

## BRITISH COLUMBIA HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

422 Richards St, Suite 170  
Vancouver, BC V6B 2Z4

+1 (604) 265-9298  
bchumanist.ca  
info@bchumanist.ca



## ISSUES SUMMARY

Since 1984, the British Columbia Humanist Association has campaigned for progressive and secular values. Humanism is a worldview that promotes human dignity without belief in a higher power. Humanists have a long commitment to democracy and human rights. We support the principles of social justice and fighting against discrimination. Documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and various Human Rights Acts across Canada exemplify Humanist values. Henry Morgentaler founded Humanist Canada during the fight for reproductive freedoms and we have been involved in campaigning for secularism in schools, supporting LGBTQ rights and the right to die with dignity.

We have adopted the Amsterdam Declaration (2002) as our definition of Humanism<sup>1</sup> and interpret it in context of the manifestos and declarations that preceded it. This document lists the policy statements adopted by the Board of the BCHA (or members directly at an Annual General Meeting) that show how we put Humanist principles in practice. Some of these positions are inspired by the resolutions of Humanists UK and the American Humanist Association and in some cases we have adopted those resolutions verbatim.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/about\\_humanism](https://www.bchumanist.ca/about_humanism)

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# 1 HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

We are firmly committed to the protection and promotion of human rights, as exemplified in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These rights represent shared values rooted in our common humanity and our shared human needs, transcending cultural and religious traditions. This regard for human rights and for the equal dignity of all human beings underpins many of our policies.

We take an intersectional view of social justice issues, recognizing that working to liberate all marginalized communities is the best way to lift the prospects of any one group. Humanism motivates us to act on a moral imperative to transform systems of oppression because they are incompatible with the aspirations of humanism.

## 1.1 Realizing Human Rights and Equality

Approved: August 13, 2018, Amended: November 26, 2019

Humanist principles of justice and of valuing the dignity of each individual lead us to support equality and oppose unwarranted discrimination. Humanists have been deeply involved in campaigning against discrimination – from homophobia to racism – for decades. Humanists have also been in the forefront of developing modern ideas of human rights, and have been prominent human rights defenders.

We support efforts to reduce systemic discrimination and believe all efforts should be based on the best available evidence. Where there is an absence of evidence, agencies and organizations should follow best practices in collecting data to inform future activities, while respecting the privacy rights of individuals.

We support the BC Human Rights Commission.<sup>1</sup> We support recognizing “nonreligion” and “socioeconomic status” as protected grounds in human rights legislation.

## 1.2 Discrimination against the nonreligious

Approved: August 13, 2018

As British Columbia’s community for Humanists and voice for the non-religious, we are particularly concerned with discrimination against the nonreligious and the effects of religious privilege in society (see Section 2 – Secularism). We work to bring about a progressive society where Humanists and atheists are accepted equally with the religious.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/1000\\_for\\_protecting\\_nonreligious\\_rights](https://www.bchumanist.ca/1000_for_protecting_nonreligious_rights)

### 1.3 Minority within a minority

Approved: August 13, 2018

Stereotyping indigenous and minority ethnic communities as religious monoliths obscures often rich traditions of freethought and religious dissent and can translate into increased pressure to conform to religious dogma. We stand in solidarity with ex-Muslims, Indian rationalists and the nonreligious in indigenous and immigrant communities.

### 1.4 LGBTQ2+

Approved: August 13, 2018

We actively support the pursuit of equal rights for individuals regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. While many discriminate against these groups on the basis of religious ideology or so-called “traditional values,” a growing majority rejects the idea that LGBTQ2+ individuals and families are second-class citizens, and encourages tolerance and public sector reform of their rights to marry, adopt children and live free from intimidation, hate speech and violence.

We have regularly participated in the Vancouver Pride Parade, supported moves to include gender identity and expression as a protected ground in federal and provincial human rights legislation and have spoken out against so-called “conversion therapy” and support efforts to ban the practice.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.5 Trans-Inclusion

Approved: July 15, 2019

*“Humanism is ethical. It affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others.”*

– Amsterdam Declaration 2002

Over 2500 biologists, geneticists, psychologists, anthropologists, physicians, neuroscientists, social scientists, biochemists, mental health service providers and other scientists, including nine Nobel laureates, signed a statement in October 2018 that said:

*“The relationship between sex chromosomes, genitalia, and gender identity is complex, and not fully understood. There are no genetic tests that can unambiguously determine gender, or even sex. Furthermore, even if such tests existed, it would be unconscionable to use the pretext*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/vancouver\\_urged\\_to\\_ban\\_conversion\\_therapy](https://www.bchumanist.ca/vancouver_urged_to_ban_conversion_therapy)

*of science to enact policies that overrule the lived experience of people's own gender identities.”<sup>1</sup>*

As Humanists in an evolving society, we recognize that defining gender along a strict binary is anti-scientific and no longer encompasses the diversity of expression and understanding of our society.

