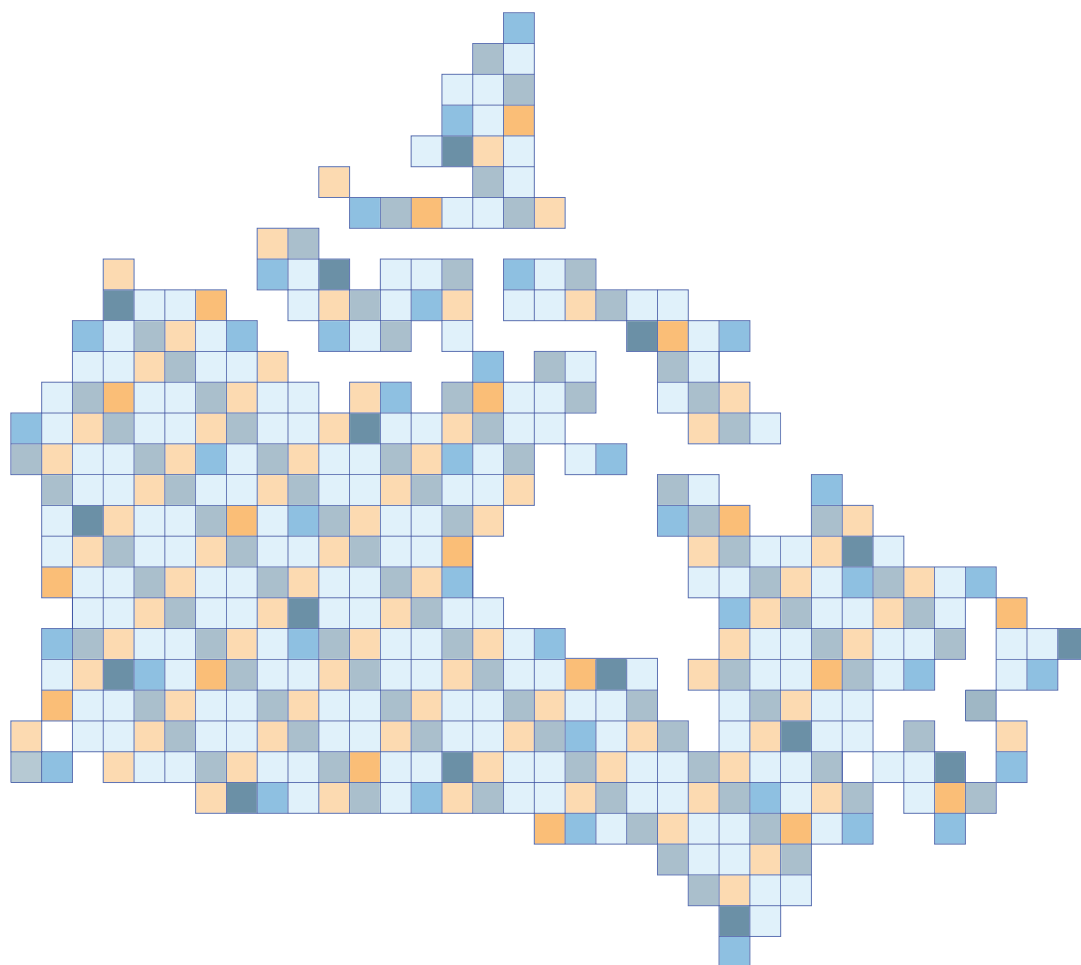


# Saskatchewan Poverty Progress Profile



2016



CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY  
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

*Poverty is a violation of human rights.*

## OVERVIEW

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Saskatchewan's child poverty rate is 24.6%, well above the national rate of 18.5%.<sup>1</sup> When compared to other provinces and territories' child poverty rates, Saskatchewan is third only to Nunavut and Manitoba.<sup>2</sup> This rate triples for the Indigenous population – it is estimated that two-thirds of Saskatchewan's Indigenous children live in poverty.<sup>3</sup>

Poverty costs Saskatchewan \$3.8 million in heightened service use and missing opportunities for contributions to the GDP and taxes.<sup>4</sup>

In the wake of a large grassroots movement towards developing a poverty strategy, Lieutenant Governor Schofield announced in October 2014 that Saskatchewan would develop its first poverty reduction strategy.<sup>5</sup> In 2016, the Saskatchewan Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction, a group appointed by the Ministry of Social Services, released a poverty strategy entitled the *Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy (SPRS)*.<sup>6</sup>

### Plan Components and Highlights

The *SPRS* sets an overall target to reduce the number of people in Saskatchewan who experience poverty for two years or more by 50 percent by the end of 2025.<sup>7</sup>

The six key areas for action identified in the *SPRS* include:

1. Income security;
2. Housing and homelessness;
3. Early childhood development and child care;
4. Education, skills training and employment;
5. Health and food security; and
6. Vulnerable families and individuals.<sup>8</sup>

The strategy identifies that early efforts will focus on:

- Implementing a Ministry of Education Early Years Plan;
- Initiating a redesign of the Ministry of Social Services' Income Assistance programs and services; and
- Expanding housing for "hard to house" individuals to support their integration into the community.<sup>9</sup>

