



Reducing Poverty Initiative

Disability assistance through early intervention

NEWSLETTER



Message from the Director

Message from Bill Dyer, Director – Reducing Poverty Initiative

July 2025 marks one year since the official launch of the Reducing Poverty Initiative in Nanaimo, and we're proud to celebrate this milestone with the release of our very first quarterly newsletter.

Modeled after a successful early intervention program in Belgium, the Reducing Poverty Initiative was designed to support individuals in British Columbia who are temporarily off work due to illness or injury and who don't have access to traditional disability benefits. Over the past year, the program has been delivered in four pilot communities: Nanaimo, Vancouver, Kelowna, and Prince George.

With the support of our Certified Disability Management Professionals and referral partners, we've helped participants navigate their return-to-work journeys with empathy, coordination, and practical support. We've also seen encouraging momentum in building cross-sector collaboration, informing future research, and identifying what early intervention can look like in a Canadian context.

Guiding this work is our national Executive Leadership Committee, comprised of key stakeholders and experts from across Canada. Their strategic input ensures the initiative reflects a diversity of perspectives and remains grounded in evidence and experience. You can read more about this committee on page 2, alongside further information on the Belgium model that inspired this pilot.

Thank you for your continued interest and involvement in this important work. We look forward to sharing quarterly updates as the initiative continues to grow and evolve.

By the Numbers

A snapshot of our impact since the Reducing Poverty Initiative launched in spring 2024

- 📍 **4 pilot communities:** Nanaimo, Vancouver, Kelowna, and Prince George
- 🏠 **Strongest referral sources:** Healthcare providers and WorkBC
- 🛠️ **Most requested supports:** Physiotherapy, counselling, and ergonomic aids
- 📄 **Growing awareness:** RPI referral button now embedded in *Pathways BC*, to help support direct referrals from healthcare
- 🗣️ **Roundtables completed** in 4 communities with cross-sector participation. Establishing unique paths to meet diverse needs

Behind the Scenes

Laying the Foundation for Long-Term Impact

Over the past year, RPI has laid the groundwork for long-term success by strengthening infrastructure, streamlining processes, and advancing evaluation.

- ✅ **Research & Evaluation Underway** – Data collection through surveys and stakeholder feedback is helping us assess what's working and where improvements can be made.
- 🔗 **Referral Uptake Growing** – Two new referral streams have been established, and awareness continues to increase among healthcare providers and community partners.
- ⚡ **Streamlined Intake** – New workflows are reducing wait times and increasing consistency across regions.
- 📁 **Expanded Resources** – Updated brochures and tools now support smoother navigation for CDMPs, healthcare providers, and employers.

These foundational improvements will continue to support stronger delivery in year two.





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Executive Leadership Committee Message from the Chair

Message from Shane Simpson, Chair - Reducing Poverty Initiative Executive Leadership Committee

The work of the Reducing Poverty Initiative is supported by the Executive Leadership Committee which provides oversight, expertise and networking support to the RPI. I am proud to chair this committee, comprised of leaders from Canada and abroad, who bring their expertise in the areas of business, labour, academia, health, policy development and disability. The Committee provides an important touchstone for staff as they develop and implement the strategic plan for the RPI.

In my time as Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction for BC, I learned a great deal about the importance of employment to so many in the disability community. Certainly, to improve their incomes and quality of life, but also to put their marker down on their value, through a job. It is not lost on this community, the value we put on work as a way to measure our contribution. They have a great deal to offer and want that opportunity as well.

For someone who has long been in the workforce and now finds themselves on the outside, due to a health issue and with no certainty to get back to work, the impact of this reality is profound. I know the members of the Executive Leadership Committee are proud to support the work of the RPI as it strives to help people find a successful path back to the workplace.

Our Belgian Counterpart

The RPI is modeled after a groundbreaking early intervention program in Belgium. Their approach focuses on proactive, coordinated return-to-work support for individuals temporarily off work due to illness or injury – and has led to significant reductions in long-term work absence.

