families in 2021, such as the BC Recovery Benefit, the BC Recovery Supplement and the federal Canada Child Benefit Young Child Supplement. Welfare recipients were allowed to keep these payments.

Temporary pandemic-related monthly benefits in 2021



Source: Maytree, *Welfare in Canada, 2021* (2022)

Increases were made in May and October to the BC monthly basic support allowance and to the shelter allowance for some families in the fall. However, despite these additional payments, when adjusted for inflation, total welfare incomes for these two family types still were lower in value in 2021 than they were 2020.

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

In 2021, for most of these families on assistance (64%), 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 single parent families, as 84% of the families with children on welfare were single parent families in 2021.¹ 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.



¹ BC Government, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, BC Employment and Assistance Summary Report, August 2023.

Child Poverty Across BC

CHILD POVERTY BY REGIONAL DISTRICTS

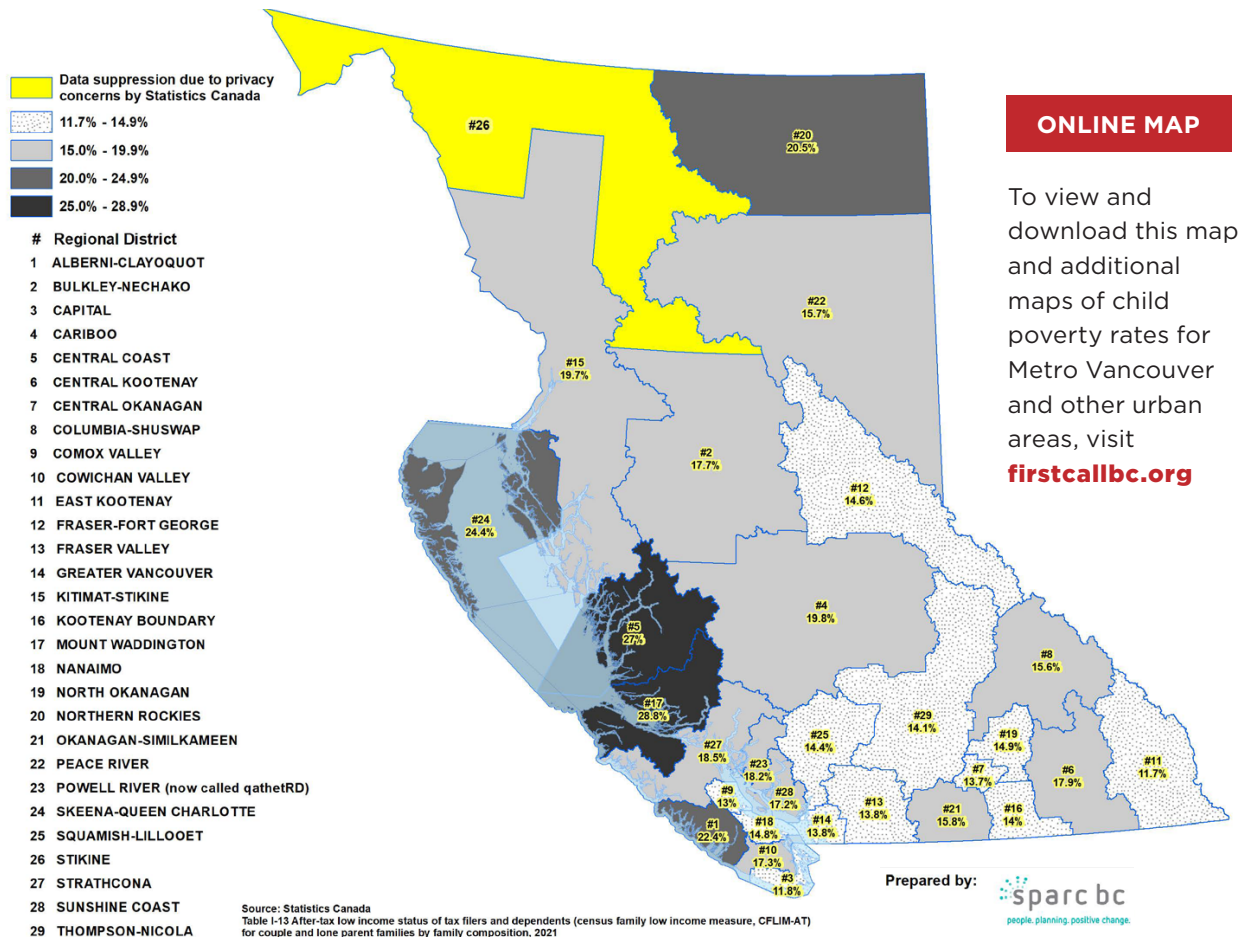
Thousands of children in each of BC's regional districts were living in poverty in 2021. Regional districts on the outer coast and parts of Vancouver Island had the highest child poverty rates. Twenty-one out of 28 regional districts with child poverty data available had at least 1,000 children living in poverty and seven of these 28 regional districts had at least one in five children living in poverty, up from four districts in 2020. The regional districts with more than one in five children living in poverty in 2021 were:

