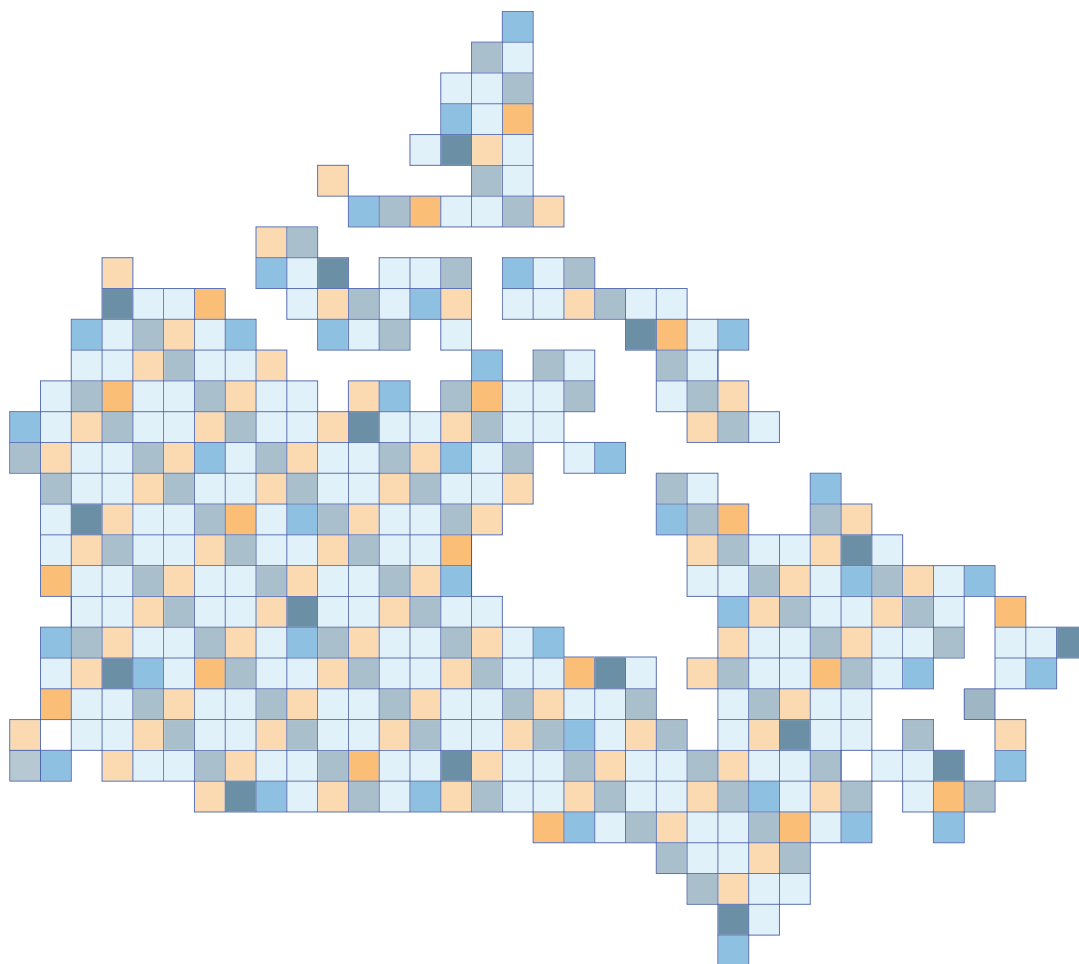


# Nunavut Poverty Progress Profile



**2016**



CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY  
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

*Poverty is a violation of human rights.*

## OVERVIEW

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There are 25 communities across Nunavut with populations between 110 and 7,500 people; each community is isolated and accessible by only air, water, or snowmobile in the winter.<sup>1</sup> Most of the people living in Nunavut are Inuit (85%) and 68% speak Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun. The legacy of colonialism is a contributing factor to poverty in Nunavut. In 2014, 10,500 economic families<sup>2</sup> in the territory experienced poverty according to the Low Income Measure. Although the data is limited, poverty in Nunavut is amongst the highest in the country.<sup>3</sup> Housing and food insecurity are incredibly high and population health rates are significantly lower than elsewhere.

