

# HEALTH INEQUITIES & POVERTY REDUCTION

backgrounder



## What are health inequities?

Health inequities are the unfair and avoidable differences in health between groups of people who share certain social, economic, demographic or geographic traits.

Health inequities are influenced by factors like access to basic housing, education and literacy levels. These factors are all negatively impacted by poverty.

Groups that experience health inequities include:

- Children and families living in poverty.
- The working poor and the unemployed or under-employed.
- Urban and on-reserve Aboriginal populations.
- Remote or rural populations.
- Recent immigrants and/or refugees.
- Persons suffering from social exclusion (e.g. seniors).
- The homeless.

## Poverty is bad for your health

Poverty is a major contributor to health inequities.

This results in higher costs for our health and social service system as well as negative social impacts to our communities.

Close to \$1.2 billion in health care costs could be avoided if disadvantaged British Columbians were as healthy as those with higher education and incomes.

## Opportunity for Action

Poverty and the resulting health inequities are not inevitable.

Despite this, B.C. has the highest poverty rate in Canada and has no provincial plan to tackle this significant public health issue.

## B.C. needs a provincial poverty reduction plan

With the exception of B.C. and Saskatchewan, every other province in Canada has adopted, or are in the process of adopting, poverty reduction plans.

This plan would include concrete and legislated targets and time lines, as well as a Minister who would be responsible for overseeing the plan.

~ 8 out of 10

British Columbians support a provincial plan to improve the health of disadvantaged citizens.



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## Poverty is bad for your health

Compared to the highest income groups, people in the lowest income groups are at much higher risk for poor health.

Risk of developing diabetes:

- Men ~5 times the risk.
- Women ~2 times the risk.

Heart disease:

- Women ~3 times the risk.
- Women ~2 times the risk.

## The kids aren't alright

B.C. has the second highest child poverty rate in Canada at 16.4%. The national average is 14%.

BC's child poverty rates have been above the national average for the last 10 years.

Children who live in low-income families scored lower for school readiness (i.e. skills, maturity, language and cognitive development).

The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada recommends reducing child poverty. Ensuring a child gets a healthy start in can reduce long-term costs associated with health care, addictions, crime, unemployment and welfare.

## We need you!

How you can make a difference:

- **Ask political candidates** in your riding, about their positions on poverty reduction.
- Attend **political candidate forums** and voice your concerns about poverty and health inequities.
- **Send a letter** to voice your concerns to political candidates and/or party leaders.

Visit [povertybadforhealth.wordpress.com](http://povertybadforhealth.wordpress.com) to learn more, get involved and create change.

## PHABC's role in tackling poverty and health inequities

The Public Health Association of British Columbia (PHABC) has partnered with other organizations as part of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, to tackle this issue.

We have been active in advocating for health inequities and poverty reduction strategies, and have a standing resolution calling for strategies to reduce poverty and health inequities.

We need your help to spread the word and call others to action.

## Learn more about poverty and health inequities

Report on health inequities in BC, prepared by the Health Officers Council.

The Public Health Agency of Canada's website, for a better understanding of the determinants of health (i.e. low income and poverty).

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition: a variety of poverty reduction resources including The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative's detailed plan for poverty reduction.

### References

1. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. *The Cost of Poverty*. July 2011.
2. BC Healthy living Alliance. *Poll Shows British Columbians Want Action on Poverty*. Press Release, October 2012.

