



# What We Heard : Engagement with Indigenous Peoples Summary Report

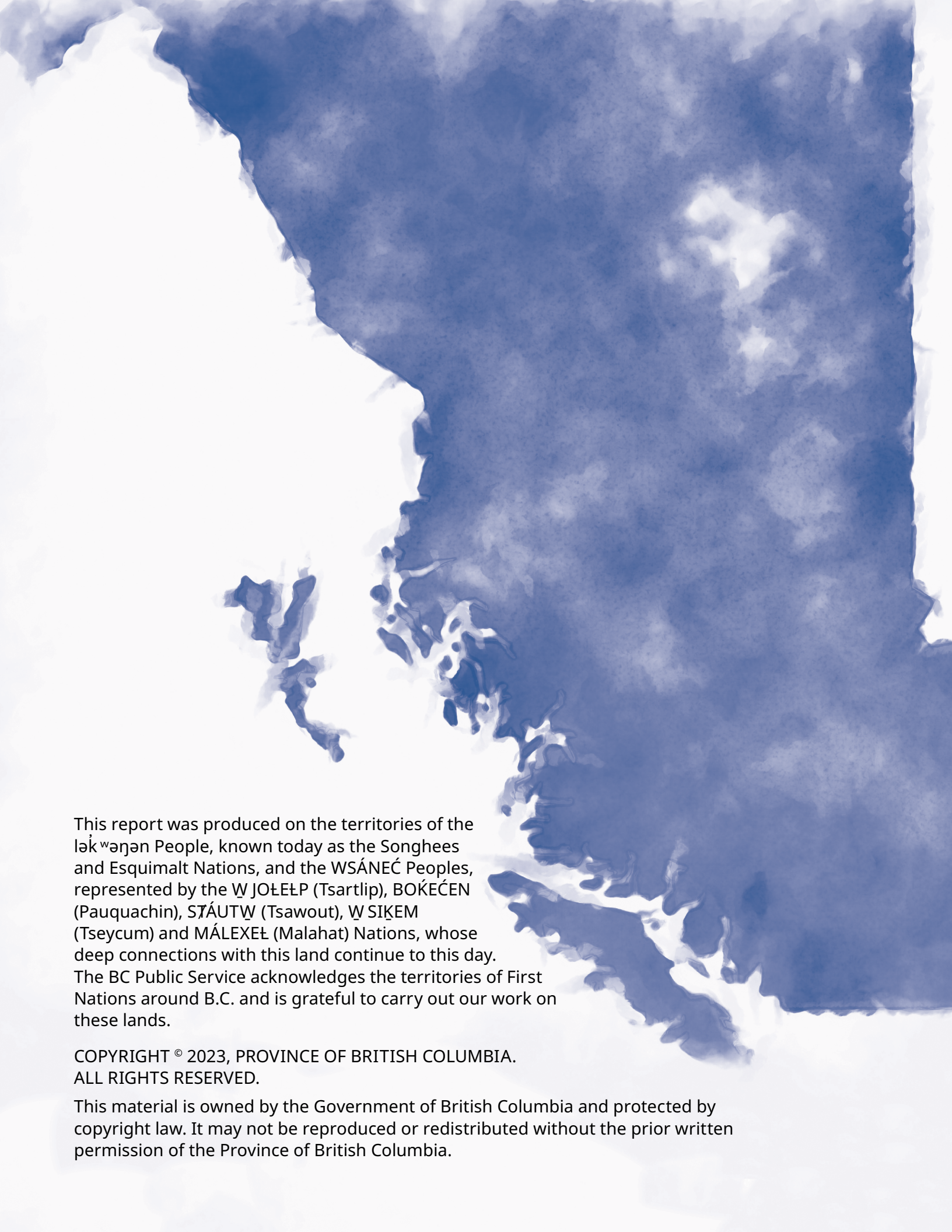
Updating TogetherBC: B.C.'s Poverty Reduction Strategy  
Spring through Fall 2023

Prepared for:



Ministry of  
Social Development  
and Poverty Reduction





This report was produced on the territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən People, known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, and the WSÁNEĆ Peoples, represented by the Ƶ JOŁŁP (Tsartlip), BOKÉĆEN (Pauquachin), SƦÁUTƵ (Tsawout), Ƶ SIKEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations, whose deep connections with this land continue to this day. The BC Public Service acknowledges the territories of First Nations around B.C. and is grateful to carry out our work on these lands.

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**B.C.'s Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction contracted Mahihkan Management to produce this report. It includes a supplemental review on Métis-led engagement through Métis Nation BC.**

**In order to respect the feedback from participants, contributions during the discussions have been written as close to verbatim as possible while protecting the speaker's privacy. Due to this, some comments may seem vague, incomplete, or require interpretation by the reader, but this choice ensures that the voice of participants is honoured and truthfully represented.**

# Executive Summary

A commitment to reconciliation is a core principle of TogetherBC, B.C.'s Poverty Reduction Strategy. As required by the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act*, the strategy must be updated every five years in a way that reflects B.C.'s commitment to reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The strategy is being updated for spring 2024.

The Province contracted Mahihkan Management (Mahihkan), an Indigenous consultation organization, to conduct Indigenous-specific engagement in spring through fall 2023, to ensure engagement sessions were delivered in a culturally appropriate and meaningful way. Métis people were warmly welcomed to attend these sessions, and in addition, a separate Métis-led engagement focused on Métis people experiencing homelessness was organized through Métis Nation BC to support a distinctions-based approach (Métis Supplemental Review, Page 24).

Engagement is a critical step toward relationship building and meaningful partnership with First Nations, Modern Treaty Nations, Métis, and Inuit to better understand and address Indigenous experiences of poverty and wellness. Concerns and recommendations raised during the engagements will help inform the 2024 update to B.C.'s poverty reduction strategy.

## Cross-Cutting Themes

The engagement was grounded in the understanding that the main drivers of poverty for Indigenous Peoples are the practices and impacts of colonialism, systemic racism, and lack of connection to community driven by colonial structures and practices. This was reinforced through many of the conversations we had so they are threaded throughout the report instead of being included as a separate theme.

Across all engagement sessions, we heard that there is a need to heal from trauma, beginning with culture, which empowers Indigenous people and increases connectedness to food and land. Participants suggested that reconciliation must include resource distribution

to help address the root causes of poverty. Some participants suggested that if First Nations were given their land back, Indigenous poverty would disappear altogether.

We heard that Indigenous self-determination and autonomy are foundational, and to move forward, Indigenous Peoples' inherent rights and authority to self-govern must be recognized. People expressed the Province must prioritize collaboration with Indigenous organizations, including those that represent First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Indigenous people continue to face systemic racism, with stigma placed on recipients of income and disability assistance. We also heard a need for more Indigenous voices at government decision-making tables and the benefits of including wisdom from Knowledge Keepers, people with lived experience, families, Elders, and urban Indigenous people.

