

BC Poverty Reduction:  
Kitchen Table Discussions  
Report

# Introduction

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The British Columbia Poverty Reduction Strategy was introduced in 2018 on behalf of the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (SPARC). The insights and feedback gained through Small Group Discussions, which were advertised as Kitchen Table Discussions, will help to ensure that a wide range of voices and ideas are heard in terms of the issues affecting people living in poverty in British Columbia, as well as in term some potential solutions.

This report will become part of the broader public engagement and consultation process that is taking place across B.C to help shape the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy. To ensure all voices were being heard the Canadian Mental Health Association-Vernon & District collaborated with the Vernon Women's Transition House, Whitevalley Community Resource Centre in Lumby, the North Okanagan and Kootenay John Howard Society in Vernon and the Urban Indigenous Elders Support Program in Vernon to organize five Kitchen Table Discussions during the month of March. The facilitator was Naaz Grewal who is an employee at the Canadian Mental Health Association-Vernon & District and the cost of hosting the Kitchen Table Discussions were covered by the funding provided by SPARC. This was done to ensure that no population was left behind and to allow for a great diversity of participants.

The Kitchen Table Discussions were approximately one and a half hours long and focused on two key questions:

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?
2. What would address these issues and help you and others out of poverty?

This report is divided into the five Kitchen Table Discussions focusing on the issues and solutions identified by the clients/participants of each organization. The issues and solutions were also further divided into the following sub-topics (Note that not issues and solutions are included from the Kitchen Table Discussions in all areas):

1. Child Care
2. Education
3. Employment
4. Equity
5. Government and Policies
6. Health Care
7. Housing
8. Income
9. Programs and Services
10. Other

# The Urban Indigenous Elders Support Program

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## Introduction

Date	March 1,2018
Community	Vernon
Number of Participants	7

## About the Participants:

Participants included a group of individuals that meet every Thursday at the library as part of the Urban Indigenous Elders Support Program. Majority of the group was seniors (6 out of the 7 participants). The participants were a mix of Indigenous and Caucasian individuals who were all low income. Participants were grateful that someone was willing to listen to what they had to say. They emphasized how important it was to them that this report was being given to provincial government because often they are neglected and their voices are silenced, especially being seniors.

## Issues

### Education

- There is a lack of education for youth living in poverty.

### Employment

- There are not enough jobs or job training for those with little to no education and for those living with disabilities.

### Equity

- Often many are left feeling vulnerable and powerless or unable to get out of poverty.
- There is a lack of a support system.
- Seniors are often forgotten about.
- Many are dehumanized by others for living in poverty which further adds to the feelings of shame.
- Indigenous people, immigrants and persons of color are not respect by others in the community and government employees.
  - Individual stated: “They can treat you like shit but the second you get mad and raise your voice you get kicked out.”

- Those who take advantage of the system make it harder for those trying to better their lives.
- Many are left having to prioritize their needs on a regular basis.
  - Individual stated: “Do I pay for sanitary pads this month or food?”

### **Government and Policies**

- There are restrictions on CPP.
- There is not enough coverage provided by PWD.
- Since majority of the forms are now online it is hard to fill forms without access to a computer or internet.
- There is not enough help with filing government documents.
- There are long waitlists and line-ups at certain agencies.
- Many agencies will not respond back once you have submitted your forms.

### **Health Care**

- There is a shortage of doctors in Vernon.
- It is hard to maintain a job due to age and health issues.
- There is not sufficient coverage for Medicare.
- There is limited housing for Indigenous people living both on and off reserve which is why many seniors are living here or in other urban areas.

### **Housing**

- It is hard to find accessible and affordable housing.
- There is a constant increase in rent.
- Those living on disability are not allowed to live together.
- Many often conduct credit checks before renting to individuals which is hard for those living in poverty.
- Many are wrongfully evicted by landlords.
- There is a lack of housing for pet owners.
- There is a lack of shelters for those who are kicked out of their houses or are unable to find housing.
- The architecture of accessible housing is hard for seniors. Certain houses are inaccessible due to stairs and other restrictions for seniors.