### Gender-neutral bathrooms

We as Humanists hold that society has a duty to provide basic, safe necessities that are equally inclusive and welcoming to all members of our community. Bathrooms that enforce outdated modalities can be a source of acute anxiety and place vulnerable, marginalised people in danger. Bathrooms located in public facilities and businesses should be designated as gender neutral. Gender neutral bathrooms provide safe, inclusive facilities for all.

### Pronouns

*“When someone is referred to by the wrong pronoun, it can make the person feel disrespected and alienated. Proactive pronoun disclosure is one way Humanists can live the progressive, inclusive, and affirming values to which we aspire.”*

– American Humanist Association<sup>2</sup>

The use of gender neutral and neo-pronouns is inclusive, respectful to those marginalized, and consistent with our philosophy of progressive community engagement. Staff, board and volunteers are encouraged to disclose their third-person pronouns on the website, in their email signature and when introducing themselves so that people who communicate with or talk about them can use pronouns that accurately describe them. This helps normalize the practice. We encourage people who engage with us to do the same.

## 1.6 Colonialism & Systemic Racism

Approved: August 13, 2018, Amended November 25, 2019

Humanists share the concern of anti-racist advocates about continued discrimination against indigenous peoples and people of colour. In Canada, there are disproportionate numbers of indigenous people and people of colour in our corrections systems<sup>3</sup>, there have been recent spates of white supremacist propaganda on Canadian campuses<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> “Transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming people #Won’tBeErased by pseudoscience” <https://not-binary.org/statement/>

<sup>2</sup> “Understanding Personal Pronouns and Why the American Humanist Association Proactively Discloses Them” [http://americanhumanist.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/aha\\_personalpronouns.pdf](http://americanhumanist.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/aha_personalpronouns.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/comm/press/press20131126-eng.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://torontoist.com/2017/11/revealed-white-supremacists-behind-alt-right-posters-around-city/>

we still live with the legacy of Residential Schools. We support the efforts of those groups that speak to these continued injustices and their effects, which we acknowledge to amount to genocide.

We support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>1</sup>, the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission<sup>2</sup> and the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls<sup>3</sup>.

## 1.7 White Nationalism is Anathema to Humanism

Approved: May 13, 2019

A majority of members in attendance at the 2019 Annual General Meeting voted in favour of the following resolution:

As Humanists, we believe that every individual has dignity, value, and the right to personal fulfillment. As such, we condemn bigotry based on national origin, race, and personal beliefs, which interferes with individual liberty and well-being. In particular, we are deeply concerned about the string of recent attacks in Norway, Quebec City, Charlottesville, Christchurch and elsewhere that were motivated by white nationalist ideology. We wholeheartedly denounce white nationalism as anathema to Humanism and as a threat to peaceful democratic society.

## 1.8 Women's equality and reproductive freedoms

Approved: August 13, 2018

Humanism does not eliminate the need for feminism in the struggle for women's equality.

Humanism's commitment to personal autonomy leads us to be unambiguously pro-choice and this is reflected in the history of Humanism in Canada.

Henry Morgentaler, inspired by his Humanist morality, took his fight to make abortions available all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. That case struck down Canada's abortion law in 1988 and since then it has been a decision between a patient and their doctor.

Today, we fight to make sure people continue to have that choice and that contraceptives are accessible to all who want them, in Canada and around the world.

We also support efforts to end the gender-based violence, to close the gender pay gap and policies that discriminate against women. Religion, tradition, and culture can no longer be excuses for the systemic oppression of half of humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>

## 1.9 Children's rights

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A parent's religious beliefs should not trump a child's right to an education, friendships or their personal safety.

We support the bodily integrity of all people as an inalienable human right and want to promote respect for the autonomous choices of individuals wherever possible. We therefore do not support non-medically necessary procedures to remove parts of the genitals of boys and girls and want to see all laws allowing such procedures repealed and the procedures themselves outlawed when conducted without consent.

Spanking or corporal punishment violates the bodily autonomy of a child and there is no scientific evidence that corporal punishment is effective and ample evidence of its harmful effects. We therefore support the repeal of Section 43 of the *Criminal Code*.

## 1.10 Medical assistance in dying

Approved: August 13, 2018

Medical assistance in dying should be available for any Canadian who freely chooses it, even if they are not terminally ill.<sup>1</sup> There is no moral argument to limit access to a physician-assisted death to individuals with "a grievous and irremediable medical condition." Safeguards should ensure that decisions are free, voluntary, and informed but should not make access unjustly difficult. Medical assistance in dying should be guaranteed through the publicly funded healthcare system and institutions that refuse should see their funding removed.

