



Why Does Poverty Matter?

Becoming aware of the issues facing British Columbians who live in poverty is an important first step in developing solutions that will increase access and encourage participation in physical activity.

What does poverty mean?

Poverty is about struggling to meet basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing. It also means not being able to access the following to ensure a comfortable quality of life:

- Essential goods and services
- Meaningful employment and decent earnings
- Adequate and affordable housing
- Safe neighbourhoods with public amenities
- Health and well-being
- Social networks
- Basic human rights¹

Exactly how 'poor' do you have to be to be poor?

Statistics can suggest aspects of poverty - such as, income levels, educational attainment, or employment.

- From these numbers, an assumption about quality of life may be made
- But statistics do not reflect the *experience* of living in poverty
- To look deeper at the issue of poverty, one may consider two important issues:
 1. Depth of Poverty
 2. Populations Affected by Poverty

The Depth of Poverty

Poverty is experienced differently by different people. Even though one may be employed full-time, they may still experience poverty. Poverty is experienced differently by:

- **Those at-risk of poverty** – people who are one or two pay cheques away from poverty or whose employment is insecure
- **The working (waged) poor** – people working close to minimum wage and trying to make ends meet
- **The temporarily unemployed** – individuals facing short-term unemployment due to layoffs or other reasons
- **The persistently unemployed** – people who face barriers in finding and maintaining employment
- **The dependent** – individuals on a fixed income (i.e. retired people, people with work limiting disabilities)
- **The homeless** – people living without proper housing²



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Populations Affected by Poverty

Some population groups are over-represented in the low-income bracket. According to 2001 census data, 17.8% of the Canadian population fell below the poverty line³. The following groups are disproportionately represented:

- 48% of the Aboriginal population
- 43% of recent immigrants
- 30% of visible minorities
- 15% of people with disabilities⁴

Other studies show that the highest incidence of poverty is experienced by the following demographic groups:

- People with work-limiting disabilities
- Recent immigrants
- Unattached individuals (ages 45 to 49)
- Single parents
- Aboriginal peoples²

Poverty affects British Columbians in a variety of ways. Whether the impacts are short term or long term, severe or relatively mild, poverty often causes people to feel isolated and excluded from community life.

In BC, people are struggling to survive

- Poverty is not going away. In 2006, BC had the highest provincial poverty rate in Canada – 13% or 546,000 people living in poverty in BC.⁵
 - To put this number in perspective, this is larger than the total number of people living in the Victoria metropolitan area in the same year (330,088).⁵
- BC has the highest proportion of working poor families in Canada
 - 14.5% of BC's families with at least one person working in a full-time, full-year position were living in poverty.³
 - Over 245,000 British Columbians earn less than \$10 per hour at their job, despite the average hourly wage for BC being \$18.01.⁵
- The number of working-age single people who survive on incomes of less than half the poverty line more than tripled between 1989 and 2003, from 163,000 to 552,000.⁶
- The average family spends 34% of its income on food, clothing and shelter. Families living in poverty spend 54% or more of income on these items⁷ meaning there is little if any money to spend on physical activity and recreation.
- In 2004, Canadian households with the lowest incomes spent on average \$1,086 per year on recreation items, compared to \$7,994 spent by households with the highest incomes.⁸ (based on the lowest and highest 20% of the population)

The current economic situation means that more people may be affected by poverty. Companies are downsizing or closing operations and unemployment is increasing. This is a crucial time to ensure community members can make healthy choices regardless of their income.

References

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- ⁵ Statistics Canada., Income Trends in Canada 1976 to 2006 (table 802)
- ⁶ National Council of Welfare, Poverty Profile (2002-03)
- ⁷ Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver (update: November, 2003)
- ⁸ Statistics Canada's Survey of Household Spending, 2004