LAKIVE

Vancouver Is a Top-10 Livable City —
But Can Local Workers Afford to Stay?

> **Vancouver ranks among the world's best cities — but remains financially out of reach for many of the workers who keep it running.**

Salary data from Government of Canada Job Bank (Lower Mainland–Southwest Region, 2023–2024). Ratings based on Lakive's 5-level Housing Price Index and Rent Pressure Index system.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Only 3 of 12 occupations rate L3 Under Pressure or better; 9 fall into L4 Difficult or L5 Severe Pressure.**
2. **Vancouver's composite benchmark HPI is 16.2 years at a $75,000 income, compared with 8.5 years in Calgary.**
3. **Estimated after-tax rent burden exceeds 50% for 9 of 12 occupations, highlighting cash-flow pressure beyond the gross-income rating.**
4. **Among occupations examined, only Family Physicians and Lawyers fall below 10 HPI Years.**
5. **Salary data for 10 of 12 occupations is from Government of Canada Job Bank; physician and dentist figures use alternative official sources and carry caveats.**

#9	16.2 yrs	9/12	9/12
EIU Global Rank 2026	**Composite Benchmark HPI**	**L4 Difficult or worse**	**Est. rent >50% of take-home**
Out of 173 cities	At $75K median salary	By occupation	On a 2BR unit

What the EIU ranking actually measures

The EIU Global Liveability Index scores 173 cities across stability, healthcare, culture, education, and infrastructure. Vancouver's top-10 ranking reflects strong overall performance across these categories. Its political institutions are stable, its healthcare is universal, and its natural setting — mountains, ocean, Stanley Park — is genuinely exceptional.

What the EIU does not measure: whether a nurse earning $92,703 can afford a two-bedroom unit without spending the majority of her take-home income on rent. Whether a teacher on $86,444 can realistically save for a down payment within a decade. These describe the financial reality of most of Vancouver's working population.

Vancouver affordability by occupation

Salaries from Government of Canada Job Bank, Lower Mainland–Southwest Region (2023–2024). After-tax income estimated for a T4 salaried employee under 2026 Federal and BC tax rules. Reference 2BR Asking Rent: $3,100/month — representing new-tenant market rates, not CMHC occupied-unit averages. ~ denotes indicative estimate.

Occupation	Gross	Est. After-Tax	HPI Yrs	RPI Gross	Est. RPI Net	Lakive Rating (HPI + RPI Gross)
Family Physician / GP[1]	$161K	~$113K	7.5	23.1%	32.8%	L2 Manageable
Lawyer	$130K	$95K	9.3	28.6%	39.3%	L3 Under Pressure
Software Developer	$102K	$77K	11.9	36.4%	48.6%	L3 Under Pressure
Pharmacist	$98K	$73K	12.5	38.2%	50.8%	L4 Difficult
Civil Engineer	$97K	$73K	12.5	38.4%	51.1%	L4 Difficult
Registered Nurse	$93K	$70K	13.1	40.1%	53.3%	L4 Difficult
Data Analyst	$87K	$66K	13.9	42.7%	56.5%	L4 Difficult
Secondary Teacher	$86K	$65K	14.1	43.0%	57.0%	L4 Difficult
Dentist[2]	$78K	~$59K	15.6	47.7%	62.6%	L4 Difficult
Social Worker	$72K	$55K	16.9	51.7%	67.1%	L5 Severe Pressure
Electrician	$67K	$52K	18.0	55.2%	71.0%	L5 Severe Pressure
Retail Sales Associate	$37K	$31K	32.8	100.4%	121.0%	L5 Severe Pressure

L1 Lower Pressure: HPI ≤5 yrs & RPI ≤25%

L2 Manageable: HPI ≤8 yrs & RPI ≤30%

L3 Under Pressure: HPI ≤12 yrs & RPI ≤38%

L4 Difficult: HPI ≤18 yrs & RPI ≤50%

L5 Severe Pressure: HPI >18 yrs or RPI >50%

Rating = max(HPI level, RPI Gross level) — RPI Net does not determine rating

Lakive Rating is determined by the worse of HPI Years and RPI Gross. Gross-income rent pressure is used for rating because it provides a standardized, comparable basis across occupations and jurisdictions. **Est. After-Tax** and **Est. RPI Net** are supplementary cash-flow indicators and do not affect the rating.

[1] Family Physician: BC provincial median (CIHI/CMA, 2023–2024). No Lower Mainland regional breakdown from Job Bank. Represents gross clinical income. ~ After-tax is indicative only — physicians may operate through professional corporations, incur practice overhead, or use payment structures that differ from standard T4 employment. [2] Dentist: 2021 Census data; after-tax also indicative only.

The ownership threshold: how Vancouver stacks up by occupation

Reaching below 10 HPI Years — the range where homeownership becomes a realistic medium-term goal — requires earning roughly $120,000 or more in Vancouver.

Among occupations with verified Lower Mainland Job Bank salaries, only **Lawyers ($129,968)** meet this threshold at **9.3 HPI Years**. Family Physicians also fall below 10 years at **7.5 HPI Years**, but their figure is based on a BC-wide clinical income estimate, not a regional Job Bank salary. Software Developers sit just outside the threshold at **11.9 years**.

Six occupations — Pharmacist, Civil Engineer, Registered Nurse, Data Analyst, Secondary Teacher, and Dentist — land in **L4 Difficult** at HPI 12–16 years. Their salaries range from $78K to $97.5K. In most Canadian cities, these represent comfortable, ownership-accessible incomes.

