
2023



SMA LISTENING & DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY 2023 RESULTS

WHAT WE HEARD



single
mothers'
alliance

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Access to legal system/aid
Affordable transit access
Income challenges
Addiction and mental health
Family Violence
Childcare access
Food insecurity
MSDPR issues

Cost of living

Determining priorities through our lived experience-led model

The Single Mother's Alliance (SMA) is a membership-based non-profit of female and gender-diverse lone-caregivers raising children in communities throughout BC. Our members and participants reside in 41 diverse locations in the province, including cities, towns, and rural and remote locations.

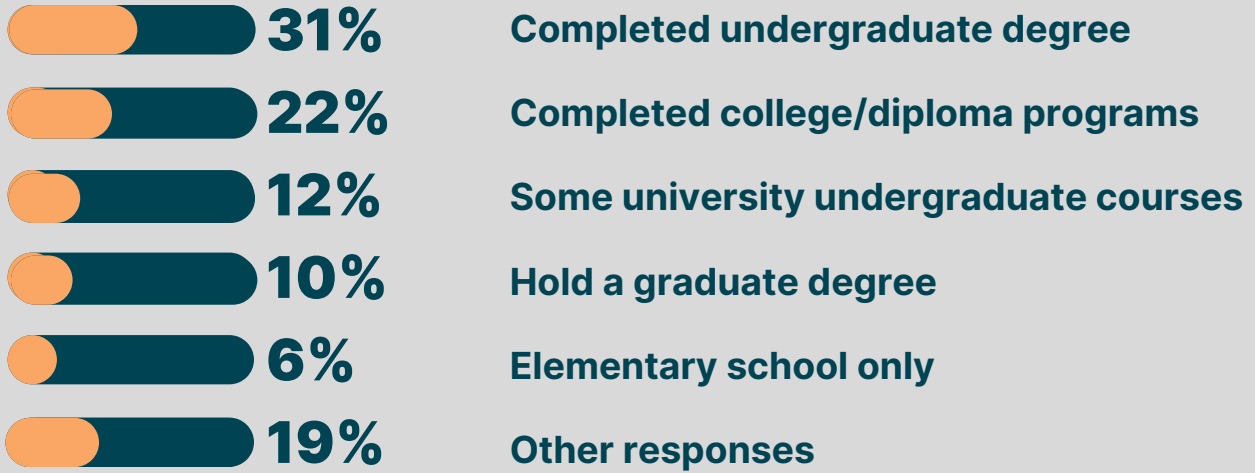
Since we founded in 2014, the Single Mothers' Alliance has been defined by a community-based organization model we have never abandoned which is well loved and valued by our membership. **We determine our annual priorities, initiatives, and campaigns based on community engagement and a 'listening campaign' we conduct annually through February and March with our members throughout BC.**

The Single Mothers Alliance distributed its 2023 listening and demographic survey in February. The anonymous survey included demographic questions, open-ended and drop-down questions on issues impacting members at this time. **We heard from 51 members located across the province in 17 diverse locations which provides a 'snapshot' of the needs and wishes of our diverse membership of lone-parents.** This report will provide a summary of the responses.