In 2012, the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (the Roundtable) – co-sponsored by the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) – developed a poverty action plan called *The Makimaniq Plan: A Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction*.<sup>4</sup> The plan emphasizes Inuit values and the inclusion of different community members in collaborating to reduce poverty in the territory. The territory is now in the process of putting together *Makimaniq II: Our Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction*.

### Plan Components and Highlights

The vision for *The Makimaniq Plan* is to promote a more sustainable quality of life and improve the standard of living for those in need. It also seeks to enhance self-determination and self-reliance for Nunavut communities. Recognizing this vision, *The Makimaniq Plan* outlines six themes for poverty reduction:<sup>5</sup>

**Collaboration and Community Participation**

**Health and Well-Being**

**Education and Skills Development**

**Food Security**

**Housing and Income Support**

**Community and Economic Development**

### Community Engagement in Plan Development and Implementation

Beginning in 2010, the Government of Nunavut and NTI led a public engagement process with community organizations, youth groups, elders, and businesses across the territory. Members of the Roundtable identified social exclusion as one of the root cause of poverty in the territory.<sup>6</sup> In Nunavut, social exclusion involves language barriers, lack of access to education, a digital divide, and continued impacts of colonialism. The Roundtable also emphasized that addressing poverty would require healing of the devastating effects of colonialism — specifically by rebuilding the Inuit way of life and community agency through increased land access and Inuit leadership.<sup>7</sup>

### Progress to Date

The *Collaboration for Poverty Reduction Act* was passed in May 2013. The *Act* requires the government to work collaboratively with NTI, Inuit organizations, other

governments, non-government organizations, and businesses that are part of the Roundtable. The *Act* also establishes a Poverty Reduction Fund which promotes a collaborative approach for a five-year action plan and supports community-driven initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

There have been four official Roundtable gatherings since passing of the *Act*. In November 2014, the Roundtable focused on justice and community healing, followed by the 2015 review on social assistance and income reform.<sup>9</sup> A full action plan, *The Makimaniq Plan II: Our Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction*, will be made public upon completion.<sup>10</sup>

In 2013, the Government of Nunavut released the *Long-Term Comprehensive Housing and Homelessness Strategy* and is now working to set specific timelines for many of its goals.<sup>11</sup> Nunavut has also introduced the *Nunavut Food Security Strategy and Action Plan 2014-16*.<sup>12</sup>

## MEASURING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

### Statistical Indicators of Poverty (unofficial measurement tools)

	Low Income Measurement <sup>13</sup> **	Social Assistance Recipients <sup>14</sup>	Secondary School Graduates <sup>15</sup>	Minimum Wage <sup>16</sup>
<b>2005</b>	7,260	12,392, <b>40.9%</b>	178, <b>29.2%</b>	\$9.65
<b>2006</b>	7,220	13,570, <b>44.0%</b>	187, <b>28.6%</b>	\$9.65
<b>2007</b>	7,710	14,820, <b>47.2%</b>	199, <b>29.4%</b>	\$9.06
<b>2008</b>	8,000	15,523, <b>48.6%</b>	210, <b>30.4%</b>	\$9.06
<b>2009</b>	7,990	14,037, <b>43.0%</b>	244, <b>36.0%</b>	\$9.06
<b>2010</b>	7,840	13,716, <b>41.1%</b>	237, <b>36.2%</b>	\$9.06
<b>2011</b>	8,050	13,197, <b>38.6%</b>	229, <b>33.9%</b>	\$11.00
<b>2012</b> ***	8,820	13,797, <b>39.7%</b>	240, <b>34.9%</b>	\$11.00
<b>2013</b> ****	10,010	14,578, <b>41.1%</b>	218, <b>32.5%</b>	\$11.00
<b>2014</b>	10,500	14,428, <b>39%</b> <sup>17</sup>	206, <b>31.6%</b>	\$11.00
<b>2015</b>	*	*	194, <b>31.4%</b>	\$11.00
<b>2016</b>	*	*	*	\$13.00 <sup>18</sup>

\* Data not available.

