

## The intergenerational injustice of climate change with Paul Kershaw

### TEASER:

**Paul Kershaw:** You know, generational fairness in its most simplest form is like, we want the country in which we live, in this case Canada, to work well for all generations. That asks us the following kinds of questions. Are we planning for all ages? Are we investing in well-being urgently from the early years onward? Are we being good stewards of things that we tend to hold to be sacred like a healthy childhood, a healthy home, a healthy planet?

### INTRO:

**David Acuna:** The climate crisis calls upon all of us to be leaders. Sometimes, leadership means standing up for precious things that don't have their own voice, like our planet. And sometimes, it means demanding justice for people who are unequally and unfairly impacted by climate change. In today's world, many of us have grown skeptical and cynical of the leadership of our elected leaders. But today, we'll hear from someone who is working with the system to demand better leadership from our politicians, and justice for young Canadians who are often overlooked.

**Lana Voracek:** Welcome to the Pulse of Change podcast, where we explore the connection between climate change and health by sharing stories about taking action. I'm Lana Voracek.

**David Acuna:** And I am David Acuna.

**Lana Voracek:** Our guest today is Dr. Paul Kershaw. He's a professor at the University of British Columbia and the founder of the charitable think and change tank Generation Squeeze.[\[1\]](#)

**David Acuna:** In the first part of our episode, we'll hear how Paul learned about generational unfairness, and how that brought him to action. Next, we'll interview Paul to find out how climate change fits into intergenerational justice and what Generation Squeeze is trying to do about it. Finally, we'll hear what he's learned along the way and what keeps him hopeful.

### Story teaser:

**Paul Kershaw:** Climate change is the greatest intergenerational unfairness of the time, even more so than housing and housing's a pretty big one.

### PAUL'S STORY:

**Lana Voracek:** Paul's story began in Metro Vancouver, where he grew up.

**Paul Kershaw:** So much of my life has been influenced by my mom. For a lot of our lives, my mom was a single mom, you know, working hard to take care of me as so many moms and parents do generally. And in my case, my mom also just has this really great ethic about seeing people who are, you know, in need and, you know, will go and help them.

A lot of her time, she spent working with people in particular with mental and physical handicaps. And right now she works so hard on helping refugees come into the country. And I think as a little kid watching her all my life, I was in awe of that. But I also just seemed, like, fatiguing, because after my mom helped one person, there was another one waiting for her help and then another and then another.

And like the line of people who were deserving of support just never really shrank that much, despite her best efforts. That sent me to say, how can we make systems change so there are fewer people needing support? And that sent me into a career in population and public health.

**Lana Voracek:** Paul got his Ph.D. in political science, law and economics from McGill University. After graduating, he moved back to B.C.

**Paul Kershaw:** Early in my academic career, I had the privilege of being hired into something called the Human Early Learning Partnership, which was an academic institute and a social change institute designed to try and get children in Canada and around the globe off to the best start possible.

In order to contribute to that work, we were monitoring early childhood vulnerability in British Columbia in particular. And we were finding, like, one in three kids are showing up in kindergarten in ways that mean they're more likely to fail or go to jail or wind up sick as adults in ways that we could have prevented.<sup>[2]</sup>

Wow, like, why aren't we doing that prevention?

**Lana Voracek:** To answer that question, he started looking into how the government was spending its money and the policies it was making.

**Paul Kershaw:** I always try and figure out, like, do we really value something in terms of the relative amount of money we put there? So I started looking at not only what are we doing to invest in the generation raising young kids, but where else are we putting a lot of money?