### **Income**

- Many are left having to work a significant number of hours for little pay.

## **Programs and Services**

- There is an awkward seniors age group of 55-65 in which they are not qualified as seniors but too old for “normal” programming.
- Organizations do not connect people together.
  - Individual stated: “Having a group that meets once a week like this to play games and socialize with one another is very rare to find but it is really needed.”

## **Other**

- Those that live in low income are often isolated from the rest of the community. There is further isolation in smaller communities such as Lumby.
- The insufficient Vernon bus system further restricts where you can work, where you can live and so forth.
- The bus does not run late at night resulting in people having to walk to their destination while feeling vulnerable and unsafe.

## **Most Important Issues and/or Barriers**

The following includes the top three important issues and/or barriers identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. There is a shortage of doctors in Vernon.
2. The horrible Vernon bus system further restricts where you can work, where you can live and so forth.
3. Hard to find accessible and affordable housing.

## **Solutions**

### **Employment**

- There should be shuttle bus program provided by employers for those who have to work late and have no other means of transportation.

### **Equity**

- The government, the community and non-profit organizations should educate the public and help reduce the stigma about those living in poverty.

## **Government and Policies**

- Government employers should be given training on how to be empathic towards those living in poverty.
- The government should provide more reasonable costs for bills for those living in poverty.
- The government should implement courses concentrating on essential services and on how to fill out government forms.

## **Health Care**

- There should be an increase in doctor officers in Vernon.
- The health care system needs to be re-vamped.
- The costs of medications should be decreased or there should be better coverage for prescriptions.

## **Housing**

- Those living on disability should be allowed to live together.
- There needs to be more accessible and affordable housing made in Vernon.

## **Programs and Services**

- There should be designated spaces for those living with poverty to display and sell their crafts to make a little extra money.
- There should be computer courses.
- Organizations should provide life skill courses.
- There should be more counselling services for those with drug addictions, abuse, neglect and so forth.

## **Other**

- There should a bus pass for those living on disability because the bus is often their main source of transportation.
- The bus system in Vernon and surrounding regions should be improved.
- Coupons for the local Farmers Market should be provided.
- Volunteer work should be made more beneficial. Non-profit organizations could provide payment, food or affordable clothing for those who volunteer for their organization.
- Certain locations, such as government offices, should be made more accessible.

## **Most Important Solutions**

The following includes the top three important solutions identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. There should a bus pass for those living on disability because the bus is often their main source of transportation.
2. There needs to be more accessible and affordable housing made in Vernon.
3. The costs of medications should be decreased or there should be better coverage for prescriptions.

# John Howard Society-Howard House

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## Introduction

Date	March 7,2018
Community	Vernon
Number of Participants	12

## About the Participants:

Participants included individuals who were clients at the Howard House which is a shelter that provides high barrier emergency shelter in the Vernon area for those who are homeless, who may be suffering from economic downturn, addictions and/or mental health challenges. Majority of the participants were Caucasian males ranging from the age of 19 to 60 years old. Two of the participants were women ranging from 30-45 years old. All participants live in poverty and some had mental health problems and/or addictions.

## Issues

### Employment

- Those living in poverty often struggle to find a job.
- Those living in poverty need assistance on searching for jobs.

### Equity

- There is a stigma towards those living in poverty.
- Doctors are often judgmental towards those living in poverty, especially if they are recovering addicts.
- Many people have wrongful assumptions towards those living in poverty.

### Government and Policies

- All forms must be completed online which is a barrier for those who are not educated on how to use the computer or for those who do not have access to a computer.
- Many organizations do not do as promised. When talking to an employee of organization X they send you to employers of organization Y who further send you to organization Z.
- The funding is constantly cut for those living in poverty.
- Bylaw officers often take things out of proportion and are rude towards those living in poverty.
- Income assistant does not cover costs such as mental health care services.

