

The background of the top half of the cover is a photograph of a mountain lake. A large, jagged mountain peak is visible in the background, with a forested slope leading down to a calm body of water. The water reflects the surrounding landscape. Overlaid on this image are several large, semi-transparent geometric shapes, primarily triangles and diamonds, in various shades of blue and white, creating a modern, abstract design.

Supporting the Low-Wage Workforce:

A Comprehensive Review of the Living Wage
in British Columbia

BC FAIR WAGES COMMISSION REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINISTER OF LABOUR

Danielle D. van Jaarsveld, Chair | Ken Peacock, Member | Ivan Limpricht, Member

Third Report March 2023

British Columbia Fair Wages Commission
An Independent Commission Appointed by the Minister of Labour

March 31, 2023

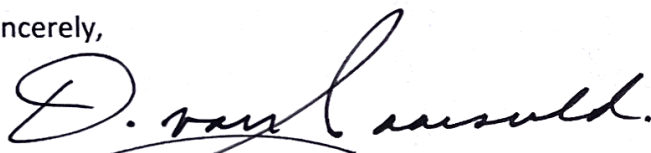
Honourable Harry Bains
Minister of Labour
Government of British Columbia

Dear Minister Bains:

The BC Fair Wages Commission began its work in October 2017. The first report, *The Transition to a \$15 Minimum Wage and Subsequent Increases*, was delivered in January 2018. The second report, *Minimum Wages for Those with Alternate Rates in British Columbia: Farm Workers Paid by Piece Rate, Liquor Servers, Live-in Home Support Workers, Resident Caretakers, Live-in Camp Leaders*, was delivered in March 2018.

I am pleased to present the third report, *Supporting the Low-Wage Workforce: A Comprehensive Review of the Living Wage in British Columbia*. This report reviews the origins and development of the living wage in BC and compares the BC living wage campaign with its counterparts in other jurisdictions across Canada and in comparable economies. We also provide recommendations for reconciling the discrepancy between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates in BC communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "D. van Jaarsveld". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Danielle D. van Jaarsveld
Chair, BC Fair Wages Commission

Supporting the Low-Wage Workforce: A Comprehensive Review of the Living Wage in British Columbia

BC Fair Wages Commission Report and Recommendations to the Minister of Labour

Signed this 31st day of March, 2023



Danielle D. van Jaarsveld, Chair

Signed this 31st day of March, 2023



Ken Peacock, Member

Signed this 31st day of March, 2023



Ivan Limpright, Member

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Thank you to our families for their patience as we worked on this important endeavour.

Dedication

We dedicate this report to Catherine Ludgate. Catherine was a passionate advocate for the living wage, financial inclusion and social justice through her work with Vancity, as senior manager of community investment, and through her involvement with the Living Wage for Families Campaign and the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition. We had the privilege to meet with Catherine early in our process. Her willingness to share her expertise with us greatly enhanced our understanding of the evolution of the living wage campaign in BC and Canada. For those who would like to learn more about the living wage in BC and Canada, a helpful volume is *Rising Up: The Fight for Living Wage Work in Canada* (Evans, Fanelli & McDowell, 2021), which includes a very insightful chapter, “The BC Living Wage for Families Campaign: A Decade of Building,” written by Catherine (Ludgate, 2021).

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Dedication	iv
Executive summary	1
Recommendations	3
1 Introduction	4
What is a living wage?	5
FWC methodology	5
2 Development of a living wage in BC	7
From grassroots support to a living wage methodology	7
Certified living wage employers in BC	11
3 Examining differences between the BC minimum wage and the living wage	16
The CCPA-BC living wage methodology	16
Calculating the Metro Vancouver living wage	17
Accounting for government transfers, government deductions and taxes	19
How does a living wage differ from the minimum wage?	20
Interprovincial comparison of the minimum wage, 2017–2022	21
Changes in the Metro Vancouver living wage, 2008–2022	23
Comparing the BC minimum wage with the Metro Vancouver living wage rate	25
Difference between the BC minimum wage and living wages in BC communities	27
Additional context for the Metro Vancouver living wage	27
4 Context of low-wage work and low-wage earners in BC	29
Context of low-wage work in BC	29
Characteristics of low-wage earners in BC	30
5 Findings from public consultations, briefs and key informant interviews	31
Findings from the workforce and trade unions	31
Findings from community, social and non-profit organizations	32

Findings from employers.....	34
Insights from focus groups on the living wage.....	35
6 Jurisdictional scan: Living wage campaigns in other areas of Canada	37
The living wage in Ontario: Transitioning from a local to a regional living wage focus	37
Alberta’s developing living wage campaign: Revising employer certification	38
Nascent living wage campaigns in other provinces: Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.....	40
The living wage in Canada’s Territorial North: Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut	41
7 Cross-jurisdictional scan: Living wage campaigns beyond Canada.....	42
The US: From living wage ordinances to city-wide minimum wages	43
The UK: A voluntary living wage campaign and a statutory national living wage.....	45
Differentiating between a national minimum wage, a national living wage and a real living wage	45
The UK voluntary living wage campaign: The real living wage.....	46
Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: The living wage as an ingredient for inclusive growth...	48
The Republic of Ireland: On the road to a national living wage by 2026	48
New Zealand: A voluntary living wage campaign.....	49
Australia: A high minimum wage context and wage theft	50
8 Academic research evaluating living wage campaigns	51
Consequences of adopting a living wage policy: Evidence from the US and the UK	51
Academic research on the impact of the living wage in Canada.....	52
9 Reflections and recommendations	53
Reflections on the strengths and challenges of the living wage	53
Strengths	53
Challenges	55
Living wage campaigns in other areas of Canada	56
Living wage campaigns beyond Canada	57
Reflections from academic research on other living wage campaigns	58
Recommendations	59
References	78

APPENDICES

Appendix I. Fair Wages Commission terms of reference 60

Appendix II. Participants who provided input to the Fair Wages Commission 63

Appendix III. Key informant interviews 65

Appendix IV. Tables and figures 68

Appendix V. Case studies of living wage employers 74

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. A comparison of BC communities with living wage calculations, 2008–2022 8

Table 2. Number of new certified living wage employers in BC, 2009–2023..... 12

Table 3. Family expenses for a two-parent, two-child, two-income family in Metro Vancouver, 2022 17

Table 4. Non-wage income (government transfers) 19

Table 5. Government deductions and taxes 20

Table 6. Comparing the BC minimum wage with the living wage..... 21

Table 7. Living wage rates for Metro Vancouver, 2008–2022 23

Table 8. Comparing living wage campaigns across liberal market economies..... 42

Table 9. Explaining UK wage rates 45

Table 10. BC living wage calculations, 2021 and 2022 68

Table 11. BC municipalities and First Nations councils that are certified living wage employers..... 69

Table 12. Share of households by family structure, BC and Metro Vancouver, 2016 census..... 70

Table 13. Ontario living wage rates by region, 2022..... 71

Table 14. Alberta living wage rates, 2022 73

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Increase in the living wage from 2021 to 2022 across BC communities with living wage calculations for both years..... 10

Figure 2. CCPA-BC living wage methodology 16

Figure 3. Minimum wage across selected provinces, April 2016–June 2023 22

Figure 4. Increase in minimum wage rates for select provinces, June 2017–January 2023 22

Figure 5. Comparing the Metro Vancouver living wage rate with and without enriched benefits, 2016–2023	24
Figure 6. Comparing the Metro Vancouver living wage rate and the BC minimum wage, 2016–2023	26
Figure 7. Comparing the BC minimum wage, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate and the Metro Vancouver living wage rate without enriched benefits, 2016–2023	26
Figure 8. Differences between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates across BC communities, 2022	27

Executive summary

THIS REPORT FULFILLS the Fair Wages Commission's (FWC's) terms of reference to examine the living wage in British Columbia and recommend strategies to address the discrepancy between the minimum wage and living wage rates in BC.

What is a living wage? A living wage is “an income from work adequate to achieve a modest but acceptable standard of living” (Eurofound, 2018, p. 4). Although the idea of a living wage originated in Ancient Greece, the contemporary living wage movement started in the US in the 1990s, soon spreading to other countries. In contrast to a minimum wage, a living wage is “what earners in a family need to bring home, based on the actual costs of living in a specific community” (Richards et al., 2008, p. 7).

What are the origins of the living wage campaign in BC? The BC living wage campaign began in response to the contracting out of health care jobs in 2002. Key organizations involved in the BC living wage campaign include the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – BC Office (CCPA-BC), Living Wage for Families BC, the Vancouver City Savings Credit Union (Vancity), and First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society (First Call). Living wage activity in BC includes: (1) generating living wage calculations for specific BC communities, (2) certifying living wage employers, (3) incorporating living wage policies into social procurement policies and (4) researching and advocating for policies to help low-wage earners. Throughout this report, we distinguish between the living wage as a concept and living wage *rates*, with geographic qualifiers indicating references to a specific living wage rate for a particular geographic location.

How are living wage rates in BC calculated? In 2008, the CCPA-BC developed a living wage methodology, the Canadian Living Wage Framework, to calculate a living wage for BC communities, and is currently in use across Canada. The Canadian Living Wage Framework is based on the hourly wage needed for two parents working full-time (35 hours per week) with two children to “achieve a decent standard of living” (Richards et al., 2008, p. 10).¹ The methodology estimates major household expenses (e.g., shelter, child care, transportation, food) and offsets these expenses with employment income, income from government transfers and considers government deductions and taxes.

How many BC communities have a living wage calculation? As of March 2023, 24 BC communities and approximately 60 communities in Canada have living wage calculations. In BC, Daajing Giids in Haida Gwaii has the highest living wage at \$25.87/hour, followed by Golden (\$25.56/hour). Greater Victoria (\$24.29/hour) and Metro Vancouver (\$24.08/hour) have the highest living wage rates in urban areas.

¹ One child, age 4, is assumed to be in daycare, while the other child, age 7, is assumed to be in school and needing before- and after-school care.

To what extent is the living wage being implemented by organizations in BC? In 2011, the City of New Westminster became the first municipality in Canada to be a certified living wage employer. As of March 2023, approximately 407 employers in BC are certified living wage employers, including 13 local governments. Despite the small number of certified living wage employers in BC, the BC living wage campaign has raised awareness about the low-wage workforce, as well as challenges relating to child care and affordable housing across the province. In BC, certified living wage employers need to ensure their direct staff and contracted workers earn a living wage.

What is the difference between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates for BC communities?

The difference between the BC minimum wage and the living wage fluctuates by community. For example, the difference between the BC minimum wage and the 2022 living wage rate is \$8.43 (53.9%) for Metro Vancouver and \$8.64 (55.2%) for Greater Victoria. Living wage rates are updated annually every November to reflect changes in living costs and public policy. In Metro Vancouver, the living wage rate increased by \$3.56 (17.3%) between 2021 and 2022; in Greater Victoria, it increased by \$3.83 (18.7%).

How can the difference between the BC minimum wage and the living wage be reduced? In recent years, the provincial and federal governments have implemented several policies reducing the difference between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates across BC, including regularly increasing the BC minimum wage, investing in \$10.00/day child care, introducing the BC Affordable Child Care Benefit, offering BC Hydro and ICBC rebates and eliminating Medical Services Plan (MSP) premiums. These initiatives are helpful, yet additional steps could help support low wage earners. Employers also have an important role in narrowing the difference between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates by creating decent jobs, including fair pay. For example, employers can voluntarily pay a living wage and become certified living wage employers so their direct staff and contracted workers earn a living wage.

How does the BC living wage campaign compare with its counterparts in other Canadian jurisdictions? Outside BC, Ontario and Alberta have the most active living wage campaigns, with living wage calculations for multiple communities and provincial living wage employer certification programs. Although broad agreement exists about the technical elements of calculating living wages, some methodological differences are emerging. The Ontario Living Wage Network (OLWN) recently transitioned to calculating regional living wage rates. The OLWN and the Alberta Living Wage Network (ALWN) also expanded the reference household beyond the traditional two-parent, two-child reference family, with the ALWN including a single-person reference household and the OLWN adding two additional reference households, a single-parent family with one child, and a single-person household.

How does the BC living wage campaign compare with living wage campaigns in comparable economies? Our jurisdictional scan of comparable economies revealed variation in how to define, calculate and implement living wage policies. Important lessons come from living wage campaigns outside Canada, including insights about public policies to support the low-wage workforce.

Recommendations

Since the FWC was established in 2017, the BC government has introduced several measures that have directly reduced living costs. However, the difference between the BC minimum wage and the living wage is increasing again in 2023, exacerbated by historically high inflation.

Beyond the direct measures the BC government has already introduced:

1. The FWC continues to see merit in establishing a permanent Fair Wages Commission and recommends the formation of a permanent tripartite Fair Wages Commission consisting of representatives from labour, business and academia, as previously recommended and reiterated in our consultations. This body would report periodically to the BC Legislature. Potential activities could include, but would not be limited to:
 - a. Conducting research on wage levels and monitoring the difference between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates across the province.
 - b. Monitoring and developing recommendations to address pay gaps experienced by historically marginalized members of the BC workforce.
 - c. Monitoring the Indigenous–non-Indigenous wage gap and improving data collection on working conditions for the Indigenous workforce in BC.
 - d. Connecting with initiatives underway in other ministries, including social development, education, housing, transportation, child care and social assistance programs, given the interrelated nature of these issues.
 - e. Monitoring the current approach for regularly adjusting the BC minimum wage and providing guidance to the BC government.
 - f. Reviewing the living wage methodology in detail. Points to consider include inclusivity (e.g., household structure, non-standard work) and consolidating geographic coverage.
 - g. Evaluating the potential for living wage rates to help inform employers and policy-makers about living costs and wage structures and to inform adjustments to the minimum wage.
 - h. Tracking major components of the living wage calculation, including housing, child care, food and transportation expenditures, across BC communities over time to understand the impact on low-wage earners, in order to help evaluate policies through the lens of reducing the cost of living.
2. The FWC recommends strengthening current BC minimum wage protections by eliminating occupational exemptions affecting low-wage workers.
3. The FWC recommends monitoring and reviewing funding for the Employment Standards Branch on a periodic basis.
4. The FWC supports the recommendations from previous FWC reports still under consideration.

1 Introduction

THIS THIRD REPORT of the BC Fair Wages Commission (FWC) considers “strategies to address the discrepancy between minimum wages and livable wages.”² First, we begin by defining a living wage. Second, we review living wage activity in BC, elsewhere in Canada and in comparable countries. Third, we conclude with reflections on the living wage and recommendations. The FWC’s terms of reference (Appendix I) were set by the Ministry of Labour, but our research, findings and recommendations are independent of the government.

The members of the FWC are:

- Danielle D. van Jaarsveld (chair), Professor, UBC Sauder School of Business³
- Ken Peacock (member representing employer interests), Chief Economist and Senior Vice-President, Business Council of British Columbia
- Ivan Limpright (member representing labour interests), President Emeritus, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1518

The FWC’s first report, [*The Transition to a \\$15 Minimum Wage and Subsequent Increases*](#), provided recommendations to government on incremental increases and timing for the provincial minimum wage to reach at least \$15.00/hour, as well as how subsequent increases to the minimum wage should be treated (Griffin Cohen, Limpright & Peacock, 2017). The FWC’s second report, [*Minimum Wages for Those with Alternate Rates in British Columbia*](#), reviewed minimum wage rates for five groups of workers with minimum wage rates distinct from the general minimum wage, with recommendations on future adjustments (Griffin Cohen, Limpright & Peacock, 2018).

In this report, we address three key tasks set out in the FWC’s final terms of reference:

1. Explaining what constitutes a “living wage” and the methodology for calculating a living wage.
2. Examining the value of the living wage and its impact, including a jurisdictional scan of BC, Canada and comparable countries.
3. Formulating recommendations to address the discrepancy between the minimum wage and the living wage.⁴

The first task is relatively straightforward, although understanding the details and nuances of living wage calculations is more challenging than it initially appears. The second task is more complex. During public engagement and discussions, we asked presenters about addressing the discrepancy between

² Final Terms of Reference, Fair Wages Commission, September 29, 2017.

³ Professor van Jaarsveld was appointed chair of the FWC in 2018 for the purposes of this third report.

⁴ Final Terms of Reference, Fair Wages Commission, September 29, 2017.

the minimum wage and a living wage, which was generally interpreted as reducing the difference between the two. With living wage calculations reflecting real-world living expenses, participants frequently cited the role of government support and employer benefits, particularly child care support, in securing a “reasonable” or “decent” standard of living for lower-income households.

The third task, formulating recommendations in the midst of “rapid changes [that have] occur[ed] in the economy,” including to the provincial minimum wage, MSP premium deductions, child care and other supports, is important, as is understanding the effects of these changes on the living wage.”⁵ “The living wage is not just about employers—the labour market alone cannot solve all problems of poverty and social exclusion. Government policies and programs also have a direct impact on our standard of living, and as a result, on the living wage calculation” (Ivanova & Klein, 2011, p. 7).

What is a living wage?

A living wage is “an income from work adequate to achieve a modest but acceptable standard of living” (Eurofound, 2018, p. 4). The intent is to ensure that full-time workers and their families meet some predetermined living standard (Richards et al., 2008, p. 10). The concept has a long history dating back to Ancient Greece (Stabile, 2008; Anker, 2011), but its contemporary roots can be traced to 1994, when the first living wage campaign resulted in the City of Baltimore passing a legal ordinance requiring firms with City contracts to pay their employees a living wage (Luce, 2017).⁶

A living wage is “what earners in a family need to bring home, based on the actual costs of living in a specific community,” and thus can be viewed as a threshold that can signal the cost of living for families in a community and that employers can incorporate into their compensation system (Richards et al., 2008, p. 7). The [Canadian Living Wage Framework](#), originally developed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – BC Office (CCPA-BC), but in use in other Canadian jurisdictions beyond BC, calculates the living wage as the hourly wage necessary for two parents working full-time (35 hours per week), with two children,⁷ to “achieve a decent standard of living” (Richards et al., 2008, p. 10).

Throughout this report, we will distinguish between the living wage as a concept and living wage *rates*, with geographic qualifiers to indicate that we are referencing a specific living wage rate for a particular geographic location.

FWC methodology

Both primary and secondary research informed our deliberations.⁸ First, the FWC engaged in public consultation to better understand the challenges confronting the low-wage workforce in BC and to

⁵ Final Terms of Reference, Fair Wages Commission, September 29, 2017.

⁶ An ordinance refers to a law enacted by a municipality (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

⁷ One child, age 4, is assumed to be in daycare, while the other child, age 7, is assumed to be in school and needing before- and after-school care.

⁸ We include hyperlinks to secondary resources throughout the report.

garner input on ways to reduce the difference between the minimum wage and living wage rates.⁹ Between April and May 2019, the FWC held eight public hearings across BC and heard 40 presentations. We also invited comments from the public, resulting in 43 written submissions. The FWC's minimum wage deliberations resulted in more balanced input from labour unions, advocacy groups and business than the FWC's living wage consultations. A list of hearing presenters and the organizations they represent is in Appendix II.

Second, the FWC interviewed experts familiar with the living wage movement and ran two focus groups (see Appendix III). We also broadened our research beyond Canada, consulting academics in comparable economies to learn about the living wage and other emerging policies to support the low-wage workforce. In 2021 and 2022, we conducted supplementary virtual interviews to understand changes in living wage rates, the evolution of living wage campaigns and public policies to support the low-wage workforce in the post-pandemic labour market. Third, we examined Statistics Canada data to inform our understanding of economic conditions and labour market dynamics.

⁹ Public hearings were held in Nanaimo (April 24, 2019), Surrey (May 1, 2019), Abbotsford (May 6, 2019), Prince George (May 13, 2019), Kelowna (May 15, 2019), Cranbrook (virtual; May 22, 2019), Vancouver (May 24, 2019) and Victoria (May 31, 2019).

2 Development of a living wage in BC

IN THIS SECTION, we examine the evolution of the living wage campaign in BC, which has evolved through a series of steps: (1) building grassroots support for a living wage campaign, (2) developing a living wage methodology, (3) generating living wage calculations for select BC communities and (4) introducing a certified living wage employer process.

From grassroots support to a living wage methodology

In 2002, partly in response to Bill 29, the *Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act*, the Hospital Employees' Union, in partnership with the CCPA-BC,¹⁰ the Vancouver City Savings Credit Union (Vancity), other labour unions, anti-poverty organizations and academics, created the first Canadian living wage campaign in BC to raise awareness about low wages and their effect on families (Evans, 2017; Ludgate, 2021; Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2015).

