

Living wage refers to the hourly rate that an individual or family needs to cover the standard needs of living while **minimum wage** refers to the lowest wage workers must be paid per hour by the provincial law¹.

Background

According to the World Health Organization, the social determinants of health are a set of conditions that affect an individual's life socially and economically to foster an environment to sustain life². Income plays a significant role in determining the health of individuals, and a lack of stable and adequate income has considerable physical and mental health implications on individuals, their social support systems and communities in which they live in³. Further, nursing recognizes that inadequate income has several implications on other determinants of health such as education, housing, and food insecurity⁴.

British Columbia currently has one of the highest poverty rates in Canada⁵. Notably, the term “working poor” has been increasingly used to describe the large portion of British Columbians who are employed, but fall below the poverty line due to inadequate income. There is an increasing number of British Columbians who are struggling to meet their individual or family's standard needs of living, due to the absence of a living wage. While the living wage varies throughout the province ranging from \$16.28/hour to \$20.64/hour⁶, there is a significant discrepancy when compared to the minimum wage of \$10.85/hour⁷. Although the minimum wage is expected to increase to \$11.35/hour by September 2017⁸, nursing knows that it will continue to be insufficient in supporting the standard needs of living for many British Columbians.

Nurses understand that income is one of the most important determinants of health, and the absence of a living wage puts many British Columbians at risk of poverty, impacting their ability to support their health and well-being⁹. Nursing also knows that many hard working British Columbians are not being supported to live healthy lives, as making minimum wage impacts their ability to purchase nutritious food, access safe housing, engage in activities that promote health and prevent disease, access child care, and education. This is evident when nurses see patients in hospital and within their communities every day, presenting with health issues that could have been prevented, if they had adequate income to sustain a healthy lifestyle.

1 Living Wage for Families Campaign (2013). *What is a Living Wage?*

2 World Health Organization (2008). *Social Determinants of Health: Key Concepts*.

3 Canadian Nurses Association (2017). *Social Determinants of Health*.

4 Public Health Agency of Canada (2013). *What Makes Canadians Healthy or Unhealthy?*

5 The Province (2017). *BC Poverty Reduction Plan is Long Overdue*.

6 Living Wage for Families Campaign (2013). *Living Wages in BC and Canada*.

7 British Columbia (2017) *Minimum Wage Factsheet*.

8 Vancouver Courier (2017). *BC Government Increases Minimum wage*.

9 Mikkonen, J., Raphael D., (2010). *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian facts*.

Issues Brief

Many individuals and organizations across the province have been vocal in advocating for living wage and the reduction of poverty such as the [BC Poverty Reduction Coalition](#) and the [Living Wage for Families Campaign](#). Similarly, nursing would suggest that as the focus of healthcare shifts from treatment to health promotion and disease prevention, it is vital to ensure that the determinants of health such as income are adequately supported. Upstream approaches such as supporting a living wage will continue to be vital in improving the health and well-being of British Columbians.

Key Messages:

- Income is a key determinant of health and has significant physical and mental health implications on individuals, their social support systems and communities in which they live.
- Many British Columbians living in poverty are employed, and often referred to as the “working poor.”
- A significant gap exists between B.C.’s minimum wage and the living wages across the province.
- Nurses recognize that many working British Columbians are struggling to meet their basic needs with minimum wage.
- Greater support is needed to ensure the social determinants of health such as income, are supported for all British Columbia.

Questions for Nurses

1. What implications does minimum wage have in your community?
2. What initiatives have been successful in other jurisdictions to decrease and eliminate poverty?
3. How does working and living on minimum wage in an urban center differ from that of a rural one?

