

POVERTY

WATCH

Fall 2011

Monitoring progress toward the eradication of poverty for persons with intellectual disabilities and their families.



50 years
Canadian
Association for
Community Living

Diversity includes.

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Greetings to the second issue of our newsletter *Poverty Watch*. In this edition, we again highlight efforts for ensuring that Canadians with intellectual disabilities and their families have the income and resources they need to secure a good quality of life and to fully participate in their communities.

We have articles on developments in several jurisdictions across the country on strategies in place to alleviate, reduce and prevent poverty. Updates are provided on Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, PEI, Quebec and Saskatchewan. The information presented here, together like this, you will not find anywhere else. A warm thank you, then, to those individuals who contributed information to this issue of *Poverty Watch* on these important policy and program reforms. It is critical that we continue to share knowledge and lessons about the fight against poverty, exclusion and inequality; to see the necessity for investments, the possibilities of action, and the reality of positive outcomes.

Some of these update indicate promising early results for poverty reduction strategies for persons with intellectual disabilities and, indeed, other disabilities as well. We must remain vigilant to ensure that poverty reduction strategies, where they exist, give full consideration to persons with intellectual disabilities. To be inclusive and effective, poverty reduction strategies must contain specific measures to address the needs of this group.

Beyond specific poverty reduction initiatives, with the current attention of political leaders to uncertain economic recovery in Canada and worldwide, all governments need to ensure that no one is left behind in the budgeting plans, policy choices and program decisions they make. Through the recent ups and downs of the Canadian economy, one fact has remained constant: people with disabilities and their families lack the disability supports, employment supports, and income supports they need to live free of poverty, isolation and exclusion.

The struggle continues to achieve the adoption of similar poverty reduction strategies in jurisdictions that have yet to adopt them, including Alberta, British Columbia, and the Government of Canada. The articles in this issue offer valuable ideas on what can be accomplished when disability organizations, advocates and families, civil society groups, and other stakeholders in the economy work together toward the goal of everyone belonging.

Michael J. Prince

Poverty Watch is a newsletter developed by the Canadian Association for Community Living. For more information or to submit an article or commentary for future publication, contact Tyler Hnatuk at 416 661 9611.

Disabling Poverty/Enabling Citizenship

By Pamela Brown

A disability-focused report on poverty reduction strategies in Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia has recently been released by Disabling Poverty/Enabling Citizenship. This research project – a partnership with the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) and Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), is now in its final year. This report is one of several that are being produced by a team of disability community and academic researchers lead by principal investigators Yvonne Peters, CCD and Dr. Michael J. Prince, University of Victoria. Combined, the results of this research will forward recommendations and plans for alleviating the disproportionate poverty of Canadians with disabilities.

Report Highlights:

The relationship between poverty and disability is complicated. Within the framework of provincial poverty reduction strategies (PRS), disability issues are explicitly addressed vis-à-vis housing, employment, health, education, income support as well as through policy instruments including taxation, exemption adjustments and accessibility. Of the four provinces reviewed for this report, only Newfoundland and Labrador's PRS has been in place long enough to yield outcomes. And, perhaps with the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador, PRS seem to largely be a means of reframing social services funded through Canada Social Transfer initiatives and Labour Market Agreements. The following list highlights the major features of this reframing:

- Explicit responsabilizing of the non-profit sector and in the case of New Brunswick, the creation of new community-based non-profit organizations to support government initiatives.
- Reinforcement of connection between employment and supports for persons with disabilities but with a (re)newed emphasis on addressing barriers to employment.
- Ever increasing emphasis on youth and education including the need to address barriers to education for persons with disabilities – this is one key area that may actually be receiving new funding.
- Explicitly funded initiatives to re-coordinate social services across government silos (housing, employment, health, education, income support) including reviews of tax-credits and eligibility thresholds that counteract each other.
- The packaging of poverty reduction with social inclusion.

Even as a repackaging of existing supports, there are potential opportunities being created by these changes inasmuch that times of change themselves can create opportunities. Some opportunities might be:

- Possible support from provincial governments for developing a federally-driven support system for persons with disabilities.
- The shift to approach poverty reduction by integrating services across silos improves the environment for recognizing the universal and intersectional location of persons with disabilities.
- More space for community-based input into policy creation and implementation.
- Accelerate recognition of disability rights and potentially extract disability from the provincial poverty policy regime.