## MEASURING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

### Statistical Indicators of Poverty (unofficial measurement tools)<sup>†</sup>

	<b>LICO</b> Low-Income Cut-off After-tax <sup>10</sup>	<b>LIM</b> Low-Income Measure After Tax <sup>11</sup>	<b>MBM</b> Market Basket Measure <sup>12</sup> ***	<b>Food Bank Usage</b> <sup>13</sup>	<b>Household Food Insecurity</b> <sup>14</sup>	<b>Social Assistance**</b> Recipients <sup>15</sup>	<b>Minimum Wage</b> <sup>16</sup>
<b>2005</b>	99,000, <b>10.8%</b>	177,240	115,000, <b>12.5%</b>	24,600, <b>2.5%</b>	*	*	\$7.05
<b>2008</b>	69,000, <b>7.3%</b>	167,560	98,000, <b>10.3%</b>	17,751, <b>1.7%</b>	9.7%	46,950	\$8.60
<b>2009</b>	68,000, <b>7.1%</b>	161,240	99,000, <b>10.3%</b>	18,878, <b>1.84%</b>	8.2%	42,530	\$9.25
<b>2010</b>	63,000, <b>6.4%</b>	160,150	99,000, <b>10.1%</b>	22,662, <b>2.2%</b>	9.2%	46,820	\$9.25
<b>2011</b>	52,000, <b>5.3%</b>	160,640	97,000, <b>9.8%</b>	25,433, <b>2.4%</b>	11.8%	48,370	\$9.50
<b>2012</b>	61,000, <b>6%</b>	161,290	107,000, <b>10.6%</b>	24,621, <b>2.3%</b>	12.5%	47,620	\$10.00
<b>2013</b>	*	159,890	*	22,465, <b>2.06%</b>	*	48,090	\$10.00
<b>2014</b>	*	160,230	*	26,820, <b>2.4%</b>	*	50,160	\$10.20
<b>2015</b>	*	*	*	26,727 <b>2.4%</b>	*	47,164	\$10.50
<b>2016</b> ****		*		31,395, <b>2.7%</b>	*	*	\$10.72

<sup>†</sup> The LICO, LIM and MBM rates in this chart should be compared vertically to understand trends in poverty from year-to-year. As there is no official low-income threshold, and data is calculated differently based on a variety of factors, these rates are not comparable horizontally.

\* Data not available.

\*\* "Social Assistance" refers to the total number of people assisted by all Social Assistance programs in the province. The Social Assistance rates do not include individuals receiving support who are also living on a First Nations Reserve. This lowers the rates significantly.<sup>17</sup>

\*\*\* The SPRS uses Market Basket Measure as its statistical indicator of poverty in the province.

\*\*\*\*Saskatchewan implemented its first poverty reduction strategy in 2016.

### Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

**Human Rights:** The Saskatchewan Government does not directly reference international human rights obligations. However, the Saskatchewan Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction does acknowledge "promoting the rights and dignity of all people" as a foundational principle in tackling poverty in its anti-poverty strategy.<sup>18</sup>

**Income and Employment Support:** 4.2% of Saskatchewan's population are living on support benefits that are far too low to transition out of poverty.<sup>19</sup> Under the *Saskatchewan Assistance Program (SAP)*, Saskatchewan's most common social assistance program payments for a single employable person are a mere \$8,901 and payments for a person with a disability are only \$11,364.<sup>20</sup> The SAP is currently used by nearly 60% of all social assistance recipients in Saskatchewan.<sup>21</sup>

In 2013, *Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID)* benefits were increased for the second year in a row as part of a four-year plan to increase benefits by \$350 for individuals (and by \$400 for couples) before 2016.<sup>22</sup> This program benefitted 15,545 recipients in 2015<sup>23</sup> and is directed towards individuals with severe and enduring physical and mental disabilities.

As of May 2016, the unemployment rate in Saskatchewan was 5.8%, well below the national unemployment rate of 6.9%.<sup>24</sup> Saskatchewan's minimum wage is currently \$10.72 per hour.<sup>25</sup>

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has concluded that a living wage in Regina is \$16.46 per hour. CCPA notes that at least 20% of Regina families are currently living below a living wage and are struggling to make ends meet.<sup>26</sup>

**Housing:** Saskatchewan's *Plan for Growth*, a strategy for the economic development of the province launched in 2012, establishes the province's goals for 2020, including investing \$344 million to add 12,600 new affordable housing units to the province.<sup>27</sup> Most of these funds appear to privilege private home ownership over home rental. In August 2014, the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation extended their bilateral *Investment in Affordable Housing Agreement (IAH)* until 2019.<sup>28</sup> The agreement renewal commits funding towards developing 251 units, which includes new housing for the "hard-to-house" and low-income persons, as well as rent subsidies and repairs/renovations to existing housing.<sup>29</sup>

