

The Advocacy Centre is a program of Nelson CARES, a not for profit organization in Nelson BC. The Advocacy Centre has provided legal information and advocacy to low income residents in the West Kootenay region of BC since 1988. We are thrilled that the BC government is developing a poverty reduction plan. Based on our experience working with people who live in poverty, we feel it is important that a poverty reduction plan include the following:

- Legislated timelines and targets.
- Coordination among government ministries.
- Ongoing input from those who live in poverty.
- Adequate and accessible income support for the non-employed. The \$100 increase in welfare rates was welcome after so many years of stagnation, but it is still insufficient. People on income assistance are unable to meet their basic needs for food, housing and medical care. We support increasing welfare and disability rates to the Market Basket Measure and indexing them to the cost of living.
- The income assistance system has also become increasingly bureaucratic and inaccessible for a population that is already facing barriers and marginalization. We support policies that increase the system's accessibility, such as ensuring there are real options for people who are unable to access computers or phones, and responsiveness, such as allowing front line workers the discretion to respond to urgent requests rather than putting requests in a provincial queue where they wait (often for days) to be processed.
- Change the income assistance legislation to do away with legislated barriers, such as the 2 year independence rule, or requiring people to have been on welfare for 12 out of the last 15 months before they can apply for Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers to employment.
- Improve the earnings and working conditions of those in the low-wage workforce.
- Including increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by January 2019 and restoring the coverage and enforcement of employment standards.
- Address the needs of those most likely to be living in poverty, including indigenous people, young people who have been in MCFD care and who have reached adulthood, people with significant mental health issues, vulnerable seniors, youth, women LGBTQ, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, newcomers, single parents and unattached individuals age 45 – 64.
- Address homelessness and adopt a comprehensive affordable housing and supportive housing plan, including bringing on stream 10,000 new units of social and coop housing per year.
- Provide universal publically-funded child care, including adopting a \$10 a day child care plan produced by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC.
- Enhance support for training and education for low-income people, including reducing tuition fees by 50% and increasing the availability of post-secondary grants for low-income students.
- Enhance community mental health and home support services, and expand integrated approaches to prevention and health promotion services, including providing more

options for the Public Guardian and Trustee, and expanding essential health services in the public system such as dental and optical care and community mental health services as well as making critical medical equipment more readily available.

- Every day we see people who are struggling with poverty. Who face homelessness and precarious housing, food insecurity, poor health and high stress levels, unsafe living situations. In a society as wealthy as ours, we have the capacity and the moral obligation to ensure that the basic needs of our citizens are met. We are extremely hopeful that a poverty reduction plan, which includes collaboration with all sectors, including those most affected by poverty, will start BC down the road to a more just, fair and healthy society.