



Social Determinants of Health Fact Sheet:  
**Gold River and Tsa'Xana**

The Strathcona Community Health Network is pleased to share these community health profiles. We have developed a community health profile for each of the eight communities within our region.

Community health profiles were developed for two purposes: 1) to support the ongoing work of the Strathcona Community Health Network, and 2) to build capacity within the Strathcona region.

1. The Strathcona Community Health Network (SCHN) has articulated our approach to work, which includes a commitment to being evidence-informed by balancing the best available data with local knowledge in collaborative decisions. These community health profiles, then, have created an opportunity to define and collect or generate local data to support decision making and future action by the SCHN.
2. Perhaps more importantly, the SCHN's approach also involves community capacity building. Per our Strategic Plan, we "encourage a capacity building approach so the community is strengthened and partners grow and improve their knowledge, skills and infrastructure through engaging with the network."

Community health profiles can be used to build community capacity in many ways, including the following:

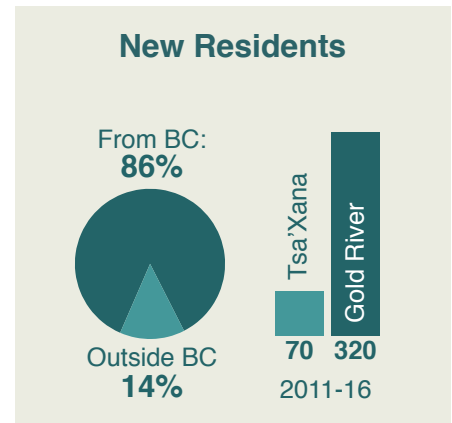
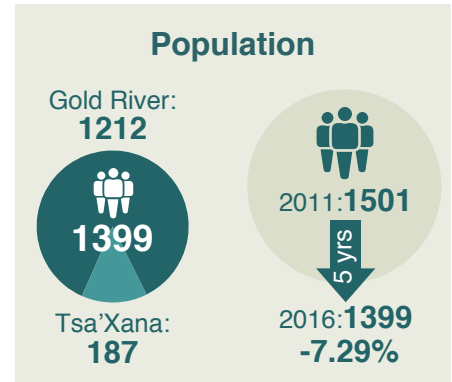
- Use the information within to support planning and decision-making processes.
- Utilize this report as evidence when applying for grant funding and/or providing evaluation information to funders.
- Employ the information within when advocating for policy changes at all levels of government.
- Connect with the individuals, organizations, and coalitions within your community that are working towards greater outcomes. If you'd like more information about these groups, please contact us.
- Initiate conversations with your neighbours, family, friends, and colleagues about the information that stood out to you. Can you take any small or grassroots actions in support of increased community health?
- Let us know if the SCHN should be aware of any initiatives happening in your community related to the social determinants of health. Our contact information is on the final page.



## Community Context

The Mowachaht/Muchalaht people, who are Nuu-chah-nulth, have deep history in the communities now known as Gold River and Tsa’Xana. Gold River is a small village with a population of **1212**, and neighbouring reserve Tsa’Xana has a population of **187**, for a total of **1399**. In 2011, the combined population of the communities was **1501**, and the population decreased by **7.29%** between 2011 and 2016. Generally, Tsa’Xana has a younger population, with a higher proportion of children ages 0-5 and a lower proportion of people age 65 years and greater.<sup>1</sup> While the populations of both communities have decreased between 2011 and 2016, both communities have also welcomed newcomers. Between 2011 and 2016, **390** people moved to the area. Anecdotally, many newcomers to Gold River seem to have chosen the community for its relative affordability. The cost of real estate in Campbell River has increased as the community receives newcomers from the Lower Mainland, and some families are no longer able to find or afford a rental home in Campbell River.

As small communities, both Gold River and Tsa’Xana fit into multiple service delivery areas. Gold River is a municipality and a member of the Strathcona Regional District (SRD). Tsa’Xana is a reserve and is within the boundaries of the SRD’s Area A. Both communities are included in School District 84 boundaries. Both are also included in Local Health Area 84 (Vancouver Island West), and in the larger North Vancouver Island Health Services Delivery Area.

