



Nunavut Poverty Progress Profile

OVERVIEW

Nunavut is Canada's newest territory and home to a small, majority Inuit population spread across a vast area of land in 25 isolated communities. Nunavut's distinct history and unique social, cultural, and economic context are key factors to understanding the specific challenges of tackling poverty in the territory. Although the data is limited, it is clear that poverty in Nunavut is amongst the highest in the country.¹

After a year-long public engagement process, the Government of Nunavut and Inuit organization Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) publically released the territory's poverty action plan (PAP), called "*The Makimaniq Plan*," in February 2012. Makimaniq is Inuktitut for "empowerment," and the plan emphasizes "a shared approach to poverty reduction – a unique Nunavut approach," says Premier Eva Aariak.¹

Plan Components and Highlights

Six major themes and priority actions over the first 18 months:

- 1. Collaboration and Community Participation** (Inuit value *piliriqatigiingniq/ikajuqtigiingniq* – working together and helping one another)
 - Improvement of the working relationships between the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and Regional Inuit Associations
 - Increased support for community action
 - Enact poverty reduction legislation

- 2. Healing and Wellbeing**
 - Support community-driven actions through the creation of ongoing community wellness plans
 - Further incorporate local resources in addressing mental health and addictions
 - Create a territory interagency committee to better integrate and administer wellness-related program funding

- 3. Education and Skills Development**
 - The development of a comprehensive early childhood education plan

¹ Statistics Canada does not collect or compile data directly measuring poverty in Nunavut. The Nunavut Roundtable on Poverty Reduction has published a fact sheet on poverty-related indicators with the data that *is* available for Nunavut, and the results reflect the magnitude of poverty in the territory. For example, high school graduation rates are the lowest in the country, median income is second-lowest in the country, and life expectancy is markedly lower than the Canadian average. For more information, please see: <http://www.makiliqta.ca/uploads/poverty-data.pdf>.

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- Increased support for working parents and workforce development

4. Food Security

- The establishment of a “Nunavut Food Security Coalition”
- Enhancement of healthy breakfast and lunch school programs in schools
- Increased support for community-driven food security initiatives

5. Housing and Income Support

- Improvements to the income support system and related supports available to those who access income support programs
- Increased understanding among the public, government workers, and workers from other agencies about the income support system overall and clarification of specific policies and programs
- Exploration of affordable housing options through collaboration and partnership
- Multi-party inquiry and public dialogue on the history of housing in Nunavut

6. Community and Economic Development

- Ensure that community wellness is an integral component of economic development
- Increase daycare services to support parents’ ability to access employment and training
- Support capacity building for NGOs at the local level²

Community Engagement in Plan Development and Implementation

Nunavut’s extensive poverty-reduction public engagement process was initiated by the Government of Nunavut, jointly sponsored by Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and led by the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat. The goals of the process were to share information, learn more about poverty in Nunavut communities, understand how poverty affects everyone, hear others’ ideas and points of view about poverty, decide what things can be done to reduce poverty, agree on priorities for action to reduce poverty, and agree who should undertake each of these actions.³ The year-long process was launched in October 2010 and included government, Inuit organizations, municipalities, community organizations, and the business community.

The first stage was the Community Dialogue Sessions, held from November 2010 to February 2011, in every community. These sessions were open to all community members. The second stage was the Regional Roundtables held in Rankin Inlet (Kivalliq region), Cambridge Bay (Kitikmeot region), Pond Inlet (North Baffin region), and Iqaluit (South Baffin region) in May 2011.⁴ The Roundtables included a broad cross-section of people representing each region, including those who have experienced poverty. They discussed the ideas brought forward in the Community Dialogue stage and developed options for action.⁵ The final stage was the Poverty Summit, held in November 2011 with 45 representatives from 22 of Nunavut’s 25 communities.⁶ The Summit members decided which options to undertake to reduce poverty and how to implement these options. The outcome of the Summit is the PAP.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Proxy Indicators of Poverty in Nunavut (unofficial measurement tools)

Indicator	Year of latest available data	Nunavut	Canada
Life Expectancy at birth, males ⁷	2005-2007	67.2	77
Life Expectancy at birth, females ⁸	2005-2007	70.2	82
High school graduation rate ⁹	2009	39%	75%
Household Food Insecurity ¹⁰	2007-2008	31.9%	7.7%
Core housing need ¹¹	2006	37.3%	12.7%
Population Living in Public Housing ¹²	2010	54%	– (estimated 6%) ⁱⁱ
Welfare Caseloads ¹³	2005	13,800, 45.5%	1,679,800, 5.2%

