

HEALTH INEQUITIES & POVERTY REDUCTION

Questions & Answers

Q: 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.

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.

Q: How is poverty related to health inequities?

Poverty is bad for your health.

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

Health Inequities have many social impacts on our communities and leads to higher costs for our health and social service system.

Q: Are poverty & health inequities inevitable?

Poverty is not inevitable. In Canada there are policy options to reduce poverty.

It is estimated that if disadvantaged British Columbians were as healthy as those with higher education and incomes, the amount of health care costs that could be avoided would equal \$1.2 billion.

BC has the highest poverty rate in Canada and currently has no provincial plan to tackle this public health issue.

Q: What do we need?

B.C. needs a provincial poverty reduction plan.

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

PHABC has been working with multiple partners on this issue as part of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition. PHABC has a standing resolution calling for strategies to reduce poverty and health inequities.

Q: What do governments need to do?

The BC government needs to develop a provincial poverty reduction plan. Most provinces in Canada have created, or are in the process of creating, poverty reduction plans.

A poverty reduction plan is an opportunity for government to take leadership on this issue by setting time lines and goals to reduce poverty.

There are several policy aims that can be part of a poverty reduction plan:

- Creating affordable housing.
- Providing universal, publicly-funded child care.



- Ensuring adequate income and training/educational opportunities for low-income people.
- Improving food security.
- Expanding prevention and health promotion services.

Q: What can I do?

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.

Q: Where can I learn more about poverty & 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.*

About the Public Health Association of BC (PHABC)

The Public Health Association of BC is committed to promoting and protecting the public's health.

Working with public health professionals, community groups, and non-profit organizations, PHABC advocates to government and other decision-makers for public policy that improves health and reduces health inequities in the province.

For over 35 years, PHABC has used a multi-disciplinary and evidence-based approach to speak out on issues affecting the health of British Columbians.

The role of advocacy for PHABC

Advocating for healthy public policy is a cornerstone for promoting the health of the public.

Advocacy involves taking a position on an issue and initiating actions to influence public policy choices to help bring about change.

In the public health field, advocacy is pursued in the public interest and often aims to enhance the health of disadvantaged groups.

Our goal at PHABC is to speak out and be heard on issues affecting the health of all British Columbians.