This report also includes an appendix with examples of initiatives from each province in the areas of housing, income security, education, training, employment and better coordination of government services. Additionally, details about each province's PRS and disability-related legislation, goals, objectives, structures, consultation process and funding are also provided.

An electronic version of the report is available on the CCD website, <http://www.ccdonline.ca>. For more information please contact Tyler Hnatuk, tyler@cacl.ca.

But wishing won't make it so. The coming federal/provincial negotiations on transfer payments afford both levels of government a real chance to engage and act on the poverty file! It's not enough to raise the alarm – we must rouse ourselves to action. Our Committee's Report shows us how. Let's get on with it.

Prince Edward Island

In July 2011, the Government of Prince Edward Island released a poverty reduction discussion paper entitled, “Preventing and Reducing Poverty in PEI: A strategy for engagement”. The discussion paper was created to help shape a strategy to prevent and reduce poverty in Prince Edward Island.

The detailed paper builds on work completed over the past year to compile information on approaches in other Canadian provinces, and on this government’s actions to date to renew social policy and to enhance systems, services and supports.

“Preventing and Reducing Poverty in PEI” is an effort to consult with Islanders and further examine options of how to improve the well-being of Islanders in need. It contains information on trends, impacts and programs, as well as questions for the public to consider when providing input on how to reduce poverty.

The P.E.I. poverty reduction discussion paper contains sections on:

- Measures and definitions of poverty
- Poverty reduction strategies in Atlantic Canada and work to date in Prince Edward Island
- Patterns and trends in poverty in Prince Edward Island
- Profiles of high risk groups
- Impacts of poverty and a rationale for taking action
- Descriptions of the various programs and services that could form part of the strategy
- Consultation process and questions for public consideration

Throughout the fall months, the Government of Prince Edward Island will be seeking feedback from the public through online feedback forms, hard copy forms and face-to-face meetings. The provincial government plans to release a Social Action Plan in 2012.

Please visit www.peipovertystrategy.ca for more information.

Nunavut

The Government of Nunavut has created a Poverty Reduction Secretariat. Early this spring they started Nunavut’s Poverty Reduction Action Plan. They have held number of roundtable discussions in each Nunavut communities. I attended one of their meetings in Iqaluit to voice our concerns from our Society and to ensure that persons with disabilities are included, although the discussions have not specific focus on persons with disabilities; following is what they have identified as themes:

- Healing and wellbeing (for families, community, and individual, including addictions treatment);
- Education and skills development, including Inuit Qaujimagatunqangit (Inuit knowledge/practises) and core life skills;
- Food security, nutrition, and access to country foods;
- Housing and income support programs, and;
- Community economic development and job options.



Diversity includes.

Ontario

As part of the poverty reduction strategy launched in 2008, the government of Ontario appointed a Social Assistance Review Advisory Council to make recommendations on reform of systems in the province. The council released an initial report in June 2010 followed by a discussion paper and public consultation during the summer of 2011. Community Living Ontario provided a response to the consultation which is available at <http://www.communitylivingontario.ca/issues/odsp/social-assistance-review>.

In the coming months the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council will be preparing a set of draft recommendations based on the feedback it has received from the public. These draft recommendations will be made available to the public by the end of the year and there will be an opportunity for the public to comment on the draft recommendations. A final set of recommendations is expected to be published in June of 2012.

Nova Scotia

Since January 2011 the Disability Strategy has been put on hold by Government. At a recent meeting with government the Community Disability Strategy Group who began this initiative in 2008 was told that many government departments need to be on board with this strategy and discussions were taking place. The “Community” group is determined to advocate and is committed to continue to push their agenda forward to keep this Disability Strategy in the forefront.

On August 8th the Department of Community Services announced changes to the Regulations concerning “special needs” enacted under the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act, these changes will have significant impacts on persons with disabilities living in poverty. The regulatory changes eliminate certain special needs assistance for services and items that are “essential” to their health. The new regulations also prohibit special needs assistance for shelter related costs and personal allowances, certain drugs and medical treatments that are not covered by MSI.

Under the previous regulation essential items or services were provided where no other alternative treatment or government programs were available. As a result of the regulatory changes, this program of last resort no longer exists.