- Mount Waddington Regional District (28.8%);
- Central Coast Regional District (27.0%);
- Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District (24.4%)
- Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (22.4%).

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

As in the previous year, East Kootenay Regional District had the lowest child poverty rate in 2021 at 11.7%.

% 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), 2021



CHILD POVERTY IN BC's URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

Fourteen out of 28 urban areas in BC had at least 1,000 children living in poverty in 2021, with especially large numbers in Metro Vancouver (62,380), the Victoria Census Metropolitan Area (6,910), the Abbotsford-Mission Census Metropolitan Area (5,420) and Kelowna (5,210).

There were 18,050 poor children living in rural areas in BC in 2021. 18.7% of all children in rural BC lived in poverty, considerably higher than the BC child poverty rate of 14.3%.

The urban areas with the highest poverty rates were Prince Rupert (22.7%), Port Alberni (20.3%), Duncan (19.8%), and Quesnel (19.8%). The urban areas with the lowest child poverty rates were Victoria (11.4%), Kamloops (11.5%) and Trail (11.8%).

Metro Vancouver Census Tracts

There were 62,380 children, or 13.8% of all children in the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2021. Out of the 520 Vancouver CMA census tracts with child poverty data available in 2021, 60% of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate was 10% or higher in 75% of the census tracts. The child poverty rate in Vancouver CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 3.8% to 58.8%. The number of poor children in Vancouver CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 20 to 360. The highest child poverty rates were found in census tracts in and around Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in 2021.

Victoria Census Tracts

There were 6,910 children, or 11.4% of all children in the Victoria Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2021. Out of the 80 Victoria CMA census tracts with child poverty data available in 2021, 28% of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate was 10% or higher in 61% of the census tracts. The child poverty rate in Victoria CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 4.8% to 47.4%. The number of poor children in Victoria CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 30 to 330. The census tracts with the highest child poverty rates were found in North and Central Saanich.

Abbotsford-Mission Census Tracts

There were 5,420 children, or 12.6% of all children in the Abbotsford-Mission Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2021. Out of the 39 Abbotsford-Mission CMA census tracts with child poverty data available in 2021, 29 of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate was 10% or higher in 77% of the census tracts. The child poverty rate in Abbotsford-Mission CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 7.10% to 27.8%. The number of poor children in Abbotsford-Mission CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 40 to 340. The census tracts with the highest child poverty rates were found along South Fraser Way from West Abbotsford to Downtown Abbotsford.

Metro Vancouver was home to 62,380 poor children in 2021.



ONLINE MAP

To view and download

maps of child poverty rates in BC urban areas, visit

www.firstcallbc.org

Of those, 5,420 children were located in the Abbotsford-Mission CMA.

Chilliwack Census Tracts

There were 3,840 children, or 14.8% of all children in the Chilliwack Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2021. Out of the 31 Chilliwack CMA census tracts with child poverty data available in 2021, 58% of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate was 10% or higher in 77% of the census tracts. The child poverty rate in Chilliwack CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 6% to 50%. The number of poor children in Chilliwack CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 20 to 370. The area around Downtown Chilliwack had a concentration of high poverty census tracts.

