



July 9, 2020
Victoria, B.C.

Recommendations to the Government of Canada for a Just Recovery

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, Minister of Finance Morneau and Members of Parliament representing the people of Greater Victoria:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility and inequality of prosperity in our country. The coronavirus, and our responses to it, have exacerbated systemic social and economic inequities and shown clearly where, as a country we must build greater resilience to future shocks that we know are coming. Climate change is the most obvious example.

Greater Victoria Acting Together is a coalition of 32 member organizations in the Victoria region dedicated to improving social conditions in our communities. Our members include faith groups, unions, business associations, non-profit organizations and service providers. Altogether, we represent over 70,000 people in Greater Victoria.

We must learn from the vulnerabilities exposed by COVID-19. This public health and economic shock provides us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reset social and economic priorities as we emerge from lockdown. Recovery strategies must focus on reducing vulnerability and building resilience. We need to employ proven methods to strengthen our response to mental health and addictions. We must ensure affordable housing so people who live here can lead secure and productive lives. We must now act on the climate and ecological crises we have seen coming for decades. As we act, we must attend to historic and continuing systemic discrimination based on race or gender.

Our diverse members represent many different types of organization in the Victoria region. We share a commitment to a socially and economically just recovery. We want to impress upon you, our elected leaders how imperative it is to use this opportunity to change direction. These are challenging and difficult requests. But if you will take these bold measures, we commit to standing with you, as we have supported drastic public health measures through the pandemic lockdown, to build a stronger and more resilient British Columbia.

Michael Glover
Chair Greater Victoria Acting Together

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Recommendations to the Government of Canada for a Just Recovery from the pandemic

8 July 2020

Overarching Recommendations

We support a just recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted and further magnified the impacts of colonialism, racism, patriarchy, human rights abuses, social and economic inequality, ecological destruction, and climate change within Canada, and the world. In the greater Victoria area, we face chronic public underinvestment and inaction in the areas of affordable housing as well as addictions and mental health, which has led to an overdose and homelessness crisis. In the month of May 2020, there were more deaths from overdoses than COVID-19¹. Canada's recovery plan is an opportunity to address these public and environmental health issues and to create systematic changes.

This document will speak to and advocate for the rights of people within Canada, including those who have been the target of systemic colonial racist practices such as Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC), women, differently abled, and the 2SLGBTQI+ community

1. A just recovery requires a multi-faceted approach to end implicit and systemic racism, homophobia, gender violence, and the marginalization of groups of people within our society. Further, the colonial history of Canada must be taken into consideration for a just recovery, which requires anti-racism work to be done in consultation and conversation with Indigenous communities in Canada.
2. In addition to the recommendations listed in this document, we advocate for the collection of race-based and gender-based data throughout a just recovery to be able to gain a deeper understanding of the inequities in our current systems, and to aid in current and future action towards a more equitable and just society within Canada.

3. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

¹<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/whitecoat/opioid-crisis-not-going-away-amid-pandemic-and-will-kill-more-canadians-says-dr-daniel-kalla-1.5585629>

- 3.1. GVAT urges the federal government to urgently develop its implementation plan and funding to respond to the 231 Calls for Justice delivered in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls².

4. Climate Justice

Objective: A just response to the health and climate emergency

Climate change is the biggest health hazard facing humanity. What we do today will help us, or haunt us, in decades to come. Recovery efforts must improve ecosystem and public health, reduce inequality and tackle the climate crisis head on.

Greater Victoria Acting Together acknowledges that climate justice is inextricably linked with Indigenous rights in Canada. Article 23 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states, “Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired...”³. As such, GVAT recommends that any climate initiatives within a just recovery must include consultation, collaboration and the consent of the Indigenous communities within the territory in question.

Additionally, racialized communities are more likely to be impacted by pollutants and industrial activities because often sites are chosen based on which communities will have the least power to resist these projects. The impacts of climate change are experienced more intensely by Indigenous communities in remote locations. Our efforts to recover from this pandemic must not further harm Indigenous and other racialized communities and should improve their social, economic, and ecological well-being.

