

**BC CHILD POVERTY RATE STILL THE WORST IN CANADA
WHEN WILL THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT TAKE ACTION?**

For six years in a row, British Columbia has had the highest child poverty rate in Canada tied only with Manitoba in 2007. Figures released today by First Call, the BC partner in Campaign 2000, show BC at a rate of 18.8 percent of children living in poverty in 2007. The Canadian average in that same year was 15 percent.

According to the *2009 Child Poverty Report Card*, in 2007 BC had a total of 156,000 poor children, equivalent to the entire population of Nanaimo and Prince George combined. And this was in a year of a strong economy.

“When will the provincial government take action?” asked Julie Norton, First Call’s chairperson. “We’ve been at the bottom year after year after year, and our elected officials still don’t take seriously the pain and suffering that poverty causes children and their families.”

November 24, 2009 is the 20-year anniversary of a unanimous vote in the House of Commons to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

For 2007, the key findings for child poverty in British Columbia include:

- On all three measures of poverty, BC had the highest rate of child poverty despite a strong economy in 2007. (Fact Sheet 1)
- While the risk of poverty is over three times greater for female lone-parent families, the majority of poor children (51.6%) live in two-parent families. (Fact Sheet 3)
- On average, poor female lone-parent families lived \$12,600 below the poverty line. Poor two-parent families were \$8,200 below the line. (Fact Sheet 3)
- Over half of children who were poor (55%) had been poor for at least four out of six years. (Fact Sheet 4)
- Over half of poor children (55.7%) lived in families where at least one member of their family had a full-time job. (Fact Sheet 5)
- Poor families are getting poorer. Families with children in the bottom five income deciles (10% groups) made no significant gains in their incomes between 1989 and 2007. Two of the groups actually saw a significant decline in their income. (Fact Sheet 7)

BC Campaign 2000 believes that British Columbians and Canadians everywhere have made a compelling case for eliminating poverty.

- Six provincial governments - Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba - have committed themselves to poverty reduction plans for their own jurisdictions.
- The Conference Board of Canada, a group supported by major Canadian businesses, took a strong stand for reducing poverty in a report released this fall. The board’s sponsors include Bell Canada, George Weston Ltd., Hydro-Québec, the Power Corporation of Canada, the TD Bank Financial Group, Wawanesa Mutual Insurance Company and Xerox Canada Ltd.

- The BC Healthy Living Alliance, a group that includes some of the province’s leading health experts, has also thrown its weight behind a poverty reduction strategy. It says it sees major disparities between the health of low-income people and higher-income people.
- The latest Vital Signs report from the Vancouver Foundation gave Metro Vancouver a D grade on poverty and income inequality. “Without effective programs to address the root causes and consequences of poverty, we limit opportunities for all types of citizens to make meaningful contributions and feel like members of our community,” the report said.
- Even Premier Campbell’s own BC Progress Board has argued for fighting poverty in all its manifestations. “The fact that one in ten British Columbians lives on the economic margins for extended periods stands as a pressing policy challenge,” the board said. “But one in ten is not an insurmountable challenge.”

Public policy solutions are available to help reduce child poverty in BC. Options recommended in the Report Card include higher child benefits, increases in the minimum wage and welfare rates, commitments to pay living wages, increased access to high quality childcare and new housing programs for people with low incomes.

However, the BC government continues to deny that we have a child poverty problem. It has even rejected the very simplest of steps to help ease the burden on poor people: indexing the minimum wage and welfare rates every year to increases in the cost of living.

“High child and family poverty rates are disturbing and unacceptable,” said Adrienne Montani, First Call provincial coordinator. “Without a concerted plan and leadership from government, things will keep getting worse. The question remains: When will the provincial government take action?”

The 2009 poverty report of BC Campaign 2000 was prepared by the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) and First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition.

First Call has prepared an updated report on child and family poverty in British Columbia. The report is available from the First Call office in Vancouver and can also be downloaded from the First Call web site at www.firstcallbc.org.