And it turns out there's this really strange habit in Canada. That we are really ready to invest a tremendous amount, relatively considered, later in life. And then we're quite stingy early in our investments in people's lives. So much so that this group called Global Age Watch ranks Canada as one of the top five countries on earth in which to grow old,<sup>[3,4]</sup> but UNICEF ranks Canada as an international laggard amongst industrialized countries when it comes to investing in children, youth, and their parents.<sup>[5]</sup>

**Lana Voracek:** He didn't understand why Canada couldn't be a good place to grow old and a good place to grow up.

**Paul Kershaw:** I want to combine both of those aspirations, and that's how you make Canada work for all generations.

And by the way, that'll be really cost efficient for us, because if we reduce early childhood vulnerability, then we are reducing kids failing in school, which means we're reducing the number of people winding up in jail, and they're reducing the number of people who are sick, and that's just better for everybody.[\[6,7\]](#)

**Lana Voracek:** In 2010, Paul founded Generation Squeeze with the vision of helping younger Canadians squeeze back on the pressures they were facing. Pressures like lower earnings, higher costs, and growing debts.[\[8\]](#)

**Paul Kershaw:** We started coining phrases like, "child care shouldn't be another rent or mortgage sized payment", trying to build up the momentum to invest in 10 a day child care, a phrase that I take real pride in. That branding for a national child care recommendation started in the Gen Squeeze lab.

**Lana Voracek:** Over a decade later, the federal government invested 30 billion in an initiative to make it a reality. But over that time, new problems came to light.

**Paul Kershaw:** When I started Generation Squeeze, I was young enough to call myself in that younger category. I was in my early to mid 30s, and I'm like, oh, I've just started trying to make a home and I'm a prof with a decent income and now have this just frighteningly large mortgage, which is scaring the hell out of me. But within a few years, I'm like, wow, like the value of my home has gone up so much. I still have a massive mortgage, but now people just as smart as me and just as hardworking as me can't afford to live where I do.[\[9\]](#)

**Lana Voracek:** So Gen Squeeze started sounding the alarm.

**Paul Kershaw:** Code red, there's a housing crisis and these housing prices are just crushing the way that hard work pays off for younger people while giving wealth windfalls to people like me while I sleep in my home.[\[10\]](#)

**Lana Voracek:** As Gen Squeeze worked hard on housing, in 2021, B.C. saw a series of events that revealed another intergenerational injustice.

**Paul Kershaw:** We started with a heat dome where literally birds and bats were falling out of the air around me. And then we had fires that ravaged our province and burnt down some towns. Followed in the same year by flooding, and that was all happening in the middle of a pandemic.

**Lana Voracek:** You may recall in episode 1 when Alexi talked about the 2021 heat dome, which caused temperatures as high as 50 degrees in some parts of BC.<sup>1</sup> The same year, the province experienced severe flooding and wildfires.[\[12\]](#) These types of events have occurred before, but never with such severity and in rapid succession.[\[13,14\]](#)

**Paul Kershaw:** I mean, it really is as biblical or pick your spiritual literature or whatever, like it's pretty significant.

**Lana Voracek:** It's important to recognize that this was not a coincidence. It was a chain reaction.[\[13,14\]](#) The high temperatures from the heat dome triggered a severe wildfire season, including the burning of the entire village of Lytton within only minutes. The land was damaged by wildfires, and because of that, it was less able to absorb water. That made it more prone to erosion, which caused flooding and landslides in the fall. Because of the severe damage, many highways had to close, cutting off access to entire communities. Scientists call this type of domino effect cascading risks.[\[13,15\]](#)

**Paul Kershaw:** Climate change is the greatest intergenerational unfairness of the time, even more so than housing, and housing's a pretty big one. It puts at risk the very conditions that younger Canadians, younger residents of this planet, and future generations need, both for their financial well being and their physiological health.

**Lana Voracek:** Paul is not the only one who feels this way. Since climate impacts will only get worse over time without action, UNICEF and the Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health in the UK have issued a statement that climate change is a child rights crisis.[\[16,17\]](#) Paul believes there are policy solutions.

**Paul Kershaw:** Climate change, housing, government budgets. These problems are symptoms of an underlying disease, a dysfunctional intergenerational system, a poor contract between older and younger Canadians and future generations.