Kamloops Census Tracts

There were 2,380 children, or 11.4% of all children in the Kamloops Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2021. Out of the 29 Kamloops CMA census tracts with child poverty data available in 2021, 41% of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate was 10% or higher in 62% of the census tracts. The child poverty rate in Kamloops CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 4.7% to 35%. The number of poor children in Kamloops CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 20 to 220. The census tracts with the highest child poverty rates were clustered around Downtown Kamloops near the Thompson River and the North Shore near Tranquille Road.

Kelowna Census Tracts

There were 5,210 children, or 13.7% of all children in the Kelowna Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2021. Out of the 46 Kelowna CMA census tracts with child poverty data available in 2021, 52% of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate was 10% or higher in 80% of the census tracts. The child poverty rate in Kelowna CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 7.3% to 31.8%. The number of poor children in Kelowna CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 20 to 340. The highest child poverty rate census tracts were clustered near Downtown Kelowna.

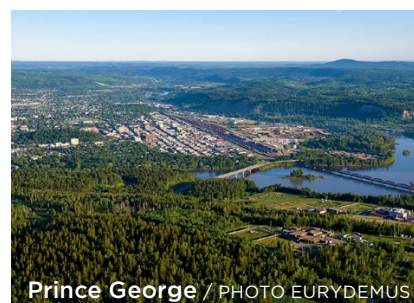
Nanaimo Census Tracts

There were 2,840 children, or 14.5% of all children in the Nanaimo Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), living in poverty in 2021. Out of the 22 Nanaimo CMA census tracts with child poverty data available in 2021, 64% of them had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate was 10% or higher in 96% of the census tracts. The child poverty rate in Nanaimo CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 9.8% to 44.4%. The number of poor children in Nanaimo CMA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 20 to 340. The highest child poverty rate census tracts were clustered near Downtown Nanaimo.

Prince George Census Tracts

There were 2,690 children, or 14.4% of all children in the Prince George Census Agglomeration (CA), living in poverty in 2021. Out of the 24 Prince George CA census tracts with child poverty data available in 2021, 46% had at least 100 children living in poverty. The child poverty rate was 10% or higher in 67% of the census tracts. The child poverty rate in Prince George CA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 7.1% to 45.5%. The number of poor children in Prince George CA census tracts in 2021 ranged from 40 to 390. The highest child poverty rate census tracts were clustered in and around Downtown Prince George.

**2,690 children were
living in poverty in
Prince George in 2021.**



Growing Income Inequality

INCOME INEQUALITY AMONG BC FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

In 2021, the richest 10% of British Columbia families with children had 26% of the total pre-tax family income pie, slightly more than the combined incomes of the poorest 50% of families at 25.8%.

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 74% of the family income pie.

