

TogetherBC

British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy





This report was produced
on the territory of the
Lekwungen-speaking
peoples, the Songhees
and Esquimalt Nations.

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Message from the Minister



I am very pleased to introduce TogetherBC, B.C.'s first Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy reflects our government's commitment to reducing poverty and making life more affordable for British Columbians. TogetherBC is the beginning, not the end, of our work. It includes policy initiatives and investments designed to lift people up, break the cycle of poverty and build a better B.C. for everyone.

There are half a million people in B.C. living in poverty today. When I traveled around the province last year, listening to people share their experiences, it became clear how complex and deeply entrenched a problem this has become, and how urgently a poverty reduction plan is needed.

It's not just about a lack of financial resources. It's about not having the same opportunities as other people. It's about feeling invisible, diminished and devalued by society. It's about being forced to make impossible choices, like whether to pay rent or buy food. It's about the constant struggle that keeps people trapped, striving for a life that, too often, they can't quite reach.

Whether it is people with disabilities, single mothers escaping violence, the chronically underemployed looking for more stability and security, or the thousands of others struggling with poverty, I hear every day from people who have been left behind and are looking for better opportunities and better lives.

TogetherBC aims to make life more affordable for people struggling to get by, through reducing costs and increasing incomes. We're also focusing on creating opportunities for people, by providing people with the supports they need to help break the cycle of poverty. We're working toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, by confronting racism and addressing the continuing legacy of harmful policies.

Together, we can make real progress on poverty reduction and create a more socially inclusive province. We can achieve the goals of our legislation, make people's lives better and create the opportunity for people to build a more prosperous future for themselves and their children. This is a commitment not just of my ministry, but our entire government.

We look forward to the federal government, local governments, the business community, labour groups, faith organizations, advocates and the broader community working with us as critical partners in this work. The way we have dealt with poverty in the past is not effective. We must find a new way forward and this strategy is where we begin. Together we can make a real difference in the lives of people, by halting growing inequality, and tackling discrimination that hurts people and holds them back.

After a decade and a half of government ignoring and underfunding social priorities, there are no quick fixes. There is much work to do. TogetherBC is an important step, but it's just the beginning. Together, we can build on this strategy, and build a better, more equal province, where no one is left behind.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Shane Simpson

Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

Message from the Parliamentary Secretary



Since I was appointed Parliamentary Secretary for Poverty Reduction, I've been working closely with the Minister to develop this strategy. After so many years of inaction, we knew how great the need is, and how urgent.

That's why our government took immediate action on some of the most pressing affordability issues facing people in the province — housing, child care, and unfair taxes and fees that targeted people who were struggling — and to reduce the depth of poverty for those most in need — raising rates for people on income and disability assistance, introducing a new transportation supplement for people with disabilities, and increasing earnings exemptions for people on assistance.

These actions are the bedrock of TogetherBC. They were designed from the start to be part of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. We knew that these actions were needed — and we also knew they were not enough without further action.

To develop the rest of the strategy, we needed to hear from people with lived experience of poverty, service providers, businesses, unions, First Nations leaders, and Indigenous communities. Over the last year and a half, I've engaged in many conversations with people living in poverty and their friends, families and advocates.

As co-chair of the Minister's Advisory Forum on Poverty Reduction, I worked with Forum members to help shape the consultation process, provide advice on the legislation, and contribute to the content of the strategy itself. People shared with us their vision for a better B.C., one where we work together to take care of each other, and make our province the best it can be. They asked for a poverty reduction strategy that takes a larger view of the ways that government supports people and takes steps to make services more accessible and life more affordable for everyone in British Columbia.

TogetherBC recognizes how we all benefit from stronger connections between people and communities. It takes bold steps to support families, and it gives extra supports to those who need it most. It also recognizes the intersectional nature of poverty and brings together actions across government that will make our province more fair, welcoming and inclusive for everyone.

Sincerely,

Mable Elmore

Parliamentary Secretary for Poverty Reduction



Executive Summary

British Columbia's first ever poverty reduction strategy, TogetherBC, recognizes the power of collective action to make life better for people. It honours the commitment of British Columbians who, for years, have been advocating for government to take action on a challenge that, at its core, is solvable.

StatsCanada information shows that in 2016, there were 557,000 people in British Columbia living in poverty, 99,000 of them children. Reducing these numbers by bringing people out of poverty will take time. It will take effort. But it can be done.

This strategy is guided by the extensive engagement undertaken with British Columbians in which thousands of people from throughout our province participated. We listened to their concerns and ideas. And from all the input, discussion and debate came a strategy that will contribute to a more diverse, equitable and prosperous province.

TogetherBC represents a starting point for delivering on the targets introduced in 2018's **Poverty Reduction Strategy Act**: a 25% reduction in B.C.'s overall poverty rate and a 50% reduction in the child poverty rate by 2024.

These are ambitious goals that can only be reached through committed partnership — between governments, across communities, and with the people whose voices have been ignored for too long. The good news is that this commitment is in place, and the work has already begun.

This strategy brings together solutions to poverty from across government and across society. This is a complex challenge requiring solutions from all levels of government, First Nations, businesses, community organizations and individuals.

TogetherBC encompasses work that our government began in fall 2017. Some of the initiatives in this strategy are completed, others are well underway, and more were introduced as part of Budget 2019.

The strategy includes an overhaul of unfair and unhelpful social assistance policies left in place by the previous government. It includes the two increases we have made to assistance rates in 20 months, and much-needed improvements to services that people rely on. It also addresses barriers that hold people back, like low wages, poor protections for workers, and the cost and accessibility of education and training.

TogetherBC has a strong focus on tackling discrimination and stigma, and bringing down unfair barriers that hold people back. This includes the restoration of the B.C. Human Rights Commission, the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the application of Gender Based Analysis Plus to decisions made by government.

All of these actions are grounded in a belief that true prosperity and dignity for all is possible. We **can** afford to take care of everyone in B.C. It's ambitious. It's difficult. And it will take time. But together, we **can** make it happen. We can lift each other up, and break the cycle of poverty. We can build a better British Columbia for everyone.



The Depth and Breadth of Poverty

For too long, decisions in British Columbia were made for those at the top, instead of for everyone — decisions that left too many people behind.

Until now, British Columbia has been the only province in Canada without a poverty reduction strategy. The result of this failure to act is high poverty rates that are greatly out of step with the wealth and prosperity of our province.

In fall 2018, government passed the **Poverty Reduction Strategy Act**, which requires us to develop a strategy to reduce and prevent poverty in British Columbia, and to release it to the public before March 31, 2019. This strategy will put us on the path to reducing the poverty rate for 2024 by at least 25% among everyone in the province, and by at least 50% among children.

In order to address the breadth and depth of poverty, we sought solutions from across government. In housing, health care, finance and other ministries, policies and initiatives were designed to bring down barriers, improve lives, and give people the tools they need break the cycle of poverty for themselves and their families.

Many of the actions outlined in TogetherBC, like increasing the minimum wage and putting the brakes on allowable rent increases, were long overdue. Others, like embarking on an ambitious strategy to build affordable homes, moving towards a universal child care system and eliminating interest on B.C. student loans, represent a foundational new approach to bringing down barriers and creating opportunity. As a whole, these initiatives reflect government's approach to making life better and more affordable for everyone in B.C., while providing enhanced benefits and supports to people living in poverty.

The partnerships that we've pursued on housing, child care and reconciliation show how much more we can achieve when we work together to build a better British Columbia. When it comes to complex issues like poverty, reconciliation and the housing crisis, no single sector can tackle these challenges alone. Over the next five years, we will expand on our work to date and pursue further partnerships, initiatives and investments to make life better for people in B.C.

B.C. IN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

The starting point for developing our poverty reduction strategy was statistical. And the numbers were clear.

As of 2016, there were more than 557,000 British Columbians living below the poverty line. Here's what these numbers mean:

- B.C. has one of the highest rates of poverty in the country and has had for decades. We have the second highest overall poverty rate in Canada.
- About 40% of people living below the poverty line are working.
- Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty.
- B.C. has one of the highest child poverty rates in the country, with approximately 99,000 children living in poverty in B.C.
- Children who live in single parent families are more than three times more likely to live in poverty than children in two parent families.

Poverty reduction is about more than numbers: it's about people. While our targets are expressed as statistics, an effective poverty reduction strategy needs to be rooted in empathy, understanding and inclusion.

WHAT WE HEARD

British Columbians want to live in an inclusive province, where diversity is valued and people are treated fairly. They want to see their family, friends and neighbours prosper and succeed. This is the message and these were the values that we heard expressed during poverty reduction consultations — face-to-face and online — held around the province in 2017 and 2018.

Thousands of people joined the conversation and shared their ideas, personal experiences and stories of struggles and successes. We heard clearly the need to expand opportunities for more people, to improve affordability and to invest further in the services and supports that allow British Columbians to reach their potential.

The formal engagement took place between Oct. 30, 2017, and March 31, 2018. We connected with more than 8,500 people, including several thousand individuals living in poverty, and their friends, families and advocates. We also heard from community organizations, service providers, local governments, Indigenous peoples, businesses, industry associations and unions. All shared their experiences of poverty and their ideas of how to tackle it.

To make sure that people with lived experience were able to participate, government made special efforts to ensure venues were accessible, people could afford to get to them, and that they could access child care and food on-site. In total, 28 public meetings were held in communities around the province, reaching people of all backgrounds and experiences.

Recognizing that not everyone would be able or comfortable sharing their experiences at a general public meeting, government also hosted a website where people could contribute their thoughts, sponsored 100 small-group discussions for community organizations, and accepted written submissions about poverty reduction.

To further our efforts toward reconciliation and to make sure the strategy reflected Indigenous peoples' needs and priorities, government took extra steps to directly connect with Indigenous communities. To make sure these perspectives were heard, the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction met with the First Nations Leadership Council and provided funds to facilitate engagement in rural and remote Indigenous communities.

Government also partnered with Métis Nation BC, which held seven regional meetings. The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres helped government reach urban Indigenous peoples with a further 27 meetings around the province. Finally, the First Nations Health Council hosted a roundtable with the Minister.

Evidence gathered from all these sessions and consultations can be found in the ***What We Heard About Poverty in B.C.*** report. This report, released in summer 2018, was critical to the development of TogetherBC and will continue to guide government as we take further actions to address poverty.

KEY PRIORITIES

While people living in poverty are as diverse as the province itself, people identified a number of areas where supports and investments could make a real difference in their lives. While there are still gaps yet to be addressed, these priority areas will continue to inform our efforts to reduce poverty.

- **Housing and Homelessness:** Overwhelmingly, the most constant and pressing issue is the lack of affordable housing, which has been identified by families, businesses, local government, Indigenous leaders and many others.

- **Supports for Children and Families:** Specifically, the lack and cost of child care has historically prevented many parents, particularly single mothers, from getting and keeping a full-time job.
- **Financial Security and Income Supports:** Government financial support services — from RAP, SAFER and other rental assistance programs to income and disability assistance rates — have historically not kept pace with B.C.'s cost of living.
- **Mental Health and Addictions Services:** No matter the community, people reported the same problems — services are hard to access, wait lists too long, and supports too late in coming.
- **Food Security:** People are more and more concerned about how the lack of quality, healthy and affordable food makes their lives harder and puts their family's health at risk.
- **Access to Health Care:** Too many people simply can't afford the medicine they need, a trip to the dentist, or other medical supplies and services that are outside MSP coverage — and even more so in remote and Indigenous communities.
- **Education and Training:** While education is frequently cited as a key to breaking the cycle of poverty, its cost puts it out of reach for too many families and young people living in poverty.
- **Employment and Jobs:** Many people spoke of being trapped in precarious employment, with low wages and unpredictable hours — making it virtually impossible to adequately support their families.
- **Access to Services:** There is an ongoing need identified for public services to modernize — in terms of meeting the diversity of B.C.'s population, improving both online and face-to-face access, and improving integration of services — so that B.C.'s most vulnerable people can better take advantage of services the Province provides.
- **Safe, Affordable Transportation:** For work, family and recreational purposes, people need reliable and affordable transportation options, particularly as they are forced to move further out of urban centres due to the high cost of housing.

- **Access to Justice:** Unresolved legal problems can cause serious and sustained financial and emotional issues for people living in poverty, and too often B.C.'s most vulnerable do not have access to the justice services that protect their safety and rights.
- **Discrimination and Stigma:** Living in poverty is challenging enough without being judged for it. Discrimination and stigma are significant barriers preventing people from accessing opportunity and breaking the cycle of poverty.

These 12 key priorities serve as a roadmap for this strategy and the significant actions and investments — past and future — this government is taking to lift more people out of poverty. They are being distilled into six priority action areas government is focusing on in the first phase of TogetherBC.

Creating a Strong Foundation

Poverty doesn't affect all people equally. Indigenous peoples, transgender people, people of colour, refugees, and people with disabilities all face more barriers and higher rates of poverty. Poverty is an intersectional problem.

To move forward together, our province needs to include everyone. TogetherBC includes a range of cross-government efforts to make provincial services and policies more inclusive, accessible and culturally safe.

Reconciliation

In keeping with government's commitment to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Province undertook a direct engagement with Indigenous communities during the poverty reduction consultation. In appointing members to the Minister's Advisory Forum on Poverty Reduction, the B.C. government recognized the need for strong Indigenous representation and appointed six members who represent Indigenous organizations and First Nations.

The **Poverty Reduction Strategy Act** set out a number of requirements meant to reflect government's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, the TRC Calls to Action, and the UN Declaration. The B.C. government will continue to work collaboratively with Indigenous leaders and organizations to meet these requirements, including ongoing engagement with the Indigenous members of the Poverty Reduction Advisory Forum. These members will continue to advise government as the Province moves forward with the poverty reduction strategy.

As work continues, government is mindful of incorporating Indigenous perspectives into all services and supports offered by the Province, ensuring they are welcoming, culturally safe, and non-discriminatory. This work is part of government's recognition that Indigenous peoples have unique constitutionally protected rights, interests and circumstances that must be considered in the implementation of all government policies, including those contained in this poverty reduction strategy.

Gender-Based Analysis

Understanding the needs of diverse groups is critical to developing solutions to poverty that work for everyone.