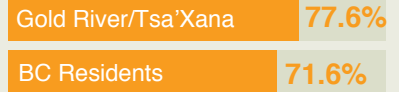




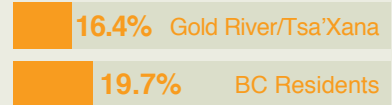
## General Well-being

As members of the North Vancouver Island Health Service Delivery Area, residents of Gold River and Tsa’Xana report a high rate of community belonging: **77.6%** of residents report a somewhat strong or strong sense of community belonging, compared to **71.6%** of BC residents. Likewise, Gold River and Tsa’Xana report lower perceptions of life stress than provincial residents (**16.4%** report that most days in their lives are quite a bit or extremely stressful, compared to **19.7%** provincially).<sup>2</sup>

### Community Belonging



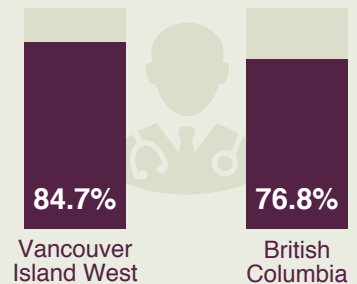
### Life Stress



## Health Care

Another measure in which residents of Island Health Region 84 (Vancouver Island West) compare positively to their provincial counterparts is in physician attachment. In Vancouver Island West, which includes Gold River and Tsa’Xana, **84.7%** of residents are patients of a physical or other primary health care provider (nurse practitioner, community health nurse, etc.). In BC, only **76.8%** of residents are attached to a primary care provider.<sup>3</sup> Gold River and Tsa’Xana residents receive most of their health services at the Gold River Health Centre, which offers primary health care and emergency medical care services. Some health services are offered on reserve as well. There is no hospital in Gold River or Tsa’Xana – the closest is in Campbell River.

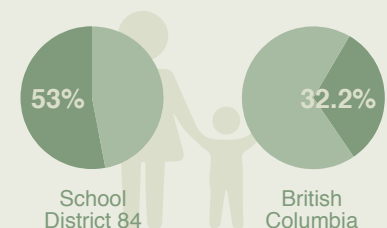
### Physician Attachment



## Children and Youth

Time and time again, research emphasizes that investing in the health and well-being of children and youth has positive health, economic, and community impacts for decades to come. One of the most important measures of young children’s health is the Early Development Instrument, which examines a child’s experiences in the first five years of life via 5 scales (Physical Health & Well-Being, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language & Cognitive Development, and Communication Skills & General Knowledge). In School District 84 (Vancouver Island West), **53%** of Kindergarten children are deemed vulnerable, meaning that without additional support, these children may experience future challenges in school and society. Provincially, the vulnerability rate is **32.2%**.<sup>4</sup>

### Child Vulnerability Rate



Another measure of support for early childhood development is the number of child-care spaces available. In Gold River, there are **30** licensed spaces at Little Dinos Childcare. There are **28** spaces at the Mowachaht/Muchalaht Kaackamin Centre. Both centres offer care to children from birth to age 12. Additionally, Ray Watkins Elementary School offers StrongStart, a parent-participation program for pre-school children.

As children get older, there are a number of institutions to support healthy development, including the Health Centre, a swimming pool, skating rink, numerous parks and playgrounds, library, and opportunities for organized sports and recreation.

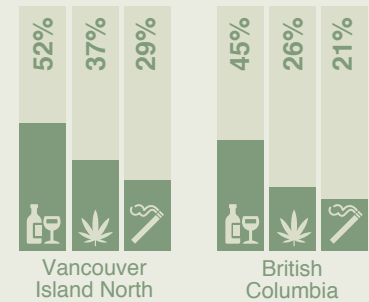
The youth obesity rate for Vancouver Island North, which includes Gold River and Tsa’Xana, is **7%** for both males and females. Provincially, it is **8%** for males and **4%** for females.<sup>5</sup>

The McCreary Adolescent Health Survey reports on youth experience with alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco. In Vancouver Island North, which includes Gold River and Tsa’Xana, **52%** of youth have tried alcohol, compared to **45%** provincially. Similarly, **37%** of Vancouver Island North youth have tried marijuana, compared to **26%** provincially. Tobacco sees a similar trend, with **29%** of Vancouver Island North youth trying tobacco, compared to **21%** of youth provincially.<sup>5</sup>

