

# Submission for a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy

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Canada Without Poverty  
June 30, 2017



CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY  
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

*Poverty is a violation of human rights.*

“While people living in extreme poverty may remain largely invisible to policymakers, a human rights approach facilitates their visibility because it requires that people are given a voice.”<sup>1</sup>

- *Former UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, Maria Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona*

## I. CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY

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Founded in 1971 under our former name, the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO), Canada Without Poverty (CWP) has represented low-income populations in Canada for over 45 years. Many of CWP’s members are living in poverty and our Board of Directors is comprised of people with direct, personal experience of poverty, both past and present.

CWP has made written and oral submissions to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA Committee) with a detailed background on a human rights approach to the CPRS (see *Appendix A*). CWP is also the co-lead in the Dignity for All campaign, an initiative that has produced a model national anti-poverty plan with the collaboration of hundreds of other organizations and individuals (see *Appendix B*).

In this submission, CWP demonstrates a key feature of a human rights approach – the inclusion of first voices who have experienced poverty and their representative organizations.

## II. A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO ENDING POVERTY

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**4.9 million people in Canada are living in poverty, thereby experiencing a violation of their right to an adequate standard of living.<sup>2</sup>**

**At least 235,000 people are experiencing homelessness, a direct violation of their right to housing.<sup>3</sup>**

**4 million people are food insecure, thereby experiencing a violation of their right to food.<sup>4</sup>**

Poverty is a violation of Canada’s international human rights legal obligations under at least six treaties ratified by Canada. And yet, 1 in 7 individuals in Canada are struggling to make ends meet.<sup>5</sup> For a country with the 10th highest Gross Domestic Product in the world,<sup>6</sup> this is unacceptable.

It is critical the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy (CPRS) incorporate a human rights approach, one which is holistic and acknowledges that poverty is not the result of the personal failures of individuals, but rather a failure of the government to implement human rights obligations.

Canada has been specifically instructed by United Nations authorities to base this strategy in human rights. For example:

- Following recommendations in previous years, the **UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** recommended in 2016 that: “the State party [Canada], in collaboration with provinces, territories and indigenous peoples and consultation with civil society organizations, implement a human rights-based national anti-poverty strategy, which includes measurable goals and timelines, as well as independent monitoring mechanisms”<sup>7</sup>
- The **UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women** recommended in 2016 that Canada: “[e]nsure that the National Poverty Reduction Strategy and the National Housing Strategy protect the rights of all women, with a focus on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, by integrating a human rights and gender-based approach”<sup>8</sup>
- The **UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** tied Canada’s human rights obligations to the rights of persons experiencing discrimination. In 2017, it recommended that Canada: “[e]nsure that the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy addresses multiple discrimination and poverty among women with disabilities, indigenous persons with disabilities and families with children with disabilities”<sup>9</sup>

### The Value Added of a Human Rights Approach

As the former Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Maria Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, stated: “[w]hat is needed, therefore, is human rights-based change that directly addresses the long-term structural barriers to equality and sets the foundations for a sustainable, socially inclusive society.”<sup>10</sup> A human rights approach directly links policies, laws, and programs with the aim of ending poverty under a framework based in Canada’s international responsibilities, including our obligations under the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which Canada has signed onto. The very first goal of the SDGs is to end poverty; a human rights framework will make this possible.

A fundamental aspect of the human rights approach is the direct involvement of people with lived experience of poverty. People who have firsthand experiences of homelessness, food insecurity, and poverty will be invaluable resources for the CPRS – working collaboratively with them from the beginning ensures that the Strategy will have a real effect. As the Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights details in *Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies*: “[the human rights approach] emphasizes the importance of ensuring the active and informed participation by the poor in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies.”<sup>11</sup>

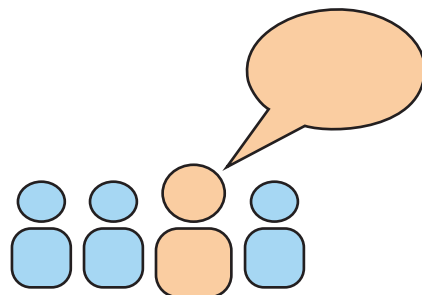
“A human rights approach respects the dignity and autonomy of persons living in poverty and empowers them to meaningfully and effectively participate in public life, including in the design of public policy, and to hold duty bearers accountable.”<sup>12</sup>

- *Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2012*

### III. WHAT WE HEARD

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In order to hear directly from those experiencing poverty, CWP initiated a project entitled This Is Poverty, where we asked those with lived experience of poverty to film short videos or draft a written description of their recommendations to the federal government. The responses we received are powerful, and can be viewed on our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/ThisIsPovertyCanada](http://www.facebook.com/ThisIsPovertyCanada).



## This is what we heard

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### 1. The cost of poverty is profound. For many, it is a matter of life and death.

"Working 'normal jobs' (fast-food, etc) was difficult and I was struggling to pay for my tuition, law school applications, and living expenses, so I turned to sex work to make ends meet. I was literally putting my life at risk every time I would go to work. 'Normal jobs' are inaccessible because of my mental health issues, sex work was one of the best options for me to survive."

– Leila, Ottawa, Ontario

"Every community across Canada has poverty, so we have shortages of housing, we have shortages of safety networks. So with me, I've seen it, I've lived on the street... I froze up in 2012, I froze up part of my brain, and I ended up with epilepsy, and that's what I have for the rest of my life from living on the street."

– Jack, Whitehorse, Yukon

"A lot of my story has to do with being homeless in the winter, which is a struggle."

– James, Whitehorse, Yukon

"When children are being starved to death in some communities in Canada, that's not only a health issue but a human rights issue."

– Amber, Calgary, Alberta

### 2. Poverty is more than just a lack of income. It is a degrading experience that limits choices and opportunities.

"For those of us living below the poverty line, our human rights are held over us, externalized, and structured as unobtainable or as something we might earn over time if we choose to live a different way. The incongruity in this response to poverty is that it is so often our lack of choice that keeps us stuck in the first place."

– Kate, Whitehorse, Yukon

"I know poverty can be simply a lack of food. But it's something more than that too. It's a sense of determining my worth, my place, my relative place to others. Poverty is about where I belong and if I belong. Poverty isn't something we can define strictly with dollars, but we know when the dollars aren't there, it's definitely poverty...Poverty is not something other, poverty is not bad choices."

– Laura, Hamilton, Ontario

"In a country that purports to value equality and human dignity, no one should have to endure the stress, isolation and humiliation of poverty. People should not have to work twice as hard to get what others have because of their socio-economic status. What is poverty? It is stress, isolation and poor health; it is unacceptable."

– Leila, Ottawa, Ontario

"Poverty has impacted my life by having to give up my son to my parents for custody, having to live off the streets, to struggle to get into affordable housing and deal with a system that degrades you as a human being."

– Amber, Calgary, Alberta

"When living in poverty, you lose opportunities for sure. It's amazing to me when people say that Canada is a land of opportunities, but the reality is that you need a way to access those opportunities."

– Wayne, Halifax, Nova Scotia

"When you are in a situation of poverty the thing you lack most is choice, so you have to make the most of whatever limited choices you have. Sometimes, you manage to get lucky. But you are always confronted with the fact that you have no ability to make your own path."

- Derek, Calgary, Alberta

"I still don't feel like I have the proper autonomy that I should have as a human, and my economic choices are greatly restricted."

– Nigel, Calgary, Alberta

"Poverty has a way of impressing upon a person their identity. So that when one comes to define themselves as poor, all the negative images associated with being poor are woven together with who you are. A person who is poor, especially in long-term poverty, most likely see themselves through a lens of negativity. The lens is bleak, without life, without hope."

– Harriett, Montreal, Québec

### **3. To address misconceptions about poverty, the government must directly engage those with lived experience.**

"But we still need the more recent experiences of people who are currently in poverty. And in the subject of housing, we need to discuss the homelessness aspect, because we are the most ignored group of people in society, and at some point we kinda have to stop being ignored."

– Nigel, Calgary, Alberta

“It often comes down to the way we hold meetings and consultations. If you’re holding a meeting about poverty measures or just poverty generally – look around the table. If there’s no one at the table living in poverty, then you need to stop that meeting right there and find someone who lives in poverty to participate in that meeting.”

– Wayne, Halifax, Nova Scotia

“People with lived experience of poverty can tell you how they got there, and what will best be needed to get them back on track again. The voice of lived experience will tell you that sometimes success does not look the same as what you expect in your life. For example, the outcomes for persons with disabilities, like myself, may not look the same as everyone else’s. Sometimes I may need more accommodation. But it’s for me to determine. When we don’t include the voices of lived experience of poverty at decision making tables, we tend to get it wrong.”

– Laura, Hamilton, Ontario

“They [the government] need to come to the people at the poverty level. They need to come and see us at the poverty level. Not the poverty people come to you. You’re not going to learn that way.”

– Jack, Whitehorse, Yukon

“My voice matters because I wasn’t born in poverty, but I learned a lot from I guess middle-class values about poverty. And then when I became impoverished, I internalized that – so I was dumb and lazy and all these things. Only I’m not...I don’t think anyone can tell my story properly. So I need to tell it. And I also think I do understand people not in poverty and what some of their view points are. So I believe I can talk to them and have dialogue with them and ask them to question their assumptions.”

– Tracy Ray, Calgary, Alberta

“I don’t believe people in the middle-class society or the wealthier community really believes there is poverty in Canada. They believe their government system works. It works well. And that the charities that society has created does well for people who live in poverty. And that’s an illusion that needs to be broken for them.”

– Amber, Calgary, Alberta

#### **4. Poverty is intergenerational and intersectional. It violates people’s human rights based on different identities.**

“I started work right out of high school and had a relatively middle-class lifestyle for the first twenty-five years of my adult life. Later, I developed vision loss. Due to this disability I found myself living in poverty. I bounced around a bit during this time and ended up homeless. For me this is the nitty-gritty of what poverty is. It means survival and working through questions like: what am I going to do for a meal?”

– Wayne, Halifax, Nova Scotia

“I lost a lot of my supports, a lot of my family supports, a lot of my housing, rent was going up, and I ended up having to live on the streets. Being on the streets for

an extended period of time, that led to a nervous breakdown, which cost me my job, which then kept me on the streets longer.”

– Nigel, Calgary, Alberta

“There’s a lot to the story, obviously. [I have been living] on and off the streets since I was 14. Poverty has affected my life, my parents’ life, grandparents and great-grandparents.”

– James, Whitehorse, Yukon

## **5. A human rights approach is critical to ensuring that people are valued as human beings.**

“We are human beings, we’re a tight family.”

– Jack, Whitehorse, Yukon

“They [governments] need to see poverty as a human rights issue. That’s the most important thing. As much as they will sign a Covenant agreeing with it, they need to make laws in place so it’s not continuing.”

– Amber, Calgary, Alberta

“Yes, it [poverty] definitely is [a violation of human rights]. Because as I’ve said before, they kinda know that they’re doing it and they keep on doing it.”

– James, Whitehorse, Yukon

“True income security ensures an adequate standard of living for everyone. It helps supplement social housing. It ensures people have access to good, nutritious food. It creates a sense of autonomy in decision-making skills. Something we all want is to make choices in our lives.”

– Laura, Hamilton, Ontario

“Something shifted in me several years ago when I worked with a young woman who was more vulnerable to daily trauma than anyone I had ever met. The system in which she revolved and the manner in which her family and community had given up on her left me reeling. She was understandably resigned and beyond hurt. I can’t even remember how it came up in conversation one day but we started to talk about human rights. One conversation led to another and we weren’t just talking about human rights broadly, we were talking about her human rights. Her body language changed, the expression on her face shifted and there was no longer a tremble in her voice. Being given the language and tools to exercise our own rights is absolutely transformational. It was for this young woman and it was for me.”

– Kate, Whitehorse, Yukon

“The government needs to care. They need to really, really care. Stop thinking of poverty as an economic issue, it’s a human issue. If you care about human beings, you will care about their well-being.”

– Tracy Ray, Calgary, Alberta

“Homelessness is a culture, it is a cultural identity, while we have the rights – or we should have the right to adequate housing, which is a right that’s being

violated to 3,500 homeless people in Calgary, 10,000 in the province, 300,000 Canada-wide, 3,000 veterans. I think we need to recognize that we have become our own culture.”

– Nigel, Calgary, Alberta

## IV. CONCLUSION

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To implement this human rights approach, the CPRS must incorporate eight key components. These have been detailed in CWP’s brief to the HUMA Committee (see *Appendix A*). The Strategy must:

- **Explicitly reference human rights;**
- **Develop measurement tools to assess the impact of the Strategy;**
- **Ensure human rights training for all those involved with the Strategy;**
- **Include those experiencing poverty in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Strategy;**
- **Set human rights goals and timelines;**
- **Make the Strategy a budget priority;**
- **Monitor and report on progress; and**
- **Create a space to claim rights.**

The federal government is embarking on a challenging task, but a human rights approach will be integral to the long-term success of the CPRS.

We would be pleased to advise the *Minister of Families, Children and Social Development*, as well as other Ministers about the importance of Canada’s international human rights obligations and how a human rights framework can be applied to this critical strategy.



## ENDNOTES

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**BRIEF TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES  
Study of Poverty Reduction Strategies**

**November 15, 2016**

Canada Without Poverty (CWP) submits this brief to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA Committee) as follow up to our presentation on November 1, 2016.

Please accept this document as a written response to questions raised by members about the elements of a human rights approach to poverty, which we recommend be the framework of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy. CWP would be pleased to answer any further questions from the HUMA Committee on the implementation of Canada's international human rights obligations and how these apply to poverty reduction strategies.

**A Human Rights Framework for the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy**

Human rights must be at the core of a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy. The value of a rights-based approach is that it connects individual policies, laws, and programs under an overarching framework based in Canada's legal international obligations.

