

Make Poverty History Manitoba Budget submission

Thank you for the opportunity to present on Canada's 2017 Federal Budget. Our recommendations include priorities to reduce poverty across Canada, with particular reference to how they will impact low-income people in Manitoba. Our submission is structured around the recommendations in *The View from Here* (2015), a comprehensive community-based poverty reduction plan that was developed in Manitoba. This plan was endorsed by more than 100 organizations across Manitoba. We believe that the federal government has a critical role to play in each of the policy areas identified in that plan.

Housing

Budget 2017 should signal a long-term commitment for social housing with a ten-year National Housing Plan investing \$2 billion per year.

We support Right to Housing Manitoba's request for a ten-year housing plan investing \$2 billion per year in social housing infrastructure, along with funding to sustain housing projects at risk from the end of operating agreements, and funding for improving First Nations and Indigenous housing.

Income Security - EIA

The Government of Canada should work with all provinces to ensure that all Canadians receive a sufficient income to meet their basic needs and participate fully in community life.

Canadians should have access to enough income to live in a safe and stable home, eat healthy food, get from one place to another, use all the health services they need, and ensure someone can look after their children when they are unable to. By having an income adequate cover these needs, Canadians are better able to pursue training, education, and employment opportunities.

Canadians with severe disabilities could be saved from a lifetime of poverty if governments were to establish a separate pension-like basic income support program for Canadians with severe and prolonged disability. The federal government should provide funding and ensure that nobody loses income or benefits under the new program.

There is a growing call for the welfare system to be replaced with a guaranteed annual income (GAI) with strong financial support from the federal government. Research on GAI conducted in Dauphin, Manitoba in the 1970s revealed better health, higher graduation rates, and no significant impact on employment. Evidence shows that savings generated through reduced administrative costs and reduced expenditures in other areas such as health and policing would exceed the cost of implementing a GAI.

Jobs

Provide funding for a Labour Market Intermediary pilot in Winnipeg and in Northern Manitoba.

The transition from training to employment can be challenging for some multi-barriered Indigenous job seekers who require ongoing supports. Recent research funded by the federal government suggests that this gap in services can be addressed with a Labour Market Intermediary (LMI) designed and delivered in partnership with Indigenous community organizations. The LMI would employ and assign caseworkers to support multi-barriered Indigenous job seekers and their employers for as long as required to ensure a successful transition into employment. An LMI would also develop enduring relationships with employers and unions when relevant, to liaise between employers and organizations and to connect clients to jobs.

The pilot would focus on serving multi-barriered Indigenous job seekers given their over-representation among those unemployed and living with low incomes. An Indigenous-focused LMI would provide cultural reclamation programming for Indigenous clients and cultural competence training for employers to improve employment outcomes for Indigenous people.

Invest in addressing the barriers immigrants face when getting their qualifications recognized.

Many immigrants have to go through a long, difficult, and expensive process to have their qualifications recognized for work in their trained field. The Government of Canada should increase support for comprehensive gap training and bridge programs that provide immigrants with an opportunity to upgrade their skills and acquire job search skills, English as an additional language training, and job placement supports. Wait lists are high for some programs forcing some immigrants to start from scratch due to being out of professional practice for too long.

The federal government has partnered with the Province of Manitoba to fund Recognition Counts, an initiative providing micro-loans to low-income skilled immigrants to help relieve the financial burden of skills upgrading. The program also offers career counselling to assist immigrants in obtaining employment in their field of expertise. The federal government should scale up support and ensure multi-year funding for initiatives like Recognition Counts that help eliminate the barriers low-income skilled immigrants face in accessing employment.

Wages

Incrementally increase the federal minimum wage to a level sufficient to lift a single parent, working full time, with one child above the LICO-BT level. Make Poverty

History Manitoba calculated this level as \$15.53 per hour for Manitoba in 2014. Once reaching this level, minimum wage should be indexed to inflation, so that its value is not eroded.

While the federal government only directly sets the minimum wage for a minority of workers, a federal minimum wage covers federally regulated industries and sends a signal to provinces that every family deserves a living wage.

To further its commitment to supporting fair wages, Canada should develop a living wage policy to ensure that all federal employees are paid a living wage and to include living wage criteria as a component of evaluation in all federal contracts.

Early Learning and Child Care

Implement the recommendations provided by the Manitoba Child Care Association in its pre-budget submission.

In Manitoba, federal support is needed to add 12,000 licensed and funded non-profit child care spaces. This requires capital and operating funding to attract, retain and fairly compensate Early Childhood Educators and deliver sustainable community-based, culturally-relevant programming.

The Government of Canada should invest in tuition and living allowances as well as successful community-based early childhood education training programs to support more low-income Indigenous people and newcomers in the child care profession.

While all children need access to early learning and child care, targeted supports are needed for marginalized communities. A portion of newly funded spaces should be prioritized in communities with high socio-economic needs.

Invest in community-based Aboriginal head start programs in and around high-needs schools across Canada.