Under the existing *Affordable Housing Program*, tenants' rent is fixed and set in relation to market rental rates.<sup>30</sup> Recently, the Minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation announced that *Affordable Housing Program* units in cities across the province are transitioning to the *Social Housing Program*.<sup>31</sup> This change is expected to eliminate at least 20% of current tenants from the program, pushing them into the private market with little rental control or regulation.<sup>32</sup>

In Regina, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert there are currently 552 households on the waitlist for subsidized housing.<sup>33</sup>

**Education:** In Saskatchewan's *Plan for Growth*, the government sets education goals, including reducing graduation disparities between First Nations and Métis students and their non-Indigenous peers, expanding alternative credentials for high school completion, and increasing supports for at-risk children and youth.<sup>34</sup>

In March 2015, the government made changes to its *Graduate Retention Program (GRP)*, which had provided a refund of up to \$20,000 for students attending in-province universities.<sup>35</sup> The refundable tax credit is now a non-refundable tax credit.<sup>36</sup> Despite the claw-back to mitigate government payment through tax refunds, the 2015-2016 budget did extend the *GRP* eligibility to ten years after graduation instead of seven.<sup>37</sup> To claim the *GRP* tax rebate, an individual must make at least \$36,000 in taxable income while single parents must earn at least \$54,000.<sup>38</sup>

**Early Childhood Education and Care:** Currently, there are an estimated 14,200 licensed childcare spaces in Saskatchewan.<sup>39</sup> Despite a recent increase in childcare availability, Saskatchewan still trails far behind other provinces and territories. In 2013, Saskatchewan remained the province with the lowest share of regulated childcare spaces at 10.5%.<sup>40</sup> Early childhood development and childcare is a key

element of the *SPRS*. The strategy notes that “[t]he lack of adequate, reliable, and affordable child care is a very real barrier for the parents or parent of a family to remain in the workforce or to seek further education or skills training”.<sup>41</sup>

The 2015 budget announced an increase in support for pre-kindergarten to grade 12 enrollment programming with an extension of \$8.29 million. The budget also increased support to childcare institutions by \$2.2 million. This is a welcome relief as the 2014 budget froze spending in both realms. However, the spike in spending is merely covering the larger than normal population growth of the year and lessening the lack of increase from the prior year.

**Healthcare:** The *SPRS* identifies health and food insecurity as a key element of the strategy. In the preamble to the section, the government identifies that “[p]oor nutrition, inadequate, overcrowded or unsafe housing, stress, and unsafe communities are a few of the factors that contribute to long-term health issues”.<sup>42</sup> The strategy specifically mentions two programs geared to improving access to healthcare for low-income individuals as the result of partnerships with health regions and community based organizations. This includes the Saskatoon Health Bus – a mobile primary healthcare bus that services Saskatoon’s core neighborhoods – and the Meadow Primary Health Care Clinic in Regina, a program designed to “attach” clients from the inner city to health providers.

In 2014, the Saskatchewan Government officially endorsed the *Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan*.<sup>43</sup> The Inter-Ministerial Action Plan outlines 16 recommendations to create meaningful change for people awaiting mental health and addiction services<sup>44</sup> and are expected to enhance access and capacity, focusing on prevention and early intervention and partnership with Indigenous peoples.<sup>45</sup>

## Views From Outside the Saskatchewan Government

Recent announcements by the provincial government have met significant critique from individuals living in poverty. For example, in August 2016 the province announced cutbacks for *SAID*, social assistance, and the shelter allowance that will drastically affect an estimated 2,700 people living with disabilities. For example, as reported in a CTV news article, one recipient estimated that he will be living off \$150 a month due to these cuts.<sup>46</sup>

The Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry (RAPM) is a group that works with individuals and groups to achieve social justice through advocacy and education has voiced concerns that provisions in the provincial budget tabled in June 2016 will have a detrimental impact on those living in poverty. As Peter Gilmer of the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry described in a media interview, these cuts are viewed by the group “a definite attempt at cost-saving on the backs of the most vulnerable people in the province”.<sup>47</sup> The group has also raised concerns that the *SPRS* introduced by the government is neither based in human rights or has legislation to implement the strategy. As noted by Gilmer, the group expected “an enhancement and improvement of benefits for income security programs” after the release of the strategy, but instead they’ve “spent the last four months fighting cuts”.<sup>48</sup> The government met additional critique, when, in February 2016, Canadian Plasma

Resource opened a for-profit plasma collection service. This was instantly met by concern as it targets low-income Canadians to donate blood for a mere \$25 reimbursement. Plasma is unlike blood because it can be donated much more often. In similar plasma banks in the United States, low-income donors are often reported to donate far more often than is medically recommended (up to four times a month) in order to receive these small amounts of compensation.<sup>49</sup>

## THE BOTTOM LINE

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Poverty remains a significant problem in Saskatchewan, with rates – particularly for Indigenous children – significantly higher than the national average. There has been some recent progress on the alleviation of poverty. For example, the release of a provincial anti-poverty strategy is a major step forward for the province. However, recent retrogressive steps by the provincial government, in particular the cuts to the shelter allowance under *SAID*, raises concerns about how serious the province is about relieving poverty.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION



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