As part of making government work better for everyone, Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is being used across government to assess how diverse groups will be impacted by policies, programs and budgets.

This lens, which goes beyond gender to consider factors like Indigeneity, ethnicity, religion, LGBTQ2S, income, geography, age and ability, was embedded in the ***Poverty Reduction Strategy Act***.

GBA+ will continue to be applied across government's poverty reduction efforts to ensure that they address systemic barriers and meet the needs of groups at particular risk of poverty.

BC Human Rights Commission

Bringing back the BC Human Rights Commission will help reduce poverty and improve inclusion by identifying ways to tackle racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and other forms of discrimination and violence that make life more difficult for people from marginalized communities.

LEGISLATION AND TARGETS

The ***Poverty Reduction Strategy Act*** requires government to deliver a strategy that will reduce the overall poverty rate by at least 25% and for children by 50% over five years, using a 2016 baseline.

To better co-ordinate action across governments, the new law requires the Province to measure the poverty rate using the Market Basket Measure published by Statistics Canada, also known as "Canada's Official Poverty Line."

The law also requires the strategy to meet a number of other requirements. For example, it must specifically address reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

It also has to consider the unique needs of children, youth, women and persons of all genders, people living with disabilities, people living in rural and remote communities, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ2S+ people, Indigenous peoples, seniors, people making low incomes, people fleeing from abuse, people living with mental illness and addiction and people of colour.

In addition to reducing poverty, the strategy is required to address the depth of poverty, and include actions aimed at making life a little easier for people who are struggling today. It must also address values at the heart of poverty reduction, including affordability, social inclusion and opportunity.

The five-year targets in legislation were chosen to be bold and achievable. Much more will need to be done to fully address both the breadth and depth of poverty in British Columbia.

The actions outlined in this strategy should be understood and seen as the beginning, not the end, of government's commitment to reduce poverty and create opportunity for everyone in B.C.

The legislation also sets out government's accountability to the people of B.C., through an independent advisory committee, and annual progress reports that will be released Oct. 1 of each year, starting in 2020.

The strategy is a living document that will continue to evolve in consultation with stakeholders and following the advice of our advisory committee, as we complete our initial, five-year targets and develop the next phase beyond them.

THE STRATEGY'S FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Any effort to reduce poverty has to address the ways that people are held back from opportunity, excluded from their communities and squeezed by unaffordability.

Our efforts also need to address the cycle of poverty: once people are in poverty how do they get out? That fundamental question is at the heart of our strategy, and the four principles on which it is built.

The following four principles focus the strategy on lifting people up and out of poverty and creating an environment that allows people to learn, work, support their family and create the future they want for themselves and their kids.

Affordability

Poverty and a lack of affordability go hand in hand. When bills go up, people feel poorer. When family budgets are squeezed, people can't afford to save money for emergencies. Even small setbacks can send people into a spiral of increasing hardship.

For people living in poverty, financial security starts with addressing affordability. It's about increasing access to income, through better paying jobs, higher social assistance rates, and the B.C. Child Opportunity Benefit. And it's about reducing the cost of the goods and services we rely on.

Many actions to improve affordability, like removing tolls from all B.C. bridges and cutting MSP premiums in half, are already putting money back in the pockets of families. Others are well underway, with affordable homes under construction, new child care spaces on the way, and the Fair Wages Commission and Basic Income Study moving us towards more financial security in British Columbia.

Opportunity

British Columbia has the lowest unemployment rate in the country, yet the province still has a high rate of poverty. This disconnect reflects a deficit in regional economic development, unfair wages and a backlog of unmet need for access to basic education and skills training.

Breaking the cycle of poverty means ensuring that people living in poverty — and their children and grandchildren — have access to opportunity. That means giving people access to education and skills training so they can reach their potential. And it means making sure that workers of all kinds in B.C. have fair wages and fair working conditions, so they can get ahead, not just get by.

Too many people are denied opportunity because of physical, social, financial, and structural barriers. By tackling these barriers so that everyone has a chance to succeed, we can increase access to opportunity and lift people out of poverty.

Reconciliation

Government policies that worked to suppress Indigenous culture, language, economies, and systems of governance have had lasting effects on the health, well-being, and wealth of Indigenous peoples in B.C. Despite these inequities, Indigenous communities remain strong and resilient.

The Province is working in partnership with Indigenous peoples to help end the ongoing systemic racism, discrimination and displacement Indigenous peoples have experienced for generations — and continue to experience today — which are barriers to opportunity and economic security that need to be faced collectively.

Addressing the ongoing symptoms of colonialism is fundamental to this poverty reduction strategy. Taking action to address this systemic social and economic injustice is also an important part of government's active commitment to pursue reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Social Inclusion

Poverty isn't just about money. It is also about belonging. People living in poverty told us they feel cut off from their communities. They told us that discrimination and stigma make it harder for them to access services, get jobs and find homes.

Discriminatory attitudes about people experiencing poverty are commonly expressed in B.C., hurting people with low incomes, and leaving them feeling unwelcome.

TogetherBC starts to address these attitudes and barriers. It also recognizes our inherent need to be part of a community, and takes steps to embrace our diversity and create spaces where all are welcome. Inclusion is fundamental to this work — and it starts with creating a culture where people who find themselves in need of government services feel welcome and supported.



A Cross-Government Poverty Reduction Strategy

TogetherBC formalizes ongoing cross-government efforts that have been underway since fall of 2017. This strategy brings together actions being taken across government, combines them with new initiatives announced in Budget 2019, and leverages federal contributions and programs.

With this holistic, co-ordinated, approach, TogetherBC meets the objectives and requirements set out in the **Poverty Reduction Strategy Act** — and illustrates a path to reaching our 2024 poverty reduction targets and beyond.

To make sure we stay on track and meet our commitments to reduce poverty, the new law requires government to review progress towards meeting our 2024 targets each year after introducing the strategy, starting in 2020. This ongoing review process means that government will be continuing to examine and develop actions and policies to address poverty in B.C.

BUILDING OUT FROM A STRONG CORE

Given the extent of poverty in B.C. and its associated history of government inaction, TogetherBC is built on a core of ambitious, transformational policies that will have a substantive and lasting impact.

To that end, the B.C. government moved forward with a strategy containing five foundational elements that will be fully implemented prior to 2024:

1. The new B.C. Child Opportunity Benefit;
2. Increases to the minimum wage;
3. ChildCareBC — making child care more available and affordable;
4. Income assistance and disability assistance rate increases; and
5. Leveraging federal initiatives and supports.

These five elements will combine to lift the greatest number of people out of poverty.

TogetherBC also recognizes and incorporates the benefits being generated by service improvements introduced since this government took office in July 2017. These are grouped into six priority action areas:

1. More affordable housing for more people;
2. Supporting families, children and youth;
3. Expanding access to education and training;
4. More opportunities, more jobs;
5. Improving income supports; and
6. Investing in social inclusion.

FIVE FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS

The impact of these five foundational elements on our overall targets is significant. When fully implemented, the combined effect of these investments and actions will lift tens of thousands of families out of poverty and get us approximately two-thirds of the way to our targets.

These initiatives will also reduce the depth of poverty, bringing the incomes of people who remain in poverty much closer to the poverty line.