## **Health Care**

- It is hard having a mental illness while living in poverty.
- The health care system is getting worse. There is a shortage of doctors and there is no such thing as a 'free health care system' in Canada if you are living in poverty.
- Many are unable to afford dental or eye care services.

## **Housing**

- There is a lack of places with affordable rent.
- Vernon has a very low vacancy rate.
- Many living in poverty are treated unfairly by landlords. Some are evicted for no reason and damage deposits are not returned.

## **Programs and Services**

- Organizations often group addicted with those who are trying to recover. This increases the chances of relapsing for those trying to recover.
- There is a lack of second stage programs for recovering addicts.
- There is a lack of harm reduction programs.

## **Other**

- There is a lack of transportation in Vernon. There is often long waiting times for busses and it is hard to get to areas such as Armstrong. Additionally, the cost of the busses is hard to afford.
- Those living in poverty are segregated from the community.
- There is a lack of affordable and healthy food.
- There is an increased price for everything including food and basic necessities.

## **Most Important Issues and/or Barriers**

The following includes the top three issues and/or barriers identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. There is a lack of places with affordable rent.
2. The health care system is getting worse. There is a shortage of doctors and there is no such thing as a 'free health care system' in Canada if you are living in poverty.
3. Many organizations do not do as promised. When talking to an employee of organization X they send you to employers of organization Y who further send you to organization Z.

## Solutions

### Government and Policies

- More funding should be provided for non-profit organizations to further enhance their programs and services.
- Government agencies need to stop with the 'wild goose chases'.
- Service Canada needs to revamp their services.
- Government needs to be stricter on those 'playing the system'.
- Those living in poverty need more support and funding to live in Canada.
- Government and agencies need to provide more awareness about programs available for those living in low income.
- The government needs to raise the minimum wage because those living in poverty often work minimum wage jobs.

### Health Care

- There needs to be easier access to dentists.

### Housing

- More affordable housing needs to be made in Vernon.
- There should be more housing made for low income individuals.

### Programs and Services

- Organizations should find a way to lower the waiting times.
- Agencies need to specialize on what they say they will do.
  - Individual stated: "Many agencies claim to have certain programs or services. However, when someone asks to join those programs or services the promises can't be fulfilled."
- Agencies need to create more one-on-one support programs.
- There should be support groups for those in between jobs and keep them busy with volunteering jobs etc.
- Organizations should create educational programs.
- There is a need for life skill programs.

## Most Important Solutions

The following includes the top three potential solutions identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. More affordable housing needs to be made in Vernon.
2. There should be more housing made for low income individuals.
3. Government needs to be stricter on those 'playing the system'.

# Canadian Mental Health Association- Vernon & District

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## Introduction

Date	March 15,2018
Community	Vernon
Number of Participants	7

## About the Participants:

Participants included clients who engage in programs provided by the Canadian Mental Health Association-Vernon & District. The participants were a mix of Caucasian and Indigenous men and women ranging from 40-70 years old. Majority of the participants live in poverty and have severe and persistent mental health problems.

## Issues

### Equity

- There is age discrimination especially towards the seniors.
- Often left being dependant on others which makes an individual feel useless.
- The rich seem to get richer while the poor get poorer.
- Often get singled out for living in poverty by other individuals living in the community.
- There is a large bias against Indigenous and people of color living in poverty. It is assumed that Indigenous people are alcoholics and drug addicts which has led them to become homeless or low income. Additionally, immigrants who are persons of color are not given the same treatment as those living in Canada.
- Doctors often judge those living in poverty for being low income.

### Government and Policies

- Government takes away PWD when someone pursues an education.
- Those living on disability are not allowed to live together.
- The current government policies on being a renter and a pet owner is quite restrictive.
- There is an age limit of 49 years old for the Registered Disability Savings Program, yet many are not told about the program until it is too late for them. This would be very beneficial to tell those living in poverty at a younger age.

