

REBUILDING OUR ECONOMY FOR ALL

BC Federation of Labour Submission
to the Economic Recovery Taskforce

May 2020



Authority

This document is respectfully submitted on behalf of the Executive Officers of the BC Federation of Labour and represents the views of more than 500,000 affiliated members across the province of British Columbia.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "W. Laird Cronk". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "W".

W. Laird Cronk
President

Guiding Principles

The economic shutdown resulting from this pandemic is historically unprecedented. Never before have we collectively decided to close entire sectors of our economy, and dramatically curtail others in service of a greater good – our collective health. BC has weathered both this pandemic and the ensuing lockdown in large part because of the sacrifices and courage of working people. They have continued to do the important work of treating the sick, providing vital public services, and ensuring we can continue to have the necessities of life. COVID-19 has revealed that essential portions of BC's economy depend on frontline workers.

But as public respect for the value of their work has grown, so has our recognition of the many gaps this pandemic has exposed. For example, we better understand the paramount importance of workplace safety and standards, the need for robust public services and social supports, and our collective responsibility to address the continued marginalization of vulnerable populations.

We have the chance as our economy emerges from hibernation to address those gaps, and to do much more. The choices we make in the coming weeks and months can help us build an economy – and a province – equipped to address climate change while prospering along the way. Our choices must acknowledge and genuinely embrace reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and communities. Our choices must secure opportunities and equity in every community of this province.

There will always be voices who suggest we move in the opposite direction: that the public sector should retreat from the economy and the community; that working people who were this province's lifeline revert back to less protections, poorer working conditions and lower wages; that vulnerable populations remain vulnerable; that we should abandon years of progress toward reconciliation. They will argue that all of this will make business more competitive and generate jobs.

But even in an unprecedented situation, we can learn from history. And history tells us again and again – from the Great Depression through countless recessions and downturns – that 'austerity' only serves to freeze out working people and the most vulnerable, enriching a handful of already-wealthy people while hollowing our communities and leaving most of us to fend for ourselves. Austerity, in fact, is why we have many of the gaps this pandemic has so glaringly exposed in the first place. We also know that this pandemic will not impact people or communities equally, and thus our response must work to decrease these inequities, rather than exacerbate them. We can't cut and slash our way back to where we were before – let alone to a better, fairer, more sustainable and more prosperous future.

The question of British Columbia's post-pandemic recovery is not a neutral one. It represents an unprecedented opportunity to make choices that reflect the fundamental values of our province. How we approach recovery will reveal what it is we truly value, what we believe is worth protecting and investing in, and how sincere our commitment is to an economy that works for everyone.

The BCFED believes that the province's post-pandemic economic recovery plan must be led by the following principles:

1. Economic recovery must be centered on the success of working people

The success of workers must be front and centre in any economic recovery plan. Their insights and expertise are vital, and their voices must be at the table because recovery cannot happen without them. A full economic recovery will require us to increase workers' wages, protections, and power in the workplace across all sectors in BC. Workers need to be empowered in response to this downturn and must not be asked to take cuts to fund the recovery of their employers. While business viability is important, we are already seeing too many employers responding to financial pressures by attempting to dodge labour regulations, employment standards, and workers' rights.

Workplace health is priority number one. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of robust workplace health and safety programs and the important role of workers' voices at joint occupational health and safety committees. As the economy re-opens, workers will play a central role, and their health and safety is critical to our success. The government must set the tone regarding the critical importance of health and safety, not just during a pandemic but every day.

Strengthening health and safety laws and regulations and increasing worker rights and income will shorten the impact of this pandemic, as a successful recovery relies on lifting all of us up. Economic support programs must focus on job retention and preserving full-time, healthy, safe, and stable employment. Workers voices must be reflected in every step of the path forward.

2. It's time to recognize the true importance of long-undervalued work

BC's post-pandemic recovery presents the chance to properly recognize, value, and compensate workers in economic sectors now recognized as essential, such as grocery store workers, healthcare workers, and frontline community and social service workers, to name a few. Workers in these sectors have been historically undervalued, and they disproportionately employ women and people of colour. While the 7 pm applause is good and appreciated, it does not put food on the table. These workers deserve better – much better. They deserve wages and benefits that recognize their innate dignity and reflect the importance of their work. And they deserve the power to organize and bargain collectively to improve their working conditions.

3. We must prioritize the rights of Indigenous communities in BC and continue implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

COVID-19 has highlighted the acute need to transform the colonial structures embedded in the public and private sectors in the province to come into line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. Once this restructuring has occurred, in the spirit of the province's recent legislation, the *BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, the opportunity created by the reimagining of BC's economy is one of true inclusion, built into the foundation of our provincial structure, allowing us to then walk a path of reconciliation, co-led by Indigenous communities and the public and private sectors.

4. BC must invest in and expand public services and programs

Public services are always critical, but even more so during the times of crisis and upheaval. They represent crucial supports that can enrich life for everyone in our society while establishing a floor that nobody will fall beneath. But as the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear, the province's suite of public services and programs have many holes in coverage that leave out many of the most vulnerable people in our province.

To close those gaps, BC must dramatically increase its investment in public services and programs. Whether related to income, housing, healthcare and childcare, access to nutritious food, education, or any other resources essential to meaningful security and well-being, the province must build a more robust and fortified suite of public services to ensure that no single person in this province is ever without those crucial resources.

5. Too many workers are falling through the cracks in B.C.'s patchwork employment standards system - workers need more security and robust standards across every employment sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the depth of worker precarity and employers' increasing reliance on contract and gig workers. It has also demonstrated that many workers must cobble together multiple jobs at multiple worksites to make ends meet. Workers in this province deserve much more security and stability in their employment. So much of the quality of our lives depends on our income, yet many workers live paycheck to paycheck, often relying on debt to get by. We must ensure that every worker in BC is covered by robust employment standards and prevent the exploitation that all too often comes with non-standard employment structures such as misclassified contracting and gig work. We must ensure that every worker has the right to join a union and bargain for fair working conditions. We must establish fair standards for working conditions in sectors that have been undervalued and underpaid for far too long.

6. We must make up for lost time in addressing the climate crisis, with an accelerated and inclusive path to a green economy

We can draw many lessons from this pandemic, but one of the most important is that denial is a disastrous strategy for dealing with catastrophic threats. And nowhere is that truer than with the threat posed by human-driven climate change. Addressing that threat is a matter of long-term survival; increasingly, it's also a question of our economic well-being in the here and now. It is also our responsibility to others around the world who will be hardest hit as sea levels and temperatures rise.

The global collapse of oil prices is only the latest drastic swing in the boom-and-bust fossil fuel economy – and one more sign that a sustainable future must rely on a swift transition to cleaner, renewable sources of energy. BC is already a global leader in green technologies, and the restart of our economy is an unparalleled opening for an aggressive agenda to accelerate that move and the thousands of well-paying jobs it will entail. Such a transition will require careful attention to ensure all communities and workers benefit from the new opportunities offered by a modern, green economy, particularly those hardest hit by the decline of carbon-intensive industries. This will demand an extensive array of investments such as training and skill upgrading – but the result will be a more resilient economy, a healthier environment and a viable future for communities throughout the province. And it will mark our province's leadership in taking on the imperative of

dealing with climate change. The province's Clean BC initiative demonstrates how we can create thousands of jobs while simultaneously building a better future for BC.

7. Use public investment to restart the economy – it's time for large-scale public investment, not austerity

British Columbians working in the private sector have been hit especially hard by job losses and work reductions associated with COVID-19. While public-sector workers have also experienced significant layoffs, this pandemic has demonstrated the volatility of the private sector exacerbated by lower levels of unionization and high susceptibility to even brief periods of economic disruption.

Strategic public investment in public services such as childcare and transit, public housing and public works projects such as infrastructure development, produce multiplier effects that create employment and support workers across all sectors as they return to their jobs. In recognition of the inherent susceptibility of the private sector to shocks such as pandemics or environmental degradation, the provincial government can choose to expand public services and employment to provide further security to workers, and as a means of protecting the provincial economy and labour force from future crises.

Additionally, public-sector investment can be strategically used to encourage, facilitate, and structure private-sector investment which will produce broad societal benefits and create secure, well-paying and family-supporting jobs – especially in support of regional economies throughout BC.

8. We need to build long-term resilience in our communities

This pandemic has proven just how fragile our social fabric is. Under the strains imposed by the pandemic, wide gaps have appeared in our communities' capacity to protect every member from harm and insecurity.

As we rebuild, we must look beyond economic indicators to human outcomes – and in particular our ability to ensure the basic needs of every British Columbian are met. Our goal entails nothing less than the end of poverty, homelessness and other inequities. And it goes deeper: a sustainable, internally resilient society guarantees not only that everyone will have housing, food, comprehensive healthcare, childcare and other supports, but also a meaningful connection to the communities they live and work in and with – even in times of crisis, with no exceptions.

Stages of Recovery

We envision BC's recovery as going through distinct phases. Each phase offers the opportunity to take up a different focus, building from dealing with present and pre-existing emergencies to planning for and investing in a prosperous future.

Phase 1: Immediate (now)

The first phase deals with policies that are needed immediately, to respond to and address the emergency crises that British Columbians are dealing with right now. In this phase, the priority is shoring up emergency programs and public services to meet both pre-existing and newly arisen crises in the province.

Worker health and safety

We recommend that the government:

- Work with unions, employers, WCB and the PHO to develop a plan for safe relaunch of key industries - make sure employers have developed exposure control plans, train workers and provide personal protective equipment (PPE) when exposure can't be eliminated.
- Use *Emergency Powers Act* to provide presumptive coverage for occupational disease for essential workers who are exposed to or contract COVID-19 while WCB completes its regulatory review.
- Secure a stable supply of PPE for workers who require it, including for those outside of health care (community and social services, public education, transit, grocery, etc.)
- Work with the WCB to provide workers and employers with support and resources.
- Effectively enforce health and safety laws and regulations through the WCB and issue penalties for employer non-compliance up to and including jail time.
- Ensure workers with health vulnerabilities or who are otherwise at higher risk from COVID-19 be permitted to work from home or granted another appropriate accommodation, and that they have access to special paid leaves.

Worker rights and protection

We recommend that the government:

- Ensure that government continues with planned worker supports, including scheduled minimum wage increases.
- Protect worker rights in the *Employment Standards Act* and *Labour Code*, including the right to severance pay.
- Develop recruitment and retention strategies for community and social services and health care, including higher safety standards, better wages and benefits, guaranteed minimum work hours, stable shifts, and access to childcare and benefits.
- Ensure workers have access to paid sick leave through government- or employer-funded programs so that no worker feels forced to work sick.
- Ensure that collective agreements and their contract provisions continue to be honoured and respected by employers.
- For employment sectors where recovery is delayed, such as the hospitality sector, explore economic supports and agreements that will help employers keep workers employed and ensure that that workers have the right to return to their job, if they choose, when the sector re-opens.
- Ensure workers can access their right to unionize while health restrictions remain in place by providing a fair, timely, and effective process for certification votes.

Public services and supports

We recommend that the government:

- Secure federal and provincial funding to re-open transit routes so workers who rely on transit can safely get to work or attain essential supplies.
- Continue to provide childcare, including for school-aged children, with a focus on health and safety for children, childcare providers, teachers, EAs, and other school district staff.
- Increase access to mental health services and supports for British Columbians struggling with social isolation and the economic impact of this crisis.
- Continue to work with unions representing workers in hotels, food preparation, and cleaning to support public programs to house vulnerable populations, health care workers, and temporary foreign workers during this crisis. Develop and implement consultation and co-development processes to ensure that workers and their unions are included in the design and implementation of support programs.
- Resist the use of privatized services as a stopgap measure to support strained public services, especially in healthcare, and instead extend public systems.
- Invest in and prioritize recruitment, training, and hiring for all public health services to address the shortfall of workers and human resources in the public healthcare sector.
- Increase access to mental healthcare and social supports for health sector workers.
- Establish directives and mandates ensuring that all sites which are used to provide childcare (including schools) are safe for all workers within them.
- Cease layoffs or dismissals of public-sector workers and re-hire any workers who have been laid off or dismissed during the pandemic.

Support for vulnerable populations

We recommend that the government:

- Continue to fill gaps in economic support programs to ensure migrant workers, undocumented workers, sex workers, and other workers in underground economies don't fall through the cracks.
- Review provincial carceral detention and psychiatric institutionalization, broaden the rules regarding eligibility for release, and safely release all those who can be. Establish and invest in transition and community reception and re-integration programs to support those released from detention and institutionalization.
- Expand financial and legal aid, support programs and transition housing for those who have experienced or are experiencing domestic, sexual, or intimate-partner violence.

Addressing climate emergency

We recommend that the government:

- Maintain the carbon tax and penalties for emitters.
- Plan implementation of major climate emergency mitigation strategies.

Phase 2: Short-term (1-4 months)

The second phase deals with policies needed over the short term as the province moves toward re-opening the economy. These proposals aim to ensure workers have adequate supports and protections

as they return to work, as well as ensuring that health and safety remain the highest priority. In this stage, insufficient public and occupational health and safety precautions will endanger the health and well-being of the workers that we are asking to shepherd the provincial economy back to activity, spur a re-acceleration of new cases of COVID-19 in the province, and erode consumer confidence. Workers must be directly consulted and actively involved in planning how their sector will re-open. Any shortsighted cost-savings some employers might hope to gain by cutting corners here would be wiped out several times over – along with the confidence of their customers – if the result was the re-imposition of an economic lockdown.

Worker health and safety:

We recommend that the government:

- Provide presumptive coverage for mental health disorders for all workers.
- Release the Patterson Report and recommendations for improvements to the Workers' Compensation System.
- Work with the WCB and the PHO to monitor efficacy of health and safety programs and compliance with laws and regulations.
- Continue enforcement and provide support, training, and worker- and employer-education programs.
- Work with the WCB to ensure they have allocated the required resources to enforce, support and monitor health and safety programs.

Worker rights and protections

We recommend that the government:

- Lobby the federal government to maintain expansive income supports and guarantees for workers and small- and medium-sized business affected by the economic downturn.
- Make government measures to stabilize the long-term care sector as part of the move to single-site staffing permanent and return to a common provincial standard for all workers in this sector, including fair wages and benefits.
- Extend and/or supplement the wage subsidy for workers in sectors that will take the longest to recover, such as tourism and hospitality. Encourage employers in these sectors to participate in government wage subsidy programs, and return all workers laid off due to COVID-19 to their payroll, covering wages and benefits.
- Continue to work with entertainment industry unions and the WCB to develop a plan for the safe relaunch of the film and television industry, with a focus on getting BC projects and talent back to work.
- Ensure universal application of successorship laws to prohibit contract flipping.
- Liaise with federal government to provide support for BC-based airport authorities, with the condition that they retain their workers.
- Eliminate all exemptions to the minimum wage, including for hand harvesters and other excluded workers.
- Legislate pay equity to eliminate wage discrimination by gender.
- Increase funding to the Workers' Advisers Office.

Public services and supports

We recommend that the government:

- Expand general delivery of childcare services to achieve universal childcare through the public funding of publicly run childcare facilities and assess need to expand summer 2020 childcare and programs for school-aged students.
- Direct health authorities to bring healthcare support services including housekeeping, food services and laundry back into the public system, repealing their privatization under the previous government.
- Expand grants for local artists to research and develop projects, and to find ways to share their work following public health directives.
- Improve access to training programs and implement recruitment and retention strategies for health care workers.
- Increase investment in public education, including post-secondary, to rectify pre-existing staffing and resource deficits, and to account for reductions in international student tuition. Ensure the maintenance, if not increase of geographic accessibility and breadth of course offerings of post-secondary education in BC.
- Increase financial assistance for post-secondary education in BC and develop a plan for the reduction and eventual elimination of tuition costs and charges for educational resources such as textbooks.
- Prioritize funding for public and unionized post-secondary institutions. Support the establishing of sectoral standards ensuring fair wages and benefits to educators, administrators, and support workers.
- Develop and implement a program to forgive student loans for low- and middle-income British Columbians and for workers in sectors with recruitment and retention challenges such as health care, community and social services, and education.
- Develop a plan for decreasing the number of students in public K-12 classes, and increase funding as required, to allow schools to function with greater physical distancing.
- Review and consider expanding the newly instituted increase to the top income tax bracket.
- Provide adequate resources to implement the *BC Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People Act*.
- Continue to expand the provision of free menstrual products in all public buildings.