In 2007, the CCPA-BC, Living Wage for Families BC and First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society (First Call), in partnership with faculty from Simon Fraser University, developed a methodology for calculating living wage rates for Metro Vancouver and Greater Victoria (Ivanova, 2022; Richards et al., 2008).¹¹ We explain the methodology in [Section 3](#). As of 2023, the CCPA-BC oversees the methodology for living wage calculations in BC, calculates the Metro Vancouver living wage rate and provides technical assistance to other BC communities in calculating their living wage rates. The CCPA-BC also regularly reviews the methodology to ensure that it continues to reflect the costs of a reasonable standard of living. Living Wage for Families BC works with community groups across the province to gather local data and calculate living wage rates elsewhere in BC (Anastasia French, interview, September 9, 2022).

In 2008, the first release of living wage rates for BC communities included only Metro Vancouver and Greater Victoria. The number of BC communities with living wage calculations fluctuates annually, as we show in Table 1 below, with living wage rates calculated for select BC communities. The most recent release of living wage calculations, from November 2022, includes living wage calculations for 22 BC communities (Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022b).

¹⁰ The CCPA is a non-partisan Canadian think tank that produces research reports on environmental, social and economic issues. The CCPA-BC is part of the larger CCPA national organization.

¹¹ The CCPA-BC did not calculate living wage rates for 2009 (Iglika Ivanova, personal communication, September 1, 2022).

Table 1. A comparison of BC communities with living wage calculations, 2008–2022

BC COMMUNITY	2008	2009*	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020**	2021	2022
Castlegar															\$20.54
Clayoquot Sound										\$20.11				\$21.15	
Columbia Valley												\$15.92	\$15.92	\$17.18	\$21.85
Comox Valley										\$15.96	\$16.59	\$15.97	\$15.97	\$16.44	\$20.26
Cowichan Valley														\$19.13	\$23.53
Cranbrook															\$21.90
Daajing Giids															\$25.87
Dawson Creek															\$20.53
Fernie															\$23.58
Fraser Valley							\$17.02	\$17.27	\$16.28	\$15.90	\$17.40	\$15.54	\$15.54	\$16.75	\$18.98
Golden														\$19.46	\$25.56
Grand Forks														\$17.21	\$20.05
Greater Victoria	\$16.39		\$17.31	\$18.03	\$18.07	\$18.73	\$18.93	\$20.05	\$20.02	\$20.01	\$20.50	\$19.39	\$19.39	\$20.46	\$24.29
Kamloops					\$17.95				\$17.21	\$16.90	\$17.31	\$15.93	\$15.93	\$16.71	\$19.14
Kelowna														\$18.49	\$22.88
Kitimat								\$20.61							
Metro Vancouver	\$16.74		\$18.17	\$18.81	\$19.14	\$19.62	\$20.10	\$20.68	\$20.64	\$20.62	\$20.91	\$19.50	\$19.50	\$20.52	\$24.08
Nanaimo												\$15.81	\$15.81	\$16.33	\$20.49
Nelson												\$18.46	\$18.46	\$19.56	\$20.83
North-central BC										\$16.39	\$16.51				
Northeast BC										\$18.29					
Parksville/ Qualicum									\$16.76	\$16.44	\$17.02				
Penticton														\$18.55	
Port Alberni							\$17.22								
Powell River										\$16.75	\$17.15				\$23.33

Table 1. A comparison of BC communities with living wage calculations, 2008–2022 (continued)

BC COMMUNITY	2008	2009*	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020**	2021	2022
Prince George					\$16.90				\$16.52						\$21.19
Prince Rupert															\$22.69
Revelstoke							\$18.87			\$18.77	\$19.37	\$18.90	\$18.90	\$19.51	\$23.60
Sunshine Coast															\$19.79
Trail												\$18.83	\$18.83	\$18.15	\$21.13

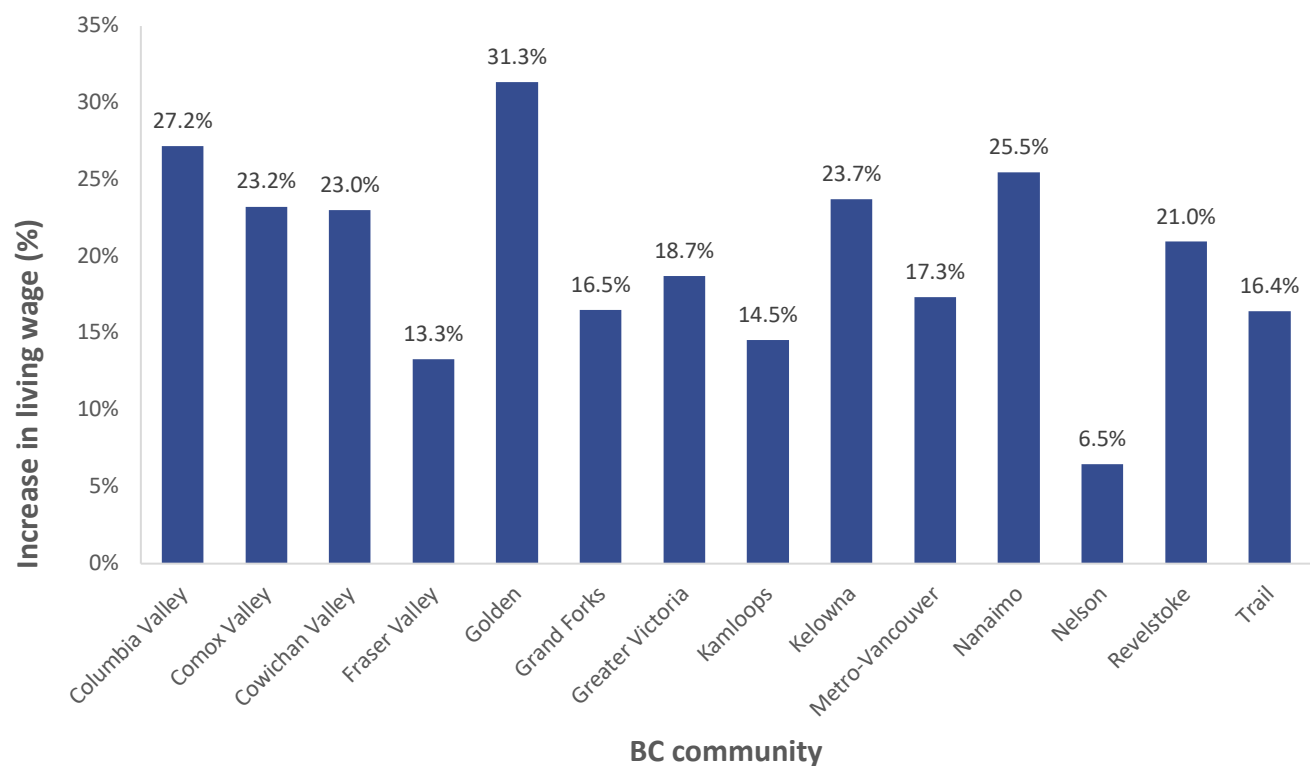
* The CCPA-BC did not calculate living wage rates for 2009 (Iglika Ivanova, personal communication, September 1, 2022).

** Living wage calculations were not updated in 2020 “because the global COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions and temporary shifts in regular family expenses and employment patterns” (Ivanova, Knowles & French, 2021).

Sources: Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022b; Ivanova & Klein, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015; Ivanova, Klein & Knowles, 2016; Ivanova, Klein & Raithby, 2018; Ivanova, Klein & Reaño, 2017; Ivanova, Knowles & French, 2021; Ivanova & Saugstad, 2019a; Richards, Cohen & Klein, 2010; Richards, Cohen, Klein & Littman, 2008.

In 2022, living wage calculations were generated for 22 BC communities, increasing from 17 in 2021, as shown in Table 1.¹² According to the 2022 living wage calculations released in November, Daajing Giids on Haida Gwaii has the highest living wage rate in BC, at \$25.87/hour, followed by Golden (\$25.56/hour), Greater Victoria (\$24.29/hour) and Metro Vancouver (\$24.08/hour). Across communities with living wage calculations, the Fraser Valley has the lowest living wage in BC, at \$18.98/hour. Community-specific living wage calculations can help inform the workforce and employers about living costs that, in turn, can influence compensation. In 2023, the number of BC communities with living wage calculations increased to 24 with the addition of Salt Spring Island (\$24.36/hour) and a new living wage calculation for the Sunshine Coast (\$24.30/hour), which had a living wage calculation for 2021 but not 2022.

Figure 1. Increase in the living wage from 2021 to 2022 across BC communities with living wage calculations for both years



Sources: Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022b; Ivanova, Knowles & French, 2021.

¹² Living wage calculations were paused in 2020 due to the pandemic and all the unprecedented changes to the labour market and government transfers that it resulted in. For the purposes of employer certification, the 2019 rates continued to be used. North-central BC includes Prince George and the surrounding areas, whereas Northeast BC includes Dawson Creek and the surrounding areas. In November 2021, 14 living wage rates were released with an additional three communities, Clayquot Sound, the Cowichan Valley and Sunshine Coast releasing living wage rates later in 2021.

As shown in Figure 1, in seven BC communities with 2021 and 2022 living wage calculations, the living wage increased by more than 20.0% in 2022. These sizable increases reflect inflation as well as methodological changes to the living wage calculation, including the addition of a second vehicle to the family budget in smaller communities and the addition of a “moving penalty” to the cost of shelter to better reflect rent increases. Wage increases in the range of 25.0% to 30.0% could be difficult for some employers to manage, but at the same time, inflationary pressures are creating challenges for people to make ends meet.

The Columbia Valley (27.2% increase) and Golden (31.3% increase) experienced the largest increases, with Nelson (6.5% increase) recording the smallest increase. The Fraser Valley also experienced one of the most modest increases (13.3% increase). We explain the factors driving these increases in [Section 3](#).

Certified living wage employers in BC

An important part of the BC living wage campaign is employer certification. Living Wage for Families BC administers the certification. It ensures certified organizations pay a living wage to their employees,¹³ and to staff of contractors and subcontractors. Non-mandatory benefits that an employer provides reduce the hourly wage necessary to reach the living wage. Certified living wage employers now also pay an annual certification fee, consistent with similar arrangements in other provinces with certified living wage employer programs.

As of March 2023, there are 407 certified living wage employers in BC (Anastasia French, personal communication, March 31, 2023). Since 2009, Living Wage for Families BC has certified 439 living wage employers.¹⁴ The largest increase in certifications occurred in 2021, when 120 employers were certified (see Table 2). In 2022, 115 employers became certified living wage employers. The presence of certified living wage employers in BC remains relatively small considering there are approximately 207,384 businesses operating in the province (Government of British Columbia, n.d.). With respect to the direct impact on the labour market, just over 1,400 workers benefited from a wage increase when their employer became certified, but this is a very small proportion considering an estimated 81,000 people earn the minimum wage or less in the province (Ministry of Labour, n.d.). Note that the number of workers with wage increases may underestimate those who experienced wage increases, because data on the staff of contractors who experience wage increases following a living wage certification is not collected by Living Wage for Families BC.

¹³ Trainees and students may be exempt if they comprise less than 10% of the workforce, or less than 20% if the organization is a non-profit with five staff members or fewer (Living Wage for Families BC, 2022).

¹⁴ The difference between 439 and 407 is explained by business, for example, ceasing operations.

Table 2. Number of new certified living wage employers in BC, 2009–2023

YEAR CERTIFIED	NUMBER OF NEW LIVING WAGE EMPLOYERS	NUMBER OF DIRECTLY EMPLOYED STAFF WHOSE WAGES INCREASED AFTER JOINING
2009	1	Data unavailable for 2009–2014
2010	7	
2011	10	
2012	6	
2013	5	
2014	4	
2015	13	3
2016	18	4
2017	29	14
2018	21	16
2019	35	17
2020	43	529
2021	120	300
2022*	115	567
2023 (to date)	12	2
Total	439	1,452**

* The living wage certification program was on hold for six months in 2022 while the program transitioned from First Call to Vancity Community Foundation. This may explain the slight drop in the number of new certifications.

** The total reflects the period of 2015–2023 (to date). Note that the number of contractors' staff who experienced wage increases is not included in the estimate of staff whose wages increased following the living wage certification.

Source: Living Wage for Families BC, personal communication, March 2023.

Certified living wage employers in BC are found across a range of industries. Reasons for becoming a certified living wage employer vary. A survey conducted by Living Wage for Families BC found that adopting the living wage can increase staff morale, reduce turnover, help with recruitment efforts and generate good publicity for the organization. Vancity is one of the largest certified living wage employers in Canada. Vancity's involvement with its branches across BC has been instrumental in promoting the benefits of a living wage among employers throughout the province (Carlaw et al., 2016; Wells, 2016).

The total number of direct employees working for certified living wage employers amounts to over 35,000 people (Anastasia French, interview, April 7, 2022).¹⁵ As Table 2 shows, a relatively small percentage of direct employees experience wage increases, yet these employees are primarily low-

¹⁵ The difference between 439 and 407 is explained by business, for example, ceasing operations.

wage earners facing the largest budgetary challenges. Some recently certified living wage employers include the Vancouver International Airport, which announced its decision in August 2022 to become a certified living wage employer to help hire and retain staff (Vancouver Airport Authority, 2022). By December 2023, all direct contractors will also earn a living wage, including “janitorial staff, building maintenance, landscaping, and traffic management contractors” (Vancouver Airport Authority, 2022).

Some businesses we interviewed pay a living wage but either were unaware of certification or chose not to become certified living wage employers. An employer can decide to pay a living wage without becoming a certified living wage employer. We examine how organizations implement the living wage in greater detail in case studies with both certified living wage employers and employers that pay a living wage but are not certified. These cases are located in Appendix V.

Most certified living wage employers in BC are small businesses with fewer than 50 employees (Ivanova, Knowles & French, 2021). Several BC municipalities are certified living wage employers, in part influenced by the City of New Westminster, the first municipal government in Canada to become a certified living wage employer, in 2011 (Ludgate, 2021). As of November 2022, 14 municipal organizations and First Nations councils were certified living wage employers, with 50% of the municipal organizations being certified since 2020, as Table 11 in Appendix IV shows. Over a decade ago, some living wage campaigns among municipalities failed, including efforts to introduce a living wage policy in Esquimalt and Surrey, due to financial considerations.

The language of living wage policies can vary in a couple of ways. First, the financial threshold may differ for contracts when the living wage policy applies, because, according to the certified living wage employer guidelines, it should reflect 0.5% of the purchasing budget. For example, the contract threshold the City of Port Coquitlam uses is greater than \$25,000, while the City of Pitt Meadows uses a contract threshold of \$10,000 (City of Pitt Meadows, n.d.). Second, the type of employees who are covered by the living wage policy can also differ. For example, some living wage policies implemented by municipalities can exclude students working for education purposes, which is also consistent with the Living Wage for Families BC certification requirements.

Support for living wage initiatives at the municipal level differs in its origins. In some municipalities, the campaign originates with councillors, whereas in others, support can originate from municipal staff or from stakeholders within the community. In explaining the decision to become a living wage employer, Bob Simpson, the mayor of Quesnel, explained: “If people can barely afford to live where they work then they cannot participate in the local economy or be engaged in their community.”

Implementing a living wage policy increases awareness about the living wage and the importance of creating quality jobs. The impact of the living wage certification may underestimate the number of workers who experience a wage increase, because Living Wage for Families BC does not collect data on contractor staff who receive wage increases through living wage certifications or on employers that decide to either increase their wages or become living wage employers themselves in response to increased awareness about the living wage when a local government becomes a certified living wage employer.

Several BC communities have engaged in research on the implications of adopting a living wage (e.g., the Resort Municipality of Whistler, Cowichan Valley Regional District, the City of Revelstoke). Meanwhile, others, such as the City of Parksville, pay a living wage to their direct employees and contractors but have yet to become certified living wage employers (Anastasia French, interview, April 2022). School districts in BC are also adopting a living wage. For example, in 2012, School District No. 69 (Qualicum) became the first school district in Canada to become a certified living wage employer (Living Wage for Families BC, 2012). Similarly, in February 2022, the New Westminster School District and the Vancouver School District became certified living wage employers (MacLellan, 2020; Bernard & Steacy, 2020).

Details pertaining to individual certification show the limited impact on direct employees in local governments. In 10 of 16 local governments, certification had no impact on direct employee wages, and in another four, fewer than 10 workers received wage increases. Collectively, the 16 local governments have 26,700 staff. Of these, 487 workers (1.8%) experienced a wage increase when their local government became a living wage employer.

Although only a small percentage of direct employees experience wage increases, they benefit from having their wage lifted to the living wage rate. When the City of Vancouver implemented a living wage policy, approximately 300 staff of contractors were directly impacted, and the effect and response have been positive. At our public hearing in downtown Vancouver, Alexander Ralph, Chief Procurement Officer and Director of Supply Chain for the City of Vancouver, explained:

“We’ve received letters from, for example, ... our graffiti removal services about employees saying just that it changed [their] life. [So] it’s very rewarding.”

The City of Vancouver becoming a living wage employer resulted in ripple effects, lifting wages in other organizations beyond those staff working on contracts with for the City. The City’s security services contractor eventually adopted a living wage for all their staff as well even those staff not working on the City of Vancouver contract. Ralph explained, “It creates an administrative nightmare for vendors” if they have only one contract with a living wage employer. Because if one contract for a vendor is a living wage employer, they need to create a separate process to differentiate between contracts. Furthermore, all of the vendor’s staff want to work on a living wage contract, because they would get paid more than if they were staffed on a different contract. Thus, the City of Vancouver’s adoption of a living wage policy created unintended positive consequences impacting far more than just the City’s direct or contractual staff. In March 2023, the City of Vancouver ceased being a certified living wage employer and instead chose to pay fair wages to direct employees and staff of contract providers based on a five-year moving average of living wage rates for Metro Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2023).

Living wage policies may be part of a compensation policy within the human resources domain and may also be implemented as part of a social procurement policy. Some BC employers have social procurement policies that incorporate paying a living wage to create “social value through

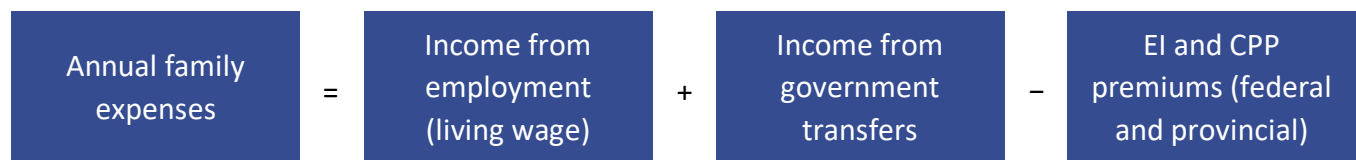
procurement” (Lupick, 2017, p. 11). In 2015, the Village of Cumberland became BC’s first municipality certified by Buy Social Canada. The Living Wage for Families BC employer certification program includes language around social procurement policies to accommodate employers contracting work to “social enterprises as part of a corporate responsibility strategy” (Living Wage for Families BC, 2022, p. 8).

3 Examining differences between the BC minimum wage and the living wage

The CCPA-BC living wage methodology

In 2008, the CCPA-BC released a methodology for calculating living wages for communities. The methodology is in use in other Canadian jurisdictions in addition to BC and is now referred to as the Canadian Living Wage Framework (Richards et al., 2008). The living wage methodology considers annual family expenses; family income; and government deductions, taxes and government transfers. The living wage budget does not include debt payments, retirement savings, savings to own a home or savings for children's future education. The living wage budget does not include anything beyond minimal recreation and holiday costs and savings for an emergency fund to cover the equivalent of two weeks' wages for each parent to cover any gaps in earnings in the event of having to miss work to take care of sick children, due to sickness beyond the statutory minimum of five paid days per year or due to being between jobs (Richards et al., 2008; Ivanova, 2022).

Figure 2. CCPA-BC living wage methodology



Source: Modified from Richards et al., 2008.

The living wage budget relies on data from multiple sources, including household spending data from Statistics Canada and shelter cost data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). In 2008 and 2014, focus groups helped refine the family budget. Additional methodological adjustments were made in 2015, 2017, 2021 and 2022 (Ivanova, Knowles & French, 2021; Ivanova, 2022).

Throughout this section, we acknowledge the secondary research we rely on prepared by the CCPA-BC.

