

A composite image featuring a rainy night street scene. The top and bottom portions show blurred lights and rain falling on a wet pavement. In the center, there is a white rectangular area containing the title text. To the right of this area, there is a vertical purple bar. The bottom right portion of the image shows a person's legs in a dark coat and light-colored pants walking on the wet street, with their reflection visible in a puddle.

# Cowichan Living Wage

2023

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# What is a Living Wage?

Simply stated, a living wage is the hourly rate of pay one must earn in order to ensure the cost of basic necessities are consistently covered, including food, clothing, rental housing, transportation, childcare (in the case of families), and a small amount of savings for illness or emergencies.<sup>1</sup> While a conservative figure representing a “bare minimum” of what a family would need to earn in order to cover a modest amount of expenses, the determination of a living wage is consistent in encouraging local employers to offer rates of pay significantly higher than the provincially mandated minimum wage to provide for greater financial stability and a way to avoid the cycle of living paycheque-to-paycheque.

As a poverty reduction tool, a living wage has the effect of leading to better overall health and wellbeing not just for families and individuals, but for the social health of communities as a whole.



# What is a Living Wage

(Continued)

Families who work for low wages face impossible choices: buy food or heat the house, feed the children or pay rent. The result can be spiraling debt, constant anxiety, and long-term health problems.”<sup>2</sup> Many parents are forced to work multiple jobs and often more than full time to earn enough to support their families, which leaves little time to spend with their children or to participate in community life outside of work.<sup>3</sup>

The living wage calculation considers factors that promote healthy child development, the ability to participate in activities that are an ordinary element of life in a community, as well as avoiding the chronic stress of living in poverty and having to make sacrifices on a regular basis. Ensuring individuals can meet their core living expenses supports peace of mind, including mental, physical and emotional well-being.<sup>4</sup>

The living wage practice has been shown to be an effective business model, and as such has already engendered significant support from communities and business across British Columbia. Higher pay has been shown to translate directly into a healthier economy, as much of the money continues to be spent and recirculate locally. In addition, business that have adopted a living wage policy have reported higher employee productivity, and a reduction in costly staff turnover.<sup>5</sup>



# What is a Living Wage

(Continued)

It is now 2023, and it seems as though things are not getting any easier. Ordinary Canadians, like much of the world, are feeling the pinch of accelerated rates of inflation, evident in soaring costs across nearly all basic goods and services required for participation in society. Geopolitical instability in certain parts of the world have been identified as having driven up costs for oil and gas and other raw materials,<sup>6</sup> which are being passed on to consumers, and, more recently in the news, greed is increasingly being looked at as a major factor in rising prices, as corporate profits, perhaps counterintuitively, reached all-time highs during the COVID-19 pandemic for many major retail and telecom conglomerates both domestically and internationally. In an effort to cool off what seems like runaway inflation, the Bank of Canada has increased its key interest rate a total of ten times, from .25 to 5 per cent since March of 2022, and although inflation is observed to be slowing in recent months, the effects are still being felt by consumers, especially so for low-wage earners, whose pay is not keeping pace with the sharp increases to the overall cost of living.<sup>7</sup>

One bright spot financially for families this year has seen major new and continued investments made by the Provincial Government with regard to child care. This child care fee reduction initiative has resulted in the Living Wage family a savings of \$3627.00 annually; a significant amount that *should* allow families better flexibility in their financial planning and extra money in their pockets that can be spent as deemed fit. But while these investments are great, a lot more still needs to be done.<sup>8</sup>

The grim fact is that all gains in affordability that we saw in this and previous years have been effectively wiped out by sharply rising costs in other areas, leading to another dramatic increase in this year's Living Wage figure for the Cowichan Region.



