



EQUITY BUILDING TOOLKIT



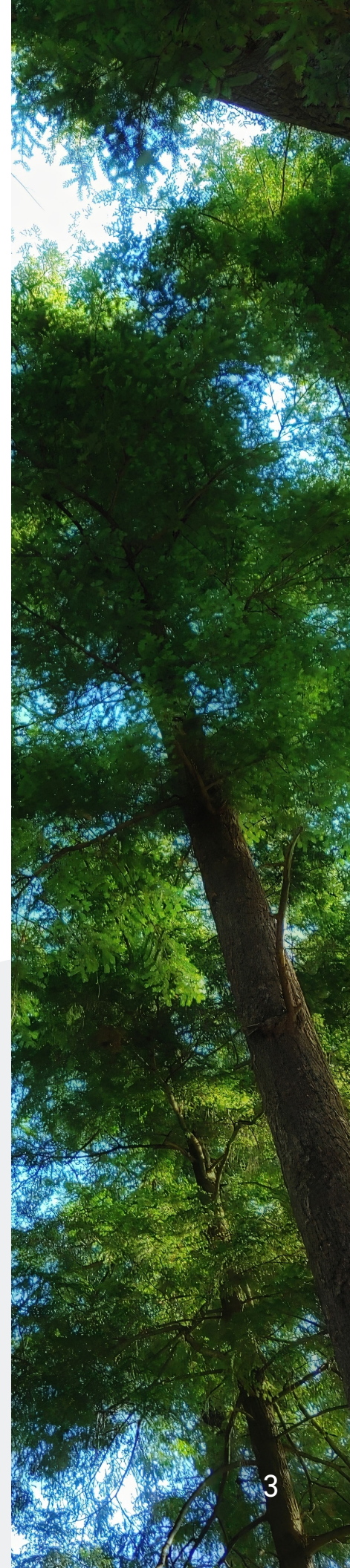
EQUITY BUILDING TOOLKIT

Building Equity in the Alberni Clayoquot is focused on stigma reduction, equity in decision-making and the inclusion of diverse voices and those with lived-experiences in the creation of policies and programs as well as the community planning process within the regional district. It seeks to address and support the recommendations provided in the Poverty Reduction Action Plan to see real meaningful change.

This Equity Building Toolkit provides a foundation to support more collaboration among community organizations and the public in determining and closing the gaps in access to and the availability of services in the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD). It covers five topics—housing; access to services and health care; transportation; stigma, racism and discrimination; and truth and reconciliation—each discussing the challenges faced by the ACRD. The key messaging and statistics provided throughout this document are aimed at various groups in the ACRD, including government officials, health care and other service providers, residents of the “not in my backyard” mentality and the community as a whole. Its goal is to provide consistent messaging and information through election cycles and staff changes.

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HOUSING

Housing supply in BC has failed to keep up with demand, while home values and rental costs have skyrocketed over the last decade—and housing within the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) is no different. The negative stigma attached to shelters and social or affordable housing has led some homeowners to say “not in my backyard,” pushing local governments to refuse rezoning that would allow diverse housing developments and multi-family homes. This has forced many families and individuals to live in overcrowded and unsafe homes or risk homelessness.

Read on to see key points and messaging to use when speaking to different groups about housing.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Challenge: As governments change, the reason for past policy decisions, committee creation or support for programming can be lost. Not everyone is knowledgeable about why diverse housing is a must for thriving communities. It takes time to gather information to re-educate a new government, time that can be spent on moving forward with actionable items that support the community.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to government officials about housing.

The local government plays a role in ensuring secure housing for residents.

Expanded: There is no one-size-fits-all solution for this housing crisis. It is our responsibility to make sure we continue to apply for funding that supports the housing needs in the ACRD and recognize that a diverse combination of

Nearly all (94%) of households in the ACRD are single-family dwellings.

housing and social programming is required to address housing insecurity and homelessness.

Expanded: As residents move through different phases in their lives, local governments must recognize the need for multiple types and forms of housing to maintain a healthy, sustainable and adaptive system that supports residents and families where they're at. No one level of housing is greater or more important than another.

Almost 10% of homes in the ACRD are in need of major repairs.

Healthy communities are made of diverse housing.

Expanded: Diverse housing types (single-family, duplexes, multi-family, etc.), increase diversity and strengthen communities, making them more resilient to economic change. Offering a diverse spectrum of housing options accommodates residents of all ages, incomes, abilities and family types.