**Lana Voracek:** Gen Squeeze is working hard to spread a message to Canadians of all ages, as well as our politicians.

**Paul Kershaw:** Let's get to the underlying disease so that we don't have so many of these symptoms, like unaffordable housing, unaffordability for families with kids, and large deficits and unfair investments in our government budgets.

**David Acuna:** Coming up next, we'll interview Paul about his work with Generation Squeeze, including how they are trying to influence Canadian politicians across the political spectrum.

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<sup>1</sup> The highest measured temperature in Canada's history was 49.6°C in Lytton, BC on June 29, 2021.[\[11\]](#)

**Work teaser:**

**Paul Kershaw:** You don't solve your wallet problems by saying, I'm not going to pay for the mess that I'm making that's ultimately going to harm the health and economic well being of my kids, grandchildren, and future generations.

**INTERVIEW ABOUT PAUL'S WORK:**

**Lana Voracek:** Can we start by hearing you talk a little bit more about why you've called climate change the greatest intergenerational unfairness of our time?

**Paul Kershaw:** You know, for now, too many decades, we in this country, more than most when thinking at a per capita level, have extracted so much of the atmosphere's scarce and precious capacity to absorb carbon.<sup>2</sup> Because governments have let people and businesses pollute for free or little cost, with the result being species loss, rising food costs, and extreme weather.[19]

And what we're witnessing right now in 2023, and in a year where the fires were just scorching us from coast to coast to coast,[20] and it comes on the heels of flooding and desertification,[21] the problem is, that's not the worst of it. It's locked in to get even worse still,[22] and yet, at this very moment, because of the framing of the scarcity everywhere, that people are struggling financially,[23] and so as a result, we can't be asked to think about paying for the pollution that we're making right now. We're just gonna kick that cost down the road. We don't mean it to be for our own kids and grandchildren, but there's just no other option. And so that is just a tremendously unjust way to engage with our own kids and grandchildren and those who will follow.

**Lana Voracek:** Thank you. And you mentioned scarcity framing. We are living in a time when cost of living pressures have increased for everyone. Is that what you mean by that?

**Paul Kershaw:** I find myself these days actually wanting to interrogate that assumption that *everyone* is facing cost of living pressures because I actually think it's part of the problem. It certainly is not the case with regards to housing.

So in Metro Vancouver Rising home prices haven't harmed most people. Rising home prices has helped me. It's printed more wealth for homeowners in a relatively short period of time than almost any other wealth production opportunity that's been there.[10] And so rising home prices made people like me more wealthy.[9] And if we suggest that housing inflation is hurting everybody, we are misdiagnosing the problem. Rising food costs are hurting most Canadians, making owners of grocery stores wealthier.[24] Rising energy costs are probably hurting most Canadians, while making the owners of energy and energy companies wealthier.[25] Rising housing costs are also making the owners of housing wealthier, but that's not some

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<sup>2</sup> In 2021, Canada was ranked as the 12th highest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHGs), with the second highest GHG emissions per person out of all of the top 10 emitters in the world.[18]

corporation. The owners of most housing in Canada are like everyday Canadians who just happen to be older because we got into the housing market earlier. And so, that really matters, Lana, because if everybody's hurting right now, it's a moment of scarcity.

And when there's scarcity, people are more likely to go and like, "do I have my physiological needs met? Am I, have I got the security that I need?" And we kind of go to our most foundational sort of base instincts about, okay, it's all, "I got to get, I got to get enough for me." But ultimately, what we want written on our tombstones and thinking about our legacy is like, I got enough for me.

That's not what we want written. It's like, "I was a good citizen. I was able to, like, leave a legacy that was bigger than me." And when there's affluence around us, there's an opportunity to ask people to actually acknowledge that affluence and say, "okay, you've got enough security. And how can we ask you to contribute, you know, to the community, the province, the country and the planet for those who don't have enough security?"