Calculating the Metro Vancouver living wage

We examine the CCPA-BC methodology for Metro Vancouver because a living wage has been consistently calculated for Metro Vancouver in most years since 2008, and because the majority of the BC population lives in Metro Vancouver.¹⁶ We outline assumptions for family expenses and employment income underlying the 2022 living wage calculation for Metro Vancouver (Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022b). The methodology is based on both parents working full-time and earning a before-tax annual income of \$43,825.60 per parent, for a total before-tax annual income of \$87,651.20. The representative household that is the basis for the living wage is a family with two parents and two children, ages 4 and 7. The younger child is assumed to require full-time daycare, while the older child is enrolled in before- and after-school care.

Table 3. Family expenses for a two-parent, two-child, two-income family in Metro Vancouver, 2022

ITEM	MONTHLY EXPENSES (\$)	ANNUAL EXPENSES (\$)	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL EXPENSES
Modified market basket measure			
Food	1,114.20	13,370.43	14.7%
Clothing and footwear	173.83	2,086.00	2.3%
Shelter	2,483.71	29,804.58	32.8%
Telecommunications	196.49	2,357.91	2.6%
Transportation	545.64	6,547.72	7.2%
Other household expenses	971.18	11,654.14	12.8%
Subtotal	5,485.05	65,820.78	72.4%
Child care	1,476.92	17,723.00	19.5%
Non-MSP health expenses	225.00	2,700.00	3.0%
Contingency fund	280.93	3,371.20	3.7%
Parent education	105.80	1,269.60	1.4%
Total	7,573.70	90,884.58	100.0%

Source: Modified from Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022a.

As we show in Table 3, four areas account for the majority of expenses: shelter (32.8%), child care (19.5%), food (14.7%) and transportation (7.2%).

With shelter accounting for approximately one-third of the “representative” budget, assumptions about housing and rent costs have a substantial impact on the living wage. The Metro Vancouver living

¹⁶ The same methodology is used for all BC urban areas with available CMHC rent data and public transit systems; only the exact numbers for various expenses differ locally. Small differences in the methodology exist in communities where CMHC rent data is unavailable and different data sources are required to estimate the costs of rent, and in communities where transit systems do not provide adequate coverage (typically smaller communities).

wage assumes the reference family lives in a three-plus-bedroom apartment.¹⁷ Because residential rents vary significantly across the province, shelter expenses also account for much of the regional variation in BC living wage calculations.

Since the inception of the living wage, calculations in BC have used CMHC estimates to determine the median rent for a “three or more bedrooms apartment” for shelter expenses. In 2022, the CCPA-BC changed its approach for determining shelter expenses to address a long-standing underestimate of the actual cost of rent encountered by families who move frequently and, consequently, may face higher rent (Ivanova, 2022). The CCPA-BC used 2016 census data to “estimate a ‘moving penalty’ faced by households who had to find housing within the previous year” and then applied this moving penalty to the CMHC rental data (Ivanova, 2022, pp. 9–10). Including the moving penalty data increased the 2022 rental estimate for Metro Vancouver from \$1,952 monthly to \$2,186 monthly, an increase of \$234 (Ivanova, 2022). This change does result in a larger increase in the 2022 Metro Vancouver living wage than in previous years. However, it addresses concerns about underestimating rental expenditures given that some households move frequently, and the absence of rent control policies means that they face higher shelter expenses when they move.

Child care fees are the second-largest expense, accounting for nearly 20.0% of the representative household budget.¹⁸ Since 2017, enriched provincial and federal child benefits have lowered living expenses for families with daycare-aged children and have tempered increases in the living wage. Food is the third-highest expense for the representative family (Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022b). The fourth-largest expense, transportation in Metro Vancouver, assumes the family will own and operate a used car and use public transportation equivalent to a two-zone bus pass for one of the parents, which is replaced by a U-Pass eight months of the year when one parent enrolls in a public college course.¹⁹

When comparing the Metro Vancouver living wage budget for previous years, shelter is consistently the largest expense. Child care fees were also a major expense until late 2017, when available federal and provincial child benefits were introduced to help offset this expense. The largest increases in expenditures for the reference family from 2021 to 2022 came from food (an increase of 16.9%), shelter (an increase of 16.7%) and transportation (an increase of 11.5%) (Ivanova, 2022). Child care

¹⁷ Until 2022, the rent data underlying the CCPA-BC living wage methodology was derived from the CMHC and was based on the median rent for a “three-plus bedroom” apartment (Ivanova, Knowles & French, 2021).

¹⁸ For the purpose of calculating child care expenses, one child, age 4, is assumed to be in daycare, while the other child, age 7, is assumed to be in school and needing before- and after-school care. In addition, three weeks of full-time care are included during winter and spring breaks, as well as six weeks of full-time summer care.

¹⁹ Before 2022, living wage calculations for transportation allocated one used car for rural communities in BC. An additional change in the 2022 living wage calculation for rural BC communities included the addition of a second used car for those living in rural communities where public transit is less accessible (Ivanova, 2022). This change contributed to higher transportation expenses in smaller communities.

costs increased by only 1%. A basic extended health and dental plan increased by 19.7% but accounts for a relatively small share of the family budget (Ivanova, 2022).

Accounting for government transfers, government deductions and taxes

Government transfers and benefits supplement income or reduce the cost of living, so they are incorporated into living wage calculations. In 2022, the reference family in Metro Vancouver qualifies for the Canada Child Benefit (\$691.07), the BC Child Opportunity Benefit (now called the BC Family Benefit; \$115.00), and the BC Affordable Child Care Benefit (\$584.45), reducing the Metro Vancouver living wage calculation (Table 4). In addition, the reference family also received a one-time ICBC rebate of \$110 per driver, as well as the one-time enhanced October payment of the BC Climate Action Tax Credit—two one-off measures that the BC government introduced in 2022 to assist families with the rising costs of living. Together, these all significantly reduced the earnings required to cover the family’s expenses and, in turn, reduced the Metro Vancouver living wage calculation.

The reference family’s income exceeds the \$40,000 gross income threshold and is not eligible for the Rental Assistance Program, which would provide an additional income supplement (Ivanova, Knowles & French, 2021).²⁰ Similarly, families earning above the \$64,206 threshold no longer receive the BC Climate Action Tax Credit.

Table 4. Non-wage income (government transfers)

ITEM	MONTHLY INCOME (\$)	ANNUAL INCOME (\$)
Canada Child Benefit	691.07	8,292.84
BC Family Benefit	115.00	1,380.00
GST credit, January to June	0.00	0.00
Doubling of GST credit, July to December	0.00	0.00
Rental Assistance Program	0.00	0.00
BC Climate Action Tax Credit, January to June	0.62	7.47
BC Climate Action Tax Credit, July to September	1.72	20.66
BC Climate Action Tax Credit, one-time enhanced October payment	9.81	117.68
BC Affordable Child Care Benefit	584.45	7,013.37
One-time ICBC rebate	9.17	110.00
Total	1,411.84	16,942.02

Source: Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022a.

Table 5 shows how government deductions and taxes are taken into consideration.

²⁰ The Rental Assistance Program “reimburses a portion of the difference between 30 per cent of the family’s total income and its adjusted rent amount” (Ivanova & Reaño, 2021, p. 17). The threshold to access the Rental Assistance Program is a gross household income of less than \$40,000; thus, the reference family is ineligible.

Table 5. Government deductions and taxes

ITEM	PARENT 1	PARENT 2	TOTAL
Hours worked per week	35	35	70
Wage	24.08	24.08	
Employment income	43,825.60	43,825.60	87,651.20
Adjustments	-10,911.26	-201.63	
Net income	32,914.34	43,623.97	76,538.31
EI premiums	692.44	692.44	1,384.89
CPP premiums	2,197.75	2,197.75	4,395.49
Federal income tax	2,017.23	3,807.14	5,824.37
Federal refundable tax credits	0.00	-250.00	250.00
Provincial income tax	810.90	1,524.44	2,335.33
Annual after-tax income	38,107.28	35,853.84	73,961.12
Monthly after-tax income	3,175.61	2,987.82	6,163.43

Source: Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022a.

The living wage budget reveals how important it is for businesses and government to work together to support the low-wage workforce. A decent “livable” wage combined with government policies can reduce the cost of living to support low-wage earners.

How does a living wage differ from the minimum wage?

The minimum wage differs from a living wage in several respects (see Table 6). First, the minimum wage is the lowest rate an employer can legally pay its employees and is set by the provincial government. In contrast, a living wage is a voluntary employment standard. In BC, the living wage is based on a prototypical reference family of two parents and two children. Second, the minimum wage overlooks household expenses, notably the cost of shelter and of raising children, and does not reflect a reasonable standard of living even for an individual. In contrast, monthly expenditures, including shelter, food, transportation and child care costs, are central to living wage calculations. In general, living wage campaigns tend to mobilize around increasing the minimum wage. Third, the minimum wage is generally not adjusted if household expenses decline due to enriched employer benefits or improved social programs.²¹ In general, living wage campaigns build coalitions to help increase minimum wage policy.

²¹ In Canada, minimum wage rates do not consider employer benefits. In some jurisdictions in the US, however, minimum wage rates do reflect employer benefits. For example, the local minimum wage for Seattle, Washington, has different minimum wage rates depending on whether or not an employer provides benefits (City of Seattle, Office of Labor Standards, n.d.).

Table 6. Comparing the BC minimum wage with the living wage

THE BC MINIMUM WAGE	THE LIVING WAGE
The wage for an individual (not responsive to family circumstances).	Calculated based on the expenses of a family of four with two young children (responsive to family circumstances).
Does not reflect actual costs of living in a given community.	Reflects actual costs of living in a given community.
A provincial or federal statutory minimum.	Determined through community consultation, negotiations, contracting conditions, municipal policies or bylaws, etc.
Not adjusted by employer-provided benefits or government tax or transfer programs.	Adjusted by benefits provided by employers, government taxation policies and programs that support low-income individuals and families.
\$15.65/hour (June 2022).	Ranges from \$18.98/hour to \$24.08/hour for BC communities.

Source: Modified from Richards et al., 2008, p. 17.

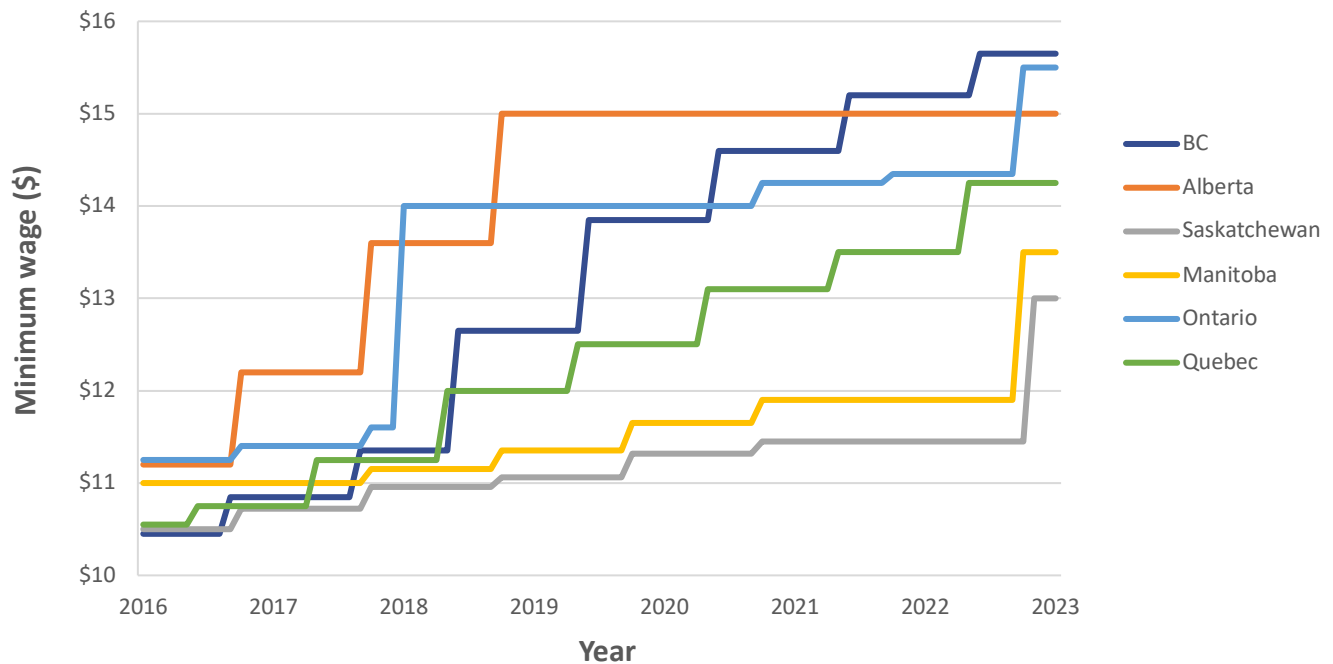
Interprovincial comparison of the minimum wage, 2017–2022²²

In October 2017, when the FWC was established, the BC minimum wage was \$11.35/hour, above Saskatchewan (\$10.96/hour) and Manitoba (\$11.15/hour), just slightly above Quebec (\$11.25/hour), 25 cents lower than Ontario (\$11.60/hour) and \$2.25 below Alberta (\$13.60/hour) (Government of Canada, n.d.). Following the FWC timeline, the BC minimum wage climbed to \$15.20/hour in June 2021 (Griffin Cohen, Limpricht & Peacock, 2018). In June 2022, BC's minimum wage increased to \$15.65/hour. With the June 2022 increase, the BC minimum wage is the highest among the larger provinces, 15 cents higher than Ontario's minimum wage (\$15.50/hour).²³ The increase in the BC minimum wage is an important factor in narrowing the gap with living wage rates across BC communities in the ensuing years.

²² Although the BC minimum wage increased in June 2022, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate is published in November 2022 and applies until November 2023. Thus, we use the June 2022 minimum wage (\$15.65/hour) and the November 2022 living wage rates, providing an overlap of eight months from November 2022 until June 2023, when the BC minimum wage will increase.

²³ In 2022, Nunavut had the highest minimum wage among provinces and territories, at \$16.00/hour. In April 2023, the federal minimum wage will reach \$16.65/hour (Government of Canada, n.d.).

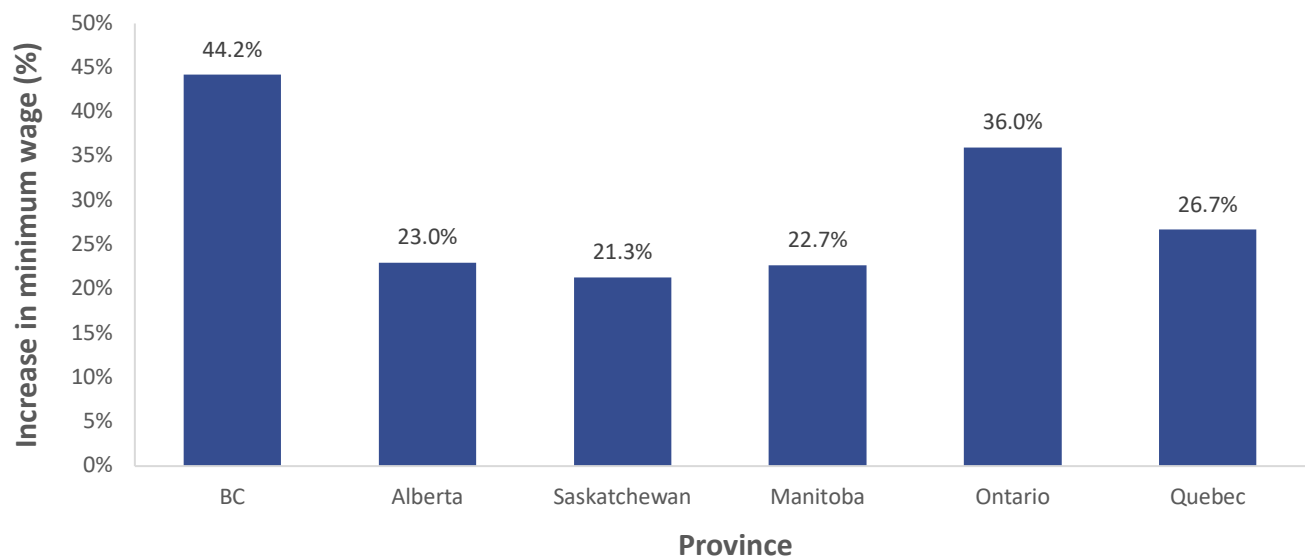
Figure 3. Minimum wage across selected provinces, April 2016–June 2023



Source: Government of Canada, n.d.

The growth in the BC minimum wage between June 2017 and January 2023 outpaced that of other provinces, as shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Increase in minimum wage rates for select provinces, June 2017–January 2023



Source: Government of Canada, n.d.

Changes in the Metro Vancouver living wage, 2008–2022

The difference between the BC minimum wage and the Metro Vancouver living wage changes over time due to changes in federal and provincial policies and changes in household expenses.

The Metro Vancouver living wage rate can increase, remain the same or decrease annually, highlighting the impact public policy has on the living wage. As Table 7 shows, the living wage rate for Metro Vancouver increased steadily from 2008 (\$16.74/hour) to 2015 (\$20.68/hour) but decreased from 2015 (\$20.68/hour) to 2017 (\$20.62/hour), in response to policy changes.

Table 7. Living wage rates for Metro Vancouver, 2008–2022

YEAR	LIVING WAGE RATE (\$/HOUR)	CHANGE FROM LIVING WAGE THE PREVIOUS YEAR		DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LIVING WAGE AND THE BC MINIMUM WAGE		ANNUAL INFLATION INCREASE FOR BC
		(%)	(\$/HOUR)	(%)	(\$/HOUR)	
2008	\$16.74			7.0%	\$1.09	2.1
2009						0.0
2010	\$18.17			16.1%	\$2.52	1.3
2011	\$18.81	3.5%	\$0.64	20.2%	\$3.16	2.4
2012	\$19.14	1.8%	\$0.33	22.3%	\$3.49	1.1
2013	\$19.62	2.5%	\$0.48	25.4%	\$3.97	-0.1
2014	\$20.10	2.4%	\$0.48	28.4%	\$4.45	1.0
2015	\$20.68	2.9%	\$0.58	32.1%	\$5.03	1.1
2016	\$20.64	-0.2%	-\$0.04	31.9%	\$4.99	1.8
2017	\$20.62	-0.1%	-\$0.02	31.8%	\$4.97	2.1
2018	\$20.91	1.4%	\$0.29	33.6%	\$5.26	2.7
2019	\$19.50	-6.7%	-\$1.41	24.6%	\$3.85	2.3
2020	\$19.50			24.6%	\$3.85	0.8
2021	\$20.52	5.2%	\$1.02	31.1%	\$4.87	2.8
2022	\$24.08	17.3%	\$3.56	53.9%	\$8.43	6.9

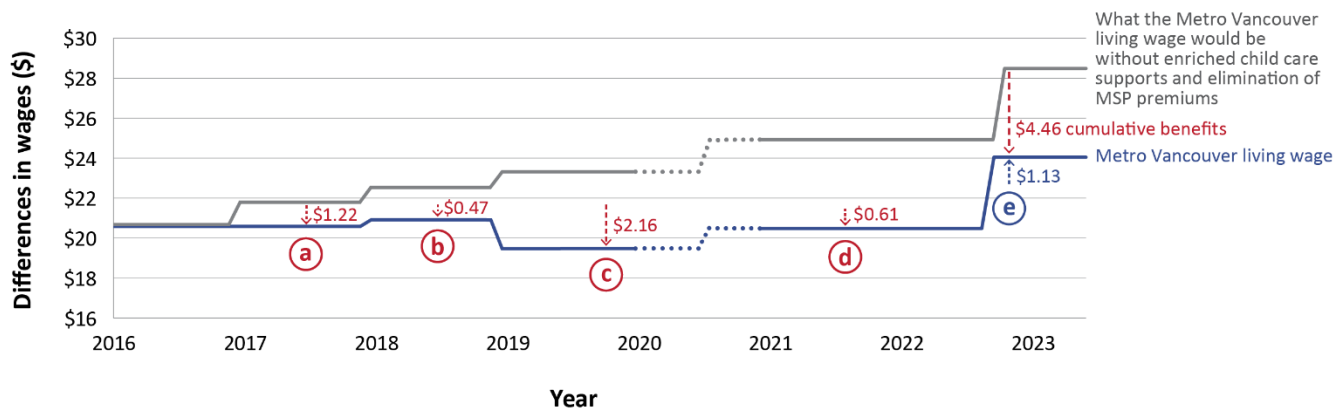
Note: Differences were calculated using a \$15.65/hour minimum wage that applies from June 2022 to June 2023.