The federal stimulus/recovery efforts must:

- i. **Only invest in projects that uphold Indigenous rights and title, and have met the standards of free, prior, and informed consent.**
- ii. **Uphold Canada’s Paris Climate commitment** to avoid disastrous consequences by keeping mean global temperature rise to no more than 1.5 C. This means reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by over 7% every year.⁴
- iii. **Lead a just transition** to 100% renewable energy that creates decent work and reduces inequality:

²<https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>

³https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

⁴www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/26/united-nations-global-effort-cut-emissions-stop-climate-chaos-2030

- a. Provide funding to guarantee a job and retraining for every displaced worker (including those outside of the energy sector).

iv. Fund a shift from cars to sustainable transportation:

Cities around the world are rapidly re-allocating public space to facilitate sustainable transportation and physical distancing. People need convenient, affordable, low barrier, and culturally safe ways to travel to and from smaller communities as well as between cities without driving. Funding a highway bus and passenger rail network interconnecting the whole country, especially Indigenous communities, is essential for the safety of Indigenous women and girls and for reducing GHG pollution.

Stimulus funds must support this shift with financial support for:

- a. Re-allocating public space to walkways, dedicated transit lanes, and bike and roll facilities for all ages and abilities that are culturally safe and inclusive
- b. Transit infrastructure, and emergency and ongoing transit operating costs
- c. Creating affordable highway bus and passenger rail service
- d. Electrifying vehicles, prioritizing fleets such as Canada Post vehicles, car sharing fleets, and delivery vehicles

v. Not make the climate crisis worse:

- a. No economic stimulus directed toward fossil fuel extraction
- b. Eliminate public subsidies for the fossil fuel industry and reinvest these funds in a just recovery
- c. End highway expansion in urban areas, freeing up tens of billions of dollars to fund healthy transportation, and invest in urban planning for more livable and walkable villages. Increasing road capacity in urban areas leads to more traffic, greenhouse gas emissions, and toxic air pollution.

vi. Fund a major conversion program of oil and fracked gas heating to electric heat pumps, prioritizing schools and other public buildings, particularly in vulnerable neighbourhoods.

vii. Fund a Green New Deal for logging communities to support British Columbia to:

- a. Transition from unsustainable logging to sustainable forest uses including: selective logging, eco-forestry, forest management and stewardship, caring for salmon-bearing streams, gathering wild foods, value-added manufacturing, tourism, and recreation
- b. Ensure that sustainable forest ecosystem initiatives and programs be designed and implemented in collaboration with the Indigenous communities who have stewarded those lands for millennia

viii. Fund natural infrastructure in urban and rural areas

- a. Greenways and treed plazas create cool natural oases in an overheating world and reduce the need to expand storm sewers given the increasing risk of

extreme rainfall.

- b. Protection of wilderness (as per Canada's commitment of 17% by 2020) and restoration of land provides carbon sinks, reduces wildfire risk, and enhances healthy recreation opportunities⁵

ix. Fund agro-ecology/regenerative agriculture, not industrial agriculture. Fund national research and updated federal agri-food policies to support agro-ecology as it restores biodiversity, produces higher yield per acre, provides significant carbon sequestration, is more in-tune with nature, helps connect people back into natural systems and protects food security.

5. Affordable Housing for All

To ensure a healthy and equitable recovery, we must assure fundamental living conditions for the most vulnerable. Housing is a basic human right under international law. However, in Greater Victoria basic housing is unavailable or unaffordable to at least 12,000 low-income and vulnerable households⁶, and is a costly burden to many more. We endorse the goal articulated by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation that **"By 2030, everyone in Canada has a home that they can afford and that meets their needs."**⁷This specifically includes, for persons with disabilities, a home that is appropriately equipped or retrofitted.

Investment in inclusive, affordable and resilient communities must include Housing First as a central focus for any COVID-19 recovery. Housing First will provide short-term opportunities for green and socially just investment and job creation, strengthen public health and reduce social vulnerability. A long-term commitment to Affordable Housing for All will strengthen our communities and prevent future social costs of homelessness. Public investment in Housing First and Affordable Housing for All must be designed to address historical inequities in access to housing for people who have been the target of systemic colonial racist practices including but not limited to: BIPOC, women, differently abled, and the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

GVAT recommends the following components for any COVID-19 Recovery program:

- i. **Affordable Housing for All:** The federal government should adopt CMHC's goal of Affordable Housing for All by 2030, and prepare specific plans describing how that goal will be achieved within an anti-racist and gender equitable framework.

