

# POVERTY

## WATCH

Fall 2010

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



50 years

Canadian  
Association for  
Community Living

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Welcome to the inaugural edition of our newsletter *Poverty Watch*. In this and future editions, we will 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 will also feature articles and opinions which focus attention on the unacceptable rates of poverty experienced by persons with disabilities and on the need for increased efforts, at all levels within Canada, to address this situation. On behalf of the National Action Committee, I thank those groups and individuals who kindly contributed information to this edition.

In such a wealthy country as Canada, a person might assume that poverty would not be a national crisis. Despite our national prosperity, more than 3.4 million (one in 10) of our fellow citizens live in poverty. For persons with disabilities, the rate of poverty is even more staggering. In Canada, we have created poverty as the most likely outcome of life with a disability. 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.

We know that Canadians with intellectual disabilities and their families face staggering rates of poverty. A few facts are that:

- almost 75% of adult Canadians with intellectual disabilities living alone are living in poverty;
- 46% of working age adults with an intellectual disability struggle to live on provincial/territorial social assistance; and,
- people with disabilities comprise a significant portion (from 22 to 67%) of social assistance recipients in provinces and territories.

On a positive note, there are strategies in place in several provinces and territories to alleviate, reduce and prevent poverty. We are hopeful that the results of these efforts will substantially improve the economic conditions of persons with intellectual disabilities. Such efforts, unfortunately, are not in place in all parts of this country. Additionally, we must remain vigilant to ensure that poverty reduction strategies, where they exist, give full consideration to persons with intellectual disabilities, those who are generally among the poorest of the poor. To be inclusive and effective, poverty reduction strategies must contain specific measures to address the needs of this group.

Effective poverty reduction requires the collaboration of all governments in Canada: federal as well as provincial and territorial. It requires enhanced access to disability supports, which we know are essential to enabling labour market participation for many people. Provincial/territorial social assistance programs require fundamental reform and modernization; and quite likely the development of some type of national income program, particularly for those with significant disabilities. This is a critical task that we must undertake, so that everyone belongs.

**Michael J. Prince,**  
**Chair, National Action Committee on Disability Supports, Income and Employment**

This is a newsletter written and produced by the National Action Committee on Disability Supports, Income and Employment. For more information or to submit an article or commentary for future publication, contact Anna MacQuarrie at 416 661 9611.

# We Can't Afford Poverty Anymore

**By Senator Art Eggleton, Chair of the Senate Sub-committee on Cities, and Senator Hugh Segal, (Former) Vice-Chair of the Senate Sub-committee on Cities**

**A**fter two years of study and until recently nearly a decade of unprecedented economic growth in Canadian cities – we were hoping to tell Canadians that we are winning the fight against poverty in Canada. Sadly we cannot.

What we heard shocked us: a staggering one in 10 Canadians living poverty – 3.4 million people. Over 800,000 of those are children – a fact that is all the more deplorable given Parliament's solemn commitment, in 1989, to eliminate child poverty by 2000. Instead, we've hardly made a dent – and this is both a federal and provincial challenge!

Let's be clear – that number of children in poverty is not just a statistic, it's a window into the future – theirs and ours. We know, for example, that a child born into poverty has a greater chance of dying in infancy and, if he or she lives, of having a lower birth weight and more disabilities. As that child grows, they're more likely to have poor nutrition and health. They'll miss more school, and when they get to school perform less well than others and fall further behind and be more likely to drop out.

As they reach adulthood, they will have higher rates of chronic illnesses including Type II diabetes and some cancers. With a poorer education they will earn less, pay less in taxes, be less productive workers and use more social services – all at significant cost to society.

We also found that the system (which has federal, provincial and municipal pieces) that is supposed to help lift people out of poverty is substantially broken, entraps people in poverty and needs a complete overhaul.

This unacceptable situation led our Committee to offer some essential, broad and incremental recommendations that go beyond the "path dependency" paralysis that has typified federal and provincial policy under governments of all affiliations for decades.

Underlying all of our recommendations is the simple premise: that the goal of all social policy in Canada should be to lift people out of poverty. This means ensuring that, regardless of the reasons for their need, people receive an income that would keep them above the poverty line.

To do this we have offered specific recommendations.

We believe that the federal government should develop and implement a basic income guarantee at or above the poverty line for people with severe disabilities. This income guarantee would mean, as one of the witness before our Committee stated, "full citizenship for Canadians who face tremendous barriers and obstacles." And, just last week, Steve Cardiff, MLA for Mount Lorne in the Yukon, introduced a broad motion in the legislature urging "the Yukon government to implement a guaranteed minimum annual income allowance for all eligible Yukon citizens... which would "expand human dignity; end poverty; save on the costs of hospitals, prisons and police work; eliminate or significantly reduce the burden on the social assistance system..." This is another example of the joint/federal provincial challenge before us.

We are also calling for a program to insure against income losses due to long-term employment interruption, covering workers that are not currently insured, including new and part-time workers as well as those who have been unemployed for an extended period, recent immigrants and the underemployed. These and other recommendations would expand opportunity, reduce inequities and help more Canadians get back on their feet.