## 1.11 Freedom of expression

Approved: August 13, 2018

We work for an open and inclusive society with freedom of belief, speech, and expression. We believe that free expression is an essential liberty without which societies can easily slide into a culture of oppression, suspicion and fear. Freedom of expression has occupied an important part in Humanist thinking for centuries and Humanist organisations have always been active in campaigns for it.

We campaigned for the repeal of Canada's blasphemy law<sup>2</sup> and support efforts to repeal blasphemy laws around the world.

We recognize there is a wide range of perspectives among Humanists as to the legitimacy of laws designed to sanction hate speech that incites violence or hatred against an identifiable group. We agree that these laws should be narrowly focused to minimally

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/allow assisted dying for all who choose it](https://www.bchumanist.ca/allow_assisted_dying_for_all_who_choose_it)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/repeal canada s blasphemy laws justice committee brief](https://www.bchumanist.ca/repeal_canada_s_blasphemy_laws_justice_committee_brief)

infringe upon freedom of expression and there should not be a specific exemption for religious-based hate speech.

### 1.12 Charities freedom of expression

Approved: August 13, 2018, Amended: November 25, 2019

We campaigned for an end to rules that restricted the freedom of expression of Canadian charities.<sup>1</sup> We welcomed the new laws and guidelines that permit charities to engage in advocacy but remain concerned about the CRA's vague restrictions on indirect partisan activities, poor choices of examples and potentially chilling reporting requirements.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.13 Prison reform

Approved: August 13, 2018

BCHA Honorary Member Claire Culhane spent over two decades advocating for the rights of the incarcerated. We honour that legacy by supporting efforts to improve conditions for inmates, end the use of solitary confinement and incorporate forms of restorative justice.

Humanists have long opposed the death penalty and we support efforts to end the practice around the world.

### 1.14 Socioeconomic rights

Approved: August 13, 2018

We endorse the recognition in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that civil rights, such as the right to free speech and the right not to be discriminated against, need to be accompanied by socioeconomic rights such as basic human rights to health and well-being, food and clothing, housing and education and medical care. We support the inclusion of socioeconomic status as a protected ground in human rights legislation and support the efforts of secular organizations that work to promote these rights.

### 1.15 The Rights of Sex Workers

Approved: March 6, 2018

*Humanist Manifesto II: "In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many*

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[https://www.bchumanist.ca/silenced\\_how\\_non\\_religious\\_charities\\_are\\_being\\_censored\\_by\\_the\\_cra](https://www.bchumanist.ca/silenced_how_non_religious_charities_are_being_censored_by_the_cra)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/new\\_cra\\_guidance\\_a\\_step\\_forward](https://www.bchumanist.ca/new_cra_guidance_a_step_forward)

*varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered "evil." Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity, a civilized society should be a tolerant one. Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles as they desire. We wish to cultivate the development of a responsible attitude toward sexuality, in which humans are not exploited as sexual objects, and in which intimacy, sensitivity, respect, and honesty in interpersonal relations are encouraged."*

*"We want laws to be refocused on making sex worker's lives safer and improving the relationship they have with the police while addressing the very real issue of exploitation. We want governments to make sure no one is coerced to sell sex, or is unable to leave sex work if they choose to," Tawanda Mutasah, Amnesty International's Senior Director for Law and Policy on the publication of the Amnesty International Policy on State Obligations to Respect, Protect and Fulfil the Human Rights of Sex Workers in 2016.<sup>1</sup>*

The British Columbia Humanist Association supports:

- the rights of sex workers to be free from human rights abuses including rape, violence, extortion and discrimination;
- decriminalization of consensual sex work for those over the age of 18; and
- prohibitions on exploitation and trafficking in commercial sex (including children).

## 1.16 Drug decriminalization

Approved: August 13, 2018

Humanist values of personal autonomy and liberty are incompatible with the criminalization of activities that do not infringe on the health, safety or freedom of others. Further, the decades-long War on Drugs has resulted in the needless incarceration of many otherwise law-abiding citizens. This criminalization violates fundamental principles of justice, wastes public resources and disproportionately affects racialized and indigenous communities. Both the broad criminalization and the systemic racial effects of the War on Drugs are antithetical to Humanist values.

We are therefore supportive of moves to decriminalize the personal possession of cannabis and other drugs. We support instead taking a public health approach and putting more effort into tackling the systemic issues around substance use through education, harm reduction, rehabilitation and treatment. These approaches should be informed by the best available evidence and respect the fundamental legal rights enshrined in the *Charter*.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/4062/2016/en/>

## 1.17 Cannabis legalization is two steps forward and one step back

Approved: April 26, 2018

The legalization of cannabis represents a positive step toward a freer and more just society but specific provisions in British Columbia and Canada's approach should worry Humanists.