**Lana Voracek:** So how is Gen Squeeze working towards a better legacy?

**Paul Kershaw:** Gen Squeeze has worked on intergenerational fairness and climate change from a range of angles. But I think one of the most important ones is one that is clearly unpopular, but it's like if you make a mess, help pay to clean it up. And that's what putting a price on pollution is, both to pay for the mess that we're making and to discourage us from making further mess.[\[26\]](#)

And yet we have been slow in this country to create legislation expecting that of us.[\[27\]](#) And at the moment, sort of, the politics started to get hard on this issue, we are backtracking from it,[\[27,28,29,30\]](#) and history books will write ill of us, because we are some of the largest fossil fuel dinosaurs when it comes to our pollution of any person, any country, at any time on this planet's history.[\[18,31,32\]](#)

**Lana Voracek:** Right. And carbon pricing, or the carbon tax, has been proven to work and evidence shows that it is the cheapest and fairest way to reduce emissions.[\[26,33,34\]](#) But, as you said earlier, it is unpopular because people don't want to have another expense in a time of perceived scarcity.[\[35\]](#) We'll share some links in our show notes about how many of these fears have been debunked,[\[33,34,36\]](#) but what would you say to people who are afraid the carbon tax will break the bank?

**Paul Kershaw:** I'm not wanting to downplay that there are wallet pressures. Politics often tries to win by, you know, offering people a cost benefit analysis that's better for their wallets. We can bring down financial pressures with better family policy, child care policy, post secondary policy, retirement planning policy.[\[37,38\]](#) And when you do that, you better position us financially to take responsibility for the costs of our polluting.



You don't solve your wallet problems by saying "I'm not going to pay for the mess that I'm making that's ultimately going to harm the health and economic well being of my kids, grandchildren, and future generations." That's not being a good steward. That is actually failing to fulfill responsibilities that come with coming before people. We can't be mortgaging the future and the present of young people because of an unwillingness to manage some of the challenges of paying for our pollution. That's an intergenerational discrimination.

**Lana Voracek:** And Paul, you mentioned that we have a tendency to focus on short term cost savings that benefit us now, while we overlook long term costs down the road, which can include costs to our health, financial costs, and environmental costs.

I think what some people may not realize is that this tendency is baked into how we assess costs and benefits in economics.[\[39,40\]](#) We're assuming that future benefits are worth less to us because we want those benefits now. And so we actually apply a discount factor to all future gains. But that is biased towards the present generation. It only looks at the value from the perspective of people who are alive today. Do you have anything to say about that?

**Paul Kershaw:** I guess the punchline is that we need to be very careful about how much we discount the needs and aspirations of the future in our calculations of what should drive our decisions today. We've been doing that discounting for so long, for the last several decades. In part, because we weren't witnessing the harm that climate change could bring.

But now it's really difficult to discount that harm. And there's new expenditures we need to make to adapt to the reality that our climate is not now what it was a few decades ago, and that causes new challenges for our homes and our built infrastructure.[\[12,41\]](#) There's no getting around that there are new costs coming to us.

The Canadian Climate Institute Has already published brilliant analyses of damage control.[\[41\]](#) Like we got damage coming. We're experiencing it. Now more is on the way. The more we invest to prevent further damage. Now, the more cost savings we actually bake into future payoffs. The more we invest now to reduce the harm from climate change, the more will climate change proof the future economy.

**Lana Voracek:** What are some other policy solutions for climate change that Gen Squeeze supports?

**Paul Kershaw:** We try and do a synthesis of the range of policy levers that an area says needs to be pulled in order to address a big problem like climate change or housing and affordability. You know, giving families good work life balance.

And so you can come and you can click on our solutions tab, and you can find a tab specifically about climate sustainability.[\[42\]](#) And it will give you, it's actually the most complex solutions framework. And there are dozens of levers that we talk about

there. So let me just pick one. Let's use market incentives well, then put a price on pollution because people, we respond to market signals.