It's also important to highlight that many of the concerns and recommendations heard through this engagement have been brought forward in previous Indigenous consultations, reports and resolutions. While prior recommendations have been included in the report where appropriate to emphasize context, the bulk of this report remains what we heard through the 2023 engagement process.

# The What We Heard Report has been organized into 6 key themes:

- 1. Barriers to Access** – Participants highlighted barriers to accessing necessary services ranging from lack of practical access to systemic barriers. Systemic barriers are created by program legislation, policies, and administration, such as excessive bureaucracy, time delays, experiences of racism, and technological gaps. Lack of practical access included geographic challenges like limited access to affordable transportation, which creates barriers to accessing employment, community connection, health services and necessities like groceries. Additional barriers included lack of knowledge of available supports and the multiple steps required to access services and supports.
- 2. Housing** – The majority of participants identified the cost of housing as a top concern, with many citing rental rates being more than an entire month's income for someone earning the current minimum wage. In addition to rental costs, people noted a lack of availability of safe and appropriate housing, and the ways these issues contribute to homelessness for Indigenous people.
- 3. Cost of Living and Inflation** – There were widespread concerns that the high cost of living and inflation have created dire situations where families are choosing between necessities. While this is particularly true for those receiving income or disability assistance, we also heard from people that work full-time but still struggle to provide for their families. People voiced concerns that income and social supports did not reflect the cost of living and that surviving on the limited resources provided to them was next to impossible. Relatedly, some told us that the level of income assistance does not help people out of poverty, but rather keeps them at or below the poverty line.
- 4. Health and Wellness** – Participants expressed a need for greater health and wellness supports overall, especially for more vulnerable populations such as Elders, youth, and people with disabilities. They felt strongly that addressing trauma and providing resources to access mental health and substance use supports, including detox facilities, are critical to addressing the cycle of poverty. People expressed that rural and remote communities are struggling with unique challenges when it comes to doctor and health care shortages, including lack of access to transportation.
- 5. Food Security** – Related to cost of living and inflation, participants identified the rising cost of food and overall food insecurity as major concerns. They also worried about the consequences these issues will have on communities and younger generations. With healthy food becoming increasingly expensive, a well-balanced diet has turned into a luxury. Food affordability is a significant problem impacting more people and straining the capabilities of nonprofit organizations like food banks. Many participants also emphasized the importance of food sovereignty for Indigenous Peoples, and shared concerns about how climate change and climate emergencies are impacting their ability to participate in traditional food gathering and hunting.
- 6. Education, Employment and Life Skills** Participants called for the expansion and improvement of education, especially for younger generations. They said that Indigenous children often do not receive quality education in the public school system and are not taught the basic life skills necessary to transition into adulthood. We heard people say that the lack of quality education is likely to increase the chances of falling into addiction or homelessness. We also heard about barriers related to employment and skills training through a group session with Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) providers.

# Introduction

The Province of B.C. is renewing its approach to poverty reduction. This involves developing priorities to update TogetherBC: B.C.'s Poverty Reduction Strategy and proposing amendments to the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act*. It also involves reviewing the two Acts that govern the B.C. Employment and Assistance program: The *Employment and Assistance Act* and the *Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act*, which provide income and disability assistance to urban Indigenous people living away from home<sup>1</sup>.

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR) undertook targeted and public engagement in spring and summer 2023. A separate, distinctions-based engagement with Indigenous people occurred over summer and fall 2023, with continued partnerships thereafter through consultation on legislation. The Indigenous engagement approach was designed to align with the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (Declaration Act) Action Plan item 4.15 to: "Incorporate Indigenous experiences and knowledge of poverty and well-being into ongoing poverty reduction efforts and the 2024 Poverty Reduction Strategy. The strategy will recognize the ongoing impacts of colonialism and include Indigenous-identified actions and progress measures."

To ensure a culturally safe engagement process, SDPR contracted Mahihkan Management, a firm specializing in designing Indigenous engagements and events. Between May 25 and September 26, 2023, Mahihkan conducted six in-person engagement sessions and three virtual sessions. During these engagement sessions, feedback was gathered from members of 42 First Nations and representatives of several First Nations organizations. There was Métis representation at 3 of the sessions. Key themes were then identified as relevant to updating B.C.'s poverty reduction strategy from an Indigenous perspective.

In addition, from April to November 2023, SDPR partnered with Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) to conduct a Métis-specific engagement. The engagement focused on Métis people accessing MNBC housing support services. (Métis Supplemental Review, Page 24).

In summer 2023, SDPR invited all 204 First Nations, including Modern Treaty Nations, to attend a series of seven virtual meetings to provide input on legislative issues that are important to them. The feedback received through these sessions contributes to First Nations-identified actions and progress measures in the poverty reduction strategy update and contributes to aligning legislative amendments with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration). Government staff have been engaging with Indigenous partners and sharing legislative intent through the proposed amendments. The process is ongoing.

We know that the root cause of poverty for Indigenous Peoples in B.C. is the ongoing and harmful effect of colonization. Indigenous Peoples have been disproportionately affected by socioeconomic challenges such as pandemic recovery, a drastic increase in the cost of living, the opioid crisis, and extreme weather events caused by a changing climate. This report identifies common themes emerging from engagement with Indigenous people around poverty, while also providing context for these issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this *What We Heard* report, "living away from home" may be used to indicate someone living off-reserve. In comparison, "living in community" refers to someone living on-reserve.

## Objectives

The objective of engagement was to gain feedback from Indigenous people on their lived and living experience with poverty and well-being. The feedback gathered will inform updates to TogetherBC, the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act*, and a review of the two Acts that govern the BC Employment and Assistance Program: The *Employment and Assistance Act* and the *Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act*. This feedback will also be used to inform future provincial government programs and services that reduce poverty and help eliminate social and economic barriers facing Indigenous Peoples.

This work seeks to fulfill Action 4.15 of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Action Plan*, where the government of B.C. commits to incorporating Indigenous experiences and knowledge of poverty and well-being into ongoing poverty reduction efforts and the 2024 poverty reduction strategy.

## Methodology

Mahihkan staff undertook thematic analysis of data received through engagement sessions to compile this What We Heard Report. Notetakers were present to capture participant contributions. Raw data from all engagement sessions was collated into a spreadsheet for analysis.

The data was initially sorted by three main categories: comments and questions, issues and concerns, and recommendations. While some comments spoke to programs and activities that were working, most comments highlighted challenges with current programs. This included inadequate funding and resources, complex and often punitive program rules, and service delivery barriers, including racism and lack of cultural appropriateness. From there, themes were identified based on key words. The results were reviewed through an iterative process to ensure the results reflected what was heard at each engagement session.