Sources: Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022b; Ivanova & Klein, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015; Ivanova, Klein & Knowles, 2016; Ivanova, Klein & Raithby, 2018; Ivanova, Klein & Reaño, 2017; Ivanova, Knowles & French, 2021; Ivanova & Saugstad, 2019a; Richards, Cohen & Klein, 2010; Richards, Cohen, Klein & Littman, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2023. Statistics Canada, Table 18-10-0005-01.

In addition, Table 7 reveals how the difference between the Metro Vancouver living wage rate and the BC minimum wage can increase or decrease annually depending on policy changes and changes in the cost of living. For example, the difference between the BC minimum wage and the Metro Vancouver living wage rate decreased by 6.7% between 2018 and 2020 and increased by 17.3% between 2021 and 2022. The largest annual increase (17.3%) in the Metro Vancouver living wage since 2008 occurred between 2021 and 2022, in part to reflect the impact of inflation and increasing housing costs.

Figure 2Figure 5 shows the Metro Vancouver living wage rate from 2016 to 2023 and reconstructs what it would have been without enriched government and employer benefits. In 2021, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate would have been \$24.98/hour rather than \$20.52/hour.

Figure 5. Comparing the Metro Vancouver living wage rate with and without enriched benefits, 2016–2023



Sources: Ivanova, 2022; Ivanova & Knowles, 2016, 2021; Ivanova & Raithby, 2018; Ivanova & Reaño, 2017; Ivanova & Saugstad, 2019b.

Notes:

- The non-taxable **Canada Child Benefit** reduces annual out-of-pocket child care expenses by almost \$1,000. The **BC Back-to-School Tax Credit** also provides a small savings, reducing the living wage by \$0.01.
- MSP premiums** are cut by 50%, saving \$900 annually. The **Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative** is introduced.
- The **BC Affordable Child Care Benefit** reduces out-of-pocket child care expenses by \$7,013 annually.
- MSP premiums** are eliminated in 2020, saving \$900 annually. The new **BC Child Opportunity Benefit** (now called the BC Family Benefit) reduces out-of-pocket child care expenses by \$720 annually.
- The **living wage methodology** is changed—a “moving penalty” is added to better reflect rent increases.

From 2015 to 2017, the Metro Vancouver living wage decreased because of the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit. Reversing this pattern, in 2018, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate increased by \$0.29 to \$20.91/hour, and in 2019, decreased by \$1.41 to \$19.50/hour. In 2020, the Metro Vancouver living wage remained unchanged because the calculations were paused due to the pandemic. In 2021, the Metro Vancouver living wage increased by \$1.02 to \$20.52/hour. Expenses would have increased by 7.0% over the period without enriched child care benefits and the elimination of MSP premiums, which saved households \$900 annually. In addition to the lift provided by the BC Affordable Child Care Benefit introduced in September 2018, the new BC Child Opportunity Benefit

(now called the BC Family Benefit) reduced out-of-pocket child care expenses for the reference family by \$720 annually.

The Metro Vancouver living wage rate increased sharply in 2022 as rent increased and high inflation drove up other household expenses. Comparing the 2021 and 2022 Metro Vancouver living wage budgets reveals that low-wage earners are confronting higher costs in several areas, including food (+16.9%), shelter (+16.7%) and transportation (+11.5%) (Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022b). A change in the living wage methodology introducing a “moving penalty” to better reflect increasing rents also contributed to the increase in the Metro Vancouver living wage rate.²⁴ The addition of the moving penalty added \$1.13 to the 2022 Metro Vancouver living wage rate.

Reviewing the Metro Vancouver living wage from 2016 to 2023 reveals the impact of progressive public policy on reducing the cost of living for households and demonstrates how the living wage can increase, stay the same or decrease from year to year.

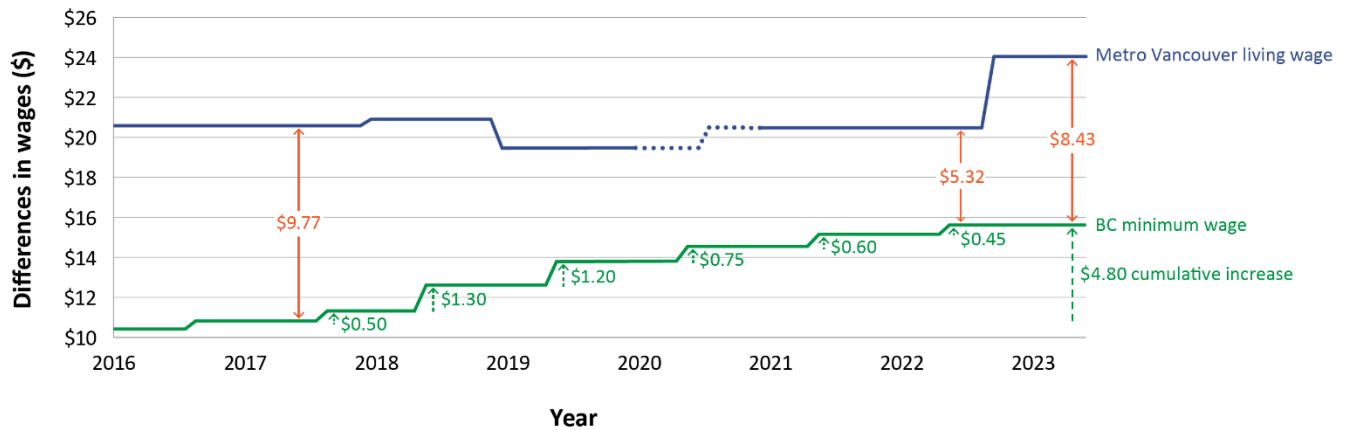
Comparing the BC minimum wage with the Metro Vancouver living wage rate

Increases in the BC minimum wage have an important role in reducing the Metro Vancouver living wage rate. Between mid-2017 and late 2021, the BC minimum wage climbed from \$10.85/hour to \$15.20/hour, an increase of \$4.35 (40.0%). Comparing the Metro Vancouver living wage rates in 2017 and 2022 illustrates the impact increasing the minimum wage has on the living wage rate.

As shown in Figure 6, in 2017, when the FWC started its work, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate was \$9.77 higher than the BC minimum wage. By 2021, the difference between the Metro Vancouver living wage rate and the BC minimum wage narrowed to \$5.32, a decrease of \$4.45 (45.5%). In 2022, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate reached \$24.08/hour, increasing the difference between the BC minimum wage and the Metro Vancouver living wage rate to \$8.43 (53.9%), slightly below where it was in 2017. Figure 6 illustrates the direct impact of the minimum wage on the Metro Vancouver living wage rate between 2016 and 2023.

²⁴ Renters tend to move more frequently, thus encountering rent increases more often.

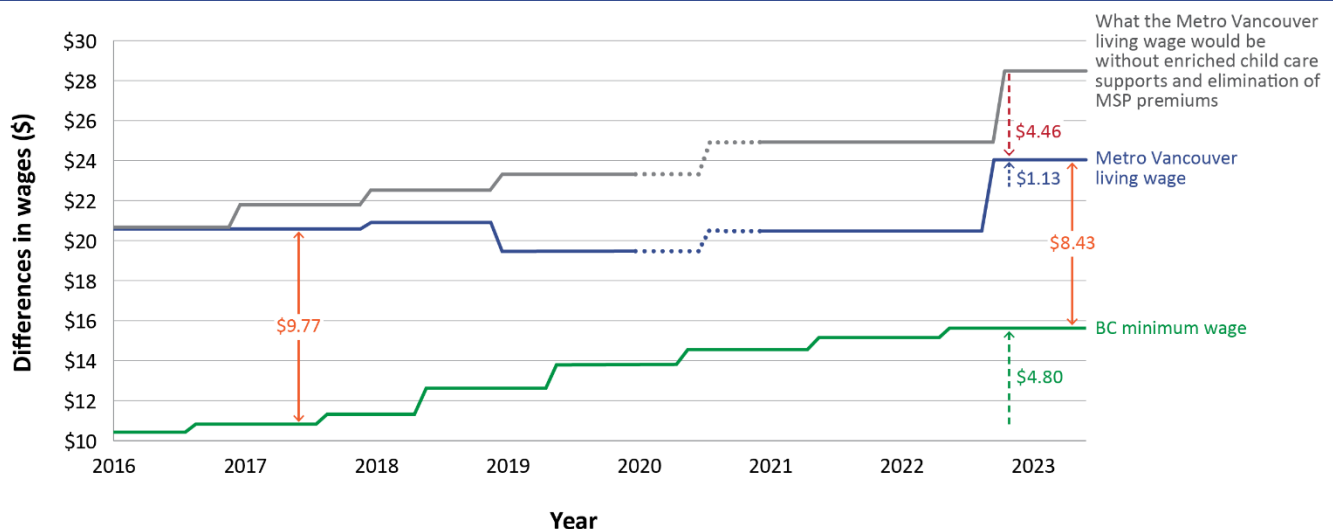
Figure 6. Comparing the Metro Vancouver living wage rate and the BC minimum wage, 2016–2023



Sources: Ivanova, 2022; Ivanova & Knowles, 2016, 2021; Ivanova & Raithby, 2018; Ivanova & Reaño, 2017; Ivanova & Saugstad, 2019b.

Figure 7 shows the BC minimum wage, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate and the Metro Vancouver living wage rate without new federal and provincial child benefits and the elimination of MSP premiums. Increases since 2017 have brought the BC minimum wage \$4.80 closer to the Metro Vancouver living wage, while new policy supports for households have decreased the Metro Vancouver living wage by \$4.46.

Figure 7. Comparing the BC minimum wage, the Metro Vancouver living wage rate and the Metro Vancouver living wage rate without enriched benefits, 2016–2023



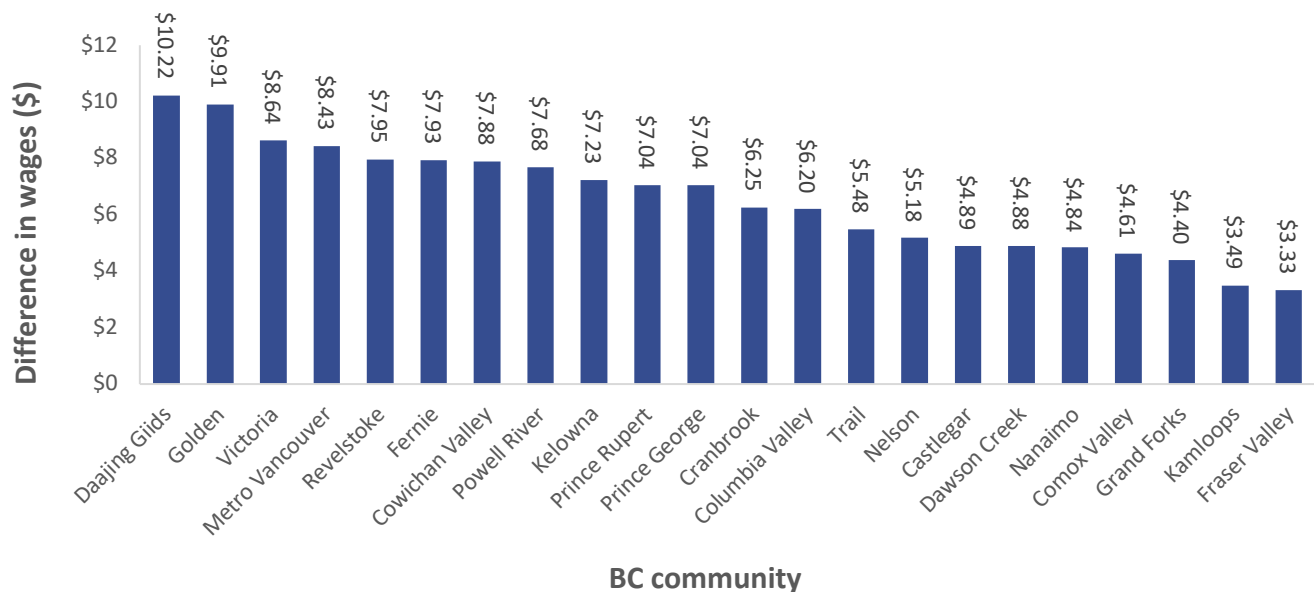
Sources: Ivanova, 2022; Ivanova & Knowles, 2016, 2021; Ivanova & Raithby, 2018; Ivanova & Reaño, 2017; Ivanova & Saugstad, 2019b.

As Figure 7 reveals, the BC minimum wage has a direct impact on living wage rates.

Difference between the BC minimum wage and living wages in BC communities

Living wage rate calculations vary across communities, so the difference between the BC minimum wage and the living wage rates for specific BC communities varies. As Figure 8 shows, in 2022, the difference between the BC minimum wage and the living wage rate ranged from \$10.22 in Daajing Giids in Haida Gwaii to \$3.33 in the Fraser Valley. Due to the higher cost of living in Daajing Giids compared with the Fraser Valley, the difference between the living wage for Daajing Giids and the BC minimum wage is much larger than in the Fraser Valley. In addition to Daajing Giids, three other BC communities, Metro Vancouver, Greater Victoria and Golden, have a living wage that is at least \$8.00 higher than the BC minimum wage.

Figure 8. Differences between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates across BC communities, 2022



Source: Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022.

Seven BC communities with living wage calculations had a difference of less than \$5.00 between the BC minimum wage and the living wage. The average difference between the minimum wage and the living wage is \$6.52/hour across the 22 BC communities. The variation across regions reflects differences in housing costs, with the two largest metro regions in the province having the largest differences.

Additional context for the Metro Vancouver living wage

Households differ in size and structure. According to the 2016 census, only 12.1% of households in Metro Vancouver consisted of couples with two children, while 40.5% of households consisted of one person (see Table 12 in Appendix IV). For example, across Metro Vancouver, a worker is much more likely to come from a one-person household or a two-adult household with no children than the reference household of two adults and two young children the CCPA-BC living wage methodology uses.

On the one hand, the current reference family is useful for having a consistent measure across BC communities. On the other hand, it overlooks other types of households and demographics that may also be experiencing significant challenges making ends meet, such as single-parent households, households with eldercare responsibilities and single-person households.²⁵

²⁵ Assumptions of the living wage calculation with respect to the reference family (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

4 Context of low-wage work and low-wage earners in BC

Context of low-wage work in BC

Examining the context of low-wage work in BC is helpful for understanding the industries low-wage work is concentrated in and identifying the characteristics of employers that pay low wages. Research on low-wage work suggests low-wage work can be problematic for several reasons. Some of the negative consequences of low-wage work are financial stress, adverse effects on physical and mental health, and exacerbation of social and economic inequities. These outcomes underscore the importance of encouraging the creation of “good”-quality jobs featuring decent compensation, fair treatment, job security, predictable hours and access to training opportunities.

In 2022, we find that those earning a minimum wage or less in BC are highly concentrated in two industries, comprising 11.9% of those working in accommodation and food services and 7.4% of those working in wholesale and retail trade. While wholesale and retail trade employs only 17.0% of the total workforce, it accounts for 36.1% of all workers who earn the minimum wage or less. Accommodation and food services employs 7.3% of the total workforce, but it employs 24.8% of all workers who earn the minimum wage or less.

A common assumption is that low-wage earners are typically found in small firms: however, as the first FWC report highlighted, the majority of low-wage earners work in organizations that employ more than 100 workers (Griffin Cohen, Limpright & Peacock, 2018).

Union presence can improve job quality, and low-wage jobs are less common in unionized workplaces. Unionized firms continue to ensure employees earn higher wages relative to their non-union counterparts; only 8.3% of all employees earning the minimum wage or less in 2022 were union members or were covered by a collective agreement.

Whether jobs are full-time or non-standard (e.g., part-time, temporary, contract) also has implications for earnings. Jobs that pay the minimum wage or less are concentrated in the non-standard category, requiring workers to find multiple non-standard jobs to make ends meet, in turn creating scheduling challenges when trying to navigate multiple work schedules along with daycare and school schedules. In 2022, 18.9% of the total workforce worked part-time (less than 30 hours per week), representing 57.7% of those earning a minimum wage or less in BC.

Characteristics of low-wage earners in BC

Turning to the context of low-wage earners in BC, approximately 81,000 people in BC, 3.5% of the workforce, earned the minimum wage or less in 2022. The workforce may have a greater ability to negotiate higher wages given the current labour market conditions: however, wage growth is not keeping pace with inflation, considering increasing costs in transportation, shelter, food and clothing (Statistics Canada, 2022a). This reality is especially difficult for low-wage earners and for those in the lower income quintiles.

In BC, low-wage earners tend to be disproportionately female, youth, historically marginalized, recent immigrants and employed in non-union jobs (Griffin Cohen, Limpricht & Peacock, 2018). In 2022, youth 15–19 years of age comprised 5.2% of the total workforce, whereas they represented 28.6% of those earning the minimum wage or less. People 20–24 years of age comprised 10.2% of the total workforce and represented 20.2% of those earning the minimum wage or less. Adults 25 years of age and older comprised 84.6% of the total workforce and represented 51.3% of employees earning the minimum wage or less. Women constituted 50.0% of the total BC workforce in 2022 but represented 61.5% of the workforce earning the minimum wage or less.²⁶ Considering household type, 7.0% of single-parent households earn the minimum wage or less. Students make up 32.9% of the workforce earning minimum wage or less. Recent immigrants are more likely to enter the Canadian labour market in non-standard jobs and could encounter challenges transitioning to full-time, better-paying jobs (Lamb, Banerjee & Verma, 2021).

Indigenous people living in Canada are overrepresented in low-wage and non-standard employment compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts (Lamb & Verma, 2021). They also experience lower employment participation and higher unemployment rates (Moyser, 2017) and encounter additional barriers when seeking employment due to historical discrimination (De Silva, 1999; Feir, 2013; George & Kuhn, 1994; Hossain & Lamb, 2012; Hum & Simpson, 1999; Lamb, 2013; Lamb et al., 2018; Mueller, 2004; Pendakur & Pendakur, 1998, 2002, 2010, 2011). The Indigenous and non-Indigenous wage gap needs to be addressed with respect to access to employment opportunities as well as income (Lamb & Verma, 2021). We lack a comprehensive understanding of Indigenous labour market conditions due to limitations of Statistics Canada data (Ivanova, 2021).

²⁶ Data from Statistics Canada's Beyond 20/20 Professional Browser, accessed February 20, 2023.

5 Findings from public consultations, briefs and key informant interviews

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS from unions, anti-poverty groups and other community members touched on many common themes, including:

- Strengthening labour and employment regulations and minimum wage protections to ensure all British Columbians are treated equally.
- Indexing future minimum wage increases to a clear measure (e.g., the Consumer Price Index).²⁷
- Improving *Employment Standards Act* enforcement.
- Establishing a permanent FWC to monitor the minimum wage and to engage in independent research to better support low-wage earners.

These groups also identified challenges associated with high and increasing living expenses.

Findings from the workforce and trade unions

Workers and union representatives frequently cited high living costs (housing, child care, transit, food), precarious work and the need to improve job quality (better wages, predictable and reasonable hours, job security). With respect to policies that might help narrow the difference between the minimum and the living wages, recommendations from these groups included strengthening labour and employment regulations, increasing the minimum wage and establishing a permanent FWC. The living wage is generally seen as a way to help lower-income households make ends meet and participate more fully in their communities.

Concerns were voiced about the living wage being an accurate reflection of what is required for a decent standard of living. With respect to living costs, comments reflected the reality that affordable housing often translates into longer commutes or lower-quality housing options. Challenges related to transit costs and accessing transit that serves work and/or child care schedules were frequently cited. As one participant in the Victoria hearing noted, “[B]uses don’t run early morning, so construction

²⁷ The BC government introduced this initiative in June 2022.

workers ... trying to get to work, if they have a 6:30 start, you know, they're not getting a bus at 5:00 in the morning."

Key insights from Indigenous representatives highlighted historic economic exclusion, discrimination in hiring and a lack of accurate data gathered with the involvement of Indigenous communities in the design and data collection process. While some Indigenous participants had experience with introducing a living wage, they raised concerns that living wage rates are too low and of the need to better address differences between Northern and Southern BC. It is important to consider higher transportation costs for rural communities and First Nations communities that are located in more remote locations. They also highlighted being displaced from housing and encountering difficulties finding affordable housing in communities such as Kitimat and Terrace.