So it's one thing to like reduce our polluting anymore, but there's so much bloody carbon up in that atmosphere. We need to bring it back down into the soil where it once was, into the forest where it once was. Gen Squeeze has been working with a talented PhD student named Kushank to grow our ability to shape and inform dialogue about how to change our agricultural practices.

So much of our agriculture right now is based on tilling up the soil on an annual basis to plant new seeds. Soil isn't just chemistry like nitrogen and phosphate and potassium. Soil's biology, it's alive. And the moment you start tilling it up, you're like killing that living ecosystem, and it ends up releasing carbon.[\[43,44\]](#)

Some colleagues have shown me satellite pictures of the earth, and when our carbon emissions are growing particularly high in a given year, it happens to be often in spring, when farmers are starting to till the land.[\[45\]](#) And so there is a growing amount of science that talks about instead of having this sort of tilling approach to agriculture, what about regenerative approaches to agriculture?[\[44\]](#) Where there'd be less tilling or no tilling and we would start to use more of a diversity of crops, bringing them into our farms, and we would be regenerating ecosystems, growing enough food to continue to feed the ever growing population on this planet.

That's just this lovely win win and we can get better food security, we can get better diversity and restoration for our ecologies. We can draw down carbon, we don't just need to pay for complicated technologies to do carbon capture and sequestration, like trees and soil are natural carbon sequestration technologies.

**Lana Voracek:** It might strike some of our listeners that Gen Squeeze leans heavily into policy action, but it doesn't subscribe to any particular political party. Can you talk a bit more about that political but nonpartisan approach?

**Paul Kershaw:** So Gen Squeeze is very significantly influenced by political theories that describe how public policy is made.[\[46,47\]](#) And we look at public policy because we know that if you want to change the systems in a society, you have to change the policies that are shaping those systems.

So we know that our end game is we want governments to change public policy. So then we're like, well, what, what makes governments do anything? And the punchline of most political theories is governments respond to those who organize and show up.[\[46,47\]](#) Which then begs the question, what causes people to organize and show up?

And so we have, you know, 5 concrete steps on that at Generation Squeeze.[\[46,47\]](#) The first is, as an academic, I'm like, "okay, there's evidence out there." You need to make meaning of the evidence to show people, wow, something in their socio economic and ecological circumstances is changing. That change, they likely feel it, but can we connect the dots with them and see how those changes are increasingly



out of alignment with the values that they hold? Because that will then be light of fire and like, oh, well, we should do something about that. That's step one.

Step two is like, in the light of that meaning making of the evidence, can we shape public opinion? So we can shape enough public opinion that's really critical for providing political cover for politicians to respond to new evidence and disrupt the status quo.

And step three is, as you're shaping that public opinion, we need to try and frame people's beliefs about what the problems are and also frame their beliefs about the solutions. It really matters what people understand to be the problem at any given moment. In climate change, people are fighting over the frame, like, is a warming planet, you know, because of human beings, or is it just natural and we're all going to be doomed anyhow? The science is clear, human beings are the epicentre of causing this,<sup>[48]</sup> but you're still in many moments having to, like, fight over that framing.

That was step three, framing people's beliefs about problems and solutions. And once you've got that, you can then set an agenda of the solutions. Here's a few of them that we're going to work on right now. And then we are going to need to build a coalition around that agenda: enough person power or organizational power to give some clout to it. And then at the end of the day, you can take the evidence in the light of people's values, the public opinion, the framed beliefs, the agenda, and the person power in the coalition to change the incentives to which politicians respond.

And then, that's what constitutes organizing and showing up, and ultimately we hope that governments will adapt their policies to put in place a better generational deal, one that works for young and old alike. And we do that at Gen Squeeze with an effort to try and influence parties across the ideological spectrum.

**Lana Voracek:** When you consider how different beliefs can be across different party lines, what gives you hope that it's possible to make climate a non partisan issue?