### Childcare Spaces Available



### Youth Experience with Alcohol, Marijuana & Tobacco

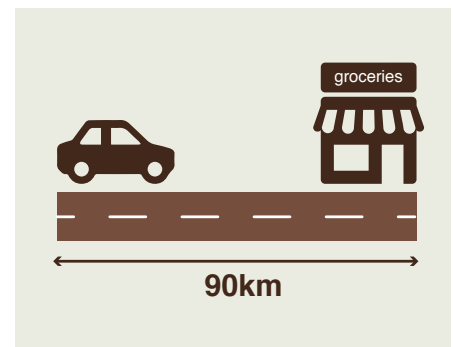


## Food Security

The World Health Organization (WHO) includes food security in its list of social determinants of health and defines household food security as “appropriate food being available, with adequate access and being affordable (location of markets, supermarkets, and closure of small suppliers creating food deserts in cities).” WHO stresses the importance of food security particularly in small and remote communities.<sup>6</sup>

In Gold River and Tsa’Xana, there are no grocery stores, community gardens, or food waste recovery programs.<sup>7,8</sup> Residents of these communities must drive for nearly 90 kilometres to a larger centre (likely Campbell River or Courtenay) to purchase groceries and household supplies. As of April 2018, there was one local delivery service in Gold River that would drive to Campbell River and pick up groceries that had been ordered online or by phone, for a charge.

In case of emergency, there is a food pantry in Gold River that is operated by the Christian Fellowship Church. There are no set open hours; residents call the food pantry’s volunteers to arrange an appointment. The food pantry supplies only dry goods, like grains and cereals, and canned fruits and vegetables. In Tsa’Xana, there is a fish share program, in which some community members fish and the whole community shares what was caught.<sup>8</sup> Residents of Gold River and Tsa’Xana can also



access the Campbell River Food Bank, though it requires access to a vehicle and funds for fuel. Between April 1, 2017, and March 31, 2018, the Campbell River Food Bank served **108** households from Gold River, or **223** individuals total. Interestingly, the majority of individuals served come from families of 5 or more people, while the second most frequent users are single people.<sup>9</sup>

The Provincial Health Services Authority’s “Food Costing in BC” report for 2017 reports on the cost of sufficient, safe, and nutritious foods across the province. For the North Island Health Services Delivery Area, the monthly cost of healthy food is **\$1,036** (compare this to the provincial average of **\$1,019**).<sup>10</sup> However, the cost is even greater for communities like Gold River, whose residents must spend more time and money to ensure adequate transportation to get to a grocery store. Using the government rate of \$0.58/km traveled, which is inclusive of fuel and vehicle maintenance, a roundtrip from Gold River to Campbell River costs **\$101.50**.



## Transportation

Being able to get from one place to another is essential for everyone, but particularly for members of rural and remote communities. In Gold River and Tsa’Xana, a vehicle is necessary to purchase food and household goods, access health and social services, and access employment, among other things.

There is no public transportation in Gold River or Tsa’Xana. No bus routes exist. There are no taxis. Aside from owning a vehicle, or utilizing active transportation, transport options are limited: there is a private water taxi company or the Uchuck for travelling on water, and a private helicopter and floatplane company for travels by air.<sup>8</sup>

There are no official active transportation routes in Gold River or Tsa’Xana, meaning that there are no officially designated bike lanes, or protected pedestrian paths near roads. Given that Gold River and Tsa’Xana are separated by about 5 kilometres, the lack of transportation options makes bridging the gap between communities difficult. For leisure, there are walking paths in the village of Gold River, and biking and hiking paths through the woods.

When asked about how residents get to work, the majority reported that they drive. In Gold River, **460** people commute to work and of those, **360** people drive. Another **70** people walk, and **30** people commute via another mode, such as biking, scootering, or skateboarding. Similarly, of the **45** people who commute in Tsa’Xana, **35** people do so by vehicle and **10** people do so by walking or biking.<sup>1</sup> The need to own a vehicle for accessing basic needs, then, likely accounts for the **76%** of residents that have a driver’s license.<sup>12</sup>



# Housing

Access to safe, adequate, and affordable housing is essential in ensuring the health of a community's residents. Inadequate housing affects physical health – housing that is mouldy, dirty, or in need of major repairs may put a resident at risk of developing one-time or chronic illnesses. Housing that is unaffordable, overcrowded, or otherwise unsuitable contributes to increased stress and/or decreased quality of life.

