



POVERTY REDUCTION RECOMMENDATIONS

A submission to the Government of British Columbia from
the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC

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Federation of
Post-Secondary Educators
of BC

INTRODUCTION

Given the extent of poverty in BC, we commend the government for committing to a poverty reduction plan and holding an extensive consultation process to inform the plan. All too often, conversations regarding poverty do not include those who are most affected, leading to a distorted picture and less effective results

Poverty affects children, workers, learners and community members in every corner of our province. Poverty is a negative, preventable experience that people of all ages and backgrounds may experience.

The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC (FPSE) is the voice of 10,000 faculty and staff at BC's teaching universities, colleges, institutes and private sector institutions, and a member organization of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (BCPRC). We endorse the following five principles from the BCPRC:

1. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS MUST BE THE STARTING POINT

Article 26 of the *Universal Human Rights Declaration of Human Rights* states: "technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all..." We can and must do more to ensure that limited financial means do not present an insurmountable barrier to higher education. To this end, we recommend:

- **that the province reduce post-secondary tuition by 50 per cent;**
- **in the immediate short-term, make all developmental programs tuition-free;**
- **Increase the availability of post-secondary grants for low-income students.**

2. POVERTY REDUCTION MUST HAVE AN UPSTREAM FOCUS

Hundreds of thousands of British Columbians struggle to meet their basic needs, including safe, affordable housing and adequate nutrition. Devoting time and energy to meeting these basic needs prevents many British Columbians from pursuing post-secondary education and other opportunities, keeping them trapped in a cycle of poverty. Government action must seek not only to assist those already in poverty, but must take pro-active steps to prevent poverty forming in the first place.

3. ENDING POVERTY MUST BE A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

Post-secondary education cannot be viewed in isolation from K-12 education. With this in mind, we support the BCPRC's call to fund K-12 education adequately to mitigate inequalities and to ensure sufficient library and special needs and programs are available to all learners.

A strong K-12 educational foundation leads to better post-secondary experiences; post-secondary training and education is increasingly necessary in today's economy.

To maximize the educational opportunities for all, barriers to post-secondary access across ministries must be addressed. It is crucial that all government policies work in harmony to reduce poverty.

4. SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION MEASURES MUST HAVE LEGISLATED TARGETS AND TIMELINES

Legislated poverty reduction targets and other accountability measures, such as annual reporting, will make our goal of reducing poverty clear and measurable. Our experience in the vast and complex post-secondary sector has underscored the importance of legislation in bringing focus and direction to policies and programs created to achieve broad goals.

FPSE endorses the targets and timelines proposed by the BCPRC.

5. GOVERNMENT MUST RECOGNIZE POVERTY REDUCTION AS AN ECONOMIC INVESTMENT

Poverty in BC has a direct cost of \$2.2 – \$2.3 billion annually, according to research by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). Indirect costs are much greater: \$8.1 – \$9.2 billion annually resulting from poor health outcomes, and lower productivity. The benefits of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan

are twofold: a reduced draw on health and social services, and increased economic activity through participation in the labour market. Affordable, locally available post-secondary education will remove barriers to education in all regions, and support career development for those experiencing poverty, including the working poor.

Specifically, FPSE recommends that:

- **social assistance recipients gain access to tuition-free post-secondary education and apprenticeships.**

CONCLUSION

At its heart, education is about bringing people together to exchange knowledge, ideas, and experience; people yearn to connect with others, to understand different viewpoints, and to find new avenues for personal and professional development. Education is a crucial step in tackling persistent poverty in BC.

We look forward to continued work towards a more just and fair society, where the cycle of poverty is finally broken, and the full scope of human possibility is open to all.



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