It is important to note that this What We Heard report is subjective, and it may be possible to analyze comments using different subject groupings. This report analyzes problems, concerns, and recommendations gathered from Indigenous participants within B.C. It is not, nor intended to be, an exhaustive account that represents the opinions of all Indigenous people throughout the province. Further, no report on an engagement process will ever be comprehensive, nor its findings static, as ideas and opinions can shift with time.

Prior recommendations have been included in the report where appropriate, to emphasize context, however the bulk of this report remains what we heard through the 2023 engagement process. Notwithstanding the subjective nature of this report, the findings based on this analysis point to an overarching issue – the current measures to reduce poverty in B.C. are not working for Indigenous Peoples.



# Engagement Structure and Overview

## Virtual and In-Person Engagement Sessions

Mahihkan conducted nine engagement sessions between May 25 and September 26; six were in-person and three, including the validation session, were virtual. Background information on the project was shared with communities before the sessions. A total of 170 people and organizations registered for the nine sessions. Members of 42 First Nations and representatives of several First Nations organizations participated in the engagement sessions. There was Métis representation at 3 of the sessions. Along with community members, session participants represented Friendship Centres, employment centres, women's shelters, and Tribal Councils. An additional 17 people who did not identify any affiliation attended the sessions.

Engagement sessions were led by Indigenous facilitators who cultivated safe spaces for dialogue. In the spirit of fostering inclusion, people were also encouraged to provide written submissions. Each facilitator brought their own level of lived experience and understanding of the subject matter and were able to connect with participants through their shared experiences.

Each engagement session was opened by an Elder, followed by a welcome and land acknowledgement by the facilitator. The next part of the session involved a presentation by SDPR staff on the poverty reduction strategy and progress made to date. Following the presentation, the sessions proceeded according to a flexible design:

- Williams Lake, Penticton & Virtual Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Providers (ISETs) Session – large group divided into two break-out discussion groups, then concluded with a large group session
- Prince George Session – two guided discussion blocks involving all participants
- Elder Session – large group session with no break-out groups
- T'it'q'et, Vancouver & Virtual Session (August 22) – large group divided into break-out discussion groups, no large group session
- Virtual Validation Session (August 29) – large group session with no break-out groups

During engagement sessions, there was a strong emphasis on the importance of maintaining safety and exercising self-care due to the difficult subject matter which included supports from qualified counsellors. Resources were also offered to help organizations host conversations in their own communities. A broad range of supports were provided to reduce barriers to participation including child care, food, honoraria, transportation support or other expenses required to access sessions.

*The format for most sessions was as follows:*

### **Discussion 1: Understanding Challenges in Your Community**

- 1. What are the biggest challenges you and/or your community are experiencing when it comes to poverty and well-being?**
- 2. Is there anything making these issues more challenging?**

### **Discussion 2: Supports and Actions to Promote Well-Being in Your Community**

- 1. What are the supports and actions required to overcome poverty and support well-being in your community?**
- 2. What is already working that could be built upon?**
- 3. How can we address the issues identified earlier?**

*The focus of questions posed at the ISET virtual session was on employment issues as follows:*

### **ISET Engagement: Employment Supports and Services to Promote Well-Being**

- 1. How do employment supports and services need to evolve to better support well-being and ensure people are not left behind?**
  - a. How can employers support the success of people while working?
  - b. What would holistic supports look like?
  - c. What might early intervention look like?
- 2. What employment services and supports are most successful in reducing poverty for people in your communities?**
  - a. What are least successful?
  - b. How should success be measured so that it works for everyone?

## **Métis Nation BC Engagement**

To ensure a distinctions-based engagement process, from April to December 2023, SDPR also partnered with Métis Nation BC to conduct a Métis-specific engagement. MNBC, in partnership with Kwusen Research and Media Ltd. (Kwusen), undertook a literature review and gathered primary qualitative research via online surveys and interviews.

Given the lack of available data focused on the needs of Métis people experiencing homelessness, MNBC chose to focus engagement on a targeted sample of

Métis people accessing MNBC housing support services. This important research provides valuable insight into how Métis people experience housing insecurity, homelessness, and other barriers to wellbeing. (Métis Supplemental Review, Page 24)

## Additional Indigenous Engagement

### Consultation and Cooperation Sessions

In summer 2023, SDPR invited all 204 First Nations, including Modern Treaty Nations, to attend a series of seven virtual meetings to provide input on legislative issues that are important to them. Staff have been considering and incorporating feedback into proposed amendments where possible. Topics were grouped into two main themes:

#### Poverty Reduction Strategy

- First Nations Priorities for the Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Reconciliation, Targets, and Key Populations
- How to Measure Progress for First Nations

#### Income and Disability Assistance

- Shared Decision-Making and Culturally Appropriate Supports
- Employment: Reducing Barriers for Indigenous Peoples
- System Complexity and Fairness: Navigation and Access Delays
- Income and Assets: Reducing Barriers for Indigenous Peoples

The feedback received through these sessions contributes to First Nations-identified actions and progress measures in the poverty reduction strategy update and to aligning legislative amendments with the UN Declaration.

## Online Survey Results

Between March 1 and April 30, 2023, members of the public were able to share their input through an online survey, hosted on the engagement website ([engage.gov.bc.ca/povertyreduction](https://engage.gov.bc.ca/povertyreduction)). This survey included questions about people's current experiences with poverty, challenges with existing programs and services, and recommendations for government to consider moving forward. It also included questions about government-wide programs and benefits that have linkages to poverty. To ensure the survey connected with people who have lived and living experience of poverty, a QR code and website link were included on two issues of income assistance cheques, directly on the MySelfServe online portal, and through social media. A total of 8,387 people completed the online survey.

Of those **8,387** people, 12% of participants self-identified as being Indigenous. Of this, 57% identified as First Nations; 38% Métis; 1% Inuit; 6% other North American Indigenous.

## Policy and Written Submissions

Organizations and individuals were also invited to submit written recommendations and policy submissions. Through these submissions, there were broad calls to prioritize Indigenous Peoples and other specific populations with higher rates of poverty across BC's poverty reduction efforts.

In addition, there were 22 Indigenous-specific recommendations under the following themes:

- Providing livable income and disability assistance rates including crisis grant rates
- Expanding affordable and supportive housing options, particularly for Indigenous youth and people fleeing violence including Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people
- Increasing the availability of mental health and addiction supports

# Key Themes – Overall

While the issues heard in the engagement sessions are categorized into themes below, it is important to understand that these issues are all deeply connected and must be considered within the larger context of colonialism and intergenerational trauma. It was broadly shared that government has been untrustworthy due to racism and entrenched systemic barriers, and there remains a lack of culturally safe services and supports for Indigenous people.