* 2012 – PAP came into place

* – data not available

* *Note: Statistics Canada does not collect or compile data directly measuring poverty in Nunavut, such as the Low Income Cut-off (LICO), Low-Income Measurement (LIM), or Market Basket Measure (MBM). The discrepancy between average and median incomes indicates income inequality.*

The Nunavut Government’s Success Indicators

Nunavut’s PAP does not explicitly outline targets or indicators of success. Instead, it states that the Roundtable for Poverty Reduction will provide leadership and oversight for the PAP, including responsibility for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Terms of reference for the Roundtable, including an accountability framework, will be developed by the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and reviewed by participants of the public engagement process.¹⁴ Ed McKenna, director of the Anti-Poverty Secretariat, has stated that measures with corresponding program funds will be in place next year.¹⁵

Progress to Date

Since the PAP was released so recently, there are no results to date. However, it is worth noting that the PAP clearly aligns with the four objectives to which Premier Aariak committed to address before the end of her mandate in 2013: to revise the public housing scale, establish a culturally relevant pilot project for addictions treatment, create a Nunavut Food Security Coalition, and draft legislation to guide the long-term implementation of a poverty-reduction plan.¹⁶

The Government of Nunavut committed \$6.68 million to address poverty over the 2011-12 fiscal year.¹⁷ The government’s financial commitments over the 2012-13 fiscal year are difficult to measure, as many activities in this year’s budget are intended to reduce poverty.¹⁸ Interestingly, the media has speculated that the PAP goals may be more easily achieved due to a resource revenue sharing steam, which will

ⁱⁱ This represents the percentage of housing that is public housing, not the percentage of population living in public housing

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give an estimated \$2 billion to Inuit organizations from mining companies operating in the territory over the next couple of decades.¹⁹ Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. vice-president Jack Anawak says people should be prepared to receive a cheque in the mail, which could offset the high cost of living in the North.²⁰

Views from Outside the Nunavut Government and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

As the PAP's community engagement process was chaired jointly by Premier Aariak and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.'s vice-president Anawak, with extensive community involvement, the PAP has been well-received by the public and the media. Emphasis was put on the government being an actor among equals, with public engagement envisioned as a shared process of decision-making and action.²¹

The PAP's focus on community approaches to addressing poverty and increased coordination and collaboration among stakeholders is also viewed favourably in the Nunavut context.²² The co-chairing of the process by Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and their commitment to continue the partnership with the Government of Nunavut to achieve the PAP's goals is a significant achievement and demonstration of multi-stakeholder buy-in. The Public Policy Forum of Ottawa, which is a non-partisan NGO that facilitates cross-sectoral dialogue on strengthening good government, points to the government's commitment to enact legislation for the long-term implementation of the PAP as truly groundbreaking - the explicit commitment itself, enshrinement into law, and the collaborative process with partners.²³ However, it has been noted that the PAP does not go into detail about how the objectives of the plan will be achieved.²⁴ To this point, public opinion is based on the PAP development process and the contents of the plan; the PAP's true strengths remain to be seen through its implementation and evaluation over the next few years.

Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

- 1. Human Rights:** The PAP does not situate poverty elimination clearly within a human rights framework.
- 2. Income Support:** About half of all Nunavummiut access income support, which includes subsidies for seniors, children, people with disabilities, fuel, daycare, and housing. The PAP commits to improving the income support system, partly through reviewing the amount of income that someone can make before their income support payments are deducted in order to support people transitioning to work.²⁵ Currently, all income support recipients are required to participate in the Productive Choices program, which is designed to help them gain greater financial independence through community-based opportunities in wellness, learning, training, and/ or work experience, but its effectiveness is not well understood.²⁶ The PAP also commits to increasing public understanding of the income support system and specific policies and programs.²⁷