The amendments are clearly regressive measures that have a negative impact on the human rights of individuals, primarily those with disabilities. The amendments have removed any possibility of tailoring accommodative special needs items and services to recipients with very different needs.

On a more positive note some of the recent funding initiatives and tax credits focused on poverty reduction that have been put in place this year, some specifically targeted for persons with disabilities:

- The Income Assistance Personal Allowance was increased by \$15 a month for adults receiving income assistance
- The Poverty Reduction Credit was increased to keep pace with inflation.
- The Independent Living and Alternative Family Support programs expanded to enable 50 additional persons with disabilities to live as independently as possible
- The flat rate of exemption for those working in supported employment within income assistance doubled from \$150 to \$300 per month
- Effective October 1, 2011, the Minimum Wage will increase to \$10.00 an hour

NSACL is committed to improving the economic well-being of persons with intellectual disabilities in Nova Scotia by contributing to the Disability Strategy and advocating for full inclusion in all aspects of their communities.

Manitoba

The Government of Manitoba passed important legislation on June 17, 2011 that will give some authority to the government's poverty reduction strategy. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act embeds itself in Bill 51, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2011 and creates the means to define, monitor and enforce what the government does to deal with poverty and social exclusion.

All Aboard: Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy, launched in May 2009 preceded this Act. The strategy identified primary reduction parts – education and employment – but lacked the vision to prevent poverty as well as cope with poverty. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act establishes in law what the government will do to reduce poverty.

A monitoring committee of government ministers and three appointed community members will review and advise on the strategy. The committee, however, does not have the power to define programs or to hold government accountable if it does not implement programs. A need for external monitoring of government progress still exists.

In the Act government is required to include the poverty reduction strategy when preparing annual budgets, annual statements, and to measure progress with developed indicators. The government must continue with program development, planning, setting timelines, and set in place action to reduce poverty and increase social inclusion.

For more information, see Government of Manitoba news release:
<http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?archive=&item=11702>

New Brunswick

Work continues on the implementation of New Brunswick's poverty reduction plan known as Overcoming Poverty Together (launched in late 2009). Over the past year the following activities/actions have taken place:

- A Social Assistance Reform process has been initiated with the creation of a provincial advisory committee that is being co-chaired by a representative from NBACL. There have also been consultations with disability organizations around Social Assistance reform for people with a disability. Disability organizations have expressed the need for a new program that supports people to work (as opposed to labelling people as 'unemployable'). This will require a program with clear links to employment and other supports as well as incentives (such as enhanced wage exemptions) that will encourage people with disabilities to find work.
- A provincial committee has been created to make recommendations for a new prescription drug and dental program for low income New Brunswickers. This program is expected to be launched some time in 2012.
- Local Community Inclusion Networks have been established to provide local planning and action around poverty reduction and social inclusion.
- The provincial minimum wage will be increased to \$10/hour as of April 1, 2012.

Outside of the poverty reduction initiative, the government of New Brunswick has committed to increasing funding for employment supports for persons with a disability. This will begin in the current fiscal year (and result in an increase in the number of hours of supports available within a 52 week period), with additional increases expected over the next three years.

In June 2011, the government announced the creation of a provincial committee (to be co-chaired by MLA Danny Soucy) that will develop recommendations for a new employment strategy for persons with a disability. In February 2011, NBACL submitted a proposed policy and program framework for supported employment to government ministers. It is hoped that NBACL's recommendations will be adopted as part of a new strategy.



Diversity includes.

In the meantime, the government of New Brunswick is supporting efforts to assist youth with an intellectual disability make successful transitions from school to work. In July 2011, NBACL entered into a contract with government to deliver transition to work facilitation support to youth in 7 school districts. It is hoped that this program will expand to all 15 school districts in the near future.

Lastly, the government is committed to improving access to early learning and childcare for children with disabilities so as to better allow families to participate in the labour force. In September 2011, a forum was held to identify strategies for improving access to an inclusive early learning and childcare system. Specific initiatives are expected to be rolled out in the 2012-2013 fiscal year.