In 2016, the average person living in poverty had an income that was only 60.5% of the Canada Poverty Line.

In 2017, this improved and rose to 65% of the poverty line. With further investments included in TogetherBC, we anticipate the average person living in poverty will reach an income that is 75% of the poverty line.

These income improvements will make lives better today, and make it easier for us to help even more people out of poverty as we reach our five-year targets and move beyond them.

1. B.C. Child Opportunity Benefit

Families with children face higher costs that can make it harder to make ends meet. To give these families and their kids extra support, Budget 2019 introduced a new B.C. Child Opportunity Benefit.

When the benefit takes effect, families with one child will receive up to \$1,600 per year, those with two children will receive up to \$2,600, and those with three children will receive up to \$3,400 a year. The previous early childhood tax benefit was only available for children up to the age of six. The new benefit recognizes that families with kids face costs over the long term by extending supports to children up to age of 18.

Once this new benefit is in place, a family will receive as much as \$28,800 from when the baby is born until adulthood. For a family with two children, support can surpass \$40,000.

Overall Benefit: 290,000 families.

Impact on Poverty: With the highest benefits going to the families most in need, the B.C. Child Opportunity Benefit will lift thousands of children and their families out of poverty.

2. Increasing and Harmonizing British Columbia's Minimum Wage

Wages that are too low to support people and support families keep people trapped in poverty. As part of the Confidence and Supply Agreement with the B.C. Green Caucus, we established the Fair Wages Commission in October 2017 to independently advise government on how to raise minimum wages to be in line with the needs of people, in a way that is regular, measured and predictable.

The Commission offered recommendations on how to establish a path to a \$15-an-hour minimum wage in British Columbia in a way that is swift for workers and fair for businesses. The B.C. government acted on the Commission's recommendations by:

- Increasing the minimum wage annually until it reaches \$15.20 by 2021;
- Harmonizing minimum wage rates for people working in restaurants, bars and other service industries, consistent with the Commission's overall path; and
- Increasing the minimum wage for farm workers paid by piece rate by 11.5% (Jan. 1, 2019), consistent with the increase to the general minimum wage.

The path-to-\$15 will benefit many British Columbians but particularly people in low-paying jobs and who live below the poverty line.

The Commission has also been asked to advise the government on ways to begin to address the discrepancy between the minimum wage and a living wage in our province. Government is looking forward to receiving these recommendations, and we expect they will guide future actions taken to make sure every British Columbian gets a fair wage, and will inform our ongoing work on poverty reduction.

Overall Benefit: This will benefit more than 400,000 people, including more than 150,000 living below the poverty line.

Impact on Poverty: As many as 20,000 people could be lifted out of poverty through the minimum wage increases, particularly when combined with other benefits.

3. ChildCareBC: Making Child Care More Available and Affordable

In Budget 2018, the B.C. government unveiled its new ChildCareBC plan, investing \$1 billion over three years to bring down the costs of child care for more families and create new licensed child care spaces throughout the province.

ChildCareBC is proving to be transformational for many families and is particularly critical in bringing down costs and creating opportunities for families living in poverty. It delivers in three crucial areas:

The Affordable Child Care Benefit

This new benefit is available to families of children in licensed child care facilities. Families making up to \$45,000 a year can receive the full benefit for each child, up to the full cost of child care. The Affordable Child Care Benefit works in tandem with the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative to make licensed child care more affordable for families of all incomes in B.C.

The new benefit is already helping thousands of B.C. families. Some families are saving as much as \$15,000 a year through this program.

Child Care Fee Reduction

The Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative was introduced by government in spring 2018. It lowers the cost of licensed child care for parents each month. Because these fee reductions are delivered through child care providers who opt in to the program, parents do not need to apply to receive funding.

Between this initiative and the Affordable Child Care Benefit, some families can save more than \$19,000 annually.

Creating New Licensed Child Care Spaces

Licensed child care is the gold standard of care for our kids. Unfortunately, for too long, investments in child care spaces didn't keep up with demand.

To give parents greater peace of mind while they pursue opportunity, and to help more families qualify for more child care savings through the Affordable Child Care Benefit and the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, government is building 22,000 new child care spaces in B.C. through space-creation initiatives like the Childcare BC New Spaces Fund.

Overall Benefit: 80,000 families

Impact on Poverty: Nearly 27,000 families with incomes under \$45,000 will eventually pay little or nothing for child care, contributing to both the overall and child poverty reduction targets.

4. Income Assistance and Disability Assistance Rate Increases

Disability and income assistance are important for many British Columbians. Yet the previous government froze income assistance rates at \$610 for a decade.

That's why this government has taken action to increase assistance rates, ensure faster access for people in need, and make sure people on assistance are treated more fairly.

Key improvements include:

- **Increasing Rates:** British Columbia has seen two increases to income assistance and disability assistance rates: \$100 per month per case in October 2017; and \$50 for individuals and single parent families and \$100 for couples and two-parent families in Budget 2019.
- **Reducing Access Times:** In 2012, the government of the day began requiring a five-week work search period before people could access income assistance. To reduce the financial stress on people when they're at a vulnerable time, we will reduce that work-search period to three weeks.

- **Expanding Earning Exemptions:** Government raised earnings exemptions for people on disability assistance by \$2,400 a year and for people on income assistance by \$200 a month on Oct. 1, 2017. This means someone on disability assistance can earn \$12,000 a year, people on income assistance can earn \$400 a month and those with children can now earn up to \$600 per month, with no financial implications.
- **Protecting Youth:** Requirements that individuals be financially independent for two years before accessing income assistance caused incredible hardship to the most vulnerable people in the province, forcing young people on to the streets, and making it difficult for people in deep need to access income supports. As part of making assistance more compassionate and effective, we are eliminating the two-year independence rule.
- **Improving Access to Transportation:** Recognizing the important role that transportation plays in the lives of people living with disabilities, government brought in a transportation supplement for people on disability assistance. This supplement can be used to purchase a BC Bus Pass and used on any local public transportation network or used towards other transportation needs.

Overall Benefit: 195,000 people, almost all of whom are living below the poverty line.

Impact on Poverty: The rate increases alone will help address the depth of poverty. Combined with other benefits, and access to new opportunities, these policy changes will help many people over the poverty line.

5. Leveraging Federal Initiatives and Supports

There is no question that federal initiatives are essential to meeting our provincial targets. Three specific programs are critical to our path forward:

A. Canada Workers Benefit

The Canada Workers Benefit (CWB), an enhancement to the former Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB), is a refundable tax credit that supplements the earnings of low-income workers and improves work incentives for low-income Canadians. Coming into effect for the 2019 tax year, the CWB is equal to 26% of each dollar of employment income over \$3,000, to a maximum credit of \$1,355 for single individuals without children and \$2,335 for families (couples and single parents).

The annual income threshold is \$12,820 for a single person without children and \$17,025 for families with children. After this, benefits are gradually reduced (by 12% of net income) until the benefit is eliminated. This benefit will be indexed to inflation after the 2019 tax year.

B. Canada Child Benefit

The federal government introduced the Canada Child Benefit in 2016 to give families more money each month and help them with the cost of raising kids. The Canada Child Benefit is tax-free and targeted to those who need it most.