# Changes to the Living Wage Calculation for 2023

- Increases to the BC Family Benefit and the Climate Action Tax Credit as of July 2023, as well as one-off enhancements to both earlier in the year
- GST credit one-off enhancement (aka “grocery rebate”)
- Canada Dental Benefit included in the calculation
- More fine-tuning of housing methodology, using census data to reflect how much more people are paying in cases when they have to move to a new home.
- Substantial child care fee reductions were introduced in December 2022 for children 0-5 in participating licensed child care settings. Smaller fee reductions became available to licensed school-age child care starting in September 2023.



# About the Model

## Two-parent, two-child household

Traditionally, the living wage in British Columbia is calculated for a family consisting of two adults, both aged 31-50, and two children, one aged seven, the other aged four—the most common family unit in BC.<sup>9</sup> The parents each work 35 hours per week and both earn an equal hourly wage. The calculation guide is based on this family model, but it is important to acknowledge that household sizes and needs vary widely and individual family circumstances may mean that a family requires more or less income to make ends meet. Other types of families will require different wage levels to achieve the same standard of living as our model family. For example, a single-parent family with 2 children may expect to see reduced costs from having a smaller family unit, however the loss of a second income is not equivalent to those reduced costs, as a single income earner might instead have to allot a higher proportion of their income toward housing costs (as just one example).



*“Families who work for low wages face impossible choices: buy food or heat the house; feed the children or pay rent? The result can be spiraling debt, constant anxiety, and long-term health problems.”*

# Methodology

Working for a Living Wage is a calculation guide developed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), an independent, non-partisan research institute, as well as First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, and it is a part of the Living Wage for Families Campaign.<sup>10</sup> This guide has been utilized to calculate Metro Vancouver and Greater Victoria living wages since 2008 and is updated annually to reflect the most current and accurate information, including yearly Consumer Price Index (CPI) statistics and modern studies.<sup>11</sup> The guide considers those factors necessary to determining a rudimentary living wage that permits paid fulltime work to provide for basic family needs in a given region. The calculation guide, methodology guide, and sources can be downloaded free of charge from the CCPA at: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/livingwage2018>.

Use of the CCPA calculation guide requires the input of local prices reflective of the Cowichan Region, and it is notable that these figures are ever changing pieces of information regarding family expenses and government transfers and taxes. Consequentially, the information provided within this report is guaranteed accurate only as of the date of its publication. The Cowichan Valley Living Wage report is updated annually to ensure its reflection of market conditions and government assistance remain as accurate as possible.

In this calculation method, family expenses are divided into 10 categories. The living wage calculation uses Human Resources and Skills Development Canada’s Market Basket Measure (MBM) —“a measure of low income based on the cost of a specified basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living”<sup>12</sup> —to determine expenses for the following areas: clothing and footwear, transportation, and other household expenses.<sup>13</sup> Local data is inserted to determine the prices of food, shelter, telecommunications, child care, parent education and transportation. Other expenses, such as medical and contingency amounts are calculated separately.<sup>14</sup> Inflation costs are accounted for in the calculation using CPI data for the previous calendar year (2022).<sup>15</sup>



# What Makes Up A Living Wage?

## Breakdown of Basic Household Expenses Per Month

\*All prices are reported in Canadian dollars (CAD)

<b>FOOD</b>	<b>\$1280.19</b>
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Obtaining food costs can provide valuable information for population and public health planning, as sufficient, safe, and nutritious food is critical to the health and well-being of our communities.<sup>16</sup> Food security is accordingly concerned with much more than simply having enough to eat, as it instead seeks to provide for a nutritionally adequate, balanced diet that is safe and culturally appropriate. Reports demonstrate that the monthly cost of the National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB) in BC is steadily increasing over time, and presently at a rate that is outpacing inflation itself. This has a disproportionate impact on households with the lowest incomes.<sup>17</sup>

The cost of food was calculated using data collected by the BC Center for Disease Control, which calculates the cost of food in each provincial health authority region based upon a random selection of grocery stores and on the federal government's standardized costing tool.<sup>18</sup> The report provides monthly food costs for both adults and children by gender and age categories and is altered using specific values for the Cowichan Valley. Figures from the CDC show that the increase in food costing is actually outpacing inflation in many instances across the province, which disproportionately affects lower wage earners and highlights some major problems with multinational corporations having such a large degree of control over our food supply.

