

BC POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY CONSULTATION – POSITIVE LIVING NORTH

Date	Interviews completed during February 2018
Community	Prince George, BC
# of Participants	12
# of Organizations	1

ISSUES

Maslow's hierarchy of needs describes food, shelter, safety and sustainability as essential to reaching one's potential. In interviews, Positive Living North (PLN)'s members regarding issues and solutions for poverty reduction, Maslow's needs were repeated again and again.

1. Housing is unsustainable in the current system.

In Prince George, affordable housing for single, couples, and families experiencing poverty is challenging. Members must choose between utilities, food, or rent when money comes in.

Many members live in shelters, due to the inability to afford or qualify for safe housing. Members of PLN, are often at the mercy of "slumlords" and live in situations with infestation of rodents and bugs, substandard electricity and sewer systems, and improper ventilation which leads to deathly black mold. All of which provide unsafe, unhealthy environments to persons with already compromised immune systems. Due to "slumlords" not signing leases, there is a monthly if not daily threat of losing their home if the tenant cannot comply with requests from the landlord for more money or if the tenant asks for repairs.

As an Aboriginal organization, staff regularly hear and witness instances of racism when our members seek housing or interact with potential landlords. Additionally Members have experienced stigma and discrimination when members give potential property owners an "intention to rent forum", and landlords learn members were on Social Assistance or Disability.

2. Income for people on Disability or Social Assistance is not adequate to meet basic human needs.

Disability, social assistance and pension benefits from the government are inadequate; causing people to choose between rent, food, or bills. In cases of living on the street, people have no fixed address, which prevents them from accessing different government and housing subsidies.

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Without access to food banks, faith-based organization's meal programs, and donations to a variety of service organizations food security is unattainable. Even then, the food provided is incompatible with a nutritious diet. Food is often high starch, high calories, high sugar, and high salt - all of which put people in poverty at risk for serious health issues.

3. **Members of PLN find discrimination to be a significant barrier** to accessing work, food, housing, social services, disability, as well as interacting with society and the community and affect an overall perception of abilities.

Members are turned away from housing opportunities because of race, source of income, and HIV status. People are assumed to be stupid, lazy and uneducated if they are accessing social services or disability.

Racial discrimination is still very real and predominant in the current culture. People of Aboriginal ancestry are shadowed in stores, refused housing, and generally perceived to be criminal. Racial slurs are common in the daily interactions of our members. Additionally, our members suffer from stigma and discrimination related to living with HIV.

SOLUTIONS

Strategy 1

Increasing the amount of social assistance, pension or disability to over the poverty line or a living wage. People should not have to choose between paying bills, food, or rent. Everyone should have enough income be able to afford, sustain, and maintain a safe and stable home.

Strategy 2

Increasing the accessibility to affordable and safe housing. People cannot move forward in their wellbeing without first addressing stability of shelter.

Strategy 3

To address the instances of racial, economic discrimination and lower the power of illegal authority of slumlords, **we recommend a low barrier (no or low cost) and accessible (not electronic) process** in which economically disadvantaged individuals can report racism, discrimination, and harassment.