



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**BC POVERTY RATES THE WORST ONCE AGAIN,  
TIME FOR LIBERALS AND NDP TO WORK TOGETHER**

British Columbia's child poverty rate rose to 12 percent in 2009 in the wake of the international economic downturn, Statistics Canada reported today. It was the highest child poverty rate of any province for the eighth year in a row. The BC rate also remained higher than the national child poverty rate of 9.5 percent in 2009, and has been higher than the national rate for a decade.

Meanwhile, the poverty rate for persons of all ages in BC also rose to 12 percent. It was the highest overall poverty rate of any province for the 11<sup>th</sup> consecutive year.

An analysis by First Call: the BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition showed an increase in the child poverty rate from 10.4 percent in 2008 to 12 percent in 2009. The number of poor BC children rose from 87,000 in 2008 to 100,000 in 2009.

For all persons, the BC poverty rate rose from 11.4 percent in 2008 to 12 percent in 2009, and the number of poor persons rose from 494,000 to 528,000.

"Both the BC Liberal Party and the BC New Democratic Party have promised to reduce poverty in British Columbia," said First Call provincial coordinator Adrienne Montani. "This is an issue that transcends partisan politics. We're looking for real efforts from both sides to work together to enact an anti-poverty program."

The Liberals have raised the minimum wage this spring, abolished the so-called training wage and have promised to work to improve the lives of BC families. The NDP introduced a poverty reduction bill in the legislature before it adjourned for the summer.

"Fighting poverty is good for the people of British Columbia," Montani said. "And it's also good politics. Polling data tells us there is strong public support for governments that show leadership by taking action on this issue."

British Columbia had the highest child poverty rate of any province for the years 2002 through 2009, as measured by Statistics Canada's low income cut-offs after income taxes.

The child poverty rate in 2009 for children living in two-parent families was 10.9 percent, and the number of poor children was 74,000. The rate for children living with lone-parent mothers fell to a record low 16.2 percent. Statistics Canada did not estimate the number of poor children living with lone-parent mothers because of the small sample size.

The poor showing by British Columbia reflected a worsening of economic conditions between 2008 and 2009. The unemployment rate in BC rose from an average of 4.6 percent in 2008 to 7.7 percent in 2009. The number of persons receiving welfare rose by 16 percent in the same two years.

First Call is a non-partisan coalition of provincial and regional organizations and individuals focused on promoting children's rights and improving the well-being of BC's children and youth.

The coalition believes the federal and provincial governments and the private sector all have a role to play in fighting poverty.

Private sector employers should pay decent wages to their employees. First Call has long supported higher minimum wages, indexed to the cost of living, and a "living wage" well above the minimum wage that would support healthier child development.

At the provincial level, First Call supports a significant increase in welfare rates and the indexing of welfare rates to the cost of living. It also wants to see more affordable, high quality child care, more social housing, improved access to coverage for dental care and prescription drugs, and easier access to post-secondary education without high student debt levels.

Federally, the call is for an increase in the Canada Child Tax Benefit and rescinding the cuts in Employment Insurance that were made over the last two decades by successive federal governments.

The best way to support these recommendations, say First Call and many other social policy groups, would be for both BC and the federal government to enact anti-poverty legislation, complete with specific targets and timelines for actually reducing the poverty rate and the depth of poverty.

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[EDITORS: Statistics Canada also publishes data based on its low income cut-offs after government transfers, but before income taxes. The child poverty rate in 2009 for BC under these measures was 16.4 percent, and the number of poor children was 137,000. For all persons the BC poverty rate was 15.5 percent and the number of poor persons was 684,000.]

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