Governments can help grow affordable, accessible and secure housing.

Expanded: There are many ways local governments can support affordable housing in their area. Actions such as permissive tax exemptions, postponing development cost charges or donating municipal land are examples of how local governments can do their part.

"Just because I have a place to live, does not mean I am happy living there and don't need help with finding a new place. I wish people had respect for everybody."



NIMBYism

Challenge: “Not in my backyard” or NIMBYism, is a characterization of opposition to proposed developments in a resident’s local area. These people may also be in support of strict land use regulations. Many in this category believe that affordable housing and diverse housing types lower property values and decrease the overall aesthetic of their communities.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to the NIMBYism audience about housing.

Healthy communities are made of diverse housing.

Expanded: Neighbourhoods that consist of diverse housing promote racial and income inclusion and diversity. Communities that vary in housing styles and purchase values are more resilient to economic downturns. Ensuring neighbourhoods have a variety of housing needs to meet demand creates more stability in property values.

More than 50% of households reported in 2021 that all shelter costs (i.e., rent/ mortgage payments, bills or repairs) were made by one person. **Roughly 20%** of households spend **over 30%** of their income on shelter costs.

“There is a middle range where many people may fall—not living in poverty but not getting anywhere. Prices are too high here, income is too low, and no affordable housing exists. I can barely afford to live here by myself and could never afford a family!”

Did you know? **4.4%** of households in the ACRD are not suitable, meaning it doesn’t have enough bedrooms for its size and composition. **10%** of households are in need of major repair.

In order to build great communities, we need a diversity of people and housing

Expanded: Offering housing options for a range of needs not only provides shelter, but improves overall health and well-being, allowing people to better contribute to their community and the economy overall. Meeting demand creates more stability in property values

Expanded: Improving people’s quality of living by offering a diverse range of housing types builds stronger communities and benefits everyone. When we provide a variety of housing options, we ensure long-time residents aren’t pushed out of their homes and that front-line workers and first responders can live in the communities they work in.

The 2023 vacancy rate in the ACRD was **1.9%**.

COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Challenge: Many families across all demographics are experiencing challenges when it comes to affordable and suitable housing. Demand is high, while supply is low, and those facing these challenges may not know how to have their needs heard by stakeholders, or they simply don't believe anyone is listening. They need to know their voices are important.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to the community at large about affordable and suitable housing.

Government officials want to hear what is required to make housing more accessible for you.

Expanded: Community engagement is important, not only for policy-makers but for members to have a voice and be heard. There are many ways you can provide feedback and tell elected officials where improvements can be made. Visit www.letsconnectacrd.ca to review projects and register to stay updated and provide your valuable feedback. When stakeholders better understand what isn't working, they are better prepared to make decisions to effect positive change.

Expanded: Your voice is important. No matter your health status, race, income or location, everyone deserves adequate, suitable and affordable housing. Visit www.letsconnectacrd.ca to review projects and register to stay updated or provide your valuable feedback. Reach the District Board and staff by sending an email to mailbox@acrd.bc.ca. Participating in community engagement activities in the ACRD helps policy-makers and key stakeholders allocate funding and resources appropriately.

35% of those experiencing homelessness became homeless due to low income. **22%** became homeless because of unsafe or unfit housing. **62%** of homeless people in the ACRD are unsheltered, meaning they live outside (**39%**), in a vehicle (**13%**) or are couch surfing (**26%**).

Your experience is valuable and telling your story can spark positive change.

Expanded: Your voice is important. No matter your family size, race, income or location, everyone deserves an affordable and suitable home where they feel safe. Participating in community engagement activities in the ACRD helps policy-makers, key stakeholders and health care providers allocate funding and resources appropriately. Visit www.letsconnectacrd.ca to review projects and register to stay updated or provide your valuable feedback.



Your feedback is valuable. Scan the QR code to review ACRD projects and tell us your story.



NON-PROFITS IN THE HOUSING SECTOR

Challenge: Non-profit organizations in the housing sector are facing significant challenges. The demand for affordable, accessible and secure housing outpaces supply, funding sources have decreased, interest rates have skyrocketed and construction costs have increased. All of these challenges have created an uphill battle for the non-profit housing sector

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to non-profit housing organizations about housing.

