

Cerebral Palsy Association of British Columbia

SPARC BC Poverty reduction Strategy

Small Group Discussion Toolkit

Introduction:

Date	March 21,2018
Community	Cerebral Palsy Association of BC
# of participants	15
# of communities	4

About the Participants

The people who participated in this group live with significant disabilities. Most identify as seniors.

- Several live with Cerebral Palsy, a non-progressive neuro-muscular condition resulting from a neonatal injury to the brain affecting balance, muscular coordination and speech.
- Participants require a range of mobility aids including custom fitted electric wheelchairs, operated by micro-switches, walkers or canes.
- One third of the participants have communication challenges, such as difficulty speaking, or being deaf and hard of hearing
- Half of the group require personal support attendants to assist with Activities of Daily Living. (Eating, bathing, accessing community).

We did not inquire about mental illness, but given the preponderance of mental illnesses within the population represented, we can confidently assume that some participants also suffer from depression and anxiety.

It is particularly noteworthy that over half of the participants have completed Undergraduate Degrees from Canadian Public Universities, but are unable to secure employment because of the extent of their disabilities.

Participants largely rely on Benefits for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) or CPP & OAS. As their disabilities present many barriers to employment, it is significant that the group perceive their needs as being substantially different than those of able bodied people who need support.

The group provided well considered and spirited discussion. While pleased that their comments are being relayed through SPARC to the Ministry of Poverty Reduction, they also expressed concern about how this process works from there.

Far too frequently, disability and poverty walk hand in hand. The conditions and needs of this demographic are somewhat different from others living in poverty as they are ready, willing and able to join the labour force (many express craving to make a contribution). Also, in addition to requiring basic financial supports, many require expensive adaptive equipment, increased medical needs, and/or personal attendant supports

About the Findings

What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now? (Transcribed from flip charts)

- Not enough income – need more money
- PWD does not provide Cost of Living increases – income steadily decreases over time
- Current earnings limit of \$1,000/ month (PWD) reinforces poverty cycle
- Can't find employment
- Excessive wait times for adaptive equipment and government only covers limited choice of models. Dealers charge more to Ministry. One deducted \$100 (25%) because she was paying cash – said it was because they didn't have to complete Ministry paperwork.
- Need to eat healthy food, but costs are rising. Have to spend a lot of money for medications that are not covered. Every year, government covers less and less. Doctors don't know what is covered – Pharmacy says, "It's no longer covered"
- Not enough coverage for glasses and dental: Must wait three years to replace glasses and dental provides only \$1000 for 2 years. "I need a root canal, but it costs \$2,000 I am thinking of just getting a filling because it is covered even though it is not best"
- Must deal with whatever worker is available- have to keep explaining situation over and over. Have to travel further and further. Ministry trying to force everyone to deal with them by phone (Challenging for people with communication challenges and may not be able to use or afford a computer)
- Are required to apply for CPP at age 59 – if you qualify, PWD is deducted.
- Spouse on CPP – when he gets a raise (CoLA), that amount is deducted from my PWD
- Don't know where to look to see what is covered. Participant paid MSP Premiums for several years before learning that it is covered.
- Social Isolation – it costs \$ to go out or on outing (transportation or \$ for just coffee) "I am too shy to talk about it. I don't know who to ask or where to look.
- Buses let on able bodied people ahead of people with disabilities. Bus Driver asked me, "Why are you travelling in rush hour"
- Government insists on keeping TTY Service – should switch to a video relay service – sometimes we don't have a sign for the English word.
- Housing – all accessible housing is under BC Housing (Metro Vancouver Housing) Lack of flexibility, long wait times.
- Coops are paying off mortgages – therefore not required to keep subsidized units

What would address these issues and help you and others out of poverty? (Transcribed from flip charts)

- Separate Social Assistance from welfare
- Individualized Funding to access supports and equipment
- Get rid of CPP claw backs
- Raise income assistance
- Raise earnings limit – remove limit as income will become taxable
- Enough income needed
- Increase medical, dental, eye care coverage to meet individual needs
- Get rid of \$ penalty for marriage- allow both partners to keep what they are getting – get rid of spousal claw backs
- Make BC employment more accessible for persons with disabilities: Decrease wait times, make more interpreters available
- Ministry should reinstate assigning one case worker to each client to increase continuity and efficiency
- Allow us to choose our own Occupational Therapist
- Ministry website needs to be more clear
- Legislate against Coop Housing units changing low income housing to market rates
- Free renovations for accessibility

Possible Solutions

- Separate social assistance from welfare
- Raise income assistance
- Raise earnings exemptions
- Guaranteed income
- Cost of Living adjustments for PWD
- End claw backs for those receiving CPP, and spousal claw back

Solutions and Actions that can make a difference.

- a) *Looking at list of issues and solutions generated, what types of solutions did the individuals who participated in your meeting identify as most important to them?*

As the conversation turned to solutions, the group had a unanimous and emphatic response: Separate income supports for persons with disabilities from the “welfare” stream. As many people with disabilities are unable to fully participate in the paid labour force, they perceive that their needs are very different than those who require shorter term assistance – they have no way option to work their way out of poverty, and disability often involves greater expenses.

Participants also identified Individualized Funding as a solution to meeting their needs, although they expressed concern over how complicated the CISL program (Choices in Supports for Individualized Living) is to operate, describing it as tantamount to running a small business.

Other suggestions from flip charts:

- Raise Income Assistance per year to lowest tax bracket
- Raise / eliminate earnings limit
- Provide enough income
- Make income security federal (to allow portability across Canada)
- Get rid of claw backs
- Website needs to be clearer (why are “persistent barriers to employment” and “persons with disabilities” separate categories?)
- Increase Medical, Dental , eye care benefits
- Consistent coverage for all required medication
- Need to address rising costs of food (concern over being able to afford healthy food – trade-offs between food and medication)
- Free galleries, museums
- Free renovations for accessibility
- Reduce wait times at BC employment – provide interpreters (not enough)
- Get rid of penalty for marriage (end spousal claw backs)
- Prevent Coops from replacing low income units with market prices (Legislate)
- Bring back social workers to help persons with disabilities
- Allow individuals to choose their own Occupational Therapists

What emerged as the top 3 solutions or ideas based on the conversations and individual priority setting?

Separate Social Assistance and welfare (received the largest cluster of dots by far)

- Welfare is temporary, Social Assistance is Lifelong.
- Get rid of CPP claw backs -Disability does not disappear at age 65.Provide
- Establish guaranteed income for persons with disabilities
- Raise or eliminate earning limits to encourage self sufficiency

Individualized Funding

- Gives person requiring supports and equipment control over those supports
- Bring back Social Workers being assigned to individual clients – people find it onerous and demeaning to have to repeatedly explain their medical history and needs when they see a different person with each visit or phone call
- Need to be able to access adaptive equipment without excessive wait times

Provide a sufficient Guaranteed Income and allow greater earnings ceilings

- “if they want us off social assistance, give us more space so that we can feel safe and possibly get off social assistance”
- Describe having insufficient income to meet basic needs, for example having to choose between buying food or needed medications
- Feel insecure in their housing – Rent evictions, single provider controls accessible housing
- Provide means to reduce social isolation