Federal Aboriginal head start programs focus on the early childhood development of Indigenous children off-reserve and in urban centres and large Northern communities. A 2012 evaluation of head start programs revealed a positive effect on school readiness, cultural literacy, and health. Further, some program sites have created a sense of community for Indigenous children and their families. The evaluation also determined a growing need for head start programs to serve the increasing number of Indigenous children living in urban centres.

The Government of Canada should ensure existing programs are adequately funded and establish additional head start programs in and around high-needs schools. In addition to having an Indigenous focus, new head start programs should be targeted to also meet the needs of children in high-needs schools with large newcomer and refugee populations.

Adult Learning

Increase funding for existing adult literacy and learning centres and ensure all low-income neighbourhoods and public housing complexes have access to community-based and culturally-appropriate adult literacy and learning centres with onsite child care services.

Adult literacy and learning centres provide adults with tuition-free programming to increase their reading, writing, and numeracy levels and to complete high school credits and diplomas. Manitoba's Adult Literacy Act requires a province-wide adult literacy strategy. As of 2013, there were 36 agencies offering adult literacy programming in 58 locations across Manitoba, and 42 adult learning centres delivering programming in 82 locations. However, less than one percent of Manitoba adults in need of literacy training are enrolled in programs supported by Manitoba's Adult Literacy Program.

The Government of Canada should invest in enhancing the reach of existing centres and in expanding access with the creation of new centres in low-income neighbourhoods and in public housing complexes where there is a need. The majority of participants in Manitoba's programs are either recent immigrant or Indigenous learners. Support is required for culturally-appropriate programming. Investments should include supports for onsite child care services.

Funding

Provide community-based organizations with adequate, flexible, and long-term funding (three to five years), and include dedicated funding to Indigenous-led organizations and organizations working with Indigenous people for the delivery of programming that integrates decolonization methods.

Short-term funding from multiple sources creates an administrative burden as well as insecure and low-paying jobs with inadequate benefits. This makes it difficult for community-based organizations (CBOs) to meet deliverables, and attract and retain qualified staff. Understaffing leads to stress and burnout, triggers high turnover and diminishes organizational capacity and stability. Short-term funding can interrupt successful programs, leaving needs unmet, making it difficult to effectively evaluate impact.

The Government of Canada could adopt a strategy similar to that of the Province of Manitoba. Manitoba's Non-Profit Organization Strategy provides more than 100 CBOs with four-year funding agreements and an integrated reporting mechanism to reduce the administrative burden associated with reporting to multiple funders.

Many Indigenous people are disconnected from their cultural heritage and have experienced significant trauma as a result of colonial policies. The deep and damaging intergenerational effects include depression, poverty, violence, addictions, poor health

outcomes, low educational attainment and a lack of parenting skills. The Government of Canada can help reverse some of the damage that has been done by providing adequate and dedicated funding to Indigenous-led organizations and organizations working with Indigenous people, for the delivery of programming that integrates decolonization methods such as cultural reclamation and healing.

Develop a Neighbourhood Revitalization Program with multi-year core and project-based funding to support urban communities across Canada in taking a long-term, comprehensive, community-led approach to neighbourhood revitalization.

A Federal Neighbourhood Revitalization Program would provide multi-year core funding for the establishment and operation of neighbourhood renewal corporations (NRCs) in designated under-invested urban communities across Canada. NRCs would be locally governed, democratic organizations that coordinate ongoing revitalization efforts within their communities. These efforts would be based on a five-year revitalization plan developed by local stakeholders in each community. NRCs will also help community organizations develop proposals and apply for project-based funding available through this program to support projects consistent with their neighbourhood's five-year revitalization plan.

This model has been developed, implemented, and evaluated at the provincial government level in Manitoba for over a decade. Independent evaluations of Manitoba's Neighbourhoods Alive! program provide clear evidence that the model has made a significant difference in the revitalization of inner-city neighbourhoods through enhanced housing quality, perceptions of safety, neighbourhood stability, resident empowerment, resident engagement in the community, and overall neighbourhood well-being.

Food Security

Set a goal to reduce the need for food bank use by half within ten years and set a date for the elimination of the need for food banks in Manitoba

Food security would be achieved by ensuring that all Canadians have physical and economic access to healthy, safe, and affordable food. In March 2015, 63,791 Manitobans used a food bank or other emergency food program. Almost half of all households that used food banks included children. Many children living in families with low incomes go to school without having eaten a proper breakfast or packed a healthy lunch. Some children will not have eaten at all. Families with low incomes are often forced to choose between paying for housing or for food. Many families will turn to food banks when housing costs eat up their food budgets. Others will go through temporary periods with little or no food.

More than half of food bank clients were Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) participants and more than 16 per cent were working. This provides further evidence to suggest that EIA benefits and minimum wage are not sufficient to meet basic needs.

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Food banks consider themselves a stop-gap measure. Manitoba food banks adopted the recommendation to reduce the need for food bank use by half within ten years and set a date for the elimination of the need for food banks in Manitoba. That recommendation could be achieved by putting more money in the hands of families.

References:

The View From Here

(2015): <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2015/01/View%20from%20here%20v8%20low-res.pdf>