**Paul Kershaw:** One of the things that motivates me to think that way is because in Canada, you won't find a political party that doesn't talk about putting more money into medical care. I say that with really great interest as a professor in the Faculty of Medicine at UBC, one of the most prestigious medical schools in the country. Like, we know our stuff at the Faculty of Medicine.

In the Faculty of Medicine, it's pretty darn clear that health doesn't begin with medical care.<sup>[49]</sup> Health begins where we're born, grow, live, work, and age. And as climate change and housing and affordability and a range of things disrupt those conditions, that's what causes people to be unhealthy. Medical care treats us after the fact when we fall sick, but doesn't really make us healthy. And yet, you have every political party kind of having this consensus that more money for medical care is a good idea. Medical care routinely wins.

I'm hoping one day that we can have a better generational deal that is not only supported by the evidence, but cross party consensus. Because then it's kind of locked in. There was a short moment when putting a price on pollution had the convergence of all parties federally.[\[50\]](#) Happened in the last federal election. And I'm like, "Oh, finally on climate change, we kind of like got to put that behind us." But it was just a short lived moment of consensus. And so I'm constantly searching, really, how do you just got to win the day to have that cross party consensus?

But that doesn't mean we're not willing to work and recognize some parties are more aligned with the evidence at a certain moment than others, or some parties are the ones in power, so they're ones that can act on it. So what do they want, and how do we get more of what they want to them, so that they'll do what we want and act on the evidence? I'm absolutely willing to think tactically and strategically and politically in those ways. But my end goal is to have the cross party consensus. If we don't, then we fail to be able to bring the best available evidence to the public sphere.

**Lana Voracek:** One thing I read about that I thought was an especially powerful example of this approach was that during election time, Gen Squeeze made a voter guide and scored each of the political parties in generational fairness. And after that, some parties actually change their platform to include the wording used in the Gen Squeeze voter guide.[\[47,51\]](#)

**Paul Kershaw:** Absolutely right. So let me tell you a little bit more about those. So if you come to Gen Squeeze. ca and you click on get informed, you'll see one of the things you can learn from is our voters guides.[\[51\]](#)

You know, we're constantly thinking about when do we have influence over parties? When do we have influence over governments? At election time, that's a moment when parties are especially sensitive. And if you can show that you can influence even a relatively modest part of public opinion, those days before people cast a ballot, that is something that will capture the attention of political parties.

And so Gen Squeeze has made ourselves famous for being able to do evidenced, informed analyses of party platforms in elections federally and provincially. And the first time we do it in a jurisdiction, we don't have that much influence over party platforms. But the second and third times, and thereafter, we have considerably more because we've demonstrated in the first time that we can draw media attention and social media attention to our analyses. And then suddenly the party's like, "oh, it would be in our interest to actually score better in their analyses. How can we do that easily?"

You know, I would love them to invest, you know, much more in a whole range of issues, but sometimes their finding the money isn't the easiest thing. But we give them opportunities to score better if they adopt some of our framing language.

And remember that I said part of our theory of change is to frame people's beliefs about problems and solutions,[\[46,47\]](#) and if you could get platforms to start echoing the framing, like, "there's an intergenerational tension," or that "we need a minister

responsible for intergenerational fairness,” or that “we don’t want housing prices to rise any longer,” or that “people should pay for their pollution.” If you can get people to, like, buy that framing, then they use their own party megaphone to start spreading that framing all the more.

And that is one of the ways that we wield influence. And so we’re very intentional about trying to use the moments that parties are paying attention during elections. And they also happen to be moments where citizens are paying attention and citizens can have influence because parties are courting their vote.

**David Acuna:** Stay tuned for the last part of our episode where Paul shares some of the lessons he’s learned along the way and what keeps him feeling hopeful.

### **Takeaways teaser:**

**Paul Kershaw:** While I know it’s easy to be cynical right now that governments are not listening or governments are part of the problem, ultimately, governments have to be part of the solution because governments create public policy change.

