

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

MANITOBA

The Time for Patience is Over: Toward a Poverty Reduction Plan for Manitoba Discussion Paper

Make Poverty History Manitoba is a multi-sectoral collaborative coalition made up of approximately 30 Winnipeg organizations from the business, education, student, Aboriginal, newcomer, labour, women's, health, and disability communities and agencies. In 2004, the Women's Health Clinic, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence and the coalition groups initiated discussions in the community about anti-poverty legislation as it had unfolded in Quebec with Bill 112: An Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. These organizations were inspired by the process that had occurred in Quebec where a broad-based coalition of citizens and communities drafted a legislative proposal that was adapted and adopted as law by the Quebec National Assembly because of the demonstrated wide-spread support. With the enactment of the bill, poverty and social exclusion were recognized as central policy priorities and formally put on the public agenda, an unprecedented development in Canada.

Newfoundland and Labrador has implemented an action plan to reduce poverty and the Governments of Nova Scotia and Ontario have been involved in consultations with citizens in the development of their own provincial plans. The Government of Manitoba has not taken comprehensive action to address poverty and social exclusion in the province, and given the urgency of the issue, the community decided to move forward and initiate a process of engagement with legislators, community leaders, diverse sectors, and the general public in a discussion of poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba.

The coalition has been acting to develop broad community based support for a plan to reduce poverty and social exclusion in principle, in order to provide The Government of Manitoba with realistic recommendations for the prevention and reduction of poverty. The approach towards the development of these ideas has, to this point, involved the synthesis of research and reports on various poverty and social exclusion issues in Manitoba in the preparation of a series of accessible discussion papers, and engaging stakeholders in consultation workshops based on the discussion papers.

The coalition has consulted with a broad cross-section of Manitobans. The main message being heard loud and clear is that minor adjustments to existing policies and programs are insufficient and The Province of Manitoba must undertake comprehensive and systematic action to reduce poverty and improve social and economic inclusion, to reduce economic, health and social disparities in our population, and to keep Manitoba abreast with developments in other jurisdictions. Such action should include:

- An integrated and coordinated approach to programs and services to reduce both the incidence and depth of poverty and social exclusion and associated effects.
- Gender and diversity analyses as part of all policy and program development processes.
- Long term and annual action plans designed and implemented with participation from multiple stakeholders.
- Increased social investment reflected in provincial budget expenses and revenues.
- Targets, timelines, and benchmarks with ongoing monitoring and reporting to ensure that objectives are being met.
- A multi-sectoral and cross-departmental authority to oversee progress and make further recommendations.

This discussion paper sets out the principles and targets for a significant improvement and reduction in poverty and social exclusion of Manitoba's citizens. The document represents the ideas generated in over four years among agencies and

individuals concerned about the lack of attention to systemic change to prevent and reduce poverty in the province. It is a summary of what Manitobans have been saying needs to be done, and a starting point from which to proceed. It is by no means exhaustive or final and the organizations involved in the campaign do not necessarily endorse all of the potential actions outlined within.

The Make Poverty History in Manitoba coalition will finalize a set of recommendations through broad discussion in an upcoming forum. The resulting plan will then be presented to the Government of Manitoba and to the general public.

Make Poverty History Manitoba recognizes that comprehensive action and increased investment at the Federal level is crucial. Past decreases in federal social spending have trickled down to the provincial and territorial levels, leaving Canada's social safety net incapable of providing sufficient protection to enable citizens to meet their needs and participate fully in all spheres of life. Comprehensively addressing poverty in First Nations communities, restoration of transfer payments (with dedicated transfers for education, health, and social programs), reinvigoration of Employment Insurance, and enhancement of the Canada Child Tax Benefit are but a few examples where action is required. It is essential however, that The Government of Manitoba show leadership and take action in its jurisdictional areas with or without federal participation.

HOUSING

Outcome #1: Accessible, safe, affordable housing is available for people with low incomes, including persons living with disabilities.

Actions:

- ⇒ Increased supply of social housing, mixed housing, emergency shelters, youth and pet friendly housing, subsidized co-op housing, and transitional housing.
- ⇒ Shelter Allowance increased for all categories and indexed to the rate of inflation or annual increases in the Rent Increase Guideline.
- ⇒ Improved condition/quality of current social housing units operated by the Manitoba Housing Authority by adopting standards in relation to the quality of units.
- ⇒ Direct aid (rebate or subsidy) to low-income renters and homeowners when their bills exceed a percentage of income.