A national anti-poverty strategy must not exist in a silo outside of other programs, laws, and policies. Concretely, a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy must relate to the National Housing Strategy, National Early Learning and Childcare Framework, initiatives related to income support programs (i.e. the Canada Child Benefit), and many other policies, programs, and laws. The *Dignity for All National Anti-Poverty Plan*<sup>1</sup> provided to the HUMA Committee considers how these policies can fit together.

A rights-based approach requires coordination among ministries. While the Ministry of Families, Children and Social Development has an integral role to play, other ministries must also be involved in the creation and implementation of the strategy. For example, the Ministry on the Status of Women, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, and Ministry of Finance should all be engaged in a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The following are elements of a human rights approach that would form the basis of a poverty reduction strategy:

**1) Explicitly Reference Human Rights**

A Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy must explicitly reference human rights and international human rights obligations. Practically, this means specifically naming obligations

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<sup>1</sup> Dignity for All, "Dignity for All: A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada", Available here: [http://www.dignityforall.ca/sites/default/files/docs/DignityForAll\\_Report-English-FINAL.pdf](http://www.dignityforall.ca/sites/default/files/docs/DignityForAll_Report-English-FINAL.pdf).

under particular UN treaties, concluding observations stemming from UN committees, or general comments that speak to the right to an adequate standard of living and related rights for people in poverty.

**By naming these rights explicitly in a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, the rights-based approach can be concretized.** It further allows rights claimants to understand how rights are accessible to them and opens avenues to access to justice as well as accountability by the government.

## **2) Develop measurement tools to assess the impact of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy**

Along with quantitative data, such as point-in-time counts on homelessness, online questionnaires, or shelter surveys, it is important to acquire a qualitative understanding of the needs and circumstances of people in poverty based on their experiences. This can be captured through oral testimony, photographs, videos, or interviews with frontline workers at services including shelters, food banks, and income support programs.

Critical to this process will be to disaggregate, or break down, data to ensure that information gathered on marginalized groups, such as Indigenous persons, racialized persons, and individuals who identify as LGBTQ2S can be considered.

## **3) Ensure Human Rights Training for those involved with the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy**

It is important to ensure that everyone involved in the creation of a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy (including policy makers and those conducting consultations) understands Canada's obligations with respect to the right to adequate standard of living, right to housing, right to food, right to life, and other related human rights.

## **4) Include those experiencing poverty in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Strategy**

A human rights approach is not just about what goes into the strategy, it's also about *how* the strategy is developed. Those experiencing poverty must be meaningfully engaged at every step of the process. **This may be the single most critical aspect to a successful strategy.**

As stated by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Maria Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, "[t]hrough meaningful and effective participation, people can exercise their agency, autonomy and self-determination... [c]onceived as a right, participation is a means of challenging forms of domination that restrict people's agency and self-determination. It gives people living in poverty power over decisions that affect their lives,

transforming power structures in society and creating a greater and more widely shared enjoyment of human rights”<sup>2</sup>.

**By removing barriers to participation, and meaningfully consulting with people experiencing poverty, Canada can take steps towards the fulfillment of our legal obligations.**

### **5) Set Human Rights Goals and Timelines**

Human rights standards recognize ‘**progressive realization**’ meaning that while some aspects of a plan may take time to implement (for example: building new housing to address housing insecurity), **governments still have immediate obligations; for example, eliminating discrimination in the administration of programs and policies currently in place as well as repealing local laws that criminalize or stigmatize homeless individuals.** This is an important action-item. It also ensures there are no “regressive” steps – movements backwards that deprive people of rights they previously enjoyed.

During this process, consideration should be given to at-risk and disadvantaged groups. Targeted measures should also be undertaken to eliminate discrimination and provide access to processes which allow for effective remedies to rights violations.

### **6) Make the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy a budget priority**

Without proper resources, it becomes impossible for a poverty reduction strategy to achieve its goals. A human rights approach requires governments to take positive action and set aside adequate resources in their budgets for preventing and addressing poverty.

“**Maximum Available Resources**” means that governments must not ignore human rights obligations in favour of “budget constraints”. This is especially true for wealthy countries such as Canada.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which recently reviewed Canada’s rights record in February of 2016, commented on Canada’s spending in relation to our maximum available resources in paragraph 10 of the Concluding Observations: “The Committee recommends that the State party increase national spending to guarantee Covenant rights so as to achieve the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights. The Committee urges the State party to adopt and implement a tax policy that is adequate and socially equitable and improves tax collection, so as to ensure the mobilization of resources sufficient for implementing economic, social and cultural rights, with special attention paid to disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona”, Available here: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:G7YpDYn7OuoJ:docbox.un.org/DocBox/docbox.nsf/GetFile%3FOpenAgent%26DS%3DA/HRC/23/36%26Lang%3DE%26Type%3DDOC+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca>.

<sup>3</sup> CESCR Concluding Observations, 2016, available here: [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CESCR/Shared%20Documents/CAN/E\\_C-12\\_CAN\\_CO\\_6\\_23228\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CESCR/Shared%20Documents/CAN/E_C-12_CAN_CO_6_23228_E.pdf).

## 7) Monitor and Report on Progress

Accountability is essential for the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy to be successful. The rights of those experiencing poverty can only be realized if they have a way to hold governments and other key actors responsible for the effective implementation of any strategy. The federal government also has an important leadership role in ensuring that strategies on the subnational level are responsive to human rights obligations. Practically, this means that reporting mechanisms must be coordinated between levels of government to be robust, transparent, and public.

Regularly reporting on goals and benchmarks, demonstrating funding capacity in annual budgets, and offering an open and transparent process, helps to ensure progress is made. Reporting should reflect both quantitative and qualitative data and measurements.

## 8) Create Spaces to Claim Rights

A Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy must create and implement an open, accessible, and responsive complaints procedure and a space to accept information relevant to the human rights of those experiencing poverty.

We recommend that the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development explore mechanisms through which this documentation can be presented to officials and effective remedies provided. Data can also be shared with human rights commissions; court cases; ombudsperson responses; social protests; legislative hearings; and media to document whether those who are living in poverty are able to claim their rights and to assess the effectiveness of responses to violations of rights.

## 9) The Implementation of International Human Rights Obligations

Responsibilities to protect and implement human rights are best understood when considering the principles that states agree to follow. **Respect, Protect, and Fulfill** speak to the overarching responsibilities of states to ensure rights are realized, while **Recognize, Institutionalize, and Accountability**, provide guidance on *how to implement* rights.

RESPECT RIGHTS: a state cannot interfere with existing rights and must refrain from acting in a way that would restrict or infringe upon a right.	RECOGNIZE RIGHTS: states must take steps to recognize rights in laws and policies.
PROTECT RIGHTS: a state must intervene when a third party interferes with an individual's rights.	INSTITUTIONALIZE RIGHTS: ensure institutions that monitor and implement human rights include economic and social rights.

FULFILL RIGHTS: a state must take positive steps to ensure all human rights are fulfilled.	ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RIGHTS: ensure avenues for redress if violations occur.
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**10) The Role of Sub-National Governments**

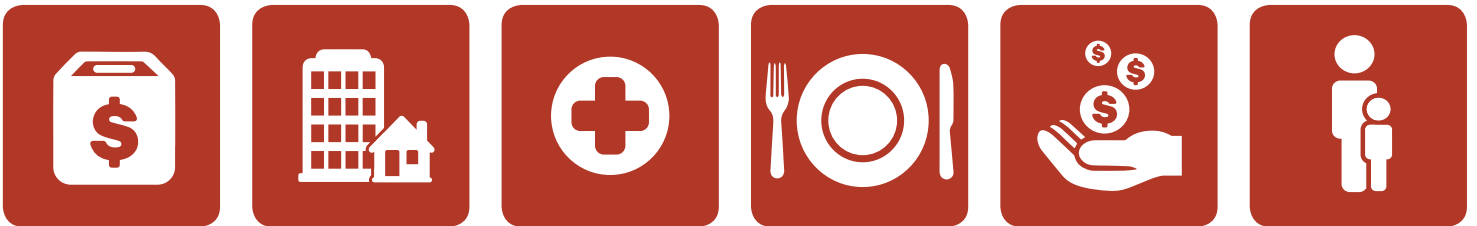
All levels of government (federal, provincial, territorial, and regional) are responsible for the implementation of rights related to poverty. Practically, this means that all laws, policies, and programs must be considered under a human rights framework. For example, when a city is considering zoning bylaws which may prevent the construction of affordable housing in a community with severe housing needs, it must prioritize its human rights obligations.

The federal government has a particularly important role in the implementation of human rights. **The federal government can demonstrate leadership on human rights by ensuring strong monitoring and accountability measures for the strategy.**

Additionally, while subnational governments may be working directly with individuals, **it is the federal government that can provide adequate financial resources.** For example, we support the position presented by other groups in this study that the federal government immediately increase the Canada Social Transfer to provinces and territories; earmark sufficient funds specifically for social assistance; and designate that transfer payments be conditional on provinces and territories setting their social assistance rates at levels that recognize human rights obligations.



# dignity for all



A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada

“A human rights approach respects the dignity and autonomy of persons living in poverty and empowers them to meaningfully and effectively participate in public life, including in the design of public policy, and to hold duty bearers accountable.”

GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS, ADOPTED BY THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL IN 2012

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## Acknowledgements

The Dignity for All Campaign co-leads, Canada Without Poverty and Citizens for Public Justice, would like to acknowledge those who have played an especially important role in developing this national anti-poverty plan.

The Dignity for All Campaign expresses our profound gratitude to the Sisters of Service for their years of commitment to ending poverty in this country and especially for their financial support for the campaign. Many other individuals and groups have also contributed financially, and for that, we offer our sincere thanks.

Additionally, the Dignity for All Campaign would like give Katherine Scott a standing ovation for wrestling down – in a tight timeframe – four years of meetings, notes, and recommendations into one succinct document. It was no easy task! Bravo!

This plan is truly the result of communities across Canada coming together to form a cohesive strategy to address poverty. Thank you to all of the over 600 organizations, coalitions, faith groups, and unions and the over ten thousand individuals whose time, effort, and resolve for a better Canada has allowed the Dignity for All Campaign to develop agreement on these recommendations – and to ensure that they soon become a reality in this country. We are indeed better together.



# Executive Summary

It's time for a plan to end poverty in Canada. In a country as wealthy as ours, 4.8 million people struggle to make ends meet: to pay their rent, feed their families, and address basic needs.

Despite multiple calls for the development of a national poverty plan by the United Nations, the Senate, and a House of Commons Standing Committee, Canada has not stepped up to the plate. This means that there is no strategy in place at the national level to address the needs of **one in seven** people in Canada who live in poverty.

This document presents the key planks of an anti-poverty plan that, if implemented, will make a meaningful difference in the lives of low-income Canadians, achieving greater prosperity and security for all.

The plan is based on an understanding that poverty is a violation of Canada's human rights obligations. It provides a succinct overview of what this means for governments formulating policy and programs aimed at addressing poverty.

The plan asserts that poverty must be addressed in Canada through focussing on six different realms:

- income security
- housing and homelessness
- health
- food security
- early childhood education and care, and
- jobs and employment

The policy recommendations in this anti-poverty plan were developed through an extensive process of community engagement by the Dignity for All

campaign, bringing together leading academics and experts from social policy organizations, provincial and territorial anti-poverty movements, national associations, faith-based groups, unions, and front-line service agencies. With limited resources, the campaign held six policy summits, where participants developed specific recommendations in each of these areas. The recommendations can be found within this report; just some are previewed below:



## Income security

Canada's income security system is now one of the weakest among developed countries. Those in receipt of social assistance continue to subsist on benefits that place them well below any poverty measure used in Canada.

Dignity for All recommends that Canada:

- Reform income assistance programs, such as Employment Insurance, to better reflect labour market realities and other gaps in the system.
- Increase the National Child Benefit to \$5,600 annually for eligible families (and index it to the cost of living).



## Housing and homelessness

While there are at least 250,000 homeless persons in Canada, most shelters are at maximum capacity.

Dignity for All recommends that Canada:

- Develop and implement a coordinate National Housing Strategy based in human rights.
- Increase funding by no less than \$2 billion per year in new money to implement housing strategies that meet the strategy targets.



## Health

Socio-economic disparities account for 20% of total annual health care spending (expected to have exceeded \$211 billion in 2013). Medicare covers only 70% of total health care costs – the rest is covered by private insurance plans and out-of-pocket spending.

Dignity for All recommends that Canada:

- Recognize in the legislation of an anti-poverty plan the social determinants of health, including income, employment, food security, early childhood education and care, and housing.
- Commit to a new ten-year Health Accord including a National Pharmacare Program.



## Food security

Since the 2008-2009 economic recession, food bank usage has increased by 25%, with children and youth now representing over 30% of food bank users. There are far more who do not visit food banks and also experience food insecurity. Among Inuit adults living in Nunavut, the rate of food insecurity is shockingly high at 69% or six times higher than the Canadian national average.

Dignity for All recommends that Canada:

- Develop, in collaboration with all levels of government, food producers, community stakeholders, and food insecure people, a National Right to Food Policy.
- Increase federal investment to address the very high levels of household food insecurity among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in a manner that respects cultural, community, and gender considerations and Aboriginal land sovereignty.



## Early childhood education and care

There are only enough regulated child care spaces for just over 20% of young children, despite the fact that more than 70% of Canadian mothers are in the paid labour force. Regulated child care in Canada is currently characterized by high fees, low staff wages, mediocre quality, and unmet demand.

Dignity for All recommends that Canada:

- Develop a high-quality, universal, publicly-funded and managed early childhood education and care program for children aged 0 to 5 years and for school-aged children up to age 12, to be phased in by 2020.
- Dedicate federal transfers of \$1 billion, \$1.6 billion, and \$2.3 billion over each of the next three years with the ultimate goal of achieving the international benchmark of spending at least 1% of GDP on childhood education and care by 2020.



## Jobs and employment

In the past 20 years, precarious employment, characterized by some degree of insecurity and unpredictability, generally low wages and few benefits, has increased by nearly 50%. Youth and other groups under-represented in the workforce face particular barriers in obtaining secure employment.

Dignity for All recommends that Canada:


- Set national wage standards above the poverty line.
- Provide employment incentives for youth and other groups under-represented in the workforce.

We know government policy can make a difference for those living in poverty. While all levels of government have a role to play in addressing poverty, the federal government, with its policy-making, legislative, taxation, and redistributive powers, has the particular responsibility of providing leadership and promoting reform in key areas that are crucial to the wellbeing of people in Canada. Already every province but one has committed to their own plans; it's time for our federal government to do the same.

Poverty is a complex issue. In order to effectively address it, we need solutions that meet those complexities. We need a coordinated national anti-poverty plan that is consistent with international human rights obligations, is comprehensive in its approach, focuses on those most in need, includes measurable goals, targets, and timelines, includes review and accountability processes, involves communities who will be affected by these strategies, and is integrated with provincial and territorial plans.

While our proposed plan is suggestive of some of the key elements required for a comprehensive anti-poverty plan, it is not exhaustive. We're not expecting the federal government to adopt our proposals in their current form. We offer this plan as a starting point. A solid, considered, informed starting point. In 2015, a federal election year, every political party platform should include the commitment to develop, and then implement, a national anti-poverty plan.

It's past time for our national government to step up and take action. *Dignity for All: A National Anti-Poverty plan for Canada is here.*



# Dignity for All: Campaign for a Poverty-Free Canada

## The Campaign

Dignity for All: the campaign for a poverty-free Canada<sup>1</sup> is a collective initiative, launched in 2009 by Canada Without Poverty<sup>2</sup> and Citizens for Public Justice.<sup>3</sup> The campaign seeks concrete and sustained action by the federal government towards a Canada where everyone can pursue opportunities for achievement and fulfillment, embrace the responsibilities of citizenship and community opportunities, and live with a sense of dignity.

While everyone has a role to play in building this Canada, the federal government, with its particular policy-making, legislative, taxation, and redistributive powers, has the responsibility of providing leadership and promoting reform in key areas under its jurisdiction.

Since Dignity for All's inception, the campaign has worked to build a movement for change, bringing together members of all political parties, persons with lived experiences of poverty, and community practitioners to discuss poverty-related issues and potential solutions.

We have hosted a series of policy summits on housing and homelessness, early childhood education and care, income security, food security, health, and labour and employment – all aimed at developing a comprehensive and effective anti-poverty plan that is founded on the best evidence and represents a consensus on the best strategies for reducing poverty across the country. (Please see Appendix 1 for an overview of the policy summits).

This document represents a summary of this work, bringing together the key planks of a plan that if implemented will make a meaningful difference in the lives of low-income Canadians, achieving greater prosperity and security for all Canadians. The recommendations made are not exhaustive but represent community consensus on six particular policy areas.

Canada has achieved a measure of success in reducing rates of poverty among seniors, the result of important investments in seniors' income security. Some provinces are also making headway in reducing the incidence and depth of poverty, notably in Newfoundland and Labrador and Québec.

Concerted action is needed now on the part of the federal government in concert with others to broaden the scope and make meaningful investments in proven strategies to reduce poverty among people in Canada regardless of where they live or the unique circumstances of their lives.

## The Dignity for All Campaign is aimed at achieving three federal policy goals:



1

Creation of a comprehensive federal plan for poverty eradication that complements the work of other partners, notably the provinces/territories and communities.



2

Introduction and implementation of a federal *Anti-Poverty Act* to eradicate poverty, promote social inclusion, and strengthen social security.



3

Collection and allocation of sufficient federal revenue to provide for social and economic security for all.

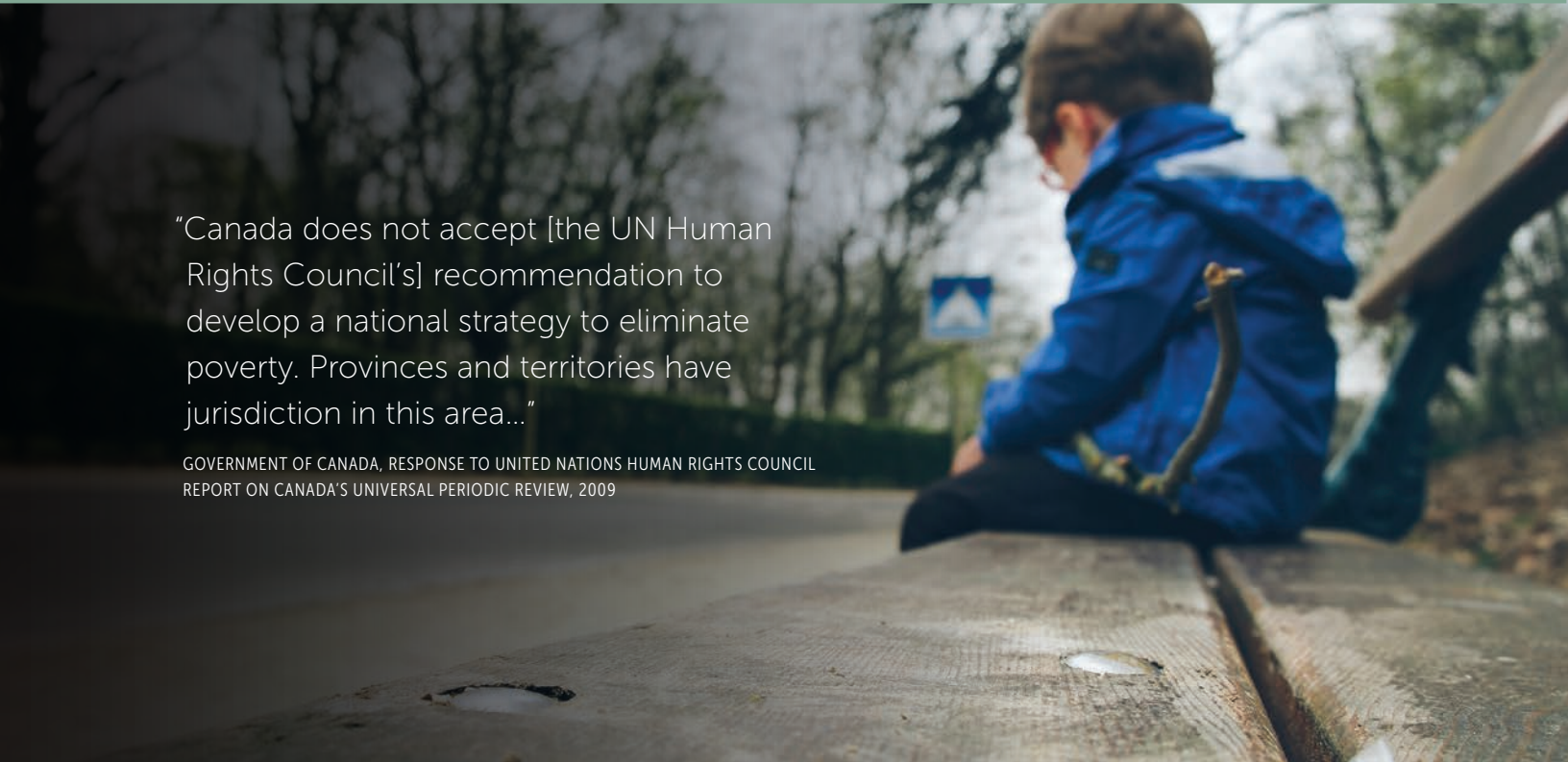
# The Federal Government's Key Role in Poverty Reduction

The task of eliminating poverty requires all levels of government to work collaboratively and in concert alongside other sectors. In this regard, the federal government has a fundamental and unique role to play. As the signatory of international human rights treaties committing Canada to uphold human rights including the right to an adequate standard of living, the federal government itself must meet certain obligations and must show leadership. Moreover, the federal government is uniquely placed to address poverty nationally in light of the role it plays with respect to:

- Income security programs (e.g., Canada Child Tax Benefit, GST Tax Credit, Working Income Tax Benefit, and Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors);<sup>4</sup>
- Programs and services designed to economically assist Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples, newcomers, and persons with disabilities; and
- Federal transfers to the provinces and territories under programs such as the Canada Social Transfer and Affordable Housing Agreements.

The federal government also plays an essential role with respect to revenue, ensuring, for example, the fair and progressive taxation of individuals and businesses. Tax policy is a key component of an effective anti-poverty plan as it is a vehicle through which government can generate sufficient revenues to support vibrant and effective public programs in ways that equitably distribute the costs.

The federal government must link with poverty reduction efforts across all levels of government (while navigating provincial/territorial distinctions) and across the federal government itself, leveraging collective knowledge and action to maximum effect. In a highly decentralized federation such as Canada, achieving success demands strong relationships between governments. This includes meaningful consultation and liaising with provinces and territories.



"Canada does not accept [the UN Human Rights Council's] recommendation to develop a national strategy to eliminate poverty. Provinces and territories have jurisdiction in this area..."

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, RESPONSE TO UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL  
REPORT ON CANADA'S UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW, 2009



# Essential Elements of a Meaningful Plan

Successful anti-poverty strategies must include the following elements:



## Consistency with International Human Rights Obligations

An effective anti-poverty plan must be informed by Canada's international human rights obligations. This includes the obligation to take reasonable steps to effectively address poverty, using the maximum of available resources. It also includes many of the elements described below.



## A Comprehensive Approach

An effective anti-poverty plan must deal with the multiple dimensions and causes of poverty, incorporating a range of strategies and investments targeting family income, the high cost of essentials such as housing and education, and needed community supports and services.



## A Focus on Those Most in Need

An effective plan must address the unique and particular needs and circumstances of groups most vulnerable to poverty (such as youth, single mothers, Inuit, First Nations and Métis peoples, people with disabilities, as well as newcomers and immigrants) and their particular experiences of poverty (such as homelessness or inadequate housing, low-wage precarious employment, and lack of affordable child care).



## Measurable Goals, Targets, and Timelines

An effective anti-poverty plan must have clear and realistic goals, as well as realistic timelines to achieve these goals, using widely accepted measures of progress. The benchmarks for the timelines must be concrete enough, and frequent enough, that a government can be held accountable within its mandate. While the goals are an important part of the plan, other and emerging factors should always be taken into account. Goals and timelines should be legislated.



## Review and Accountability

Accountability mechanisms are key to an effective and credible anti-poverty plan. Transparent and timely mechanisms and indicators are needed to track progress. A detailed implementation plan must be established for the government and individual departments to follow, which is coordinated and monitored by a lead minister or department. The lead minister, in turn, should be required to report annually to Parliament. And individuals must have opportunities to hold their government accountable to a national anti-poverty plan – be it through existing or newly established mechanisms.



## Community Involvement

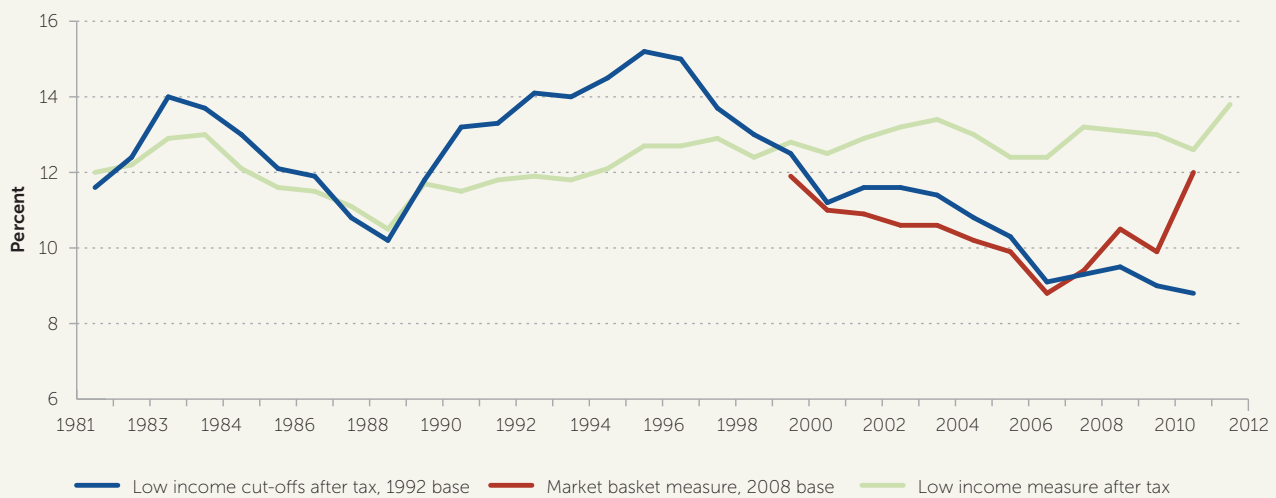
Meaningful and ongoing country-wide consultations and engagement is essential to producing, implementing, and monitoring an effective anti-poverty plan that speaks to the diverse experiences of people living in poverty in Canada. In particular, it will be critical to meaningfully engage First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, as well as other groups at high risk of poverty, including: recent immigrants, single mothers, single senior women, people with disabilities, and people with chronic illness and addictions.



## Integration

Provinces and territories have led the way in introducing poverty reduction plans in Canada over the past decade. A new federal plan should link with existing efforts at the provincial/territorial and community levels, recognizing in particular the unique position of Québec and its approach to social policy within the Canadian context.

**Poverty Rate by Different Measures, 1981-2012**



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 202-0802 – Persons in low income families, annual

## Poverty in Canada: Why We Need a Plan

It is clear. Canada needs an anti-poverty plan – one with measurable goals and timelines and mechanisms for assessing progress – to change the lives of people in Canada on the economic margins.

By any measure, Canada has a high rate of poverty. Even according to the most restrictive measure, almost 3 million people in Canada are poor. Compared to other developed countries, our poverty rate is shocking, especially in light of our wealth and economic stability as a nation: Canada ranks 24th out of 34 OECD countries. Our record on Inuit,

First Nations, and Métis poverty is shameful: one quarter of Aboriginal people live in poverty.<sup>5</sup> Many poor people in Canada are employed in the paid labour force, yet their earnings are not enough to lift their families out of poverty. Others hover on the edge of poverty, only the loss of a job or an illness away from economic hardship.

There is no excuse for poverty in a society as wealthy as ours. The United Nations has repeatedly told the Government of Canada that its poverty levels are unacceptable in light of the country's wealth and that Canada is obliged to do better and must take immediate steps to address poverty, including by adopting a national plan or strategy. Adopting an anti-poverty plan is not only just and fair, it makes sound financial sense. If we commit to a plan, and take reasonable steps in keeping with the country's wealth, the eradication of poverty is within our reach.

## The Cost of Poverty Diminishes Us All

Living in poverty is hard. It requires impossible choices. Pay the rent or pay for medicine? Pay the hydro bill or buy food? The experiences of poverty – hunger and inadequate nutrition, substandard housing, preventable illness and disease, precarious employment, huge levels of family stress and social isolation, feelings of inadequacy, diminished opportunities to develop and learn, and discrimination and stigmatization – exact a heavy toll on individuals and families living on Canada's economic margins.

There is no more telling statistic than the difference in life expectancy between individuals living in poor communities and those living in affluent communities. A Hamilton study found a **21-year difference** in average age at death between neighbourhoods at the top and the bottom of the income scale, an appalling gap in a country that prides itself on universal health care and that has the resources to address poverty.<sup>6</sup>

Poverty has been consistently linked with poorer health, higher health care costs, greater demands on social and community services, more stress on family members, and diminished school success – not to mention huge costs associated with reduced productivity and foregone economic activity. Yet governments claim a lack of sufficient resources to adequately address the problem all the while paying for the damaging consequences of living in poverty.

According to a report by the National Council of Welfare, poverty costs taxpayers more than \$24 billion a year.<sup>7</sup> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that the total annual cost of homelessness to the Canadian economy is \$7.05 billion dollars, including the cost of emergency shelters, social services, health care, and corrections.<sup>8</sup>

It makes much more sense to tackle poverty directly rather than to attempt to address its injurious legacy. For example, ensuring people have access to housing has been shown to be considerably cheaper and much more effective than continuing to pump money into emergency supports such as shelters. Indeed, bringing the income of poor households up to the poverty line – closing the poverty gap – would cost considerably less than the total cost of poverty we now pay.<sup>9</sup>

There is no excuse for poverty in a society as wealthy as ours. The United Nations has repeatedly told the Government of Canada that its poverty levels are unacceptable in light of the country's wealth and that Canada is obliged to do better and must take immediate steps to address poverty, including by adopting a national plan or strategy. Adopting an anti-poverty plan is not only just and fair, it makes sound financial sense. If we commit to a plan, and take reasonable steps in keeping with the country's wealth, the eradication of poverty is within our reach.



# Human Rights Framework

## Overview

Addressing poverty is essential in creating a society where everyone, regardless of their means, background, or ability, can be actively engaged members of their communities. Although poverty is closely associated with charity, poverty is not about charity, it's about human rights. In turn, solving poverty requires a commitment to human dignity and justice and it requires recognition that when people are denied adequate housing, an adequate income, and adequate food their human rights are violated, particularly in a rich nation like Canada.

What distinguishes a human rights approach to addressing poverty from other approaches is the transformative nature of human rights. Human rights transform issues of homelessness, poverty and hunger from being solely about economic deprivation to being about equal citizenship and dignity. A human rights approach understands that socio-economic deprivation occurs in large part because of the de-valuing of the rights of the most vulnerable leading to particular policy and program choices and decisions.

A human rights approach to poverty shifts the conversation. It moves us away from political ideology and political whim and provides more solid ground upon which laws, policies, and programs aimed at ending poverty must be based. The legitimacy of the human rights framework comes from a set of universally internationally recognized norms.

Human rights are a moral yardstick against which we can assess government measures and progress over time and to which we can hold governments accountable.

Using a human rights framework to address poverty in Canada is a legitimate approach in light of the fact that Canada has ratified a number of treaties committing itself to ensuring the most disadvantaged enjoy an adequate standard of living. Though these treaties are not directly enforceable in Canadian courts, it is understood that laws, policies, and programs that fall in areas where governments have international human rights obligations must give effect to those obligations. This means laws, policies and programs related to an adequate standard of living must be informed by Canada's international human rights obligations.

Human rights transform issues of homelessness, poverty and hunger from being solely about economic deprivation to being about equal citizenship and dignity.

## Human Rights Standards

One of the benefits of using a human rights based approach to addressing poverty is that a set of standards has been developed to measure progress and ensure accountability. The same cannot be said for other approaches.

What exactly are these standards and what do they mean for governments in Canada? Does it mean governments have to ensure everyone in Canada is affluent?

Using human rights to address poverty does not mean the government is responsible for ensuring everyone in Canada is affluent. It also does not mean that poverty must be eliminated immediately (with the exception of any poverty related policies or programs that discriminate – those must be addressed urgently). Under international human rights law, it is understood that putting in place the requisite programs and policies to eliminate poverty will take time and therefore that governments must **progressively eliminate poverty** by **taking reasonable steps** in light of their **maximum available resources** and they must refrain from taking **retrogressive measures** – measures that will make people worse off.

The **progressive elimination of poverty** in Canada requires the government of Canada to develop an anti-poverty plan that distinguishes three types of human rights obligations:

- i. **Immediate Obligations** – These apply to all existing programs and policies and include obligations to administer programs without discrimination and meet basic and emergency needs.
- ii. **Short-term Commitments and Targets** – These are obligations to meet agreed upon targets with established timelines – for example, to increase levels of social assistance or minimum wage by a particular percentage or to put in place a new program for community living within a year. Short-term commitments should be concrete and realistic and based on firm government policy. Commitments should be regularly updated.
- iii. **Longer Term Goals** – The central long-term goal should be an expressed commitment by the government to eliminate poverty as a violation of human rights, and not as a matter of policy. This commitment should be incorporated into a national anti-poverty plan, like this one. It should be achieved without unreasonable delay, and should be based on an established timeline that is realistic in light of resources and other challenges.

In order to show that the maximum of available resources are being harnessed to address poverty, governments must demonstrate that human rights priorities are reflected in their budgeting. The obligation to eliminate poverty cannot be deferred simply because of general budgetary constraints.

# The Key Characteristics of the Human Rights Approach

Human rights are most often thought of as lofty goals or principles to strive for, but they can also be understood as practical tools – as a way of doing policy or as a way of governing. We advocate therefore, that an anti-poverty plan include the following human rights characteristics:

- A commitment to non-discrimination and equality in all aspects of the plan from development, substance, and implementation to monitoring, and review. This will help to ensure that the plan is focused on the most disadvantaged groups and will require an analysis of whether the effect of the plan is to ameliorate poverty and its consequences.
  - Meaningful consultation and engagement throughout the development and implementation of the plan with representatives from groups most affected by poverty including, Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples, single mothers, immigrants, refugees and newcomers to Canada, persons with disabilities, and young people.
  - Meaningful consultation with all levels of government (eg: provincial/territorial and municipal) that retain responsibilities with respect to poverty to ensure they have the knowledge, capacity and resources to implement their international human rights obligations.
- Measureable goals, targets, and timelines to assist in ensuring that the plan focuses on addressing concrete problems within a realistic timeframe.
  - Monitoring and review mechanisms to remain transparent and accountable to those for whom the anti-poverty plan is intended to assist, as well as for the general public. Monitoring and review mechanisms should not become an end to themselves; both statistics and real life experiences of beneficiaries will be used to measure results.
  - Access to effective remedies to ensure the rights protected through the anti-poverty plan are meaningful. Human rights are illusory if they cannot be enforced in some manner. There are a variety of mechanisms that can be put in place beyond resorting to courts. For example: parliamentary hearings, human rights tribunals, Ombudsmen, etc.

There are a variety of mechanisms that can be put in place beyond resorting to courts.



Parliamentary Hearings



Human Rights Tribunals



Ombudsmen



## Taking Action: Dignity for All's Anti-Poverty Plan

“For too long we’ve heard that a rising tide lifts all boats – that economic growth benefits everyone and will solve problems like poverty.”<sup>10</sup> Yet in Canada, even after a decade-long run of strong economic growth and low unemployment in the 2000s, poverty remains deep and persistent. The sluggish recovery since the 2008–09 recession has created further barriers as the benefits of economic growth are increasingly concentrated in the hands of just a few.

Public policy choices not based in an appreciation of Canada’s human rights obligations, explain some of this paradox. In recent years there have been a series of policy choices that have been largely retrogressive resulting in the erosion of benefits and protections for the most marginalized, reduced access to Employment Insurance, frozen or reduced social benefits, barriers to adequate, affordable housing for those with few means, or contracted-out work so that thousands of workers earn less than a living wage.

To tackle poverty, particularly in the face of a slow-moving recovery, governments must commit to a policy agenda that focuses on that goal, in keeping with Canada’s human rights obligations. “Only when governments make concrete commitments to reducing poverty — and evaluate their choices through that lens — will we see real improvements.”<sup>11</sup>

There are many factors to consider. Income from employment is fundamental. But it is not enough. It is also necessary to ensure that people have the ability, as Amartya Sen has said, to choose lives that they personally have reason to value.<sup>12</sup> The key building blocks of a comprehensive anti-poverty plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> century include respecting human rights and providing adequate support and resources for people to meet their basic needs while promoting

the active participation of all community members in social, economic, cultural, and political life.

Just as important are strategies that foster innovation and spur the creation of well-paid, stable employment for all working-aged people. Facilitating the growth of “good” employment that is both socially inclusive and highly productive is essential to eliminating poverty.

We also need creative strategies to address the caring needs of families and communities. Families now struggle largely alone, with women bearing the brunt of competing demands – employment, child care, and elder care. The answer lies in acknowledging the unsustainable role women play in caregiving and in the need for new models which embrace the collective character of caregiving and equitably distribute the costs and responsibilities between men and women, and between families, communities, businesses, and governments.

Together these different strategies build on the government of Canada’s central role in the economy and its historic leadership in creating and sustaining a resilient social safety net, in keeping with its obligations under a number of international human rights instruments including, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.

In what follows, we present the programmatic planks of an anti-poverty plan for Canada developed at six different policy summits, organized around six thematic areas. They are:



Income Security



Housing and Homelessness



Health



Food Security



Jobs and Employment



Early Childhood Education and Care

A paper like this can only be suggestive of some of the elements that are required for a comprehensive anti-poverty plan. In order to get there, a wide-ranging discussion is needed to forge a new, shared understanding of what we can achieve together.

Action items are presented under each thematic area. These recommendations were developed through an extensive process of community engagement, bringing together leading subject matter experts with representatives from various organizations, including social policy organizations, provincial and territorial anti-poverty movements, national associations, faith-based groups, and front-line service agencies.

For a full list of policy recommendations prepared through the policy summit process and a description of the process, please see [www.dignityforall.ca](http://www.dignityforall.ca)



“Canadian governments have stopped trying to keep up with rising inequality... Action and inaction – policy change and policy shift – are at the heart of growing inequality in Canada.”

KEITH BANTING AND JOHN MYLES, *INEQUALITY AND THE FADING OF REDISTRIBUTIVE POLITICS*, 2013, P. 33



## Income Security (April 2012)

Canadian families on average enjoy a higher standard of living today than they did thirty years ago. Senior families, in particular, have made important gains in their after-tax incomes, even as the number of seniors has grown.

And yet, approximately 4.8 million people in Canada still live in poverty.<sup>13</sup> Far too many for a wealthy nation like Canada. The general poverty rate only tells part of the story. Many of today's poor are those who have jobs and increasingly are singles between the ages of 18 and 64. What's more, the poor are very poor, with incomes well below the poverty line.<sup>14</sup>

A survey of poverty indicators reveals that in fact two "recoveries" from the 2008-2009 recession are underway.<sup>15</sup> For those on the "lucky" side, recovery has meant maintaining employment or finding a new job at the same wage level as the old job. For those on the unlucky side, however, recovery is either precarious or non-existent. They are still unemployed or precariously employed, with low wages, facing rising costs of living. They are living on poverty-level incomes – with all the attendant stresses and struggles that living in poverty involves.

While Canada's system of income transfer programs and income taxes has helped to offset the growing gap in income and opportunity, it is not nearly as effective as it once was. The tax-benefit system offsets less than 40% of market inequality, compared to more than 70% prior to the mid-1990s.<sup>16</sup>

This downward trend in redistribution has been driven by policy choices which have reduced the role of means-tested<sup>17</sup> transfers such as social assistance and through deep cuts to benefit levels and tighter eligibility rules (e.g., a new definition of "suitable employment" under Employment Insurance regulations). As a result, those in receipt of social assistance continue to subsist on benefits that see marginal, if any, increases and that

place them well below any poverty measure used in Canada. Social assistance recipients are required to live a life replete with impossible choices: pay the rent or pay for food? Pay the heating bill or pay the phone bill?