From this new data, food costs have risen 6.17 per cent over our previous calculation, completed in 2022; and up by a staggering 41.6 per cent since before the pandemic. It is worth noting that food is the second biggest expense for our scenario family, having recently surpassed the cost of childcare with recent investments made to alleviate financial pressures in that area, while the cost of food continues to soar.<sup>19</sup>

# What Makes Up A Living Wage?

(Continued)

<b>RENTAL HOUSING</b>	<b>\$2089.49</b>
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Being that 2021 was a Canadian Census year, Statistics Canada was the data source used to obtain the median rental price in the Cowichan Valley for 2023. Three bedroom rental data from the Duncan and Ladysmith Census Agglomeration areas were weighted by population to determine a base rate for the region. Notably, whereas past data sources (CMHC) only captured data pertaining to the primary rental market (purpose-built rental units), this census data includes rates from the secondary rental market as well, including suites, rental condos and / or entire houses among others, all of which are common rental arrangements in our region.<sup>20</sup> On top of this, as was the case last year, is an additional 18 per cent was added to account for a portion of “available now” rental unit rates (which skew much higher than the median according to Statistics Canada); a value that has been termed a “mover’s penalty” by the campaign organizers. This differs from methodology from 2021 and earlier, which presumed a family has been living in their current rental home for quite some time, allowing for relative stability in rental costs. However, including the mover’s penalty better reflects the often tenuous situation of many renters (including families) who are disproportionately at risk of having to move for various reasons (including eviction) at any time due to various and often unforeseen circumstances, forcing those having to move to absorb significantly increased costs due to the higher rental rates available in the market in the current climate. Finally, an inflation rate of 12 per cent was also applied, as determined by the campaign. This methodology is consistent in participating communities with a population of over 10,000 people across the province.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, housing represents the single greatest cost that families in our region are faced with. It should also be noted that aggregated housing data is not currently available for designated places whose population is fewer than 10,000 people (ie. Town of Lake Cowichan, the various outlying areas of the CVRD, etc.), however it is accepted that this is an appropriate proxy to reflect housing prices throughout the entire region. Housing costs for our scenario family show an increase of 17.6 per cent over last year’s calculation.

# What Makes Up A Living Wage?

(Continued)

<b>UTILITIES</b>	<b>\$248.15</b>
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This figure was obtained automatically through the calculation guide, which uses Stats Canada’s 2021 census that is then augmented using the 2021 and 2023 CPI statistics for “Water, fuel, and electricity” from Stats Canada, CPI Table 18-10-0005-01 (Formerly CANSIM Table 326-0021).<sup>22 23</sup> This year’s calculation shows a slight cost decrease of \$7.74 per month over last year’s figure.

<b>RENTER’S INSURANCE</b>	<b>\$47.14</b>
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The estimated monthly price for renter’s insurance used in this methodology was determined by obtaining quotes for the cost of tenant’s insurance from four different providers (BCAA, InsureBC, Westland, Square 1), and then from those determining the average cost. The quotes obtained were based on a generic 3-bedroom rental apartment unit with electric heating and an average price per month +/- \$200 of the Cowichan Valley Regional District’s (CVRD) metrics for house type rental information (if applicable). Quotes can vary greatly, however, depending on location and age of the house, renter’s history and age, and a number of other factors. For the two-parent, two-child family, a minimum contents value of \$50,000 was used, plus any applicable financing fees for monthly payment. The cost of renters insurance has increased over last year by \$14.31 per month.