\*\* Statistics Canada does not collect data directly measuring poverty in Nunavut, such as the Low Income Cut-off (LICO) or Market Basket Measure (MBM).

\*\*\* The *Makimaniq Plan: A Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction* was introduced in 2012.

\*\*\*\* The *Collaboration for Poverty Reduction Act* was introduced in 2013.

## Progress to Date

The *Collaboration for Poverty Reduction Act* requires the Minister responsible for poverty reduction to table an annual report in the Legislative Assembly. The Minister is also mandated to monitor the budget, programs, initiatives, and government policies for consistency with *The Makimaniq Plan* and the *Five Year Poverty Reduction Action Plan*.<sup>19</sup>

In accordance with the *Act*, the Minister collaborated with the Roundtable to develop progress measurement indicators. In 2014, the first Minister's report identified: a roundtable shared approach; outcomes; indicators; program planning and implementation; monitoring; reporting; and evaluation, reflection, and adjustments as key measurement focuses. A performance measurement framework will be finalized in the upcoming five-year action plan.<sup>20</sup> The 2014-15 report will most likely not be tabled until 2017.<sup>21</sup>

## Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

**Human Rights:** *The Makimaniq Plan* does not clearly connect poverty elimination to a human rights framework. However, certain poverty reduction initiatives recognize socio-economic human rights and implement monitoring and accountability mechanisms in attempts to realize these rights. For example, the *Nunavut Food Security Strategy and Action Plan* integrates a human rights perspective into its guiding principles. It defends Nunavummiungulluta's right to adequate food including accessibility, affordability, sustainability, and Inuit societal values.<sup>22</sup>

**Income and Employment Support:** The Government of Nunavut plans to reform its social assistance system with \$13.5 million to improve residential care and domestic violence prevention, as well as increasing the social assistance budget.<sup>23</sup>

As of September 2015, 45% of Nunavummiut receive income assistance.<sup>24</sup> In 2013, Nunavut had the second lowest median income in the country.<sup>25</sup> This is further aggravated by the fact that income-earning Nunavummiut support more dependents than anywhere else in Canada at 82.1%. In comparison, the national dependency ratio is only 59.2%.<sup>26</sup>

The unemployment rate in 2016 in Nunavut was 13.5%, more than a 3% decrease from the previous year — however, it was significantly higher than the national rate of 6.8%.<sup>27</sup>

Nunavut no longer includes the *National Child Benefit Supplement* when calculating income support eligibility. The Department of Family Services expects that this change will provide low-income families with up to an additional \$6.8 million, affecting approximately 25,000 families this fiscal year.<sup>28</sup> The *Nunavut Child Benefit* provides income-adjusted monthly cash benefits towards the cost of raising children for families with a net income under or equal to \$20,921.<sup>29</sup> Working families with children are also eligible for the *Territorial Worker's Supplement*.

The government released the *Report on the Review and Reform of Income Assistance* in August 2016 to set out steps for improving current income programs. The report identified five pillars of action for the government to work from. These areas include:

- **Simplify benefits and ensure they cover basic living expenses;**
- **Improve incentives to work and train;**
- **Adopt a supportive, coaching approach to Income Assistance;**
- **Invest in job creation and reducing barriers to work; and**
- **Strengthen internal administration.**<sup>31</sup>

**Housing:** Nunavut's housing need is marked by levels of overcrowding twice the national average.<sup>32</sup> The *2010 Nunavut Housing Needs Survey* showed that over 35% of homes are overcrowded and 23% need major repairs.<sup>33</sup> The government directly subsidizes more than 80% of all housing in the territory.<sup>34</sup> It has been estimated that Nunavut needs an additional 3,000 housing units on top of its 5,153 units. Only 248 units were built in 2015.<sup>35</sup>

