



United Way of the Lower Mainland

Consultation Response #2

BC Government Poverty Reduction Strategy

March 31, 2018

Introduction

We are pleased to make this second submission to BC's Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultation. Whereas our first submission focussed on the mobilization of the private sector to contribute to social well-being and poverty eradication in BC, and offered recommendations for creating an enabling environment for "social purpose businesses," this submission calls attention to two other important considerations. One is the growing number of seniors' living in poverty in BC and the need to address the unique situation of older adults in any provincial Poverty Reduction Plan. The other is our strong endorsement of the set of recommendations for such a Plan that are contained in the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition's submission to these Consultations.

The Growth of Seniors' Poverty in BC

Within the next month or two, United Way of the Lower Mainland and the Social Planning and Research Council of BC will be releasing a *BC Seniors Poverty Report Card*. The report is prompted by our experience in community, where the increasing number of older adults living on low incomes is often remarked upon by the non-profit agencies we support. In fact, the growing suburbanization of low-income households, which we believe includes many senior-led households, was a major reason for the merger between United Way of the Lower Mainland and United Way of the Fraser Valley in 2017.

Based on BC Stats Population Projections, British Columbia is expected to gain an additional 357,474 older adults (65+) between 2014 and 2024, a figure that corresponds with a 45.5% growth rate in the seniors population over that time period. The report indicates that low incomes and related financial struggles are a reality for too many of our seniors today.

The *BC Seniors Poverty Report Card* aims to raise awareness of the growing problem of poverty among seniors and help encourage new programs and policies that will improve the quality of life for seniors living in British Columbia. Upon its release, we urge the government to study the report's findings closely.

The *BC Seniors Poverty Report Card* consists of twelve fact sheets. The major findings in each follow:

- **Fact sheet 1** presents British Columbia's seniors' poverty rate (based on the Low Income Measure or LIM), which was the highest any province or territory in Canada in 2015 – at 8.8%. The Canadian average was 6.6%.
- **Fact sheet 2** shows the increase in the number of poor seniors in British Columbia from 33,780 poor seniors in 2000 to 70,990 poor seniors in 2015 – or more than a doubling over 15 years.
- **Fact sheets 3 and 4** bring attention to the increased risk of living in poverty faced by seniors not living in families (single seniors) compared with seniors in other family situations. The 16% of senior singles living in poverty in 2015 represents a dramatic increase (up from 7%) from 2000.
- **Fact sheet 5** reports on the proportion of seniors that had a sense of belonging in their communities.
- **Fact sheet 6** explains how 18.8% or almost one in five seniors in British Columbia was living in unaffordable housing in 2016.

- **Fact sheet 7** discusses the 58.7% increase in the number of seniors on BC Housing’s seniors housing wait list between 2012 and 2017.
- **Fact sheet 8** discusses the sharp rise in homelessness among seniors in Metro Vancouver – from 32 in 2008 to 123 in 2017.
- **Fact sheet 9** examines the spatial distribution of seniors poverty across British Columbia’s 29 Regional Districts, including the one in seven seniors living in poverty in the Central Coast and Metro Vancouver Regional Districts (14.9% and 13.5% respectively).
- **Fact sheet 10** looks at the seniors poverty rates in the 25 urban areas in British Columbia, including the thousands of seniors living in poverty in each of British Columbia’s Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs). For instance, it shows a shocking 50,170 poor seniors in Metro Vancouver in 2015.
- **Fact sheet 11** examines the spatial distribution of seniors poverty across census tracts in Metro Vancouver, including a focus on high concentrations of seniors poverty in many parts of Metro Vancouver. West Newton in Surrey, as well as Chinatown, Gastown and the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver all have poverty rates of 40% or higher.
- **Fact sheet 12** highlights the geography of seniors poverty across census tracts in other urban areas in British Columbia: Abbotsford-Mission CMA, Chilliwack CA, Kamloops CA, Kelowna CMA, Nanaimo CA, Prince George CA and Victoria CMA.

We are hopeful that the information provided in this *Report Card* will be used to inform evidence-based policy and program developments by our senior levels of government, including the Province, in collaboration with the diverse seniors serving organizations across British Columbia. With projections to add 357,474 seniors between 2014 and 2024, it is important for policy makers to invest in improvements to our social and health infrastructure if we want our older adults and seniors to age in British Columbia with dignity.

United Way will forward the *BC Seniors Report Card* to the Province immediately upon its publication.

Endorsement of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition’s recommendations

United Way of the Lower Mainland is pleased to report that we [□] have been an active member of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and a steady funder of the Coalition’s work for several years now. Last year, we supported the Coalition as it undertook province-wide consultations for the Federal Government’s Poverty Reduction Plan. As such, we strongly endorse the recommendations that BCPR sets out in its March 2018 submission to these Consultations.

We join the BCPRC, first of all, in congratulating the Provincial Government for its commitment to implement a poverty reduction plan for BC.

We also agree wholeheartedly with BCPRC’s identification of five fundamental principles required in such a plan – a foundation in human rights; an upstream focus to end poverty and inequity; a whole-of-government approach when it comes to responsibility; legislated targets and timelines; and poverty reduction as an economic investment for our province.

We agree further that BC’s provincial poverty reduction strategy must include seven policy action areas – income assistance, low wage, child care, housing, education and training, health and equity. As our

first submission indicates, we also identify the importance of enlisting and mobilizing the private sector in BC in a “social purpose business” approach to poverty eradication.

Finally, we endorse the more specific recommendations the BCPRC makes for each of these seven policy action areas, together with the recommendations (pertaining to the private sector) we identified for the Provincial Government’s consideration in our first submission.