Changes made by governments to income tax rates and the erosion of spending on social programs have also played a role in increasing poverty in Canada. Total tax revenues have fallen from 36% to 31% of GDP since the mid-1990s, matched by an equivalent decline in spending on social programs.<sup>18</sup> Tax cuts in Canada have been among the largest in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Canada's income security system is now one of the weakest among developed countries, ranking 25 out of 30 countries studied.<sup>19</sup>

Programs such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and the two main pillars to the federal government's retirement income programs – Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) – have been working harder to fill the gaps left by the shortfall in employment earnings and private savings.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the decline in old-age poverty rates has slowed and reversed since the 2008-09 recession.<sup>21</sup> However, the federal government's decision, announced in Budget 2012, to raise the eligibility age for OAS/GIS from 65 to 67 will mean that many poor Canadians approaching retirement (including those living on social assistance) will have to wait longer before accessing seniors benefits and related programs.<sup>22</sup> And the introduction of programs such as the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) have actually diverted significant resources away from low-income families to upper-income families.<sup>23</sup>

The "working poor" find themselves in particular difficulty due to precarious employment including inadequate pay and limited advancement opportunities.<sup>24</sup> For instance, dramatic changes to the



Social assistance recipients are required to live a life replete with impossible choices: pay the rent or pay for food? Pay the heating bill or pay the phone bill?

unemployment insurance program in 1996 – raising the entrance requirements and reducing the duration of benefits – have had the effect of driving down the numbers served. This despite the fact that Employment Insurance (EI) is funded by individual workers and employers, and not by government.<sup>25</sup>

The current system does not reflect labour market realities as it is premised on full-time employment under one employer with a 35-hour work week, ignoring the dramatic increase in other forms of labour. "Erratic and part time hours disadvantage workers, leaving many with insufficient hours to qualify for EI or reducing their weeks of entitlement if they do qualify."<sup>26</sup> The barriers posed by the current EI system are felt most keenly by those already vulnerable to poverty, in particular: women, immigrants, and young people.<sup>27</sup> At the height of the recession, between 2009 and 2011, EI beneficiaries actually decreased to 40% even though unemployment continued to rise.<sup>28</sup>

New approaches to income security programming are necessary to protect Canadians against loss of income due to unemployment, illness, disability, or family responsibilities. Programs devised a half century ago need to be updated to meet the realities of Canada today. In particular, there is a critical need to support workers trapped in precarious, low wage jobs and to ensure social assistance benefits are set at realistic levels in light of the real costs of housing, food, and other necessities.

Income security programs for children in low-income families and seniors have demonstrated that when government makes it a priority, poverty can be reduced. How can we build on that and work towards a goal of zero poverty, where everyone has enough? Without an anti-poverty plan, the progress that Canada has made will erode, diminishing the life chances and opportunities of the poor and undercutting Canada's future prosperity.

## The Dignity for All Campaign Calls on the Federal Government

1. To lift children and their families out of poverty by **increasing the maximum National Child Benefit** (CCTB/NCBS) to \$5,600 (2014 dollars) for eligible families (annually indexed to increases in the cost of living), and taking steps, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, to ensure that families living on social assistance retain the full child benefit without claw backs and rate reductions in social assistance.
2. **To redirect funding** for income support programs that do not sufficiently benefit low-income families with children, including the Universal Child Care Benefit, the Child Tax Credit, and Child Fitness Tax Credit, **and invest the savings** in high quality child care and the National Child Benefit – a progressive transfer focused on both poverty prevention and eradication. Campaign 2000 estimates that this approach would bring the child poverty rate down by 15% and lift 174,000 children out of poverty at a modest additional cost of \$174 Million (when combined with funding currently dedicated to the UCCB, the CTC, and the CFTC).
3. To support provincial and territorial efforts to reduce poverty by **reinstating minimum national standards for provincial and territorial income assistance** through conditions that require that social assistance rates be set at adequate levels in keeping with the real costs of housing, food, and other basic necessities, with specific consideration for vulnerable populations (such

as: persons with disabilities, lone-parent families, immigrants, and women). This would be in keeping with recommendations to Canada made by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1998 and 2006.

4. To enhance the **Canada Social Transfer** to include a boost of \$2 billion to the provinces to support poverty reduction efforts, tying the investment to measurable goals and timelines and efforts to improve public accountability.
5. To increase refundable tax benefits for individuals engaged in work that requires financial assistance, including the **Working Income Tax Benefit** so that it pays one half of the poverty gap between minimum wages and the after-tax Low-Income Measure with the remainder of income provided by the employer.<sup>29</sup>
6. To reform the Employment Insurance program so as to better support individuals separated from their employment by **easing eligibility requirements, extending benefit durations, and increasing benefit rates**. For example:
  - a. Establish an entrance requirement of **360 hours** for a minimum EI claim; apply the 360 hour requirement to all regions in Canada and to EI special benefits for maternity, parental, sickness, and compassionate care leave;
  - b. Restore the **50 week maximum benefit duration** and extend EI income benefits for older workers, expanding the scope of the 'Targeted Initiative for Older Workers'; and
  - c. Increase the benefit rate of 55% of previous earnings to **60% or more** that would apply to all forms of EI, including regular benefits and special benefits for leaves.
7. To **reform EI sickness benefits** to better serve the needs of people with disabilities, who represent over half of the EI sickness benefit recipients who exhaust their benefits, by extending the length of coverage of EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks; lowering the number of hours needed to claim EI to 360 hours; raising the benefit

entitlements to 60% of best weekly earnings in the last 52 weeks; and allowing people with a disability to work part-time and still receive partial EI sickness benefits.

8. To improve the **Old Age Security (OAS)** and **Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)** programs by:
  - a. **Increasing the GIS** by the amount required to lift the incomes of all seniors in Canada out of poverty and increasing and indexing the basic earnings exemption for employment income (set at the current level of \$3,500 in 2008) when calculating GIS;
  - b. **Modifying the residency requirement** for seniors' programs, including OAS and GIS, so that immigrants are entitled to benefits after three years of residence instead of 10 years; and
  - c. Implementing a **proactive enrollment regime**, similar to that proposed in Budget 2012, that would automatically notify and enroll eligible seniors for OAS and GIS benefits.
9. To **reverse its decision to raise the eligibility age from 65 to 67 for OAS, GIS, and the Spousal Allowance**, a decision that will disproportionately penalize low-income seniors and extend poverty for those on social assistance, and establish a multi-stakeholder taskforce to explore the feasibility and advantages of lowering the age of entitlement below age 65 as part of a broader discussion about retirement security, time stress, and access to jobs for younger workers.
10. To take action immediately to **double the CPP income replacement rate from 25% to 50%** of pensionable earnings over a period of several years by raising the employer and employee contribution rates to a modest 7.95% (15.9% combined). As part of these discussions, governments should **explore ways to reduce the impact of CPP contribution rate increases on low-income earners** such as raising the basic personal exemption to offset the impact on lower income workers.

New approaches to income security programming are necessary to protect Canadians against loss of income due to unemployment, illness, disability, or family responsibilities. Programs devised a half century ago need to be updated to meet the realities of Canada today.

“The Special Rapporteur calls for Canada to adopt a comprehensive and coordinated national housing policy based on indivisibility of human rights and the protection of the most vulnerable. This national strategy should include measurable goals and timetables, consultation and collaboration with affected communities, complaints procedures, and transparent accountability mechanisms.”<sup>30</sup>

MILOON KOTHARI, SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON ADEQUATE HOUSING, *REPORT: MISSION TO CANADA*, OCTOBER 2007. OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.



## Housing and Homelessness (March 2011)

Access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing is fundamental for survival, health, social inclusion, and participation in society. For too many people in Canada, it is a scramble every night to find a safe place to spend the night. Many more people are at serious risk of homelessness because of the high cost of housing, meagre stock of affordable units, inadequate incomes, discrimination, and family violence and illness. Support services such as mental health facilities or child welfare agencies can actually create homelessness when programs discharge people with no place to go.

Homelessness and inadequate housing are strongly linked to a range of negative health outcomes, stress, family breakdown, and increased mortality. These negative outcomes contribute to the costs of health care and social services as well as economic participation, productivity, and competitiveness.

The people most at risk of living on the streets, in shelters, or in inadequate housing are those most at risk of living in poverty: First Nation, Métis, and Inuit, recent immigrants, persons with disabilities and chronic illnesses, lone-parent families and single seniors, families on social assistance, and the working poor. Housing on many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis reserves, for instance, is in deplorable condition, characterized by the presence of mould, poor heating, contaminated water, and overcrowding. Housing conditions are not much better off-reserve with 20% or more Aboriginal people living in core housing need.<sup>31</sup>

Since the 1980s, the erosion of access to affordable housing, combined with the erosion of income support programs and inadequate supports for housing, particularly for those with psycho-social and physical disabilities, has created high levels of homelessness and housing insecurity in many Canadian communities.

Federal investment in affordable and social housing has fallen considerably short of demand. Indeed, taking inflation and population growth into account, funding levels have been on the decline for more than two decades.<sup>32</sup> And funding is scheduled to continue to drop sharply as the federal government ‘steps out’ of its remaining affordable housing commitments. The \$1.7 billion in annual federal funding for Canada’s 600,000 social housing units “has already started to expire” putting more than 200,000 units – or one-third of Canada’s stock of social housing – at risk.<sup>33</sup>

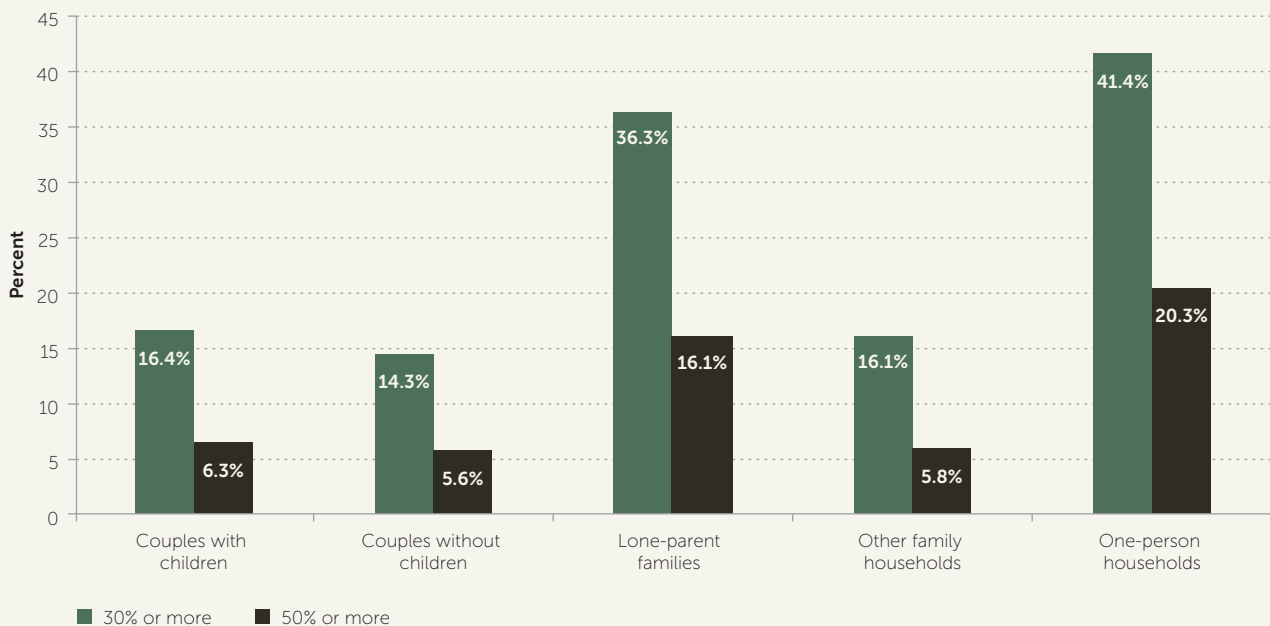
The government has just renewed the Homeless Partnering Strategy (at \$113 million per year) and Investment in Affordable Housing program (at \$253 million per year) – until 2019. The latter is cost-shared with the provinces and territories, bringing the potential value of this funding stream up to \$506 million, still only about one-quarter of what is needed annually, according to housing experts, to expand and upgrade the stock of affordable housing in Canada.<sup>34</sup>



An investment of nearly \$1 billion dollars is needed to expand and repair housing on reserves. According to an evaluation for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, by 2034, there will be a housing shortfall of 130,197 units. An additional 11,855 units will be required to replace existing units, and approximately 10,000 units will need major repairs.<sup>35</sup>

The hodgepodge of programmatic, policy, and funding decisions related to housing, taken without regard for the intersections between income support programs and housing, has created and sustained homelessness and resulted in an insecure housing sector for the most vulnerable populations.

**Percentage of households spending more than 30 and 50 percent of total income on shelter, 2011**



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey 2011. Catalogue Number 99-014-X2011031.



## The Dignity for All Campaign Calls on the Federal Government

1. To develop, in collaboration with all levels of government (including First Nations, Métis governments, and Inuit Land Claim Organizations), key community stakeholders, and individuals living in precarious housing situations, a **comprehensive National Strategy on Housing and Homelessness**. In keeping with the United Nations recommendations to Canada on a number of occasions, the strategy should include:
  - a. Recognition of the **right to adequate housing** as found in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
  - b. **Measureable goals and timelines** for implementing a new national housing and homelessness strategy and provisions for public **monitoring and reporting** on the strategy's performance and impact;
  - c. Measures to address the needs of **specific marginalized populations**;
  - d. Appropriate supporting **policies, programs, and legislation**; and
  - e. Dedicated **federal funding** of not less than \$2 billion per year in new money (to be matched by the provinces and territories) to implement housing solutions that meet the national strategy targets.
2. To develop, adopt, and implement **national legislation** that clearly establishes the right to secure, adequate, and affordable housing (similar to the 2013 proposed legislation, Bill C-400) and the federal mandate to move forward in collaboration with its partners to implement, monitor, and evaluate a national housing and homeless strategy.
3. To collaborate with Inuit Land Claim Organizations, First Nations, and Métis governments to develop a **comprehensive Aboriginal Housing Strategy**, setting out measureable goals and timelines as well as mechanisms to coordinate implementation and to track and evaluate progress. The new strategy should cover all aspects of established housing programming (on and off-reserve) as well as investments in new social housing, more affordable housing, and options for individual home ownership.