Humanists value personal autonomy and liberty, which includes "the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others." These commitments are incompatible with the criminalization of activities that do not infringe on the health, safety or freedoms of others. We are therefore encouraged by moves to end the criminalization of the recreational consumption of cannabis.

Humanists also have a long commitment to civil liberties and human rights. The decades-long War on Drugs has resulted in the needless incarceration of many otherwise law-abiding citizens. This criminalization violates fundamental principles of justice, wastes public resources and disproportionately affects racialized and indigenous communities<sup>1</sup>. Both the broad criminalization and the systematic racial effects of the War on Drugs are antithetical to Humanist values.

However, Bills C-45 and C-46, the legislation currently before Parliament to legalize and regulate cannabis, and the Government of British Columbia's Cannabis Control and Licensing Act, introduced today, fall short of the promise of full legalization. The bills perpetuate a prohibitionesque regime that raises numerous civil liberties issues. Most disturbingly for Humanists is the prospect of subjective and unscientific roadside tests being used to perpetuate the criminalization of people who use cannabis. By attempting to mitigate risks of drug impaired driving, our governments may ultimately be forced to rely on flawed and inaccurate science. This puts individuals at risk of having their civil liberties violated in troubling ways.

Numerous experts, including substance use researchers, forensic scientists, toxicologists, criminal defence lawyers, the ACLU and others, report that there is no scientifically accurate way to conduct a reliable and accurate roadside drug test to show someone is too impaired to operate a motor vehicle. Cannabis is a largely subjective effect, and can vary largely between individuals with the same quantifiable levels of THC in their blood or saliva. Further, many tests can register cannabinoids or THC in the body days to months after ingestion, well after psychological impairment has worn off. Other tests rely on the subjectivity of an officer and inevitably have limited accuracy.

Reliance on these inaccurate and subjective tests puts drivers at the will of the officer who pulls them over – and any biases they bring with them. This puts people of colour and people with disabilities, who are more likely to be mischaracterized as being under

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/canadas-prisons-are-the-new-residential-schools/>

the influence, at risk of being charged with driving under the influence on little scientific evidence.

These concerns are reflected by the legislation introduced by the Government of BC today. Under the bill, drivers face a 90-day administrative penalty if they're deemed to be under the influence of cannabis. However, it's still unclear which tests will be used to determine that impairment. Further, the bill would ban new drivers from having any THC in their system. However, tests for THC do not indicate when or how the material was encountered. So THC may enter the bloodstream through second-hand smoke. Both of these cases raise serious concerns about the reliance of our justice system on questionable science.

The use of administrative penalties in BC raises further concerns. Attempts to challenge these penalties are dealt with through provincially run administrative tribunals. In part because of the increasing number of traffic violations that are dealt with by these tribunals, backlogs have developed. Therefore, the presumption of innocence has effectively been reversed as individuals face these consequences before they've even had the chance for a hearing. This disproportionately affects poor and marginalized individuals and those living in rural communities who may be left without a vehicle for days or months, as they cannot get to work, drop their children at school or childcare or otherwise complete the litany of tasks required to survive.

Our concerns around roadside tests are but one of a multitude of issues raised by civil liberties advocates regarding the proposed legislation. Others have spoken out about the continued criminalization of cannabis prior to its legalization and the continued criminalization of youth. Instead of continuing to treat cannabis as a criminal justice issue, we support taking a public health approach and putting more effort into tackling the systemic issues around substance use through education, harm reduction, rehabilitation and treatment. These approaches should be informed by the best available evidence and respect the fundamental legal rights enshrined in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

### 1.18 Permanent Resident Voting Rights in Municipal Elections

Approved: July 15, 2019

WHEREAS Humanism supports democracy and human rights;

AND WHEREAS over 45 countries, including Australia, Denmark, New Zealand and seven jurisdictions in the USA allow permanent residents to vote in municipal elections;

AND WHEREAS approximately 60,000 permanent residents live, work, pay taxes and send their children to schools in Vancouver alone;

AND WHEREAS Vancouver City Council unanimously passed a motion to ask the province to allow permanent residents to vote in local elections:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the BCHA supports efforts to extend municipal voting rights to permanent residents in British Columbia.

## 2 SECULARISM

### 2.1 On Secularism

Approved: September 13, 2016

The British Columbia Humanist Association supports a secular society that affirms:

- the right of every individual to live and practice any religion or none, free from coercion by the government, private institutions or their community and
- that the state has a duty of religious neutrality, meaning it must neither endorse nor prohibit any belief or non-belief.