The Canada Child Benefit is indexed to keep pace with the cost of living. The maximum annual benefit for July 2018 to June 2019 increased to \$6,496 for each child under age 6 and to \$5,481 for each child between the ages of 6 and 17. The amount starts to get reduced once the family's net income is more than \$30,450.

C. Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) Top Up

The Guaranteed Income Supplement top up was increased in July 2016 to support the most vulnerable seniors; those seniors who rely almost exclusively on old-age security (OAS) and GIS benefits.

Single seniors with an annual income (other than OAS and GIS benefits) of about \$4,600 or less will receive the full increase of \$947 from July 2016, according to the budget. Above this income threshold, the amount of the increased benefit will gradually decline and will be completely phased out at an income level of about \$8,400.

Overall Benefit: More than one million people will be helped through these programs.

Impact on Poverty: The federal measures are estimated to lift 20,000 children and their families out of poverty in B.C.

Six Priority Action Areas

Poverty is a province-wide issue requiring a government-wide approach that supports people in their homes, their workplaces and their communities.

British Columbians want to live in a province where we lift people up instead of pushing them down, and where we work together to make things better for everyone, rather than leaving people to fend for themselves.

After so many years when so little was done to address poverty in B.C., solutions are not easily put in place and come at significant cost.

The initiatives in TogetherBC include strategic new investments, renewed supports and programs, and improved and modernized approaches to delivering supports for people.

Together, these solutions represent an ambitious new approach to building a province that is better for everyone — while also focusing on tangible outcomes that improve the lives of those most in need.

Moving out from its core, TogetherBC draws from the expanse of ministry initiatives introduced since July 2017 as it moves towards fulfilling the 2024 goals.

In ways large and small, TogetherBC is a whole-of-government effort that directs ministries to contribute to poverty solutions, work towards our targets, and make life better for all British Columbians.

Within this strategy's six priority action areas, key initiatives are summarized below. For additional details on any of these programs and services, please search for them at gov.bc.ca.

1. MAKING HOUSING MORE AFFORDABLE

A. Support for Renters

Restricting Rent Increases

In September 2018, government cut rent increases by 2%, limiting them to the rate of inflation. This provides greater financial security for renters and saves them hundreds of dollars a year.

Ending Geographic Rent Increases

Too many renters were faced with skyrocketing rent increases when units in their neighbourhood suddenly and sharply became more expensive. Government eliminated the ability of landlords to capitalize on those spikes.

Closing the Fixed-Term Lease Loophole

This loophole was being used to get around rent controls and to take housing security away from families. Closing this loophole improves financial and housing security for vulnerable renters, and makes it easier for families to keep their homes.

Improving Rental Assistance

Recognizing the important role the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) plays in making life affordable and expanding opportunity, government improved B.C.'s Rental Assistance Program by expanding eligibility to households making up to \$40,000 a year, and by increasing the average monthly subsidy by nearly \$67. Families in need now can now get an average of \$472 a month to help them with rising rents.

Raising SAFER Rates

Helping seniors afford their homes can be critical in keeping them from falling into poverty. That's why government raised the average monthly payment for Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) recipients by nearly \$78, allowing seniors in need to access an average of \$265 a month to help with rent.

Making Rentals Work Better for Everyone

In 2017, government invested \$7 million in the Residential Tenancy Branch to make it more effective and responsive. Phone wait times have decreased by 89% since September 2017 from an average of almost 45 minutes to an average of five minutes, as of the end of January 2019.

B. Increasing the Supply of Affordable Homes

Building Affordable Mixed Income Housing

The ***Building BC: Community Housing Fund*** will invest \$1.9 billion over 10 years to build more than 14,000 affordable rental homes for seniors, families and low- and middle-income earners. Many of these new housing developments will also include on-site child care facilities.

Retrofitting Existing Community Housing

Government is investing more than \$1 billion on improving, maintaining and renovating existing affordable community housing — making homes more energy efficient and reducing heating costs.

Increasing Targeted Housing Stock

In 2018, government introduced targeted programs to:

- Build 1,750 new homes on- and off-reserve for Indigenous peoples (\$550 million);
- Build 1,500 new homes for women and children fleeing violence (\$734 million); and
- Finance up to \$450 million in student housing projects over six years.

Stronger Protection for People Living in Manufactured Homes

Government has taken action to prevent families from being forced into poverty because of manufactured home park redevelopment by increasing the required notice of redevelopment, improving compensation for families affected, and allowing owners of manufactured homes to recover the cost of their homes if they cannot be moved.

Action on Homelessness

Homelessness is inextricably linked with poverty. Without a home, people have few ways of addressing their basic needs, let alone finding a way out of poverty.

Recognizing the urgency of the housing and homelessness crisis, Budget Update 2017 and Budget 2018 included several major investments, including:

- 2,000 supportive modular homes over the three years through the Building BC: Rapid Response to Homelessness.
- 2,500 supportive homes over 10 years through the Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund.
- 1,750 homes over 10 years for Indigenous peoples, both on- and off-reserve through the Building BC: Indigenous Housing Fund.
- 1,500 spaces of transition and second-stage housing over 10 years for women and children escaping violence through the Building BC: Women's Transition Housing Fund.
- 14,000 mixed-income homes over 10 years, 70% at below market rental rates, through the Community Housing Fund.
- Expanded eligibility and increased benefits under the Rental Assistance Program and Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters to help an estimated 35,000 families stay stably housed.
- The first-ever provincial report on homeless counts, providing a snapshot of the demographics and service needs of people experiencing homelessness.

The 2018 Report on Homeless Counts in B.C., summarizing findings from 24 homeless counts conducted in communities across British Columbia, indicated a total of 7,655 individuals are experiencing homelessness. Of these, 63% were sheltered and 37% were unsheltered; 20% were seniors (55+ years of age); 15% were youth (under 25 years of age); and, 38% of survey respondents identified as Indigenous. Individuals who have been in foster care have a higher risk of becoming homeless.*

** The Report acknowledges this to be a conservative estimate.*

A New Approach

Under the previous government, homelessness was allowed to increase, leaving more people cold, hungry and trying to survive on the street.

This approach was reversed with the new government, which took immediate action to examine the scale and the scope of the problem, while also working quickly with 22 communities to build more than 2,000 low-barrier, modular homes with 24/7 supports for those most in need.

Work to build homes for people experiencing homelessness is continuing with Budget 2019, which includes additional funding for supportive modular housing. Together with the Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund, these investments are opening up the homes that people need to get out of homelessness and begin their journey out of poverty.

To guide further action on homelessness, we have launched the Office of Homelessness Coordination, to move beyond reactive emergency responses to homelessness and towards a co-ordinated, effective approach that prevents people from becoming homeless in the first place. Our government's approach to addressing homelessness can be summed up by the following four points:

- 1. Prevention:** Make homelessness rare by preventing people from becoming homeless and by helping people who are at risk of homelessness or precariously housed.
- 2. Immediate Response:** If someone becomes homeless, actions should make the experience brief to reduce harm and help prevent chronic homelessness.
- 3. Stability:** Once a person has a roof over their head, give them the supports they need to make sure their experience with homelessness is a one-time occurrence.
- 4. Working Better Together:** Co-ordinate actions across provincial and local government and with community partners. This includes being clear about responsibilities and making sure responses to homelessness are effective in every part of the province.