“The poorest of the poor, around the world, have the worst health. Within countries, the evidence shows that in general the lower an individual’s socioeconomic position the worse their health.”

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION – SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



## Health (January 2014)

The health of people in Canada is profoundly impacted by their social and economic circumstances. While biological factors and lifestyle choices play an important role, research reveals that it is the quality of the social determinants of health – such as level of education or quality of housing – that largely define individual well-being.<sup>36</sup>

“How long Canadians can expect to live and whether they will experience cardiovascular disease or adult-onset diabetes is very much determined by their living conditions. The same goes for the health of their children: differences among Canadian children in their surviving beyond their first year of life, experiencing childhood afflictions such as asthma and injuries, and whether they fall behind in school are strongly related to the social determinants of health they experience.”<sup>37</sup>

Level of income, in particular, is strongly correlated with health outcomes. Poverty weighs heavily on health in both its material and social dimensions. And the consequences of this are reflected in most social and health indicators: reduced life expectancy and more particularly, in the higher prevalence of disease, stress and psychological problems.

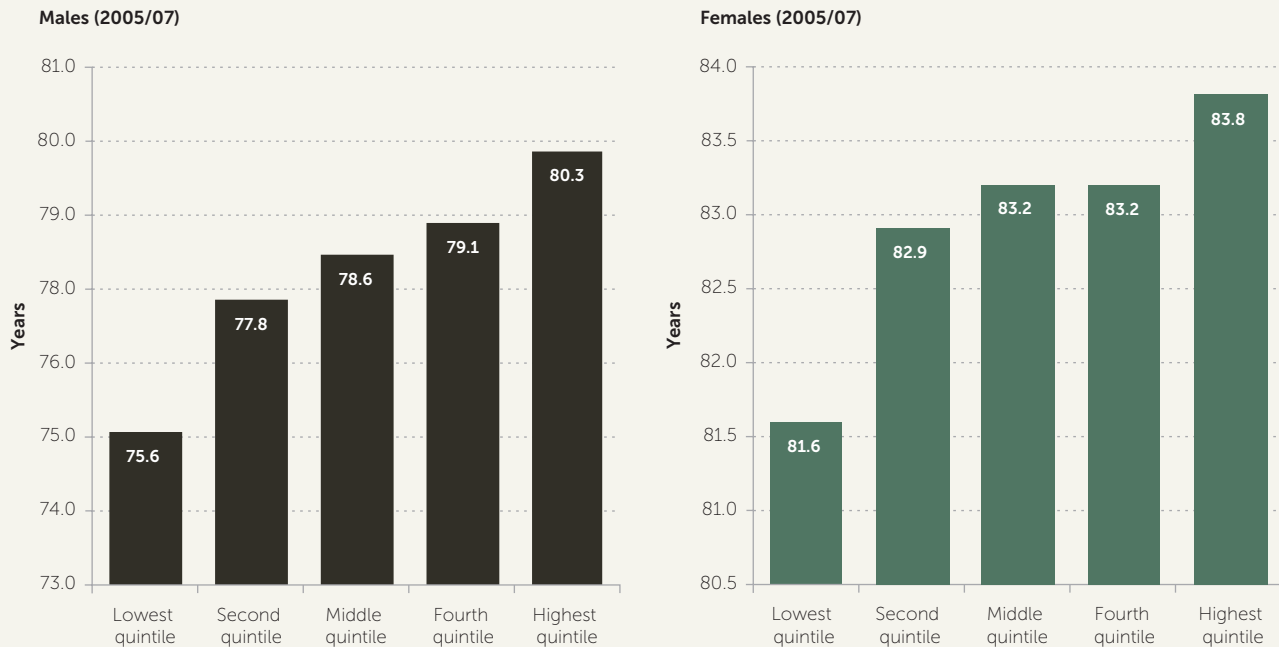
Thus, as social and economic inequalities among Canadians have widened, so too have the disparities in health – the damaging consequences of which persist over people’s lives.

We see this most graphically among groups at high risk of poverty such as Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples or people with chronic illnesses. The Health Council of Canada reports that life expectancy for First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples is far lower than non-Aboriginal peoples at the national, provincial, and territorial level.<sup>38</sup> A recent study of urban Aboriginal people living in Hamilton found much higher levels of chronic illness when compared to the overall population. For example, the rate of arthritis was 50% higher among First Nations adults compared to the rate among all adults (30.7% compared to 19.9%), while the rate of diabetes was three times greater (15.6% compared to 5.1%).<sup>39</sup>

These findings are particularly troubling in light of the well-documented barriers to receiving health care services among the poor, including long wait lists, challenges with accessing and affording transportation, and not being able to afford health costs or services that aren’t covered by provincial health insurance plans. Almost half of the respondents in the Hamilton study, for example, reported that their ability to engage in preventative health activities (i.e., regular exercise or going for health screening tests) had been affected by financial hardship.

Poverty has extremely detrimental effects on health – and poor health can contribute to experiencing poverty. For example, “the risk of mental illness among people who live in poverty is higher, but so too is the likelihood that those living with mental illness will drift into or remain in poverty.”<sup>40</sup>

## Life expectancy at birth, by income group



Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Birth and Death Databases and population estimates

We all pay the cost of health disparities through higher health care costs and other social programs. It is estimated that 20% of total annual health care spending (expected to have exceeded \$211 billion in 2013) can be attributed to socio-economic disparities.<sup>41</sup>

Canadians are rightly proud of their public health care system which provides access to all “medically necessary” services on a universal basis, regardless of province of residence, age, income, or health status. Yet significant gaps remain. While Canada is in the mid-range of public spenders on health care (14th of 30 OECD nations), it is amongst the lowest in its coverage of total health care costs. Medicare covers only 70% of total health care costs – the rest is covered by private insurance plans and out-of-pocket spending. Unlike many other wealthy countries, the Canadian health care system does not cover drug costs, and

there is huge variation in the coverage of home care and nursing costs among provinces and territories. The lack of total coverage is particularly difficult for the working poor who most often have to pay out-of-pocket because their precarious employment rarely provides private coverage.

The pressure to cap health spending has led to a further narrowing of services covered under the public system and expansion of private sector alternatives. Health premiums are being introduced across the country for a range of community-based services such as home care or supports for those with mental illness, many of which are effective in preventing costly health care problems from developing in the first place. As a consequence, it is the poorest residents who have the greatest needs that are least able to access care.<sup>42</sup>

Poverty has extremely detrimental effects on health – and poor health can contribute to experiencing poverty.



# The Dignity for All Campaign Calls on the Federal Government

1. To recognize in legislation the **social determinants of health**, including **income, employment, food security, early childhood education and care, and housing**<sup>43</sup> as part of its anti-poverty plan and adopt a **Health Impact Assessment**<sup>44</sup> process as part of its policy-making and evaluation practice across current environmental, social, economic, and service portfolios.
2. To develop, in collaboration with all levels of government (including Inuit Land Claim Organizations, First Nations, and Métis governments), a new 10-year Health Accord for the implementation of high-quality, universal, culturally-appropriate, publicly-funded and managed health promotion, prevention, and acute care services. The Accord should include:
  - a. Recognition of the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health as found in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified by Canada in 1976) and the values of the **Canada Health Act** where access to care is not based on ability to pay or place of residence;
  - b. **Measureable goals and timelines** for implementation of the Accord, and provisions for public monitoring and reporting on the Accord's performance and impact;
  - c. Measures to address the needs of **specific marginalized populations**.
3. To develop, in collaboration with all levels of government, health organizations and providers, and the public, a new **Continuing Care Program**<sup>45</sup> that provides a seamless continuum of safe, culturally-appropriate quality services, to be financed in part through a new, legislated, non-time-limited fund, with a 6% annual escalator as set out in the 2004 Health Accord.
4. To develop, in collaboration with all levels of government, health organizations and providers, and the public, a new universal, publicly-funded **National Pharmacare Program** that provides cost-effective prescription drugs at little or no cost to all Canadians, regardless of income, occupation, age, or province of residence. The program should be financed through the elimination of tax subsidies to private drug insurance plans and an earmarked progressive tax to help facilitate price negotiations for patented medicines, bulk-buying of generic medicines, and overall government accountability.
5. To implement the National Mental Health Strategy developed by the **Mental Health Commission of Canada** directed to the federal government, which includes a national campaign **to combat stigma and discrimination**, policies and programs that create **greater access to needed mental health and addictions supports** for vulnerable individuals and families, and tools for **monitoring and reporting** on mental health and its determinants.
6. To fund, support, and encourage multi-lateral collaborative ventures designed to improve the health and well-being of Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples, working toward the goal of establishing a separate, but equitable **First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Health Authority**. Such a system would be based on the recognition of the inherent right of Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples to control the design, delivery, and administration of health promotion, prevention, and acute care services.
7. To **fully rescind the 2012 cuts**, totalling \$20 million, to the **Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)**, repay those provinces who stepped in to fill the gap, and reimburse Sponsorship Agreement Holders for any costs incurred as a result of the 2012 IFHP changes. As a general principle, all refugees and undocumented migrants – regardless of category or stage of processing – should be eligible for the same health care coverage as is provided to social assistance recipients.

“What I’ve seen in Canada is a system that presents barriers for the poor to access nutritious diets and that tolerates increased inequalities between rich and poor, and Aboriginal (and) non-Aboriginal Peoples.”

OLIVIER DE SCHUTTER, UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD, MAY 2012



## Food Security (December 2012)

Far too many Canadians do not have access to nutritious food “in sufficient quantities and of sufficient quality” to maintain their health and well-being.<sup>46</sup>

The surge in food bank users and high levels of food insecurity are two of the most visible and lasting impacts of the 2008-2009 recession. Since the recession, food bank usage has increased by 25%, with children and youth now representing over 30% of food bank users.<sup>47</sup> There are far more who do not visit food banks and also experience food insecurity.

Stagnant incomes, inadequate income support programs, the loss of permanent jobs and the rise in precarious employment, along with rising food costs have resulted in high levels of food insecurity, especially in remote and northern Aboriginal communities. While food banks were originally intended as a temporary stop-gap measure, they have now become entrenched community institutions in the absence of coordinated efforts to eliminate poverty.

Research from the Canadian Community Health Survey found in 2011 that slightly more than 12% of Canadian households were “food insecure” – a number totaling more than 1.6 million households and 3.9 million people. These levels represent a shocking increase of over 100,000 households (and 450,000 Canadians) since 2008.<sup>48</sup>

The disparity between income and cost of living is particularly prominent in Inuit, First Nations, and Métis communities, especially those located in the North. A family of four in an isolated community in Nunavut must spend \$395 to \$460 a week to buy a basic nutritious diet. This compares to spending \$226 a week in a southern city such as Ottawa.<sup>49</sup>

Almost half of poor Aboriginal households (46%) are food insecure. Among Inuit adults living in Nunavut, the rate is even higher at 69% or six times higher than the Canadian national average.<sup>50</sup> Country food continues to be an important source of sustenance for some Inuit, First Nations, and Métis communities, but the significant cost of purchasing gas, ammunition, snowmobiles, boats, and motors places it beyond the grasp of many.<sup>51</sup>

Food insecurity constrains food choices, increasing nutritional vulnerability particularly among adults and adolescents, and increases the risk of negative health outcomes.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, food insecurity makes it harder for people with chronic diseases (e.g., diabetes, HIV/AIDS) to manage their conditions.<sup>53</sup> It also has long-term adverse health consequences for Canadian children.<sup>54</sup>

Charitable food programs provide a necessary service for the people who do not have the means to provide enough food for themselves and their families, given current levels of poverty and the policy climate. However, the scale of the problem extends much further, affecting millions of people who find themselves food insecure in a wealthy nation. This highlights the need for a coordinated national anti-poverty plan to ensure that all people, at all times, have access “to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilization.”<sup>55</sup>

As a part of this effort, it will be critical to examine the efficacy of the new Nutrition North Canada program in making nutritious food accessible and affordable in northern communities.