<b>CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR</b>	<b>\$175.76</b>
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This figure was calculated automatically for British Columbia using the MBM amount for 2022, which was then adjusted to reflect current prices using the CPI for 2021 and 2023.<sup>24</sup> Annual clothing costs have shown just a slight increase for a family of 4, for a total cost of \$2,109.12 for the year.

# What Makes Up A Living Wage?

## (Continued)

### PHONE AND INTERNET

**\$173.04**

With data monitored by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Council (CRTC), and their tracking of industry and consumer trends, cell phone parameters for the calculation continue to include 4G LTE network, but increased the allowable data minimum from 4 to 5 gigabytes per month.<sup>25</sup> The costs of two phone plans (one per adult in the family) under these parameters that also included unlimited Canada-wide talk and text, as well as the cost of the two smartphones for themselves was included in the calculation.<sup>26</sup> Campaign organizers opted to include rates from Virgin Mobile as the cheapest mobile plan available province-wide, at a cost to the family of \$109.20 per month.

A fixed, high-speed internet connection (as close to 50/10 Mbps as possible, as per the CRTC's consumer trend data<sup>27</sup>) in the home is included in the calculation as well. The most cost-effective provider in the region is Oxio Internet, which offers 75/7.5 Mbps internet speed \$63.84/month, which includes the rental of a modem and applicable taxes.

While these items total \$173.04, this shows a reduction from last year's calculation, down from \$196.00 per month, for a notable savings of \$22.96 per month.

### TRANSPORTATION

**\$953.32**

Once again, Cowichan was able to use the "rural" transportation model for the calculation of Living Wage to account for our region's spread-out, decentralized population and smaller urban centers underserved by public transportation options, necessitating that most families in our region require two vehicles for daily commuting needs. This fact of life for people in the Cowichan Region was backed up by newly released data from the 2021 census, which found that only 0.9 per cent of the Cowichan Region's workforce commutes to work using public transit.<sup>28</sup>

The figure supplied by the campaign is based upon the MBM 2022 amounts for rural communities in BC (which represents the costs of owning and operating a second-hand vehicle) and was adjusted by the CPI to reflect current prices.<sup>29</sup> Under these parameters, the annual cost of operating two passenger vehicles works out to \$11,439.82, a 1.15 percent increase over 2022's figure.

# What Makes Up A Living Wage?

(Continued)

<b>OTHER HOUSEHOLD AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$1097.81</b>
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This number is automatically calculated by the Living Wage calculation guide, using the 2022 MBM that estimates all “other” expenses at 75.4% of the combined expense of food, clothing and footwear. This amount is intended to cover such things as toiletries and personal care items, furniture, household supplies, laundry, school supplies and fees, bank fees, some reading materials, minimal recreation and family entertainment, family outings (ex. museums and cultural events), birthday presents, modest family vacation time, and—when relevant—some sports and/or arts classes for the child(ren).<sup>30</sup> This amount has increased by a rather significant \$57.54 per month over last year's calculation, thanks to rising costs across the board.

<b>CHILD CARE</b>	<b>\$481.90</b>
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The family model includes 2 children, and assumes the four-year-old to be in full-time day care (licensed group child care) and the seven-year-old to be in before and after school care during the school year, full-time daycare for three weeks during winter and spring breaks plus 6 professional development days off from school, and in six weeks of full-time summer care.<sup>31</sup>

Local child care data this year was obtained by surveying approximately 20 child care centers throughout the region, obtaining rates they charge for the various parameters through a combination of phoning to speak directly with providers, costing information supplied by Cowichan’s Child Care Resource and Referral (Clements Centre), and the BC Government [Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative Estimator tool](#). Where applicable, facility fee reduction amounts were accounted for in all 12 months of care for the four-year-old; and four months’ worth of fee reduction for the seven year old, given that the fee reduction for that age group only came into effect in September of 2023. The remaining six months of the school year were calculated without the reduction.<sup>32</sup>

Through the information collected, it was determined that full-time daycare for the younger child was \$ 5,760.00 annually, which includes a \$545 per month facility fee-reduction. Before-and-after school care for the school-aged child was \$4700 per year, including a \$115 per month reduction in fees.