“I am not able to plan for future expenses as 100% of my income goes to current living expenses.”

Establish strong relationships with key community stakeholders and local governments.

Expanded: Non-profit organizations are a key component of developing and providing affordable housing throughout the ACRD. They often understand the needs and gaps that exist in local communities, providing a wealth of information to help governments make informed decisions.

Partnerships with these organizations fill the gaps when it comes to housing in the ACRD.

Over 28% of households in the ACRD were built in or before 1960.

“I am fortunate to have an affordable rental unit and great landlords. Even with my ‘decent-waged job’ if I needed to find a new rental the same size I currently rent I would never be able to afford it.”

Non-profit organizations access hard-to-reach populations, bridging the gap between those in need and the support available to them.

Of those experiencing homelessness in the ACRD, 66% identify as Indigenous. Less than 20% of the region’s census population identifies as Indigenous.

Expanded: Non-profits bridge the gap between local governments and populations in need. Taking part in local government activities, such as council and board meetings, allows non-profits to advocate for and provide insight into the communities they serve, so governments can better understand what is needed.

Only 70% of census respondents said they lived in acceptable housing, meaning their home is suitable for their needs, does not require major repairs and is affordable.

DEVELOPERS

Challenge: Often, profit margins for affordable housing and other housing types aren't enticing enough for developers. This means developers will often focus on single-family and condominium developments, where costs and profits are more favourable.

Here are key points and messaging when speaking to market developers about housing.

We want to incentivize development in the ACRD, while ensuring affordable housing remains in focus.

Expanded: We recognize developers have numerous costs to take into consideration when determining the viability of a project. However, there are many benefits to developers who choose to build more diverse housing. Local governments have the ability to create better incentives for developers who wish to support affordable housing projects.

"I wish they understood how tough it can be on a daily basis. How I would like to change my life but knowing there is nowhere to go and funds are too low to move into a decent vicinity."

Rental housing demand will increase by **4-7%** over the next **25 years**. As of 2023, there were no rental units available in ACRD electoral areas.

Average monthly rent shelter cost* in ACRD: **\$1,074**

- **12%** spend **over 50%** of income
- **36%** spend **over 30%** of income

*Those expenses include the monthly rent (for tenants) or the mortgage payment, property taxes and condominium fees (for owners) and the costs of electricity, heat, municipal services, etc.

12% of housing in the ACRD is in core housing need*.

*Core housing need refers to whether a private household's housing falls below at least one of the indicator thresholds for housing adequacy, affordability or suitability, and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable.

"We own a house, but cannot afford to live in it and pay the mortgage payments. We rent it out as a long-term rental, and rent a small suite for ourselves."

ACCESS TO SERVICES & HEALTH CARE

There are many factors, such as transportation, income, availability and stigma, that affect a family or individual's access to services and health care, whether it be a food bank, doctor's appointment or addiction services. Furthermore, information gaps between those in need and service and health providers make it difficult for policy and decision-makers to allocate funds and resources.

Read on to see key points and messaging to use when speaking to different groups about accessing services and health care.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Challenge: Understanding the gaps and what community members need to better access services and health care in their area.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to government officials about accessing services and health care.

Local governments have a role to play in advocating for the increased health and well-being of residents in the ACRD.

Expanded: Local governments have the responsibility to advocate for their areas. Support for the funding and creation of preventive services and navigational programs, as well as increasing specialized services in the region and developing localized services are all key components of a healthy population.

Expanded: Our health care and social services are interconnected. Vacancies in one area, such as nursing, impact physicians, support positions and patients. Indeed, when members of the community suffer due to a lack of access to health and mental care or basic needs, it creates a ripple effect that impacts their well-being and how others access these services.

“No escape, no holiday from poverty, no special outings, holidays or movies, no extras.”

“I have an income, but lack of child care prevents my partner from getting steady income.”

Local governments have a direct impact on the health and well-being of those in their communities.

Expanded: Local governments play a role in the health and well-being of their communities. Through community planning, government officials enact policies and services that focus on environmental, social and economic factors, all of which have an impact on the health and well-being of the communities they serve.

In 2023, physicians reported a median wait time of 27.7 weeks between a referral from a general practitioner and receipt of treatment.