## The Dignity for All Campaign Calls on the Federal Government

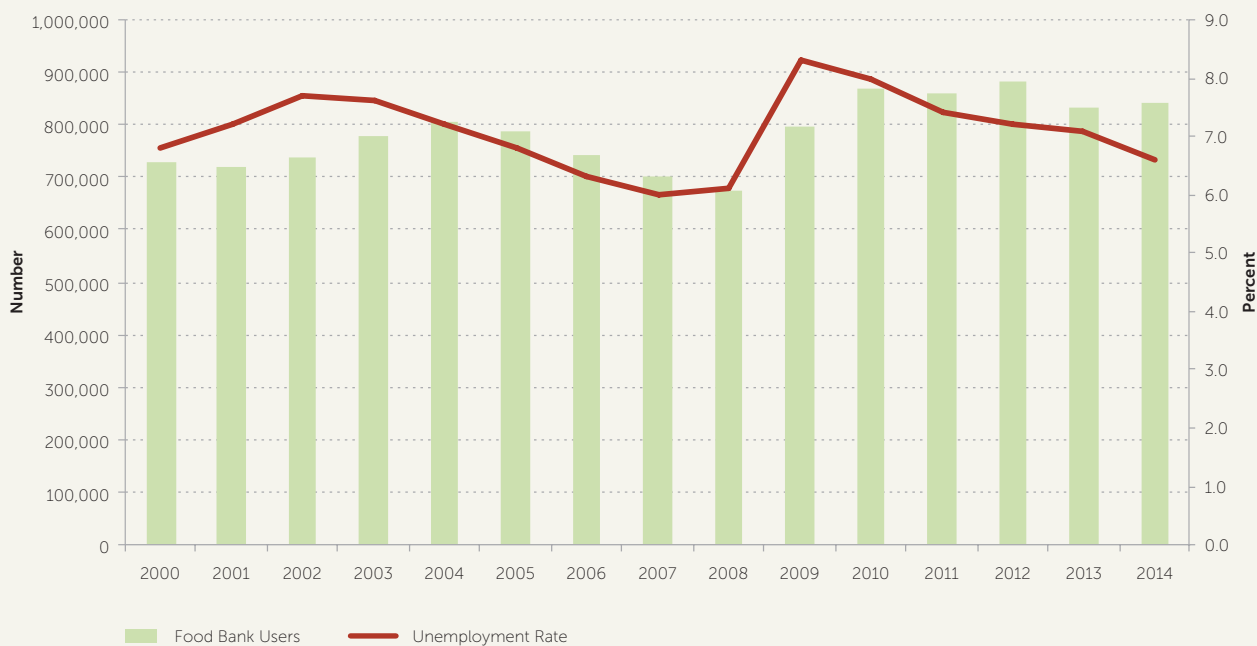
1. To develop, in collaboration with all levels of government (including Inuit Land Claim Organizations, First Nations, and Métis governments), food producers, community stakeholders, and food insecure people, a **National Right to Food Policy**, as part of a broader anti-poverty plan. The policy should include:
  - a. Recognition of the right to adequate food as found in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 2;
  - b. Measureable goals and timelines in regards to the prevalence of food insecurity, using the validated measure and methods adopted in 2004 as part of the Canadian Community Health Survey cycle 2.2 (Nutrition) or another appropriate tool;
  - c. Mechanisms to identify threats to availability of safe and adequate food and water, coordinate implementation of the national policy, and track and evaluate progress at all levels;
  - d. Measures to address the needs of children, youth, and specific marginalized populations that experience barriers to food security such as social and geographic isolation and dietary needs; and
  - e. Community-based food programs as well as population-level interventions. Scale-appropriate food safety regimes are also important in that they reduce the economic burden on small- and medium-scale producers and processors while protecting the public.
2. To **increase federal investment** to address the very high levels of household food insecurity among **First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples** in a manner that respects cultural, community, and gender considerations and Aboriginal land sovereignty, as well as supports the transfer and preservation of traditional ways of knowing. In addition, the government should pursue efforts that reduce and monitor the impact of climate change, industrialization, and contaminants on Aboriginal land, resources, and livelihoods.

Charitable food programs provide a necessary service for the people who do not have the means to provide enough food for themselves and their families, given current levels of poverty and the policy climate. However, the scale of the problem extends much further, affecting millions of people who find themselves food insecure in a wealthy nation.



3. To take action, in consultation with affected communities, to eliminate food insecurity and improve access to safe water and sanitation in Northern Canada (territories and Northern provinces) by:
  - a. Addressing the challenges of the Nutrition North Canada Program, including increasing funding so that those living in northern remote communities can take full advantage of the program;
  - b. Reviewing the current program and the needs of all isolated communities to determine how best to support food security in northern communities going forward; and
  - c. Establishing a new federal Northern Food Security Fund to support community innovation and the physical and social infrastructure needed to serve northern communities.

**Number assisted by food banks, 2000-2014**



Source: Food Banks Canada (2014), Hunger Count 2014; Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 282-0002.

“Working many hours and holding full-time, year-round employment is no longer a guarantee of escaping poverty.”

DAVID HULCHANSKI, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



## Jobs and Employment (June 2014)

Six years after the recession, the economic recovery remains modest and Canadians continue to report high levels of uncertainty about the future. While job growth has been fairly steady over the last few years, employment gains have not kept pace with population growth and unemployment levels have been stuck at or near 1.4 million since 2011.

Overall, the labour market is much more volatile than it was before the recession: making gains one month, clawing them back the next. From a regional perspective, Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island have experienced significant job growth since the height of the recession, but employment levels are still depressed in New Brunswick, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia. The other provinces are treading water.

There is also troubling evidence that the average duration of unemployment – and the number of long-term unemployed – is growing.<sup>56</sup> This is part of a growing trend toward labour market polarization.

While some well-paid sectors such as natural resources, health care, and construction are doing well post-recession,<sup>57</sup> the trend towards non-standard work continues with the increase in temporary work and the erosion of workplace benefits. The number of people in temporary jobs, for instance, grew at more than two and half times the pace of permanent employment between 2009 and 2013 and now accounts for over 11% of the labour force.<sup>58</sup>

This is part of a larger trend. In the past 20 years, precarious employment, characterized by some degree of insecurity and unpredictability, generally low wages and few benefits, has increased by nearly 50%.<sup>59</sup> Today, those searching for work increasingly face the stark choice between precarious work – at lower levels of pay – or no work.

Groups such as young people have been particularly hard hit. While young people have always struggled to establish themselves, times are particularly hard now. Diminished job security, growth of temporary work, rising costs for the basics (education in particular), and record debt levels are threatening the economic security of a generation and could leave a permanent gouge in the national economy.<sup>60</sup>

Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples, newcomers, caregivers (predominantly women), and individuals with disabilities face real barriers as well. For instance, while First Nations Peoples are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population, unemployment rates are at least three times higher than the rest of Canada. The average employment rate on-reserve is 50%,<sup>61</sup> while some First Nation communities have unemployment rates as high as 90%.<sup>62</sup> The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has estimated that an additional 100,000 First Nation jobs are needed in order to meet their employment parity with the rest of Canada.

The economic benefit of higher education and skills for workers is well documented, including lower rates of unemployment, higher pay, and greater labour mobility.<sup>63</sup> Importantly, training that is broadly-based can enhance the ability of workers to reach their full potential and participate fully in society.

And yet, Canadian business investment in training has decreased 40% since 1993.<sup>64</sup> Only 31% of employed adult Canadians receive workplace training, placing Canada far behind many of its international competitors.<sup>65</sup>

There are significant training dollars available for unemployed workers through the Employment Insurance system. However, less than 40% of unemployed workers now qualify for Employment Insurance benefits.<sup>66</sup> As the surplus in the EI account accumulates, billions of potential training dollars are

lapsing.<sup>67</sup> And with the introduction of the new Canada Job Grant program, \$300 million is being diverted from training programs targeting unemployed workers outside of the EI system. Other programs such as Aboriginal Skills Employment and Training Strategy (ASETS) have been renewed for 2015-2016 but commitment to the program has yet to be announced beyond this timeline.

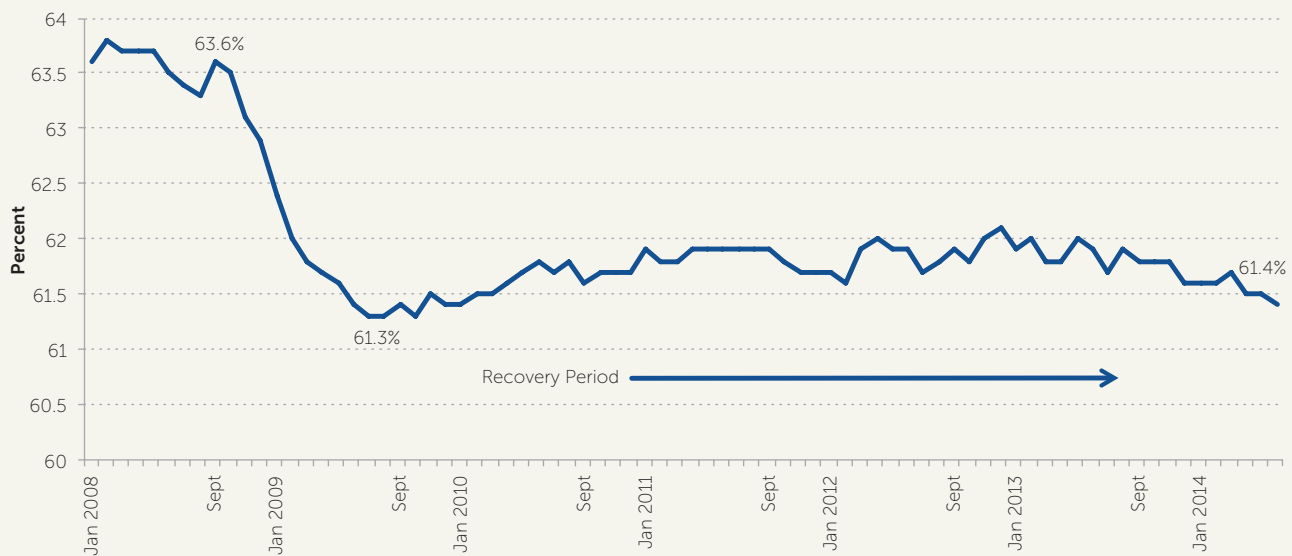
Canada has never had a coherent and comprehensive federal/provincial/territorial strategy for labour market development. The resulting patchwork of programming is failing to provide the training necessary to assist workers in Canada to adapt and thrive in today's labour market, particularly those who are low-income and engaged in precarious work.

In the past 20 years, precarious employment, characterized by some degree of insecurity and unpredictability, generally low wages and few benefits, has increased by nearly 50%.

## The Dignity for All Campaign Calls on the Federal Government

1. To develop, in collaboration with all levels of government (including Inuit Land Claim Organizations, First Nations and Métis governments), labour, employers, education groups, and representatives from groups facing employment barriers, a **National Jobs Creation and Training Strategy**, with a view to ensuring that all jobs have all the advantages of secure employment, including equitable access to occupational benefits, labour standard protections, and opportunities for post-secondary training and education. This strategy should include:
  - a. Recognition of the **right to work which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his or her living by work which is freely chosen** as found in Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the **right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work** as found in article 7 of the ICESCR;
  - b. **Measureable goals and timetables** for implementing the new employment and training strategy, and provisions for **public monitoring and reporting** on the strategy's performance and impact;
  - c. Measures to address the needs of **specific marginalized populations**;
  - d. Appropriate supporting **policies, programs and legislation**; and
  - e. **Increased federal funding**, tied to explicit reporting requirements, to implement solutions that meet the national strategy targets, including funds for the **Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs)**, the **Labour Market Agreements (LMAs)**, and **Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPDs)**.
2. To **set national wage standards** by promoting the phase-in of federal/provincial/territorial minimum wages for all Canadians and Temporary Foreign Workers which meet a living wage, indexed to the Consumer Price Index, and promoting living wage policies that reflect actual costs of living in specific regions.
3. To explore different ways to **support human capital development** through the expansion of education and training programs for those without access and through bridging programs for newcomers and equity-seeking groups, including Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples, people with disabilities, racialized groups, and people facing employment barriers. Strategies may include paid internships, subsidies, and/or tax incentives for employers who practice employment equity.

## Employment Rate, Population 15 years and older, January 2008 – June 2014



Statistics Canada. Table 282-0087 Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by sex and age group, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, monthly

4. To **reform existing programs** to better serve the needs of Canadians seeking to upgrade their skills, taking into account unique barriers to employment and training such as language, location, caring responsibilities, etc. For example:
  - a. The federal government should introduce a new program, starting with a pilot, which would allow currently employed workers to access EI benefits for training leaves up to a certain amount and duration.
  - b. The federal government should enhance employment incentives in national and provincial disability-related income programs through improvements to allowable asset limits, increased earning exemptions, and the provision of supports for transition to employment.
5. To strengthen and fully implement the federal **Employment Equity legislation** so that all designated groups enjoy equal opportunity to employment, and to implement the **Pay Equity Task Force recommendations** dealing with systemic gender inequities in pay and extending protection to members of visible minorities, persons with disabilities, and Inuit, First Nations, and Métis people.
6. To invest an additional \$500 million per year over the next five years (\$2.5 billion total) for **Aboriginal education, skills training and economic development** to enable Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples to fully participate in employment and economic development opportunities. The **Aboriginal Skills Employment and Training Strategy (ASETS)** program should be renewed after 2016.
7. To offer **youth facing employment barriers** co-operative placements, work terms, summer jobs in the private sector, or jobs in social enterprises with inclusive work settings; supported employment and job retention; targeted wage subsidies; and enforcement of existing employment equity legislation.
8. To enforce and uphold the **provision of workplace accommodations** and consider providing financial incentives to employers to create inclusive workplaces.
9. To **increase funding for Statistics Canada** so it can collect and analyze comprehensive labour market information, following up on the recommendations of the Don Drummond Expert Panel on Labour Market information (2009).

“Government commitments will not achieve sustained poverty reduction and improve the life chances for all children and their families without a robust, planned and adequately-resourced system of ECEC [Early Childhood Education and Care] services and complementary maternity/family leave.”<sup>68</sup>

LAUREL ROTHMAN, CAMPAIGN 2000



## Early Childhood Education and Care (February 2011)

Today in Canada, families struggle to balance their caring and earning responsibilities. There are only enough regulated child care spaces for just over 20% of young children, despite the fact that more than 70% of Canadian mothers are in the paid labour force.<sup>69</sup>

An entire generation of Canadian children has grown-up since federal and provincial reports first identified the need for child care and the value of early childhood education (e.g. the *Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970*). Yet Canada’s public support for young children and their families is the weakest among the world’s rich countries at only 0.25% of GDP – about one-third the OECD average (0.7%).<sup>70</sup>

In its most recent review of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN expressed concern about Canada’s lack of progress in expanding “affordable and accessible early childhood care and services,” this despite “the State party’s significant resources.”<sup>71</sup>

With few exceptions, Canada continues to rely largely on the market – individuals, non-profit organizations, and for-profit businesses – to plan and operate services, and parents to pay for them. It is not surprising, then, that regulated child care in Canada is currently characterized by high fees, low staff wages, mediocre quality, and unmet demand.