Participants emphasized that there are multiple factors that contribute to living in poverty. We heard across sessions that colonialism must be acknowledged as a root cause when considering the origins of poverty for Indigenous Peoples. Creating systems and processes that keep people trapped in a cycle of poverty and dependency is viewed by some as a deliberate approach. This is consistent with past advice, recommendations and calls to action.

## 1. Barriers to Access

The most common theme identified through this engagement related to barriers to accessing services and supports intended to address poverty. This included both systemic and practical access barriers.

### Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers to access programs and supports included the complexity of both the programs and their application processes, a lack of coordination between programs, and a lack of awareness of what is available.

### Racism and Discrimination

Underlying these barriers is an inherent discrimination that participants reported feeling when accessing government supports. We heard that this experience can fuel reluctance among people in poverty to seek help because of a fear of how they may be treated. As a result of these experiences, some people were left feeling that the government of B.C. was disinterested,

uncaring and unaware of how systemic barriers impact access to essential supports. We heard that requiring Indigenous Peoples to operate within a colonial framework with rigid program rules and processes does not align with traditional cultural practices. Participants reflected feeling alienated from the present system because it does not reflect Indigenous values, support strong ties to the land (e.g., to provide food security), or give value to important cultural traditions (e.g., the ability to smudge in hospitals). The impact of these ongoing interactions with government can have multigenerational effects and perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

***“Poverty is a created history. It was created to keep Indigenous People from practicing their cultural practices and feeding into and contributing into a more colonial way of living.”***

- Elder participant, Elders Gathering

### Application Processes

Participants shared that the application process for provincial government assistance programs is too complex and navigating the system has many barriers. An online application presents a challenge for any applicant that does not have access to a computer, internet, or a cell phone, since they are required to submit materials online. It is even more difficult for people who may have limited computer literacy or other challenges. We heard that some people do not trust electronic submission methods and would rather file a more traditional paper application. In addition, we heard about the need for shorter wait times after an application for government services is submitted. For people in dire need of help, such a delay is another difficult burden.

***“The application process is online, and difficult for those who are not familiar with the system.”***

– participant, Prince George

### **Lack of Coordination**

The complexity of applications can be compounded by a lack of coordination between different B.C. government programs, forcing people to re-tell their stories repeatedly to access each service. This can be re-traumatizing every time someone needs to reveal information. Lack of coordination also applies to the continuity of programs. Participants noted that they access programs for some time, only to be told later that they no longer exist due to funding or other reasons, which leaves a gap in supports and services with people unsure of what to do next.

### **Communication and Awareness**

People who need support may lack knowledge of the supports available, and the steps to access services in a more expedient manner (e.g., filing their taxes as a condition to qualify for income assistance). Participants expressed they, or members of their community, are often unaware of available supports. They suggested that the provincial government could do better to communicate what programs and services are available. Several participants pointed out simple, practical information-sharing ideas. For example, instead of paper documents that get damaged easily, more durable booklets of resources and agency contacts could be created and shared with Friendship Centres. These booklets could be updated regularly to prevent material from becoming obsolete.

### **Practical Barriers**

Practical barriers included geographic challenges related to transportation and a lack of access to adequate services, particularly for people living in rural and remote communities. Participants noted that not only do people in rural and remote communities have minimal access to critical goods and services, what is available can be both costly and ineffective including cell phone service.

### **Transportation**

Geographic challenges are a particular barrier for people who live in rural and remote communities and

who face a lack of resources and services. Transportation can be a significant issue in these communities, as accessing training, services, and supports (medical, mental health, etc.) often necessitates traveling to a nearby city. This can be expensive, complicated, and time-consuming for people, particularly those who must navigate both water and land crossings. People told us about communities that have little to no transit access, despite multiple requests having been made over the past decade for expanded service to the area. Disconnected transportation schedules can also lead to extra expenses, putting additional strain on people with low incomes. For example, a participant in Williams Lake said:

***“A medical bus goes to Kamloops once a week, but you have to stay overnight as the bus leaves on Monday and returns on Thursday.”***

– participant, Williams Lake

Many participants echoed the benefits of expanding transit services, especially for youth and Elders. We heard that expanded transit would benefit those that cannot obtain a driver’s licence, a private vehicle, or afford the cost of gas and insurance. In such cases, public transportation is vital for commuting to jobs, attending appointments, and running essential errands. The alternatives, including taxi or rideshare services, are not always accessible either, due to their high cost, limited availability, or long wait times. Participants across many regions called for government to reduce transportation costs, with suggestions such as complimentary bus passes to youth and Elders. Additionally, we heard a need for transit systems to operate for longer hours each day, as shift workers are sometimes left without transportation options.

### **Services**

In addition to transportation, geographically remote locations also experience inconsistent availability of services. In areas where cell phone service is weak or non-existent, people rely more heavily on Wi-Fi internet. This can be problematic in emergency situations, for example, if an ambulance is needed but people are unable to reach it. It also increases the importance of having affordable and reliable communication services.

## Moving Forward

Participants from all regions noted that the current social system of supports is complicated, and the process should be streamlined and allow for more ways for Indigenous voices to be heard. They expressed a desire to be involved in addressing barriers, rather than have others speak on their behalf. We heard that Indigenous people in poverty have no suitable way of sharing their stories. One suggestion to rectify this was to create an Indigenous-led policy table and build a better platform for people with lived and living experience of poverty to directly impact policy and program change and development.

***“We need to make sure that we invite youth, families, and elders to the Table. We must hear their voices and get them involved in the solution – not just talk on their behalf.”*** – participant, virtual engagement session

### Community-Based Programs

Participants noted that there should be more funding available for community wellness initiatives and other community-based programs. This was particularly emphasized in the context of Friendship Centres. Participants voiced that Friendship Centres play a crucial role in urban Indigenous wellness and should be supported in meeting the needs of urban Indigenous populations. We know from prior recommendations that self-determination is essential in the delivery of culturally safe, appropriate, and effective services for Indigenous Peoples. There were recommendations that every Friendship Centre, service provider, and organization should have access to adequate resources and specialized staff, such as employment counsellors.

***“We have a community garden. We’re growing our own veggies. We offer them to the community... we also have a community pantry. It’s all community-based. The community feels ok to go there because it’s happening on that level. They know they’re not being judged.”***

– participant, Vancouver

### Trauma-Informed Practice

Participants expressed a desire for frontline workers to go through trauma-informed workplace training so that they can interact with clients using compassion and listen without judgement. Language is powerful, and people should not be getting triggered when they are reaching out for help. Throughout the engagement participants referred to the characteristics of more effective programs, including:

- Being client focused
- Community-based
- Shared decision-making
- Holistic
- Collaborative
- Culturally grounded
- Focused on prevention
- Equitable, and
- Adequately resourced.

