



RENEWAL OF TOGETHERBC: B.C.'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY, AND INCOME AND DISABILITY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

BACKGROUND

The Province is currently renewing its approach to poverty reduction in B.C. This involves developing priorities for updating B.C.'s Poverty Reduction Strategy and proposing amendments to the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* and the two Acts that govern BC Employment and Assistance (BCEA): the *Employment and Assistance Act* and *Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act*.

The Province recognizes that the main cause of poverty for Indigenous Peoples is the lasting and ongoing, harmful effect of colonial practices and policies. For that reason, reconciliation is a core principle of B.C.'s poverty reduction strategy, along with a commitment to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR) has been undertaking targeted and public engagement to inform an updated strategy for release in 2024. This engagement is also informing the review of the B.C. Employment and Assistance program legislation, which provides income and disability assistance to people off-reserve.

The experience of poverty by Indigenous people is multifaceted, and SDPR staff are taking a distinctions-based approach, engaging with First Nations, Modern Treaty Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous Peoples. This aligns with the Declaration Act. It also aligns with the Declaration Act Action Plan commitment to incorporate Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous experiences of poverty and well-being, including Indigenous-identified actions and progress measures.

We understand that Indigenous partners are frequently contacted to engage on Provincial Government initiatives. We also recognize that Nations and Indigenous organizations have made their views well known on issues of poverty and income assistance. As such, our first steps were to:

- Review the extensive feedback already shared in reports, resolutions, letters and other input sources by Nations, associations, non-profit organizations, and other groups representing Indigenous Peoples;
- Identify ways the Province has been responding to priorities and recommendations;
- Highlight areas for further engagement, and
- Attend exhibition booths and workshops at scheduled First Nations gatherings, when invited, to gain more perspective on issues and priorities.

POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY: EMERGING THEMES

FEEDBACK FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ON GAPS AND PROMOTING WELLNESS

- **Preventing Poverty**

- Self-determination is crucial to reducing poverty including economic development, rights and title.
- High poverty rates due to ongoing impacts of colonialism, racism and systemic barriers.
- Few supports available to address trauma, including intergenerational trauma.

- **Accessing Supports**

- Self-determination is needed in services and supports to ensure responsiveness to community needs and reflection of ties to land, culture, and language.
- More guidance/assistance is needed to navigate services/systems, including on/off reserve.

- **Receiving Supports**

- Experiences of racism and systemic barriers make government supports untrustworthy.
- There is a lack of culturally safe services and supports for Indigenous people.
- Interest from some Nations to build capacity to deliver social programs based on their communities' socio-economic, education and health priorities.

- **Exiting Supports**

- Access to post-secondary education and employment opportunities are limited.
- Lack of recognition and support in workplaces for specific cultural needs including leave for events in home community.
- Wages for entry level jobs are not enough to lift people out of poverty.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY: POTENTIAL CRITICAL ACTION AREAS

1. Indigenous self-determination
2. Prevention and early intervention of poverty
 - including supports for children, youth and families & addressing intergenerational poverty
3. Meeting basic needs
 - including housing, food, healthcare, transportation, menstrual products
4. Reaching people with life resources
 - including childcare, tax filing support, personal identification, banking
5. Increasing uptake of current programs and benefits
 - including navigation of government programs
6. Government programs promoting poverty reduction, including income supports
7. Promoting meaningful social inclusion
8. Providing effective education and employment pathways

INCOME AND DISABILITY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

A key part of the poverty reduction work will focus on supporting recipients of income and disability assistance who face significant social and economic barriers. We know Indigenous Peoples may face additional barriers due to the ongoing effects of racism, systemic discrimination, and colonialism.

Our services should help make life better. Our system should be modern and easy to understand, and people should be treated fairly and with dignity. Yet we know some of our laws and policies put up barriers and prevent people from getting the support they need. These need to be updated.

Key goals of the review of rules governing income and disability assistance:

- Addressing the ongoing impacts of colonialism and aligning our programs with the rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Ensuring people can access all the supports they are eligible for, considering both individual circumstances and systemic barriers
- Supporting a sense of belonging and dignity, and the opportunity to participate fully in the community and the work force
- Better supporting clients to achieve long-term stability by adding flexibility to our framework

LEGISLATIVE REVIEW: EMERGING THEMES

- **Employment**
 - Income assistance rules assume people are readily employable or will be soon
 - People may be hesitant to leave income assistance for work due to program rules about employment obligations and delays reapplying
- **Income & Assets**
 - Rules contribute to people remaining in poverty
 - Assistance is provided only after other sources are exhausted
- **Complexity & Fairness**
 - System is complex and navigating it may compound trauma
 - Delays to accessing assistance create hardship for people
- **Reconciliation**
 - System was not designed to consider the ongoing impacts of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples
 - Indigenous people are overrepresented and underserved in the income assistance system