### 2.2 Freedom of and freedom from religion

Approved: August 13, 2018

Freedom of religion is protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and various UN declarations. We recognize the importance of this freedom to ensure each individual's ability to hold and manifest their personal beliefs. Freedom of religion is an inherently individual right and, while there is a communal aspect to many religions, we have argued that the right does not extend to corporations, organizations or other institutions<sup>1</sup>. We see freedom of religion as inclusive of the right to freedom from religion.

### 2.3 Symbolic religious privilege

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support removing the preamble of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the religious references from the national anthem. Both exemplify the symbolic privilege afforded to religion in Canada.

We also support ending the practice of Parliament and the BC Legislature of beginning each day with a prayer. Efforts to include prayers by non-Christian faith leaders and secular invocations are an improvement; however, as the Supreme Court of Canada ruled, "Even if [governmental prayer] is said to be inclusive, it may nevertheless exclude non-believers."<sup>2</sup>

We also call for private, secular organizations, including Scouts Canada<sup>3</sup> and the Iron Ring<sup>4</sup>, to remove pledges to God.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/bcha\\_scc\\_twu\\_arguments](https://www.bchumanist.ca/bcha_scc_twu_arguments)

<sup>2</sup> <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/15288/index.do>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/why-does-my-beaver-scout-have-to-promise-to-love-god>

<sup>4</sup> <http://terahertzatheist.ca/2009/03/19/an-open-letter-re-the-iron-ring/>

## 2.4 Census

Approved: August 13, 2018

As part of the long-form census and National Household Survey (2011), Statistics Canada asks “respondents to indicate a specific denomination or religion even if the person is not currently a practising member of that group.”<sup>1</sup> This conflates religious identity with active religious participation. We support changing the question to better measure the religious diversity of Canada. Good public policy requires good evidence.

## 2.5 Human Rights Acts

Approved: August 13, 2018

We recognize the importance of exemptions from human rights legislation to protect the rights of individuals to associate to advance the interests and welfare of an identifiable group; however, these exemptions should be narrowly tailored and sensitive to the context. For example, a religious school may justifiably require their teachers to agree to a statement of faith, but such a requirement is not justifiable for the janitor who cleans the school.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.6 Criminal Code provisions

Approved: August 13, 2018, Amended: November 25, 2019

We argue for the repeal of Criminal Code protections that are available only to religious Canadians. For example, section 176 criminalizes obstructing a religious officiant or disturbing religious worship.<sup>3</sup>

We support the repeal of the exemption for “an opinion based on a belief in a religious text” from section 319 of the Criminal Code, which deals with hate speech.

## 2.7 Clergy residence deduction

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support the repeal of Section 8(1)(c) of the Income Tax Act, which provides deductions for individuals who are “a member of the clergy” to deduct the costs of their residence. There is no equivalent benefit available to leaders of Humanist or other nonreligious organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/ref/guides/99-010-x/99-010-x2011010-eng.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/bcha\\_scc\\_twu\\_arguments](https://www.bchumanist.ca/bcha_scc_twu_arguments)

<sup>3</sup> BC Humanist Association. “Repeal Canada’s Blasphemy Laws”. Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Oct 25, 2017.

<http://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/JUST/Brief/BR9200265/br-external/BritishColumbiaHumanistAssociation-e.pdf>

## 2.8 Charitable purposes

Approved: August 13, 2018

We call for a legislated definition of charities that either removes advancement of religion entirely or follows England and Wales’ decision to explicitly permit religions that “do not believe in a God.”<sup>1</sup> In either case, we support a public benefits test that is applied equally to secular and religious charities.

## 2.9 Healthcare system

Approved: August 13, 2018

British Columbia provided approximately \$1 billion to religious healthcare institutions in 2015.<sup>2</sup> Many of these facilities refuse to provide even referrals for medical assistance in dying or abortion. We support phasing this funding into secular institutions and an immediate end to institutional objections at publicly funded institutions.

## 2.10 Secular recovery programs

Approved: August 13, 2018

It’s entirely within the rights of individuals and private organizations to create and attend voluntary religious-based recovery programs like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). However, programs supported and mandated by government bodies should be inclusive of people of all faiths and none. We have called on the Government of BC to<sup>3</sup>:

1. Remove links to AA and 12-Step Programs from its HealthLink BC website and to suggest secular alternatives instead,
2. Establish addictions recovery guidelines requiring all licensed treatment facilities to be evidence-based and attendance in religious-based meetings be voluntary,
3. Require that any addictions recovery programs that receive government funding or that are mandated by courts or employers be secular and evidence-based,
4. Inform physicians, counsellors and addictions specialists of their duty to ensure that patients receive culturally sensitive and evidence-based treatments, and
5. Monitor addiction treatment programs to ensure patients’ religious freedoms are upheld.