Overall, union members viewed the concept of a living wage positively, citing benefits such as "money going back into local communities, lower turnover rates and [the] ability to fully participate in one's community." Some labour voices were concerned about the living wage being sufficiently high. The cost of housing used to calculate Metro Vancouver's living wage rate was described as "overly optimistic." Excluding costs to service any debt or an emergency fund was also seen as problematic.

Several unions and the BC Federation of Labour recommended that some form of a FWC become a permanent body. A permanent FWC would conduct research on wages and employment, help interface and quantify benefits from other government initiatives and social assistance, and inform labour policy.

Findings from community, social and non-profit organizations

Anti-poverty advocates, other non-profit organizations and individual community members expressed similar themes as representatives of the labour movement. These stakeholders recognized the benefits of expanding government child care supports, notably the Affordable Child Care Benefit. Low housing vacancy rates and the lack of affordable housing were also widely heard concerns. It was clear that rising housing costs have been the biggest driver of the increases to the living wage budget in recent years.

Anti-poverty advocates and non-profit organizations viewed the living wage favourably, seeing it as a potential way to help combat high living costs. Similar to insights from the labour movement, the living wage was viewed as a way to bring money back into communities: "Those making living wages tend to spend their money locally, often within walking or transit distance from their home or workplace, and, as a result, they're reinvesting their increased wages back into their local economy."

Several anti-poverty advocates and individuals who participated in the hearings shared concerns about the living wage calculation being based on a two-parent family with two children, which overlooks the reality that "families" come in all shapes and sizes. Moreover, single people and seniors are also experiencing difficulties making ends meet. Some anti-poverty advocates suggested that including single individuals without children and expanding the family types the living wage is calculated for

would be helpful, especially when considering different types of public policies to help support these groups.

Costs continue to be high for all family types, including those without children, single people and seniors. For these and other family types, the cost of living is increasing this year, and more needs to be done to ensure these groups can also enjoy an attainable cost of living in their communities. Investing in child care fails to address the needs of anyone without young children.

They acknowledge that the current government has taken several positive steps to reduce the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage. Despite this progress, across the province, the “need for income to match what was actually costing them to live in their communities” emerged in every hearing. Below are more thoughts about the living wage from the advocacy and non-profit groups we heard from:

“Higher wages would improve both physical and mental health for workers [and] paying a living wage constitutes a critical investment in the long-term prosperity of the economy by fostering a dedicated skilled and healthy workforce.”

Advocates noted the living wage calculation assumes the family is able to access child care. Many communities continue to face a shortage of licensed child care spaces as well as challenges finding child care outside the typical workday. It is such a challenge that the City of Prince George, for example, has applied for funding to compile a child care inventory, including consulting with providers and individuals about their needs.

Additional recommendations from anti-poverty advocates included the provincial government adopting and implementing a living wage policy for its direct and contracted staff. Other broader recommendations included introducing vacancy control for renters; implementing \$10.00/day child care across BC; increasing welfare and disability rates for those who do not do paid work; implementing the All On Board Campaign recommendation of a sliding scale monthly transit pass for adults based on their income; improving the affordability of post-secondary education; and expanding provincial health care to include dental services, optometry, paramedical care and enhanced PharmaCare.

Considering the complexity and crosscutting nature of these issues, suggestions included taking a multi-sector approach to develop creative policies and encouraging the integration of work on poverty reduction, fair wages and basic income across provincial ministries, such as the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health.

Expanding the provincial health care plan to include dental services, optometry services, paramedical care and enhanced PharmaCare would help families and individuals to offset non-MSP health expenses. Implementing a sliding scale transit fare system based on income would help address transit affordability and is a policy implemented successfully in Calgary (City of Calgary, n.d.-1).

Findings from employers

Some employers and employer associations voiced concerns about the housing crisis, transportation expenses and child care costs contributing to increases in the cost of living. Others indicated that the wedge between minimum wage and the living wage is a reflection not of chronic low wages, but of high rents and child care costs. Employers pointed to the lack of affordable housing as the primary factor contributing to high living costs. The FWC heard concerns about the escalating business tax burden and other costs, including income tax increases, carbon tax increases, the new employer health payroll tax, new and increased real estate taxes that increase leasing costs and the recent minimum wage increases in BC, which are all adding to higher operating costs for employers.

One Chamber of Commerce representative reported “hearing regularly about the increasing cost of doing business ... and the challenge of absorbing increases in existing taxes, plus new taxes.”

Regarding the gap between the living wage and the minimum wage, some submissions suggested efforts should focus on the “living wage” element rather than further increases to the minimum wage. Increasing the BC basic income tax exemption or expanding other tax credits (e.g., the BC Climate Action Tax Credit) and other assistance programs (e.g., the BC Rental Assistance Program) would all increase household income and help lower the living wage. Some employers also wondered about the challenges in quantifying a “living wage” because it varies significantly across regions, sizes of households, ages of family members, etc. Some comments noted that in the absence of detailed and consistent regional rates, a single living wage is not able to reflect regional variations, which can be significant.

Related to the issue of who is the “representative living wage earner,” questions were raised about paying living wages to dependants who may still be living at home or someone working for supplemental income versus individuals living on their own and/or supporting dependants. Some representatives in the restaurant sector suggested that gratuities should be accounted for in living wage calculations, pointing out that tips reduce (often significantly) the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage.

We heard from several employers who chose to become certified by Living Wage for Families BC. They included municipalities, credit unions and a few small businesses and non-profit organizations. Some cited the positive effects on job performance, recruitment and retention, employee morale, organizational culture, absenteeism and employee satisfaction. A few employers indicated that they had adopted a living wage policy to signal their ethical treatment of the workforce. These comments are broadly consistent with a 2018 survey of living wage employers (conducted by Living Wage for Families BC) that identified three main reasons for employers becoming certified as living wage employers: to improve employee retention, to be viewed as an ethical employer and to attract better-qualified job applicants.

Other employers indicated that they pay their employees a living wage but are not certified. Reasons for not becoming certified included a lack of awareness about the certification process and the burden and cost of compliance.

Insights from focus groups on the living wage

We supplemented our public hearings and stakeholder interviews with two focus groups in collaboration the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and Living Wage for Families BC to ensure we included direct experiences from the low-wage workforce. We held both focus groups in Vancouver in January 2020 and included participants who were either unemployed or working in low-wage jobs. These focus groups helped inform our consultation process.

A key theme emerging from our focus groups was the need to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Participants disclosed that they had worked various combinations ranging from numerous part-time jobs to two full-time jobs *and* one part-time job. Participants shared their stories of struggling to support themselves and their families. Several participants explained that their only option was to work multiple jobs, echoing what we heard at our public hearings, which leaves very little time to rest or to participate in the community. We heard about the “profound social isolation” low-wage earners experience because “they almost never see their children.” Focus group participants shared with us that:

“[You] basically [have] no social life if you look at it because there is no way you can show up in your kids’ life or be able to pay your rent, provide food, provide pack lunches for them, give them pocket money. It’s almost impossible.”

A second theme that arose in our focus groups emphasized how costly transit is and long commutes to work:

“Transportation is a very important piece. When you are on [a] low income, you have to balance eating, medicine and buying a bus pass.”

When describing a regular day, one focus group participant shared that she had to wake up at 5:00 a.m. to catch a 6:00 a.m. bus, work until 3:00 p.m., then commute 1.5 hours to another job that she worked at until 12:30 a.m. She went on to say that she goes to bed around 1:30 a.m. before having to repeat her schedule. Given the complexity of managing multiple jobs, trying to organize how to get to those jobs via public transit is stressful.

In terms of what contributes to high living costs, similar issues arose as those expressed at our public hearings, namely lack of affordable and decent-quality housing, lack of child care and escalating transportation and transit costs. We heard from most focus group participants that the majority of their income is spent on rent. While housing expenses continue to increase, wage levels are not keeping pace. Furthermore, participants shared common experiences with low-quality housing, such as living with black mould or rat infestations, as it was all they could afford.

Focus group participants identified their leading expenses as rent, medication, food, child care and transit, consistent with what we heard in the hearings. They explained some of the trade-offs they make, such as forgoing healthier food options, medical prescriptions, home internet and/or a personal cell phone to make ends meet:

“I’ve been paid the same wage for six years. I don’t have a phone, internet—just a basic TV.”

“Rent, food, medication. The things I gotta forgo is telephone, internet.”

“Internet is very expensive, but it’s a necessity now. Ten years ago I didn’t need internet for anything, five years ago some, now everything. I lost some of my immigration documents; I found an advocate to help me out through the internet.”

Our focus groups provided some additional policy recommendations beyond what we have already covered that would help improve their standard of living. First, to make public transit more affordable and to reduce penalties for low-income passengers who fail to pay for transit. This recommendation is consistent with an All On Board recommendation to allow low-income earners who receive a transit violation for not paying to engage in community service instead of paying the violation. Second, expand the Telus Internet for Good low-income program, which provides internet access for \$10.00/month (Telus, n.d.).

6 Jurisdictional scan: Living wage campaigns in other areas of Canada

KEY INSIGHTS FROM across Canada reveal similar patterns in Alberta and Ontario as in BC. Both provinces have living wage calculations for some communities and a province-wide employer certification program. These efforts are at an earlier stage in Alberta. In other provinces and territories, we find living wage calculations in a few communities.

Since the start of the pandemic, the number of certified employers has been increasing in provinces with more developed living wage campaigns, including BC, Alberta and Ontario. Moreover, living wage calculations for major cities in Canada experienced large increases from 2021 to 2022, reflecting the impact of inflation on the cost of living. This included a 17.3% increase for Metro Vancouver (Table 7), an 18.2% increase for Edmonton (Appendix IV, Table 14) and a 15.1% increase on average for the Greater Toronto Area (Appendix IV, Table 13). Subtle changes in the living wage calculations are emerging, specifically in Alberta and Ontario. We expand on these points in greater detail below.

The living wage in Ontario: Transitioning from a local to a regional living wage focus

In 2008, the CCPA released a living wage calculation for Toronto, generating interest from other Ontario communities (Mackenzie & Stanford, 2008; Anne Coleman, interview, February 2021). Living wage employer certification programs were initially more decentralized in Ontario, with each local living wage campaign having its own certification program (Anne Coleman, interview, February 2021). In 2017, the Ontario Living Wage Network (OLWN) launched a province-wide employer certification program, similar to the BC living wage employer certification program (Anne Coleman, interview, February 2021).

As of September 2022, the OLWN consisted of [10 regions](#) with living wage calculations and 522 certified living wage employers, including municipalities, private sector companies and non-profits. This represented a reduction in the number of living wage calculations from 28 local living wage rates to offer more coverage across Ontario and to make it easier for employers who do business in multiple locations within the province (Coleman & Shaban, 2022). Moreover, focusing on regional economies as opposed to local communities takes into consideration where people work and live. As Table 13 in Appendix IV conveys, the 2022 Ontario living wage rates range from \$23.15/hour in the Greater

Toronto Area to \$18.05/hour in London. The living wage in the Greater Toronto Area is approximately 40.0% higher than the Ontario minimum wage. Similar to BC, significant growth in the number of certified living wage employers occurred during the pandemic, with the number of certified employers reaching 500 in 2022.

Three key differences arise from comparing living wage campaigns in BC and Ontario. First, far fewer Ontario municipalities, only six, are certified living wage employers.²⁸ Second, the Ontario certified living wage employer program considers only health, dental and prescription drug benefits when determining how much wages need to be increased to meet the living wage threshold (Ontario Living Wage Network, 2023). Moreover, the Ontario certified living wage employer program has three tiers: “living wage supporter,” “living wage leader” and “living wage champion.” The key distinctions between these levels are that the living wage supporter pays all full-time employees a living wage; the living wage leader pays all full-time and part-time employees a living wage; and the living wage champion pays full-time employees, part-time employees and third-party contracted staff a living wage. The majority of employers enter the program at the living wage champion level. Employers that start at the living wage supporter or leader levels often transition to the champion level. Third, in updating the Ontario living wage calculations in 2021, the OLWN included three reference households:

1. A typical reference family of two adults and two children based on the Canadian Living Wage Framework
2. A single-parent family with one child (male, age 7)
3. A single adult male who is 30 years old²⁹

The Ontario living wage calculation includes a weighted average for the above household types. In addition, the 2022 living wage calculations are presented for regions as opposed to communities, representing a departure from the approach in previous years.

Alberta’s developing living wage campaign: Revising employer certification

The Alberta living wage campaign is newer than its BC and Ontario counterparts. Similar to BC, some support for the living wage is coming from municipalities. In 2007, the City of Calgary considered a living wage initiative that failed to pass (Hudson, 2021).³⁰ In 2019, the City of Edmonton passed a motion adopting a living wage policy for City and contract employees (City of Edmonton Financial and

²⁸ The following municipalities are living wage employers: the City of Cambridge, the Municipality of North Perth, Huron County, the City of Kingston, the region of Waterloo and the City of St. Catharines. Some living wage campaigns in Ontario municipalities have been successful, while others have failed. For example, the Cities of Ottawa and Hamilton have failed to pass municipal living wage initiatives following living wage campaigns (Keddy, 2015; Goutor, 2021).

²⁹ Each adult is assumed to work 35 hours per week year-round (Coleman, 2021).

³⁰ In 2007, the City of Calgary considered adding a living wage to its sustainable environment and ethical purchasing policy and supplier code of conduct (Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2007). For more background on the Calgary living wage campaign, see Hudson (2021).

Corporate Services, 2019; Ngo, 2019). The City of Edmonton’s living wage is based on the CCPA’s living wage framework, with slight variations (Ngo, 2019). The City of Edmonton is working to implement its living wage policy and to align it with its human resources and social procurement policies (Ryan Lacanilao, interview, May 13, 2022).

In November 2021, the Alberta Living Wage Network (ALWN) launched an employer certification process. As of March 2023, 94 employers in Alberta, concentrated in Calgary and Edmonton, were certified living wage employers (Ryan Lacanilao, interview, May 13, 2022; Zeng & Honig, 2016). The ALWN first released [living wage rates](#) in 2021, with the highest living wage calculations in Canmore (\$37.40/hour) and Fort McMurray (\$27.35/hour), largely driven by the cost of housing. The 2022 living wage rates for Alberta communities are presented in Table 14 in Appendix IV, with lower living wages for both Canmore (\$32.75/hour) and Fort McMurray (\$22.50/hour) compared with the 2021 living wage rates.

Three differences stand out from comparing the BC, Ontario and Alberta living wage campaigns.

First, Alberta has a smaller number of certified living wage employers, a function of the Alberta living wage campaign being at an earlier stage of development than its BC and Ontario counterparts.

Second, in the ALWN certification program, similar to its BC counterpart, the living wage an employer in Alberta needs to pay its workforce is adjusted by non-mandatory benefits, including “health, dental, vision, and prescription coverage,” along with any other non-mandatory benefits the employer chooses to offer that could reduce expenses, such as housing, transportation, food and child care, and paid time off above the legislated minimum (e.g., sick days, personal days, paid vacation above the legislated minimum) (Alberta Living Wage Network, 2021a). In contrast to the OLWN, the ALWN includes a broader range of non-mandatory benefits beyond the health, dental and prescription drug benefits that the OLWN considers.

A third difference relates to revisions to the 2021 living wage calculations for Alberta communities. Similar to the OLWN, but in contrast to the BC living wage campaign, the ALWN expanded its reference households to include a single-person household (Ryan Lacanilao, interview, May 31, 2022; Alberta Living Wage Network, 2021b). Single-person households are the most common household type in Alberta, so an additional single-person household was added for Lethbridge, Rocky Mountain House and Grande Prairie (Alberta Living Wage Network, 2021b).³¹

³¹ The ALWN family of four reference household includes two children, one age 7 and one age 3, a year younger than the second child included in the Canadian Living Wage Framework.

Nascent living wage campaigns in other provinces: Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan

In other provinces, living wage activity is largely confined to generating living wage calculations for specific communities or regions.

Atlantic Canada. Among the Atlantic provinces, the CCPA's Nova Scotia Office has generated living wage calculations for five regions: Halifax County, Annapolis Valley, Cape Breton, Northern (including Antigonish, Colchester, Cumberland, Guysborough and Pictou Counties) and Southern (including Digby, Lunenburg, Queens, Shelburne and Yarmouth Counties) (Driscoll & Saulnier, 2020; Saulnier, 2022). On October 1, 2020, the Halifax Regional Council adopted a supplier code of conduct, including a living wage requirement for Halifax Regional Municipality contractors and subcontractors (Munro, 2020; Halifax Regional Council, 2020). Yet Nova Scotia lacks a provincial living wage employer certification program (Johnston & Saulnier, 2021). A few other communities in Atlantic Canada have living wage calculations: Saint John, New Brunswick (Hicks, 2018; Driscoll & Saulnier, 2020); St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador (Saulnier, 2019); and Charlottetown, PEI (Saulnier, 2020).³²

Quebec. In Quebec, independent of the CCPA, L'Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques (the Institute of Socioeconomic Research and Information) has calculated a living wage for Montreal and Quebec City since 2015 (Leduc, 2017). As of 2017, additional calculations have been generated for Saguenay, Trois-Rivières, Sept-Îles, Gatineau and Sherbrooke (Couturier, Labrie & Nguyen, 2020). Reference households represent multiple family types, including two-parent, two-child households; one-parent, one-child households; and single-person households. Their calculations assume children attend subsidized child care and people are working full-time, or 37.5 hours a week (Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques, 2015). Currently, there is a campaign underway to increase the minimum wage to \$18.00/hour (Minimum \$18, n.d.).

Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Both Manitoba and Saskatchewan have some living wage activity, with living wage calculations for Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson in Manitoba (Evans, 2017; Fernandez, 2017) for households with two parents and two children and households with a single parent and a single child. Meanwhile, Regina and Saskatoon in Saskatchewan both have living wage calculations (Gingrich, Enoch & Banks, 2014; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Saskatchewan Office, 2022; Stevens, 2021).

³² Support for higher wages in PEI is spurring interest in a basic income program. In February 2020, a provincial committee started calculating the cost of adopting a basic income program as a way to address poverty and inequality (Campbell, 2019). In March 2021, PEI senators asked Ottawa for a PEI-based basic income pilot program (Lim, 2021).

The living wage in Canada's Territorial North: Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut

In 2012, the high cost of living in the Territorial North (i.e., Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut) motivated interest in the living wage, culminating in the formation of Alternatives North, a coalition of labour unions, churches and anti-poverty organizations (Evans & Fanelli, 2016; Hammond, 2019). Living wage calculations were developed for Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and Whitehorse, Yukon (Hammond, 2021, 2022). An employer certification program soon followed.³³ In 2019, Alternatives North announced 11 living wage employers in the Northwest Territories (Alternatives North, 2019).

In Nunavut, the Living Wage North campaign persuaded the government to consider raising the minimum wage to a living wage of \$26.00/hour (LeTourneau, 2018). In November 2019, 10 Nunavut MLAs expressed support for the living wage, presenting a petition on behalf of their constituents (Anselmi, 2019). In March 2020, Nunavut passed a minimum wage of \$16.00/hour (Nunatsiaq News, 2020), the highest minimum wage across Canadian provinces and territories as of January 2023.

³³ To be considered a “rising star” living wage employer by Alternatives North, organizations need to pay a living wage to their full-time employees. To be a “living wage champion,” organizations need to pay all full- and part-time employees, including post-secondary students, and all contract workers, a living wage (Alternatives North, 2017).

7 Cross-jurisdictional scan: Living wage campaigns beyond Canada

OUR JURISDICTIONAL SCAN found that living wage policies are either voluntary or implemented at the city level. We did not find examples of nationwide or even state-wide cases of a mandatory living wage policy. In addition, our examination of living wage campaigns beyond Canada reveals variations in definitions, methodologies and the number of calculations (see Table 8). For example, in the US, living wage policies are introduced via legal ordinances, whereas in New Zealand, the living wage functions as a voluntary employment standard. Examining how comparable economies are supporting the low-wage workforce offers important policy insights.