BC Average After-Tax Family Income Shares — Top and Bottom Halves, 2021

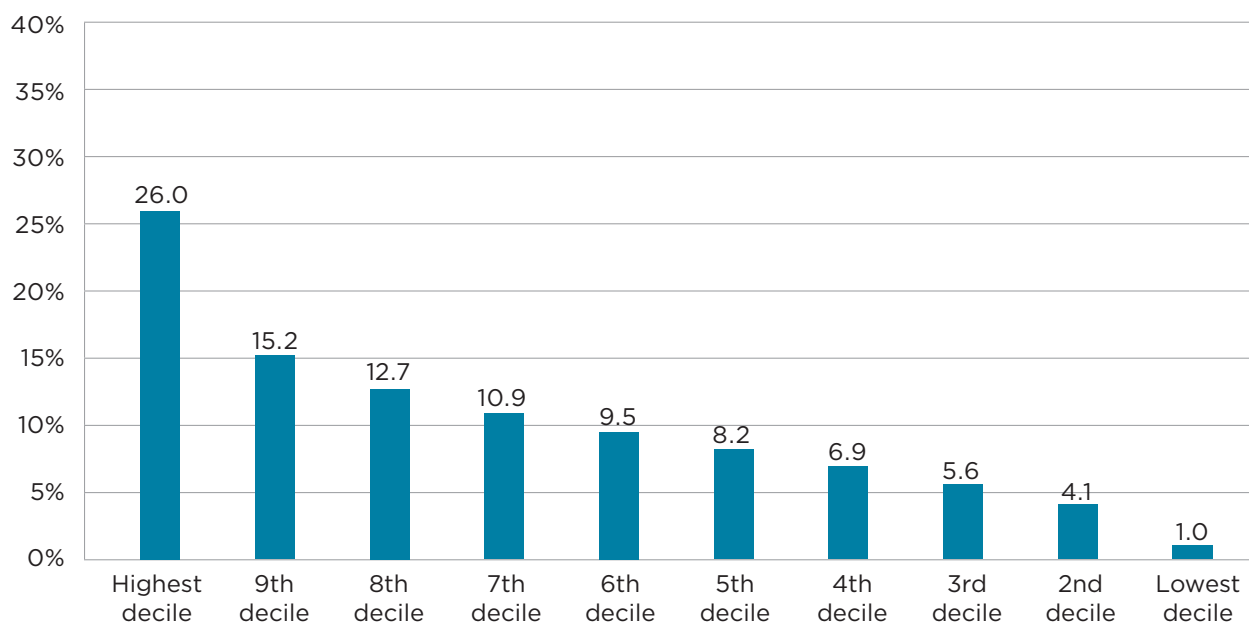
In 2021, the richest 10% of BC families with children had 26% of the total after-tax family income pie, similar to the combined incomes of the poorest 50% of families.

Richest half of BC families' share: **74%**



Poorest half of BC families' share: **26%**

BC Average After-Tax Family Income Shares, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2021 (2023)

BRITISH COLUMBIA: THE 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 2021, BC families in the highest income decile collected 25 times what the families in the lowest income decile made, based on their average after-tax annual income. This was a larger income inequality ratio than the Canadian average ratio of 16 times in 2021 and a larger disparity than any other province or territory.

The disparity for lone-parent families in BC was much higher, with the average after-tax 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 by far the highest income inequality ratio for lone-parent families of all provinces and territories, with the next highest being Ontario at 36 times. BC couple families also had the highest income inequality ratio in the country at 12 times, compared to the Canadian average of 9 times.

Gap Between Poorest and Richest 10% of BC Families with Children, in 2021 Constant Dollars

BC families with children under 18 years old, 2021	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	\$11,110	\$282,505	\$271,395	25 times
Couple families	\$25,821	\$303,988	\$278,167	12 times
Lone-parent families	\$2,427	\$130,605	\$128,178	54 times

Source: Statistics Canada, Custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2021 (2023)

In dollar terms, in 2021, the average after-tax income for the richest 10% of families with children was \$282,505, which was \$271,395 more than the average after-tax income for the poorest 10% of families with children at \$11,110. The gap for couple families was \$278,167 and \$128,178 for lone-parent families.

Average After-Tax Incomes by Decile, Families with Children in BC, in 2021 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	\$11,110	\$25,821	\$2,427	\$2,437	\$2,529
2nd decile	\$45,125	\$63,648	\$19,489	\$23,077	\$18,880
3rd decile	\$60,729	\$78,640	\$30,181	\$33,027	\$29,764
4th decile	\$75,141	\$91,287	\$37,487	\$41,667	\$36,952
5th decile	\$89,031	\$103,444	\$44,164	\$50,097	\$43,464
6th decile	\$102,987	\$116,415	\$50,518	\$59,063	\$49,554
7th decile	\$118,678	\$131,255	\$57,576	\$68,423	\$56,176
8th decile	\$137,875	\$149,629	\$66,632	\$79,773	\$64,620
9th decile	\$165,254	\$176,872	\$80,631	\$95,947	\$77,834
Highest decile	\$282,505	\$303,988	\$130,605	\$160,167	\$124,703

Source: Statistics Canada, Custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2021 (2023)



In 2021, the disparity between the average after-tax incomes of the richest and poorest 10% of BC families with children was dramatic. The families in the highest income decile collected 25 times what the families in the lowest income decile made. This was a larger disparity than the Canadian average ratio of 16.

