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ACORN Canada Small Group Discussion Report

Introduction

Date: March 20, 2018

Community: Metro Vancouver

of Participants: 27

of Organizations: 0

About the Participants:

The majority of attendees identify as having disabilities, and a majority also had lived experience of poverty. Participants were from a range of age groups. Other notable demographics that attended the discussion included single parents and seniors.

Findings:

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?

- Medical problems that need to be covered. People living in poverty face issues affording medical supplies. The Ministry supplies some of the help but they can't afford the full cost.
- Scrapping of the automatic appeals process. Tribunal used to be able to force the ministry to pay for things when there was a bad decision relating to unfair rulings. Appeals for any kind of assistance issue. Restoration for social assistance appeals.
- We need funding for advocates or lawyers. Legal aid is necessary to allow people to achieve the rights afforded to them.
- People living in poverty should be seen as a human rights issue. Most of the wealth is going to the 1%. Everyone living in poverty has a human right for better conditions. We have the highest cost of living in the country.
- Teachers aren't being paid enough.
- Create a mechanism for appeals. We need an independent party to adjudicate on issues that are unfair. For example, a widow whose husband died of cancer, with children who needed financial relief from the government. She appealed to the Ministry for income support while she was getting back on her feet, but she was refused. We need a separate body that has power.
- It's very important that the tribunals are set up to be fair to the poor. They currently favour the government.

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- Poverty destroyed my son. He is a musician with a high IQ and now he isn't going anywhere. They shouldn't abuse children. We were threatened with eviction. Bullied by the agencies. My son changed when he heard the word, "eviction". It really stressed him out.
- We need the disability rates to be raised.
- Parents get away with not contributing to their child. We need stronger enforcements to get people to pay the fair share of child support.
- We need more of a voice over how subsidised housing is run. When they know you are on social assistance you have no rights.
- The ability of the owners of houses to increase the rent with impunity. There needs to be a limit to how high the rent can go. Living off a government pension, I will not be able to afford the place I currently live in. The rent controls need to be stronger.
- Not enough social housing or affordable housing. The population of the lower mainland is going to double in 10 to 15 years, and there is no plan to deal with the deficit of social housing that there is now. Especially with aging population. There is a total lack of enforcement on developers to force them to supply the number of affordable housing that is needed. It should go under the cost of doing business.
- Reducing the rates of medical supplies.
- My mum paid taxes and worked and died. She left \$12,000 to give to her grandson. She wanted it to go to his education, but the ministry forced them to put it towards the medical supplies.

1a. Are there any issues that specifically impact people with disabilities?

- It's really hard for people with disabilities to find a place to live. There is discrimination affecting where people can go.
- Chronic Fatigue – the health service doesn't accept Chinese medicine. They don't want to pay for alternative health therapies.
- 80% of our health costs are preventable. And there is no provision of money to help people not get ill. We need a preventative model. We need to deal with mental health issues.
- Most shops are still not accessible for people with disabilities
- My mental health therapy bankrupted me.
- People on disabilities aren't allowed to get their full CPP. PWD is currently classified as unpaid income. And that means people have to choose when they can retire and it will affect how much money they get from the government.
- People who are not able to work who are on disability are on an extreme disadvantage.

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- The government needs to put a cap on what pharmaceutical companies can charge for medicine.
- We need to increase the disability pension and the welfare pension. Because renters pay property tax the renters normally pass the tax onto the renters.
- The Minister needs to increase the rent portion of social compensation. It's been at \$375 for 20 years!
- The Province has to put in place rent freezes right now. Rent is killing lower income people. 4% increases are way higher than inflation.
- We need a commitment to build massive amounts of social housing and laws to stop property speculation (including property futures).
- Tribunals for disabilities should always be solution focused. If you have too much money to receive benefits you should have the right give it to your children.
- If you're living with another person with PWD you are currently penalized and you receive less money.
- The government should be focusing more on mental health and addictions.

2. What would address these issues and help you or others out of poverty?

- Relook at the general supplements, like dental coverage, eye coverage, etc. We need to increase medical cost provision because the benefits haven't kept up with inflation. Put a cap on medical costs.
- Supermarkets and clothing stores should not be able to waste food/clothing. They should be forced to donate it to food banks etc.
- Income supports need to be closer to the living wage.
- Housing affordability needs to be addressed.
- Mental health supports need to be addressed.
- End CCP clawbacks.
- End death benefits clawbacks, e.g. One partner passed away and they had the CPP of their partner clawed back.
- We need better rent control and need to end property speculation.
- There is a need for financial support for people on low-income
- The government should be providing free prescriptions/treatment for people with addictions.
- Everyone should get free prescriptions.
- We need a universal basic income.
- Places designated to family housing should be enforced to be non-smoking. Especially where there are young children living there.

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- Change the name of pensions. People are treated differently on pensions. PWD should be changed to be called pensions, to reduce the stigma PWD recipients receive.
- Employment assistance workers should be re-established. People on benefits need more human resources to help them. There needs to be better access to these workers.
- Government should be taxing the rich and corporations more.
- Universal pharma-care.
- Tax the wealthy that are speculating on real estate. They are forcing up the rent. We also need a vacancy tax.
- We need a place to call to get help with rent for people on disabilities – incorporate a form of rent help for people with disabilities.
- Examine foreign ownership
- Government should treat people with invisible disabilities like they treat visible disabilities.
- Shorten the wait times when calling the “1-866” number to speak to a worker.
- Housing Minister needs to pressure the federal government to get housing to be a human right. It needs to be based on poverty in the country now. We need subsidised housing to be there for everyone, like in Austria. (Enforcement of the UN Declaration of Human Rights).
- We need to restore specialized transit funding and services for people on disabilities. For example, HandyDART.
- More rent banks, to apply for a loan to help with your rent if you can’t afford it. And for low-interest loans.
- The Province needs to pressure the federal government to double the federal housing money.
- A massive percentage increase in subsidised/affordable housing.
- City council has a lot of authority over zoning. We need to get the province to put pressure on the city to provide more social housing
- Increase municipal housing powers.
- Increase municipal power (force them to use their power). The province also needs to take back some of its powers over rezoning when it comes to demovictions/renovictions.
- Universal free transit.

Possible Solutions

Solutions and Actions That Can Make a Difference

Top 3 Issues:

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1. Not enough social housing or affordable housing. The population of the lower mainland is going to double in 10 to 15 years. And there is no plan to deal with the deficit of social housing that there is now, especially with aging population. There is a total lack of enforcement on developers to force them to supply the number of affordable housing that is needed. It should go under the cost of doing business.
2. Medical supplies (prescriptions, etc.) are too expensive.
3. The disability rates are too low and need to be raised

Top 3 Solutions:

1. Three solutions tied:
 - a. Income supports need to be closer to the living wage.
 - b. We need a universal basic income.
 - c. We need to tax the rich and the big corporations more.
2. We need a massive increase in the percentage of affordable/subsidized housing.
3. Five solutions tied:
 - a. We need better rent control and end property speculation
 - b. The government should be providing free prescriptions/treatment for people with addictions
 - c. Universal Pharmacare
 - d. Increase municipal power (force them to use their power), the province also needs to take back some of its powers over rezoning when it comes to demovictions/renovictions.
 - e. Stop landlords/slumlords from being able to bully/abuse their tenants without any reprehension