# What Makes Up A Living Wage?

## (Continued)

Full-day care for school-aged child during the year's 6 professional development days is \$249, \$600 for full-day care for winter and spring breaks (3 weeks total), and \$1070 for a full-day care summer program (1 month and 2 weeks).

In addition to the facility fee reductions mentioned, the family is also eligible to receive BC's Affordable Child Care Benefit, reimbursed directly to the family for an additional \$560.51 per month worth of savings.

With all reduction initiatives accounted for, annual costs for childcare in the Cowichan Region are \$5782.88, a very substantial reduction from the previous year's reported cost of \$16,136.00. This is a savings of \$862.76 per month, and while we commend the BC Government for these steps in addressing affordability, much more can still be done in this area to further alleviate financial strain on families such as increasing funding and capacity for childcare in our community, and implementing more \$10 a day daycare centers, of which there are currently just three in our region.

### HEALTHCARE EXPENSES

**\$279.00**

This estimate assumes that the family's health care expenses are equivalent to the cost of purchasing private health insurance. This amount was automatically provided by the CCPA, obtained from the expense of purchasing Pacific Blue Cross Insurance, including coverage on the extended health care plan, prescription drug option, and dental option. Showing an increase of 24 per cent since last year's calculation, annual healthcare costs are up to \$3,348.

### PARENT EDUCATION

**\$126.42**

The Living Wage calculation allows for one parent to be attending university classes part-time. For credit-based undergraduate programs (including career and technical programs) at Vancouver Island University's Cowichan Campus, tuition fees are \$163.14 per credit. Calculations are for two courses per year (3 credits/course), with a student activity fee at 4% tuition, and a student services fee of \$7.21 per credit. The Cowichan campus also has a student union monthly fee of \$17.68.<sup>33</sup> Finally, an estimate of the cost of textbooks was provided by the Living Wage campaign organizers, determined to be \$150 per course.<sup>34</sup> Total cost is \$758.56 per semester.

# What Makes Up A Living Wage?

(Continued)

**CONTINGENCY FUND**

**\$294.00**

This source of savings is meant to provide some element of protection in the case of unexpected events like the serious illness of a family member or transition times between jobs.<sup>35</sup> It is provided as an expense for each parent and is calculated by the equation: (The living wage amount \* hours worked per week \* two weeks). This amount has necessarily risen by 6.8 per cent since 2022's calculation.



## What is NOT included in the Living Wage calculation?

It is important to note that this calculation represents a “bare minimum”, and fails to include additional expenses such as:

- Debt repayments from credit cards, loans, or other interest payments;
- Future savings for home ownership, retirement, or children’s post-secondary education;
- Anything beyond minimal recreation, entertainment, and holiday costs;
- Costs of caring for a disabled, seriously ill, or elderly family member.

\*All government deductions, taxes, and subsidies are calculated in the spreadsheet provided by the CCPA and were verified to be accurate at the time of calculation.

# \$25.20

## Hourly Living Wage Cowichan 2023

Living Wage in the Cowichan Region has  
INCREASED by 7.1% since 2022

<b>Year</b>	<b>Living Wage</b>	<b>Percent change from previous</b>
<b>2014</b>	\$17.04	n/a
<b>2015</b>	\$17.50	+ 3.0%
<b>2016</b>	\$18.81	+ 7.2%
<b>2017</b>	\$19.05	+ 1.3%
<b>2018</b>	\$18.18	- 4.6%
<b>2019</b>	\$18.15	- .02%
<b>2020</b>	(Not calculated due to COVID-19)	n/a
<b>2021</b>	\$19.13	+ 5.4%
<b>2022</b>	\$23.53	+ 20.6%
<b>2023</b>	\$25.20	+ 7.1%