## 2. Housing

We know that Indigenous experiences of poverty tie to lack of affordable, appropriate, and safe housing as well as higher incidence of homelessness. Worsened by the current affordability crisis, there is an overrepresentation of Indigenous people among those experiencing homelessness.

### Housing Cost

Inadequate access to safe, affordable housing was a key concern across all engagement sessions. We heard that housing cost is a major concern, with rental rates in many communities far greater than a month’s income. This was identified as the reason many people are forced to work multiple jobs, especially if they have children to support. Another important consideration we heard is that the low shelter rates for people receiving income or disability assistance force them to live in shared accommodation and, if people don’t have someone to share costs with, they risk becoming homeless.

We heard that issues caused by the high costs of rent are compounded when landlords ask people to prove that they earn an income of up to three times the rental amount to qualify for a rental. Tenants then need to pay a damage deposit, first and last month's rent, and factor in moving costs, which can be substantial. There were repeated calls to hold landlords more accountable for their behaviour and pricing. One example provided was housing advertisements that specified "working couples only", which is unlawful. While participants did acknowledge that they had the option of filing a complaint with the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB), they added that the complaints process is far too long.

***"Rent should not have been commodified to this extent. Rent and mortgage amounts are higher than experts recommend. The current system is made to keep people in poverty. Housing should be a human right."*** – participant, Penticton

### **Safe, Supportive and Appropriate Housing**

We heard that the problem is not strictly the cost and availability of housing. New housing is being built, but it is often inadequate or unaffordable. Some participants mentioned that their housing was built to minimum standards many years ago, and that those structures are now beyond repair. Participants expressed that there is a gap in adequate housing, especially for Indigenous youth.

#### ***Cultural Supports and Appropriate Housing***

People told us there should be a better housing continuum that includes broader cultural supports. Prior recommendations regarding safe and adequate housing include meeting the needs of women and urban Indigenous people specifically, as well as ensuring enough culturally supportive housing for Elders and for younger adults. Some participants called for government to review occupancy standards for multigenerational homes, particularly in urban areas where families share housing, to lower the cost of living and honour traditional cultural practices.

We heard that there is a need for more First Nations housing to facilitate people staying in their home communities and to provide safe housing for community members who live away from home. Participants called for every community to have an Elders complex, allowing Elders to maintain independence and keep them in community. Some First Nations identified that they don't have an off-reserve housing strategy, nor the means and time to create one, despite most of their members living away from home.

#### ***Safety***

Many people spoke about discrimination, stigma, and systemic racism prevalent in communities across the province, which directly limits access to safe housing for themselves and their families. In addition to being discriminated against by landlords for being Indigenous, people reported experiences of landlords rejecting applications if they disclose that they are receiving income support.

***"Applicants are discriminated against or rejected if they are on income assistance or disability assistance, and it is necessary to disclose whether they are on disability assistance."***

– participant, Penticton

We heard the need for more housing shelters and detox facilities for people that struggle with substance use. People asked for housing that offers holistic, wraparound support services related to food, transportation, education, and counselling. The lack of these housing supports can contribute directly to homelessness.

#### **Homelessness**

Participants noted that more work needs to be done to address homelessness. It is a chronic and complex issue that disproportionately impacts Indigenous people and requires alignment of various support services, not just funding, to provide solutions.

***“Some people choose to stay in shelters because they are afraid to move away from what they know, and these people have not had the opportunity to grow.”***

– participant, Vancouver

***“Our biggest challenge right now is inflation and housing. Our homeless citizens are – there's a really high rate of them – and there's very little affordable housing for them.”***

– participant, ISET session

### **Transitions on and off Reserve**

We heard that when people move from a First Nation to off reserve, there is a gap between receiving income assistance on reserve and applying for income assistance off reserve. People mentioned they get cut off from income assistance when moving off reserve and are expected to have 6-8 weeks of income saved until their off-reserve income assistance is in place. We heard that there should be transition funding to help them adapt and avoid the potential of this transition leading to homelessness. It was noted that Friendship Centres are very useful in certain situations, as they have homelessness funding. Unfortunately, they currently do not have capacity for transition funding. People mentioned that if they are not assisted in their transitions away from home, they might end up living on the street in a place like the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

## **3. Cost of Living and Income Supports**

### **Cost of Living**

The current high cost of living is having widespread impacts. We heard from single parents who are working two full time jobs so they can use the wages from one job to pay for their housing costs, and the other to afford food for their children. We heard examples of people being forced to leave retirement and resume work to afford their basic needs. One participant shared that they drank coffee and tea to stave off their hunger so that groceries would last longer.

### **Wages**

The reality of rising inflation has led some participants to identify as part of the ‘working poor’. This refers to people who have full-time employment but still cannot afford the costs of daily living. We heard about circumstances in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside shelters where 10-15% are part of the working poor, often getting up at 5 a.m. to stand in line for temporary work to earn a single day’s wage.

We heard wide support for the implementation of a living wage, and participants stressed the importance of having on-reserve wages match wages paid to those working off-reserve. Some participants advocated that people earning poverty-level wages should also be eligible to receive some form of income assistance.

***“The high cost of living is keeping those down that are already struggling.”*** Participant, virtual session

### **Income Supports**

Participants spoke positively about the supports provided during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>2</sup>, which allowed many people the opportunity to afford food, rent, and utilities. However, many people added that they are now struggling without these supports while simultaneously bearing the rising cost of living.

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<sup>2</sup> e.g., the Canada Emergency Response Benefit - CERB



### Rates

Although the government of B.C. has increased income and disability assistance rates over the last few years, the rates remain below the poverty line and are not keeping pace with inflation. We heard about circumstances where people must choose between food, rent, electricity, and medicine because the amount of assistance they receive is too low. Recipients of income assistance also told us that the current earning exemptions limits are considered a disincentive for people to find work or advance their education and skills training. We also heard that earnings exemptions for income assistance should be flexible to account for seasonal work such as hunting and fishing where income increases only at certain times of the year.

***“I am thankful that the rates went up – but we are still struggling.”***

– participant, Penticton

### Regulations

Participants said they fear that they may inadvertently make mistakes, due to which money may be taken away from them, especially as the process for receiving assistance is complex and full of barriers. During engagement sessions, people said they feel they are not allowed to have a relationship due to a possible impact on their assistance rates. People also mentioned that when in a relationship, they are expected to contribute to their household bills, which is not always possible due to the effects of certain income and disability assistance policies. These issues can create power imbalances, which may lead to people feeling trapped in unhealthy situations.