An estimated 58% of Nunavummiut live in public housing, given the lack of "private affordable rental housing and given the high costs of independent homeownership".<sup>36</sup> The annual cost to maintain each public housing unit is \$26,200. In 2013, the government indexed the public housing rent scale to Nunavut's minimum wage, increasing the percentage of tenants eligible for minimum rent from 58% to 76%.<sup>37</sup>

A point in time count of Nunavummiut experiencing homelessness showed that roughly 1,220 individuals, or 4% of the population, are homeless and living temporarily in other people's dwellings.<sup>38</sup> In June 2016, the Minister of Family Services tabled *2015-2016: Angiraqangittuliriniq, a Framework for Action for Nunavut's Absolute Homeless*.<sup>39</sup> Like the territory's poverty plan, it will be developed in collaboration with homeless partners and stakeholders across Nunavut.

The Nunavut Housing Corporation is in the process of completing a new action plan entitled *Blueprint for Action: Building a Commonsense Approach for Overcoming Nunavut's Housing Crisis*. It is meant to be tabled in 2016 and finalized next year.<sup>40</sup>

**Education:** The Government of Nunavut has identified education as a key area for improving overall wellbeing and economic prosperity. In *Sivumut Abluqta*, the government's current mandate, the development of self-reliance through education and employment is a top priority.<sup>41</sup> The Department of Education budget is just over \$205 million for 2016-17.<sup>42</sup>

*Financial Assistance for Nunavut Students (FANS)* offers funding for post-secondary students from Nunavut and includes supplementary grants for beneficiaries under the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement*.<sup>43</sup> The basic grant covers a maximum of \$1850 per semester for tuition and travel costs for students, their dependents, and spouses. A grant up to \$8,000 is available for students with permanent disabilities to cover equipment costs, or up to \$1,000 per credit for correspondence courses.<sup>44</sup>

Inuit students lag behind non-Indigenous peoples in Canada in education. Recent data shows that 28.2% of Inuit aged 25-64 within Inuit Nunangat have postsecondary qualifications, compared with 53.3% outside the region.<sup>45</sup> The government has identified the need to hire more Inuit teachers who can relate to the community and teach in all official languages as there is concern about Inuit teachers soon retiring.<sup>46</sup>

Nunavut has the lowest high school graduation rate in the country. Some communities go years without seeing any graduates. In 2016, Lindsay Joy Evaloajuk was the first graduate in three years in her community of Qikiqtarjuaq.<sup>47</sup>

**Early Childhood Education and Care:** Family fees for childcare in Nunavut remain the highest among the Inuit regions of Canada and represent 45-58% of the median Inuit personal income. Employment officers state that high fees for childcare pose a barrier to Nunavummiut employment – families earn too much to qualify for subsidies but too little to pay for the full cost of childcare.<sup>48</sup>

In 2014, the Minister of Education participated in a consultation with Inuit elders that was designed to help integrate Inuit knowledge and language into early childhood education training.<sup>49</sup> Nunavut offers *Young Parents Stay Learning* to subsidize daycare for students under the age of 18 who have children of their own.<sup>50</sup>

**Healthcare:** Health outcomes in Nunavut are among the poorest in Canada. In a health report card published by the *Conference Board of Canada*, Nunavut ranks near the bottom of most health indicators. Nunavut receives a “D-” in life expectancy, premature mortality, infant mortality, suicides, mortality due to cancer, and mortality due to respiratory disease.<sup>51</sup>

Notably, only 20% of Nunavut residents have a regular doctor compared to 83% of Canadian residents.<sup>52</sup> Overcrowding in the territory also contributes to chronic stress, and other health conditions among Inuit, including infant mortality and tuberculosis.<sup>53</sup>