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[http://www.bchumanist.ca/silenced\\_how\\_non\\_religious\\_charities\\_are\\_being\\_censored\\_by\\_the\\_cra](http://www.bchumanist.ca/silenced_how_non_religious_charities_are_being_censored_by_the_cra)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.bchumanist.ca/bc\\_taxpayers\\_gave\\_1\\_billion\\_to\\_religious\\_hospitals\\_in\\_2015](http://www.bchumanist.ca/bc_taxpayers_gave_1_billion_to_religious_hospitals_in_2015)

<sup>3</sup>

[http://www.bchumanist.ca/bcha\\_asks\\_health\\_committee\\_to\\_end\\_religious\\_coercion\\_in\\_addictions\\_recovery](http://www.bchumanist.ca/bcha_asks_health_committee_to_end_religious_coercion_in_addictions_recovery)

## 2.11 Property tax exemptions

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support the repeal of the section 220(1)(h) of the *Community Charter* and section 369(1)(c)(iv) of the *Vancouver Charter*, which provide exemptions for buildings used for “public worship” by religious organizations. We also call on municipalities to end permissive exemptions for other property owned by religious organizations. These provisions can be replaced with a broader exemption for all registered charitable organizations who pass a local benefits test.

## 2.12 Marriage solemnization

Approved: August 13, 2018

We have campaigned for the Province of British Columbia to recognize Humanist officiants as religious representatives for the purposes of the *Marriage Act*. We call on the government to amend the *Act* to recognize marriages performed by Humanists.

## 2.13 Reasonable accommodation

Approved: August 13, 2018

There is ample jurisprudence in Canada demonstrating that when a neutral law conflicts with an individual’s religious freedoms, that individual can generally be accommodated, preserving both the intent of the law and the individual’s rights. We therefore do not oppose in principle such reasonable accommodations; however, we call for non-religious beliefs and viewpoints to receive equal treatment. We further reject suggestions that positive government action may be required in some cases to make such an accommodation.

## 2.14 Religious headgear bans

Approved: August 13, 2018

Blanket bans on the wearing of religious headgear or symbols in public, or as a requirement to receive public services, are an infringement of an individual’s freedoms of religion and expression that is not consistent with our view of secularism. Where there is a legitimate requirement for facial identification or safety, restrictions on face coverings and other headgear may be reasonable.

## 2.15 Reiterating our opposition to Quebec’s Bill 21

Approved: July 15, 2019

Whereas Humanism supports secularism in government, we believe that it must be balanced with individual free expression. Bill 21, as it stands, invokes government control over the personal clothing choices of individuals and therefore stands in opposition to Humanism’s principles; therefore, we oppose Quebec’s Bill 21.

## 3 SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY

### 3.1 Evolution and creationism

Approved: August 13, 2018

We supported efforts to end the teaching of creationism in BC in the 1990s<sup>1</sup> and support the inclusion of evolution as a central feature of science and biology in the BC curriculum. Independent schools should not be able to include creationism in science classrooms.

### 3.2 Climate change

Approved: August 13, 2018

The overwhelming scientific consensus is that human actions are driving climate change and that we must stabilize global temperatures at the two degree Celsius target to prevent dangerous impacts to humans, flora, and fauna. The consequences of our actions—and inaction—regarding the destruction of our environment for ourselves and future generations mandate a naturalistic social responsibility inherent to humanist values.

As Humanists, we acknowledge the damage done to our environment has been caused by human action and we understand that only humans can save ourselves from the climate crises we have created. We call on all Humanists to take personal and collective action to save our planet.

On a personal level, we call on Humanists to reduce our impact on the climate through moving to plant-based diets and reducing consumption and energy usage.

As a society, we support efforts to transition away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy sources. This may include political and financial incentives like BC's carbon tax. All of our policies should be guided by the best available evidence and developed in an open and transparent manner.<sup>2</sup> They must also recognize the rights of indigenous peoples.

### 3.3 Addictions recovery

Approved: August 13, 2018

In addition to our support for the decriminalization of the personal possession of all drugs (1.16) and our support for secular recovery programs (2.10), we support evidence-based and harm reduction policies. Our response to ongoing opioid, overdose and fentanyl crises must be informed by the best available evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/creationism\\_in\\_canada](https://www.bchumanist.ca/creationism_in_canada)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/bc\\_humanist\\_response\\_to\\_climate\\_leadership\\_plan](https://www.bchumanist.ca/bc_humanist_response_to_climate_leadership_plan)

### 3.4 Complementary and alternative medicine

Approved: August 13, 2018

We endorse scientists' and researchers' quest for knowledge and the improvement of human health and wellbeing that can follow it. Equally, we reject the endorsement of remedies for which no evidence is provided.