Table 8. Comparing living wage campaigns across liberal market economies

COUNTRY	NEW ZEALAND	UNITED STATES	THE UK*	THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
Year campaign started	2012	1994	2001	2014
Nature of policy	Voluntary	Legal ordinances and voluntary	<i>Voluntary</i> : Real living wage <i>Statutory</i> : National living wage	Voluntary
Number of calculations	One	Multiple, but in practice the federal poverty line is used	Two	One (as of 2022; previously four)
Reference household(s) for calculations	A couple with two children	Two parents and two children; based on the federal poverty line	17 reference households ranging from single people to couples with four children	A single person working full-time
Employer accreditation	Living Wage Movement Aotearoa New Zealand	Multiple: Just Economics, Tompkins County Workers' Centre	<i>The UK</i> : Citizens UK <i>Scotland</i> : The Poverty Alliance <i>Wales</i> : Citizens Cymru Wales <i>Northern Ireland</i> : Citizens UK	No

COUNTRY	NEW ZEALAND	UNITED STATES	THE UK*	THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
Accreditation includes contractors?	Yes	Primarily focuses on full-time employees	Real living wage employer accreditation includes contractors	No

* England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Sources: King & Waldegrave, 2012; Cominetti & Murphy, 2022; Living Wage Technical Group, 2021; Hurley, 2021; Luce, 2017.

Two approaches exist for how countries implement a living wage policy. Some develop a living wage using a fixed threshold, such as 60% of median hourly pay, as reflected in the UK's statutory national living wage. Other countries, such as New Zealand, adopt a voluntary living wage based on a minimum essential standard of living and a market basket of goods and use focus groups to determine living wage rates (Anker, 2011; Hurley, 2021; Doris, O'Neill & Sweetman, 2022).

We begin with the US because it has the most mature living wage campaign of the countries we reviewed; it has also influenced living wage campaigns in other countries. The distinctiveness of the US context also translates into important differences between the US living wage campaign and campaigns in other countries.

The US: From living wage ordinances to city-wide minimum wages

In the US, living wage policies are introduced through legal ordinances, laws enacted by a municipality. In 1994, the first living wage victory in Baltimore involved an ordinance requiring firms with City service contracts to pay their employees a living wage (Luce, 2017). By 2011, approximately 140 cities and counties had passed living wage ordinances (Luce, 2017; Sosnaud, 2016).³⁴ The language of US living wage ordinances is heterogeneous regarding the scope of business, the size of contracts, the specific occupations and the type of employment relationships they apply to, and their scope can expand over time (Luce, 2004; Luce, 2017; Neumark & Adams, 2003a).

Living wage calculations in the US typically rely on the federal poverty line as a point of reference so that a full-time worker with a family of four earns more than the federal poverty line, US\$30,000 for a family of four and US\$24,860 for a family of three as of 2023 (Luce, 2004; Neumark & Adams, 2003b; Sosnaud, 2016; US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, n.d.).³⁵

³⁴ Cities with living wage ordinances include New York City; Los Angeles; Boston; Milwaukee; Minneapolis; and Portland, Oregon.

³⁵ In response to some of the shortcomings of this simple but less nuanced methodology, three alternative living wage methodologies emerged in the US: The Center for Women's Welfare developed a self-sufficiency standard, Dr. Amy Glasmeier at MIT developed a living wage calculator to estimate living wages for 12 different household types and the Economic Policy Institute developed a basic family budget calculator to estimate expenses for 10 household categories.

Some US cities with a high cost of living and robust regional living wage campaigns that evolved into the “Fight for \$15” campaign are implementing city-wide minimum wages that exceed state or federal minimum wage levels to support the low-wage workforce in their communities (Dube & Lindner, 2021). As of 2021, 55 US counties and cities had a county-wide or city-wide minimum wage rate (UC Berkeley Labor Center, n.d.), and 22 cities, including San Francisco; Seattle; Los Angeles; and Washington, DC, had a minimum wage exceeding US\$15.00/hour (Dube & Lindner, 2021).

For example, in January 2023, the city-wide minimum wage for Seattle reached US\$18.69/hour for large employers (501 or more employees) and US\$18.69/hour for small employers (500 employees or less) if their employees do not earn tips or do not receive medical benefits, and US\$16.50/hour if their employees do earn tips or receive medical benefits (City of Seattle, Office of Labor Standards, n.d.). To counter the spread of city-wide minimum wages, approximately 28 states have imposed legal restrictions on cities introducing city-wide minimum wages (Economic Policy Institute, 2018; Dube & Lindner, 2021). A full inventory of city-wide and county-wide minimum wage rates is available from the [Labor Centre](#) at the University of Berkeley.

Some of these efforts to increase the minimum wage mean that the living wage can converge with the minimum wage. For example, in December 2018, the New York State minimum wage exceeded the living wage, so the minimum wage became the living wage rate.³⁶ In the US, the recent emergence of a small voluntary living wage certification program similar to programs in Canada is also helping increase wages for the low-wage workforce (Luce, 2017).

Beyond increasing the minimum wage, other indirect approaches to reduce the difference between the minimum wage and the living wage in the US include expanding minimum wage coverage to include historically excluded occupations. For example, in 2020, policy-makers in Washington State expanded minimum wage protections to include agricultural workers. Consequently, even agricultural workers who are paid a piece rate have to earn at least minimum wage. As of January 1, 2023, the Washington State minimum wage was US\$15.74/hour (Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, n.d.-1). In addition, agricultural workers in Washington State are required to be paid overtime, including those earning a piece rate (Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, n.d.-2).

Even though these more detailed living wage calculations are available, in practice they are more commonly used to help firms set pay grades or in a collective bargaining setting than as benchmarks included in living wage ordinances.

³⁶ In 2012, the *Fair Wages for New Yorkers Act* came into effect, requiring employers receiving “at least \$1 million of financial assistance from the City [of New York]” or from a City-affiliated economy development agency to “pay no less than the living wage to their employees at the project site, unless the employer qualifies for certain exemptions” (NYC Consumer and Worker Protection, n.d.; Fonstein, Perkins & Egan, 2014). In 2014, through an executive order, then-mayor Bill de Blasio increased the living wage to \$11.50/hour for employees receiving benefits and to \$13.30/hour for employees not receiving benefits, with regular annual increases linked to the Consumer Price Index (Fonstein, Perkins & Egan, 2014).

The UK: A voluntary living wage campaign and a statutory national living wage

Differentiating between a national minimum wage, a national living wage and a real living wage

In addition to a national minimum wage, the UK has both a statutory national living wage and a voluntary real living wage. It is important to distinguish between them. The Conservative government implemented the national living wage in 2016, establishing a higher statutory minimum wage for employees over the age of 23 (Prowse & Fells, 2016; Hirsch, 2017), in contrast to the statutory national minimum wage, which applies to workers over the age of 21 (Hirsch, 2017).³⁷ [The UK Low Pay Commission](#), a permanent commission of nine commissioners, advises the government about the national minimum wage and national living wage rates and engages in research. Despite the name, the national living wage does not reflect living costs, instead functioning as an age-based statutory minimum wage with a goal to reach 66% of UK median pay by 2024 (Hirsch, 2017).³⁸

Table 9. Explaining UK wage rates

	NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE	NATIONAL LIVING WAGE	REAL LIVING WAGE
Scope	Government minimum for people older than 21 but younger than 23	Government minimum for people age 23 and older	The only wage rate based on what people need to live
Wage rate ³⁹	£9.18/hour	£9.50/hour	£11.95/hour in London; £10.50/hour elsewhere in the UK
Enforcement	Statutory	Statutory	Voluntary
What age group is covered?	21 and older	23 and older	18 and older
How is it set?	A negotiated settlement based on recommendations from businesses and trade unions	A percentage of median earnings; it aims to reach 66% of median earnings by 2024	A calculation made according to the cost of living, based on a market basket of household goods and services

³⁷ In 1997, the Labour government established the Low Pay Commission, which includes employer representatives, trade union representatives and academics (e.g., economists), to develop recommendations for introducing the UK's first national minimum wage, which came into effect in 1999.

³⁸ The national minimum wage is a statutory minimum that will “help as many low-paid workers as possible without any significant adverse impact on employment or the economy” (Hirsch, 2017, p. 816), whereas the objective of the national living wage is to “reduce the number of people who have low pay relative to the median” (Hirsch, 2017, p. 817).

³⁹ The wage rate for the national minimum wage and the national living wage will change in April 2023.

	NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE	NATIONAL LIVING WAGE	REAL LIVING WAGE
Is there a London weighting?	No	No	Yes, there is a separate living wage rate for London, the London living wage, which is higher than the UK living wage

Source: Modified from Living Wage Foundation, n.d.

The UK voluntary living wage campaign: The real living wage

The UK real living wage campaign is a separate voluntary standard of pay aligned with employee and family needs that exceeds the national living wage. This grassroots movement started in East London by The East London Communities Organisation (TELCO, which later became Citizens UK) among outsourced staff (e.g., janitorial) in financial companies and hospitals. This campaign gained momentum when HSBC and Barclays agreed to pay contracted cleaners the real living wage.

In 2011, Citizens UK formed the Living Wage Foundation, introducing a formal certified living wage employer accreditation system. The UK real living wage campaign attracted attention when the 2012 London Olympics paid staff a real living wage. The influence of the UK's real living wage campaign extends to non-certified living wage employers who use the real living wage as a baseline for compensation (Heery et al., 2017).

Based on the real living wage campaign, the UK has two living wage rates: the UK living wage and the London living wage (Wills & Linneker, 2013). The UK real living wage rates apply to all four nations within the UK (i.e., England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), with varying degrees of success encouraging employers to voluntarily implement a living wage and contractors to pay a living wage to their staff (Heery, Hann & Nash, 2015).

The Resolution Foundation oversees the methodology for calculating both the UK living wage and the London living wage (Heery, Hann & Nash, 2017). The calculation relies on the minimum income standard estimates for low-wage families generated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Prowse & Fells, 2016).⁴⁰ The methodology considers 17 household types, ranging from single-person households to single parents with three children and couples with three children (Cominetti, 2021). To address labour market shocks and changes in benefit programs the low-wage workforce can access, a “shock absorber ... keeping the living wage increase within the range of inflation plus or minus 3 percent” is built into the methodology (Cominetti & Murphy, 2022, p. 8).

The Living Wage Foundation runs a voluntary employer certification program (Prowse & Fells, 2016). As of 2021, 11,228 employers are certified living wage employers across the UK, including 7,881 in England, 2,842 in Scotland, 450 in Wales and 55 in Northern Ireland (McManus, 2022). The majority of accredited UK employers are in London and Scotland. Certified employers include Burberry, Google,

⁴⁰ The UK living wage and the London living wage were originally calculated using different methodologies but were later harmonized (D'Arcy & Finch, 2019).

40% of the UK Financial Times Stock Exchange 100, 107 local governments and several universities (Heery, Hann & Nash, 2021).⁴¹ In 2021, Eilís Ferran, the pro-vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge, noted that “University of Cambridge staff are at the heart of everything we do as one of the world’s top global research-intensive universities” (Living Wage Foundation, 2021).

Since the pandemic began, the number of certified living wage employers has increased. This growth is attributed to several factors, including the declining difference between the national living wage and the real living wage. Recognizing that wages are only one aspect of job quality, in 2023, the Living Wage Foundation introduced a living pension accreditation for employers that fund livable pensions for their workforce in addition to a living hours accreditation introduced in 2019 for employers offering employees more predictable work hours—for example, a guaranteed minimum number of work hours per week and at least four weeks’ notice for shifts.⁴²

City authorities in Cardiff, Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Cambridge and Milton Keynes demonstrate support for the living wage in several ways (Datta & Machin, 2021). These efforts include offering tax incentives for employers who pay their employees a living wage, listing a living wage among the employment practices they want their suppliers to adopt and publicly supporting the living wage (Heery et al., 2017). Some communities in the UK, including Cardiff, Salford, Southwark, Dundee, Bristol, Edinburgh and Birmingham, have achieved [Living Wage City](#) status due to their efforts to promote the living wage (McManus, 2022; Living Wage Foundation, 2019). For example, the Cardiff city council pays the annual living wage employer fee for small to medium-sized enterprises that become living wage employers. Greater Manchester is the UK’s first Living Wage City region. Living wage zones and living wage buildings are other initiatives, albeit on a smaller level, but with a similar intention.

Some certified living wage employers are unionized, and the UK living wage campaign receives support from the Trades Union Congress (Heery, Hann & Nash, 2018). Some unions are uneasy with employers adopting a living wage, because becoming living wage employers could enable employers to avoid unionization (Heery, Hann & Nash, 2015). In some workplaces, decisions to adopt and implement a living wage are made without union involvement and can have implications for the overall compensation structure (Heery, Hann & Nash, 2015). Both the pandemic and the narrowing of the difference between the national living wage and the real living wage are resulting in more employers becoming accredited living wage employers.

⁴¹ While the National Health Service (NHS) is not accredited, some of its constituent employers are, including individual NHS trusts (hospitals) and regional health boards (in Scotland and Wales). The national governments of both Scotland and Wales require the NHS to pay a living wage to all direct employees (Edmund Heery, personal communication, February 2022).

⁴² The savings target is 12% of a worker’s annual salary, of which the employer pays at least 7%. This builds on auto-enrollment, where the employer is required to contribute only 3%.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: The living wage as an ingredient for inclusive growth

The UK real living wage receives strong support from the devolved governments of both Scotland and Wales. Scotland has approximately 2,800 accredited living wage employers (The Poverty Alliance, n.d.).

In 2012, the Scottish Parliament decided to pay a living wage to government employees, later extending this policy to all government agencies and the National Health Service (Prowse & Fells, 2016). In 2015, the Scottish Parliament itself became a living wage employer; it also funds The Poverty Alliance, the certification body for living wage employers in Scotland (Heery, Hann & Nash, 2020).⁴³ As of April 2020, the Scottish Government supplements wages of social care support workers to bring them up to a living wage and to ensure they receive sick pay (Heery, Hann & Nash, 2020; Scottish Government, 2020). This measure includes occupations such as “adult social care workers providing direct care and support to adults in care homes, care at home, day care and housing support” (Scottish Government, 2020).⁴⁴

The [living wage campaign in Wales](#) lags behind its counterpart in Scotland. As of 2023, Cynnal Cymru, the living wage certified employer in Wales, accredited 450 living wage employers, representing 11,750 employees, and Cardiff earned a Living Wage City designation (Heery, Hann & Nash, 2015). One difference between the living wage campaigns in Wales and Scotland is that the Scottish Government has partially funded the living wage accreditation body for a longer period of time than its Welsh counterpart, which started doing so more recently (Dickens et al., 2019). The living wage campaign in Northern Ireland is at an earlier stage of development. As of 2021, 40 employers were living wage employers accredited by the Living Wage Foundation. In addition, the Northern Ireland Executive became an accredited living wage employer as part of the [New Decade, New Approach](#) agreement.

The Republic of Ireland: On the road to a national living wage by 2026

The living wage campaign in the Republic of Ireland found its roots in advocacy organizations, religious organizations and research centres, with the first living wage calculation released in 2014 (Hurley, 2021). Yet the Republic of Ireland lacks a living wage employer accreditation process (Hurley, 2021). In 2020, the government at the time announced a goal to narrow the difference between the minimum wage and the living wage, forming a commission (O’Sullivan, 2021). Based on the commission’s report, in June 2022, the Government of Ireland announced its plan to replace the national minimum wage

⁴³ By prioritizing “inclusive growth,” the devolved governments of both Scotland and Wales are developing policies encouraging employers to pay a living wage, although neither government has the power to legally mandate a living wage (Eurofound, 2018; Heery, Hann & Nash, 2020).

⁴⁴ Scotland is also a leader in other innovative policy initiatives, such as providing free period products to anyone who needs them. The Scottish Parliament passed the *Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021* in November 2020 after two years of providing free period products through “schools, colleges, universities, and public buildings” (Specia, 2020).

with a national living wage equivalent to 60% of the median hourly wage, to be phased in over a period of four years starting in January 2023 (Ireland Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2022). The Republic of Ireland's [Low Pay Commission](#) recommended this step to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment "to set a minimum wage that is fair and sustainable" (Ireland Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2021). This decision is a step toward legally requiring employers in the Republic of Ireland to pay a living wage (Living Wage Technical Group, 2020).⁴⁵

New Zealand: A voluntary living wage campaign

New Zealand has a voluntary living wage movement that pursues a single national living wage rate (King, 2016; Parker et al., 2022). In 2012, the New Zealand living wage movement gained traction in Auckland and Wellington, culminating in Living Wage Movement Aotearoa New Zealand in 2013 (Parker et al., 2016; Living Wage Aotearoa New Zealand, 2013; Arrowsmith & Parker, 2022).

New Zealand's first living wage was calculated in 2013, based on a four-person household including one adult working full-time, one adult working part-time and two children (King, 2016).⁴⁶ The New Zealand living wage includes a contribution of 2% of gross income to a retirement savings program (King, 2016). Since 2012, nearly 400 employers in New Zealand have become accredited living wage employers (Living Wage Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d.), including the Labour Party and the Green Party. Some local councils have also implemented the living wage, including Wellington and Auckland (Arrowsmith et al., 2021).⁴⁷

In 2018, the Labour government demonstrated support for the living wage by increasing wage levels for "core public service employees," including full-time, part-time and casual employees, to at least the living wage level (Public Service Association, 2018). In 2020, then-prime minister Jacinda Ardern increased wages for the public sector workforce, including nurses and teachers, paying them at least a living wage. Despite Ardern's efforts to increase wages for government employees to the living wage, there is pressure to extend the living wage to Crown corporations, contractors and suppliers. In addition, the Labour-led government incorporated living wage language into its procurement policy in December 2021 (New Zealand Government Procurement, 2022). The Labour government also clarified that its procurement practices need to ensure quality employment opportunities by ensuring that "cleaning, catering, and security guard contracts" stipulate that these workers earn at least the New Zealand living wage (New Zealand Government Procurement, 2019). The current prime minister, Chris

⁴⁵ The Government of Ireland is working to "progress to a living wage," with the Low Pay Commission investigating the implications of implementing a nationwide living wage (O'Sullivan, 2021).

⁴⁶ The living wage calculation is connected to a broad average hourly rate measured by Statistics New Zealand's Quarterly Employment Survey (King, 2016; Waldegrave, King & Urbanová, 2018). Statistics New Zealand's Household Economic Survey provides the expenditure data, while the University of Otago collects data on food costs through its annual food cost survey (King, 2016), with the methodology undergoing a review every five years.

⁴⁷ While Wellington chose to be accredited by Living Wage Movement Aotearoa New Zealand, Auckland chose to implement the living wage without going through the accreditation process (Arrowsmith et al., 2021).

Hipkins, introduced this policy and recently announced that the annual minimum wage increase would parallel the inflation rate, at just over 7%, beginning April 1, 2023.

Australia: A high minimum wage context and wage theft

The living wage concept in Australia dates back to Justice Higgins's 1907 decision in the Harvester case, establishing a basic wage to ensure that wage earners could support a family and that would fulfill "the normal needs of the average employee, regarded as a human being living in a civilized community" (Healy, Pekarek & Fells, 2021).⁴⁸

The influence of the living wage concept resulted in Australia having a relatively high minimum wage compared with other liberal market economies (Healy et al., 2021). However, concerns about declining nominal wages generate support from the Australian Council of Trade Unions Congress and the Australian Labor Party for a living wage campaign (Gahan, Pekarek & Nicholson, 2018; Stanford, 2018). Several cases involving wage underpayment (also known as wage theft) have come to light involving vulnerable groups in the workforce, including temporary work visa holders, gig workers, international students and horticulture workers on seasonal work visas (Thornthwaite, 2017; Clibborn, 2020). Wage theft is also a problem low-wage earners encounter in other countries we review. These cases are most common in low-paying sectors such as hospitality and retail (Healy et al., 2021; Healy, 2016). In response, the State of Victoria passed the [*Wage Theft Act*](#) in 2020, making it a criminal offence to "withhold employee entitlements or underpay employees," with a punishment of up to 10 years in jail for individuals and a maximum fine of A\$991,320 for companies (Clibborn, 2020; Hilakari, 2021). The living wage is also starting to emerge in policy discussions. With the change in government in 2022, it will be interesting to see if the living wage assumes a larger role in the public policy agenda given the increasing cost of living.

⁴⁸ At the time, the basic wage calculation was based on a full-time earner who would need to support his wife and three children (Stanford, 2019).

8 Academic research evaluating living wage campaigns

ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON adopting a living wage focuses on two main topics: (1) whether adopting a living wage can improve outcomes for the workforce and (2) whether living wages reduce employment opportunities. Researchers acknowledge that findings regarding the impact of the minimum wage may have limited generalizability to understanding the effects of adopting a living wage (Neumark & Adams, 2003a). Many organizations consider adopting a living wage policy to address the broader social and economic costs of paying low wages and to improve job quality. Key conclusions from research on living wage policies is that they benefit the workforce and have “little or no” impact on employment opportunities.