⁵On southern Vancouver Island this is of particular importance since we have globally rare and important ecosystems (coastal douglas fir, garry oak, arbutus) and one last continuous tract of old growth forest (Edinburgh Mountain).

⁶ CRD research 2019.

⁷ CMHC defines a home that people can afford and that meets their needs as (a) costing less than 30% of a household's pre-tax income, (b) being in an adequate state of repair, and (c) having a suitable number of rooms for the people living there. CMHC provides specific details on these three criteria [here](#).

- ii. **GHG emissions reduction:** All housing supported under a recovery program should contribute to GHG emissions reduction in several ways: a) use low-emission construction materials; b) apply energy efficient design principles; c) choose sites that encourage active transportation (walking and bicycling) to access essential services nearby, and are well served by public transit.
- iii. **Urban indigenous households:** Additional funding is needed for housing tailored to the social and cultural context of urban Indigenous households and Indigenous youth, and controlled by their communities. Their needs are typically not addressed by funding for on-reserve housing, or by general low-income housing programs. All additional funding or programs in this sector must be developed and implemented in collaboration and consultation with Indigenous communities.
- iv. **Social housing:** Governments should provide more funding to subsidize low-income social housing units in mixed-income, multi-family rental housing. Funding could include either new construction or conversion of older units. This should include seed funding for non-profit organizations who currently own land to accelerate the process of preparing development proposals. Public financial support for such organizations should be accompanied by clear guidelines for anti-racist and gender-equitable approaches to housing allocation and management, along with reminders of non-discrimination responsibilities under Canadian law.
- v. **Support to co-operative housing:** The federal government should re-introduce funding including land purchases for CMHC to support co-operative housing of various types, focusing on mixed, medium density family housing for central urban neighbourhoods.

6. Addressing Mental Health and Addiction Issues in Our Communities

GVAT has an overarching objective and understanding that inclusivity of care for all people, including those with marginalized identities, and an investment in culturally competent mental health and addiction treatment are essential elements of a just recovery. The widespread nature of homelessness and deaths from addiction, together with the equally widespread recognition of the origins of these problems in intergenerational trauma and a patriarchal colonial society informs our proposals to the federal government.

Funding provided directly to community- led organizations and NGOs or provided through transfer payments to the province should be based on the following principles:

- i. **Core Funding:** We consider existing community- led organizations and NGOs providing, to be to be essential foundational elements of any healthy, thriving, and productive community. Funding for culturally competent mental health care and no-cost addiction treatments, as well as mental health services in public schools, and other services should be provided through core-based operational funding, as opposed to grant

applications, which place care-providers in the position of diverting resources to grant writing which could be better spent on evidence based direct service delivery.

- ii. **Funding for Low Barrier Access Portals to Care:** Funding directed to portals for access to mental health and addiction services should be provided by trained and paid peer navigators . This model will reduce the bewildering array of services and service providers currently in existence. . Low-barrier access to a range of recovery-oriented and funded evidence-based interventions including peer support should also comprise a principle for “just recovery” funding.
- iii. **Funding for Mobile Crisis Response Teams and Ongoing Evaluation:** Where funding is provided for mobile outreach and crisis units, such services should be formed with a qualified peer, a social worker, and a medically qualified helper, but without the presence of police officers. The success of these units is evidenced in places like Eugene, Oregon. Secondly, funding must include research and standards-based evaluation to determine the effectiveness of these mobile crisis response team models.
- iv. **Funding for Education and Early Intervention:** Any federal funding for public education or educational services within areas of federal jurisdictions should be based on the following principles:
 - a) Adequate and culturally appropriate support for people of all ages;
 - b) Priorization of educational / intervention support for economically underprivileged neighbourhoods serving a diverse range of families with varying cultural needs and reduced resources;
 - c) Recognition that early intervention is key to improved wellness from birth to maturity,
 - d) Curriculum development to include anti-racism, gender diversity and inclusivity as key elements.