Much evidence has been produced to refute claims made for many 'complementary' and 'alternative' medicines and treatments. We oppose state funding of such treatments, including homeopathy. We oppose further funding research on treatments when the evidence that they work no better than a placebo is overwhelming. We support a requirement that pharmacists who sell such products make clear the lack of evidence supporting the efficacy of these products. We also support requirements that advertising about such products and claims made on packaging be clear and scientifically accurate.

While there might be a place in healthcare for so-called 'ethical placebos', complementary and alternative medicines are unethical because their practitioners typically claim that they are efficacious for conditions in which more than a mere placebo is required.

We also support wider public health campaigns that are often opposed by proponents of complementary and alternative medicine but that are strongly supported by scientific evidence, for example: vaccinations being offered in all schools; fluoride being present in tap water; and folic acid being included in flour.

### 3.5 Ethics in research

Approved: August 13, 2018

We recognize that science is a human practice and is therefore susceptible to the biases and limitations of all humans. The advancement of scientific exploration and study must be tempered by humility, compassion, and constant care for all life and our environment.

We call for the greater recognition that science has often been a tool of colonialism and racism in Canada. For example, several provinces, including British Columbia, maintained eugenics programs, the last of which was repealed in Alberta in 1972<sup>1</sup>. Throughout the 1940s the Canadian Government also experimented on students in residential schools, which included starving children<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.macleans.ca/society/science/canada-is-not-immune-to-its-own-scientific-dark-ages/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/hungry-aboriginal-people-used-in-bureaucrats-experiments-1.1317051>

We support the calls of the AllTrials campaign call that all clinical trials be registered and all results reported<sup>1</sup>.

### 3.6 Stem cell research

Approved: August 13, 2018

For reasons of belief and doctrine, some religious groups and individuals attempt to restrict the use of human tissues and other remains, such as embryonic stem cells or historic human remains, for scientific research, impeding medical progress.

We want the primary ethical consideration in scientific matters to be the benefit to human beings so that research, such as stem cell research, can yield the maximum return in terms of technologies and treatments for diseases.

Scientific research that involves the use of human tissues is continually developing and it would be impossible for us to develop policy that keeps up with these developments. However, in broad terms we believe decisions as to whether to permit any such research should be based entirely on secular ethical considerations and not in any way on religious considerations.

### 3.7 Conversion therapy

Approved: August 13, 2018

We reject the dangerous claim that one's sexual orientation or gender identity can be changed through therapy. We support efforts to ban the practice.

### 3.8 Public science

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support the science pledge<sup>2</sup>:

*We believe that all Canadians benefit when governments solicit, collect and use the evidence and expertise needed to make smart policy decisions that safeguard the health, safety and prosperity of Canadians. We support actions that invest in public-interest science; ensure open, honest and timely communication of scientific information; and make public the evidence considered in government decisions.*

We support the Voices-Voix Declaration 2016<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.alltrials.net/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.bchumanist.ca/bc\\_humanists\\_take\\_the\\_sciencepledge](https://www.bchumanist.ca/bc_humanists_take_the_sciencepledge)

<sup>3</sup> <http://voices-voix.ca/en/declaration-2016>

## 4 EDUCATION

### 4.1 Secular Schools

Approved: August 13, 2018

British Columbia's School Act explicitly requires all public schools to be "strictly secular and non-sectarian".<sup>1</sup> We support similar protections being adopted across Canada.

We oppose public funding going to faith-based education. We actively support efforts to amalgamate publicly funded Catholic school systems in Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta with the secular public system. We support ending funding to faith-based independent schools in BC and other provinces.

We oppose schools leading students in prayer, which is still legal in Alberta.<sup>2</sup> We have successfully campaigned for the end of the distribution of Gideon Bibles to students in public schools.<sup>3</sup> We oppose public schools promoting religion or religious groups to students, for example through Christian songs during the holidays or through special access to poster boards.

We support individual students' right to freedom of religion. For example, through the creation of student groups, but any student faith groups should not be lead by teachers or staff.