Outcome #2: Improved social and community inclusion and safety within communities and neighbourhoods.

Actions:

- ⇒ Development of 300 new rent geared to income units each year for 10 years.
- ⇒ Creation of long and shorter term neighbourhood based housing action plans.
- ⇒ Manitoba Housing resourced with an array of community based services and supports.
- ⇒ Integration of social housing in a diversity of neighbourhoods.
- ⇒ Reconvening the Working Group on Housing for Individuals with a Disability.
- ⇒ Educating landlords, builders, developers, service providers etc. about disability issues.

Outcome #3: Greater co-ordination of policies in order to enhance services between all three levels of government and other sectors.

Actions:

- ⇒ Ongoing support for the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI).
- ⇒ Commitment to long-term, operational, multi-year core funding.
- ⇒ Multi-sectoral partnerships to extend, enhance, and develop programs that provide training and employment opportunities to community residents in housing development projects to assist people to re-enter or remain in the workforce.

- ⇒ Greater utilization of the Provincial Community Economic Development model to create opportunities for people within their communities.
- ⇒ Partnering with housing planning community groups and securing long term federal funding.

INCOME SECURITY

Outcome #1: Financial supports that allow social assistance recipients, and others of low income, to not only meet their basic needs, but participate fully in community life.

Actions:

- ⇒ EIA benefits increased for all categories to the value of 1992 levels and indexed to annual increases in the cost of living.
- ⇒ A transparent mechanism to establishing basic income support rates.
- ⇒ Income support programs for persons with disabilities that consider the unique costs of having a disability; prescription drugs, nutritional needs, equipment.
- ⇒ Basic needs redefined to include: telephone service, recreation, transportation, special dietary allowances, and other basic amenities.
- ⇒ Benefits provided through the Manitoba Child Benefit increased and integrated with the Canada Child Tax Benefit.
- ⇒ Lobby the Federal Government to establish an income-tested Basic Income program for those who cannot reasonably be expected to earn adequate income from employment (aimed primarily at those with severe and prolonged disabilities).
- ⇒ Movement towards a Guaranteed Annual Income.

Outcome #2: Social assistance recipients are able to keep more of their earned income, disincentives to work and education are decreased, and recipients are able to accumulate assets to achieve long term financial independence.

Actions:

- ⇒ Liquid asset exemptions doubled for all categories.
- ⇒ Earnings exemptions increased for all categories until individuals reach adequate income levels.
- ⇒ A grace period for EIA recipients of two years to allow a reasonable time to save before employment earnings are clawed back.
- ⇒ Extended dental and prescription drug benefits to all people of low income.

Outcome #3: An efficient, fair, person-centered, user friendly, system of income support which aims at serving the long term needs of participants.

Actions:

- ⇒ Programs administered from a holistic and person centered perspective.
- ⇒ Improved accessibility to education and training.
- ⇒ Accessible government information written in plain language.
- ⇒ EIA workers inform participants of their rights, entitlements, responsibilities, and options under the program.
- ⇒ Cultural and gender diversity/sensitivity training for EIA workers.
- ⇒ A participant committee to undertake a comprehensive review of EIA policies and programs.
- ⇒ Financial support for community based advocacy processes (i.e. funding community based advocacy agencies).
- ⇒ Establishment of an ombudsman with genuine authority to improve EIA systems and budgets for the recipients.

LABOUR MARKET

Outcome #1: A single individual with no children working full-time over a full year earns enough money

through employment to stay above the poverty line.

Actions:

- ⇒ The minimum wage is increased to a liveable level of \$10.65 (2005 dollars) per hour in a predictable fashion over the next three years and indexed annually to the rate of inflation.
- ⇒ Living wage legislation to govern service contracting.
- ⇒ The establishment of an independent multi-sectoral committee to review and make recommendations regarding the minimum wage.

Outcome #2: An increase in the number and proportion of “good jobs” in the private, public, and non-profit sectors.

Actions:

- ⇒ Revised employment standards that reflect the considerable changes in the labour market.
- ⇒ A new pro-ration of benefits formula for non-standard, part time workers.
- ⇒ Enhanced dismissal legislation.
- ⇒ Standards for part time employees including provision of a guaranteed number of hours, enhanced benefits and pay parity, and requirement for an adequate notice of change in hours.
- ⇒ Employment standards reflecting the value of the work-life balance.

Outcome #3: Improved employment opportunities for all Manitobans, with particular emphasis on newcomers, Aboriginal peoples, and persons living with disabilities, in the public, private, and non-profit sectors.

Actions:

- ⇒ Enhanced multi-sectoral partnerships to identify opportunities recognizing the need for a diversity of strategies to respond to the needs of different groups.
- ⇒ More efficient and effective recognition of foreign credentials and work experience.
- ⇒ High profile public relations campaign to promote the abilities of persons with disabilities.
- ⇒ A requirement that all companies with more than 50 employees with which the province has service contracts have an effective employment equity policy.
- ⇒ Incentives to private sector employers to cover accommodation costs for persons with disabilities.
- ⇒ Employment training agencies that utilize holistic success measurements.
- ⇒ The Manitoba Civil Service Commission meets its own employment equity targets.

EDUCATION

Early Learning and Child Care

Outcome #1: Child care spaces are broadly available to promote early childhood development and facilitate parental participation in employment or training.

Actions:

- ⇒ Keep pressure on the federal government to honour, enhance, and make permanent the previous funding agreements on Early Learning and Child Care.
- ⇒ Reduce wait times by increasing the number of child care spaces across Manitoba, particularly for infants, children with disabilities, and during non-traditional hours.
- ⇒ Increased accessibility of child care programs by resolving service delivery challenges in rural, remote and northern regions and lower income communities.
- ⇒ Creation of more sites parents can easily access such as schools, government agencies and offices, Manitoba Housing facilities and workplaces.

Outcome #2: Enhanced quality of child care provision in Manitoba.

Actions:

- ⇒ Fund competitive compensation for the child care workforce and provide a continuum of training.
- ⇒ Consultation with the community on a regular basis.
- ⇒ Implement the recommendations of Family Choices – Manitoba’s Five-Year Agenda on Early Learning and Child Care.
- ⇒ Increased funding for the nutritional component of child care programs.
- ⇒ A public education campaign on how to choose quality child care and the importance of early childhood development through play based, age appropriate early learning curricula.

Outcome #3: Increased support to families with young children.

Actions:

- ⇒ Subsidy rates increased and subsidy eligibility formula considers the cost of child care when calculating qualifying income levels.
- ⇒ Indexation of the subsidy on a yearly basis.
- ⇒ Enhanced respite opportunities for single parent families and stay at home parents.
- ⇒ Addressing the short and long term financial penalties experienced by stay at home parents.
- ⇒ Involving the local business community to support programs aimed at early learning.

Kindergarten to Senior Four

Outcome #1: Appropriate funding to schools to ensure quality educational outcomes.

Actions:

- ⇒ Increased funding to school boards to achieve an 80:20 funding ratio of general provincial revenue to locally generated property taxes for operational budgets.
- ⇒ Appropriate funding for provincially mandated programs.
- ⇒ Adequate funding for students with special needs and effective delivery of therapy services in the school setting.
- ⇒ Increased high school graduation rates with adequate funding supports with targeted funding supports for vulnerable students.

Outcome #2: Forward-thinking educational policy that promotes social inclusion and positive health outcomes for children.

Actions:

- ⇒ Greater linkages between child care programs, schools, and before and after school care programs (an integrated system for parents), better in-school supports over lunch hour for appropriate supervision of school age children.
- ⇒ Enhanced coordination between school divisions/schools and other agencies.
- ⇒ Supporting local organizations that benefit and mentor children province wide.
- ⇒ Training teachers, support staff, and other service providers about disability issues.
- ⇒ Consistent disability services and training standards throughout the province.
- ⇒ Additional support to school divisions and community programs for EAL/ESL students.
- ⇒ Curricula that incorporate units on the causes and effects of poverty and social exclusion.

Post Secondary

Outcome #1: Adequate funding for post secondary institutions to ensure high quality education.

Actions:

- Provincial government funding for colleges and universities restored to the share of the total budget it represented in 1985 (83%).
- Creation of a \$250 million capital repair and upgrade fund.