***“Income assistance is not meant for people to do well on. It’s created for people to survive.”***

– participant, Elders Gathering

### Transition Gaps

Despite low rates, we heard that some people fear leaving the perceived stability of income and disability assistance. When people transition to paid employment and as they wait for their first paycheck, they run the risk of being without income for a period of time. Further, if they happen to lose their job and need to go back to assistance, there is another service gap during which they could be without income for a period of time. For someone already in a precarious situation, this could lead to homelessness.

## 4. Health and Wellness

Due to colonialism, discrimination and systemic racism, Indigenous Peoples experience significant disparities in health outcomes. There have been many calls to close the gaps in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and focus on the availability of appropriate health services. It is widely understood that poverty outcomes are closely tied with well-being, health, and mental health.

Participants stressed the importance of using Indigenous approaches to address the root causes of health and well-being issues, rather than continuing to use colonial approaches that focus on symptoms. Supporting Indigenous health and wellness must first begin with culture, which empowers Indigenous Peoples and provides support to navigate provincial health programs. Prior recommendations described Indigenous-run health programs using Indigenous methods and medicines to address physical, emotional, mental, sexual, and spiritual harms. Participants spoke positively about Indigenous health and wellness centres and healing houses that offer culturally safe, trauma-informed care, and called for expansion of these centres and supports across B.C.

### Medical Services

#### Service Gaps

Lack of access to medical services was an issue identified across all engagement sessions. There is a province-wide shortage of doctors and nurses, and this challenge is greater for those living in smaller or remote communities. We heard that a lack of options

for medical treatment leads to unnecessary emergency room visits and long waits. Participants note the difficulty in securing medications if there are no doctors or nurses to visit, or there is a weeks-long waitlist for an appointment.

### ***Lack of Appropriate Supports***

Many participants identified a need for more health and wellness supports, especially for more vulnerable populations such as Elders, youth, and Indigenous people with disabilities. We heard that healing trauma by providing people with the means, resources, and access to health supports is critical to addressing the cycle of poverty. Additionally, we heard the lack of access to medical services makes it more difficult to apply for disability assistance. People highlighted the challenges of not only finding a social worker to sign off on the application, but also having a doctor that knows them. We heard that most people trying to survive on the streets don't have a family doctor.

### ***Rural and Remote Communities***

Lack of access to medical services is felt acutely in smaller communities with limited medical transportation options. The closure of the Greyhound Bus Company ended a reliable way for people to travel for medical appointments or access other essential services. While it was noted that people in some communities have access to medical shuttles, this may involve staying overnight, which increases the financial burden, especially for those living on income or disability assistance or a pension. There have been calls to expand access to free transportation to and from medical appointments, particularly for people with disabilities and the elderly. Other suggestions involve ensuring services are accessible enough that no Indigenous person needs to relocate to access care. This could involve expanding telehealth or other technological service delivery methods, which would also require ensuring access to internet.

Although the availability of telehealth services has grown since COVID-19, there are still limitations on the services, and lack of internet, unreliable Wi-Fi, and low computer literacy skills create barriers. However, people also spoke about the benefits of expanding these services, such as treating diabetes, having heart appointments, and reviewing x-rays. This would help address the barriers posed by lack of transportation and cost associated with traveling for medical appointments.

### ***Elders***

We heard a call for additional funding to support Elders with various medical needs, such as vision care, hearing and mobility aids, and medication. People mentioned that Elders have fallen through the cracks, sometimes having no benefits at all to help with their medical costs. Several participants agreed that Elders should not have to spend out of pocket to get the support and services they need.

### ***Indigenous Knowledge and Practices***

While Indigenous people living in urban centres may have more access to medical resources and services, they still face challenges related to the institutionalized racism that exists within healthcare spaces. There have been calls to recognize the role of Indigenous knowledge and have more health professionals trained in Indigenous health practices. There have also been calls to increase Indigenous patient navigators to bridge between Indigenous patients and the Western medical system.

***“There are now Aboriginal patient navigators in the hospital, but this is not enough. Why can Catholic priests offer last rites in the hospital, but Indigenous People can't smudge? There's a disregard for cultural heritage.”***

– participant, Penticton

***“More hospitals need to have a First Nation liaison.”***

– participant, Vancouver

### ***Role of Friendship Centres***

Participants acknowledged work being done by Friendship Centres and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) to bridge gaps in health care for Indigenous people, but felt needs are still not being met. It was reported that funding is limited through the FNHA, with many reimbursements not covering the full costs of medications, eyewear, and dental care. Respondents stated that Friendship Centres have limited slots available for treatment sessions.

## Mental Health and Addictions

Mental health and substance use challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples must be seen in the context of intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, stigma and discrimination. Participants noted how the lack of accessible and culturally appropriate medical services, including those for mental health and addictions, is exacerbating the widespread mental health struggles and high rates of substance use among Indigenous Peoples. They also spoke about the growing rates of mental health and addictions challenges that are caused, or worsened by, living in poverty. There have been calls to reframe mental health and addictions services to mirror the social and economic realities of Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, and their aspirations toward healing.

***“The root causes of poverty and well-being need to be addressed, otherwise there will just be more of the same.”***

– participant, virtual engagement session

***“Making someone feel seen, heard and understood is the loudest way to support and love them.”***

– participant, virtual engagement session

Participants highlighted that mental health and addictions is a huge issue everywhere – there is an urgent need for more mental health professionals to work within Nations but also with urban Indigenous people. We heard that people suffering from mental health and addictions issues don’t receive the support they need, which has severe consequences, especially when it comes to children and youth. A lack of support can delay treatment, and eventually lead to job loss, eviction, and homelessness. The need for mental health supports has grown since the COVID-19 pandemic and the various levels of isolation experienced during lockdowns have exacerbated many existing mental health conditions.

***“Communities need more people who are properly qualified to deal with mental health. People with mental health challenges do not get any support and end up left behind. These people end up getting kicked out of their housing.”***

– Participant, T’it’q’et

***“People fail because they can’t manage their mental health on their own. Even a small daily reminder would help, but the local facilities don’t have the capacity to provide that. There is no in-home support available.”***

– Participant, T’it’q’et

Participants spoke about a lack of adequate government mental health and addictions supports, particularly in certain regions. For example, people struggling with substance use are in urgent need of more detox facilities and shelters. These services currently have long waitlists and people cannot access vital supports when required. Some participants shared that the current waiting time for detox services in their community is two months. While waiting for these detox services, someone could be turned away from shelter due to their mental health or substance use challenges. We heard about a lack of detox centers in both urban areas and rural and remote communities. People in the Northern region said that as death rates increase from toxic drugs, it is crucial to focus urgent attention on supporting those with mental health and substance use challenges.

## Moving Forward

Many participants agreed that the best method of prevention is treating trauma. They emphasized there needs to be more support, compassion, and understanding for residential school survivors, who have developed multiple health conditions due to traumatic experiences. This is one example of how those experiencing poverty need more than just financial support.