Supports for vulnerable populations

We recommend that the government:

- Provide permanent quality housing for the homeless population, with wrap-around services.
- Make the increase to income assistance and disability rates permanent.
- Expand and make-permanent access to a safe drug supply, including non-medical delivery.
- Support the right of everyone in BC to access basic and essential services, including healthcare, regardless of their migration status and without fear of being reported to immigration officials.
- Increase funding to libraries reflective of their offering access to supports and resources for vulnerable populations.
- Design and initiate comprehensive, gender-, race-, disability- and equity-based analyses of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, to properly inform support and recovery efforts.

Infrastructure projects

We recommend that the government:

- Develop and initiate a long-term road repair and upgrade program.
- Expedite and expand seismic upgrades of schools, hospitals and other government buildings.
- Move ahead with stage 1 investment in public transit expansions, including Skytrain extensions and the Massey Tunnel and Patullo Bridge replacement.
- Fully publicly fund and expedite initiation of shovel-ready projects in the health, K-12, post-secondary, and municipal sectors.
- Provide incentives for lumber producers/tenure holders to participate in value-added manufacturing.
- Develop Community Benefits Agreements for existing and future projects to ensure the benefits of public investment is captured by workers and community through employment and upskilling opportunities. Implement provisions to prioritize the hiring of women, Indigenous workers and members of other equity-seeking groups. Include local-hire provisions in CBAs.
- Develop and initiate a long-term hazardous material abatement program for empty public and commercial buildings and upgrade these buildings for future use.
- Increase financial resources available for trades training to permit adherence with new physical distancing requirements. Resource and implement major recruitment and re-training initiatives to bring displaced workers into the construction industry.
- Consult and work with Indigenous communities – at their request and direction – to design and implement on-reserve constructions projects. Partner with BC Building Trades to provide support and training where needed.
- Increase capacity of the province's energy systems, including hydro, solar and wind farms, and energy transmission lines.
- Ensure maximum value for BC's natural resources and good family- and community-supporting jobs when bringing the province's resources to market.
- Ensure the use of union-made, BC- and Canadian-produced steel products for infrastructure projects.
- Provide stable, long-term funding to BC Centre for Women in the Trades (BCCWITT).

Addressing climate emergency

We recommend that the government:

- Include climate mitigation conditions in any private-sector bailout package to ensure a green recovery and reduce carbon emissions.
- Create and expand energy retrofit programs to more public, private, commercial, and residential buildings throughout BC.
- Provide direct funding for public research and innovation related to climate change at universities and colleges, including work on mitigation technologies, environmental remediation, habitat restoration and preservation, and more.
- Invest in tree planting as a sector of stable employment.
- Ensure existing LNG projects in BC are used as a transition energy source away from higher-emission fossil fuels to a zero-emission economy and meet the climate targets of the province's Clean BC initiative.

Market solutions

We recommend that the government:

- Develop a 'Buy BC' strategy for public procurement and encourage local consumers to buy local.
- Expedite the recognition of international certifications, credentials, and qualifications.

Phase 3: Mid-term (4-8 months)

The third phase of recovery is where BC can truly take the reins of recovery. By leading with public investment, the province can create thousands of secure, family-supporting jobs addressing existing needs in our communities, expanding public services and supports, and bolstering the provincial labour force in case of future crises. The infusion of wealth into our communities will support local businesses and fuel the recovery of regional economies. This third phase is where we can move from being reactive to being proactive.

Worker health and safety

We recommend that the government:

- Move ahead with the implementation of worker-centred compensation reforms in the *Workers' Compensation Act* and Regulations.

Worker rights and protections

We recommend that the government:

- Remove existing statutory barriers to joining or forming a union by reinstating the one-step certification process.
- Improve worker protections including hours of work, overtime, paid vacation, etc.
- Ensure that precarious workers and gig workers are not excluded from Employment Standards protections by ending the misclassification of workers and strengthening the enforcement of ESA regulations to reduce employers' reliance on precarious and gig workers.
- Research and implement sectoral bargaining. Strike a single-issue commission to implement a made-in-BC multi-employer sectoral bargaining model.
- Establish a long-term strategy to provide all workers – including casual and part-time workers – with access to paid sick leave.

