



# Child poverty in British Columbia

Dr Paul Martiquet, Medical Health Officer



**In any endeavour, six years** or identical results pretty much means you really

deserve that placing. Unfortunately, when the category is child poverty, and you are coming in last, that is a very unbecoming statistic. For British Columbia, that is exactly the situation: we have, for the sixth year in a row, come in dead last in the category of child poverty.

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition produces an annual report card on child poverty to compare BC's situation to the rest of the country's. The current report (with 2007 data) ranks BC last yet again. In 2007, BC had 18.8% of its children living in poverty. Though tied with Manitoba, this rate compares poorly to every other province; the Canadian average is 15%.

Three methods are used to measure poverty (find details on the [First Call website](#); LICO, or low-income cut-off, before tax; LICO, after tax; and Market Basket Measure, MBM. There is debate on the most effective or 'accurate' measure, but it is a moot point as which-ever is used, BC comes last.

While the risk of poverty is highest for female single parent families, about half of all poor children live in two-parent families. And 55.7% of poor children lived in

families where at least one member had a full-time job.

Hidden in the overall statistics are subgroups of children who are particularly susceptible to poverty. Statistics Canada reports that the national poverty rate for First Nations children under the age of six living off-reserve was 49%. The comparable figure for non-Aboriginal children was 18%.

There are public policy solutions that will help reduce child poverty in BC. Unfortunately, we are not seeing movement on many of these.

Federally, the Canada Child Tax Benefit (1998) has helped, but little has been done to provide substantial new childcare and housing programs, or to fix holes in Employment Insurance. BC has abandoned efforts to expand the BC Family Bonus to make it an important income supplement for families with children. It has also steadfastly refused to raise the minimum wage for the past eight years.

First Call BC makes very specific and actionable recommendations. The provincial government should appoint a cabinet minister with the authority and responsibility to set and achieve poverty reduction targets. It should raise the minimum wage to \$10.80 an hour and index it to cost of living increases. And certainly, the "training wage" of \$6 an hour must be abolished.

Furthermore, First Call BC recommends raising welfare rates to meet the Market Basket Measure

calculated by the Federal government. Ensuring universal access to high quality childcare enabling parents with young children to remain in the labour force would benefit not only the families and children, but also ensure a strong start in

their early years.

British Columbia is a rich, resourceful province and should not be at the bottom of the child poverty pile. We must do better.

***British Columbia is a rich, resourceful province and should not be at the bottom of the child poverty pile.***