

B.C. Poverty Reduction Coalition wants more than “Band-Aid” election promises

by [Yolande Cole](#) on Mar 19, 2013 at 7:37 pm



With the provincial election less than two months away, a B.C. coalition is challenging political leaders to commit to implementing a poverty reduction strategy, including measures such as increasing welfare rates and the minimum wage.

“We haven’t seen enough from any political party yet,” said **Trish Garner**, the community organizer for the B.C. Poverty Reduction Coalition, at a press conference in Vancouver today (March 19).

“We’re challenging all political parties, all candidates around the province to be serious about addressing this issue, to commit to a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines, and help out the 510,000 British Columbians that are struggling in poverty today.”

The poverty reduction plan that the coalition wants to see implemented would also include steps such as the construction of 2,000 new units of social housing, the implementation of a public childcare plan that would cost parents \$10 a day, an increase in post-secondary grants

for low-income students, and the expansion of community health-care services.

Seth Klein, cochair of the B.C. Poverty Reduction Coalition and director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in B.C., said the groups want to see political parties commit to a plan that’s embedded in legislation.

“Our feeling as a coalition all along is that there’s many different policy tools towards reducing and ultimately eliminating poverty,” he said. “The first task is to have those clear commitments and an accountability mechanism where the government has annual reporting towards meeting those targets, and we have a way of publicly holding them to account.”

Ted Bruce, the other cochair of the coalition and the past president of the Public Health Association of B.C., said some populations need “immediate attention” as part of a poverty reduction plan, such as people on income assistance.

“Clearly from a health perspective, we know that there are some folks that are in very, very vulnerable situations right now, having very significant impacts on their health,” he stated.

The coalition wants to see income assistance rates raised by 50 percent, and the minimum wage increased to \$12 an hour, with both indexed to inflation. The current welfare rate in B.C. for a single person expected to work is \$610 a month. The B.C. government increased the minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour last year—a rate that the coalition argues still does not allow a single person working full time to live above the poverty line.

According to Garner, a large part of the “poverty story” in B.C. is the working poor.

“Most poor people actually have a job, but it’s still not enough to live above the poverty line,” she said. “That’s why we support raising the minimum wage and providing a living wage.”

The group stressed that they’re urging politicians to commit to a strategy that would span across government ministries.

“We’re asking for a systematic approach—a long-term, sustainable approach that recognizes that the Band-Aid solutions that we’re enacting right now are not working,” said Garner.

She noted that B.C. has the highest poverty rate in Canada, but is one of the few provinces left that doesn’t have a poverty reduction plan in place. Saskatchewan does not have a strategy, while Alberta Premier Alison Redford has promised to bring in a 10-year plan to end poverty.

According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a comprehensive B.C. poverty reduction plan would cost between \$3 to \$4 billion to implement once fully phased in. But the coalition argues that the total price stemming from poverty, such as increased health-care and crime spending, adds up to an estimated \$8 to \$9 billion.

The B.C. Poverty Reduction Coalition has sent a survey to the B.C. Liberals, NDP, Conservatives and Green Party asking for their plans to address poverty, and says it will release the results in April.

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