



## **A Brief Summary of Poverty in Nelson**

**May 2021**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This summary is based on a review of data ranging from 2015 to 2019, with some 2020/2021 data. It will likely generate more questions than answers. However, it will hopefully stimulate the demand for more and better information as it becomes available.

Nelson's demographics, Nelson's poverty indicators, data in six priority areas that align with *Together BC's* poverty reduction strategy and the Social Determinants of Health help to inform our work at the community level.

### **NELSON'S DEMOGRAPHICS**

The estimated 2019 City of Nelson population is 11,359 made up of 20% children and youth, 60% adults and 20% seniors. 5% identify as Indigenous. 13% are immigrants born outside Canada. The number of new immigrants per year is less than 1%. Like the rest of BC, Nelson's population is aging.

There are 8,950 households in Nelson: 4,850 family households and 4,100 single households. Of the 4,850 family households, 4,123 (85%) are couples and 727 (15%) are single parent households. 43% of family households have children, and of these, nearly half (44%) are singles.

### **POVERTY INDICATORS IN NELSON**

Canada's 2019 national poverty rate (based on Low Income Measure or LIM) is 10.1%. BC's 2018 poverty rate (based on Market Basket Measure or MBM) is 8.9%. Nelson's 2019 LIM poverty rate is 19% (2,170) and as high as 25% for those under 17 years of age.

Nelson's poverty rate is notably higher than the provincial and national rates. 11.3% of those living in poverty are employed. 40% to 48% of single parent families live in poverty. 75% of single parent families are female-led households.

Nearby communities serviced by Nelson with even higher poverty rates are Slocan at 40% and Salmo at 23%. Castlegar and Trail have lower poverty rates closer to 14%, while Rossland and Fruitvale are just above 10%.

The BC Minimum Wage of \$14.60/hour for a single person (37.5 hrs/wk) results in an annual income of \$28,470. The 2019 LIM poverty line is an annual income of \$25,153 for a single-person household.

Two parent families with both parents working a minimum wage role (37.5 hrs/wk) results in an annual income of \$56,940. The living wage\* calculation for two parent/two child families would mean an annual income of \$72,760. Two parent families with two children earning a minimum wage results in \$15,820 less than a living wage annual income.

\* The 2019 Living Wage in Nelson was calculated at \$18.46/hour. The Living Wage calculation includes the amount required for a family of four (two adults/two children) to cover basic expenses including food, clothing, rental housing, childcare, and transportation plus a small amount of savings to cover illness or emergencies.

There is limited data on the number of community members living on less than a living wage, but we do know that 150 families (19%) reported an annual income of \$70,000 or less in 2018 and that the annual cost of living (based on a living wage calculation) for 2019 was \$72,760. The number of community members living on less than a living wage is higher than the number of community members living below the LIM poverty threshold. This means that more than 19% of Nelson's population is living on less than what is needed for a basic, minimum standard of living that a living wage would afford, but the exact % is unknown.

## **SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH**

### **Access to Health Care & Mental Health Care \***

30% of our community members are not attached to a health care practice, and 40% are not attached to a GP or nurse practitioner. Nelson has a 5% higher rate of non-attachment to a health care practice than surrounding communities such as Arrow Lakes, Castlegar, Kootenay Lake, and Trail with only 25% not attached to a health care practice.

\* Data on access to mental health care and addiction supports was not found for this report.

## **Affordable Housing**

61% of households own their home. 39% of households rent their homes. 54% of Nelson's Indigenous community members rent their homes. 47% of renter households and 21% of owner households spend 30% or more of their total household income on shelter costs (rent/mortgage and heat). 31% of single parent households and 22% of single person households live in unaffordable situations, where they pay more than 30% of their income on shelter costs.

During Nelson's April 2019 Homeless Count, 132 people were identified as homeless (unsheltered, emergency sheltered, or provisionally accommodated) on a given night in Nelson, including accompanying dependent children. Of this number, 72% (95) were unsheltered and 44% (58) have called Nelson home for at least 10 years. 35% (46) identify as Indigenous and 18% (24) are under age 25.

Nelson has 31 Cooperative housing units and 754 non-market\* housing facilities ranging from emergency shelters to subsidized rental units. 237 of these are affordable housing units. An additional 127 affordable housing units are currently being built but will not reach demand with 819 waitlisted for these units. Average rental costs range from \$633/month for a room to \$1,842 for a 3 BR unit.

*\* BC housing & community based non profit housing*

## **Education**

At school entry there is a regular assessment of children's readiness to learn. The Early Development Index (EDI) is a validated tool for examining developmental vulnerabilities in five domains. The most recent EDI in SD #8 (Nelson only) shows the number of children with vulnerabilities has been increasing. All other regions in SD#8 have seen EDI vulnerabilities decreasing. Quality early childhood experience is known to improve EDI scores and life course success.

Nelson's graduation rate has been declining over the past three years from 86% in 2017/2018 to 83% in 2019/2020. 22% of our population has post secondary education, which is lower than the provincial average of 25%. 13% of adults in Nelson have no post secondary education.

## **Employment & Income Supports**

The unemployment rate has almost doubled from 6% to 11.3% between August 2019 and August 2020. The majority of employees (64%) in Nelson work part time. Only 36% of those employed report full time work. Close to 1 in 4 (23%) are in sales & service roles. 5% of our workers are in arts/culture or recreation/sport roles. Our top three industries are Healthcare & Social Services (15%), Retail Trade (13%) and Construction (9%).

The median income of couple families is \$88,760 per year. The median income of single parent families is \$42,030 per year. Single parents earn roughly 40% less than couples with children. 1,400 people received EI in 2018 and 679 people received social or disability assistance in 2019.

**Social Supports & Social Inclusion** (food security, transportation, justice, immigrants)

On average, in 2019, Nelson Food Banks received 50 visits a day and served 73 emergency food services / community meals a day. Monthly bus pass costs range from \$31/month (students) to \$60/month (adults). The low-income bus pass is \$45/year, which is only available to seniors aged 60+, people with a disability, and people living on a First Nations reserve getting Band Office assistance. There is no low-income bus pass for adults or families in general. 13% of our population are immigrants, with less than 1% being recent immigrants. No data was located on access to justice services.

**Supports for Families, Children & Youth**

There are 378 licenced childcare spaces in Nelson and areas E & F. 863 additional spaces are needed to bring Nelson and area's coverage rate to a recommended target of 55%. 64 spaces have been approved and are being created in 2021. The potential for increased availability of universal quality childcare will help address this gap.

Full-time, average monthly childcare costs, after eligible fee reductions, are \$718 for infants and toddlers, \$754 for 3 – 5 year olds, and \$350 for school-aged children in after school care.

28% of children live in low-income households, significantly higher than the provincial rate of 18.5% and Canada's child poverty rate of 18.2%.

**Want to learn more?**

Listen to *Nelson at its Best's* recent Kootenay Coop show on local poverty [here](#).

Read a short overview of BC's first-ever provincial poverty reduction strategy, *Together BC* [here](#)

Read a short overview of Canada's first-ever national poverty reduction strategy, *Opportunity for All* [here](#)

## References

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Together Nelson gratefully acknowledges funding from

