About the Office

In 2018, changes to B.C.'s ***Human Rights Code*** established the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner as an independent office of the Legislature and the Commissioner as the first independent Human Rights Commissioner in our province's history. Under the *Code*, the Commissioner is responsible for promoting and protecting **human rights** in our province.



Our vision

A province free from inequality, **discrimination** and injustice where we uphold human rights for all and fulfil our responsibilities to one another.

Our mandate

To address the root causes of inequality, discrimination and injustice in B.C. by shifting laws, policies, practices and cultures. We do this work through education, research, advocacy, inquiry and monitoring.

Our role

The *Human Rights Code* states that the Commissioner is responsible for promoting and protecting human rights in B.C. In the course of fulfilling this mandate, the Commissioner can do the following:

- conduct human rights inquiries and issue reports and recommendations
- identify and promote the elimination of discriminatory practices, policies and programs
- develop, deliver and support research and education about human rights
- create policies, guidelines and recommendations to prevent discrimination and ensure policies, programs and legislation are consistent with B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*
- promote compliance with international human rights obligations
- approve special programs to improve conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups
- **intervene** in human rights proceedings before the **BC Human Rights Tribunal** or other courts and tribunals

Download our brochure (PDF, 3MB)

B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner

B.C.’s Human Rights Commissioner, Kasari Govender, started her five-year term on Sept. 3, 2019. Since then, our Office has been working swiftly to build a strong team, to listen deeply to the concerns of British Columbians, to issue policy guidance to protect the human rights of underserved communities and to lay a rights-based foundation for our work. As an independent office of the Legislature we are uniquely positioned to ensure human rights in B.C. are protected, respected and advanced on a systemic level throughout our society.

Visit our media kit for images of Commissioner Kasari Govender, pronunciation guidance, bios and more.

Our grounding approaches

Our grounding approaches describe the analytical frameworks that guide how we do our work. This helps to define BCOHRC’s culture and practice, as well as to direct and guide our strategic priorities and actions.

Human rights-based approach (HRBA)

How we do things matters. A human rights-based approach seeks to centre the voices of those most marginalized, and to make inequality visible in order to redistribute power.

Key principles include:

- indivisibility, inalienability and universality of rights
- intersectional equality and non-discrimination
- meaningful participation, inclusion and empowerment
- transparency and accountability

- rule of law

Decolonization

Decolonization is the dismantling of the process by which one nation asserts and establishes its domination and control over another nation's land, people and culture. It is the framework through which we are working toward undoing the oppression and subjugation of Indigenous Peoples in what is now known as British Columbia and unlearning colonial ways of thinking and being.

Key principles include:

- equality and non-discrimination
- listening, learning and honouring Indigenous worldviews, including the value of reciprocity and working in relationship
- self-reflecting as a mechanism to expose systems of bias
- recognizing and addressing intergenerational trauma as a direct result of colonization
- recognizing and supporting self-determination, including Indigenous Peoples' right to govern under their own laws and legal orders
- dismantling or transforming laws and institutions designed to oppress Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous ways of knowing and being
- restoring a respectful relationship to land

A decolonizing approach to human rights requires us to recognize both collective and individual rights and responsibilities. It applies the 4Rs to building respectful relationships: reciprocity, reflexivity, responsibility and relevance.

Climate justice

Climate change is the existential crisis of our time. It poses a massive threat to our planet and all life that grows on it—and therefore to our human rights. We cannot have rights if we do not exist. This crisis is a matter of life and death for all of us; however, climate change, environmental degradation and extreme weather patterns disproportionately impact the daily lives of marginalized people. Those most impacted are often those who have contributed least to the crises. All people should be able to live with dignity, yet the climate crisis is causing loss of homes, safety, lives and livelihoods; putting many at risk of food and water shortages; and triggering displacement and societal conflict.

Key principles include:

- Human rights are indivisible, including our right to a healthy environment.
- Climate justice is fundamentally intertwined with decolonization and recognition of Indigenous rights.
- **Substantive equality** and non-discrimination require action to address and remedy the **disproportionate impacts** of climate change on the most marginalized, and in consideration of future generations.
- Decisions on climate change policy must be participatory, transparent and accountable, informed by Indigenous world views.
- Solutions require valuing community-based adaptations and responses.
- Climate policy must enable an equitable transition, including for workers.
- Climate crisis is not inevitable. Education can be a key driver of change. Indeed, we all have an imperative to act, in big and small ways, to tackle the crisis, including through educating ourselves.

Our guiding principles

These principles reflect the culture we want to create for our new organization, and how we will conduct our work to ensure accountability to British Columbians. We recognize some of these principles exist in tension with each other—for example, being bold and working at the speed of trust—but we believe that identifying and navigating this tension will help make us better at what we do.

- We operate **on the basis of nothing about us without us**. We centre the perspectives and rights of those most marginalized and seek to empower those whose rights are at stake.
- We strive to be **trauma-informed** and **culturally safe** in all our relationships.
- We understand that all of us have **intersectional identities** and experience discrimination and privilege in diverse ways. Inequality, discrimination and injustice are rooted in the systems around us and must similarly be addressed in a systemic way.
- We **move at the speed of trust** when engaging with community. We recognize the importance of **flexibility and learning** from the stories of diverse people on these lands, including both our elders and our young people.
- Entrenched problems require **bold actions**. Acting boldly means taking risks, and sometimes we will make mistakes. We are committed to having **humility**, **being curious** and **courageous** and **continually learning**. We will give grace to ourselves and others as we learn.
- We are **strategic** and **proactive** in creating change, and balance timeliness with sustainability and accountability.
- We believe that the protection and promotion of human rights is essential to a **functioning democracy**. We are committed to a vision of democracy in which the rights of the majority do not trample upon the rights of those in the minority, and law, policy and practice is rooted in evidence.
- Ensuring information, space and services are **accessible to everyone** is essential to the realization of human rights. Our work is designed for a

range of abilities, cultures, languages, education and literacy levels, learning styles and perspectives.

- We recognize the **humanity in everyone.** We are accountable to all people on the lands known as British Columbia, and we will continue to be **responsive**, **compassionate** and **transparent**.

Please note: We are not the **BC Human Rights Clinic.** We do not offer legal advice or provide representation.

Please note: We are not the **BC Human Rights Tribunal**. We do not accept or adjudicate individual human rights complaints.

If you need more help figuring out where to turn for human rights issues, please visit **bchumanrightssystem.ca**