Public services and supports

We recommend that the government:

- Complete bringing long-term seniors' care into the public health system, with private, for-profit facilities removed from the sector.
- Make high-speed internet access a universal right for all British Columbians.
- Develop a permanent, local manufacturing stream for essential goods including PPE, essential drugs, basic hygiene products, medical supplies, and essential foods.
- Expand primary health care reforms to ensure multi-disciplinary teams include health science professionals and skilled health workers, and expand the Community Health Centre model for delivery of primary care.

- Institute a provincial international student program in K-12 education to ensure equity among school districts and eliminate districts' reliance on international student tuition.
- Commission local artists to develop artistic works and performances across mediums and make them available to the public in accordance with social distancing guidelines.

Supports for vulnerable populations

We recommend that the government:

- Build publicly owned social housing, acquire and refit hotels, and develop modular housing, with community benefit agreements established for all projects.
- Build public infrastructure to protect and support sex workers.
- Expand and stabilize food security networks.
- Make permanent the waiving of the three-month waiting period to access BC's Medical Services Plan.
- Work with the federal government to implement permanent residency upon arrival for all migrant workers including those without status.

Infrastructure projects

We recommend that the government:

- Expedite planned infrastructure projects including schools, hospitals, other government buildings, and transit.
- Revise building codes and standards, particularly in schools and hospitals, to allow for greater physical distancing.
- Acquire or build publicly owned and operated long-term and seniors' care facilities.
- Acquire or build publicly owned and operated childcare facilities.
- Invest in expanding apprenticeship and training program opportunities for women workers, Indigenous workers, and other groups underrepresented in the trades.
- Re-institute compulsory trades certification in BC.
- Include comprehensive climate-responsive and green-transition education in each respective trade.
- Expand transit-accessible and pedestrian-oriented community outdoor infrastructure and green spaces.

Addressing the climate emergency

We recommend that the government:

- Move ahead with the electrification of the transit fleet.
- Launch conservation programs and habitat restoration projects.
- Undertake remediation of industrial sites, similar to federal programs that have been launched to clean up abandoned oil and gas wells.
- Replace all government vehicles at end of life with e-vehicles and convert where possible.
- Develop and install zero-emission vehicle infrastructure throughout BC.
- Continue to expand public, commercial, and residential building retrofits.

Phase 4: Long-term (8+ months)

The fourth phase looks furthest ahead, to British Columbia's social and economic future. In re-opening the economy, we have an opportunity to significantly change how things operate. We can structure society to avert the sorts of inequities that have existed for decades, if not centuries. We can build internal sufficiency and long-term resiliency into the province, ensuring that we have the capacity to produce and distribute essential resources even if borders and trading networks are shut down. And we can lay the foundations for shifting to a post-carbon economy. In short, we can begin building the world we want, rather than simply re-build the world we had.

Worker health and safety

We recommend that the government:

- Continue to support the development of worker-centered regulatory improvements and policies at the WCB.

Worker rights and protections

We recommend that the government:

- Develop a plan to implement a living wage in BC.
- Increase annual operating budgets for both the LRB and ESB to ensure effective implementation of recent changes, strengthen enforcement, and guarantee that labour issues and disputes are addressed in a timely manner.

Public services and supports

We recommend that the government:

- Implement fare-free public transit throughout BC.
- Develop a plan for re-establishing inter-city transit, with connections to neighbouring provinces and territories.
- Expand public health services and facilities to include universal dental, para-medical, and mental health services.
- End the contracting out of HandyDART and other transit services.
- Expand ICBC's role as a public insurer to offer home, life, non-automobile vehicle, and travel insurance.
- Work with the Federal government to deliver fair pharmacare.

Supports for vulnerable populations

We recommend that the government:

- Continue to lift income assistance and disability rates.
- Expand social housing programs and wrap-around services to more communities in BC.

Infrastructure projects and addressing climate emergency

We recommend that the government:

- Develop and initiate a plan for constructing a 100% clean-energy power grid.

- Align government procurement and infrastructure renewal programs with provincial climate goals.
- Implement ongoing sustainable forestry, agriculture, and aquaculture management systems.
- Make large-scale public investments in the green energy sector, including research and development.
- Invest in carbon sink technologies and systems.
- Develop programs to promote biodiversity.
- Develop and construct green-energy infrastructure for public distribution.