# History of the Living Wage

The living wage movement began in earnest in 1994 in Baltimore, Maryland and has since gained support throughout the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom as an effective means to combat stagnant wages and poverty.<sup>36</sup> “The Living Wage for Families Campaign was formally launched in the fall of 2008 with the publication of *Working for a Living Wage* and is guided by an advisory committee made up of representatives from unions, businesses, parents, immigrants, and community groups.”<sup>37</sup>

*The Living Wage for Families Campaign is a B.C.-based organization that certifies employers that pay a living wage and advocates for complementary government policies that would help families make ends meet. They publish Living Wage Facts & Myths.*



# Why Child Poverty in BC is a Low-Wage Issue

According to the updated Child Poverty Report Card published in 2022 by First Call: Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, as of 2020 one out of every eight BC children are poor, or 116,500 children. This was a **decrease** of 40,600 children living in poverty from 2019, marking a record low for British Columbia.<sup>38</sup> This can be attributed to swift government intervention and income supports during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure low- and middle-income families could avoid plunging deeper into poverty due to the uncertainty presented by the public health emergency. Of course, with inflation and rising costs evident throughout this report, gains made toward reducing child poverty have likely been cancelled out, and this statistic is all but assured to increase again as affordability continues to spiral out of control.<sup>39</sup>

The prevalence of child poverty in British Columbia is primarily attributed to the static income levels of parents, and a cost of living that greatly exceeds what is affordable on an income that is below a living wage, as argued in this report. With the gap between minimum wage and living wage continuing to widen, it is noteworthy that a significant proportion of impoverished children in the province reside in families categorized as "working poor," denoting those who are gainfully employed but still do not attain a net income sufficient enough to surpass Canada's poverty line.<sup>40</sup>



*In a 2008 study, economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago who examined 23 years of household spending data found that an increase in the minimum wage leads households with a minimum-wage worker to significantly increase their spending over the next year. In fact, for every dollar increase in the minimum wage, families with a minimum-wage worker tend to increase spending by more than \$800 per quarter.<sup>41</sup>*

