

Ref: 212139

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President  
Chief Don Tom, Vice-President  
and Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer  
Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs  
[ubcic@ubcic.bc.ca](mailto:ubcic@ubcic.bc.ca)

Dear Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Chief Don Tom, and Kukpi7 Judy Wilson:

Thank you for your letter of March 15, 2021, regarding Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) Resolution 2021-16 about support for the permanent reinstatement of the \$300 per month COVID-19 Crisis Supplement and the recommendations made by the Expert Panel on Basic Income in their final report, *Covering All the Basics: Reforms for a More Just Society*.

I appreciate the time you've taken to write and want to assure you that we will take your comments into consideration as we work to improve our programs and services and reduce poverty. I am heartened to hear the support for our government's efforts from across all sectors and from communities around the province.

As noted in my office's email to you on March 16, 2021, the Province recently announced an increase of \$175 per adult to income and disability assistance monthly rates. The temporary supplements had been extended numerous times, and it was time to implement something permanent for people to be able to have some predictability and certainty. This increase, which took effect on April 21, 2021, is the third increase since 2017.

A few other income supports were announced recently. On December 8, 2020, the Province announced new COVID-19 supports, including a tax-free BC Recovery Benefit (BCRB). The BCRB provided \$500 for single people or \$1,000 for single-parent families and two-parent families. The BCRB payment has been exempted by both the ministry and Indigenous Services Canada, meaning people who apply will not have the amounts deducted from their provincial income or disability assistance or by Band Social Development Workers. Information on the BCRB can be found at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/economic-recovery/benefit>.

Another form of income support which was increased in October, but not widely publicized is the COB, which replaced the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit in October

2020. This program now provides support for children up to 18 years old (it previously expired when a child reached 6 years of age) with the following increased amounts:

- Up to \$1,600 per year for families with one child
- Up to \$2,600 for families with two children
- Up to \$3,400 for families with three children
- Up to \$800 for each subsequent child

Some policy decisions have also improved circumstances for some recipients. The Province increased earnings exemptions for income and disability assistance recipients, effective January 1, 2021. This will ensure that thousands of people on income and disability assistance can benefit by being able to keep more of the money they earn before having their assistance payments reduced. A single person receiving Income Assistance can earn up to \$500 a month, and a single person on Disability Assistance may earn up to \$15,000 a year without impact to their benefits.

Our poverty reduction strategy involves investing in key social programs as well. British Columbia has invested in child care, housing, including funding for on-reserve housing, minimum wage increases, Medical Services Plan and PharmaCare, and a number of other initiatives to make life more affordable for people in BC.

These recent rate increases, ministry policy changes, government's strategic investments, and legislative changes are part of government's overall commitment to making life better for all British Columbians and to TogetherBC, the province's first poverty reduction strategy. The strategy seeks to improve people's lives by addressing both the breadth and depth of poverty and focuses on initiatives designed to help break the cycle of poverty.

We are taking many approaches and strategies to reduce poverty. TogetherBC is a living document that marked the beginning of the work to guide our Province toward poverty reduction. I had been calling for a plan for many years, so I took immense pleasure in releasing the 2019 Annual Report on TogetherBC in December 2020. The report contains work on poverty reduction that spans across all ministries and every region of the province. You can view TogetherBC and the 2019 Annual Report online at <http://www.gov.bc.ca/TogetherBC>.

With respect to the Expert Panel on Basic Income's final report, I found the report very informative and potentially very helpful. Government is reviewing their 65 recommendations as we build an economic recovery that supports all British Columbians.

The Province recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on people everywhere. In response to these impacts, the Province has released StrongerBC for Everyone: BC's Economic Recovery Plan, which includes \$1.5 billion in economic recovery spending measures that respond to immediate needs. This is in addition to \$660 million in tax measures and more than \$1.86 billion in federal and provincial restart funding for municipalities, transit, and education. The plan outlines the latest steps the Province is taking to help people, businesses, and communities recover and come out of COVID-19 stronger and better prepared. You can view the full plan online at <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca>.

Our government is committed to making life more affordable for all British Columbians. This includes taking steps to tackle poverty and inequality and delivering quality services that meet people's needs.

Thank you again for writing and for your advocacy on behalf of all British Columbians.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Simons  
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

cc: Honourable John Horgan, Premier  
Honourable Mitzi Dean, Minister of Children and Family Development  
Honourable Selina Robinson, Minister of Finance