> *A registered nurse earning $92,703 per year in Vancouver faces a composite benchmark HPI of 13.1 years and an estimated after-tax rent burden of 53.3% — more than half of take-home pay for a two-bedroom unit. If 20% of the income remaining after rent were saved toward a down payment, building a 20% deposit on a benchmark-priced home would take several decades. This simplified static estimate excludes home-price growth, investment returns, and income growth.*

For Social Workers, Electricians, and Retail Associates, estimated after-tax rent burden exceeds **67%** — leaving very little for food, transport, and savings, let alone wealth accumulation.

The Calgary alternative: same country, different math

Calgary operates within the same national immigration, banking, and labour-market framework as Vancouver — but the housing and cost numbers are materially different. Calgary's composite benchmark HPI stands at 8.5 years. Reference 2BR asking rent is approximately $1,900/month versus $3,100 in Metro Vancouver.

Alberta also offers lower provincial income tax rates (10–15% versus BC's 5.6–20.5%) and no provincial sales tax (BC charges 7% PST). Alberta does have provincial income tax — the advantage is lower rates and no PST, not the absence of provincial tax altogether.

Occupation	HPI Years		RPI Gross		Lakive Rating	
	Vancouver	Calgary	Vancouver	Calgary	Vancouver	Calgary
Registered Nurse	13.1	6.9	40.1%	24.6%	L4 Difficult	L2 Manageable
Software Developer	11.9	6.2	36.4%	22.3%	L3 Under Pressure	L2 Manageable
Secondary Teacher	14.1	7.4	43.0%	26.4%	L4 Difficult	L2 Manageable
Lawyer	9.3	4.9	28.6%	17.5%	L3 Under Pressure	L1 Lower Pressure
Electrician	18.0	9.5	55.2%	33.8%	L5 Severe Pressure	L3 Under Pressure
Social Worker	16.9	8.9	51.7%	31.7%	L5 Severe Pressure	L3 Under Pressure

Registered Nurse — Calgary vs. Vancouver
Calgary reduces HPI Years from **13.1** to **6.9** and RPI Gross from **40.1%** to **24.6%** — moving from **L4 Difficult** to **L2 Manageable**.

The gap is consistent across occupations. Calgary rates one to two levels better for every occupation in this comparison, with five of the six improving by two levels. For workers in trades, public services, and mid-income professions, financial progress is significantly more difficult to achieve in Vancouver at current income and housing-cost levels.

Who faces lower — and higher — financial pressure in Vancouver

This analysis is not a case against Vancouver. It is a case for honesty about who faces lower financial pressure here, and who faces structural headwinds.

✓ Lower financial pressure

· High-income professionals — physicians, senior lawyers, executives
· Dual-income households with combined income above $180K
· Remote workers earning USD or premium CAD tech salaries
· Long-term homeowners with substantial accumulated equity

✗ Higher financial pressure

· Single-income households earning below $130K
· Newcomers starting from zero without existing capital
· Public sector workers — nurses, teachers, social workers
· Tradespeople and skilled workers outside high-demand tech sectors

This distinction matters most for newcomers, who enter the market with no existing equity, limited Canadian credit history, and often a credential recognition gap that temporarily suppresses income. Spending 50–70% of take-home income on rent in the early years leaves virtually no capital to build toward stability.

Outlook

Vancouver's affordability challenge is structural, not cyclical. Supply is constrained by geography, historically restrictive zoning, lengthy housing-delivery timelines, and sustained demand. Interest rate movements can shift monthly carrying costs but do not change the underlying price-to-income gap.

For workers and newcomers making location decisions in 2026, Vancouver's global livability ranking is one data point among many. It captures real quality-of-life advantages. It does not capture whether those advantages are financially accessible to many of the workers who sustain the city.

Methodology & Data Sources

Occupation salaries: Government of Canada Job Bank, Lower Mainland–Southwest Region (region 39070), reference period 2023–2024 (Labour Force Survey / Statistics Canada; Small Area Estimation model for Civil Engineer and Electrician). Family Physician: CIHI / Canadian Medical Association, BC provincial, 2023–2024. Dentist: 2021 Census. Annual salary = median hourly wage × 1,950 hours where applicable.

Reference 2BR Asking Rent: $3,100/month Metro Vancouver; $1,900/month Calgary. Both figures represent estimated new-tenant market asking rates (Rentals.ca / Zumper aggregate data, H1 2026) — not the average rent paid across all occupied units. CMHC occupied-unit averages are lower because they include existing tenancies and older leases, while asking-rent data reflects the prices currently faced by new tenants. CMHC Rental Market Report 2025 records these averages at approximately $1,970 (Metro Vancouver) and $1,775 (Calgary).

Metro Vancouver composite benchmark home price: approximately $1,215,000 (REBGV, H1 2026). Calgary composite benchmark: approximately $637,500 (CREA, H1 2026). After-tax income estimated using 2026 Federal and provincial tax parameters (T4 salaried employee model). CPP includes 2026 second additional contribution (CPP2: YAMPE $85,000, rate 4%, max $416).

EIU Global Liveability Index 2026: Vancouver ranked #9 globally out of 173 cities (Economist Intelligence Unit press release, July 7, 2026). Lakive is not affiliated with the EIU or The Economist Group.