Quebec

The Government of Quebec has developed a 2010-2015 Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion. The plan commits nearly \$7 billion over five years and identifies four main thrusts:

1. Strengthen solidarity by making regional and local communities key players in the decision-making process.
 - a. Increase funding for regional priorities through the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales.
 - b. Coordinate, plan and implement regional anti-poverty action plans (regional solidarity alliances).
 - c. Work closely with players from the community, benevolent, economic, union and social sector.
 - d. Rally all of society to the cause of solidarity: A mission of the new Groupe des partenaires pour la solidarité (GPS) to make action more effective.
 - e. Establish a Solidarity Week so that all Québeckers contribute to the social inclusion of individuals in situations of poverty.
2. Acknowledge the value of work and foster the self-sufficiency of individuals.
 - a. Make work a more attractive option by maintaining the Work Premium, the Supplement to the Work Premium and the Adapted Work Premium.
 - b. Gear the increase in the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) to single individuals and childless couples.
 - c. Conduct an annual review of minimum wage by taking its effects on poverty into consideration.
 - d. Continue the Commitment for Employment's labour market integration investments.
 - e. Better serve new immigrants in order to foster their socioeconomic integration.
3. Support the income of disadvantaged individuals.
 - a. Continue assistance to underprivileged families, notably by maintaining Child Assistance.
 - b. Automatically index last-resort financial assistance benefits.
 - c. Introduce a solidarity tax credit to cushion the impact of public user fee increases and tax hikes.
 - d. In calculating last-resort financial assistance benefits, exempt the first \$100 of child support payments per month per child and harmonize student financial assistance accordingly.
4. Improve the living conditions of low-income individuals and families.
 - a. Build 3,000 new social housing units, bringing the goal to 30,000.
 - b. Establish initiatives for Aboriginal people in terms of employment, housing, transportation and social inclusion.
 - c. Foster the social inclusion of homeless individuals through regional and local action and by deploying the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux's Plan d'action interministériel en itinérance 2010-2013 (2010-2013 interdepartmental action plan against homelessness).
 - d. Better support initiatives aimed at respect for seniors and improve the slate of services for natural caregivers.
 - e. Work to implement structured support services for persons with disabilities and for their families.

More information can be found on-line at: http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/plan-action/orientations_en.asp

Newfoundland and Labrador

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Poverty Reduction Strategy was created to work towards the goal of prevention, reduction and alleviation of poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador. In 2011, the investment in the Poverty Reduction Strategy has grown to \$140 million to support more than 80 ongoing initiatives.

By all available measures of low-income, the province is seeing significant improvement in reducing the overall level of poverty since 2003. Extensive province-wide consultations were held in the fall of 2010 to inform the development of the next action plan. These consultations were extremely productive, as more than 650 stakeholders, including the NLACL, provided input that will help strengthen the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The next phase of The Strategy will be announced in the coming months. Efforts continue on the initiatives reported on in the Fall 2010 Poverty Watch newsletter. Additionally, the Adult Dental Health Program has been expanded as a result of the 2010 consultation process. Access to dental health services was frequently raised as an issue by people with disabilities.

The Adult Dental Health Program has been expanded to make diagnostic and therapeutic dental services available once every three years to adults aged 18 and over who live in low income or who are in receipt of Income Support. This initiative makes basic dental services available to people living in low income regardless of age.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy will continue to work with the Disability Policy Office, established in 2009, on a collaborative approach to achieve common goals related to persons with disabilities.

News and Views from Across Canada

Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID)

DISC – the Disability Income Support Coalition – has a membership of 38 disability advocacy organizations as well as people with disabilities and their families. 8 DISC members represent the Coalition on the Program Implementation Advisory Team (PIAT) which guides the development and implementation of SAID. Other DISC members work with government staff on 5 sub-committees that are looking at enrolment, service delivery, assessment, benefits and staff training.

In the past year the following developments have taken place:

December 2010 – the earnings exemption for SAID (and people with disabilities on SAP) was increased by \$100 per month for single persons with a disability, and by \$125 per month for childless couples with disabilities. This is approximately double the previous exemption. A \$100,000 inheritance exemption for SAID was implemented.

March 2011 – the provincial budget included funding to develop the assessment tool for SAID and to begin assessing individuals for the next phase of SAID enrolment. The budget also provided for a \$50/month increase to SAID clients in residential care settings beginning in January 2012. This will increase personal spending allowances by over 30% for this group.

May 2011 – the first SAID office was opened in Saskatoon. This office is located separately from the Social Assistance office in a step to increase the dignity of those who receive SAID benefits.



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To date, 13 of the 50 recommendations developed in 2009 for the SAID program have been fully implemented. Work is underway on most other recommendations.