Expanded: Knowledge and education are powerful tools for local governments. Understanding the gaps in services and needs of tier communities is essential to improving the health and well-being of the people they serve. Utilizing partnerships and listening to the lived experiences of community members will better prepare government officials to make informed decisions for positive change.



“Some places still make you feel awful for asking for help. Shouldn’t have to prove you need help/assistance. If you are asking, it’s for a reason (especially food).”

Local governments are the bridge between their communities and the provincial government. They can be strong advocates for positive change in their communities.

Expanded: Municipal leaders are the voice of their constituents and communities. Establishing accessible and effective lines of communication and engagement with members of the community, especially those with lived experience, means elected officials can better understand the needs of the area and advocate for funding and resources.

Expanded: When the basic needs of a community are met, everyone has access to services and resources, fostering a healthy and strong community. When residents have access to the services they need, we prioritize care that is preventative rather than reactive, providing community services and characteristics that support strength and resiliency. Local governments are empowered to make decisions that can evoke this change.

Medical personnel needs in the Alberni Valley in 2023:

- **Over 30** nurses
- Up to **7 more** doctors
- Up to **2 more** psychiatrists
- **At least 2** social workers and **2** counsellors
- **Up to 10** medical office assistants

A comparison of 10 healthy food items showed that food prices are **21% more expensive** on the west coast than in Port Alberni:

- Port Alberni: **\$33**
- West Coast: **\$40**

Return costs by boat or car to the nearest grocery store in 2023:

- Esowista: **\$18.50**
- Opisaht: **\$14**
- Ahousaht: **\$60**
- Macoah: **\$40**
- Hot Springs Cove: **\$150**

“Sometimes there’s not enough in the grocery budget for tampons or pads. We go through extra TP those weeks.”

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Challenge: Bridging the gap between front-line workers, policy-makers and those with lived experience provides opportunities to improve the system and make it more equitable for all.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to health care workers about accessing services and health care.

Current health care workers in the ACRD must be included in the decision-making process.

Expanded: It is vital that we work to reduce the barriers residents face when accessing services and health care in the region, no matter their location, income or race. Front-line workers and first responders are a key component in determining what is needed and the steps to alleviate pressure on the system.

Expanded: Clear lines of communication are required to establish a feedback system that meets the needs of front-line workers and first responders. When there is a clear, accessible and effective feedback loop between health care workers, policymakers and those with lived experiences, we can begin to work towards an equity-based system.

Long-term care wait times:

- Port Alberni: **3-6 months**
- Victoria: **3-12 months**
- Nanaimo: **6-18 months**

“There are not enough resources. Time is crucial. In a crisis, patients can’t wait 2 weeks for an appointment.”

“I have luckily had few barriers myself, but I witness people hitting barriers daily at my job with MHSU. Local services are simply not enough for our demographic here in Port Alberni.”



COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Challenge: Demographic differences in the ACRD mean there is a variety of needs and accessibility when it comes to programs, services and health care. The goal is that policy-makers, health care providers and key decision-makers have access to information about the needs of their community and gaps in programs and services offered in the ACRD.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to the community at large about accessing services and health care.

Government officials and health care policy-makers want to hear from you about what is required to better access services in your community.

Expanded: Community engagement is important, not only for policy-makers but for members to have a voice and be heard. There are many ways you can provide feedback and tell elected officials where improvements can be made. The more that is understood about what isn't working and the opportunities

One in four BC residents don't have a family doctor.

Expanded: Your voice is important. No matter your health status, race, income or location, everyone deserves equitable access to services in their region. Participating in community engagement activities in the ACRD helps policy-makers, key stakeholders and health care providers allocate funding and resources appropriately.

"I believe there should be more access to healthcare education for all folks in Tofino/Ucluelet... In addition, the access to [STI] testing should be more accessible. Many folks work 2-3 jobs and can't make it to one of the few scheduled lab times at the hospital or even get an appointment."

"I never knew how to ask for help."

Access to reliable health care services is a basic need and an integral component of a well-supported queer community

Expanded: Diverse communities are strong communities and a lack of access to care drives queer folks to move away from in order to access care. Coastal Queers' has heard multiple testimonials of community members who have experienced challenges in accessing local health care. Their health care resource documents were developed to address the compounding challenges of accessing queer-specific health care in a rural community. These resources were developed by queer folks, for queer folks, with the hope of facilitating the beginnings of a local queer health network. Coastal Queers hopes that by beginning to connect members of our community, queer folks will be able to access the support they deserve in the community where they live.