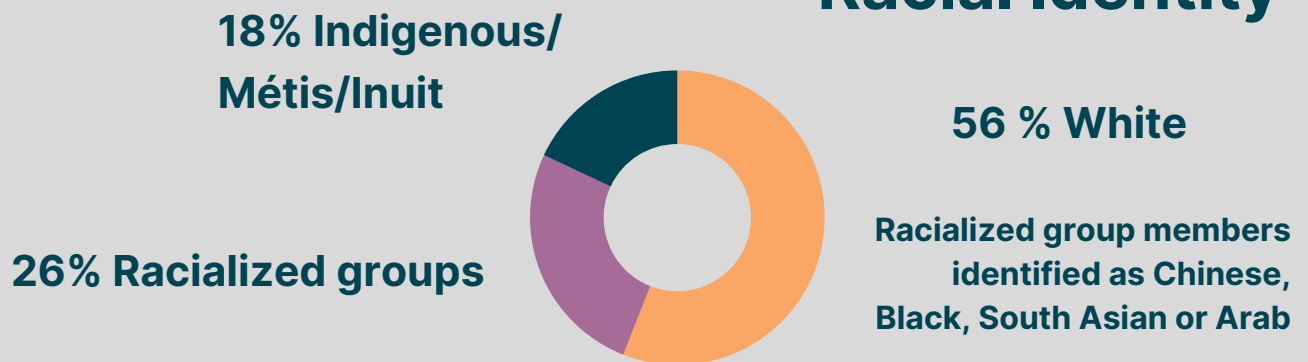
INTRODUCTION

WHO WE HEARD FROM

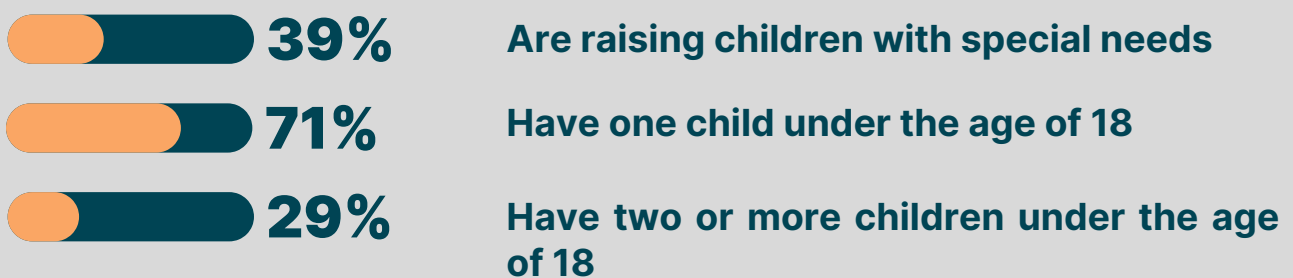
Education Level



Racial Identity

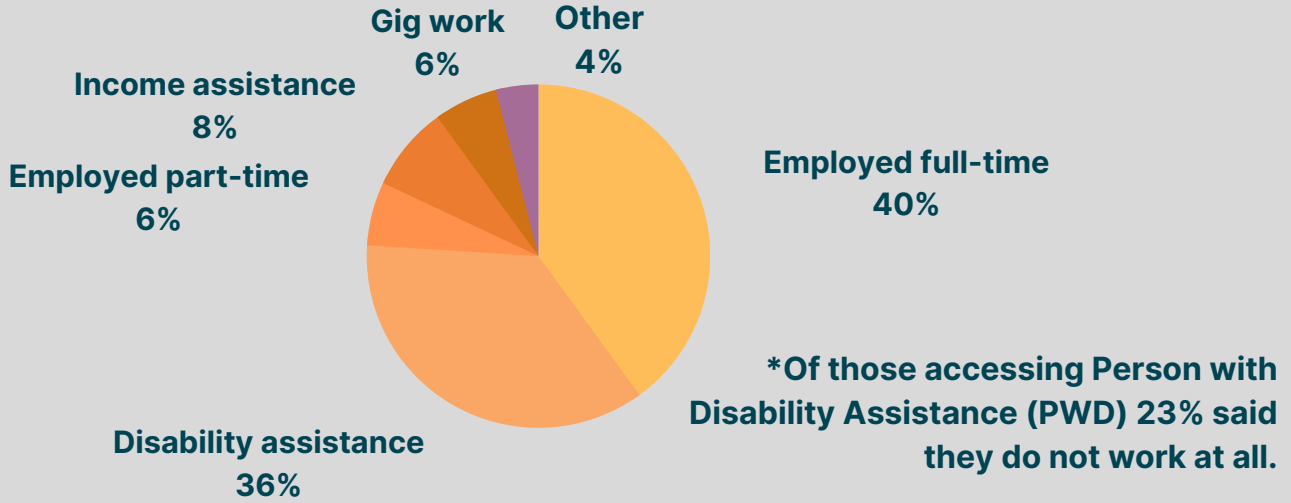


Children

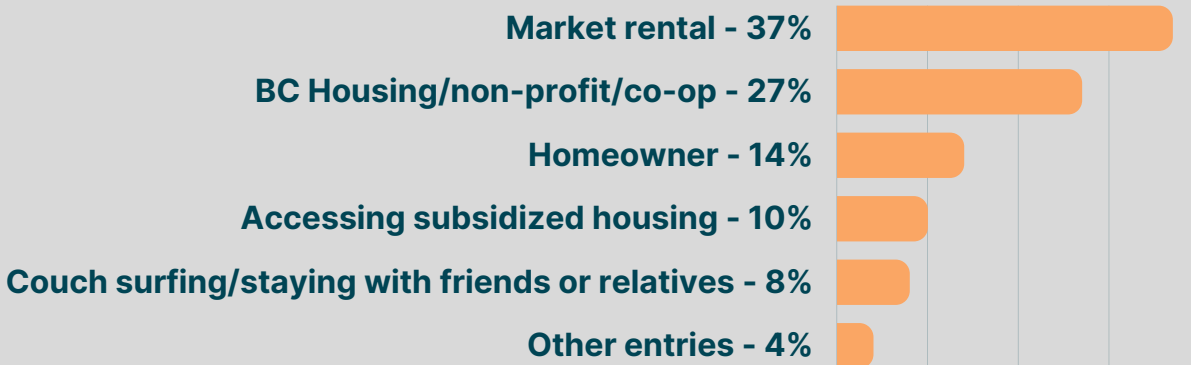


WHO WE HEARD FROM

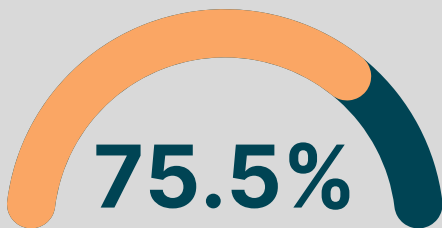
Working Situation Highlights



Housing Highlights



Income & Poverty

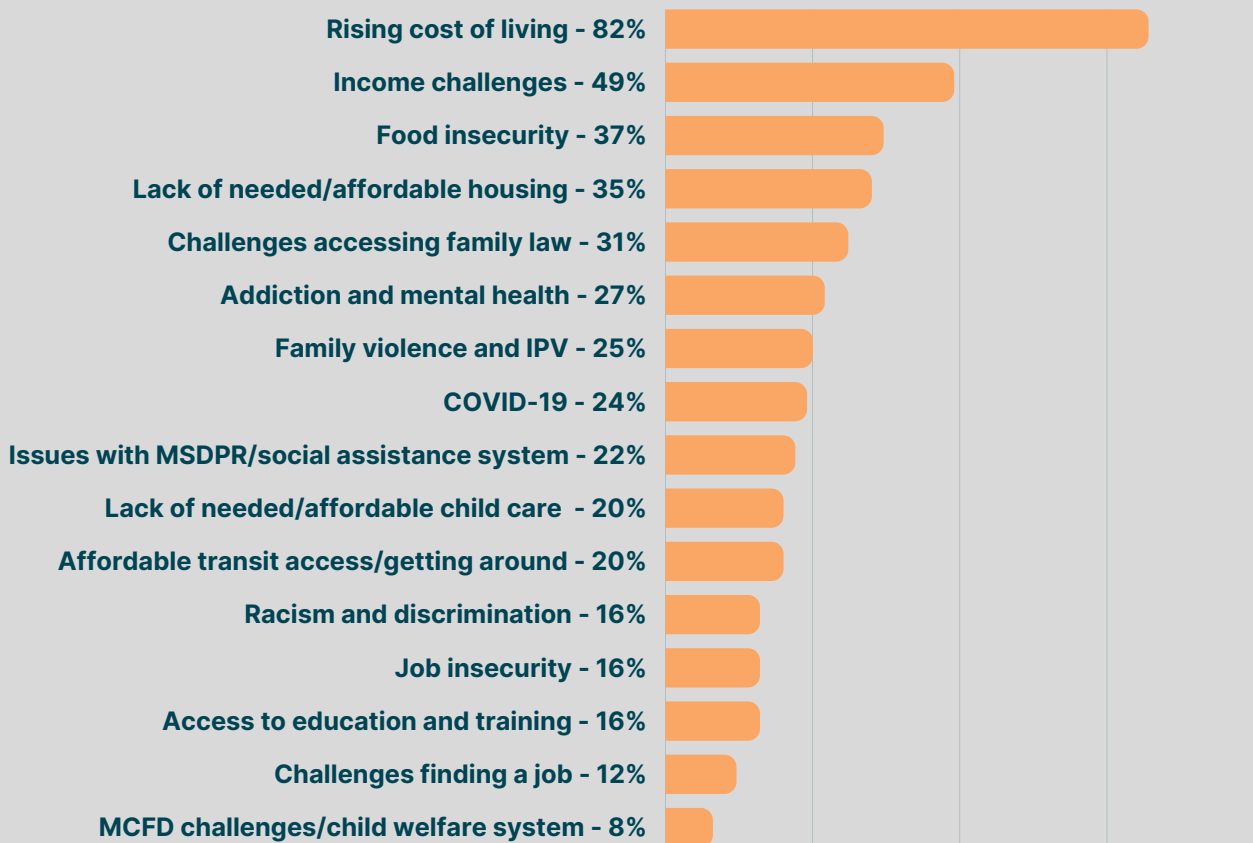


Of respondents live below the MBM poverty line for their area

*Based on the Market Basket Measure (MBM) poverty measure used in BC for families. The MBM calculates a basket of goods and services and is adjusted for the cost of living based on population size.

WHAT IS IMPACTING YOU THE MOST?

To identify the concerns and challenges members are currently facing and thereby inform SMA's work and key priorities, the survey included questions on what issues are impacting members the most. A drop-down of 16 options out of which the respondent could pick an unlimited number of issues was provided.



Though the responses had a wide range, **the rising cost of living (82%), income challenges (49%), food insecurity (37%), lack of needed/affordable housing (35%), and challenges with the family law system (31%),** were the **top five issues** impacting members. Beyond the top five, addiction and mental health (27%), family violence (25%), COVID-19 (24%), lack of affordable child care (20%), and lack of affordable transit and getting around (20%) rounded out the top ten key issues impacting respondents. Members shared that they continue to struggle to access childcare, job training, stable employment, and livable wages. The impact of family violence and racism and discrimination were also highlighted as key issues impacting members. The impacts of COVID-19 are still being felt by members in different aspects of their lives.

TOP 5: RISING COST OF LIVING

In their words...



“

Every single day my heart breaks a bit more that I can't find a way to solve this problem, that I'm unable to provide my kids with more than the basic bare minimum. It is hard as **the cost of living is high**, plus we worry about food a lot. It doesn't help that he's a picky eater too. Also, I worry about returning to work full-time as I'm a single mother, and **[my workplace] doesn't want to include benefits or full-time hours**. So, it could turn out to be a challenge once I return in March. I may need to look for a new position.”

”

“

I need transportation tickets.

”

“

The prices of food and fuel and how many hours need to be worked in order to get the basics and how it affects the family and being a single parent.

”

TOP 5: INCOME CHALLENGES

In their words...



*Before the pandemic I was hanging on by a thread, but I was proud that I was hanging on, and finding way to make it work as a single mom struggling after years of severe and controlling IPV [Intimate Partner Violence]. **Each year since 2020 has compounded the hardship with the price of everything still increasing, while my income and ability to safely earn a living stagnated.***



*I am worrying about my family's financial situation, **my capability to enter into the job market**, my teenager's behavior, safety on social media and their academic performance.*



*[It is] challenging under high [cost of] living, gasoline, transportation cost under **low payment from income assistance**. **Getting only minimum wage with a part-time job** and having difficulty to find a suitable job as a single parent.*



TOP 5: FOOD SECURITY

In their words...

“

We lost the farmers market coupon system this past summer because they changed the accessibility and I was relying on that to carry us through the fresh veggie season. **I've had to rely on free food programs instead with mouldy produce.** I don't qualify for the school programs because my daughter isn't old enough yet to be in the school system.

”

“

Not enough food.

”



“

Now even the services and people I normally turn to for help when things get tight are stretched thin, and it's hard not to feel hopeless when I can't afford to take my kids to the dentist or even buy them thrifted clothing when they outgrow theirs, and **I'm skipping most meals in order to be able to afford to feed my children healthy food.**

”

“

Bills have gone up, and **expenses have gone up making it harder and harder to put food on the table** and meet basic needs.

”

TOP 5: LACK OF HOUSING

In their words...

“

[The biggest thing impacting me right now is] **finding safe housing for my family and jobs that don't discriminate against Indigenous people and people on low income and [with] less education.**

”



“

The housing crisis. There is no affordable housing. I am also in debt from having completed my degree in 2019, and child maintenance I get is \$250. I don't actually have access to the income I make to pay for housing because so much money goes to student loans and I don't qualify for any subsidies. **If we lose our current housing, we will have to move out of BC.** Rising costs to live in [redacted small town]. It would make most sense for me to leave, however my whole support system is here. It would just create other problems to leave.

”

“

All of my meager income goes to rent and legal costs. **There are very little housing options that are also safe and accessible for me.**

”

“

It's all just a lot to balance to keep myself as a parent stable while **there is so much pressure financially and emotionally and physically to maintain a roof over our heads.**

”

TOP 5: ACCESSING FAMILY LAW

In their words...

“

We are dealing with the financial impact of an ex-partner who used coercive control for over six years in the legal context... **I could not sustain the \$400 per hour of legal bills so he won the financial battle.** The children and I will be impacted by the family debt for the remainder of their childhood.”

”



“

Ongoing family violence and legal issues. I separated from my ex in 2016 and I am still being dragged through the court system...**the legal costs are crippling.**

”

“

I'm facing constant bullying by my ex abusing the legal system and it's **taking all my income** just to keep up with his demands.

”

“

[I am] facing court to protect a child from non-physical abuse and the challenges of doing this in a system where lawyers and judges are not well educated on non physical abuse and trauma. The court is not set up to protect and support women in this process [is impacting me the most right now]. **The system is not geared to support traumatized women who have been abused... it is very fear and trauma-inducing and intimidating; it is not a safe place.**

”

WHAT WOULD MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW?

Our listening campaign also sought to discover what would make the most difference in our members' lives right now - expressed in their own words. The responses we received focused primarily on the following: the ability to access stable and affordable housing, lower rents, an increase to government-supported incomes such as income and disability assistance that do not leave them struggling so far below the poverty line, the ability to access quality and sustainable full-time and part-time jobs, and decent wages that afford a quality standard of life. Much needed financial support to access BC's family law system was a primary theme across the responses. Debt due to the pandemic and CERB was brought forward as well as the need for CERB amnesty. The need for more opportunities to increase social connectedness and community belonging was also a strong theme.



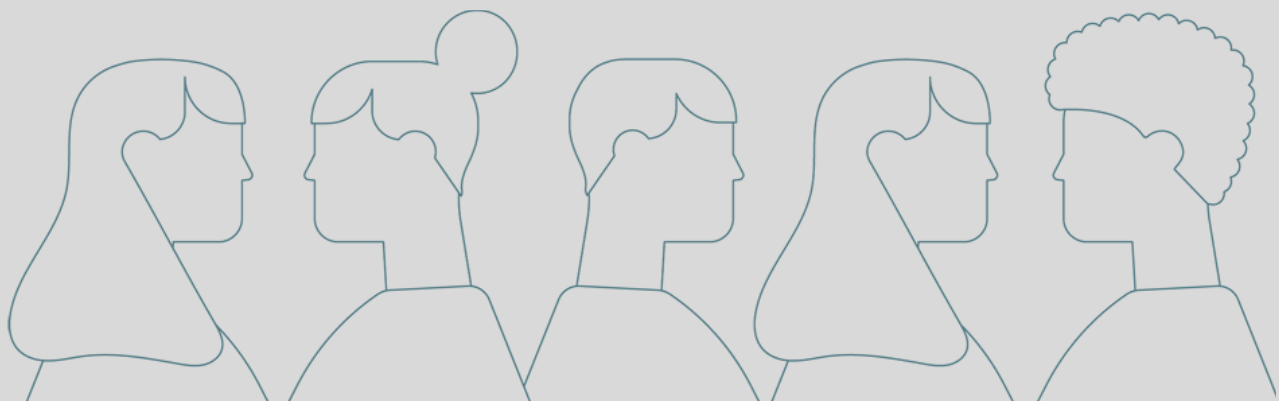
Beyond the need for financial support to access BC's family law system, the ability for those impacted by intimate partner violence to feel safe, heard, and protected within BC's family law system was a key suggestion. Members also cited that more access to mental health supports and assessments for both parents and their children and youth would make a huge difference in their lives. They also shared the important need for more supports to access healthy food to address their family food insecurity and the importance of more affordable transit access to get everywhere they need to go with their families.

WHAT IS IMPACTING YOU THE MOST PERSONALLY?



We also seek to understand what is impacting our members on a social-emotional and personal level. In order to do so we asked a series of open-ended questions to find out more about our members perceptions and descriptions of their mental health status, overall social connectedness, and social-emotional quality of life.

Our analysis of the open-ended responses identified three primary trends: the stressors of raising special needs children, significant mental health challenges for both parents and their children and youth, and the ongoing impact of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence on the mental health of mothers and families including those both with and without formal IPV-related PTSD diagnoses. While much of what we heard will not be released to the public but used to inform our internal program and policy advocacy development, we have highlighted key sharings from our members in these three primary areas below.



CHALLENGES RAISING SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

*39% of respondents are raising special needs children

In their words...



Raising an autistic child, as well as a child who is ADHD on my own has impacted my life tremendously. **I have had to fight to get them what they need** to have a healthy and happy life.

I have a child with autism who is extremely violent and as a result, she is in ministry care although I do remain her legal guardian. I am constantly seeking resources, attending meetings, putting out fires and **it has taken a toll on my mental health.**

My child struggles socially and academically (ADHD/ASD diagnoses) and needs extra attention and care. **I am trying to get my degree, but I am generally overwhelmed with finding the time for schoolwork, solo parenting, and a part time job.** I am being stretched very thinly and I worry about the well-being of my child....

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

In their words...

“

*I have a child with a ADHD and who has considered suicide. I have complex PTSD. **Limited mental health services with not enough income to regularly access a counsellor makes supporting our needs overwhelming.** I also fear being unhoused, as we cannot afford any other housing here and are considering moving out of province.”*

”

“

***No friends, no social connectivity,** and health challenges that make my fatigue and pacing myself a challenge.*

”



“

*The violence and addiction around us that has impacted our mental health [is a big issue] as I am 10 years clean and **my son has severe anxiety and autism.** So as a mom, **I have severe PTSD and an anxiety disorder, and it does impact our lives in a very big way.** Our mental health [is a huge concern]- feeling depressed and on alert with a fight or flight response.*

”

“

*My child is not diagnosed with special needs but struggles significantly with mental health, anxiety, and socially, and **there aren't enough school supports to make the days positive.** This creates a significant amount of stress for me.*

”

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV) & PTSD

In their words...

“

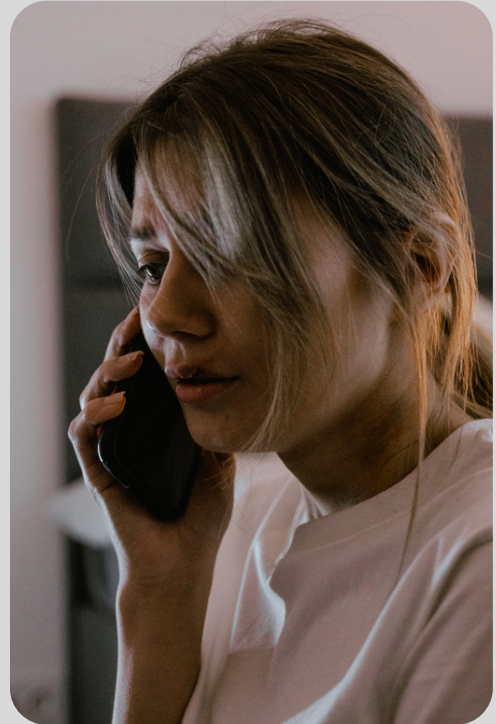
*My greatest challenge is trying to **heal from PTSD** from abuse while trying to navigate a PTSD-inducing court system.*

”

“

*There is also not enough help for family law. **I have to protect my children** from their absent, inconsistent father **with no legal help** and it is actually terrifying.*

”



“

*My daughter is currently on a step-up parenting plan after 2 years of limited supervised visits. She is in distress and has negative reactions and regressions after visits [with my ex]. **Keeping her regulated is very demanding on my own mental health**, especially while navigating the dismal court system and all other aspects of coparenting with an abusive ex.*

”

“

*I'm also experiencing ongoing **IPV** [intimate partner violence] from my child's father via the court system.*

”

OUR FOUR FOCUS AREAS 2023

Priced Out!

Priced Out addresses the rising cost of living and its impact on BC's families impacted by poverty. Priced Out will address solutions to rising costs and inflated food prices, lack of affordable and accessible child care and after school care, and access to dental care, transit, medication, vision care and counselling for families experiencing poverty in BC.



Income Justice

Our **Income Justice** focus area responds to member input on work, wages, quality jobs and job opportunities. This focus area will address solutions to low and unlivable wages, inadequate income and disability assistance rates, lack of access to higher paying work and quality, sustainable part time and full-time jobs with benefits for families impacted by socio-economic inequality. We will also address the need for pay equity legislation and tackle the entrenchment of marginalized parent and caregiver workers including trans and gender diverse parents, mothers, racialized parents, those with disabilities and other equity-seeking parent-workers in sectors defined by low-waged and precarious labour.

OUR FOUR FOCUS AREAS 2023

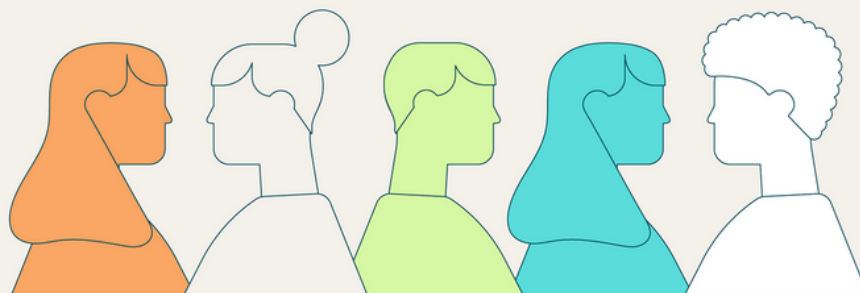
A Roof Over Our Heads

A Roof Over Our Heads tackles the housing crisis in BC for low-income families with a focus on justice for renters and the right to move. A Roof Over Our Heads aims to ensure all families in BC can access appropriate, safe and affordable homes within which to grow and thrive.



Safe, Heard, Protected: A Vision for Family Law

Safe, Heard, Protected addresses both the necessity of a family law system that is financially accessible for low-income parents and caregivers in BC and one that works to ensure those impacted by intimate partner violence and gender based violence are safe, heard and protected in and by every facet of the system.



We would like to express our gratitude and extend a **special thank you** to all the Single Mothers' Alliance members who took the time to share their experiences, stories, thoughts and input to impact the shape and scope of our work this year through the 2023 Listening and Demographic Survey, as well as through our various projects and initiatives. Hey members - we know we ask you to put your hearts, fears, hardships, and tough realities out in the open to shape the justice we seek, and we value and treasure your leadership, tenacity, and your commitment to justice. You **are** this organization. Those of us who work on the staff team and contribute on the board of directors are honoured as an entity that you remain committed and active SMA members in your diverse realities across the province, often contributing so much every day to SMA to secure justice and better lives for the thousands of lone-parent and caregiver-led families in BC.

We see you, we hear you, and we appreciate you.

And thank you.

We would like to express our gratitude to the **Health Sciences Association** for their core support to conduct our 2023 listening campaign and produce this report.

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