We know it is critical to recognize the cyclical relationship between poverty and addictions challenges, and to take steps to address them simultaneously. We have also heard the importance of ensuring services are available and accessible so that no Indigenous person needs to relocate in order to access care. This could mean expanding telehealth or transportation options.

Moving forward, there were calls to build a decolonizing, anti-racist health system where all levels of service delivery understand the multi-generational impacts colonialism and residential schools have on survivors and communities, and an understanding of unique needs of Indigenous people affected by trauma.

***“A lot of the homelessness here is not caused by drugs and alcohol but by a disconnect from their lands and community, and they need land-based healing.”***

– participant, Vancouver

***“In our area we have a lack of resources and services, especially for those clients that are dealing with addiction issues or mental health challenges... One of the things that we have a big need for is grief counseling. We’ve had quite a few Elders pass away and we’ve had a rash with the fentanyl overdose deaths, as well as suicides. So, that really impedes our clients’ abilities to move forward and get to the space where they can actually apply to programming or employment.”***

– participant, virtual session

## 5. Food Security

Colonization has led to loss of Indigenous lands, resources, and food sources. This is a major contributing factor to food insecurity for Indigenous Peoples. Global inflation leading to rising food costs is also seriously impacting food security. Major concerns expressed in engagement sessions included the rising cost of food, overall food insecurity, and the ramifications it will have on communities and younger generations.

### Affordability

With healthy food becoming unreasonably expensive, a well-balanced diet has turned into a luxury. Food affordability is a significant problem impacting increasing numbers of people and is far beyond the current scope of charitable approaches such as food banks.

***“I leave the grocery store crying.”***

– participant, Penticton

### Community Initiatives

Community-based initiatives were identified by participants as being more effective in addressing poverty as compared to programs designed by the provincial government. However, we heard that the success of these programs was limited due to lack of resources. An example given was a community food bank that struggled with sourcing fresh and healthy food and keeping shelves stocked due to high demand. Participants recommended providing more funding for community food banks, greenhouses, and gardens. They also suggested addressing food insecurity by requiring new housing to include space for gardens, enabling an opportunity for self-sufficiency and greater food access.

Participants called for expansions to community wellness funding initiatives to combat food insecurity. This would allow communities to create specific supports and programming for vulnerable populations such as Elders and keep them from becoming isolated by maintaining cultural and community connections. An example was paying for hunting and fishing services for Elders who do not have family members able to provide for them. Another example was an Indigenous

community food bank for residents that struggled with sourcing healthy food and fresh produce.

### **Traditional foods/food sovereignty**

Suggestions to expand funding opportunities that increase food security often came from participants voicing concerns about how climate change is altering their ability to participate in traditional food gathering and hunting. The environment is shifting, and one participant described how their local climate has become almost desert-like, so the community needs funding to construct greenhouses. Other participants shared they are experiencing dwindling berry and fish harvests in their territories due to climate change.

***“Poverty for Indigenous Peoples is a result of colonization. Indigenous communities lost access to their natural resources and were forced to pay for food grown or caught on their unceded territories.”***

We heard that Indigenous Peoples are closely scrutinized when it comes to accessing their traditional resources, such as fishing, hunting, timber, and berries. Participants agreed they have an inherent right of access to these resources and are concerned about the loss of resources due to climate change. By extension, participants echoed that a holistic approach with cultural supports is required to help community members maintain their connection to their land, a major source of wellness, in addition to offsetting the rising cost of food and living.

***“We are rebuilding our community food garden and investment into food sovereignty would be beneficial. Not grant-based, but ongoing, set funding would be great for such initiatives.”***

– participant, virtual engagement session

### **Moving Forward**

Participants pointed out the success of Friendship Centres in providing effective programs, such as food access. They noted that a collaborative approach between Friendship Centres, local Indigenous communities, and municipalities was central to making a positive difference. Maintaining these partnerships or creating new ones must be a priority, as many participants shared their local Friendship Centre is a welcoming space when they need assistance. There is trust that support will be provided in a culturally appropriate and trauma-informed manner.

## **6. Education, Life Skills, and Employment**

### **Education**

Systemic barriers continue to prevent equal participation in education. Indigenous Peoples historically have lower high school participation and completion rates. Participants suggested the continuation of poverty among Indigenous people can be partly attributed to educational programs that ignore or marginalize Indigenous culture. While this is beginning to change through investments in education, and improvements in culturally relevant curriculum planning, it ties directly to the cycle of poverty, beginning with Indigenous youth. In the words of one participant:

***“Starting with culture is key. Incorporating cultural activities within programming provides cultural support for Indigenous students and helps to build their confidence and ties to their community. If they are feeling confident and supported, then they will be more successful moving on to other things.”***

– ISETs engagement session

***“From a lens of education, it would be nice to see more resources, funding, and supports that provide youth with the opportunities for land-based healing and medicine and access to traditional foods. School systems have opportunities to meet components of curriculum and mandates of UNDRIP that address shortcomings of public education...Shortcomings of resources and funds that can accommodate and target these areas for these students dealing with poverty and well-being challenges. Creating supports so that they can overcome these later in life.”***

- Participant, Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Engagement

## **Life Skills**

In addition to basic education that prioritizes Indigenous culture, participants spoke about gaps in life skills training for younger generations. Indigenous youth have not been receiving the necessary supports to transition into adulthood. Without a basic education understanding of life skills, such as how to budget resources, youth are set up to fail. Participants commented that vital survival tools should be taught while children are still in school, and that quality education is essential to break the cycle of poverty. This was highlighted as especially important in the context of youth transitioning from care. Participants advocated that these youth are in dire need of foundational life skills, so they don't find themselves homeless and out on the streets when they age out of provincial government care. This education must include topics like financial literacy and the associated responsibilities of adulthood, such as filing taxes.

***“The foster care system sets people up for failure from the beginning. Many children who are in the system, exit the system with fragmented life skills.”***

- Elder, Elders Gathering

## **Employment and Skills Training**

Employment counsellors are helpful for people needing work, as they can provide access to the employment training that many people need. Employment counsellors can also act as sources of information or provide basic communication tools and resources, which are vital for securing a job. However, people told us there is a lack of consistent access to employment counsellors across communities.

### **Rural and Remote Communities**

Smaller and more remote communities face unique challenges when it comes to employment. Job opportunities may be limited or require further education or training that cannot be obtained locally. Often, job seekers must leave their homes and travel to a nearby city to gain employment training, costing money and leaving their support systems behind in the process.

In the Northern region, we heard that the natural resource industries must do a better job with recruitment and training. However, it was also noted that dependence on the natural resource industries for jobs can have a disproportionate impact when the work comes to an end.