Reducing homelessness is a shared mandate of the Ministers of Social Development and Poverty Reduction and Municipal Affairs and Housing. Further, addressing the real causes of homelessness is included in the 2017 Confidence and Supply Agreement between the BC Green Party Caucus and the BC New Democrat Caucus (CASA).

Further Actions on Homelessness

Provincial Rent Bank: Emergencies happen — people get too sick to work, hours get cut, a roommate suddenly moves — and a person's income can be unexpectedly interrupted. Recognizing that a temporary crisis can increase the risk of homelessness for renters, we are investing \$10 million to support community-based rent banks to help people keep their homes.

Targeted interventions: When people experience a crisis, the right interventions at the right time can help keep them from becoming homeless. The Office for Homelessness Coordination will work with partners across government and in the community to better understand the needs in our communities and help make sure people aren't falling through the cracks.

Policy Enhancements: Along with the \$26 million announced in Budget 2019 to remove administrative barriers to accessing income and disability assistance, government is investing more than \$10 million to ensure policies and procedures do not contribute to — or fail to prevent — homelessness. Beginning in summer 2019, government is removing several restrictions on access to the moving supplement for people on income or disability assistance. This will help more people moving to lower-cost housing or moving closer to work, services, or family and friends.

We are also eliminating the “transient” category to ensure that a person without a fixed address is eligible to receive the same supports, general supplements and earned income exemptions as other income assistance clients.

Rapid Response and Supportive Housing: Government's Rapid Response to Homelessness program was initiated in September 2017, with a goal of building 2,000 new modular homes with 24/7 supports for British Columbians in need by the end of spring 2019.

Budget 2019 builds on the Rapid Response to Homelessness program with funding to build another 200 supportive modular homes for people in need in communities around the province.

The Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund funds the creation and operation of 2,500 homes with 24/7 services and supports for those who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless.

Provincial Homeless Counts: The Province will work with communities throughout B.C. that conduct local counts, to co-ordinate the next provincial count in 2020.

2. SUPPORTING FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Universal Child Care Prototypes

As part of government's long-term goal of moving towards universal child care, government is supporting more than 50 prototype sites where families of all incomes pay no more than \$200 a month per child for full-time enrolment during regular business hours, regardless of the care type. For some low-income families, child care at these sites costs nothing.

Investing in Dental Care

Dental care can be hard to access for people in need. That's why government is improving access to quality, affordable dental care through a \$3.6 million grant to the BC Dental Association (BCDA). The grant offers three years of stable funding that will help 24 not-for-profit clinics purchase needed equipment and provide more services to people in need.

Fair Pharmacare

As of Jan. 1, 2019, families earning up to \$30,000 each year no longer pay deductibles for prescription medication under Fair PharmaCare, and get 70% drug coverage right away. Once people in this net income bracket reach their family maximum, PharmaCare will then cover 100% of their drug costs for the rest of the year. To further help those most in need, Fair PharmaCare co-payments have been completely eliminated for seniors born before 1940 earning a household net annual income up to \$14,000, and for other British Columbians earning \$13,750 a year or less. Nearly a quarter of a million households are benefiting from the elimination and reduction of deductibles and co-payments, the first change in 15 years.

Increasing Foster Care Rates

As part of Budget 2019, government is lifting the 10-year freeze on support payments for foster parents, increasing them by nearly 20% across the board. This will improve life for children in government care and the families taking care of them.

Better Support for Former Youth in Care

The tuition waiver program provides former youth in care, to age 26 inclusive, with support in pursuing a degree, certification or trades training. To further support children aging out of the care who are pursuing life skills training and education, benefits available under Agreements with Young Adults are now available year round, and up until age 26. Maximum benefits were also increased by up to \$250 a month.

Harmonizing Rates for Family Caregivers

Recognizing the benefits of keeping children close to their relatives and their communities, government is increasing support rates for caregivers in the Extended Family Program by up to 75% as part of Budget 2019. And to better facilitate permanency for children, post-adoption rates are being increased by 15%.

Improving Rates for Home Share Providers

Community Living British Columbia Home Share providers play a valuable role in helping adults with developmental disabilities live as independently as possible within the community. To support these important care givers, government is investing \$45 million to increase funding for the Home Share program by 15%.

Tougher Family Maintenance Enforcement

To better ensure parents meet their obligations to financially support their children, government has toughened enforcement measures for parents who fail to pay child support, including denying driver's licenses to those who are refusing to pay.

3. EXPANDING ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Eliminating Interest on B.C. Student Loans

To take some of the financial burden off graduates, Budget 2019 eliminates interest on the B.C. portion of a student loan. For example, someone with \$11,200 in provincial loans will save approximately \$2,300 in interest charges over a 10-year repayment period.

Skills Training for Older Workers

People who are 55 years and older often face discrimination, and may need some extra training and extra supports to transition into new work environments. This \$3.2-million program will help workers, 55 or older, regardless of their eligibility for Employment Insurance, and will include supports like mentoring, counselling, wage subsidies and work experience.

Skills Development for People Needing Extra Supports

Skills Training for Employment (STE) programs in B.C. provide important supports to those who face extra barriers to success. Government is investing \$26.8 million per year in six of these programs, targeted to those most in need, including programs for survivors of abuse, workers 55 and over, Indigenous workers, young adults, young adults at risk (including former youth in care), and people with multiple barriers.

Tuition-Free Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning

Budget 2019 supports the continued expansion of free Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning with an addition of \$16.5 million in funding over three years.

Investing in Trades Training

To better support British Columbians of all backgrounds who want to enter trades, Budget 2019 invests \$3 million in the Industry Training Authority (ITA) to help it provide more hands-on support for apprentices, employers and Indigenous communities.

4. MORE OPPORTUNITIES, MORE JOBS

Making WorkBC Work Better for People in Need

Changes to WorkBC will offer better services for people who need support to re-enter the workforce, access training opportunities and help them find good jobs. These changes will direct more supports at those who need the most help to find a good job and keep it.

New Opportunities for People With Disabilities

Work is continuing between government, the BC Chamber of Commerce, and the Presidents Group — a network of B.C. business leaders — on identifying new ways to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities and to reduce stigma around disabilities in the workplace.

Improving Employment Standards

Government is investing \$14 million over the next three years to the Employment Standards Branch to update employment standards to reflect the changing nature of work, and to make sure that these standards are applied fairly and consistently to all workplaces. This funding will also support the implementation of the **Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act**.

Better Protection for Temporary Foreign Workers

By bringing in legislation that allows a Temporary Foreign Worker Registry, government is taking action to help make sure temporary foreign workers aren't pushed into poverty by employers that break the rules.

5. IMPROVING AFFORDABILITY

Eliminating MSP Premiums

Eliminating MSP premiums will remove a monthly financial burden for people in low-paying jobs. MSP premiums have already been cut in half, and will be fully eliminated by Jan. 1, 2020.

Improved Climate Action Tax Credit

This tax credit is aimed at families who need help most — benefits are being increased by almost 70% from July 2017 to July 2021, to offset the effect of carbon tax increases on low- and moderate-income families. An eligible family of four will get up to \$400 back between July 2019 and June 2020, and up to \$500 back per year beginning July 2, 2021. For the lowest income individuals, the enhancements will likely more than offset any additional carbon tax paid due to the higher carbon tax rates.