Over the coming months the main focus in the actual delivery of SAID will be on the assessment of individuals with disabilities who live independently in community in order to move those who are eligible to the SAID program. DISC is also working to secure a benefit rate increase for these individuals. DISC continues to push for an adequate income level for all current and future SAID recipients to be achieved over the next 3 years.

To show your support for DISC you can sign up as a friend on our Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/saskdisc> and be sure to follow us on twitter for all the latest updates. Just search @DISCsk. For more information go to <http://www.saskdisc.ca/>

Spotlight on Poverty Reduction Strategies in Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador

The fight against poverty: innovative measures in Quebec

By François Aubry

On December 13, 2002, the Quebec government unanimously passed the Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion (Act 112) that implemented a Strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion.

The Act makes the fight against poverty and social exclusion a clear priority of the government of Quebec and it is the first of its kind in North America.

The Act stipulates the implementation of five-year action plans containing a series of measures to achieve the purpose of the law, which is to progressively include Quebec among the industrialized nations with the smallest number of poor people by 2013.

Unlike the traditional legislative process, Act 112 is the direct result of a civil society initiative, one of the largest rallying of citizens and public deliberations in the history of social action in Quebec. The rallying lasted several years and included community organizations, women's groups, unions and citizens who wanted to lay the foundations of a province without poverty.

Act 112 is innovative through the political process that resulted in it as well as through its content:

1. It adopts a wide definition of poverty that goes beyond insufficient income and includes the notions of choice and power of individuals as well as those of inclusion and participation in society;
2. It institutionalizes the participation of citizens in the fight against poverty and exclusion. The Strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion stresses the participation of all the stakeholders in society and the involvement of people living in poverty;
3. It institutes an innovative strategy to combat poverty and exclusion: the strategy takes a longitudinal perspective and takes into account the incidence of poverty at various stages of the life cycle; it uses an integrated approach that takes into consideration education, training, health and housing as well as employment and income; it stresses citizen participation and action and states that nothing can be accomplished without the active involvement of people living in poverty and communities and without the solid commitment of the entire society;
4. It takes into account the specific needs of certain groups that have specific difficulties due to age, ethnic origin or disabilities;
5. It includes mechanisms to ensure the effective enforcement of the Act and the coordinated action of the government;
6. It creates an Advisory Committee to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion as well as a Centre for Studies on Poverty and Exclusion to improve knowledge, make recommendations and develop better socio-economic indicators.

Poverty Reduction in Newfoundland and Labrador

By Pamela Brown

Newfoundland and Labrador is one of four provinces whose poverty reduction strategies (PRS) are analyzed in a recent report released by Disabling Poverty/Enabling Citizenship, a Canadian Association for Community Living and Council of Canadians with Disabilities research partnership. Unlike the other three provinces in this report, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador's PRS has been in place long enough to actually yield results.

Initiated by Danny Williams' Conservative government, Newfoundland and Labrador's PRS took root in 2003 and it was launched in 2006 with the goal of becoming the province with the least poverty by 2014. Unlike the other three provinces reviewed in this report, Newfoundland and Labrador passed only one piece of legislation after launching its PRS – the Transparency and Accountability Act – in 2004. Although it's not possible to be certain, it could be that this Act has contributed to the success of Newfoundland and Labrador's PRS simply by emphasizing the value of accurate measures and reporting.

Not only unique in Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador's development of a community-level poverty measure that draws on local factors, is a significant achievement in poverty reduction world-wide. The Newfoundland and Labrador Market Basket Measure (NLMBM) combines traditional market basket measure data such as family income and the cost of a basket of goods and services with tax-filer data to enable reporting on low-income levels in communities, neighbourhoods and other groups¹. Additionally, the province has also developed the NLMBM of Housing Affordability “for the examination of the affordability of housing by low-income populations at the community levelfor detailed characteristics such as gender.”¹ For persons with disabilities and their supporters, this means gaining more insight into the complex connections between disability and poverty.

So, has all this measuring revealed any progress in poverty reduction for persons with a disability? Analysis shows that Newfoundland and Labrador has a significant suite of income supports for persons with disabilities that are not employment dependent. For example, since its PRS was implemented, funding for adults with disabilities living with family members increased by up to \$362 per month and as of March 2009, 1,700 individuals benefited from this change¹. For those who are able to work, restructuring of support programs means some adults who become employed no longer lose access to benefits or tax breaks. In one low-income family case study, this meant annual earnings increased from \$22,206 in 2003 to \$29,712 in 2009¹.