***“We are also remote – not as remote as some other communities – but access to training and opportunities is hard. We have to pay extra fees for people to travel into the city to then gain access and that creates barriers of being away from family and support systems.”***

- Participant, Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Engagement

### **Accessible Training Opportunities**

Participants said that it is essential for more organizations to build relationships with employers so that people can be matched through their interests, making targeted training more engaging and beneficial. People suggested funding local co-op programs for young people to gain work experience while giving back to their home community. We heard that providing skills training is vital, as people need specific skills to be employable. However, it was also noted that training opportunities are not accessible to everyone, especially those struggling with homelessness and poverty who are unable to seek employment support until they meet their basic needs.

***“It’s a catch-22 because unless people have safe housing and food security, they won’t be seeking the employment or training opportunities that could help them get out of that cycle.”***

- Participant, Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Engagement

### **WorkBC**

WorkBC is a government program that provides career tools and connects job seekers to employers with the goal of helping everyone in B.C. successfully navigate the labour market. Multiple participants highlighted challenges related to a lack of integration across employment services organizations. Participants reported that services often seem to be working in isolation from each other and felt a lack of unified information sharing. They noted that this can make it difficult for people to access the services they need and can force them to seek out multiple different services themselves. It was suggested that there needs to be a better process for connecting Indigenous employment seekers who reach out to WorkBC with local Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) providers<sup>3</sup>.

Experiences of discrimination by some employment services providers and employers was seen as leading to a reluctance to seek help among Indigenous people living in poverty because of fear about how they will be treated. Participants shared that there have been instances where fully qualified job seekers were treated differently by employers due to being involved in the ‘Indigenous Training Assistance’ program.

### **Moving Forward**

Many participants suggested modeling culturally relevant education and training through Friendship Centres, many of which already have programs in place. This would require more coordination and communication between the provincial government and Friendship Centres.

Multiple ISET program representatives strongly expressed that a different service delivery model would make more sense for the development and delivery of programs. They suggested that this model should ensure that funding, development and decision-making capabilities are placed solely in the hands of the ISET organizations themselves. Participants also expressed that communities should have the authority to design their own employment-related policies and programs based on local community needs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. An Indigenous-led design approach requires collaboration between the Federal government, who funds the program, the Province, and Indigenous service delivery organizations.

***“More thought needs to be given to how we can foster careers instead of just jobs.”***

- Participant, Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Engagement

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<sup>3</sup> The ISET Program is a federal program providing funding to Indigenous service delivery organizations that design and deliver job training services to First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous people in their communities. ISET providers are located throughout the province to serve First Nations, Métis, and Urban Indigenous Peoples. ISET program listings are available on the WorkBC website.

# Supplemental Métis Nation BC Review of Housing and Poverty Reduction

## Métis Engagement Approach

To inform its partnership with Métis Nation BC (MNBC), SDPR reviewed extensive feedback previously shared with government through Métis-specific reports and data published by Métis Nation BC. This allowed SDPR to work with MNBC to identify ways the Province has responded to priorities and recommendations to date and to identify key areas for further engagement. Métis-specific priorities outlined in previous reports mirrored many of the main themes identified in Indigenous engagement, including housing affordability, income assistance rates, service gaps, system navigation, and a lack of culturally appropriate supports and services.

To inform the current work on updating B.C.'s poverty reduction strategy for spring 2024, SDPR collaborated with MNBC to learn more about Métis experiences of poverty and wellness, with a focus on housing and homelessness. To support this work, MNBC partnered with Kwusen Research and Media Ltd. (Kwusen Research).

Kwusen Research conducted a Métis-specific literature review and gathered primary qualitative research via online surveys and interviews from April to December 2023. Given the lack of available data focused on the needs of Métis people experiencing homelessness, MNBC chose to focus engagement on a targeted sample of Métis people accessing MNBC housing support services. This important research provides valuable insight into how Métis people experience housing insecurity, homelessness, and other barriers to wellbeing.

## Methodology

### *Literature Review*

The literature review included both quantitative and qualitative research. Analysis revealed that most of the available data did not focus on the needs of Métis people who are experiencing homelessness.

### *Primary Research*

Kwusen Research collaborated with MNBC to create a survey and interview questionnaire. MNBC used their existing programs such as Reaching Home, a program that supports low-income MNBC citizens and self-identified Métis who are homeless, precariously housed or facing housing instability to solicit participants for the survey and interviews. Kwusen also conducted interviews with staff from MNBC's Ministry of Housing and Homelessness, who specialize in providing front-line supports.

## Results

The primary issue cited by respondents was the lack of affordable housing. This core issue, coupled with neighborhood suitability and safety, was felt more keenly by participants with children. Housing insecurity was also cited as a strong barrier to obtaining employment and education.

Most survey and interview respondents experienced at least one barrier to accessing or maintaining access to income assistance, rent supplements, or other forms of assistance. Surveys and interview responses aligned with MNBC staff observations of barriers including:

- Difficulty filling out applications and system navigation.
- Lack of communication between service providers (multiple applications meant having to repeatedly share their stories).



- Gaps in services between transitional housing supports and long-term/stable housing supports.

A lack of education on Métis identity, history and culture by the general public, was raised by some respondents as a barrier to accessing social assistance programs, obtaining safe and suitable housing, and maintaining their overall well-being. This was attributed to:

- The ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma and systemic racism.
- Discrimination.
- The lack of Métis specific services and cultural supports and programming.

The above issues create gaps in services including not having access to services available to Indigenous people but facing discrimination and other barriers when attempting to access non-Indigenous resources.

A majority of respondents had not utilized a non-MNBC program. Respondents who did provide feedback on accessing non-MNBC programming noted that people struggled to find programs they were eligible for.

MNBC's services, particularly the MNBC rent supplement program, were identified as contributors to obtaining or maintaining safe and stable housing. Several participants called for an expansion of MNBC's programs and expressed strong interest in Métis-specific solutions that address not only housing and income gaps, but also provide such wraparound supports as cultural, emotional, and community support.



# Conclusion

This engagement process reinforced that the root cause of poverty for Indigenous Peoples is the ongoing and harmful effects of colonization. Across all engagement sessions, participants agreed that to move forward and make meaningful changes, the B.C. government must begin prioritizing collaboration with First Nations and Indigenous organizations, including those that represent Métis and Inuit. Indigenous experiences and knowledge of poverty and well-being bring new solutions to old problems and address the unique barriers Indigenous people experience when it comes to housing, income supports and the costs of living, health and wellness, food security and education.

The recommendations and experiences shared in this engagement are being used to inform B.C.'s renewal of the poverty reduction strategy in spring 2024. It is also a step forward on a path toward meaningful and ongoing partnership and collaboration with First Nations, Modern Treaty Nations, Métis, and Inuit to better understand and address Indigenous experiences of poverty and wellness.