Economic studies have repeatedly shown that investing in quality child care is not only the right thing to do for children and parents, but the smart thing to do for

Canada’s economy.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, “investing in child care services offers among the highest benefits of any policy strategy a nation can adopt.”<sup>73</sup>

All children should have equal opportunities to develop their capacities fully and access to economic security. Child care is essential to promoting social inclusion, with important benefits to children in terms of their long-term development in key areas such as social interaction with other children, language, cognitive and physical development.<sup>74</sup>

Safe, stable, affordable, and high quality child care also enables parents to financially provide for their families in an economy where two salaries are essential to making ends meet.

Investing in child care produces a higher tax revenue, as an increased number of people can be gainfully employed. This is the Québec experience: with the introduction of \$7/day child care employment rates and tax revenues are up, and child poverty rates are down.<sup>75</sup> Cleveland and Krashinsky estimate that society gains two dollars for every dollar spent on a publicly-provided, quality child care program.<sup>76</sup>

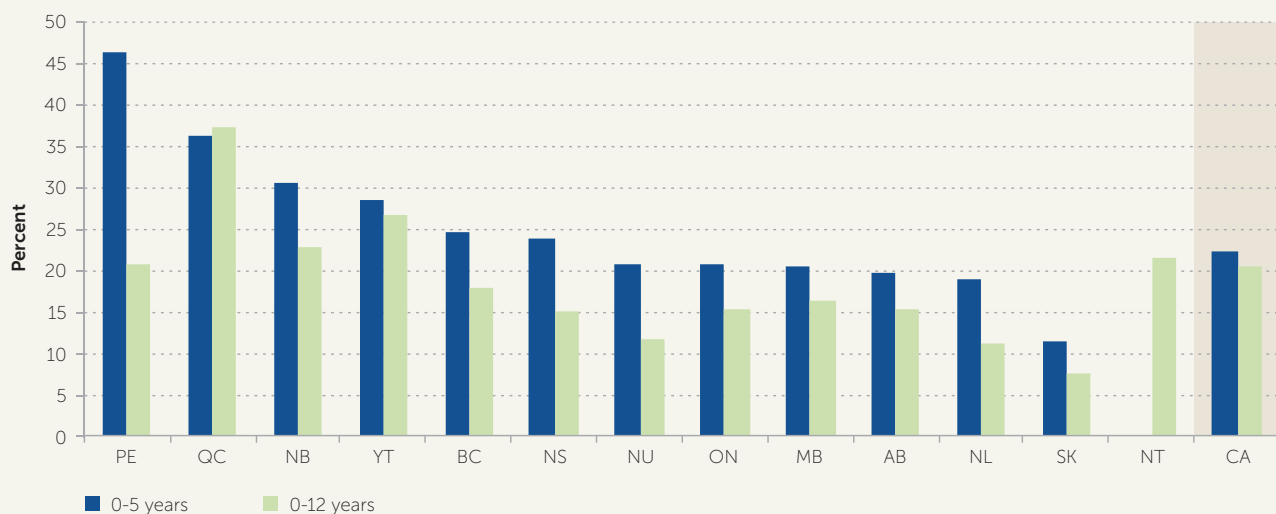
A lack affordable child care, by contrast, is a significant obstacle to acquiring training, entering the labour market and escaping low income, especially for groups at high risk of poverty such as women and new immigrants.



## The Dignity for All Campaign Calls on the Federal Government

1. To develop, in collaboration with the provinces, territories, and Inuit Land Claim Organizations, First Nations and Métis governments, a comprehensive plan and timeframe for the implementation of a high-quality, universal, publicly-funded and managed early childhood education and care program for children aged 0 to 5 years and for school-aged children up to age 12, to be phased in by 2020.
2. To develop, pass, and implement national legislation that clearly establishes:
  - a. The right of children of working parents to benefit from child care services and facilities, in keeping with Article 18(3) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
  - b. Canada-wide **goals and principles** for the care and education of young children including, but not limited to, quality (such as staff training and compensation), access (universal entitlement, affordability, and inclusion), and respect for diversity including measures to address culturally and linguistically relevant programming;
  - c. **Measureable goals and timetables** for implementing the new Early Childhood Education and Care system and provisions for public **monitoring and reporting** on system performance and impact;
  - d. Measures to address the needs of **specific marginalized populations**;
  - e. Appropriate supporting **policies, programs and legislation**; and
  - f. Dedicated **federal transfers** of \$1 billion, \$1.6 billion, and \$2.3 billion over each of the next three years to assist in the development of high-quality, accessible services, with the ultimate goal of achieving the international benchmark of at least 1% of GDP by 2020.
3. To improve **maternity/parental leave benefits** by: increasing maternity benefit level to 80% of wages; creating a more flexible system with respect to duration and financing options; improving eligibility for all currently excluded workers, trainees, and students as well as those in special circumstances; and introducing a paternity leave benefit of at least two weeks in accordance with international benchmarks.

**Percent of children for whom there is a regulated centre-based child care space, by age group, and province/territory (2012)**



A photograph of a person sitting on a bus bench, reading a book. The person is wearing a blue patterned jacket, a black backpack, and a patterned cap. The background shows a city street with buildings and trees.

# Progress and Accountability

The Dignity for All Campaign calls for the creation of a comprehensive, coordinated federal plan for poverty eradication based in human rights. To be effective, a plan requires **transparency** and **accountability**, with **measurable goals and timelines** and **indicators** of progress. Different **mechanisms** will also be necessary to ensure that the federal government is held to account for the creation, evaluation and ongoing improvement of its anti-poverty plan along with the underlying strategies. This would include confirming access for people in poverty to mechanisms to ensure their rights are protected.

What follows is a framework to assist the government in establishing progress and accountability mechanisms to ensure a national anti-poverty plan is effectively implemented.

## Setting Goals and Timelines

Specific goals and timelines should be established for each of the recommendations made in this report. In keeping with a human rights based approach to progressively eliminating poverty, immediate, short, and long term commitments should be established in the range of policy and program areas covered in this plan. In each area, the responsibilities of particular bodies or actors should be specified with individual targets and timelines.

Poverty affects particular groups disproportionately and it affects different groups in different ways. Setting general goals and timelines for the population as a whole is an important way to assess over-all progress but it is also important to ensure progress with respect to particular groups. Rights-based strategies should therefore include both broad poverty reduction targets and specific targets and commitments in relation to the groups that are most affected by poverty. In some cases, targets may relate to particular sectors, such as access to employment for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, people or supports for community living for people with disabilities. The communities most affected by poverty need to be engaged in an ongoing process of improving the understanding of what is needed to fulfil their dignity and equality rights in the context of an anti-poverty strategy.

Accountability mechanisms must be put in place so that governments can be challenged when they act in a manner which is inconsistent with attaining established long term goals.

### **Establishing Mechanisms**

The obligation to put in a place a comprehensive and reasonable plan or strategy with clear goals and timelines to eliminate poverty is a legal requirement under international human rights law. For human rights to be meaningful, there must be some means by which individuals can hold governments accountable to their obligation to progressively eliminate poverty. Mechanisms should be in place to assess the impact of new policies, to ensure that budgets take into account the commitments made and to review whether governments are on track to meet their commitments.

Accountability mechanisms must be put in place so that governments can be challenged when they act in a manner which is inconsistent with attaining established long term goals.

### **Monitoring Progress**

To ensure meaningful accountability and to monitor progress in eliminating poverty as a matter of human rights, it is important to develop human rights based indicators. Indicators should be developed to measure progress in relation to agreed goals and timelines and to assess whether governments are meeting their obligations to apply the maximum of available resources to eliminating poverty and whether they are addressing the needs of vulnerable groups.

Statistics and indicators should not be overemphasized, obscuring from view the successes and limitations of the National Anti-Poverty Plan as experienced by people living in poverty. Human rights based indicators should therefore combine statistics with qualitative information about experiences of poverty and social exclusion.

Monitoring should be directly incorporated into the implementation of an anti-poverty plan, rather than as an evaluation at the end of a process.

The communities most affected by poverty need to be engaged in an ongoing process of improving the understanding of what is needed to fulfil their dignity and equality rights in the context of an anti-poverty strategy.

A number of lessons have been learned from international experience of indicators, including:



1

Disaggregated statistics and indicators of experiences of poverty by different vulnerable groups are important to ensure that strategies are effective at addressing diverse circumstances.



2

Different measures may be needed for different groups. Low-income measures that do not include disability related expenses, for example, will not be useful in assessing progress in reducing poverty among people with disabilities.



3

Stakeholders, experts, governments as well as private actors should be involved in the ongoing monitoring of anti-poverty strategies. However, there also needs to be a neutral body with both human rights and social policy expertise to make objective assessments.



## Ensuring Accountability

It is an intrinsic feature of the human rights approach that institutions and legal/administrative arrangements for ensuring accountability are built into an anti-poverty plan.<sup>77</sup>

There is a need for both internal and external mechanisms of accountability. An internal review mechanism provides a way for the government to review its own progress and make necessary changes. In this regard, it may be helpful to appoint an ombudsperson or commissioner to take charge of promoting an anti-poverty plan and encouraging all government ministries and departments to comply with it.

An external review procedure by a committee or council is also important to ensure objective assessments of progress and to provide fair hearings of complaints. Monitoring bodies should issue periodic reports assessing governments' progress and identifying problems. The external human rights body should have the authority to present its findings to the government for a response as well as to the public.

Procedures for individual communications or complaints should also be developed within a national plan. Complaints procedures provide a mechanism for people living in poverty to have their concerns heard and an opportunity for governments to explain considerations that may have informed their decisions.

# Time to Act



## Call to Action

The most visible aspect of poverty is low income, but poverty is much more than that. It is lack of access to a sustainable livelihood. It includes being forced to make impossible choices between basic necessities like food, shelter, clothing, heat, and other utilities. It is lack of opportunity, stigmatization, discrimination, and social exclusion. Poverty is also about well-being, lack of access to community health care, education and training, safe and rewarding work, and the opportunity to engage in community life and activities.

## Poverty makes it difficult for people to live in dignity.

The Dignity for All Campaign has outlined a detailed package of action items that together will significantly reduce poverty in Canada. As the federal government gets ready to announce a budget surplus, the time is right to move forward decisively, and introduce a comprehensive anti-poverty plan, based in human rights.

We can invest this money now into ending poverty or we can continue to shut out the most vulnerable in our society from the wealth of the nation. There is

nothing inevitable about poverty in a country as wealthy as Canada. Other jurisdictions, including those within Canada, have made a difference in reducing the incidence and depth of poverty, even after a recession. It is time for the federal government to step-up.

Time and again, public opinion polls find that people across Canada are concerned about poverty and believe that the federal government should play a bigger role in reducing poverty and closing the income gap between the rich and the poor.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, in a 2012 poll, close to 70% of Canadians indicated that they are willing to pay slightly higher taxes if that's what it would take to protect our social programs.<sup>79</sup>

Ending poverty in Canada will take coordination across a number of sectors, but it is do-able, more than reasonable in light of the country's wealth, and is a human rights obligation.

"The need is obvious, the policy measures are known, the financial resources are present, and the public appetite is strong. All that is needed now is the political will to act boldly."<sup>80</sup>

It's past time for our national government to step up and take action. We offer *Dignity for All: A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada* as a strong place to start.

# Appendix: Dignity for All Policy Summits

For a complete record of the summits, including background materials, recommendations, and presentations, please see the Dignity for All website at [www.dignityforall.ca](http://www.dignityforall.ca).



## **Jobs and Employment Summit June 2014**

### **Summit Presenters:**

- James Clancy, National Union of Public and General Employees
- Stephanie Procyk, United Way Toronto
- Mike Luff and Amy Huziak, Canadian Labour Congress
- Karl Flecker, Canadian Labour Congress
- David Macdonald, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Bryan Hendry, Assembly of First Nations
- Alexa Conradi, la Fédération des femmes du Québec
- Avvy Go, Colour of Poverty: Colour of Change
- Michael Prince, Council of Canadians with Disabilities



## **Health Summit January 2014**

### **Summit Presenters:**

- Nuala Kenny, Department of Bioethics, Dalhousie University
- Dennis Raphael, Faculty of Health, York University
- Mike McBane, Canadian Health Coalition
- Steve Morgan, School of Population and Public Health, University of British Columbia
- Yvonne Boyer, Aboriginal Health and Wellness, Brandon University
- Doug Gruner, Bruyère Family Health Team and University of Ottawa
- Mark Ferdinand, Canadian Mental Health Association
- Martha Jackman, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa



### **Food Security Summit December 2012**

**Summit Presenters:**

- Diana Bronson, Food Secure Canada
- Lauren Goodman, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
- Shawn Pegg, Food Banks Canada
- Valerie Tarasuk, Department of Nutritional Sciences, University of Toronto



### **Income Security Summit April 2012**

**Summit Presenters:**

- Laurel Rothman, Campaign 2000
- Miles Corak, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa
- John Stapleton, Open Policy Ontario
- Laurell Ritchie, Canadian Auto Workers
- Monica Townson, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Chris Roberts, Canadian Labour Congress



### **Housing and Homelessness Summit – March 2011**

**Summit Presenters:**

- Michael Shapcott, Affordable Housing and Social Innovation, Wellesley Institute
- Charlie Hill, National Aboriginal Housing Association
- Leilani Farha, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation



### **Early Childhood Education and Care Summit – March 2011**

**Summit Presenters:**

- Martha Friendly, Child Care Resource and Research Unit
- Christa Japel, Department of Special Education and Training, University of Montreal
- Lynell Anderson, Childcare Advocacy Association of Canada and UBC Human Early Learning Partnership



# Endnotes

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