Expanded: Our health care system historically and continues to disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, queer, disabled and chronically ill individuals. This impact is exacerbated by the barriers encountered when accessing care in rural and remote communities, such as those within the ACRD. Our communities will thrive and grow when access is available to all.

“Besides seeing a doctor that appears to have little to no knowledge outside the [gender] binary system, other resources are extremely limited.”

Your experience is valuable and can be used to better understand the needs of your community and gaps within the system.

Expanded: The stories we tell are valuable. Those with lived experience dealing with an inequitable system, problems accessing services or an inability to access the care they need are vital to our ability to understand where our systems are failing. We encourage those people to reach out and tell their stories so we can work towards creating a better, more connected community.



Scan the QR code to view Coastal Queers' Healthcare Resource Documents.



NIMBYism

Challenge: The “not in my backyard” argument has the ability to impact access to addiction, recovery and other harm reduction or health services in a community, despite the growing need for these services across the country.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to the NIMBYism group about accessing services and health care.

Health and harm reduction services are a human rights issue.

Expanded: Those who are in need of addiction, harm reduction and other health services are often stigmatized under a certain demographic, income bracket or living situation. In any given year, one in five Canadians experience a mental illness. It's vital the ACRD is prepared to offer the services community members need to heal and grow.

Canadians are **x3 more likely** to indicate they would not admit they were suffering from a mental illness than from a physical illness, such as cancer.

“The whole community is impacted when there is not adequate access to appropriate housing, health care and substance use supports.”

A person's income or living situation shouldn't determine whether they can access health and other services.

Expanded: Most of the communities in the ACRD are rural or remote, meaning travelling long distances for basic services and health care is a regular occurrence for many. Building an equitable system means all who call the ACRD home have an equal opportunity to access the services and health care they need, no matter their income, location, gender or race.

“Access to affordable childcare is not only important for the parents but for the child to have safe, reliable care and give stability and comfort.”

75% of working Canadians would be reluctant to admit or wouldn't admit to a boss or co-worker that they were suffering from a mental illness.

TRANSPORTATION

Travelling from one community to another within the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District can be a beautiful experience, but the distance between communities and service providers can mean an hour-long appointment becomes a multi-day endeavour. Some remote areas are restricted to boat or plane access, and other communities are situated along logging roads. The ACRD has a variety of transportation needs, making it difficult to offer a single public transport solution.

Read on to see key points and messaging to use when speaking to different groups about transportation.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Challenge: Local governments may not understand the hardship people in the ACRD face when travelling for food, services or health care. Some transportation options, such as public transit, by air or on water, may be out of the scope of the municipal budget.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to government officials about transportation.

Local governments must look to expand transportation systems from a strictly intra-community model to one that includes transportation from community to community.

Expanded: There are a variety of transportation needs in the ACRD. From boat travel to bus routes, the way in which we access basic services has a direct effect on our health and well-being. A collaboration between all levels of government, Indigenous communities and Non-profit organizations is vital in establishing systems that benefit all communities.

“I don’t live where there is a good public transport system. I [have] problems getting everything, from groceries to going to work.”

Expanded: For many in the Alberni-Clayoquot region, leaving the home for a health or medical appointment can mean packing a bag for a multi-day trip. We want to expand transportation services, in order to increase access to health and wellness programs and improve health equity in the region.

Publicly funded transportation ensures equitable access to transport.

Expanded: The Alberni-Clayoquot is unique in its transportation needs. Residents use a variety of methods to get from A to B, many of which are costly and time consuming. Programs and services that lower the financial burden on low-income households help ensure equitable access to health services.

“The cost of education is too high and travel is required.”

Closest medical centre to:
Ahousaht/Hot Springs Cove/Opitsaht

- **45 mins-1.5 hour** water taxi
- **10-15 mins** float plane trip

Macoah/Bamfield/Anacla

- **Logging road**

Distance range to nearest medical facility (one way):

- **17-127 kms**
- **Tofino-Victoria: 317 kms**



NIMBYism & COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Challenge: Some residents believe that bringing public transit to their communities will increase crime rates and the amount of “undesirable” people. They believe it will ruin the overall quality of their day-to-day lives.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to the NIMBYism group about transportation.