- The government often has empty promises that are never implemented.
  - For example, a poverty reduction survey was conducted about 10 years ago and poverty as promised to be reduced by 2020-2024 yet nothing was done according to some of the participants.
- Politicians are very vague about policies and their platforms during elections.
- Politicians use very complicated language which is hard to understand, especially for those with a learning disability.
- There are different criteria for government forms which often make it hard to receive all potential benefits.
- The government is ruining relationships because those living on disability are unable to live together.
  - Individual stated: “Are we not humans too? Are we not allowed to love and build a relationship with those who we love even if they live on disability?”
- British Columbia’s residence receives the least amount of funding for disability compared to the rest of Canada.
- The cut off for PWD is 65 years old but what happens to those who are older and do not have the financial stability?
- The money given by the government is not enough to survive especially when there is inflation.
- The government is not targeting those who are corrupted and are using the system. Instead it feels as if they are going after the weak.
- PWD only gives \$2,500 to families after death of a loved one which is not enough to cover funeral costs.

## **Health Care**

- The medication is ridiculously expensive and often hard to obtain.
- The Canadian health care system is lacking its full potential
  - Statistics show that rates of repeat hospitalizations are the highest in British Columbia especially those living in poverty.
- There is a shortage of doctors in Vernon and the surrounding districts which makes it harder to see a doctor and get the correct treatment.

## **Housing**

- There is a low chance of obtaining a loan to buy a house of your own.
- Being forced to live alone which leads to less housing options for everyone else. People living on disability are not allowed to live together and that could possibly provide more housing for others.
- The rate of rental properties is constantly increasing.
- There is a low vacancy rate in Vernon.

- Those who are PWD are unable to live together.
- Many subsidized housings do not allow pets. Pets are often companions for those who are in poverty and living alone.
- Often landlords will wrongfully evict a person living in poverty.
- The current pet policies are very restrictive especially when trying to find a place to rent.

### **Other**

- There is a lack of affordable healthy food.
  - Individual stated: “Everything bad for you is cheap which leads to more health problems.”
- There is a high cost for gardening. Being able to garden would give access to fresh and affordable food for those living in poverty.
- Not being able to afford health care or necessities for pets.

### **Programs and Services**

- There is a lack of advertisement about the programs provided by the government and non-profit organizations which could benefit those living in poverty.

## **Most Important Issues and/or Barriers**

The following includes the top three issues and/or barriers identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. The money given by the government is not enough to survive especially when there is inflation.
2. The medication is ridiculously expensive and often hard to obtain.
3. The current pet policies are very restrictive especially when trying to find a place to rent.

## **Solutions**

### **Child Care**

- Child care is very expensive. Government and agencies should have more affordable child care services for families.

### **Education**

- There should be more government support from those trying to pursue an education which can help better their lives and potentially get them out of poverty.

## **Equity**

- Stop the bullying towards the vulnerable.
- More attention needs to be paid towards female needs. The needs of males and females differ. Females need more support with areas such as affordable, or free, sanitary pads while living in poverty.

## **Government and Policies**

- The government should change the laws about allowing renters to own pets.
- The government should raise the amount of funding provided for those living in poverty.
- Government should do what is promised.
- The Ministry of Children and Family Development should change certain policies.
  - For example, instead of taking the child away for being in a low-income household the government should be helping the family to better their lives.

## **Health Care**

- There should be a universal Pharma-Care.

## **Housing**

- There should be more transition programs for renters to become home owners.
- Those who are home owners should be given courses on how to fix minor problems which would lower the costs of asking for outside help.
  - For example, home owners should have courses on how to fix a leaky pipe, so they do not need to spend the money to call a plumber and instead can use that money elsewhere.
- Vernon should have a tiny house community for those living in poverty.
- More access to affordable housing is needed.

## **Programs and Services**

- There should be more courses on life skills.
- Non-profits should invest more into educational and therapeutic programs such as Equine Therapy.
- More programs which provide fresh and affordable food is needed especially after the food box program was shut down recently. The food box allowed for individuals who are low income to buy fresh fruits and vegetables for a low cost.
- There should be more support systems for young adults living in poverty.