### **PAUL’S TAKEAWAYS:**

**Lana Voracek:** Can you share some of the biggest wins for generational fairness that you’ve had since you started your work with Gen Squeeze over 10 years ago?

**Paul Kershaw:** We’ve had some successes. You know, the 10 a day childcare investment, so 30 billion over five years at the federal level and then an extra 9 billion a year, a billion a year thereafter, is the biggest social policy and new social policy investment in more than half a century.[\[52,53\]](#)

You know, change always reflects what an ecosystem is doing. But I take pride in the fact that the branding of 10 a day childcare started at Gen Squeeze’s lab on the fourth floor of the School of Population Health at UBC. It reminds us of the importance of that framing. So many smart, especially women, came well, well before us at Gen Squeeze recommending that childcare idea first for feminist reasons, then eventually for child development reasons, but they weren’t enough to push us over the political threshold.

And so we worked hard to come up with a complementary narrative. Like, “let’s talk to people about their pocketbooks because we know pocketbooks matter.” And during the COVID pandemic, where you had parents, moms going home, where they were workers at home, teachers at home, childcare workers at home, cooks at home, just like everything was happening at home. And it was disproportionately really punishing women.[\[54\]](#) And so you had our first female finance minister[\[55\]](#) with a self defined feminist prime minister[\[56\]](#) and this window opened up.

And when they were looking for a way to sell that they now wanted to do something historic for childcare, I take enormous pride that they went with 10 a day because

they saw the power of that narrative, that lens, that framing, that brand. That would be the biggest financial win, the biggest reduction in pressure on family wallets that we've been able to offer.

But we also made sure that the first national housing strategy we've had in three decades finally included young people in the list of groups vulnerable in our housing market.[\[57\]](#) Can we just pause here for a moment? A national housing strategy had a list of vulnerable groups that were going to be eligible for the money coming from the national housing strategy, and it only had one age category: seniors. People, if you look at the data, seniors have the highest rate of home ownership.[\[58\]](#) They've also been in the housing market the longest and the greatest opportunity to gain wealth from rising home prices.[\[9\]](#)

Sure, there are about 20 to 23 percent of seniors who are not homeowners, so we need to be worried about them. So seniors who are not homeowners, I'll give you that. But if you're not going to actually identify younger folks as being the ones creamed in the housing market, then we have a problem with our national housing system. Draft 1 came out. No young people. Draft two came out, no young people. Draft three we're like, "oh my lord."

And it was a little bit lucky where we built relationships with an MP who happened to be sitting next to the then-Minister responsible for housing. And we went to her like, "please, please, please, like just show them this infographic showing how young people are being creamed and they're the most likely as an age group to being harmed."

So that made young folks eligible for billions of dollars in the National Housing Strategy to be available for the, you know, portable rental benefits and a range of other investments. And then, you know, some smaller things still, like if you look at the reasons that 18 month parental leave exists now, that came partly from Gen Squeeze's influence on the 2015 election platform of the Liberals.

Uh, we worked with the Vancouver mayor back in the day to create the first-ever tax on empty homes.[\[59\]](#) We have worked tirelessly to try and get a number of rental projects off the ground in the face of nimbyism, especially because that's local work happening in Metro Vancouver. And we take pride in being part of an ecosystem that helped to defend the constitutionality of a price on pollution.[\[60\]](#)

And there is more, you can go check out Gen Squeeze, uh, what we do.[\[61\]](#) And I think it says win sometimes for a complete list.

**Lana Voracek:** What lessons have you learned along the way with Gen Squeeze?

**Paul Kershaw:** So much change begins with relationships. You know, I'm a professor. I'm trained to produce good evidence and then share good evidence with people. But the lesson that I have is that evidence is but one factor shaping people's behaviour, organizations' decisions, and government's policy legislation.[\[62\]](#) And really, what matters is the values that we have. And our values are going to be

shaped in no small part by the relationships around us. And so, I would encourage us to tap into the values that are going to help us remember what's the legacy that we want to lead.