Better accessibility to transportation has a positive effect on mental health and well-being.

Expanded: Publicly funded transportation is an essential and vital service, creating opportunities for those in the community who may not otherwise have access. Being able to easily and conveniently access transportation heightens and promotes a sense of belonging in the community and positive mental health through social connection.

“I have to work out of town to provide for my family.”

Expanded: A public model of transport supports families and individuals in all stages of their lives and through various temporary or long-term circumstances. When access to transportation is limited, a family or individual’s social and financial equity is at risk, affecting their day-to-day lives.

Return costs by boat or car to the nearest grocery store in 2023:

- Esowista: **\$18.50**
- Opisaht: **\$14**
- Ahousaht: **\$60**
- Macoah: **\$40**
- Hot Springs Cove: **\$150**

Public transportation promotes a higher quality of life.

Expanded: Access to easy and convenient transportation improves overall quality of life through increased access to employment, family, housing and social inclusion, while improving physical activity and mental well-being. Those who do not have the means to own a vehicle are at a disadvantage without public transport.

Government officials want to hear what is required to make travel in the ACRD more accessible.

Expanded: Community engagement is important, not only for policy-makers but for members to have a voice and be heard. There are many ways you can provide feedback and tell elected officials where improvements can be made. Visit www.letsconnectacrd.ca to review projects, register to stay updated and provide your valuable feedback. When stakeholders better understand what isn’t working, they are better prepared to make decisions to effect positive change.



Your feedback is valuable. Scan the QR code to review ACRD projects and tell us your story.

How people in the ACRD travel

- Water taxi: \$60–\$129+ round trip
- Float plane: \$200+
- Taxi: \$150 return
- Charter: \$195+ one way
- Bus: \$29+ one way
- Personal vehicle: \$0.70/km
(as per CRA)

STIGMA, DISCRIMINATION & RACISM

Many Canadians experience stigma, discrimination and racism, affecting their access, involvement and dignity within their communities, workplaces or when accessing services. Building an equitable system means ensuring that equal opportunities are granted to all, no matter their race, gender or economic status. Our systems often characterize those in need as merely recipients, not participants in the healing process. When these systems fail to engage those with lived experience in the decision-making process, our systems fail to accommodate their needs.

Read on to see key points and messaging to use when speaking to different groups about stigma, discrimination and racism.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Challenge: Personal unknown biases, education and lived experience can affect a person’s knowledge of systemic racism, stigma and racism in their area. This is an important consideration for government officials as they enact policies and regulations that have a direct effect on their constituents.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to government officials about stigma, discrimination and racism.

Governments have a role to play in acknowledging systemic racism in the system.

Expanded: Systemic racism is a ripple effect from decades of racist and discriminatory practices, regulations and policies. Recognizing it exists in society is an important step in working against oppression and towards equity for all.

2021 census data:

- Total: **33,521**
- Indigenous: **6,420 (19.15%)**
- Visible Minority: **1,585 (4.73%)**

Expanded: Education is vital in understanding Canada’s history with racism and building a foundation upon which we can fight against injustice. Community engagement and active listening are important when learning about the lived experiences of those in our communities.

Governments have a role in reducing the stigma around mental health issues and addiction.

Expanded: Stigma is one of the biggest barriers to people getting the help they need. Reducing stigma improves the quality of life for those living with mental illness and helps create more inclusive communities. Using person-first and appropriate language while focusing on the benefits of harm reduction services as well as practical actionable solutions, not just problems, helps to combat stigma.

Expanded: Hearing the stories of those with lived experiences is the best way to combat stigma. Well-planned community engagement sessions in a variety of formats can provide valuable opportunities to gather information from communities, inform the public, identify issues of concern and dispel misconceptions.

“It’s all overwhelming and I find if you don’t know what to ask or you don’t know where to go you just get the run around. By that time the stigma has set in and you just give up.”



FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Challenge: Personal biases and a lack of knowledge can further augment stigma, racism and discrimination in the workplace.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to front-line workers and first responders about stigma, discrimination and racism.

“Not every story is cut and dry. Most people who end up needing help never saw their story turning out the way it did.”

People who struggle with mental health issues and/or addiction should be supported, not judged.

Expanded: Destigmatizing drug use can save lives. Those who use drugs or live with a mental illness need to know that they are safe with health care workers. Harm reduction services seek to provide education, offer effective drug treatments and other necessary health services. When people know they are supported we can change the narrative.