BC Hydro Customer Crisis Fund

This fund offers support for people and families who are facing disconnection of their BC Hydro service, due to a temporary financial crisis. This pilot program allows people and families to apply for a grant of up to \$600 if they heat their home with electricity and for up to \$500 in assistance if they don't use electricity to heat their homes.

Consumer Protection

Prior to Sept. 1, 2018, when we introduced tougher rules on payday loans and cheque-cashing fees, these lenders could charge up to \$17 for every \$100 borrowed on loans to people in need.

We are building on our initial work to protect people in short-term financial need by strengthening the rights of borrowers, setting stricter limits on borrowing costs, eliminating certain fees, requiring short-term lenders to be properly licensed and making sure that borrowers are given the information they need to make informed financial decisions.

Expanded Access to Healthy Food

Government expanded the B.C. Farmer's Market Nutrition Program to help more low-income British Columbians gain access to healthy, locally grown food. Funding for the program was increased by \$750,000 to raise the value of the coupons to \$336 and increase the number of coupons that can be provided to participating households.

Bridge Tolls Eliminated

People shouldn't be punished because they live on the other side of a river from where they need to go. One of this government's first acts was to eliminate tolls on the Port Mann and Golden Ears bridges, saving families hundreds of dollars a year.

6. INVESTING IN SOCIAL INCLUSION

Investments in Affordable Transportation

In partnership with the federal government, B.C. is investing in new transit, including the new Broadway Subway, upgrades to Expo and Millennium line infrastructure, and new and retrofitted buses in communities throughout the province. In addition, Budget 2019 includes an additional \$21 million over three years to improve bus service in over 30 B.C. communities, including improvements to handyDART for both rural and urban communities. And it provides \$6 million for active transportation investments over three years.

Accessibility Legislation

Government is committed to building a better B.C. for people with disabilities. An essential part of that work requires addressing the barriers that stop people with disabilities from being able to access opportunity and participate in their communities. That's why B.C. will be moving forward and developing comprehensive accessibility legislation that will help bring down barriers that exclude people with disabilities from full participation in our province and our communities.

Embracing Gender Diversity

Transgender, Two-Spirit, intersex and non-binary people often face discrimination in housing, employment and access to services. Many minorities experience discrimination and stigma, both in their interactions with government and in their daily lives. This discrimination sees (LGBTQ2S+ people exposed to greater levels of physical violence and higher rates of homelessness and unemployment than other British Columbians. Government has taken first steps to improve services and supports for gender-minority British Columbians by adding a non-binary option to BC Driver's Licenses and BC Service Cards, and by expanding access to gender-affirming surgeries here in British Columbia.

Restoring the Human Rights Commission

In 2002, B.C. became the only province in the country without a Human Rights Commission when the province's commission was disbanded. In fall 2018, the current government took steps to restore the B.C. Human Rights Commission with amendments to the *Human Rights Code* to allow for the appointment of an independent B.C. Human Rights Commissioner.



Eliminating Policies That Held People Back

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction exists to provide services to people trying to overcome social and economic barriers. These services should make life better for people, allowing them to access the supports they need while being treated fairly and with dignity. Yet not all existing policies support those goals.

TogetherBC takes important steps to address harmful and mean-spirited policies. This work has already begun — the ministry has committed to improving service wait times, people receiving disability assistance now have a transportation supplement so they can once again get an annual bus pass, and crisis supplements for food have been doubled.

Those are just the beginning of a series of changes the ministry will make over the next six months to improve services and shift the culture to one of empathy, dignity and respect — so that people know supports will be there when they are needed.

Ending Early CPP:

Currently people between the ages of 60 and 64 who access assistance are forced to take early pension payments with the Canada Pension Plan. Because there are financial penalties for accessing these retirement benefits early, we will eliminate that requirement as outlined in Budget 2019.

Reducing Access Times:

In 2012, the government of the day began requiring a five-week work search before people could access income assistance. To reduce the financial stress on people when they're at a vulnerable time, we will reduce that work-search period to three weeks.

Expanding Earning Exemptions:

In October 2017, government raised earnings exemptions for people on disability assistance by \$2,400 a year and for people on income assistance by \$200 a month. This means an individual on disability assistance can earn \$12,000 a year, individuals on income assistance can earn \$400 a month, and those with children can now earn up to \$600 per month, with no reduction to their cheques.

Modernizing the Definition of Spouse:

Government is making a change to the definition of spouse to treat people fairly and ensure alignment to other benefit programs. This change will allow people in relationships to live together for one year, instead of three months, before being considered spouses and having their benefits reduced to couple rates.

Making it Easier to Move:

Beginning in fall 2019, government will remove the limit on the number of housing security deposits people on assistance can access and implement a new supplement for pet damage deposits.

Fairer Supports for People Without Homes:

Government is eliminating the “transient” category to ensure that people without a fixed address are eligible to receive the same support and general supplements and earned income exemptions as other income assistance clients.

Higher Asset Limits:

To be eligible for income assistance, a single person can only have \$2,000 in assets and a couple can only have \$4,000. Government will increase these limits to \$5,000 and \$10,000, respectively, allowing people on income assistance to keep a little more of their money and build their assets.

Allowing People to Keep Their Vehicles:

Under the previous rules, people with a primary vehicle that was worth more than \$10,000 were forced to sell it before they could access income assistance. Beginning in summer 2019, people will be able to keep their primary vehicles, regardless of value.

Improving Crisis Supplements:

People who rely on disability and income assistance often don’t have resources to handle an emergency. Last year, government doubled the amount available to help with food and made it easier to access help with utilities prior to receiving a disconnection notice. We will build on these changes by increasing the maximum amount people can receive to help with unexpected shelter costs, increasing it to the full monthly amount of support available to the family.

Expanding Hardship Assistance:

Government is expanding access to special care facilities and substance-use treatment for those on hardship assistance, who might otherwise not have access to the care they need. Expanding access to these supports will help people address their health needs so they can heal and stabilize.

Streamlining the Return to Assistance:

Government will streamline the application process for returning clients, making it easier for people to have their benefits reinstated after a short period, rather than making them go through the full application process.

Ending Housing Assistance Penalties:

Removing the financial penalty for paying room and board to a parent or child while on income assistance will make these supports more effective for low-income families.

Expanding Access to the ID Supplement:

Government will extend the identification supplement to disability and income assistance clients to ensure they can meet program eligibility requirements and access other essential services like a bank account and a BC Services card.

Expanding Access to PPMB Programs:

Government will expand eligibility to the Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers (PPMB) category by removing restrictions that: required people first be on income assistance for 12 out of 15 months; and, prevented access for people with addictions. Moving forward, further enhancements will provide more effective supports for people with significant barriers, including supports for mental health and addiction.

STUDYING BASIC INCOME FOR B.C.

As part of the Confidence and Supply Agreement with the BC Party Green Caucus, in July 2018, government announced the creation of an expert committee to study the potential for using a basic income approach in its efforts to reduce poverty and prepare for technological change and the emerging economy.

The committee will oversee independent research to assess the feasibility of a basic income for British Columbia and how basic income principles might be used to improve the existing income and social support system.

Recommendations from the panel will be submitted to government in 2020 and will be critical to informing government's next steps on poverty reduction.

Towards Reconciliation

The Province of British Columbia recognizes that all relations with Indigenous peoples need to be based on the recognition and implementation of the right to self-determination, including the inherent right of self-government.

In keeping with that principle, in November 2018 at the First Nations Leadership Gathering, government announced that First Nations in B.C. will share in provincial gaming revenue.

This funding will be available to all First Nations in British Columbia to support self-government and self-determination. Through the long-term stable revenue source, First Nations will be able to invest in their priorities, and much-needed services and infrastructure, such as health and wellness, community safety, transportation and housing, economic and business development and education, language and culture.

This commitment will provide First Nations with an estimated \$3 billion over the next 25 years.

In addition, government is working in partnership with Indigenous communities to deliver improved services in the coming years, including:

Legislation to Enact the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is a universal human rights instrument that helps us all come to a common understanding of what reconciliation is and what it should be.

Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is a cross-government priority — government is working in every sector, together with Indigenous peoples, to support healthy communities and create shared prosperity that benefits all British Columbians.

In the 2019 throne speech, the provincial government reinforced its commitment to co-develop legislation with the First Nations Leadership Council to implement the UN Declaration into provincial law. B.C. will be the first province in Canada to introduce such legislation, which will establish the UN Declaration as the foundation that guides our joint reconciliation efforts with Indigenous partners.

Draft Principles that Guide the Province of British Columbia's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples

The B.C. government is deeply committed to true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in British Columbia. People who work in the B.C. Public Service are uniquely positioned to transform the Province's relationship with Indigenous peoples through the important work they do every day.

In May 2018, the B.C. government introduced a set of 10 draft principles designed to guide the daily work of provincial government employees as the Province builds relationships with Indigenous peoples based on respect and recognition of inherent rights.

These draft principles are a resource for every public servant as ministries implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.

Investing in Aboriginal Friendship Centres

Friendship Centres are community hubs that provide services and social connectivity to Indigenous peoples living in urban areas. Friendship Centres help people access housing, education, employment, child care and other services, and help connect Indigenous peoples to culture and community.

For too long, these important organizations were not given steady and stable support from government. That changed with Budget 2018, which saw the valuable, low-barrier and inclusive work done by Friendship Centres supported with reliable dedicated funding for the first time in B.C. history.

Investing in Indigenous Housing

Recognizing that Indigenous families too often face exceptional challenges in finding housing that meets their needs, government is investing \$550 million to build 1,750 new homes for Indigenous peoples through the ***Building BC: Indigenous Housing Fund***.

The first set of homes being funded are in 26 different communities. They include nearly 780 off-reserve homes and close to 370 on-reserve homes, representing the first major investment in on-reserve housing for Indigenous peoples ever made by a provincial government.

First Nations and other Indigenous housing providers are also eligible to apply for funds to build housing, both on and off reserve, under any of government's other housing funding streams.

Supporting Children in the Home of a Family Member

It's widely understood that children, especially Indigenous children, do better when they stay connected to their family and to their communities.

Unfortunately, for too long there has been a significant difference in the kind of supports that foster families get, versus the supports given to relatives caring for children — a difference that doesn't take into account the financial needs of these families.

Recognizing the benefits of keeping children close to their relatives and their communities, government is increasing support rates for caregivers in the Extended Family Program by up to 75%, as part of Budget 2019. And to better facilitate permanency for children, post-adoption rates are being increased by 15%.

These rate improvements respond to recommendations made by Grand Chief Ed John, and help government fulfill its obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Better supporting extended families to care for children will decrease the number of Indigenous children in care, and help keep them close to their families and in their communities.



Conclusion: Moving Forward Together

TogetherBC represents the beginning of government's efforts to end poverty. It brings together government efforts aimed at improving services, offering enhanced supports and bringing down barriers so people can get out and stay out of poverty. There are many reasons to reduce poverty. Because it's the right thing to do. Because we care about our neighbours. Because we care about the kind of world we want to leave behind for our children.

And there are costs to inaction. Poverty and chronic health conditions are interconnected. Both mental and physical challenges are intensified through the experience of living in extreme poverty. That comes with costs that stretch across the system — from health care to policing to social services.

There are also good economic reasons to reduce poverty. When we increase incomes for people living in poverty, that money goes directly into the local economy. Every dollar of support that goes to people in need gets spent on groceries, gas, clothing, goods and services. People spend their money where they live.

The policies and initiatives outlined in this strategy are all contributing to our effort to reduce poverty in B.C. When they're all added together, they will put hundreds of millions of dollars a year into the pockets of people living in poverty. That is hundreds of millions of dollars going back into our communities — an investment that multiplies while creating a positive impact for all British Columbians.

Although TogetherBC includes billions of dollars in investments in new homes, affordable child care, health services and direct supports and benefits for families, we recognize it doesn't meet all of the needs of people living in poverty today.

TogetherBC is designed to achieve our targets of reducing child poverty rates by 50% and overall poverty by 25% over five years. But there will still be much work to be done once these targets are reached.

To keep us on track and to measure our progress, government must present a report each year, starting in 2020, that outlines how much further we have to go to reach our five-year poverty-reduction targets. As part of this analysis, government will be continuing to examine ways to improve programs and services to better meet the needs of people, so we can meet our legislated commitments and go beyond them.

Significant work is now underway that will further enhance the policies and initiatives in TogetherBC. For example, an expert committee was appointed by government to study the potential for using a basic income approach to reduce poverty and to address new challenges posed by our changing economy. Along with a basic income feasibility study, the committee's work includes extensive research on how basic income principles might be used to improve the existing income and social support system. This body of work will be integral to our ongoing efforts to reduce poverty in B.C.

We will also be continuing work on outstanding commitments like the introduction of a renter's rebate. These and other policies that are under continuing development will further enhance actions that are part of TogetherBC. Particular gaps that were named during the poverty reduction consultations, but not yet met by TogetherBC, include better access to good food for families, enhanced investments in affordable transportation, and improved income security, including assistance rates.

Government is all about choices. The choices that were made in the creation and implementation of TogetherBC always aimed for the widest accessibility, inclusion and effect in the lives of people in B.C.

Government is choosing to invest in people — while also balancing the budget and safeguarding the economy so that these investments, services and programs will be sustainable in the long term. Yet, TogetherBC is more than a string of investments. It's how we tie them together. It's how we create opportunities for people to succeed in life. The challenge of poverty is a societal challenge — it's not something that government can address alone.

We need to work together across all levels of government, with business, our communities and as individuals. That's why we called this strategy TogetherBC. It is a shared effort that reflects our commitment to make life better for people. By working together, we can and we will lift 140,000 British Columbians out of poverty in the next five years.

These efforts are the beginning. To get to our targets and beyond — to the future we all want — we need to work together to create a more secure, inclusive and sustainable future, where everyone has the chance to reach their full potential.

TogetherBC won't solve poverty in B.C. overnight. But it sets British Columbia in the right direction — towards a province that is fairer, more accessible and better for all.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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