



# UNIONS WORK FOR AFFORDABILITY

## Workers are the engine of our economy.

Without the labour that working people provide, nothing gets done: no services delivered, no products made, no resources processed. If working people aren't prospering, then our economy isn't either.

Yet in BC, one of the wealthiest provinces in Canada, workers aren't seeing their share of the benefits from our economy; we have one of the **highest inequality gaps in Canada**.

For years now, wages haven't kept up with the cost of living.

1 in 3 BC workers now earns **less than the living wage** for their community (a calculation of the hourly amount needed to cover basic expenses like food, shelter and transportation).

Rising costs are part of the reason. We pay some of the **highest shelter costs** in Canada, rising by 17 per cent from 2021 to 2023 alone. And 1.2 million British Columbians live in households that **struggle to afford the food they need**.

Another reason is precarious work: **fewer than half of BC workers have full-time, permanent jobs** with benefits. The rest of us work multiple jobs to make ends meet, or don't have any security we'll still have our jobs one year from now.

That burden is even heavier for racialized and immigrant communities, Indigenous peoples, and women and gender-diverse workers.

High levels of inequality cast a long shadow over BC's well-being, diverting money away from those most likely to spend in their local community and drive economic growth, and toward those who are **more likely to send it out of the country**. And inequality damages health and social outcomes across society, including increased violence and polarization.

And all of these challenges are occurring while many of the companies making life less affordable — like grocery chains — **are reporting record profits in Canada**.

## UNIONS AS AN ECONOMIC STRATEGY

*The single best bulwark against inequality — and for affordability — is unionization. But union density has decreased sharply in BC since the 1980s, only leveling out in more recent years.*

*Making it easier for workers to organize and bargain collectively is **a proven strategy** for improving the standard of living for all working people — not only union members.*

*By allowing workers to exercise their bargaining power, **unions balance profits more equitably** among shareholders, managers and workers, reducing inequality and challenging non-union employers to increase wages and benefits to remain competitive.*

*Workers' higher disposable income **gets spent in the community**, helping to grow local and provincial economies. And because union workers have higher wages, better benefits, increased job security and more secure retirements, they also have more time with their families, more time to volunteer and engage in their communities, and better health and social outcomes.*



## | WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED TOGETHER

Unions working together with progressive governments toward shared goals are a powerful force. We help the BC government understand the most pressing issues facing working people around affordability and the economy — and work to create the political room to address them.

That's how we've won important victories to make life better and more affordable for working people, including:

- annual **minimum wage increases** indexed to the Canadian CPI;
- more workers able to join unions through **single-step certification**;
- **repatriation of public health workers** from low-paying, precarious jobs with private contractors into good public-sector jobs;
- **successorship protections** to prevent workers in specific industries from wage and benefit cuts when a contract is retendered;
- a dramatic expansion of **affordable child care**, lowering costs and making it possible for parents to seek training and better jobs;
- better access to **public transit**, reducing transportation costs; and
- the **end of health care premiums** under the Medical Services Plan.

## | WHAT'S NEXT

There's a lot more left to accomplish. Here are some of the most important opportunities we have to make progress together:

- close the gap between the **minimum wage** and the living wage;
- remove barriers to **join a union**, and implement sectoral certification and bargaining;
- immediate action to reduce costs faced by working people, including **vacancy control** so rents for a home don't skyrocket between tenants;
- increased investment in **affordable housing**;
- invest in Connecting BC, our vision for a **provincewide integrated public transit network**;
- implement intersectional **pay equity legislation** that acts to end discrimination, not just expose it; and
- a stronger **Employment Standards Branch** to end wage theft and ensure that workers get the money they've earned.

In challenging times, **unions** are a crucial part of the solution to many of the problems BC is facing. Whether it's affordability and the economy, health and safety, equity or building the infrastructure we need, **unions help make our province and our communities stronger.**

move**up**

