



# Research and advocacy organizations announce Living Wage rate calculation

The community campaign for a living wage has received another boost with the release of new research showing that workers in Vancouver need at least \$16.74 an hour – and \$16.39 an hour in Victoria – to support their families.

The living wage calculation was released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, and the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria at a September 25 news conference.

Noting that B.C. has had the highest child poverty rate in Canada for the past five years, First Call's Adrienne Montani told the news conference that a living wage is fundamental to the struggle to eliminate child poverty in our communities.

“For those who seek to end child poverty, this is truly where the rubber hits the road,” she said. “What does it say about our economy when families are doing all the right things – working hard and working long hours – and yet have to choose between paying the rent or putting food on the table?”

Erna Calingasan, an HEU member and food service worker employed by Sodexo, told the news conference that she holds down two jobs



SARAH RACE PHOTOGRAPHY

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Unlike the legislated minimum wage, the living wage calculation is based on what it costs a two-earner family with two young children to meet such basic expenses as housing, food, child care and transportation. It allows families to escape poverty and severe financial stress, ensure healthy child development, and participate

fully in their communities.

But according to CCPA researcher Seth Klein, the calculation is still a

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# updates

## Living Wage Open House Events bring health care workers together

Throughout October, Living wage Campaign activists set up open house events at St. Paul's, Vancouver General, Richmond and Lion's Gate Hospitals.

These events created opportunities for dialogue with facilities-sector HEU members, nurses and other health care workers about the connections between their work and the issues faced by hospital housekeepers and food service workers.

Health care workers were asked to answer the question, "how are hospital support services important to your work," and post their responses on a bulletin board.

Those who attended the events were also given stickers to show their support for a living wage, asked to sign up for future actions and to endorse the petition.

With the successes and lessons from these four events, the campaign working group is looking at expanding the open house model to other facilities in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island.



## MLA lobby kicks off with letter writing campaign at HEU's Convention

As the living wage campaign solidifies support across many sectors of the community and of the labour movement, living wage activists are taking their message to MLAs around the Lower Mainland and Southern Vancouver Island.

"Health authorities can make policies to require contractors to pay a living wage," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy, "but government funds those health authorities and is responsible for ensuring consistent standards in our public health care facilities across the province."

As part of the letter writing component of the lobby, delegates at HEU's Convention have been asked to complete sample letters to Health and Labour Ministers George Abbott and Iain Black. Following the HEU convention, the letter writing campaign outreach will expand to the campaign's individual, labour and community allies.

## Because work should lift you out of poverty,



JOIN THE CAMPAIGN! TO LEARN HOW YOU CAN HELP END POVERTY PAY IN HEALTH CARE AND

# BC Nurses' Union and Health Sciences Association members continue to show support for campaign

Living wage activists have made a record number of presentations to regional meetings of both BC Nurses' Union and Health Sciences Association members.

In comments and questions following the presentations, nurses and other health care workers such as physiotherapists, pharmacists and laboratory technicians, told their own stories about how support service privatization has affected their work. They also pledged ongoing solidarity with hospital housekeepers and food service workers' efforts to achieve a living wage and safe working conditions.

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## Living Wage petition signatures surpass 13,000

The hard work of hundreds of activists, both within HEU's membership and among allies, continues to pay off with growing numbers of signatures on the living wage petition. As of October, more than 13,000 people have endorsed the campaign's call on health authorities and government to ensure contractors pay living wages to hospital support service workers.



## What does Labour Day mean to you?

For hospital cleaners and food service workers like Michelle, it means another year struggling to pay for back-to-school supplies, healthy school lunches and field trips for her kids.

**She's not alone.** In B.C., more than half of all children living in poverty have parents who work at least one full-time job.

This Labour Day, tell health authorities to make sure the multinational contractors in our public hospitals pay living wages to workers like Michelle.

**Because work should lift you out of poverty, not keep you there.**

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www.bclivingwage.org



## Living Wage Labour Day message heard around B.C.

This labour day, HEU took the opportunity to send a message about the importance of living wages for all workers and for children across the province.

The living wage ad and labour day column, published in local papers throughout B.C., talked specifically about the connections between child poverty and low wages. "For many [children], Labour Day also means another year of struggle, watching their parents scramble and sacrifice to pay for things like school supplies, healthy lunches, and field trips," wrote HEU's secretary-business manager Judy Darcy.

Both the ad and the column highlighted the fact that this province has the highest rate of child poverty in the country, for the fifth year in a row and, called on governments to implement living wages as one of the strategies for addressing this unacceptable statistic.

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modest one. It does not include, for example, debt payments, savings for retirement, home ownership, savings for higher education or anything beyond minimal recreation and entertainment.

“One of the guiding principles of the project,” he explained, “was that it had to be reasonable and conservative.”

He said the living wage is first and foremost a call to private and public-sector employers to sustain families, but is also a call to government for programs and services that can help shift certain costs off the shoulders of individual families.

The report also pointed out that a living wage

benefits employers, as well as workers and their families. Living wages, explained Klein, are shown to improve recruitment and retention, enhance workers' morale and create opportunities for employers to promote themselves as a living wage business or agency.

The study, *Working for a Living Wage: Ensuring Paid Work Meets Basic Family Needs in Vancouver and Victoria*, is a joint initiative of the CCPA and Simon Fraser University's Economic Security Project.

More information is available at <[www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)>.

## Meetings with health authorities put executives face-to-face with realities of workers' lives.

At a recent meeting, the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority's Senior Executive Team listened quietly as workers told them about getting up at 5 a.m. to make breakfast for their children before heading out to the first of their two jobs, as they told them about the fear that settles into their gut when they think about how they'll support themselves when they reach retirement age and can no longer work the physically demanding shifts on the tray line.

These moments were part of an hour-long meeting, in which VCHA's executives heard about the numbers behind the living wage calculation, the importance of a stable workforce in main-

taining infection control standards and high quality patient care, and about the unacceptable working conditions provided by VCHA's contractors Sodexo and Aramark.

Similar meetings are planned with the Vancouver Island, Fraser and Provincial Health Services Authorities.

## City of Waterloo, Ontario considers living wage policy

The Waterloo regional council has hired a consultant to study the impacts of a living-wage policy for the region. It is expected to take a year to complete.

Under the proposed living-wage policy, people working for the region, either on staff or on contract, would have to be paid a living wage rate.

While 125 cities in the United States have some form of living-wage policy, no Canadian municipality has adopted the principle. Waterloo Region could be the first.

The study would include a survey of some of the region's contractors, as well as consultation with anti-poverty groups, local municipalities, employer associations and the chambers of commerce.

The study is to be completed by September 2009. Council will then decide whether it wants to implement a living-wage policy.



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