- 3. Housing:** Almost half of Nunavummiut access public housing, indicating a large need for public housing that the PAP committed to address through partnership and collaboration. Premier Aariak has stated the government will revise the public housing scale to remove disincentives to work, which was a commonly voiced concern in public dialogues.²⁸ The PAP also committed to enhancing public dialogue on the history of housing in Nunavut.²⁹ This history is based on a colonial past whereby Inuit (who are traditionally nomadic) were settled in communities by the federal government with the promise of publically funded housing. Public housing is now a significant government expenditure and the need for housing continues to grow.³⁰
- 4. Education:** Nunavut's high school graduation rates are very low, reaching a historical high of only 39% in 2008-09.³¹ The PAP highlights the importance of a continuum of education services, from early childhood to adulthood, enabling a smooth transition to Inuit society. The government does have an adult learning strategy in place, but almost three quarters of adults continue to struggle with serious numeracy and literacy issues.³² The PAP committed to family literacy programs, resources, and materials in the Inuit languages. It also discusses the important role that parents play in their children's education and the need to foster parental engagement through parenting programs and services.³³
- 5. Early Childhood Education and Care:** Nunavut is a territory of young people, with a disproportionate number of children under the age of 15 compared to the rest of Canada, 45% of whom accessed Nunavut's Child Benefit in 2008-09.³⁴ The government has created an early childhood education program,³⁵ but the PAP emphasizes the importance of a broader, comprehensive early childhood education plan for the territory, complete with infrastructure, curricula, and human resources training and support.³⁶ The PAP also recognizes a severe shortage of daycare spaces and commits to exploring creative ways to address this, including portable childcare subsidies and business partnerships.³⁷
- 6. Health Care:** Community-driven initiatives to address health and wellness are emphasized in the PAP, including supporting the creation of community wellness plans, currently underway in 2012-13. Other initiatives include better incorporation of local mental health and addictions initiatives into territorial services and simplifying the administrative process of accessing funding for health and wellness through an interagency funding committee. Premier Aariak has also committed to developing a culturally relevant pilot program for addictions treatment by 2013.³⁸ Almost 70 percent of children live in houses rated as food insecure;³⁹ the PAP commits to addressing this by increasing access to sufficient, nutritious, and culturally-relevant store-bought foods and country foods.ⁱⁱⁱ Specifically, a Nunavut Food Security Coalition will be established to develop a territorial action plan for food security, healthy breakfast and lunch programs in schools will be enhanced, and community-

ⁱⁱⁱ Country foods are foods traditionally eaten by Inuit, including sea mammals (such as seal, whale, and walrus), fish, caribou, and berries. The Nunavut Food Guide says that "all country foods are healthy." The PAP recognizes that access to country food is important for nutrition, cultural identity, skills development, and community sharing networks.

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driven food security initiatives will be supported. Notably, the *Nunavut Economic Development Strategy* recommended creating a food security coalition by 2008, but no coalition was formed.⁴⁰

- 7. Employment Support:** With an unemployment rate of 15.3% in 2012,⁴¹ more than double the Canadian rate, it is no surprise that public dialogues included discussions of barriers to career development, including lack of academic credits or career training.⁴² Some progress has been made through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA), which requires industry to negotiate Inuit Impact and Benefit agreements with local Inuit, including Inuit employment measures.⁴³ However, the PAP highlights the need for broader, flexible workforce development programs and commits to exploring formal and informal avenues for workplace education, mentoring, and development programs. An emphasis is put on teaching traditional Inuit skills alongside oral language and literacy skills.⁴⁴
- 8. Community Building/Investment:** The PAP is firmly rooted in community development values. One of its explicit commitments is to provide increased support for community action, including creating a territorial organization to support networks of community-based organizations combating poverty. Community assets and locally developed responses are also key to the PAP's approach to health, food security, and supporting capacity building and networking for community-based NGOs. Furthermore, the PAP recognizes the need for stronger community participation in citizen-serving organizations' decision-making and implementation processes, as well as a greater consideration of overall community wellness in economic development plans.⁴⁵

THE BOTTOM LINE

Nunavut's extensive public engagement process and the PAP's emphasis on empowerment, community-driven initiatives, and collaboration among stakeholders have laid a solid foundation for poverty-reduction measures in the territory. However, the strength of the plan largely remains to be seen, as an implementation plan, accountability framework, and poverty-reduction legislation are not yet in place, and results have yet to be achieved. Addressing Nunavut's high poverty rates and unique challenges (including a history of colonization and rapid social change) is no easy feat. Nevertheless, the PAP's strength-based and community-oriented approach puts the territory in good stead for tackling poverty in a long-term and sustainable way.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ENDNOTES

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