House prices in Gold River are more affordable than many other island communities. The median value of a home is **\$140,120**.<sup>1</sup> The median monthly cost of home ownership is **\$567**. Median monthly cost is the total cost for a mortgage, property taxes, and the cost of electricity, heat, water, and other municipal services. For a renter household, median monthly cost to rent is **\$541**.<sup>1</sup> Caution must be taken, however. Although these costs are much lower than surrounding communities, this is also reflective of Gold River's lower median income. For example, despite the relatively low median rental price, **33%** of tenant households are spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs.<sup>1</sup> For homeowners, this number decreases greatly – only **12%** of homeowners are spending 30% or more of their income on housing.<sup>1</sup> (Due to the small size of Tsa'Xana, these data are not publicly available.)

There is no accurate rental vacancy rate for Gold River, though residents shared anecdotal knowledge about the rental market. Renters typically find a rental home via word of mouth, social media, or online postings. While anecdotal reports suggest that renters in need of a home can usually find one quickly, monitoring the Gold River Buzz online rental postings suggests that there isn't an excess of rental housing stock in Gold River.<sup>8</sup>

Of all homes in Gold River and Tsa'Xana (rented or owned), **10.2%** have been reported as requiring major repairs (65 of 635).<sup>1</sup>

As no formal homelessness count has occurred in Gold River or Tsa'Xana, local residents were relied on for their input. Residents of both communities reported no absolute homeless people, but there are hidden homeless residents in Gold River and Tsa'Xana. The hidden homeless may be couch surfing or living in overcrowded residences. However, community members note that, because so many social services are available in larger centres, Gold River or Tsa'Xana residents may move to larger cities and sleep rough or live in absolute homelessness to access services.<sup>8</sup>





## Connectivity

Access to phone and internet services is necessary for reasons related explicitly to health – including access to health and emergency services and opportunities for telehealth – but also to meet other needs. Access to phone and internet services also allows access to education and professional development, employment, connection to friends and family, and entertainment, among others.

There is no cell phone coverage in Gold River and Tsa’Xana. Thus, most residents rely on landlines. A landline from Telus, the most popular provider of home phone services in the area, costs **\$40** per month and includes unlimited local calling.<sup>19</sup>

Cable and DSL are the most utilized internet service types in Gold River and Tsa’Xana. An individual household can expect to pay between **\$40** and **\$100** per month, depending on desired speed and usage.<sup>20</sup> Both the Gold River branch of the Vancouver Island Regional Library and the Gold River Literacy Society offer free access to the internet.

Though not all residents who work from home would utilize home phone and internet, some would. In Gold River, **35** members of the workforce work from home. There are **0** home-based workers in Tsa’Xana.<sup>1</sup>

### Phone, Internet & Cable Costs



Phone (Landline)  
**\$40** per month



Cable/DSL  
**\$40 - \$100** per month



## Employment and income

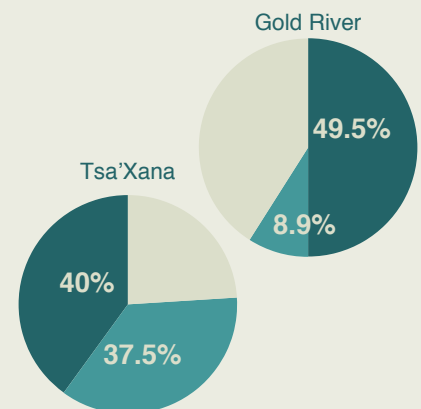
Living Wage Canada notes that “Income plays an important role in health outcomes. In general, the less someone is paid the poorer their health is across a number of physical and psychological measures. In addition, employment and working conditions have a significant impact on our health.”<sup>13</sup> Small communities, like Gold River and Tsa’Xana, have limited education and employment opportunities and may have fewer appropriate work opportunities than larger communities.

Gold River has the second highest median income in the Strathcona Regional District, at **\$65,344** with only Campbell River residents earning more. Median income data is suppressed for Tsa’Xana, due to the small size of the population, but Tsa’Xana residents felt that median income on reserve was lower than in Gold River.<sup>1,8</sup>

Most income in Gold River is generated by employment (**82%**), while **18%** comes from government transfers like the Old Age Pension, Guaranteed Income Supplement, Canada Pension Plan, child benefits, or social assistance benefits. Gold River sees an employment rate of **49.5%** and an unemployment rate of **8.9%**, while neighbouring Tsa’Xana has an employment rate of **40%** and an unemployment rate of **35.7%**.<sup>1, 14</sup>

