

Raise the Rates: Welfare Food Challenge Fact sheet and Talking Points

Life on Welfare

- 185,000 people in BC rely on welfare, nearly 4% of BC's population, of which over 35,000 are children
- It has been near this level since 2009, following the 2008 recession.
- The majority of people, 62%, on welfare are people with disabilities.
- Basic welfare rates for a single person is \$610 a month and has been frozen since April 2007, nearly 10 years.
- The rate for a person with disabilities was frozen for 9 years at \$906. This year it was increased to \$983 a month, but the free bus pass or travel support worth either \$52 or \$66 was cut. A person on disability in Alberta receives \$1,588 a month.
- People are on welfare due to misfortune: a serious accident, long-term physical or mental health problems, fled an abusive family situation or lost their job.

Getting Welfare

- In order to apply for welfare you have to have exhausted all other sources of income: savings, RRSP, family and friends.
- The application form has 90 on-line pages and after filling it in you have to wait 5 weeks for the first payment.
- Around 50% of all applicants never receive any money.
- A person with disabilities has to prove to a Doctor and the Ministry they cannot work, this is not an easy task and many applicants' forms are 'lost', or they are denied.
- In 2003 the government closed 36 welfare offices making it harder for people, especially in smaller communities, to access welfare and the offices.

Life on Welfare

- Food Banks were established in BC in 1982 as 'temporary', 34 years is not temporary.
- In 2015 100,086 people used Food Banks in BC, the highest level ever
- People in poverty are ill more often and die on, on average, 10 years younger than people who are not poor. Children's mental and physical development are damaged by poverty.
- People survive on welfare by using charities, panhandling, binning, survival sex work, etc

Cost of Poverty

- Poverty in a rich province like BC is not inevitable. It is the result of political choices.
- Poverty costs BC over \$8 billion dollars a year (<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/costofpovertybc>).
- A full poverty reduction program – including raising welfare and the minimum wage, building social housing and a provincial childcare program – would cost around \$4 billion, saving \$4 billion a year.
- BC is the only province in Canada without a poverty reduction plan.

Poverty is A Political Choice

- The BC government, over the last 15 years, has cut the taxes of richest 1% of people in BC by an average of \$41,000 a year! This is more money than half of BC workers earn in a year.
- BC is the most unequal province in Canada, with the richest 10% own 56% of the wealth and the poorest 50% own only 3% of all wealth.
- 78% of people in BC want a poverty reduction plan.

Where Does the \$610 a month Go

Total welfare		\$610
Rent (realistic rent for an SRO)*	\$479	
Room damage deposit	\$20	
No bus tickets - walk everywhere	\$0	
Cell phone (to look for work)	\$25	
Personal hygiene/laundry	\$10	
Total of all non-food expenditures	\$534	
What's left for food		\$76

SROs are the cheapest accommodation in Vancouver.

The City of Vancouver found that the average rent of an SRO is now \$479 a month. This contrasts with the Provincial government's shelter allowance portion of welfare of \$375 a month. (<http://council.vancouver.ca/20160531/documents/rr1presentation.pdf> page 14)

Raise the Rates dropped buying bus tickets, which is what many people on welfare often do, so that there is some money left for food. They either walk or hope for the goodwill of bus drivers – which is usually the case, but they do risk a \$173 fine. Out of \$610 there is very little money left for food.

Raise the Rates calls for:

- Increase income assistance to the Market Basket Measure – about \$1,500 a month for single person on basic welfare
- Remove the arbitrary barriers to receiving welfare
- Raise earnings exemptions
- Increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour
- Build 10,000 social housing units a year
- Provide high quality \$10 a day public childcare
- Reverse the tax cuts for the rich and corporations and increase tax on people earning over \$250,000 a year

Useful Sources

- Cost of Poverty: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/costofpovertybc>
- Food Costing in BC: <http://www.phsa.ca/population-public-health-site/Documents/2015%20Food%20Costing%20in%20BC%20-%20FINAL.pdf>
- Child Poverty Report Card: <http://stillin5.ca/>
- Hunger Count: <http://www.foodbanksbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HungerCount2015.pdf>
- We Can't Afford Poverty: <https://nopovertybc.ca/>

Useful Phrases

- Poverty is a Political Choice
- In BC, a rich province, there is no reason for anyone to live in poverty. Present policies hit the poor and workers while benefiting the rich.
- Poverty Kills – this is Murder by Policy