

On behalf of Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, and the Jewish Family Services, we are submitting our feedback to you as part of your consultation process.

First, we want to commend the government for engaging in this process to develop a “made in BC” poverty reduction plan. The plan has been a long time coming and we are hopeful that the recommendations contained in the plan will bring about the changes necessary to lift people out of poverty. We are grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the consultation engagement process.

An Overview of Poverty in the Jewish Community

The Lower Mainland Jewish community has a population of approximately 26,500 people or 17,777 households. Based on the most recent data that we have obtained, there are over 2635, or 1 in 6, Jewish households in the Lower Mainland that earn less than \$30,000 annually and live below the low-income cut-off. Another 1900 households earn less than \$50,000, significantly below the median income for Metro Vancouver (National Household Survey, 2011). Approximately 32% of these low-income households are composed of working families living in the West End of Vancouver. This is the largest concentration of poor Jews residing in one location in our community. The two age groups that are most affected by poverty are children under the age of 15 years old (15% of the total number children in this age range) and older unattached women (41% of the total number).

Many of these families are single parents with young children and are struggling to make ends meet. Their day to day reality is dire. Often, they do not have enough food to last the whole month without accessing a food bank. Some parents go without, so that their children have enough to eat. Still others have poor diets, lacking sufficient income to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables. These families are regularly making the difficult decision to pay the rent over purchasing food.

We have a strong tradition in our community to help those in need. Through Jewish Family Services, the synagogues and other charitable organizations, individuals and families receive financial support to enrol their children to participate in educational, recreational and cultural activities, and pay for needed dental and medical services. Approximately 1 million dollars in assistance is provided annually to those in need. This includes the approximately 300 people who access the Jewish Food Bank on a bi-weekly basis, and 500 people (individuals receiving social assistance, seniors, and families) who receive food vouchers on a monthly basis. Many of these same people also receive rent subsidies to enable them to stay in their homes without fear of eviction.

While our overall population is relatively small in comparison to many other communities, the percentage of those living in poverty or categorized as working poor is comparable to many other larger communities. The difficulties and challenges faced by people living in poverty generally are similar to the difficulties and challenges faced by our community members. Not only are they struggling with the absence of the basic necessities on a daily basis, they often experience marginalization and social isolation and lack of meaningful connections, because of the restrictive nature of their lives. As in many ethno-cultural communities, these issues are compounded when community members are not able to live in close proximity to their cultural and/or faith based institutions, or they are denied a sense of social affiliation because they can't afford to participate in activities of communal life. This is a particular

problem for the Jewish community, as the centre of community life and the area where the majority of our community institutions are located is in one of the most expensive areas of Vancouver. We are faced with the increasingly difficult challenge of trying to address the growing numbers of seniors and families who require ongoing financial assistance to survive, while seeking more cost-effective ways to enable them to feel connected to community life.

The two most daunting issues are the availability of affordable family housing and access to healthy nutritious food. These are province-wide concerns that cannot be resolved without meaningful intervention and substantial investment.

We acknowledge the important spending decisions that have been proposed in the 2018 provincial budget. We also propose the following recommendations:

- Increase income assistance and disability rates consistent with the Market Basket Measure and index them to the cost of living.
- Increase earnings exemptions for people receiving income assistance.
- Increase the minimum wage for entry level workers, and index it to the cost of living.
- Expand essential health services such as dental and optical care to the working poor.
- Accelerate the development of new rental housing units for low income working families and supportive housing for people with mental health issues and addictions
- Expand the range of post secondary education and training options for people on income assistance and remove the job search requirement while they are acquiring new skills.
- Incentivize employers who are prepared to provide benefits for single parent families who are working less than full time hours
- Encourage employers to provide job opportunities to people on disability receiving government assistance, youth, and other under-represented groups.
- Require BC Hydro to develop low income customer policies such as the waiver of security deposits, late payment and reconnection fees and the suspensions of services during cold weather.

Respectfully submitted: