

Report: BC Local Governments Shorted by Billions

VANCOUVER, B.C. -- Provincial and federal governments are balancing their books while local governments pick up the tab.

Between 1995 and 2008 regional districts and municipalities in British Columbia had \$4 Billion dollars less to work with than they would have had at 1995 funding levels.

Reductions in direct provincial and federal government funding, social program underfunding and new requirements dictated by senior levels of government without local funding to support them, are all adding up.

A new report from Columbia Institute – “Who’s Picking Up the Tab? “ investigates the scale and scope of downloading onto local governments, using a fresh analysis of statistical and financial data along with new information gathered from surveys of local leaders and senior staff.

“Local governments can - and do - efficiently deliver services, and are happy to take on expanded roles when given the right resources. But downloading without access to new sources of funding is stretching local government thin. It’s hitting us where we live.” said executive director Charley Beresford.

- Local government police costs are rising to deal with mental illness. The Victoria Police Department tracked a 356 per cent increase in “disturbed person calls” between 2008 and 2013 and the Vancouver Police Department reports 21% of all incidents handled by VPD Officers are related to mental illness.
- Homelessness was not a significant issue until the mid-1980’s when the deepest cuts were enacted. In the 1970’s through 1990’s, 2,000 new co-op and social housing units were built in BC each year. Since 2006, the yearly average of new units is 416. Canada’s largest 22 cities have ranked housing as their top priority.
- New drinking water regulations are triggering millions of dollars in mandatory upgrades. Windermere (population 1,300) faces capital costs ranging from \$5.7 million to \$10.3 million. That means additional taxes of \$1,000 to \$2,000 for the next 25 years.
- As climate change becomes more severe municipal infrastructure will be hit hard. The cost of adapting to sea level rises could reach \$9.5 billion for Metro Vancouver alone.

“The growing concentration of Canadians in cities underscores the need for a major review of funding models, revenue streams and share for local government.” said Beresford.

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