Another Newfoundland and Labrador PRS outcome that may be significant for persons with disabilities is the one percent decrease in the number of people experiencing “persistent poverty”. Persistent poverty is measured as the number of people whose income is below Low Income Cut Off (LICA). Between 1996 and 2001, three percent of the population was in this category and that decreased to two percent between 2002 and 2007¹. This is significant because it is statistically demonstrated that persons with disabilities are more at risk for “persistent poverty”².

Newfoundland and Labrador's next PRS progress report should be released soon. To watch for that, locate the report cited in this article, or learn more about that province's PRS, please visit <http://www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/poverty/index.html>.

1 Empowering People Engaging Community Enabling Success (2009). Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment. ISBN: 978-1-55146-373-5.

2 Federal Government of Canada, Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (2010). Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in partnership towards reducing poverty in Canada.



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Towards a Multidimensional Approach to Poverty Reduction

By Tyler Hnatuk

There has been much debate in Canada about how we define poverty and how it is measured. In turn, how we define poverty has implications on what is done to address it. A number of governments in Canada and throughout the world have developed and have now begun to implement poverty reduction plans. The Federal government has also begun to explore its role in poverty reduction. Looking across these initiatives we find different ways of defining poverty and has different understandings of the relationship between poverty and disability.

It is well known that there is a strong link between disability and poverty. In Canada, working age adults with disabilities are twice as likely to live on low income as those who do not report having a disability. Internationally, people with disabilities in both developing and more developed countries are more likely to be in poverty than people without a disability. In developing countries people with disabilities make up to 20% of the poor and are among the poorest of the poor. Governments throughout the world have begun to turn greater attention toward the link between disability and poverty as they have realized that it will be impossible to meet targets for reducing poverty without specific and focused attention to the disproportionate rates of poverty experienced by people with disabilities.

When we think about poverty we tend to think of it as meaning not having enough money to provide for the basic needs of life. There have been different attempts made by policy makers in Canada to decide just exactly how much money is 'enough' to provide for basic needs and what counts as a basic need. This is called an *absolute* definition of income poverty. The problem with only using an *absolute* measure is that it doesn't take into account the position of the person in relation to the community around them. *Relative* measures of poverty, on the other hand, look at income inequality and the difference in the share that a person has in the wealth and benefits of a society. If poverty is measured only in *absolute* terms then it is possible that poverty rates will appear to be stable or declining, even as income inequality and other forms of exclusion are increasing.

In fact, recent reports have expressed alarm that income inequality is rising in Canada. Income inequality is concerning because it demonstrates an increasing 'social distance' between the members of a community. It demonstrates that the benefits of an increase to living standards are not being equally distributed among all members of a community. Certain groups are more vulnerable than others to being 'left out' of increased prosperity. People with disabilities have been particularly vulnerable to being left out of the full range of benefits of Canadian society. For example, Canadians with disabilities experience disproportionately low levels of employment; educational achievement, and participation in post-secondary training and education, and access to affordable and adequate housing.

Bringing the issues of social distance, inequality and living standards into view substantially expands the narrow income focus of traditional definitions of poverty and reveals that there are many intersecting factors in the relationship between disability and poverty. For example, income levels affect housing status; housing status and access to disability-related supports affect access to education, skills and training; which affects employment and labour market access – which in turn affects income levels and security, and so on. An absolute definition of poverty as income sufficient for basic needs not only renders invisible the rising levels of income inequality, it also risks concealing the multidimensional and intersecting nature of the inequality and exclusion that people with disabilities face. A relative approach opens a view to inequality but needs to be expanded to reveal the broader range of factors that are at play.

Our research suggests we take another step in defining poverty – beyond absolute and relative approaches – to a multidimensional approach to poverty. In this approach, various dimensions, like those identified above and known to be strong factors in the relationship between poverty and disability, need to be taken into account.

Different definitions of poverty point to different policy goals – an absolute definition points to raising benefit levels to an ‘adequate’ level, however defined; a relative approach points to closing the income gap by a certain percentage point. So what policy goal does a multidimensional approach to defining poverty point to? We propose that the policy goal should be clearly defined as social and economic inclusion. Using this lens for policy analysis and proposals encompasses the broader dimensions of employment and access to inclusive labour markets; access to skills, training and education; family and relationships; and equal enjoyment of civic, legal and political rights.