- Commitment from the province to direct increased federal funding to the operating budgets of institutions, without reducing provincial contributions.

Outcome #2: Post-secondary education where personal or family income is not a barrier to participation.

Actions:

- ⇒ Increasing the number of needs based grants.
- ⇒ Enhanced opportunities for rural/northern students using tax exemptions and subsidies.
- ⇒ Manitoba Student Loan interest rates reduced to the borrowing rate of the Government of Manitoba.
- ⇒ Full-time status eliminated as an eligibility requirement for Manitoba Student Aid loans and bursaries, and a pro-rated living expense amount for part-time students.
- ⇒ The minimum annual living allowance of the student aid program set to the LICO, adjusted on the basis of the area in which a student is studying, and updated annually by the rate of inflation. Increased need resulting from the use of LICO for assessments would be met with grants and higher allowances for in-study earnings.
- ⇒ Funding for the ACCESS program indexed to the growth of the Aboriginal student body in Manitoba, based on high school graduation rates.
- ⇒ Movement towards a publicly funded system of free post secondary education.

Adult Learning and Training

Outcome #1: Increased access to meaningful, long term employment for all Manitobans.

Actions:

- ⇒ Increased funding for Adult Learning Centres to increase support for community based education and training programs.
- ⇒ Increased financial support and access to education and training programs for high demand skills and jobs that offer a career path and long term security.
- ⇒ Expanded education and training options for EIA recipients, allowing access to programs beyond the two year limit.

RECREATION

Outcome #1: A universal community-based recreation system that is accessible and affordable to all persons regardless of income.

Actions:

- ⇒ Tri-governmental partnership with funding for recreation as population health promotion.
- ⇒ School facilities resourced to remain open in the evenings, on weekends, and during summer, particularly in rural and northern areas.
- ⇒ Expansion of capacity building linkages between recreational and justice structures, stronger planning for children and youth involved with the justice system.
- ⇒ Dedicated municipal funding for recreation.
- ⇒ Fees and schedules subjected to regular public review.
- ⇒ Enhanced City of Winnipeg subsidy program; extended to all low income people, publicized, centrally administrated, and confidential.

Outcome #2: Enhanced physical accessibility of recreational programs and facilities.

Actions:

- ⇒ Adherence to the principles of Universal Design.
- ⇒ Assessments for public facilities conducted by persons with disabilities.
- ⇒ Enhancing user friendliness permits/zoning/licensing.

- ⇒ Ensuring accountability on recommendations to improve public facilities, ensure timelines and facility plans are adhered to.
- ⇒ Recreation made a priority under the Handi-Transit system.

TRANSPORTATION

Outcome #1: Increased access to public transportation for persons of low income and persons with disabilities.

Actions:

- ⇒ Subsidized public transportation for **all** low income persons.
- ⇒ Separate Handi-Transit services for seniors and persons living with disabilities.
- ⇒ Mandatory disability training and safety programming for all transportation providers.
- ⇒ All forms of public transportation adhere to the principles of Universal Design in the development and implementation, and incentives for the private sector to do the same.
- ⇒ Identification cards to EIA participants that serve as both a photo ID and transit pass.
- ⇒ Handi-Transit in cities and municipalities extended to seven days a week with 24 hour telephone booking or cancellation of appointments.
- ⇒ Alternative public transportation options for persons living with disabilities in cities and municipalities, such as school buses, passenger vans, and cabs.

DISABILITY SUPPORTS

Outcome #1: Full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres of society.

Actions:

- ⇒ Public education campaign to combat the myths surrounding disability.
- ⇒ Community living for persons with disabilities, rather than institutionalization.
- ⇒ Consumer control of disability supports, including self management of services.
- ⇒ A seamless lifelong continuum of support services for persons with disabilities.
- ⇒ Comprehensive program for the purchase, maintenance, and upgrades of assistive devices.
- ⇒ Stable equitable funding for disability supports throughout the province.
- ⇒ Well trained service providers that have a good understanding of disability issues.
- ⇒ Persons caring for persons with disabilities are provided respite.
- ⇒ Improved home care services including staff continuity, technical support training, and 24 hour emergency service.
- ⇒ Supporting persons with disabilities, and their families, transitioning into to adult life, including life skills training.
- ⇒ Supporting persons with disabilities in gaining the education and training of their choice, including post secondary education.