- There should be programs on how to fill out government forms. Often the forms are filled incorrectly or hard to understand.

### **Other**

- In this day and age of technology everything is available online, but Wi-Fi prices are expensive. There should be more affordable Wi-Fi.
- There is a need for community gardens. This will allow those living in poverty to access fresh food and contribute to the community by gardening.

### **Most Important Solutions**

The following includes the top three solutions identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. The government should raise the amount of funding provided for those living in poverty.
2. In this day and age of technology everything is available online, but Wi-Fi prices are expensive. There should be more affordable Wi-Fi.
3. There should be more courses on life skills.

# Women's Transition House-Young Parents Program

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## Introduction

Date	March 16,2018
Community	Vernon
Number of Participants	3

## About the Participants:

Participants included clients who engage in programs and services provided by the Vernon Women's Transition House. The participants were young Caucasian mothers ranging from 20-30 years old. The Young Parents Program has a total of 7 clients, but many were unable to make it due to prior commitments. Majority of the participants currently live in poverty.

## Issues

### Employment

- It is hard to find a good and respected job. Often the jobs are minimum wage and in the fields of fast food or retail.

### Education

- Income assistance is taken away when someone gets a loan to pursue a post-secondary education.

### Equity

- Often many are disrespectful towards those who are low income.
- The society has a stigma towards young single mothers who are trying to better the lives of their children.
- Many government employees are judgemental towards those living in poverty.

### Government and Policies

- Government and other organizations often forget those living in poverty are humans too. They should be given the same amount of respect and provided the same programing as those not living in poverty.

- Ex: Programs provided for those living in poverty are often directed to their immediate needs such as food. However physical and mental health programs are just as important.
- Money is often the root problem for those living in poverty. Yet when one tries to apply for a loan they are often shut down.

### **Health Care**

- The cost of dental care is expensive. Many cannot afford dental surgeries and there are only a limited amount of dentists who will provide low prices for services.
- The cost for mental health care services, such as a psychologist, is expensive often leaving those with mental illnesses to self-medicate or to suffer.
- There is a huge waitlist for surgeries for children in the North Okanagan.
- The cost of medication is expensive.

### **Housing**

- There is a lack of affordable housing.
- For many organizations there is often a large waitlist for low income housing.
- The price of rent is constantly increasing making it hard for those living in poverty to afford rent and therefore being 'kicked to the curb'.
- Some landlords are often rude and disrespectful towards those living in poverty knowing that they will be unable to do anything.

### **Programs and Services**

- There is a lack of support systems provided by non-profit organizations.
- Those living in poverty are not informed about programs and services which could be beneficial for them.
- Rehab programs are often very expensive and those trying to get help must stay sober for a certain period of time which is hard for those living in poverty.

### **Other**

- There is a lack of affordable healthy food.
- There is a lack of access to fresh water which is a necessity to live.
- The bus services in Vernon is not as good as other bus systems in British Columbia
- For those living in poverty drugs and alcohol are often a way to escape for a short period of time. However, when they are trying to get help there is often no programs available or they are too expensive to afford.
- There is a lack of affordable and presentable clothing.
- It is hard to get transportation for areas outside of Vernon.

## **Most Important Issues and/or Barriers**

The following includes the top three issues and/or barriers identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. There is a lack of affordable housing.
2. The cost of dental care is expensive. Many cannot afford dental surgeries and there are only a limited amount of dentists who will provide low prices for services.
3. There is a lack of support systems provided by non-profit organizations.

## **Solutions**

### **Child Care**

- There should be more child-care services while mothers are at school or work.

### **Education**

- The cost of post-secondary education should be decreased, or the government and universities should provide support for those living in poverty.