Consequences of adopting a living wage policy: Evidence from the US and the UK

A fair amount of research examines the impact of US living wage policies. Wage increases associated with living wage initiatives can improve morale, productivity and efficiency, and lower turnover and absenteeism (Fairris, 2005; Brenner, 2005; Reich, Hall & Jacobs, 2005; Brenner, 2004; Pollin, 2005; Chapman & Thompson, 2006; Schmitt, 2013).

Implementing the living wage can affect the entire compensation structure for an organization. Depending on how the living wage initiative is implemented, workers who are in the next-lowest-paid category above the low-wage threshold will experience an increase in their wages to maintain consistency within the wage structure (Sosnaud, 2016; Wicks-Lim, 2006). Living wage initiatives may have indirect effects on income levels for employees within organizations that introduce the living wage; they can also have external effects on wage levels among employers outside of organizations implementing the living wage, similar to the effect that pay levels in unionized firms have on non-union firms within the same industry (Leicht, 1989). Adopting a living wage can improve working conditions beyond those directly covered by the living wage policy, because other firms will need to increase their wage levels to be competitive in the labour market (Pollin et al., 2008).

Several studies show that living wage initiatives have “little or no impact on employment” opportunities (Luce, 2017, p. 867). Brenner (2005) examined the consequences of the living wage ordinance in Boston and failed to find support for a corresponding reduction in employment. Adams and Neumark (2004) question Brenner’s (2005) interpretation and suggest that there is evidence of a decline in employment opportunities following the implementation of a living wage initiative. Neumark

and Adams (2003a, 2003b; Adams & Neumark, 2004, 2005) have been criticized for their reliance on US Current Population Survey data, because it creates difficulties isolating the workforce that directly benefits from living wage ordinances, complicating the ability to assess the accuracy of their findings (Sosnaud, 2016; Holzer, 2009).

Turning to the question of individual-level outcomes, the effect of living wage ordinances on real wages for the workforce, Pollin and Luce (1998) found that living wage laws are associated with improving the standard of living for the low-wage workforce. Neumark and Adams (2003b) showed positive wage effects on poverty in cities that adopt a living wage.

Studies undertaken in the UK, primarily in London, follow a similar pattern as the US, with a few caveats (Wills & Linneker, 2012; Heery et al., 2017). Examining the impact of the national living wage in the UK, Datta and Machin (2021) found that the age eligibility requirement in the UK resulted in a company shifting work hours to younger workers who were covered under the national minimum wage as opposed to the national living wage.

Academic research on the impact of the living wage in Canada

Far less peer-reviewed academic research assessing the impact of living wage policies has been undertaken in Canada than in the US, with a few exceptions. Evans, Fanelli and McDowell's (2021) edited volume centralizing information about living wage campaigns across Canada is a useful reference. Living wage research undertaken in Hamilton, Ontario, demonstrates how living wages could influence employee performance by improving the social exchange between employers and employees (Zeng & Honig, 2017). Some researchers (Carlaw et al., 2016; Janmaat et al., 2019) are tackling the question of how to quantify the impact of introducing a living wage and its benefits for smaller communities. Meanwhile, other scholars (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2015) are examining the living wage employer certification process and its impact on business outcomes. They have found positive human resource benefits on recruitment, retention, as well as reductions in training expenditures (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2015).

9 Reflections and recommendations

Reflections on the strengths and challenges of the living wage

In closely examining the living wage, we reflect on its strengths and challenges, recognizing the BC living wage campaign is at an earlier stage of development relative to its counterparts in comparable economies.

Strengths

Highlights the disconnect between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates. Among the strengths of the living wage as a voluntary employment standard is the ability to signal a disconnect between the cost of living and compensation and how public policy can directly impact the cost of living. A consistent methodology to operationalize the living wage across BC communities for a reference household of two adults and two children is a useful benchmark for employers and policy-makers to guide decision-making to reduce the cost of living.

Some BC communities have commissioned reports about the costs and benefits of adopting a living wage policy for their community even if a living wage proposal has not yet come before their municipal council. In BC, some smaller municipalities are adopting or considering adopting a living wage to help develop sustainable communities. Smaller communities that are experiencing working poverty may view the living wage as a potential means to support their community and to encourage the creation of decent jobs.

Consistent living wage methodology. Among its strengths as a voluntary employment standard is the ability of the living wage to signal a disconnect between the cost of living and compensation and to highlight how public policy can directly impact the cost of living. A consistent methodology to operationalize the living wage across BC communities for a reference household of two adults and two children is a useful benchmark for employers and policy-makers to guide decision-making to reduce the cost of living.

Advocacy and impact on public policy. The living wage campaign in BC, through its advocacy efforts, has shed light on significant challenges low-wage earners encounter in trying to make life more affordable, raising awareness about the difference between the BC minimum wage and the actual cost of living. Child benefits, regular minimum wage increases and the creation of a commission to study the living wage are evidence of the impact of the BC living wage campaign. When examining changes in the living wage budget from 2021 to 2022, the largest increases in expenditures are in shelter,

transportation and food, demonstrating the impact that policy changes to support child care have had on households in BC.

Highlights the need for livable wages in urban and non-urban communities. As living wage rates for BC communities reflect, challenges making ends meet are a reality in urban and non-urban communities in British Columbia. Some BC communities have commissioned reports about the costs and benefits of adopting a living wage policy for their community even if a living wage proposal has not yet come before their local government. In BC, some smaller municipalities are adopting or considering adopting a living wage to help develop sustainable communities. Communities that are experiencing working poverty may view the living wage as a potential means to support their community and to encourage the creation of decent jobs.

Positive impact of implementing a living wage. Our interviews with certified living wage employers confirmed multiple benefits for organizations of adopting these policies, including improvements in employee morale, recruitment, retention, job performance, absenteeism and employee satisfaction. Adopting a living wage can help an employer be viewed as ethical and can help bring money back into communities. For employees, reducing the pressure to make ends meet enhances their mental health and physical health, gives them the ability to spend time with family members and frees up time to engage with their community.

Highlights areas beyond the domain of the Ministry of Labour to reduce the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage. Our analysis of the living wage calculation reveals how public policy has reduced child care expenses, enabling low-wage families to deploy the cost savings to other expenses. When examining changes in the living wage budget from 2021 to 2022, the largest increases occurred in shelter, transportation and food expenditures, leading to increases in the 2022 living wage rates and widening the difference between living wages rates in BC communities and the BC minimum wage. Since 2008, when living wage rates in BC first started being calculated, rent has been a consistent driver of living wage rates. Child care fees also significantly contributed to living wage calculations until 2017, when child care affordability measures were introduced, underscoring the important impact that public policy can have on living wage rates.

Several opportunities exist beyond the Ministry of Labour's domain that could help reduce the gap between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates in BC communities. The BC minimum wage and the living wage are part of a larger social policy context (e.g., housing benefits, transportation, affordable education) that has the potential to have a positive impact on lower-wage earners and their families and to avoid the social and economic costs of a low-wage economy. While our public consultations occurred in 2019, current economic pressures are magnifying the urgency around introducing policies to support low-wage earners in BC. From our interviews, focus groups, and consultations, some additional suggestions about how to support low-wage earners arose that we outline below.

1. Food
 - a. Develop plans to address the growing issue of food insecurity and unaffordability to ensure that consumers are paying fair prices for food.
 - b. Connect with food banks in BC to help coordinate their efforts to provide access to food across the province.
2. Shelter
 - a. Build more housing stock.
 - b. Follow through on the recommendations of *Opening Doors: Unlocking Housing Supply for Affordability* (Canada–British Columbia Expert Panel on the Future of Housing Supply and Affordability, 2021).
3. Telecommunications
 - a. Expand the Telus low-income internet access for \$10/month program.
 - b. Increase internet availability for all rural communities in BC.
4. Transportation
 - a. Implement the All On Board Campaign’s proposals for a sliding scale monthly transit pass for adults based on their income, similar to the model in use in Calgary (City of Calgary, n.d.-2), and free transit for children and youth ages 0–18.
 - b. Increase transit availability in rural areas to reduce transportation expenses.

In addition to these suggestions, revisiting the recommendations from Professor David Green’s 2021 report (Green, Kesselman & Tedds, 2021) offers very worthwhile considerations for reducing the gap between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates in BC communities.

Challenges

There are also challenges associated with the living wage.

Implementing a living wage policy. Introducing the living wage can increase labour costs for employers, yet these can be offset by savings in reduced absenteeism and increased employee retention. In contrast to the minimum wage, a living wage is a voluntary employment standard and thus lacks the enforcement mechanism associated with the BC minimum wage. The number of BC communities with a living wage calculation differs annually, and living wage calculations are not always generated consistently from year to year for BC communities, creating complications for employers doing business across multiple communities. Living Wage for Families BC does commit to employers when they become certified living wage employers that they will continue calculating a living wage for their community. The presence of multiple living wage rates for BC communities can complicate the process of adopting a living wage for employers doing business in multiple BC communities. Although it is growing, the number of living wage employers in BC is still small, and employers are more familiar with the minimum wage than they are with the living wage.

Volatility in living wage rates from year to year. The possibility that living wage rates can increase or decrease from year to year creates volatility for employers considering paying a living wage. Although

economic conditions may support these changes, the magnitude of the changes from year to year may discourage some employers from becoming certified living wage employers.

Small number of certified living wage employers in BC and quantification of the impact of living wage policies. The number of certified living wage employers in BC, approximately 407 employers, is small. The majority of certified living wage employers are small businesses. Increasing the number of certified living wage employers in the private sector would help expand the impact of the living wage campaign. Some companies voluntarily pay a living wage but may be unaware of the living wage certification program. Thus, these numbers may underestimate the number of employers that pay a living wage in BC. It would also be helpful to track the number of staff employed by contractors of certified living wage employers who receive an increase in their wages to help more accurately quantify the impact of the living wage employer certification.

Living wage methodology. Living wage calculations may underestimate the cost of living. While the living wage methodology assumes a family of four can find a decent three-bedroom-plus rental, the availability of this type of housing is in short supply in many communities. Both parents having access to full-time employment may not reflect the labour market reality for low-wage work, where finding full-time employment is less common. Moreover, another question arising from examining the living wage calculation itself is whether a one-size-fits-all reference family overlooks the challenges that other types of low-wage households encounter. From an employer's perspective, household structure differs greatly across a workforce. On the one hand, the reference family yields a consistent measure across BC communities. On the other hand, it overlooks other types of households that may be experiencing significant challenges making ends meet, such as single-parent households, households with eldercare responsibilities and single-member households that include seniors (Statistics Canada, 2022b).⁴⁹

Living wage campaigns in other areas of Canada

Key insights from our jurisdictional scan across Canada reveal that support for the living wage and concerns about the cost of living are emerging in both urban and rural communities, with the majority of living wage activity outside BC found in Alberta and Ontario. Once a community generates a living wage calculation, if support exists for its implementation, municipalities can adopt a living wage policy either on their own or as part of a larger initiative, such as a broader social procurement policy (van Jaarsveld, Coronel & Eaglesham, 2021).

Communities across Canada are adopting the CCPA's Canadian Living Wage Framework, with some adopting the model wholesale and others choosing a variation of it. At the same time, subtle changes expanding the reference households the calculation is based on are emerging, specifically in Alberta and Ontario. In addition, the shift from focusing on community living wage calculations to regional living wage calculations demonstrated by the OLWN and being adopted in Nova Scotia reflect the

⁴⁹ Assumptions of the living wage calculation with respect to the reference family.

decision of some living wage campaigns in the comparator countries we examined to have a smaller number of living wage rates (e.g., the UK: two living wages, New Zealand: one living wage). Ontario publishes living wage calculations for 10 regions, expanding coverage across the province to employers.

Since the start of the pandemic, the number of certified employers is increasing in provinces with more developed living wage campaigns, including BC, Alberta and Ontario. However, the number of certified living wage employers in these provinces is relatively small compared with the number of employers in each of these provinces.

The sizable increase in the living wage from 2021 to 2022 for some of the densely populated high-cost-of-living cities in Canada (e.g., Metro Vancouver: 17.3% increase [Table 7], Greater Toronto Area: 15.1% average increase [Appendix IV, Table 13], Edmonton: 18.2% percent increase [Appendix IV, Table 14]) raises the question of whether approaches for smoothing out major variations in the living wage from year to year would help alleviate employer concerns about large swings in living wage calculations.

Living wage campaigns beyond Canada

Our review of how comparable economies are supporting the low-wage workforce offers several key insights that help inform our recommendations.

We note several public policy developments. In some countries, living wage campaigns are establishing a voluntary employment standard that coexists alongside statutory minimum wage regulations (e.g., the UK, New Zealand). In addition, the UK established a permanent Low Pay Commission with representatives from business, academia and labour to conduct research and offer independent recommendations to support the low-wage workforce. The Low Pay Commission is independent from both government and the Real Living Wage Campaign in the UK. Strengthening minimum wage policy by expanding its coverage also helps support the low-wage workforce. For example, a recent legal decision in the UK extended minimum wage protection to gig economy workers (Greater London Authority, n.d.; The Associated Press, 2021).

Some governments are examining their own responsibilities as employers and deciding to take steps to incorporate a living wage into their own employment practices. For example, the Scottish Government became a certified living wage employer and funds living wage campaigns, while others, such as the New Zealand Government, are incorporating a living wage into their social procurement policy. In response to the pandemic, the New Zealand and Scottish Governments initially extended a living wage to specific occupations, including health care workers, then to all public sector employees. The existence of one living wage in New Zealand and two living wage rates in the UK simplifies the application of these policies. In response to concerns about wage theft in Australia, we note the introduction of wage theft regulations, including jail time and fines for employers who engage in wage theft. In the US, examples of efforts to strengthen minimum wage protections include extending them to agricultural workers in Washington State.

Examining living wage campaigns, we note that living wage campaigns have been gaining momentum since the beginning of the pandemic, as demonstrated by the increasing number of employers becoming living wage employers. Our review also shows differences in living wage methodologies and reliance on different types of reference households.

Reflections from academic research on other living wage campaigns

Academic research undertaken in the US and the UK demonstrates the benefits of adopting a living wage. While preliminary research undertaken in Canada suggests a similar pattern, more research is needed to better understand the consequences for employers, unions and the workforce of adopting a living wage as a compensation policy and a social procurement policy. For example, does a living wage policy have greater benefits when adopted as a compensation policy and incorporated into a broader social procurement policy? Moreover, whether some organizations view paying a living wage as a union avoidance policy is also a research question that warrants attention in the Canadian context. Given the small number of certified living wage employers in each province, much remains to be learned about what threshold of living wage employers is necessary to persuade the majority of employers in an industry to become certified living wage employers and to have an impact on industry-wide compensation systems.

In contrast to the US and UK examples, the living wage for remote communities such as Nunavut are higher than their urban counterparts. Considering the dynamics of living wages for urban, rural and remote communities also deserves more research attention given Canada's unique geographic context. Within British Columbia, more research is needed to improve the understanding about how adopting a living wage can help contribute to sustainable communities where people can afford to live and participate in social aspects of those communities. This research needs to include Indigenous communities to help reduce the Indigenous–non-Indigenous wage gap and to help better understand the role of the living wage in reducing wage inequality.

Recommendations

Since the FWC was established in 2017, the BC government has introduced several measures that have directly reduced living costs. However, the difference between the BC minimum wage and the living wage is increasing again in 2023, exacerbated by historically high inflation.

Beyond the direct measures the BC government has already introduced:

1. The FWC continues to see merit in establishing a permanent Fair Wages Commission and recommends the formation of a permanent tripartite Fair Wages Commission consisting of representatives from labour, business and academia, as previously recommended and reiterated in our consultations. This body would report periodically to the BC Legislature. Potential activities could include, but would not be limited to:
 - a. Conducting research on wage levels and monitoring the difference between the BC minimum wage and living wage rates across the province.
 - b. Monitoring and developing recommendations to address pay gaps experienced by historically marginalized members of the BC workforce.
 - c. Monitoring the Indigenous–non-Indigenous wage gap and improving data collection on working conditions for the Indigenous workforce in BC.
 - d. Connecting with initiatives underway in other ministries, including social development, education, housing, transportation, child care and social assistance programs, given the interrelated nature of these issues.
 - e. Monitoring the current approach for regularly adjusting the BC minimum wage and providing guidance to the BC government.
 - f. Reviewing the living wage methodology in detail. Points to consider include inclusivity (e.g., household structure, non-standard work) and consolidating geographic coverage.
 - g. Evaluating the potential for living wage rates to help inform employers and policy-makers about living costs and wage structures and to inform adjustments to the minimum wage.
 - h. Tracking major components of the living wage calculation, including housing, child care, food and transportation expenditures, across BC communities over time to understand the impact on low-wage earners, in order to help evaluate policies through the lens of reducing the cost of living.
2. The FWC recommends strengthening current BC minimum wage protections by eliminating occupational exemptions affecting low-wage workers.
3. The FWC recommends monitoring and reviewing funding for the Employment Standards Branch on a periodic basis.
4. The FWC supports the recommendations from previous FWC reports still under consideration.

Appendix I. Fair Wages Commission terms of reference

FINAL Terms of Reference

FAIR WAGES COMMISSION

Whereas the general minimum wage in British Columbia is \$11.35/hour and the liquor server minimum wage is \$10.10/hour as of September 15, 2017;

And whereas among Canadian provinces, minimum wages range from \$10.72 to \$12.20/hour as of August 2017, although Alberta has announced a commitment to be at \$15/hour by October 2018 while Ontario has plans to reach \$15/hour by January 2019;

And whereas with the cost of living in BC, a person working full-time in a minimum wage job cannot make ends meet or support a family;

And whereas in contrast to the minimum wage, a living wage is designed to reflect what earners in a family need to bring home based on the actual costs of living in a specific community;

And whereas government intends to increase the minimum wage to \$15/hour as part of a plan to create good jobs, fair wages and build a sustainable economy in every sector and in every corner of the province, including indexing it to inflation in the future so as not to fall behind;

And whereas the Confidence and Supply Agreement from May 2017 contains the following commitment at Section 2 (e): *“Immediately establish an at-arm’s-length Fair Wages Commission that will be tasked with establishing a pathway to a minimum wage of at least \$15 per hour and overseeing regular rate reviews. The commission will bring forward recommendations regarding strategies to address the discrepancy between minimum wages and livable wages. The*

commission will make its first report on a new minimum wage within 90 days of its first meeting.”


Now, therefore, the Minister directs the establishment of an impartial Fair Wage

Commission as follows:

1. The Commission will consist of a Chair, one representative of employer interests and one representative of worker interests. These three Commission members will be appointed by the Minister of Labour. The Minister may add two members (one who represents employer interests and one who represents worker interests) to the Commission if needed after the first report is submitted (as per item 4 below) to address the complexities of the discrepancy between minimum wages and living wages.
2. The budget for the Commission will come from the Ministry of Labour. Payment for the Commission Chair and its members will be in accordance with government policy. The Ministry will provide administrative support for the Commission, including research and website support.
3. The Commission will determine its own procedures, including the format for reporting to the Minister and communications. It is expected that the Commission will engage in consultations with and receive submissions from interested stakeholders from all regions of the province including but not limited to representatives of economists, trade unions, the technology sector, small business, and youth.
4. The Commission will make its first report on a new minimum wage within 90 days of its first meeting. The first meeting of the Commission will take place on or before October 1, 2017 to enable a first report no later than December 31, 2017. The report should be in writing to the Minister of Labour and address the issues in items 5 to 7, inclusive, below. The timing for items 8 and 9 are for discussion with the Minister but are not required to be included in the first report to the Minister.
5. The Commission must prepare recommendations on the general minimum wage that will result in a series of increases over time to reach a \$15/hour minimum wage. Where possible, the recommendations should support the principles of regular, measured, and predictable increases over time to allow employers an appropriate notice period to plan for the changes on the way to a \$15/hour minimum wage.

6. The Commission should consider the impact of minimum wage increases in other jurisdictions including those jurisdictions that have committed to achieving \$15/hour. Consideration should be given to the prevailing views on the impact of minimum wage increases on employment.
7. The Commission must consider and make recommendations on the other minimum wage rates under the Employment Standards Regulation.
8. The Commission must prepare recommendations related to regular rate reviews once the \$15/hour minimum wage is achieved, including the Commission's role in overseeing regular rate reviews. The Commission should give consideration to the BC consumer price index and other factors (e.g., economic and labour market conditions), and provide recommendations on when and how the increases beyond the \$15/hour minimum wage should be determined.
9. The Commission will review the issue of what constitutes a "living wage" and the elements that make up determining a "living wage", including a jurisdictional scan of the issue in BC and across Canada. Recognizing rapid changes occurring in the economy, the Commission will make recommendations regarding strategies to address the discrepancy between the minimum wage and a "living wage".
10. The Minister of Labour will make the Commission's reports public after a reasonable period of time to review and consider them. The Minister will also provide the reports to Cabinet.