### Employment Rates

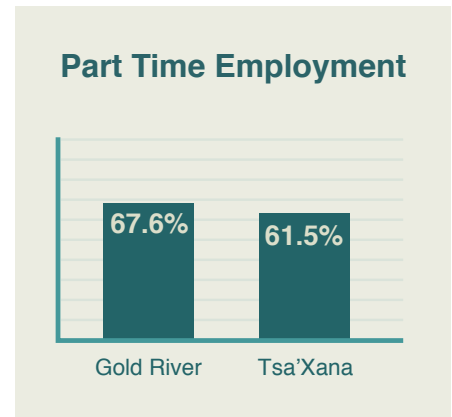
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Out of labour force



Given that there are no major industries or employers in Gold River or Tsa’Xana, it isn’t surprising that **67.6%** of Gold River’s labour force works part year and/or part time. Similarly, **61.5%** of Tsa Xana’s labour force works part year and/or part time.<sup>1</sup>

Given the absence of a major industry or employer, the proportion of minimum wage workers is an interesting consideration. While the data is not publicly available for Tsa’Xana, there are approximately **380** people in Gold River who may be minimum wage earners.<sup>1, 15</sup>

While most residents in Gold River and Tsa’Xana work within the two communities, **8%** of Gold River’s labour force works outside of the community, and **2.6%** work outside of the province or country.<sup>1</sup>



## Education and Training

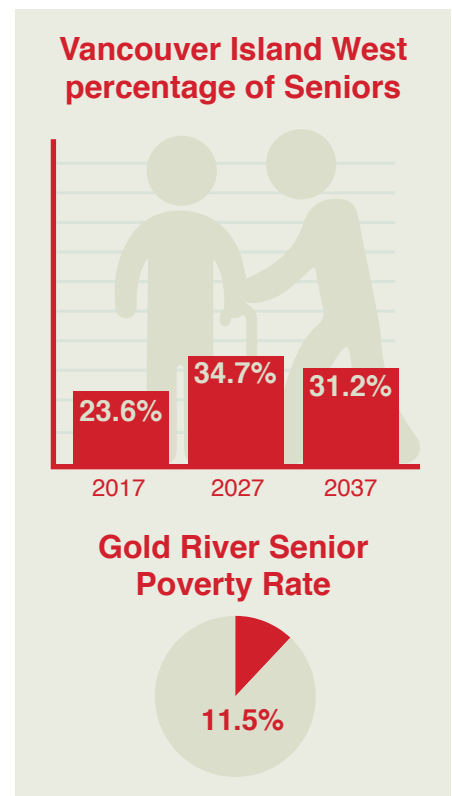
Education and training are becoming increasingly integral to employment success. In Gold River, those wishing to access post-secondary training while still living in the community would be required to learn via distance. In Tsa’Xana, North Island College offers Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes. Classes are open to all residents, whether from Gold River or Tsa’Xana.<sup>16</sup> ABE classes focus on literacy and numeracy skills. North Island Employment Foundations Society (NIEFS) visits the Gold River Literacy Centre and Gold River Secondary School offering job search skills and training.<sup>17</sup>

## Ageing

Growing old requires related social, financial, and health supports. Currently, the proportion of the population in Vancouver Island West (which includes Gold River and Tsa’Xana) that is comprised of seniors is **23.6%**. That proportion is expected to grow to **34.7%** by 2027, and then decrease slightly to **31.2%** by 2037.<sup>18</sup>

Community members report that older adults and seniors are retiring to Gold River because of the low cost of living.<sup>8</sup> Retirees may sell a home in a large community or urban centre and purchase a home in Gold River while maintaining or even growing their nest egg. (The senior poverty rate for Gold River is **11.5%**; the data for Tsa’Xana is suppressed due to population size.)<sup>1</sup> However, there is currently very little care for seniors in Gold River and Tsa’Xana. Though residents have access to in-home care for two hours per week, there are no independent or assisted living facilities, no memory care facility for people with Alzheimer’s or dementia, and no retirement homes. Thus, it is hard to paint a clear picture of the cost of ageing in Gold River or Tsa’Xana.

Likewise, one measure of senior health is the proportion of seniors who live at home (often called “ageing in place”). Seniors who age in place can feel isolated if they live alone; seniors that live with a partner, roommate, or family members often have a higher quality of life than those living alone. Given that there is no other option in Gold River or Tsa’Xana, all seniors live at home.