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.

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-being⁴.

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 inequality 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 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 Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, 2009, The Equality Trust, equalitytrust.org.uk/about-inequality/spirit-level

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

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

5 Doug Saunders and Tom Cardoso, *A tale of two Canadas: Where you grew up affects your income in adulthood*, June 2017, The Globe and Mail, 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, provincial social assistance (or welfare) benefits, provincial refundable tax credits and family benefits, and other government transfers. In 2021, COVID-19 pandemic benefits were still a significant part of the income picture for many families.

The impact of government transfers to family incomes on child poverty reduction was significantly smaller in 2021 than in 2020 in Canada and in every province and territory largely due to the reduced COVID-19 benefits available in 2021.

In 2021, without government transfers to family incomes, Canada's child poverty rate would have risen to more than one out of three children (34.4%), based on the CFLIM-After Tax. Over two and a half million Canadian children (2,557,700) would have been poor without these government programs and benefits. With federal and provincial transfers, the Canadian child poverty rate was reduced to 15.6%, lifting 1,395,240 children out of poverty in 2021.

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS REDUCE CHILD POVERTY IN BC

In 2021, without government transfers to family incomes, British Columbia's child poverty rate would have risen to 29.6%, leaving 260,470 children poor that year. Government income supports for low-income families through government transfers lowered the BC child poverty rate to 14.3%, keeping 134,350 children out of poverty.

Since its inception in 2016, the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) has become the most effective government transfer for families with children. The amount of this benefit now includes the BC Family Benefit. 2021 was the first year families received the new BC Family Benefit for the full year. This combined federal and provincial benefit contributed 48.2% of the reduction of child poverty in BC for 2021, lifting 64,720 children out of poverty.

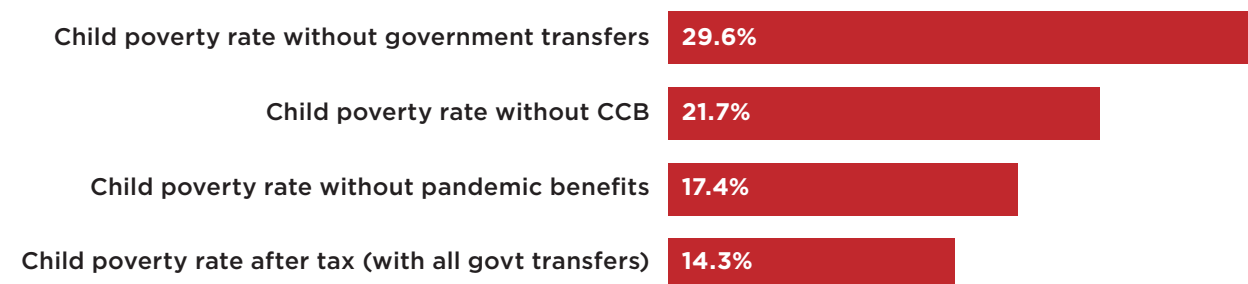
134,350 BC children
were kept out of
poverty in 2021 thanks
to government help.



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 **1,162,460**.

Although they were reduced in 2021, the addition of pandemic benefits continued to have a significant impact on child poverty rates across the country. Without any government transfers, the child poverty rate in BC would have been 29.6% in 2021. With all government transfers except for the Canada Child Benefit, the child poverty rate in BC would have been 21.7% in 2021. With all government transfers except for COVID-19 benefits, the child poverty rate in BC would have been 17.4% in 2021. With all government transfers, the child poverty rate in BC was 14.3% in 2021.