### 4.2 End public funding of independent schools

Approved: April 20, 2018

Humanism "insists that personal liberty must be combined with social responsibility" and is "committed to education free from indoctrination." Further, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right of children to an education "on the basis of equal opportunity" and that promotes a respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The bedrock for developing this respect in a free and multicultural society is universal public education. However, since 1977, successive governments in British Columbia have sought to create a two-tiered education system through a public subsidy to independent schools. A majority of these schools are faith based, while others charge prohibitive tuitions. These barriers segregate society along sectarian and socio-economic lines. Further, the Government has a duty to protect the rights of children, recognized under

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<sup>1</sup> Section 76 School Act [http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/96412\\_06](http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/96412_06)

<sup>2</sup> <http://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/three-schools-ditch-lords-prayer-to-avoid-human-rights-case>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.bchumanist.ca/humanists\\_call\\_on\\_sd27\\_to\\_end\\_bible\\_distribution](http://www.bchumanist.ca/humanists_call_on_sd27_to_end_bible_distribution)

the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in religious independent schools. Humanists have also welcomed innovative and experimental forms of education.<sup>1</sup>

RESOLVED that the British Columbia Humanist Association:

- Supports the principle of public funds for public education;
- Opposes public funding going to faith-based education;
- Joins calls for the phase out of public funding to all independent schools;
- Supports greater innovation within the public education system; and
- Calls on the Government of BC to ensure:
  - the religious neutrality of the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools,
  - all independent schools meet comparable curriculum standards as public schools and
  - students in independent schools are free from discrimination and their freedoms of religion and expression are protected.

### 4.3 Sex and relationship education

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support comprehensive, consent-based and inclusive age-appropriate sex and relationship education. Such education should be guided by the best available evidence, encourage healthy relationships and be inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

### 4.4 Inclusive schools

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support efforts to reduce homophobia and transphobia in schools and the greater inclusion of LGBTQ2+ students through initiatives like the SOGI 123 curriculum, GSAs and explicit anti-LGBTQ2+ bullying policies. These programs should be available in both public and independent schools.

### 4.5 \$10aDay Child Care

Approved: November 27, 2018

The BCHA endorses the \$10aDay Child Care Campaign.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eleventh point of Humanist Manifesto II (1973)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.10aday.ca/>

#### **4.6 Comparative religions and ethical systems**

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support objective comparative religion classes where secular worldviews, including Humanism, are included. Such classes should treat all worldviews equally and participation in any demonstrations should be optional for all students.

#### **4.7 Critical thinking**

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support modern pedagogical techniques that promote critical thinking and inquiry over rote memorization.

#### **4.8 Indigenous education**

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support the calls of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to end educational gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians and to promote understanding of local indigenous cultures in public schools.

## 5 PUBLIC ETHICAL ISSUES

### 5.1 Peace and diplomacy

Approved: August 13, 2018

Despite their societal, ethical, philosophical, and geographical differences, we recognize the freedom, value, and respect to which all of the world's individuals are entitled. The pursuit of peaceful and non-violent strategies for resolving the world's most dire conflicts, which too often result in genocide, war, and autocracy, is paramount for human coexistence and progress. Pre-emptive war, unilateral conflict, arms proliferation, terrorism, and indiscriminate use of force all threaten the common bonds of humanity that we all share.

We believe that cultural exchange, cooperation, peaceful conflict resolution and diplomacy through multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, are the most appropriate ways to respect human rights and make the world a safer place for all of its inhabitants.

### 5.2 Organ donation

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support medical advances for the improvement of human health and wellbeing. Humanists do not believe that respect for the dead constitutes any reason to object to allowing deceased humans' organs to be used to help others, except when the deceased has expressed a contrary wish.

We believe that better public education about organ donation and transplantation is essential, and that policy actions are needed to increase the number of organ transplants and so save more lives. We are concerned that the low number of organs donated across Canada is contributing to unnecessary suffering, many unnecessary deaths, and to a market in organs and even trafficking in human beings for the purpose of removing organs.

British Columbia operates 'opt-in' donor schemes where people must register themselves. However, it is often the case that those who would be happy to donate their organs fail to register or have never discussed the matter with their friends and family, so medical staff and close relatives may not be aware of their consent to help others after their deaths. This contributes to the low number of organs available.

We support calls for a 'soft' system of 'presumed consent', whereby organ donation (for those over the age of 16) would be the default position, but individuals could opt-out while alive. Next of kin would be informed after death that the individual had not opted out and asked if they are aware of any unregistered objection: this would make their decision easier than at present. If not, organs could be transplanted. We support

campaigns to encourage the public to discuss their wishes for the end of life, including organ donation, in advance.

### 5.3 Animal welfare

Approved: August 13, 2018

We support the reduction of animal suffering resulting from human behaviour and see compassionate attitudes to animal suffering as a hallmark of a humane society. For this reason, we support restrictive laws on experiments on animals, while recognising that some such experiments are justified in the cause of finding cures for diseases.

As we wish to reduce suffering, Humanists are concerned about the treatment of food animals, both during their lives and when they are slaughtered. We support the position of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association calling for an end to slaughter-without-stunning.<sup>1</sup> We do not support religious opt-outs to stunning requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/humane-slaughter-of-animals-position-statement>