The Department of Health budget increased to \$338 million in 2016-17. In 2013, the government relocated the *Akausisarvik Mental Health Treatment Centre* to a newly renovated location in Iqaluit, investing \$860,000 to expand the Centre’s mental health programs.<sup>54</sup> The government has also converted a building in Cambridge Bay into a residential mental health and addictions treatment facility. Five new mental health staff have been hired across the territory and have trained over 800 Nunavummiut in *Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training* since 2011.<sup>55</sup> In 2015, Nunavut’s suicide rate was 10 times the national average.<sup>56</sup>

**Food Security:** Almost 70% of Inuit households in Nunavut are food insecure. Not only is this eight times higher than the national average, but it is also among the highest documented food insecurity rates for an Indigenous population in a developed country.<sup>57</sup>

Government departments, Inuit organizations, and community groups have formed the *Nunavut Food Security Coalition* which has published the *Nunavut Food Security Strategy and Action Plan 2014-2016*. The plan is based on six key areas of action: Country Food, Store-Bought Goods, Local Food Production, Life Skills, Programs and Community Initiative, and Policy and Legislation. Objectives include: supporting harvesters in pursuing traditional livelihoods; exploring measures to increased healthy food options and reduce costs in food stores; supporting research into producing food locally; and assessing the adequacy of food allowances provided by the income assistance program.<sup>58</sup> In June 2016, applications were open for funding food security projects under *The Makimaniq Plan*.<sup>59</sup>

### **Views from Outside the Nunavut Government and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.**

Commentators on *The Makimaniq Plan* have acknowledged that the Government of Nunavut's emphasis on collaboration and public engagement heightens transparency and government accountability. The inclusive approach includes communities in the planning and delivery of plans and some experts say it is worth considering by other governments in Canada.<sup>60</sup> Community members have also expressed enthusiasm about the approach. Efforts to engage the voices of elders in the community during this process have been applauded, as they are considered the guardians of cultural values and principles.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the positive community response to *The Makimaniq Plan*, there is significant concern for the pervasiveness of poverty in the territory. According to a report from the Centre for the Study of Living Standards released in 2016, poverty in Nunavut ranks among the poorest nations in the world. The report uses the Human Development Index (HDI) to measure life expectancy, education, and income in each region. According to the report, if Nunavut were a country it would rate 46th in the world for the overall quality of social and economic well-being. In fact, in their HDI ranking, Nunavut fell five times lower than Canada's overall ranking of 9th among 188 national states.<sup>62</sup>

Civil society organizations have also raised serious concerns about food insecurity in the territory, which was recently reported to be at record levels. According to a recent report from PROOF, a research team at the University of Toronto, in 2014, 60% of children in Nunavut are living in food insecure households. In the same year, nearly 47% of households experienced some level of food insecurity.<sup>63</sup> As Valerie Tarasuk, the lead author of the study stated in an April 2016 news release, "[t]he rates in the North suggest a state of emergency."<sup>64</sup>



## THE BOTTOM LINE

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*The Makimaniq Plan* has received significant attention for its collaborative approach in Nunavut and elsewhere. The unique cultural, social, and economic history surrounding poverty in Indigenous communities is a contributing factor, as is the importance of community development. The government has asserted that the approach is meant to help restore self-reliance in Inuit communities. Experts have suggested that other solutions for homelessness policy, programs, and services aimed at Indigenous peoples should be as culturally sensitive and collaborative as in Nunavut.<sup>65</sup>

However, rates for housing need, household food security, and mental health services remain incredibly high and progress is slow moving. Many areas such as income, employment support, and education are still in great need of improvement. A review of Nunavut's social assistance, an assessment of its long-term care system, a homelessness plan, and a mental health plan are all pending. Evaluations of these efforts and *The Makimaniq Plan* will offer greater insight to help steer Nunavut towards future success in reducing poverty.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION



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## ENDNOTES

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