### **Employment**

- Employers should give people the opportunity to work in reputable work fields and to grow with the company.
- There should be payment for volunteering. For example, non-profit organizations can provide free meals or housing for those who volunteer for their organization.
- Employers should be more understanding towards single mothers. They are often unable to afford child care services even with a job and employers should understand that.

### **Government and Policies**

- The government should try to support the parents living in low income instead of taking the children away.
- More funding needs to be provided for education and those in poverty.
- Non-profits and the government need to work together to provide more advertisement about available resources for those living on low income.

### **Health Care**

- There should be private health care nurses and low costs for equipment for seniors allowing them to live in the comfort of their own homes. This will then allow for more low-income housing instead of senior homes.

## **Housing**

- More affordable housing should be created.
- There needs to be less senior buildings and more low-income housing in Vernon.

## **Programs and Services**

- There is a need for life skill courses.
- There should be more second stage programs for support.
- Organizations should provide budgeting courses.
- There should be 12 step programs for acceptance and grief, like those for AA.
- There should be more programs and services for young mothers.
- There should be support groups for those living in poverty and for single mothers.

## **Most Important Solutions**

The following includes the top three solutions identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. Employers should give people the opportunity to work in reputable work fields and to grow with the company.
2. The cost of post-secondary education should be decreased, or the government and universities should provide support for those living in poverty.
3. There is a need for life skill courses.

# Saddle Mountain-Seniors Drop-In Program

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## Introduction

Date	March 23,2018
Community	Lumby
Number of Participants	25

## About the Participants:

Participants included clients from Saddle Mountain who are apart of the Seniors Drop-In Program and live in the residence buildings. Some participants were individuals with disabilities who also lived in the residential buildings. The participants included a mix of Caucasians and Indigenous individuals who ranged from the ages of 40 to 80 years old.

## Issues

### Education

- There is a wide discrepancy in pricing and expensive costs of educational courses for all age groups.

### Equity

- Seniors are often isolated and alone because there is not enough outreach.
- Racism and ageism towards low income seniors is prevalent in Lumby.
- There is a lack of respect for those who are low income.
- Seniors are often abused and neglected.
- A lot of stigma is associated with seniors who are low income.

### Health Care

- Medical doesn't cover enough. This includes:
  - No dental or denturist
  - No eye care
  - No hearing aid coverage
  - No physiotherapy
  - Coverage for shingles and pneumonia shorts
  - Coverage for prescriptions
- There is a shortage of doctors.

- Pharmacare is not fair.
- There is a shortage of assisted living for seniors which forces them to go to retirement homes.
- There is a lack of home care for seniors.
- Smoking is an addiction that requires support.
- You need referrals for activities and programs, but a doctor's referral is not easy to get.
- There should be different forms of counselling. This includes one-on-one support versus group support systems.
- There is horrible hospital discharge planning and organization.
  - Individual stated: "I was sent home in a taxi"
- There are problems with mental health. This includes:
  - The lack of trauma counselling and therapy
  - The lack of education, awareness and understanding
  - Mixing of populations which does not provide all potential training and therapy

### **Housing**

- There is a lack of housing for pet owners.
- There is a lack of housing in Lumby area.
- Hard to find affordable housing.

### **Income**

- The age cut off for disability is 65 which is a huge disadvantage when you age out of the system.
- OAS and CPP are taxable incomes which allow the government to take some of the income away.

### **Other**

- There are poor bus services.
- Increased gas prices make it hard to get around anywhere.
- Rates for bills are expensive. This includes hydro and Wi-Fi bills.
- Lack of access to veterinarians and cost is expensive for pets.
- Groceries in Lumby are twice the cost of Vernon and the produce is poor.

### **Programs and Services**

- Legal aid is unaffordable and inaccessible.
- Rules of Monashee Place and Saddle Mountain are different and unfair.
- There is a lack of educational courses for seniors.

- Computers are required for everything yet not many seniors know how to use or access the internet.