# The Social Determinants of Health

The Strathcona Community Health Network (SCHN) works collaboratively to increase the health of the residents of the Strathcona Regional District. Focusing on upstream prevention, the SCHN focuses on the social determinants of health to guide its work.

In Canada, the following social determinants of health are frequently referenced:

Income and income distribution, education, unemployment and job security, employment and working conditions, early childhood development, food insecurity, housing, social inclusion/exclusion, social safety network, health services, aboriginal status, gender, race, disability.

The SCHN has engaged in extensive community consultation, including two forums. Community consultation surfaced the following social determinants of health most relevant to the region: First Nations and Cultural Safety, Healthy Children, Food Security, Housing, Ageing and Caregiver Support, Connectivity, Transportation.

Within these seven distinct determinants, there are many areas of overlap. In Gold River and Tsa'Xana, for example, the link between transportation and food security is evident. In communities without a proper grocery store, a robust transportation system – including adequate public transit options – is required. Alas, Gold River and Tsa'Xana are without public transportation, making food procurement even more difficult.

Along the same lines, education and employment are inextricably linked. As noted earlier, employment demands advanced education and training. In Gold River and Tsa'Xana, there are few options after high school. Regional residents have access to Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes from North Island College, but ABE courses are limited to basic literacy and numeracy. Gaining most certifications, learning the trades, or studying for a Bachelor's degree or beyond are only achievable by distance. This calls to mind another of the determinant's: connectivity. In rural and remote communities, reliable and affordable internet that is also fast enough to stream classes and do other coursework can be hard to come by.

Another obvious link exists between healthy children and housing. Housing that is adequate should be affordable to the residents, allow for sufficient space given the number of residents, and should be in need of minor repairs or no repairs at all. Houses in need of major repairs may present significant barriers to health, including moisture damage and mold growth, and cold temperatures due to inefficient heating. Children living in damp, cold, and/or moldy homes have increased likelihoods of developing asthma, meningitis, and other conditions. Children whose families are members of the hidden homeless – couchsurfing or living in vehicles – suffer decreased mental health alongside physical ailments. Given that the percentage of housing in Gold River and Tsa'Xana requiring major repair is 10.2% - significantly higher than the provincial average of 6.3% - this is cause for concern.

Which links are evident to you?

## Sources

- <sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Census 2016 - Gold River and Tsa'Xana
- <sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2015-2016
- <sup>3</sup> Island Health, Local Health Area Profile 84 (Vancouver Island West), 2015
- <sup>4</sup> Human Early Learning Partnership, Early Development Instrument, School District 84, 2014-2016, [www.earlylearning.ubc.ca](http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca).
- <sup>5</sup> Poon, C., Peled, M., Stewart, D., Kovaleva, K., Cullen, A., Smith, A., & McCreary Centre Society (2015). North Vancouver Island: Results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.
- <sup>6</sup> World Health Organization, The determinants of health, <http://www.who.int/hia/evidence/doh/en/index3.html>
- <sup>7</sup> Canada 411
- <sup>8</sup> Consultation with residents of Gold River and residents of Tsa'Xana
- <sup>9</sup> Campbell River Food Bank (Personal correspondence)
- <sup>10</sup> Provincial Health Services Authority. (2018). Food Costing in BC 2017. Vancouver, B.C.: Provincial Health Services Authority, Population and Public Health Program.
- <sup>12</sup> ICBC
- <sup>13</sup> Living Wage Canada, What is a living wage?, <http://www.livingwagecanada.ca/index.php/about-living-wage/>.
- <sup>14</sup> BC Stats
- <sup>15</sup> This calculation was completed by multiplying the current minimum wage (\$11.35) by 40 (given a 40-hour work week) and then multiplying that number by 52 (the number of weeks in a year). A full-time, minimum wage worker would earn a maximum of **\$23,608** per year. The number reported here is a compilation of the income earners who reported earning \$0-10,000 (including loss), \$10,001 - \$20,000, and one-third of those earning \$20,001-30,000 annually.
- <sup>16</sup> North Island College
- <sup>17</sup> North Island Employment Foundations Society, NIEFS Services, [www.niefs.net/niefs-services](http://www.niefs.net/niefs-services).
- <sup>18</sup> BC Stats, Population Projections
- <sup>19</sup> Telus.com
- <sup>20</sup> Internet Service Provider estimates



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