

## Briefing Note on a Social Policy Framework for B.C.

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### **Purpose:**

To provide a brief overview about the idea of a social policy framework for B.C. to help guide Board Voice discussions with boards or government officials

### **Introduction:**

We have many exceptional supports for people in the province of B.C. We are lucky to have some excellent schools and universities, good hospitals and medical staff, and outstanding community agencies providing services and supports from cradle to grave. We also have some complex and difficult social issues that will require a more comprehensive and integrated approach to resolve. For example, British Columbia has the highest rate of poverty in all of Canada and is tied for the highest rate of child poverty with Manitoba.

We can do better. And a social policy framework is an approach to make this happen.

### **Definition:**

**Social policy** focuses on the issues and responses that affect the quality of life and welfare of individuals. In doing so, social policy efforts often seek to protect or promote the material well-being of individuals, families, or groups on the grounds of equality, compassion or justice. Because of this, social policy is tied to economic policy.

Social policy is about the values, strategies, plans, and actions that most directly affect people—individually and in their relationships and networks with their friends, families, and communities. (From *Weaving the Threads* – Nova Scotia)

**Policy frameworks** are tools that can guide decision making, set future direction, identify important connections, and support the alignment of policies and practices both inside and outside an organization. In short, policy frameworks are blueprints for something we want to build and roadmaps for where we want to go. (From the Alberta Social Planning Framework)

## **Why a Social Policy Framework for B.C.**

### **The Problem**

- Currently in B.C. there is no overarching framework to guide the work of social ministries and related community organizations in the province. No all-embracing vision, goals, and accountabilities, which could assist in bringing new approaches to difficult to solve issues.
- While collaboration is recognized as critically important to ensure the best and most efficient use of resources, there are few mechanisms either at a provincial or community level to bring this about.
- Broad ministry plans, which drive change, are often not linked and most ministries continue to operate largely in silos.
- At a community level, there are few planning mechanisms that bring organizations together within their sector or across sector boundaries. Those that do exist are often spotty, ad hoc and not institutionalized. Few resources exist to support this type of work within agency or municipal budgets.
- Linkages between social policies and economic policies are difficult to discern, although upon reflection, are obvious and need to be understood and managed.
- The issues that affect individuals and families are not easily dealt with in silos: issues of employment, housing, health care, child protection, day care, food security, and disability supports for example, are generally linked and require solutions that are linked horizontally at all levels to be effective.
- Time consuming and expensive organizational restructurings rarely accomplish the level of collaboration and integration they set out to resolve.

### **A Social Policy Framework and the Government/Non Profit Initiative (GNPI)**

- GNPI introduced in 2008 is “a vehicle to strengthen the way Government and the Non Profit Sector work together to support stronger communities and better outcomes for British Columbians.”
- Since its inception, GNPI and parts of the non-profit sector have worked together on some key operational issues primarily in the finance and HR areas. Some reports have been generated, although action has been slow.
- A social policy framework is a broader concept, which would include and transcend the work of GNPI. It would go beyond the relationship and transactions between government and the non profit sector and speak to the development of social policy, the roles of the various players, including all of the relevant ministries and would be based on a consultation involving all British

Columbians. A Social Policy Framework would speak to the kind of province we want to live, learn, work and play in and would craft long term goals to take us in these directions.

- The work of the GNPI would become a necessary part of the Framework.

## **A Solution**

- A social policy framework could begin to drive the change necessary to bring about better policy coherence and better social outcomes through the creation of a shared vision and goals, integrated plans, clarified roles and responsibilities and clear expectations and accountabilities.
- Recently six Deputy Ministers were required to develop a joint action plan to address issues for persons with developmental disabilities. The plan recognized that people do not live in silos and require integrated solutions. A social policy framework would institutionalize an approach that would make this the norm rather than an exception.
- A social policy framework developed through extensive provincial consultation would help to build understanding of the linked nature of social issues and the role of different stakeholders in making things better.
- In times of tight budgets, a framework could help to develop provincial priorities and integrated plans to address them and help to streamline delivery mechanisms.
- Existing plans, such as the Healthy Minds, Healthy People, A Ten Year Plan to Address Mental Health and Substance Use in British Columbia; the B.C. Early Years Strategy; and White Paper, Part One: A Modern, Transparent Justice System and White Paper, Part Two: A Timely and Balanced Justice System would all be identified and included in the broad framework.
- The framework would be monitored by a steering committee of Deputy Ministers to ensure milestones were being addressed. All social policy would be reviewed through an integrated lens.
- Evidence based research on the social determinants of health could help to guide priority setting and decision-making.
- The nature of the partnership relationship between government and community agencies could be clarified and the potential for community planning and development exploited to better manage the system of supports to people.
- A policy framework could better balance investments in prevention and

intervention.

### **An Approach to Development**

- Just as there are many different forms a social policy framework could take, there are many ways to get there.
- Board Voice would advocate for a broad provincial consultation, undertaken by the provincial government, informed by a steering committee of key stakeholders.
- Resources would be required to undertake this initiative, although the intent would not be to create funding commitments for new programs in the development of the framework. New funding requirements, which could evolve from the framework, would be handled through the existing processes and within the resources and priorities of the government.

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