## **Most Important Issues and/or Barriers**

The following includes the top three issues and/or barriers identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. Medical doesn't cover enough. This includes:
  - No dental or dentist
  - No eye care
  - No hearing aid coverage
  - No physiotherapy
  - Coverage for shingles and pneumonia shots
  - Coverage for prescriptions
2. Increased gas prices make it hard to get around anywhere.
3. Groceries in Lumby are twice the cost of Vernon and the produce is poor.

## **Solutions**

### **Education**

- Schools should open doors for seniors for education programs and including intergenerational programs with high school students.

### **Equity**

- In order to reduce stigma against seniors living in low income there should be educational programs for students and parents. This could include adding a course in elementary and high schools.

### **Government and Policies**

- Those who make more money should be taxed more.

### **Health Care**

- There needs to be more coordinator of medical services which will allow for easier access to the medical system.
- There should be incentives or benefits given to those who live healthy and/or recover fully from additions.

- There should be free health care. The government should investigate health care systems from other countries such as Denmark.
- There needs to be more doctors available in Lumby and increased laboratory hours.
- Walk in clinics should be developed in Lumby.

### **Housing**

- There should be a cap off on the cost of rent.
- Lumby should have more subsidized housing and there should be changes to how subsidization works.
- More housing needs to be made in Lumby.

### **Other**

- There should be more transportation opportunities to get groceries in Vernon.
- There should be a senior's discount on local groceries in Lumby.
- There are several suggestions for solutions for the bus system. This includes:
  - Buses should cover more of Vernon
  - There should be an increased frequency in the number of busses and the time
  - Potential private busses for Lumby area because the bus system in Vernon does not cover the Lumby area

### **Programs and Services**

- More legal aid programs should be provided for those living with low income. This can include providing incentives to lawyers to take more pro bono cases.
- There should be more community gardens for seniors in Lumby.
- There should be more computer courses for seniors in Lumby. Refurbished computers can be used to educate seniors and there should be intergenerational assistance. This could include night classes where high school students educate seniors on how to use the computer and internet.
- Currently the library only provides 3 free computers. There is need for more computer availability.

### **Most Important Solutions**

The following includes the top three solutions identified by the participants. Participants were given three sticky dots to put on the flip chart paper identifying the most important issues and/or barriers they faced. The list is in order from the solutions that received the most dots to those receiving the least number of dots:

1. There should be a cap off on the cost of rent.

2. There are several suggestions for solutions for the bus system. This includes:
  - Buses should cover more of Vernon
  - There should be an increased frequency in the number of busses and the time
  - Potential private busses for Lumby area because the bus system in Vernon does not cover the Lumby area
3. In order to reduce stigma against seniors living in low income there should be educational programs for students and parents. This could include adding a course in elementary and high schools.

# Conclusion

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While many of the individuals who took part in the Kitchen Table Discussions came from different places and had different backgrounds, a common theme emerged during the discussions. There are evidently a multitude of issues facing those living in poverty. Issues around the bus system, health care, pet policies and PWD policies were heavily discussed in majority of the Kitchen Table Discussions. Participants feel that the Vernon bus system is not sufficient enough making it hard to transport from point A to point B. This further limits where they are allowed to live and where they are allowed to work. Participants also felt that the health care system is severely lacking and many are left without the aid they need. They are unable to afford medications, find a general practitioner on a regular basis and unable to afford dental or eye care. Additionally, many explained that owning a pet helps enhance their mental wellbeing and helps with isolation but they are often unable to find a place to rent which will accept pets. They firmly believe that the policies surrounding pet ownership and rental properties must be changed in British Columbia so that pet owners should not have to choose between a roof over their head or the companion of their best friend. Lastly, many participants from the Kitchen Table Discussions believe those living on PWD should be allowed to live together. This could help with the feelings of isolation and increase the amount of affordable housing available for those living in Vernon and the surrounding districts. Though many of these issues may seem insurmountable, through sufficient community engagement and consultation, effective change is plausible. Thank you again for making this program possible and allowing for the voices of the participants to be heard.

Sincerely,  
Canadian Mental Health Association-Vernon & District