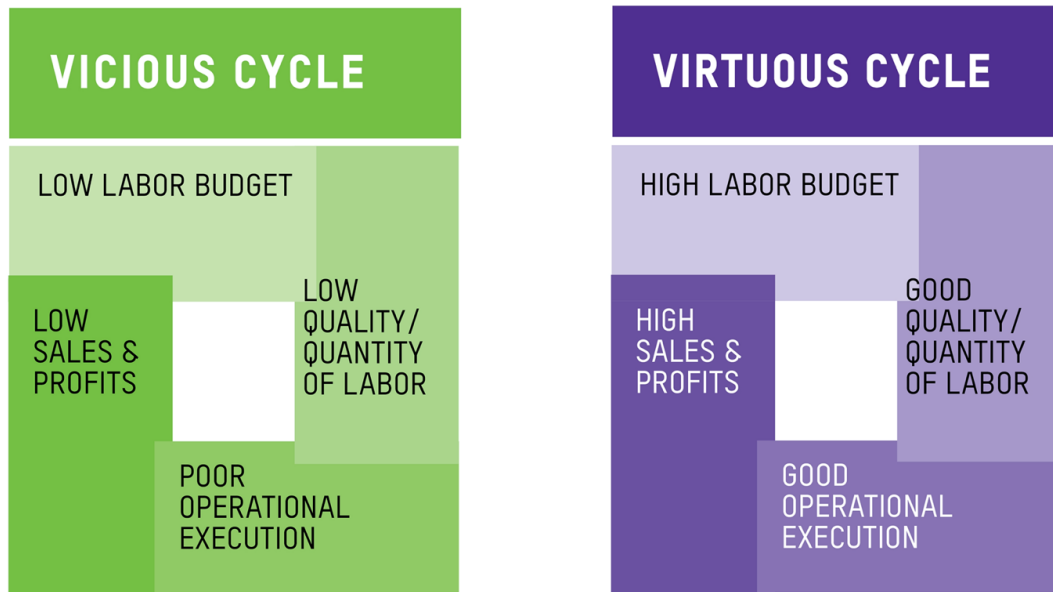
# Becoming a Living Wage Employer

## A Business Case for a Living Wage

Often viewed as conflictual are the best interests of business and its employees; however, along with improving working conditions and the financial security of labourers, employers and businesses can also gain from the adoption of a living wage policy. Studies have found that in the case of living wage practices, businesses can expect to see improved job quality, productivity, and service delivery, as stresses from economic anxiety are eliminated and incentives are restructured, resulting in an instant return when viewed in terms of productivity.<sup>42</sup> This also leads to lower rates of absenteeism and employee turnover, creating significant savings in hiring and training, and both contributing even further to heightened output.<sup>43</sup> Local businesses can also expect to see a stimulated economy as increased “disposable income [is] likely to boost purchases more for lower-income than for higher-income households.”<sup>44</sup> Lastly, businesses will experience greater corporate social responsibility and firm reputation which leads to becoming an employer of choice, necessary for retaining a talented and motivated workforce.<sup>45</sup> As a mayor of London—a living wage city—once put it, “what may be viewed to a company [as] an unaffordable cost [a living wage]... should more often be viewed as a sound investment decision.”<sup>46</sup>

## The Economic Context for the Living Wage

In Canada and in developed countries around the globe, stagnant wages have increasingly become a significant issue for the working class, as tougher competition for steadily inferior wages has led to greater income inequality and a diminished working class. The Cowichan Valley is rapidly growing unaffordable and unlivable for average families, which is why the living wage seeks to provide for an income that more accurately reflects current prices and living expenses to compensate where provincially mandated minimum wage requirements have failed. Wage increases have often been resisted on the basis of contributing themselves to inflation, so negating the positive impact of a wage increase. However, reviews of the research done on the effects of wage increases for those in the lower classes of society have soundly rebutted this logic, illustrating that in the real world, wage increases—even when swift—fail to causally contribute to substantial inflationary pressures as it does not alter the money supply in the economy and only minimally augments the money in circulation, while the loss to businesses in wages can and is most often offset by increased productivity.<sup>47</sup> As such, the argument for the living wage holds in macroeconomic terms, as the process can instead promote money circulation and investment—an economic stimulus for local economies.



In her groundbreaking work, [Zeynep Ton](#) describes the benefits a business can reap from a “good jobs” strategy. She characterizes “vicious” versus “virtuous” cycles in labor practices. In the vicious cycle, businesses respond to short-term pressures to pay low wages with few benefits. The result is that workers are disengaged, and the business suffers: absenteeism is common, turnover is high, mistakes are frequent, and the operation is eventually plagued with problems.<sup>48</sup>

In the virtuous cycle, workers are regarded as an integral part of the business. Businesses that pay higher wages attract more loyal and productive workers, experience less absenteeism and turnover, and see fewer mistakes and accidents.<sup>49</sup>

## The Social Case for the Living Wage

The goal of the living wage is to promote social health and sustainability; it is designed to enhance the long-term well-being of the employee, as well as that of one's family and community. At the current minimum wage of \$16.75/hour, there are thousands of families in British Columbia who are living below the poverty line. For families, this means children are unable to live a stable lifestyle due to frequent movement and the resulting lack of continuity in their education and with friends. Moreover, parents are forced to work more at lower wages, leading to less time spent with their children. A statement from Ellen Pেকেles, the Senior Vice President of Operations at Vancity—BC’s largest living wage employer—addressed this saying, “If both parents in a family are working full-time, their children should not be living in poverty. Just as we consider our environmental footprint, it’s our hope that more BC employers will consider their social and economic impact and pay their employees a living wage.”<sup>50</sup>