Reform or redesign of income benefit programs have been a common element in poverty reduction strategies. How would such a lens revise approaches to income benefit programs? People with disabilities are up to six times more likely to be dependent on social assistance than people without disabilities and are overrepresented in case loads. Income benefit programs for people with disabilities provide a degree of income support to alleviate poverty. Recent studies have shown that even the most generous programs in Canada provide rates that are only slightly better than the most restrictive estimates of the amount of money necessary to meet basic needs. Most provide far less and they do so with rules that undermine the other dimensions of social and economic inclusion such as employment, education, housing, family and relationships and self-esteem. Some of these are known to be the factors that can make the greatest difference in escaping poverty.

Applying a lens of social and economic inclusion to income security for people with disabilities means asking some difficult questions about the purpose and rationale of an income benefit program: Is it welfare? Pension? Disability-related support? Income security? Replacement of employment income? Compensation for inaccessible labour markets? Under most benefit programs that are currently available there is little clarity about these questions. The underlying rationale of an income program affects every aspect of the way that it operates—from benefit rates and eligibility to rules that affect subsidized housing, student loans, employment supports, assets and even family and relationships. Policy analysis is needed that can assess income benefit programs in terms of whether they enable a poverty exit strategy and access route to social and economic inclusion. Our research takes on some of these difficult questions and applies a lens of social and economic inclusion to income security in hopes of furthering discussion about how we can more effectively break the link between poverty and disability.

Tyler is Policy and Programs Officer, Canadian Association for Community Living



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Thinking about Poverty Reduction Strategies

Does your province or territory have a poverty reduction strategy? What about your community? Here are some basic points that you and your association can consider. For more information visit CACL.CA

HOW IS IT ORGANIZED?

- Is it law? Anchoring poverty reduction strategies in legislation creates opportunities for engagement and makes them more stable in the event of a change in government.
- Nothing about us without us! Be sure there is a process for meaningful consultation and involvement of people with disabilities and their families.
- Is it making a difference? Find ways to measure progress and require regular reporting.
- Who is responsible? Cooperation across different departments and ministries is crucial to making an impact on poverty. A leading minister or committee can assist coordination.
- Lead the way. Get involved in anti-poverty coalitions and groups or make efforts to start one.

IS THE LINK BETWEEN POVERTY AND DISABILITY RECOGNIZED?

- People with disabilities make up 16.5% of the Canadian population and are twice as likely to live in poverty as people without disabilities. To reduce poverty it is necessary to address the needs of people with disabilities. For more facts on poverty and disability visit CACL.CA
- Poverty is about more than income. Exclusion from equal access to education, employment, and housing contribute to the poverty experienced by people with disabilities.

A SOCIAL INCLUSION LENS

Social and economic inclusion is about having the resources and access necessary for full participation in the social, economic, political and cultural life of a community, including:

- Education and training: childhood, primary and secondary and post-secondary;
- Employment, careers and income security;
- Affordable, safe and healthy homes and neighbourhoods;
- Access to justice, political and civic life;
- Artistic, cultural and recreational opportunities;
- Health, social and other related services;
- Transportation and infrastructure.

A social and economic inclusion lens can be helpful in thinking about poverty reduction strategies. Many of the existing strategies have already begun to consider such an approach.

For any proposal or policy it can be helpful to ask:

- Will this improve the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities?
- Will this act as a barrier to the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities?
- What is missing? What else needs to be done?

CACL's Call to Action

In the long-term we must look at expanding and enhancing the federal role in providing non-stigmatizing, non-punitive direct income support to people with disabilities. In the short term, the Federal Government could take immediate steps to address the poverty of Canadians with disabilities by:

- 1 Making the Disability Tax Credit refundable for low-income Canadians
- 2 Establishing an advisory committee – reporting to both the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and the Minister of Finance – to explore options for expanding the federal role in income support for people with disabilities
- 3 Making those eligible for Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits automatically eligible for the Disability Tax Credit
- 4 Making Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits non-taxable
- 5 Expanding Employment Insurance Sick Benefits to 52 weeks

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Diversity includes.