

Media Announcement:

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Communities across Canada are embracing a living wage.

In Canada today, more than 1.8 million employed people don't earn enough at their jobs to pull themselves and their families above the poverty line: they are working and poor. In fact 150,000 working Canadians are dependent on food banks just to be able to eat. Paying employees a living wage can change that for millions of Canadians and employers in 30 cities are set to do just that.

Living wage initiatives are based on the premise that work should lift workers out of poverty. A living wage is the amount of money an employee needs to earn to cover the cost of basic necessities and to adequately participate in community life.

Unlike provincially mandated minimum wages, a living wage is an evidence-based standard that calculates the costs of living in a given community based on a basket of goods and services. Minimum wages do not come close to meeting the actual cost of living for individuals and families, whereas a living wage can make a world of difference in health outcomes and quality of life. The living wage rate varies across Canada due to differences in the cost of living and government transfers, as it is based on local and provincial costs for goods such as food, housing, health care, transportation and childcare.

Thirty cities in four provinces have engaged in local discussions on how to create living wage communities. To aid these discussions, two new websites are being launched; www.livingwageforfamilies.ca for communities in BC and www.livingwagecanada.ca for communities throughout Canada.

New Westminster, B.C. became the first municipality in Canada to officially become a living wage employer in 2010. Vancity Credit Union and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board are two of Canada's largest private and public sector employers to sign living wage declarations. Kamloops, Calgary, Saskatoon, Guelph, Kingston and dozens of other Canadian cities are actively engaged in living wage discussions supported by national organizations such as Vibrant Communities Canada and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Across Canada, employers are adopting living wage policies because it is good for their employees and good for their bottom line. When living wages are paid, staff turnover and absenteeism is reduced while productivity dramatically increases. Proponents see living wage as a win for healthier, more prosperous communities.

"Canada is joining an international movement that has already seen more than 150 jurisdictions in the United States, Great Britain and New Zealand commit to living wage campaigns" said Michael McCarthy Flynn, coordinator of the Living Wage for Families Campaign in BC.

For Further Information:

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