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Series tells human rights story of four B.C. communities

Vancouver B.C. – What is the state of human rights in B.C.? That is the question B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner has been seeking to answer through her Office's multi-year Baseline Project, which today released a series of Community Briefs. The Briefs provide a snapshot of human rights issues in four B.C. communities.

"To ensure our work is relevant and effective, we need to first look at the real impacts of human rights issues on the ground," said Commissioner Kasari Govender. "We are committed to listening and responding to communities, ensuring that people's experiences with human rights issues are at the centre of our work. To do this, we traveled to four diverse communities to gain a better understanding of what's happening across the province."

The Community Briefs series includes reports for the district of Chetwynd and the cities of Chilliwack, Cranbrook and Terrace, B.C. In each location, BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (BCOHRC) undertook community-embedded research, including by working with local "Community Connector" organizations to host focus groups and interviews. The insights gained were then supplemented with data from Statistics Canada, media sources and other relevant secondary sources.

"Each community we visited has a unique experience of rights issues and solutions. But there are also many commonalities that paint an important picture of the key human rights issues facing our province," said the Commissioner.

"Across B.C., many of us are feeling the impacts of the affordability crisis, housing shortages, the toxic drug crisis, inadequate access to health and social services and discrimination within the health care system, among other issues. And, importantly, in communities across B.C., we are all trying to build bridges and come together—to build understanding, support one another and stand up to hate."

The Briefs are designed to share information and insights that community and civil society groups can use to advocate for progress, and to which decision-makers in B.C. can refer when setting priorities and making plans. To assist advocates and decision-makers, BCOHRC has also produced two-page summaries of the Briefs and sample slide decks with facilitator guides.

The release of the Community Briefs marks an important milestone in the Baseline Project, enabling a deeper understanding of human rights issues at the community level. It builds on previous work of the Baseline Project, which has included a province-wide [survey of service organizations](#) and a [database of existing recommendations](#) on human rights issues in B.C. Additional research from the Baseline Project is expected this summer.

All four Community Briefs can be found at: baseline.bchumanrights.ca/briefs

Quotes from Community Connectors

Teri Westerby, Past Director (2019–24), Chilliwack Pride Society

“The Baseline Project brings attention to the pressing human rights issues facing the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, revealing the harsh realities of discrimination and systemic inequalities that we are facing. These Briefs provide an opportunity for everyone to listen to the voices of their marginalized neighbours, so they can understand our experiences and learn to stop perpetuating injustice. Equipped with this pivotal research, we now have the means to hold leadership accountable and demand action for inclusivity and equality. I want to express my deepest appreciation to BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner for amplifying our voices and tirelessly advocating for meaningful change.”

Julie Rose, Executive Director, Cranbrook Food Bank

“The Cranbrook Food Bank is strengthened and grateful to have worked on the Baseline Project with BCOHRC. We are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis that is violating people’s right to an adequate standard of living. Food and shelter are the two expenses no household can avoid, and they cost significantly more every year. We try so hard at our Food Bank to fill the gaps, but increased client numbers and decreased donations make it challenging. The Community Briefs highlight this issue and underscore a need to strengthen our social safety net to support our most vulnerable community members. And our clients’ resiliency, ingenuity, grit and kindness inspire us daily to continue our advocacy work in food security and find solutions.”

Troy Peters, Associate Director, Support Services, Terrace & District Community Services Society (TDCSS)

“TDCSS is excited to be partnering with BCOHRC in the multi-year Baseline Project. With an Office of the Human Rights Commissioner having been absent from B.C. for 17 years, establishing what the state of human rights is in British Columbia is vital. It allows us to understand where we as British Columbians are and what we need to advocate for to ensure everyone’s rights are upheld. In participating in the Baseline Project, TDCSS held focus groups and expanded community members’ understanding of human rights, including educating people about who rights holders are and who rights bearers are. TDCSS looks forward to sharing the Community Briefs and spreading this important information regarding human rights issues in our community.”

Polly Sutherland, Team Lead, ANKORS Cranbrook / Community Action Team Coordinator, Cranbrook Moving Mountains

“The Baseline Community Briefs done by BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner could not have come at a better time to ensure the voices of rural citizens in Cranbrook impacted by human rights are captured. Our community is growing and we have faced many challenges in terms of the housing crisis, food security, poverty and stigma against people who use drugs. The current drug poisoning crisis adds another layer. These Community Briefs provide inclusion, compassion and respect, and a safe platform to have this important dialogue. As a result, we at ANKORS have formed a Human Rights Community Partner Group, which will continue to bring our most vulnerable citizens’ voices forward as we navigate the everchanging landscape of human rights in Cranbrook.”



Tanis Rose Oldenburger, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Mountainside Harm Reduction Society

“At the start of our focus group on barriers to shelter, housing and substance use services—which we undertook as a Community Connector for BCOHRC’s Baseline Project—we took participants and co-facilitators through a slideshow that explained the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and together we read through each of these rights and responsibilities. It was a startling and illuminating exercise that highlighted the need for this type of education. Most of us had never actually read or heard of these in any great detail. How can folks in community even know if their rights are being violated if they don’t inherently understand each of these unique human rights? The work BCOHRC has done to develop and release these Community Briefs begins to address this gap. And it highlights how more education and advocacy in this area is desperately needed, especially with more vulnerable, marginalized and stigmatized populations in our communities.”

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Media contact

To request an interview with Commissioner Kasari Govender, please contact Lindsey Bertrand, Manager, Communications, at media@bchumanrights.ca or 604-306-7369.

Media kit

[Visit our media kit](#) for images of Commissioner Kasari Govender, pronunciation guidance, bios and more.

About BCOHRC

BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner exists to address the root causes of inequality, discrimination and injustice in B.C. by shifting laws, policies, practices and cultures. We do this work through education, research, advocacy, inquiry and monitoring. Learn more at: bchumanrights.ca

About the Commissioner

B.C.’s Human Rights Commissioner, Kasari Govender, started her five-year term on Sept. 3, 2019. As an independent officer of the Legislature, Commissioner Govender is uniquely positioned to ensure human rights in B.C. are protected, respected and advanced on a systemic level. Her work through BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner centres listening deeply to British Columbians to inform educational materials, policy guidance, public inquiries, interventions, community-based research and more that protects marginalized communities, addresses discrimination and injustice and upholds human rights for all.

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