Policy Categories

Ensuring the recovery is durable, just and equitable requires bold action on many fronts – and all of them must be pursued in the spirit of reconciliation, in full partnership with Indigenous communities.

Here is a summary of how we recommend the BC government approach key policy areas.

Worker health and safety

Workers' health and safety must be paramount throughout the recovery. The government must ensure that all essential and frontline workers are protected according to the hierarchy of controls. To accomplish this, the government must ensure that employers work with the WCB and PHO and their employees to ensure all necessary health and safety precautions are in place. Support, training and worker and employer education will be critical as workplaces re-open, with consistent monitoring and reporting to ensure health and safety programs are effective. The public now understands the importance of workplace health and safety in a way they never have before, and this is the time to put workers at the centre of the WCB and make long-overdue improvements to workers compensation legislation.

Worker rights and protections

The pandemic clearly demonstrated that the rights and protections of workers in BC are insufficient. Thousands of workers that we collectively rely upon are underpaid and lack job security. We need to strengthen those protections immediately and ensure that existing laws and labour regulations are enforced. Over the longer term, our economic recovery will require significant structural improvements to working conditions throughout BC to end abusive practices for good, address the changing nature of work, provide greater protection for all workers, especially those dealing with precarious employment, and provide sectoral stability and better access to collective bargaining. And for sectors that were hard hit and are likely to take longer to recover, such as tourism and hospitality, emergency supports will need to continue, and additional supports may be needed.

Public services and supports

The public sector is crucial in times of crisis, both in providing essential services and resources to communities throughout BC and in offering secure employment for workers in the province. The public sector must be central in the province's recovery efforts. The pandemic has spotlighted the urgent need

to increase staffing levels in health care, including in specialized health care services and long-term care. As well, we must continue the process of making long-term seniors' a public-sector service. Investing in public services such as childcare and transit will be necessary to support workers who have remained on the job through the pandemic, and to enable workers to begin returning to their jobs as safe re-opening permits; making transit fare-free will help to quickly restore ridership. Over the longer term, expanded access to post-secondary education will allow our workforce to reskill and help sustain our recovery. Where private insurers have responded to COVID-19 by reducing coverage, a broader role for ICBC as a public insurance provider will help close those gaps. And investment in public services will also allow us to create employment while supporting historically under-served and marginalized groups – an effort that must also be central to the province's recovery.

Supports for vulnerable populations

The communities in BC which have experienced the most grievous harm related to COVID-19 are the same communities that have been most impacted by the province's overdose crisis, the crises of homelessness and poverty, and other existing inequities in BC. The pandemic and ensuing lockdown have had impacts far beyond the economic, in areas such as domestic violence and mental health. And economic support programs still don't address the needs of many of the most vulnerable workers, including sex workers, undocumented workers and those in the underground economy. This economic recovery is both an opportunity and an imperative to end these inequities for good, from housing-first strategies to an end to poverty.

Infrastructure projects

Investing in public infrastructure benefits British Columbia across the board. The economic stimulus provided through capital investment, and the well-paying jobs that result through Community Benefits Agreements, can fuel recovery in communities throughout the province, aided by local sourcing and hiring. The resulting new and upgraded infrastructure keeps supporting the recovery – for example, by making it easier for employees to get to their jobs and goods to get to market. Our communities and families benefit from safer schools and better access to health facilities. And we all benefit from an expanded, modernized energy system, including new renewable energy capacity. To make the most from this construction, we must invest in the skills and certification of workers in the trades, including greater participation by underrepresented groups; change the way we build to reflect what we've learned from the pandemic about (for example) physical distancing; and prioritize projects that help us make the transition to a greener economy.

Addressing the climate emergency

The global climate crisis hasn't paused for the pandemic, compounding the time we've lost through years of inaction. Suspending (or, worse, reversing) what climate measures we have in place now would be short-sighted in the extreme, delaying our progress toward a modern green economy while the rest of the world moves on. The good news is that accelerating climate action can spur growth in sectors of our economy that hold tremendous promise now and in the coming years. In the immediate term, that means staying on track with B.C.'s current climate measures. Over the longer term, it requires such initiatives as ensuring climate-crisis response is central to our stimulus efforts, investing in research, innovation and mitigation, spurring manufacturing in green technology sectors, and retrofitting our built environment.

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