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Living wage in Cowichan Region rises to \$25.20 amid soaring costs

COWICHAN — As the cost of essentials continues to balloon, particularly for housing and food, Cowichan's regional living wage has climbed to \$25.20 per hour for 2023, marking an increase of 7.1 per cent from last year, the 2023 Living Wage Update report shows.

The living wage, calculated by Social Planning Cowichan, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Office and Living Wage for Families BC, is the hourly rate that each of two parents working full-time must earn to support a family of four based on the actual costs of living in a particular community.

The 2023 Living Wage report shows that the Cowichan living wage family has to spend over \$3780 more than last year for the same basket of goods.

While parents with young children in licensed child care have benefitted from large fee reductions this year, the savings are entirely consumed by soaring prices in other areas. Housing costs alone demand an added \$312.73 per month from their budget—a spike of 17.6. Food, the second most expensive item in the living wage family budget, is an extra \$74.36 per month, soaring by 6.1 per cent.

“Although inflation has dropped from last year’s historic highs, the cost of living across BC continues to increase rapidly,” says Ryan Watson of Social Planning Cowichan, who has been conducting living wage research for the past 4 out of 9 calculations that Social Planning Cowichan has reported for our region.

Cowichan’s living wage ranks among the highest in the province, only slightly behind larger urban centers such as Victoria and Metro Vancouver. While there are some areas in which cost of living may be more affordable in our region (the cost of rental housing, for instance), Cowichan’s more rural, dispersed geography and mix of smaller communities nearly always requires that families maintain two vehicles for daily commuting, adding a significant financial burden compared to families in larger urban areas with access to more efficient public transportation. Having to pay more to get around is often overlooked, but could be greatly improved by advocating for more investment in our transit infrastructure to better serve our communities and help make life more affordable for families in the Cowichan Region.

Many BC employers have stepped up to pay both direct and contract employees wages sufficient to support families, with nearly 400 certified Living Wage Employers across the province, with 8 registered employers in the Cowichan Region.

Many BC workers earn less than the living wage and face impossible choices—buy groceries or heat the house, keep up with bills or pay the rent on time.

“In the last two years, the gap between the minimum wage and living wages in BC has grown significantly. In Cowichan, this gap is now close to \$8.45 dollars per hour, ” says Watson.

“BC’s low-wage workers need a raise but the labour market alone can't resolve all economic insecurities,” he notes. “Governments can and should do more to address the cost of living crisis that people are facing across the province.”

Watson stresses that the living wage only allows for a modest lifestyle without extras many of us take for granted.

“A living wage allows workers meet their basic needs and have the time and money for an active and fulfilling family and personal life,” he adds, “however it is important to note that this calculation represents a ‘bare minimum’ standard of living, and fails to include additional expenses such as debt repayment, future savings for a house, retirement or children’s education, anything beyond minimal entertainment and recreation, among other unexpected costs that might arise throughout the year.”

We encourage all Cowichan businesses and organizations to become certified Living Wage Employers. To learn more or register your business, visit [Living Wage for Families BC](#).

For more information please visit www.socialplanningcowichan.com, or contact infospcowichan@gmail.com.