Is it that we want to prevent harm to others and we're going to care, you know, to do enough to do so? Is it that, like people, you know, you should take out what you put in? Or you shouldn't leave more of a mess than you're willing to pay for to clean up? Or is it like we are going to, you know, we're going to protect people's freedom and there's going to be so much less freedom and less liberty in a context where there is disarray and damage all over the place from climate change? Or is it that just we care about what's sacred, clean air and clean water? Clean soil. These things are sacred.

You know, there's a range of ways in which people's values will motivate them, but right now we desperately need to be motivated to be the best versions of ourselves in the light of our values.

**Lana Voracek:** And what gives you hope as you engage in this work?

**Paul Kershaw:** I have hope because I know that we've done big things in the past and that politics does respond to those who organize and show up. There is an opportunity to make governments work more effectively for young and old alike. While I know it's easy to be cynical right now that governments are not listening or governments are part of the problem, ultimately governments have to be part of the solution because governments create public policy change.

And so part of the Gen Squeeze mission is to rejuvenate democracy and invite a younger demographic to resist its cynicism and to invite an older demographic to use its political heft to not only vote for themselves, but to vote for the legacy they want to leave for their kids and grandchildren. Not only do I have hope, but I have big expectations for Canadians.

We sometimes get the politics we deserve and if we're not being courageous enough to showcase to our politicians that we both can and will fix our wallet problems while we are simultaneously fighting our climate problems, and that those of us who have enough security are willing to do more than we're being asked right now, if we don't do that, then I don't have enough hope.

But Canadians, we, we care about our legacy. We care about our community. And so I want to tap into that part of who we are as a nation. And when we do that, that's where the hope lies.

**Lana Voracek:** Thank you so much. As we're wrapping up, we want to plug Generation Squeeze's podcast, Hard Truths.[\[63\]](#) Can you share what else our listeners can do if they want to engage more with Gen Squeeze's work on intergenerational fairness and advocating for policy solutions to climate change?

**Paul Kershaw:** Yeah, if you've been attracted to this particular conversation, then please do join us at GenSqueeze.ca because our power to influence public policy grows with the size of our network.[\[1\]](#) So you can join[\[64\]](#) and add to our numbers and share our videos and podcasts with others to attract more people to come to our website. I'm really keen these days on having people share their stories[\[65\]](#) about why they care about generational fairness and how they see the problem of generational unfairness because we can then use those stories to help wrap around the evidence and compel politicians to act more urgently in response to the data because stories are powerful and politicians and people follow other people so your stories matter.

### SUMMER 2024 UPDATE:

**Lana Voracek:** We interviewed Paul in November 2023. Since then, Gen Squeeze has made exciting progress. Canada's federal government listened, and for the first time ever, not only did they acknowledge that hard work doesn't pay off for younger Canadians around issues like climate change, housing, and affordability, but they also structured the 2024 budget around creating fairness for every generation.[\[66\]](#)

But these long term problems took decades to create and will take decades to overcome. There is more work to do to reach agreement on these issues across party lines and to engrain generational fairness into the structure of our government. If you want to get involved and learn more, follow the links in our show notes.[\[1,64,65,67\]](#)

**Paul Kershaw:** It's about building a movement that we can then bring into the halls of our legislatures and together make the difference to protect this planet going forward.

### CREDITS:

**David Acuna:** Pulse of Change is hosted and produced by Lana Voracek. Audio production and music by David Acuna. Artwork by Alanna Thorburn Watt. If you enjoyed this episode, follow us wherever you get your podcasts and leave us a review.

You can also find the transcript with citations for this episode in our show notes.

This episode was recorded and produced in the traditional, unceded, ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

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If you'd like to connect with us on social media, you can follow our Instagram [@pulseofchange podcast](#). Thanks for listening.



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