***Studies show that living wage employers also cut costs when it comes to hiring and training new employees. Learn more in [How Living Wages Benefit Employers](#).***

Additionally, according to the Living Wage for Families Campaign, income is perhaps the most important determinant of health. This occurs because our income level shapes our overall living conditions, affecting psychological functioning and influencing health-related behaviours. In terms of civic engagement, allowing adults to work fewer hours to get by allows for greater participation in community life and ability to provide volunteer services, and the opportunity to spend more time with children in both personal and community capacities, while also the opportunity to pursue further education and/or skills training in order to qualify for higher-paying positions is now readily available. In these ways, the cause of a living wage is the cause of a bettered community, whereby the economy will be stimulated, and social health will improve for all.

## Supporting a Living Wage

While the benefits of becoming a Living Wage employer are clear, local businesses can join the ranks of the [8 Cowichan Living Wage employers](#) by becoming certified living wage employers themselves through the official [Living Wage for Families BC campaign](#). More information on the process, guidelines and criteria are available on the campaign's [website](#). We encourage all local businesses to take the steps toward becoming a living wage employer in our region, and are excited to recognize and share the success stories of businesses rising to the challenge of paying all staff and contractors a living wage going forward.

In the meantime, here are some other immediate steps that businesses can take to add value to employees with little-to-no cost involved. Some you may be doing already! The following is a short list of ideas that can help move toward becoming an employer of choice:

- **Offer Flexible Hours** – Take employee needs into account when scheduling;
- **Eliminate Split Shifts** – These increase transportation and childcare costs;
- **Phone-In Policy** – Allows children to call in at any time they wish;
- Provide Employees with **Discounts on Goods and Services**;
- **Free Meals** for Employees (food industry specific);
- **Strive to Promote from Within** – Relevant skills for future positions or other employment;
- **Provide Incentives** – For obtaining specific training objectives;
- Offer “**Personal Days**” rather than “Sick Days” to provide greater flexibility in usage.

# Employers get behind Living Wage

A growing number of BC employers are seeing the value of paying living wages—there are more than 400 certified Living Wage Employers across BC, including many small businesses, non-profit organizations, unions and cooperatives, across many diverse industries and areas of specialty.

These employers have committed to pay all their direct staff and contract employees a living wage and to require their major service providers to also pay a living wage, including for janitorial, security and food service contracts. Living Wage for Families BC, a program of the Vancity Community Foundation, runs the living wage certification for employers in BC. For the full list of Living Wage Employers or to become a Living Wage Employer, please contact Living Wage for Families BC ([www.livingwageforfamilies.ca](http://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca)).



Source: BC Living Wage for Families, 2023

# Conclusion

As one of our organization's research and reporting functions for the region, Social Planning Cowichan has been tracking Living Wage in the Cowichan Region since 2014. Over this time, we have seen an unprecedented rise in the cost of housing, increases in the cost of food, services, and overall, a growing divide of income inequality in our community. Relying on small and medium-sized local businesses to propel our economy, Cowichan, like numerous other regions, grapples with increasing staffing shortages when wages paid are failing to keep pace with the cost of living. While significant strides were made in addressing affordability in the area of childcare, rising costs across the board mean that many low wage families continue to struggle; and it is also important to recognize while child care fee reductions have been helpful for families, very little progress toward alleviating financial pressures in categories such as rental and grocery costs that would benefit single people or child-free couples has taken place in recent years. As such, families and individuals will increasingly face the dilemma of determining whether they can continue to afford living in the Cowichan Region. While a Living Wage in Cowichan may not solve every challenge facing families in our region, it is certainly a welcome step in the right direction.

# Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely thank our community partners for assisting us in this work, and our funders for making it possible.

- Economic Development Cowichan (CVRD)
- Cowichan Valley Regional District
- Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives
- Clements Centre Society



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