Expanded: Those with lived experience of addictions are key allies in reducing stigma. Practicing active listening can help to determine the gaps and barriers that community members are facing when they want help.

Indigenous staff and patients experience widespread racism and discrimination when accessing health care.

Expanded: Many Indigenous Peoples experience racism and discrimination in the health care system, both as staff members and patients. Health care providers have an important role to play in combating systemic racism in the industry. Strong action can be taken by listening to and learning from those with lived experiences.

37 people died from toxic drugs in Port Alberni in 2023, compared with 28 in 2022.

Port Alberni toxic drug death rate increased 32% from 2022, more than both BC (5%) and Central Island (23%).

“Substance use support is a cornerstone. Anything else that I was attempting to build was set on a shaky foundation of a lack of support and understanding rooted in my community.”

COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Challenge: The stigma around mental health and addictions, as well as racism and discrimination, is found in communities across BC. The challenge is educating and informing these communities to work towards a more inclusive and understanding populace.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to the community at large about stigma, discrimination and racism.

People with mental health issues or addictions need our support, not our judgment.

Expanded: The Alberni-Clayoquot region had the third highest death rate in BC from toxic drugs in 2023. These people were neighbours, family members and friends. It is important that we as a community come together to support those in need rather than judge or condemn them. Communities that are inclusive are healthier and promote equity.

“I wish people would stop and listen to me because what I have to say is important.”

Our communities are stronger when equal opportunities are granted to all who call the ACRD home.

Expanded: Diverse, equitable and inclusive communities are economically, socially and financially stronger. When we build inclusive communities, we foster a sense of belonging, and better outcomes in life, creativity, innovation, empathy and social cohesion. It means basic services are provided for everyone, regardless of how they look or their needs.



Working together to ensure all feel welcome in our communities will foster growth, inclusivity and stronger connections.

Expanded: Living in a community where you feel represented and supported strengthens your connection with the community and those around you. Many who identify as part of the queer community feel that non-queer people are okay with queerness, so long as it exists within the stereotype of what it looks like to be queer, due to a lack of education and awareness. Concerns from the queer community often go unheard, cultivating a divided community, where these groups feel isolated and lonely.

“The attitude of people on the phone when calling [the] Ministry for social assistance. Instead of saying how can I help it sounds more like how can I get rid of you.”

Expanded: Our diversity is our strength. When we support and listen to one another we create inclusive spaces that welcome open dialogue and challenge the status quo. Communities that are open to criticism and value the insights of those with lived experiences are more resilient and better equipped to provide access to services for all.

“People think because I am FN that I drink and party all the time. Hard to find housing because of racism. Even though I have a full time job.”

Those with a higher income experience less stigma when accessing certain programs and services.

Alberni-Clayoquot had the third highest death rate, behind Hope and Vancouver Centre.

Local experts believe the actual numbers are as much as 10% higher than the official numbers.

TRUTH & RECONCILIATION



Truth and reconciliation aims to acknowledge the harms and mistakes of colonization in Canada, including the intergenerational effects of the residential school system. It also focuses on sharing and learning about positive ways to move forward while also educating Canadians about Indigenous history, language and culture. Reconciliation is about listening, learning and action.

Read on to see key points and messaging to use when speaking to different groups about truth and reconciliation.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Challenge: There are varying levels of education and knowledge surrounding Canada’s history and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, as well as the systemic racism, continued discrimination and intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous Peoples. This can lead to unjust or discriminatory policies and regulations implemented by decision-makers.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to government officials about truth and reconciliation.

Elected officials and decision-makers must understand the effects of colonialism, both in the past and present.

Expanded: It is important for policymakers to understand how colonialism has had an intergenerational impact on Indigenous Peoples and to recognize how poverty, racism, discrimination and history affect access to resources and equity. Colonialism has led to cultural alienation, intergenerational trauma and socio-economic marginalization. When decision-makers have a better understanding

“I have trauma that affects me even though I seem ok.”

of the unjust system that was created, they can implement policies and regulations that support equity and reconciliation.

In 2021, **6,420 (19.15%)** people in the ACRD identified as either First Nations, Metis or Inuk:

- First Nations: **4,980**
- Metis: **1,325**
- Inuk: **15**



Neighbouring Indigenous communities should be included in discussions to create an inclusive government.