Given under my hand this 29th day of September, 2017.



Honourable Harry Bains, Minister of Labour

Appendix II. Participants who provided input to the Fair Wages Commission

Business sector:

- BC Chamber of Commerce
- Buckerfield's
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business
- Coalition of BC Businesses
- Greater Langley Chamber of Commerce
- Independent Contractors and Businesses Association of BC
- Kelowna Chamber of Commerce
- Restaurants Canada
- Surrey Board of Trade
- Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce

Trade unions and worker organizations:

- BC Teachers' Federation
- BC General Employees' Union
- British Columbia Federation of Students
- Canadian Union of Public Employees
- Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 1858
- Fraser Valley Labour Council
- Health Sciences Association of BC
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 230
- North Okanagan Labour Council
- South Okanagan Boundary Labour Council
- United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1518

Community, advocacy and non-profit organizations:

- BC Poverty Reduction Coalition
- Board Voice Society of BC
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – BC Office (CCPA-BC)
- Canada Homestay Network
- Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society
- Living Wage for Families Campaign
- Mission Community Skills Centre Society
- Ontario Living Wage Network
- Prince George Native Friendship Centre

- Single Mothers' Alliance BC
- Tamarack Institute
- Umbrella Society

Individual voices:

- Academics
- Business owners
- Low-wage workers
- Single mothers
- Union members
- Worker with disabilities
- Recent immigrants

Municipalities and other government bodies:

- City of Burnaby
- City of Port Coquitlam
- City of Quesnel
- City of Vancouver
- District of Central Saanich
- Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation)
- Social Planning Cowichan
- Village of Cumberland

Appendix III. Key informant interviews

NAME	DATE
Adrienne Montani <i>Executive Director</i> First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society	April 15, 2019
Andrew Weaver <i>Member of the Legislative Assembly</i> Green Party of British Columbia	June 14, 2019
Anne Coleman <i>Program Manager</i> Ontario Living Wage Network	November 5, 2020
Barb Ward-Burkitt <i>Executive Director</i> Prince George Native Friendship Centre	November 1, 2019
Bernice Paul <i>Human Resources and Office Manager</i> Modo	December 15, 2019
Catherine Ludgate <i>Senior Manager of Community Investment</i> Vancity	April 15, 2019
Cori Ramsay <i>Marketing Analyst and Communications Officer</i> Integrus Credit Union	May 13, 2019 (public hearing in Prince George) November 12, 2019 (phone call)
Dawn Himer <i>Executive Director</i> John Howard Society of Okanagan & Kootenay	December 6, 2019
Dena Kae Beno <i>Housing and Homelessness Coordinator</i> City of Abbotsford	October 25, 2019
Diana Gibson <i>Executive Director</i> Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria	October 29, 2019
Edmund Heery <i>Professor of Employment Relations</i> Cardiff Business School	June 7, 2019
Gavin Jones <i>Director of Operations</i> EMBERS	November 5, 2019
Halena Seiferling <i>Campaign Organizer</i> Living Wage for Families Campaign	April 15, 2019

NAME	DATE
Simon Enoch <i>Director</i> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Saskatchewan Office	March 11, 2021
Stephanie Luce <i>Professor of Labor Studies and Sociology</i> City University of New York	March 26, 2019
Steve Traviss <i>Director of Human Resources</i> City of Port Coquitlam	October 25, 2019

Appendix IV. Tables and figures

Table 10. BC living wage calculations, 2021 and 2022

BC COMMUNITY	2021 LIVING WAGE	2022 LIVING WAGE	2021–2022 DIFFERENCE (%)	2021–2022 DIFFERENCE (\$)
Castlegar		\$20.54		
Clayoquot Sound	\$21.15			
Columbia Valley	\$17.18	\$21.85	27.2%	\$4.67
Comox Valley	\$16.44	\$20.26	23.2%	\$3.82
Cowichan Valley	\$19.13	\$23.53	23.0%	\$4.40
Cranbrook		\$21.90		
Daajing Giids		\$25.87		
Dawson Creek		\$20.53		
Fernie		\$23.58		
Fraser Valley	\$16.75	\$18.98	13.3%	\$2.23
Golden	\$19.46	\$25.56	31.3%	\$6.10
Grand Forks	\$17.21	\$20.05	16.5%	\$2.84
Greater Victoria	\$20.46	\$24.29	18.7%	\$3.83
Kamloops	\$16.71	\$19.14	14.5%	\$2.43
Kelowna	\$18.49	\$22.88	23.7%	\$4.39
Metro Vancouver	\$20.52	\$24.08	17.3%	\$3.56
Nanaimo	\$16.33	\$20.49	25.5%	\$4.16
Nelson	\$19.56	\$20.83	6.5%	\$1.27
Penticton	\$18.55			
Powell River		\$23.33		
Prince George		\$21.19		
Prince Rupert		\$22.69		
Revelstoke	\$19.51	\$23.60	21.0%	\$4.09
Sunshine Coast	\$19.79			
Trail	\$18.15	\$21.13	16.4%	\$2.98

Sources: Ivanova, Daub & French, 2022; Ivanova & Knowles (2021).

Table 11. BC municipalities and First Nations councils that are certified living wage employers

EMPLOYER	TYPE	DATE ENROLLED	COMMUNITY	NUMBER OF STAFF	NUMBER OF STAFF WHOSE WAGES INCREASED	
					RECERTIFYING	JOINING
City of Burnaby	Municipality	January 8, 2020	Metro Vancouver	3,959	16	337
City of New Westminster	Municipality	November 27, 2012	Metro Vancouver	1,390	0	0
City of North Vancouver	Municipality	July 23, 2021	Metro Vancouver	634	0	0
City of Pitt Meadows	Municipality	June 13, 2017	Metro Vancouver	193	9	0
City of Port Coquitlam	Municipality	December 12, 2016	Metro Vancouver	575	56	
City of Quesnel	Municipality	June 29, 2016	Northern	180	0	0
City of Vancouver	Municipality	March 4, 2017	Metro Vancouver	8,662	0	7
City of Victoria	Municipality	January 15, 2020	Greater Victoria	1,100	13	45
Corporation of the Village of Fruitvale	Municipality	June 8, 2021	Greater Trail	18	0	0
District of Central Saanich	Municipality	December 17, 2018	Greater Victoria	140	0	10
Grand Forks & District Public Library	Library	November 25, 2021	Grand Forks	12	n/a	3
Huu-ay-aht First Nations	First Nations council	July 2, 2015	Clayoquot Sound	70	0	0
New Westminster School Board	School board	February 4, 2022	Metro Vancouver	1,000	n/a	0
School District No. 69 (Qualicum)	School board	November 1, 2015	Nanaimo	675	0	0
Sḵw̓xwú7mesh Úxwumixw	First Nations council	July 23, 2020	Metro Vancouver	476	67	85
Vancouver School Board	School board	January 27, 2022	Metro Vancouver	7,643	n/a	0

* In February 2023, the City of Vancouver chose to end its living wage employer certification and to smooth out the annual fluctuations in the living wage by adopting a five-year rolling average, using the Metro Vancouver living wage rate from 2018–2022 for wage increase.

Table 12. Share of households by family structure, BC and Metro Vancouver, 2016 census

	SHARE OF ALL CENSUS FAMILIES (%)		MEDIAN AFTER-TAX INCOME, 2015 (\$)	
	BC	METRO VANCOUVER	BC	METRO VANCOUVER
Couple families with children	24.4%	27.5%	\$96,176	\$96,888
Couple families with one child	10.1%	11.3%	n/a	n/a
Couple families with two children	10.5%	12.1%	n/a	n/a
Couple families with three or more children	3.8%	4.0%	n/a	n/a
Lone-parent families	9.0%	9.2%	\$46,668	\$49,006
Couple families without children	26.3%	22.8%	\$70,464	\$73,895
Single-person families	40.2%	40.5%	\$28,320	\$29,236

Note: We used the 2016 census data because the 2021 Statistics Canada census data lacked the specific breakdown of family characteristics we were interested in.

Table 13. Ontario living wage rates by region, 2022

REGION/ COMMUNITY	2021 LIVING WAGE (\$)	2022 LIVING WAGE (\$)	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE 2021 AND 2022 LIVING WAGES		DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE 2022 LIVING WAGE AND THE ONTARIO MINIMUM WAGE	
			(%)	(\$)	(%)	(\$)
Greater Toronto Area						
Durham	\$17.80	\$23.15	30.1%	\$5.35	49.4%	\$7.65
Halton	\$20.75		11.6%	\$2.40		
Peel	\$19.80		16.9%	\$3.35		
Toronto	\$22.08		4.8%	\$1.07		
Grey Bruce Perth Huron Simcoe						
Grey and Bruce	\$18.39	\$20.70	12.6%	\$2.31	33.5%	\$5.20
Perth and Huron	\$17.95		15.3%	\$2.75		
Simcoe	\$19.05		8.7%	\$1.65		
Dufferin Waterloo Guelph–Wellington						
Waterloo	\$17.20	\$19.95	16.0%	\$2.75	28.7%	\$4.45
Guelph–Wellington	\$18.10		10.2%	\$1.85		
Brant Niagara Haldimand Norfolk						
Niagara	\$18.90	\$19.80	4.8%	\$0.90	27.7%	\$4.30
Haldimand Norfolk	\$17.35		14.1%	\$2.45		
North						
Sault Ste. Marie	\$16.20	\$19.70	21.6%	\$3.50	27.1%	\$4.20
Sudbury	\$16.98		16.0%	\$2.72		
Thunder Bay	\$16.30		20.9%	\$3.40		
Ottawa	\$18.60	\$19.60	5.4%	\$1.00	26.5%	\$4.10
East						
Hastings and Prince Edward	\$17.95	\$19.05	6.1%	\$1.10	22.9%	\$3.55
Kingston	\$17.75		7.3%	\$1.30		
Leeds, Grenville and Lanark	\$18.25		4.4%	\$0.80		
Muskoka	\$18.55		2.7%	\$0.50		
Northumberland	\$18.80		1.3%	\$0.25		
Peterborough	\$18.35		3.8%	\$0.70		
Renfrew County	\$17.40		9.5%	\$1.65		
United Counties of Prescott and Russell	\$17.15		11.1%	\$1.90		

REGION/ COMMUNITY	2021 LIVING WAGE (\$)	2022 LIVING WAGE (\$)	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE 2021 AND 2022 LIVING WAGES		DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE 2022 LIVING WAGE AND THE ONTARIO MINIMUM WAGE	
			(%)	(\$)	(%)	(\$)
Hamilton	\$17.20	\$19.05	10.8%	\$1.85	22.9%	\$3.55
Southwest						
Chatham–Kent	\$16.33	\$18.15	11.1%	\$1.82	17.1%	\$2.65
Windsor and Essex	\$16.60		9.3%	\$1.55		
London Elgin Oxford						
London and Middlesex	\$16.55	\$18.05	9.1%	\$1.50	16.5%	\$2.55
St. Thomas and Elgin	\$16.57		8.9%	\$1.48		

Note: Differences were calculated using a \$15.50/hour minimum wage.

Source: Pickthorne (2023).

Table 14. Alberta living wage rates, 2022

ALBERTA COMMUNITIES WITH A LIVING WAGE	2021 LIVING WAGE (\$)	2022 LIVING WAGE (\$)	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE 2021 AND 2022 LIVING WAGES		DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE 2022 LIVING WAGE AND THE ALBERTA MINIMUM WAGE	
			(%)	(\$)	(%)	(\$)
Calgary	\$18.60	\$22.40	20.4%	\$3.80	49.3%	\$7.40
Canmore	\$37.40	\$32.75	-12.4%	-\$4.65	118.3%	\$17.75
Chestermere	\$18.60					
Cochrane	\$22.60	\$22.35	-1.1%	-\$0.25	49.0%	\$7.35
Drayton Valley		\$19.65			31.0%	\$4.65
Drumheller	\$19.70	\$21.20	7.6%	\$1.50	41.3%	\$6.20
Edmonton	\$18.10	\$21.40	18.2%	\$3.30	42.7%	\$6.40
Fort McMurray	\$27.35	\$22.50	-17.7%	-\$4.85	50.0%	\$7.50
Grande Prairie		\$19.65			31.0%	\$4.65
Lethbridge	\$19.00	\$20.30	6.8%	\$1.30	35.3%	\$5.30
Medicine Hat		\$17.50			16.7%	\$2.50
Red Deer	\$17.15	\$19.65	14.6%	\$2.50	31.0%	\$4.65
Rocky Mountain House	\$18.05	\$21.85	21.1%	\$3.80	45.7%	\$6.85
Spruce Grove		\$20.70			38.0%	\$5.70
St. Albert		\$22.40			49.3%	\$7.40
Stony Plain	\$17.20	\$20.40	18.6%	\$3.20	36.0%	\$5.40
Strathcona County	\$16.80					

Note: Differences were calculated using a \$15.00/hour minimum wage.

Source: Alberta Living Wage Network, 2022.

Appendix V. Case studies of living wage employers

Integris Credit Union

Integris Credit Union is a financial co-operative based in north-central BC and an early adopter of the living wage. While Integris was already paying a wage likely higher than the living wage, members at the annual general meeting raised the issue. Integris decided to research the certification process and what it would entail for their 220 full-time staff members.

As the first employer in north-central BC to consider implementing a living wage, Integris worked on a living wage calculation for the region with Living Wages Families BC and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Once the calculation was approved, Integris applied for certification on July 22, 2015, and was certified shortly after. Overall, the certification process was fairly straightforward. Integris also has only one contract over 120 hours, a janitorial contract, which was coming up to tender at the time. Therefore, they were able to insert a living wage clause and complete the certification process.

Other than the janitorial contract that saw increases, the only staff who experienced an increase in wage rates were the roughly 34 casual staff, who received an approximately 20- to 25-cent raise. The implementation cost was minimal, as most part-time and full-time staff were already earning a living wage. The total wage compensation structure was also slightly affected; the hourly wages for both entry-level reception positions (\$15.00/hour) and entry-level insurance and teller positions (\$15.75/hour) were increased to \$16.85/hour, the living wage, on October 1, 2016.

Integris's new living wage policy had a direct positive impact on employee recruitment and talent acquisition. Since implementing the policy, talent acquisition has increased threefold. Survey results showed that many job applicants cited Integris being a living wage employer as their reason for applying for a position. In addition, staff turnover is declining—another positive outcome from the living wage. Due to the living wage policy's success, Integris has since become a large supporter of the movement. The company even helps other employers who express interest in the living wage navigate the certification process.

Sḵw̓xwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation)

While municipalities have shown a significant interest in the living wage, Indigenous communities are also implementing the living wage. For example, on August 2, 2020, Sḵw̓xwú7mesh Úxwumixw, the Squamish Nation, a Coast Salish First Nation, became the third First Nation in British Columbia to become a living wage employer, behind Huu-ay-aht First Nations in 2014 and Yuuʔuʔiʔath (Ucluelet) First Nation in 2017.⁵⁰ The Squamish Nation is in the area ranging from North Vancouver to Howe

⁵⁰ The Yuuʔuʔiʔath First Nation (Ucluelet) did not recertify in 2019.

Sound, with the majority of Skwxwú7mesh stelmexw (the Squamish People) living in Squamish and Vancouver (Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw, n.d.).

Approval for the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw living wage policy came from its council in 2019, following a long approval process. The policy came into effect on August 2, 2020, with the support of the 16 council members who were the main drivers behind the policy's adoption. This motivation stemmed primarily from the council's recent focus on the issue of wages. They sought to raise wages to stay competitive in the labour market, but also ensure that they were taking care of the people in their community. The Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw living wage policy applies to contractors and full-time, temporary and casual employees. In total, Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw has around 400 employees, 91 of whom were affected by the new living wage policy (33 had benefits; 58 were temporary/casual without benefits and received a significant pay increase). The policy and Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw's certification as a living wage employer through Living Wage for Families BC are still fairly new, so some concerns about wage compression issues and the possibility of raising the total compensation structure still need to be resolved.

Buckerfield's

While the previous two examples involve employers that went through the formal living wage certification process with Living Wage for Families BC, this example involves an employer that chose not to go through the formal certification process. Buckerfield's is a chain of general agricultural stores with nine locations across the province. Buckerfield's is a small, private sector business in operation for the past 100 years, employing around 100 employees. One factor in deciding to adopt a living wage was that it was a method to standardize what was formerly a heavily differentiated pay scale. In addition, the CEO, Kelvin McCulloch, explains:

"We have employees who have worked 40 years for the company. ... We see them every day and realize well, whatever money those people have, they got from working in this company, and whatever retirement they have, they got working in this company ... because they put their working careers into this company. ... So, if they didn't get a living wage from the company and even get a pension, I mean, they wasted their entire working careers, and I can't face them, right!? [That] would just be wrong."

Interestingly, unlike other businesses in the province that use the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' living wage calculation, Buckerfield's used Cowichan Valley's living wage calculation and then incorporated it into their own compensation system. The key difference between the Cowichan Valley's living wage calculation and the Living Wage for Families BC calculation is that it includes two cars as opposed to one car and a transit pass to better reflect transportation in rural communities. Buckerfield's is not certified with Living Wage for Families BC and does not pay part-time workers a living wage. Employees begin to earn a living wage after one year of full-time employment. The policy

was first implemented in Buckerfield's only unionized store in Duncan. Once the union approved the pay scale, the rest of the locations across BC were updated. However, regardless of the store's location in the province, the living wage is still based on the Cowichan Valley calculation.

Buckerfield's is a unique case, one in which the CEO chose to adopt the living wage as a solution to uneven pay scales and gendered pay differences and as a benchmark to pay staff fairly. While payroll costs increased more than 10% in the first year, McCulloch reports that the impact of the policy "continues to pay dividends" and describes it as the "the best marketing program we've ever had."

Modo

Modo is a car-sharing co-operative with over 700 cars and vans operating in the Lower Mainland, in the Okanagan and on Vancouver Island. Aware of the living wage campaign through their community partners (for example, the City of Vancouver and Vancity), Modo was motivated to adopt their own living wage policy not only because they felt like it was the right thing to do, but also because it aligned with the values they and their community partners hold. In a similar implementation story as other living wage employers, Modo reached out to and met with Catherine Ludgate from Vancity, which, like Modo, is also a co-operative, to understand how the certification process would work.

Throughout the process, Modo worked very closely with both the City of Vancouver and Vancity. An important point for Modo was to understand how large an impact the policy would make, as they have a mandate for their members to keep access affordable. But, they soon realized few employees would actually be affected. Once this became clear, they decided to move forward with the process.

Instead of increasing employee hourly rates, the adoption of the living wage led Modo to rethink the kind of positions they offered. For example, instead of having separate car-jockeying and technician roles, these roles were combined and further fleshed out to include other roles within the job description, with Modo hiring this new role at a living wage rate. At the time of implementation, there were also some staff that were paid slightly under the living wage rate (approximately \$18.50/hour); however, after three months of working with Modo, they received employee benefits, which amounted to a rate above the living wage. Now, all incoming employees are paid a living wage rate.

Another interesting factor in Modo's living wage journey was that during the implementation, Modo was due for a union negotiation with their customer service staff. During bargaining, Modo brought up the living wage. The union reacted very positively to this new policy, and, interestingly, the living wage is now tied into the collective agreement.

According to Bernice Paul, Human Resources and Office Manager, the results of adopting a living wage have been only positive. The implementation of a living wage policy forced Modo to rethink their roles and make the company more efficient. Additionally, staff felt good knowing their co-workers would receive a guaranteed living wage. It even benefited staff recruitment, as hiring managers noticed employees from other car-share programs applying to Modo because of the opportunity for job experience in a more comprehensive role with higher wages.

Conclusions

These four cases describe various reasons for employers implementing a living wage policy. However, the language of each living wage policy itself differed with respect to whether it affected direct employees or non-standard staff. While the first two cases, Integris Credit Union and Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), pursued formal certification through Living Wage for Families BC and adopted the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – BC’s living wage calculation, Buckerfield’s used a living wage calculation developed exclusively for the Cowichan Valley. Across these four cases, the decision to implement a living wage policy offers potential tangible benefits for both employers and the workforce, and these benefits are viewed as outweighing the costs of implementation. While these cases involve different types of employers, they shared a common goal of treating their workforce fairly.

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