BC Child Poverty Rates (CFLIM-AT) With and Without Government Transfers, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Custom tabulation, data from T1 Family File, 2021 (2023)

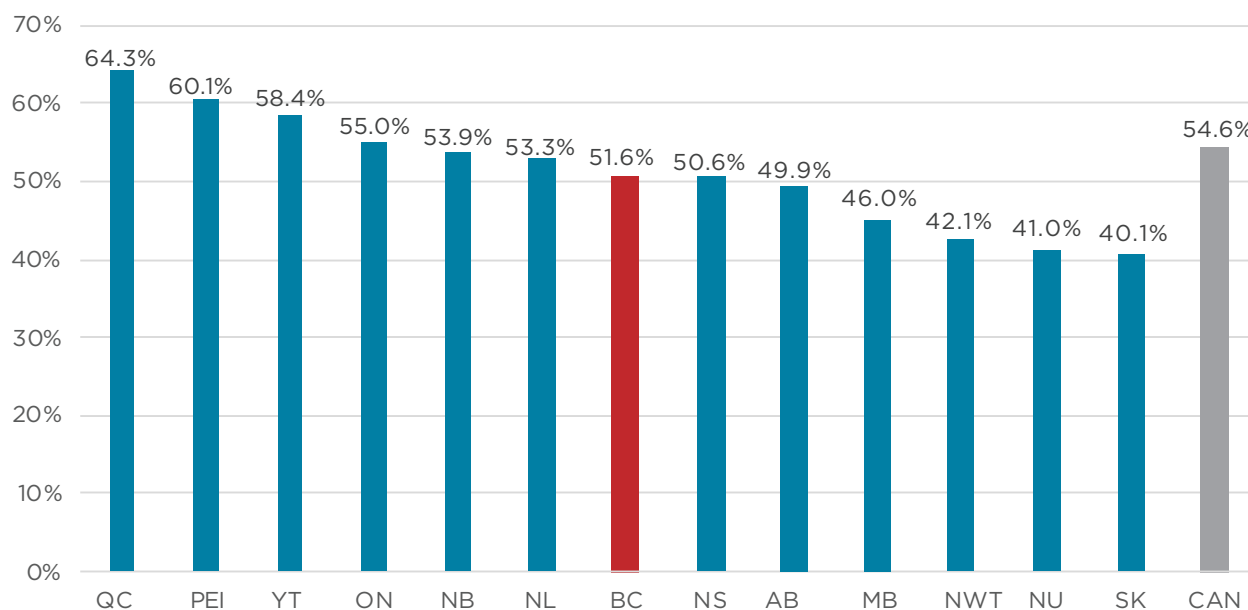


Eliminating child poverty in BC and Canada is achievable in the short term if we muster the political will to act on the lessons learned over the past many years.

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS BY PROVINCE - HOW DOES BC COMPARE?

The graph below shows the rate of child poverty reduction by government transfers in 2021 in Canada and individual provinces and territories. Thanks to government transfers, the overall Canadian child poverty rate was reduced by 54.6%, from 34.3% to 15.6%, keeping 1,395,240 children out of poverty. Support for low-income families through government transfers lowered the 2021 after-tax BC child poverty rate from 29.6% to 14.3%, a 51.6% reduction.

Child Poverty Reduction by Government Transfer Payments, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Custom tabulation, data from T1 Family File, 2021 (2023)

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.

FIRST FULL YEAR OF THE BC FAMILY BENEFIT

In 2018 First Call submitted a proposal to the BC Government to transform the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit, specifically to increase the dollar amount and to extend it from age 5 up to age 18. In the 2019 provincial budget, the new BC Child Opportunity Benefit was announced, now called the BC Family Benefit. As noted above, 2021 was the first year families received the enhanced benefit for the full 12 months. In 2021, the maximum annual benefit for a family with one child was \$1,600, and \$2,600 for a family with two children.

In 2023, the maximum annual benefit was increased to \$1,750 for a family with one child and to \$2,850 for a family with two children. A new maximum supplement of \$500 per year for lower-income single parent families was also introduced in 2023. First Call recommends this benefit continue to be indexed to keep up with inflation, among other recommendations to reduce the depth of poverty for the lowest income families.

Recommendations: What Needs to Happen

For the 27th year, the data in this First Call annual report illuminate the causes of child, youth and family poverty and policy solutions that are available to us to address these root causes. While federal and provincial income supports and gradual policy changes have helped make some progress in lowering child poverty rates in recent years, 126,120 children in this province remained in poverty in 2021. 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.

