



HEALTH OFFICERS' COUNCIL OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Attn: Dr. Paul Martiquet, 494 South Fletcher Gibsons, BC V0N 1V0

**Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
Room 224, Parliament Buildings**

October 22, 2008

Select Standing Committee on Population Health

I am writing on behalf of the Health Officers' Council of British Columbia (HOC). The HOC is comprised of public health physicians practicing in British Columbia. For more than fifty years, members of the Health Officers' Council have, individually and collectively, played key roles in every major public health achievement in British Columbia. HOC recently initiated the development of a policy and advocacy initiative to promote awareness of the health impacts of child and family poverty.

HOC is pleased to respond to the request for feedback for the 2009 budget. Specifically, we are calling on the BC Government to make a significant investment in the health of our province via a commitment to a child poverty reduction strategy. HOC has recommended that BC develop a comprehensive provincial child poverty reduction strategy that is driven by an intergovernmental/interministerial approach and includes specific and meaningful targets for child poverty reduction. The Federal Senate Subcommittee on Population Health has stated the importance of setting health targets:

Tangible, measureable health goals, objectives and targets are essential components of a population health strategy. They support identification of the areas on which to focus attention, determine the data to collect and indicators to monitor, establish benchmarks, and enable progress to be measured and reported.

As part of its strategic plan, the government of British Columbia has declared its desire to make British Columbia the healthiest jurisdiction ever to host the Olympic games. Further, British Columbia has outlined within its strategic goals the desire to build the best system of support in Canada for children at risk. Children living in poverty are involuntary victims. They are at risk for numerous health and wellbeing outcomes throughout their life. Thus, investing now is the best opportunity to ensure these children have those supports and thus the greatest chance to succeed.

As medical health officers, we have a legislated role to advise and advocate in an independent manner for public policies and programs directed to improving the health of populations. HOC believes that health inequity and poverty, particularly among our families, are a population health concern of significant magnitude in Canada and British Columbia. Poverty not only leads to immediate health concerns for poor children, but

also leads to long lasting and indelible effects on the health of these children for the rest of their lives.

We would be very interested in sharing our experiences, expertise and voice with the Subcommittee as it pertains to investing in the health of our population. We are pleased to include our discussion paper on child poverty which was shared with (among others) the BC Provincial *Conversation on Health* and the *BC Representative for Children and Youth*.

Sincerely,

Paul Martiquet MD, Chair, Health Officers' Council of BC