Expanded: Communities in the Alberni-Clayoquot region work, live and play on the traditional territory of numerous First Nations and Indigenous communities. Governments can support reconciliation by recognizing and weaving Indigenous knowledge into policy considerations focused on land, water and resources. Combining Indigenous knowledge with western ideology provides a wider perspective and can be used in harmony to influence stewardship and the protection of our communities.

Expanded: Listening to the lived experience of Indigenous Peoples is vital to better understanding the intergenerational trauma that affects numerous families. Learning from and listening to these stories helps to educate policymakers so they can make informed decisions.

“We need more education and programs where people can get together and better understand each other’s culture and beliefs. There is no such place to do so.”

Below are some ways the ACRD is supporting reconciliation with neighbouring First Nations and Indigenous communities in the region.

- **Government-to-Government Accord between Tseshaht First Nation + ACRD was signed on Oct 18, 2021.**
- **Huu-ay-aht and Yuuʔuʔiʔaṭṭṭ First Nations 10+ years director status with ACRD; path to “economic reconciliation.”**
- **ACRD recognizes Sept 30—National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—as an annual holiday to commemorate the history and legacy of residential schools as well as honour the Survivors, their families and communities.**
- **ACRD became first municipal government to welcome treaty First Nations to its board as full voting members in April 2012.**
 - **Four members of the Maa-nulth Treaty—Huu-ay-aht, Toquot, Uchucklesaht, and Yuuʔuʔiʔaṭṭṭ.**
- **On Monday, June 17, 2013, the ACRD board of directors adopted a resolution from Reconciliation Canada to declare 2013 as the year of reconciliation and undertake further actions to inform themselves and their constituents about reconciliation and the impact of IRS within the region.**

NON-INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Challenge: There are varied levels of education and knowledge when it comes to truth and reconciliation. This means many Indigenous Peoples experience racism and discrimination in their communities.

Below are key points and messaging to use when speaking to non-Indigenous communities about truth and reconciliation.

Learn the history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and the effect of colonialism.

Expanded: It can be uncomfortable to learn about the unjust history experienced by Indigenous Peoples and to acknowledge how much Canadian history tried to erase Indigenous culture, language and traditions. Non-Indigenous people must learn the truth about this horrific history when engaging in the process of reconciliation.

Expanded: Learning the history and legacy of the residential school system is integral to the reconciliation process. It is a long and recent history that still affects the lives of hundreds of Indigenous Peoples and their families today. In order to engage with the reconciliation process, non-Indigenous Canadians must acknowledge the experiences of Indigenous Peoples at residential schools and its impacts and consequences, including intergenerational trauma.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, created in 2008 to facilitate reconciliation among residential school Survivors, their families, their communities and all Canadians, recommended 94 Calls to Action in its 2015 Final Report. These are actionable policy recommendations focused on the acknowledgement of the horrifying history of residential schools and establishing systems to prevent the abuses from happening again.

As of December 2023, eight years after the TRC’s report, just 13 of the 94 Calls to Action have been completed. Zero Calls to Action were completed in 2023.



To view the TRC’s final report and the 94 Calls to Action, scan the QR code.



Listen to the stories of those with lived experiences.

Expanded: When we listen to the stories of those who have lived experiences, we can better understand and feel empathy for them. While these stories may be hard to listen to, they are an important piece in understanding the horrific legacy of residential schools and their effect on future generations. When we know more about the injustices Indigenous People face, we are better equipped to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Expanded: When we hear the stories of those who experienced the atrocities of colonialism, we feel empathy. As a community, we can fight systemic racism and inequality and advocate for an equitable system when we better understand the issues faced by those experiencing them.

“Together, Canadians must do more than just talk about reconciliation; we must learn how to practice reconciliation in our everyday lives—within ourselves and our families, and in our communities, governments, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. To do so constructively, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.”

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,
Volume One: Summary: Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future

CONCLUSION

No matter the size of the community, all of those who call the ACRD home deserve equitable access, involvement and dignity. The Equity Building Toolkit is a collection of statistics and key messaging that support the betterment of communities in the ACRD. Guided by the recommendations put forward by the Poverty Reduction Plan, this toolkit was built to support decision-makers, health care workers and the community at large to build communities that afford the same opportunities to all.



To view the entire list of resources, scan the QR code.





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