



July 9, 2020
Victoria, B.C.

Recommendations to the Province of British Columbia for a Just Recovery

Dear Premier Horgan, Members of Cabinet and Province of British Columbia Members of the Legislative Assembly representing the people of Greater Victoria:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility and inequality of prosperity in our province. The coronavirus, and our responses to it, have exacerbated systemic social and economic inequities and shown clearly where, as a province, 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 all 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. We know you agree that 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 need to ensure affordable housing for all members of our community so that they 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 British Columbia 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 in British Columbia and elsewhere. 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 there were more deaths from overdose than COVID-19¹. B.C.'s recovery plan is an opportunity to address these **public health** issues and to create systematic changes.

This document will speak to and advocate for the rights of people in B.C., 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 our province 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 B.C.
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.
3. **Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls**
 - 3.1. GVAT urges the provincial government to urgently develop implementation plans and funding to respond to the 231 Calls for Justice delivered in the Final Report of

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

the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls². This must not be delayed by federal-provincial finger pointing.

4. Climate Justice

Objective: A just response to the health and climate emergency

Climate change is the biggest health hazard ever to face 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. As stated in Article 23 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, “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 of the land 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 such projects. The impacts of climate change are also 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.

B.C.’s 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 increase 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:
 - o Guarantee a job and retraining for every displaced worker (including those outside of the energy sector).

² www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/

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

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

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 province and beyond, 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 adequate funding for:

- 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
- Transit infrastructure, and emergency and ongoing transit operating costs
- Creating affordable highway bus and passenger rail service
- Electrifying vehicles, prioritizing fleets such as transit buses, municipal vehicles, B.C. Ferries vessels, taxis, car sharing fleets, and delivery vehicles

v. Not make the climate crisis worse:

- No economic stimulus directed toward fossil fuel extraction
- Eliminate public subsidies for the fossil fuel industry and reinvest these funds in a just recovery
- 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 space heating conversion program from oil and fracked gas fuels to electric heat pumps, prioritizing schools and other public buildings, particularly in vulnerable neighbourhoods.

vii. Fund a Green New Deal for logging communities. Investments in economic recovery must restore the health of B.C.'s forests and create healthy and diverse rural economies. Healthy forests act as carbon sinks, removing carbon from the atmosphere, but B.C.'s forests now emit more carbon than they absorb. Under current B.C. logging practices, logging one hectare of typical Pacific Northwest old-growth results in releasing more than 1000 tonnes of CO₂. Communities on Vancouver Island, particularly indigenous communities, need support as old growth logging is ended and the volume of wood cut is reduced to sustainable levels.

- 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
- Guarantee a job and retraining to every displaced worker

- Restore funding to the Ministry of Forests and create more jobs in the B.C. forest service. Restore responsibility for monitoring forests from logging companies to the Ministry of Forests.
- 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

- 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. Natural infrastructure can also replenish precious ground water.
- 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 agroecology / regenerative agriculture, not industrial agriculture. 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."**⁷ This 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 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

⁵ On 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](#).

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 Recovery program:

- i. Affordable Housing for All:** B.C. 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.
- ii. GHG emissions reduction:** all housing supported under a recovery program should contribute to greenhouse gas 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. Housing First for the Unhoused:** All unhoused persons in Greater Victoria should have access to appropriate and diverse forms of permanent and supportive housing, including closely linked support services such as mental health counselling, harm reduction, health care, and employment counselling to meet their individual needs. This should include basic emergency housing for anyone whose need is temporary, such as fleeing violence. Distinct housing is needed for seniors and youth, including youth at risk, youth aging out of care and young adults who may be at greater risk if housed with adults, with particular attention to indigenous and 2SLGBTQI+ youth. Supportive and wrap-around services for the unhoused should be co-located appropriately. Permanent housing should be created at a modest scale distributed across neighbourhoods around the region.
- iv. 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.
- v. Social housing:** The provincial government must 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 speed the process of preparing development proposals for provincial funding. 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.
- vi. Protection for renters:** Legislation should be revised to require landlords to apply to an independent arbitration panel for any eviction action except "just cause" under s. 47 of

the Residential Tenancy Act. When evictions are justified for reasons of renovation or demolition, landlords managing more than five units should be obliged to find suitable accommodation for tenants who request it, at comparable rents.

- vii. GVAT suggests specific policies to regulate practices in the real estate industry to promote greater transparency. As the recovery proceeds, local treatment of zoning, property taxes and development charges related to land assembly and residential development should be reformed to reduce speculative incentives in residential property markets.

6. Addressing Mental Health and Addiction Issues in Our Communities

We have 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 is an essential part of a just and green recovery. Though framed in a local context, 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 suggests that our proposals have wider relevance for the provincial government as well.

- i. **Core Funding:** We consider existing community led organizations and NGOs providing culturally competent mental health care and addiction treatments at no cost on delivery, as well as mental health services in public schools, to be to be essential foundational elements of any healthy, thriving, and productive community. We therefore ask the Provincial government to increase their investment in the well-being of residents by funding these, and other services with core-based 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. **Fund Low Barrier Access Portals to Care:** We are aware that in our area and other areas, various portals for access to mental health and addiction services have been proposed or set up. We applaud this effort, since low barrier access to what are at present a bewildering array of services and service providers seems an essential component of a just recovery for all users. However, we want to propose that trained and paid peer navigators should be the staffers of this point of access, and that these peer navigators be chosen with attention to their life experience and intersectional marginalized identities. As part of the portal “menu of offerings” there should be low-barrier access to a range of recovery-oriented and funded evidence-based interventions including peer support.
- iii. **Mobile Crisis Response Teams and Funded Ongoing Evaluation:** Mobile outreach and crisis units should be formed with a qualified peer, a social worker, and a medically qualified helper, but without the presence of police officers. These units –whose success

has been evident in places like Eugene, Oregon—would be available for the peer navigator to call on. Secondly, we propose that the hub organization we describe above also have a fully funded research team to evaluate the effectiveness of the mobile crisis response teams. Marginalized people must be able to access these resources, and peer navigators be available to direct those accessing mental health and addiction services. This kind of evidence and standards-based evaluation seems essential and missing in other portal proposals.

iv. Education and Early Intervention: Adequate and culturally appropriate support for people of all ages is imperative. This includes fully funded school programs, at all levels, with a specific focus on early intervention and community-based comprehensive, multi-tiered, mental health and family counselling pilot programs. Schools situated in economically underprivileged neighbourhoods serving a diverse range of families with varying cultural needs and reduced resources must be a priority. The following are points that must be considered when putting such programs in place:

- Recognition that early intervention is key to improved wellness from birth to maturity, this includes institutional interventions for those who perpetuate bias and prejudice
- Priority given to counselling for children in primary classes
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting protocols, it is necessary to prepare for increased anxiety in children upon their return to school in September
- Revamping of educational funding to schools in high poverty areas
- Establish operational (non-grant) core funding in collaboration with school districts for expansion of community-based, culturally-informed, comprehensive mental health programs
- Curriculum should be redeveloped to ensure anti-racism is centred in all material
- Curriculum development for the education of gender diversity and inclusivity
- Work with the B.C.TF to establish ratios for counsellors in schools
- Promote stronger and more effective inter-ministry collaboration at the provincial level in addressing mental health in children; Ministries of Education, Health, Finance, Children and Family Development, Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Mental Health and Addiction, Social Development and Poverty Reduction