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

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.
- 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.
- P** Adjust income and disability assistance rates for **families with children with disabilities** to recognize the additional costs associated with raising children with extra support needs.
- 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, such as newcomer and Indigenous families and children in lone-parent 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 (\$27,354) to \$30,000 for the maximum annual benefit. Adjust 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 a cost-neutral fashion.
- 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.
- F** Ensure **maternity and parental leave benefits** are universally available to all parents (regardless of work status), increase the duration of leave, ensure a minimum benefit level of \$500 per week and increase the maximum benefit level to \$1,000 per week.

Area of responsibility:

F	Federal
P	Provincial
L	Local

9. **F** Make it easier for families with children to file their taxes, including expanding access to **automatic tax filing**, thus allowing them access to income supports such as the Canada Child Benefit.
10. **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 very high levels of wealth and implementing an excess profit tax focused on corporate pandemic windfalls.

TARGETED INITIATIVES FOR GROUPS OVER-REPRESENTED IN POVERTY DATA

11. **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.
12. **P** Automatically enroll all **young people transitioning out of care** in an income support program that meets their basic living costs and ensures they have safe, secure and affordable housing.
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, assessments, family respite, inclusive child care, medical care and in-home supports.
14. **F P** End the Ministry of Children and Family Development's policy of claiming federal benefits for **54.01/54.1 kinship families**, to provide equity with other family support programs. Denying these families their child's CCB makes them ineligible for a host of other federal and provincial benefits, harming children with disabilities and low-income families the most. Allow grandparents on CPP Disability who are raising their grandchildren to continue to receive the **CPP children's benefit** after they turn 65.
15. **F P** Intensify efforts to help **immigrants and refugees** adjust to life in Canada by enhancing employment assistance, removing long-standing barriers to foreign-trained professionals accessing jobs in their field, making more language training with child care available, and improving employment standards and human rights protections and enforcement.

LOWER BARRIERS AND IMPROVE LIVES THROUGH UNIVERSAL PROGRAMS

16. **F P** Continue to prioritize new **early learning and child care investments** in 2024 budgets and beyond to establish universal access to a system of high-quality, inclusive \$10aDay child care for BC children and families that has no parent fee for low-income families. Create enough new public and non-profit licensed child care spaces for all who choose them. Implement a province-wide, publicly-funded and fair ECE wage grid of at least \$30 to \$40/hour and increase funding for specialized ECE education to support inclusive practices. Ensure there are adequate resources and support for the implementation of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

17. **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.
18. **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. Curtail the financialization of rental housing by Real Estate Investment Trusts through tax reform. **Tie rent control to the unit** to remove the incentive for evictions of current tenants to raise the rent for new tenants.
19. **F P** Contribute funding to establish a universal, cost-shared, **national healthy school food program** for all K-12 students that is respectful of local contexts, connected to community and curriculum, health-promoting and sustainable.
20. **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 special education assistants and concerted action to address the serious teacher shortage.
21. **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 reducing tuition fees at public colleges, institutes and universities, and more non-repayable grants for low- and middle-income students. The long-term goal should be eliminating tuition fees in public post-secondary institutions for all Canadian students.
22. **P** Provide **free public transit** for minors ages 13-18 and free or reduced-fee transit access for low-income households.
23. **F P** Continue to work with industry to ensure all lower income families and youth have **access to technology** (both hardware and internet access) so that they are able to apply for financial assistance, learning opportunities and access other supports.
24. **F P** Introduce **universal coverage** for all Canadians for prescription drugs, dental care, 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.

ADDITIONALLY

25. **F P** The CFLIM-AT is a broad, comprehensive, and relative measure of poverty. **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**.

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 93.9% of the population in 2021.

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 2021 Thresholds for After-Tax Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM)

Number of family members	Income Threshold
Single person (no child)	\$24,397
Lone parent with one child	\$34,503
Lone parent with two children	\$42,257
Couple with one child	\$42,257
Couple with two children	\$48,794

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. The MBM calculation currently excludes people living on First Nations reserves and in the Territories.



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.

Please email us at info@firstcallbc.org

We also invite you to support our work by becoming a monthly donor to our fund. Your donations are tax deductible. Please visit give.vancouverfoundation.ca/s/firstcall

putting children and youth first

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