



## **Building Bridges for Better Return to Work: Vancouver Roundtable Advances Early Intervention and Poverty Reduction Efforts**

On February 28, 2025, the Reducing Poverty Initiative (RPI) brought together over 30 key stakeholders for its fourth Stakeholder Roundtable—this time in Vancouver. Building on the momentum of previous sessions held in Nanaimo, Kelowna, and a virtual event in Prince George, the Vancouver session further strengthened cross-sector collaboration aimed at improving return-to-work outcomes and reducing poverty among British Columbians navigating injury or illness.

The roundtable included representation from Service Canada, the BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR), labour organizations, WorkBC, WorkSafeBC, ICBC, health authorities, non-profit organizations, and the broader healthcare community. The session focused on identifying system-level improvements that support earlier, more coordinated interventions for individuals at risk of long-term unemployment due to health challenges.

“These roundtables create powerful spaces where community leaders, service providers, and policymakers come together to build a more inclusive, supportive employment landscape,” said Shane Simpson, Chair of the Executive Leadership Committee and former BC Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. “The Vancouver session was a key milestone—both in its representation and in the clear outcomes it produced.”

Two major outcomes emerged from the Vancouver Roundtable:

- **Direct Communication with Claimants:** The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR) has now implemented direct email outreach to individuals receiving Medical Employment Insurance (EI) benefits in pilot regions, informing them of the RPI and available supports.
- **Streamlined Medical Referrals:** A dedicated referral button for the RPI has been added to *Pathways BC*, a widely used platform among physicians and health professionals in BC, making it easier for healthcare providers to connect patients with RPI services.

Healthcare engagement has continued to be a cornerstone of RPI's success. Across all regions, the strongest referral streams stem from healthcare practitioners—particularly family physicians, urgent care clinicians, and allied health professionals. Growing support from Divisions of Family Practice, private practitioners, and regional health authorities has played a critical role in expanding both awareness and access.

“This growing engagement with the medical community is essential,” said Bill Dyer, Program Director for the RPI. “Healthcare providers are often the first point of contact when someone is struggling with a health issue that impacts their ability to work. By streamlining referrals and raising awareness within medical networks, we can connect people to the support they need sooner.”

With roundtables now completed in four regions—Nanaimo, Kelowna, Prince George, and Vancouver—the RPI continues to develop community partnerships and gather valuable insights that will inform program evolution and potential expansion.

The Reducing Poverty Initiative is a joint effort supported by the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada. It provides direct services to individuals on medical leave in four pilot communities, aiming to enhance employment outcomes and reduce long-term dependency on income support systems through early, person-centred intervention.

For more updates on the RPI please visit: <https://www.reducingpoverty.nidmar.ca>