

Poverty

The Elimination of Poverty in British Columbia.

HOW WE'RE THINKING ABOUT THIS

Poverty is a political choice. There has long been a misguided belief that poverty is the result of an individual's failure. We know it is far more complex than that; the decisions that we have made have created systemic, entrenched, poverty in British Columbia. This is not inevitable—we can make different choices and have different outcomes. Investing well, early and fairly in all people, is the best and most cost-effective way to reduce poverty.

Our once-celebrated social safety net has been described by the Expert Panel on Basic Income as “a house that has had many renovations without an overall plan,” resulting in a system that often fails to treat people with the dignity they deserve, despite the best efforts of those working within it. Clawbacks and spousal caps often force individuals to choose between maintaining relationships or receiving assistance, leaving some to avoid relationships or remain in harmful situations due to financial dependence.

Indigenous poverty continues to be systemic and we must prioritize its elimination. This includes removing barriers for Indigenous people with disabilities, confronting systemic racism in government services, strengthening local Indigenous food systems and affordable housing and expanding Indigenous-specific harm reduction and treatment supports.

A failure to invest in our social systems comes at a significant cost to the province—impacting our health system, child welfare system and carceral system. Estimates put this cost at between 3.4% to 4.7% of GDP, equating to \$13.4 billion to \$18.6 billion annually. Poverty not only strains these systems but can also impair the cognitive development of children, affecting their mental growth and future potential.

Conversely, investing in people yields substantial benefits. It boosts local businesses, improves health and education outcomes, reduces crime, and enhances social cohesion. By prioritizing investment in our communities, we can drive positive economic and social impacts while fostering a healthier, more equitable society.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

In British Columbia, one in seven children lives in poverty—and the situation is even more dire on First Nations reserves, where the child poverty rate reaches 31%. Across Canada, 16.5% of disabled individuals live in poverty, and 41% of those living in poverty are disabled.

The most recent provincial figures from 2021 showed that 8.8% of British Columbians were living in poverty. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that this number has worsened significantly since then.

Current social assistance rates trap people in poverty. The provincial monthly Disability Assistance Payment stands at \$1,483.50, while the poverty line is \$2,322 in Vancouver and \$2,249 in cities like Victoria and Kelowna—leaving a monthly gap of almost \$900.

Moreover, 57.8% of homeless youth in Canada have previously been involved with the child welfare system. A young person leaving youth protection is nearly 200 times more likely to experience homelessness than a young person who did not use these services.

POLICIES FOR ANNOUNCEMENT

We will commit to raising social and disability assistance rates to above the poverty line, ensuring that all individuals receive adequate support for their needs.

- Raise social assistance rates to ensure that individuals can meet their basic living expenses and live above the poverty line.
- Increase disability assistance rates to provide adequate support for individuals with disabilities, ensuring they can thrive in their communities.

We will increase assistance rates to the following:

Social assistance

	Current	New
Single person	\$1,060	\$2,400
Person and a spouse and no children	\$1,650	\$3,450
Single parent with one child	\$1,405	\$2,900
Person and a spouse and one child	\$1,845	\$3,450

Disability Assistance

	Current	New
Single person	\$1,483.50	\$2,400
Person and a spouse and no children	\$2,548.50	\$3,450
Single parent with one child	\$1,828.50	\$2,900
Person and a spouse and one child	\$2,268.50	\$3,450

British Columbia currently has 170,200 individuals and families on social or disability assistance. A \$917 per month increase would bring the cost of this to \$1.87billion in the first year.

We will treat individuals on social and disability assistance with dignity and respect, while simplifying access to necessary support.

- Remove clawbacks, including the spousal cap, to ensure individuals receive the full support they need.
- Create low-barrier access to assistance, eliminating intrusive checks that discourage individuals from seeking help.
- Ensure a year of guaranteed assistance upon first receipt, allowing individuals to assess their needs without the burden of constant checks and reporting.
- Reduce regular reporting requirements after the first year to ease the administrative burden on recipients.
- Raise the food crisis grant from \$40 per month to \$200 per month to better support individuals facing food insecurity.

We will develop targeted poverty reduction strategies that address the specific needs of vulnerable populations, particularly Indigenous communities.

- Develop a poverty reduction plan tailored to Indigenous individuals, families, and Nations, addressing the systemic impacts of genocide and dispossession.
- Fund Indigenous-specific services in social service areas, including reintegration programs for incarcerated Indigenous women, addiction support, and childcare.
- Incorporate human rights, Indigenous rights, and gender-based analysis into all poverty reduction strategies, policies, and decision-making processes.
- Invest in programs for specific groups such as youth aging out of care, women fleeing violence, people with disabilities, and those who are long-term unemployed.

We will reduce homelessness by increasing affordable housing availability and providing comprehensive support services.

- Expand the availability of deeply affordable housing to prevent inflows into homelessness and mitigate adverse childhood experiences.
- Offer direct support for individuals leaving hospitals, medical care, and prisons for at least six months to facilitate successful transitions.
- Provide housing and wrap-around support in every township in British Columbia to reduce the risk of newly homeless individuals transitioning to long-term homelessness based on the proven ‘the Village’ model from Duncan.
- Establish second-stage housing for victims of intimate partner violence, residential school survivors, and individuals exiting MCFD care, complete with counseling and legal aid.
- Allocate funds to First Nations to create housing that meets the specific needs of their communities.
- Safeguard affordable rental housing and ensure access to necessary wrap-around supports to help individuals maintain stable living conditions.

We will reduce bureaucratic barriers for non-profit service providers, ensuring they can effectively support vulnerable populations.

- Reduce bureaucratic requirements for trusted non-profit service providers, ensuring their operational efficiency.
- Guarantee annual funding for non-profits, limiting the need to compete for grant funding, thus ensuring stability.
- Offer adequate, multi-year operational funding to non-profits with a proven track record of delivering public good.