By adapting and applying this model here in British Columbia, the Reducing Poverty Initiative is testing how early intervention can be implemented within Canada's healthcare and social systems. This pilot project has the potential to inform and inspire system-wide improvements across the country, helping to build a more inclusive, responsive, and effective approach to disability and workforce reintegration nationwide.



Meet the Committee

Executive Leadership Committee Members

- **Karen Blackman** – Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment and Labour Market Services Division (Government rep)
- **Dr. Garry Corbett** – PCU-WHS faculty; Fr. WorkSafeBC Senior Vocational Rehab Manager & Manitoba Government Director (Eligibility & rehab perspective)
- **Dr. Paul Farnan** – Occupational Health Physician (RTW & recovery specialist)
- **Francois Perl** – Strategic Advisor, Solidaris, Belgium (Disability insurance expertise)
- **Prof. Herbert Biggs, PhD** – Chief Academic Officer, PCU-WHS (Implementation research)
- **Katherine Hatchard, OT Reg. BC** – PCU-WHS faculty (Mental health lens)
- **Lance Blanco** – SVP Strategic Development, Adentra (Employer Rep; NIDMAR Board)
- **Lani de Hek** – Manager, Disability Management, BCNU (Labour Rep)
- **Prof. Lode Godderis, MD, PhD** – Univ. of Leuven; Health Advisor, Belgium Gov't, WHO, ILO (Policy research)
- **Mike Carleton** – Former Exec. Director, Premier's Council on Disability (Rehabilitation; NIDMAR Board)
- **Sari Sairanen** – Exec. Asst. to Secretary Treasurer, UNIFOR (Labour Rep; NIDMAR Board)
- **Scott Lunny** – Director, District 3, USW (Labour Rep)
- **Shelly L. Dauphinee** – Chief Engagement Officer, WCB Nova Scotia; former VP, WCB NB (Social innovation & re-employment)
- **Steve Barnett** – Fr. COO, QuadReal; Fr. SVP Finance, WorkSafeBC (Program evaluation & ROI)
- **Trevor Alexander** – CEO, WCB of Alberta (WCB perspective)
- **Hon. Wayne Wouters, PC, OC** – Chancellor, PCU-WHS; former Clerk of the Privy Council (Federal/provincial interface)





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Nanaimo Roundtable – July 2024

Community partners, service providers, and stakeholders gathered to explore early intervention strategies and strengthen local collaboration.

What We are Learning

As the Reducing Poverty Initiative evolves, we're paying close attention to what's working – and what's meaningful, for participants and partners across our four pilot communities. One insight we're hearing consistently is the value of personalized, knowledgeable support. With nine Certified Disability Management Professionals (CDMPs) actively supporting participants, many participants have shared how impactful it is to have a dedicated person guiding them through the return-to-work process, someone who understands the system and offers both empathy and practical advice.

We're also seeing that early, coordinated intervention supports stronger outcomes and helps build collaboration between medical providers, employers, and community services. These relationships are essential for creating a more inclusive and responsive approach to recovery.

As we enter our second year, we remain focused on listening, learning, and refining our approach to best serve those who need it most.

In the Community

Over the past year, RPI held roundtables in Nanaimo, Kelowna, Prince George, and Vancouver to strengthen partnerships and explore how early intervention can be supported locally. Each pilot community brings unique strengths and needs. Insights from these sessions have helped shape tailored approaches, based on local resources and feedback. Highlights include stronger ties with healthcare and employment services, new referral pathways, and improved access in remote communities. These relationships continue to guide our work moving forward.

Connect now!

Get Support. Get Back to Work.

We've made it easier than ever to access the Reducing Poverty Initiative.

✓ You – or someone you know – may be eligible

Learn more or apply:

www.reducingpoverty.nidmar.ca

What's New:

- Simplified Intake Forms
- Updated Referral Tools for clinics, service providers, unions & employers
- Resource Hub with brochures, forms & updates

Want to learn more?

We offer short training sessions for professionals, clinics, and service providers on how to refer eligible individuals and support participation.

Need help or materials?

Contact us at reducingpoverty@nidmar.ca – we're here to support you.



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