To ensure that children arrive at school ready to learn, we propose a nation-wide, federal-provincial initiative on early childhood learning. This would go a long way to leveling the playing field for poor children.

Many of the income transfers to individuals take place through the tax system. Some, such as the National Child Benefit Supplement, work well and we recommend increasing it to \$5000 by 2012.

Housing and homelessness remain enormous challenges for the poor, with over three million Canadians struggling to find affordable accommodation. This is not only a moral issue, but an economic one. It costs about \$48,000 a year to leave someone on the street, but only about \$28,000 to house them.

We propose better funding through the Affordable Housing Initiative; recommend that the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program be made permanent and call on the federal and provincial governments to finally come to grips with this issue through a national housing and homelessness strategy. The jarring juxtaposition of poverty in a land of plenty is one Canadians have lived with for too long – a movie they have seen too many times. We need policies that work – both for the poor and for our country as a whole.

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.

## Provincial/Territorial **UPDATES**

Poverty is a complex and multi-dimensional social and economic issue that negatively affects individuals and families in all provinces and territories within this country. Poverty not only reflects a lack of adequate financial resources but also includes social exclusion, as it prevents people from participating fully in the social and economic activities of a society. Moreover we believe that poverty cannot be viewed simply as a personal failure. Rather it is more correctly seen as a failure of our systems to appropriately support people to secure adequate and dignified means of support.

Given that the causes of poverty are multi-dimensional, it is clear that developing long term and sustainable solutions will require commitment and actions by a wide range of stakeholders. Leadership and investment must come from provincial and territorial governments but the conditions that contribute to poverty do not fall solely within the governmental domain, nor do its solutions. Poverty reduction will require collaboration across many different sectors.

Several Canadian provinces have introduced active poverty reduction strategies. Others are at various stages of considering introduction of a strategy. In this edition of *Poverty Watch* we feature brief updates of the intent and outcomes of several provincial strategies. Updates on the remaining provincial / territorial strategies will be presented in our next edition.

### Newfoundland and Labrador

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Poverty Reduction Strategy was created to promote self-reliance, opportunity, and access to key supports for people who are living in or are vulnerable to poverty. A major government wide initiative, involving 14 government departments and agencies, the Poverty Reduction Strategy was first launched in 2006 with an initial investment of \$30.5 million to support 20 initiatives. In 2010, the investment has grown to \$134 million to support more than 80 ongoing initiatives.



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The intention of the Strategy is to reduce both the incidence and depth of poverty for all those living in or vulnerable to poverty. The provincial strategy has also included initiatives with specific intent and impact for persons with disabilities. These include:

- Full exemption of the Registered Disability Savings program from both Income and Disability Supports.
- Increased funding to adults with disabilities who live with parents, grandparents, and siblings so that they receive the same board and lodging supplement as people with disabilities who live with non-relatives.
- Increased access to the Special Child Welfare Allowance Program to help families who care for children with developmental or physical disabilities with the additional costs.
- Funding to NLACL to promote and develop materials to assist families in setting up Trust Funds on behalf of adults with disabilities
- Investments in wage subsidy programs, employment-related disability supports, internships to promote technology, school-to-work transition supports, and public awareness efforts – all intended to increase the labour market participation and reduce barriers to employment for persons with disabilities
- General income support levels raised and indexed; Earning exemptions increased

The provincial Strategy includes regular public reporting and a commitment to consult with the public every two years. These consultations were used to develop the first Four Year Action Plan, and the current consultation process (September 2010) will influence the activities for the next four years. The Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living and other community disability organizations have participated in these consultations as a way of ensuring that the needs of persons with disabilities are fully considered and addressed within the Strategy.

The stated objective of the Poverty Reduction Strategy is to make Newfoundland and Labrador the province with the lowest rate of poverty in Canada by 2014. NLACL is certainly supportive of this goal. In collaboration with government officials, we will ensure that as future initiatives are designed and implemented, there is full acknowledgement of the specific needs of persons with intellectual disabilities. The Strategy has to date achieved positive outcomes for many people, but certainly much more needs to be done. Our role must be to remain vigilant and to work in concert with government in ensuring that, over time, the still unacceptable high rate of poverty for persons with intellectual disabilities is completely and absolutely addressed.

## New Brunswick

In November 2009, New Brunswick launched its poverty reduction plan under the name *Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan*. This plan was developed after months of public consultation that was co-chaired by a government Minister as well as representatives from the community and business sectors. The plan was also endorsed by the official opposition and has been given legal recognition through legislation – the *Economic and Social Inclusion Act*.

The vision of the new plan is as follows:

*Through the collaboration of governments, business and non-profit sectors, people living in poverty and individual citizens, all men, women and children in New Brunswick shall have the necessary resources to meet their basic needs and to live with dignity, security and good health. Furthermore all New Brunswickers shall be included as full citizens though opportunities for employment, personal development and community engagement.*

The plan involves many priority actions focused on opportunities for being (meeting basic need), becoming (life-long learning and skills acquisition) and belonging (community participation). Some of the key actions include:

- Significant reform (over the next two years) of the provincial social assistance program to focus on employment opportunities and social and economic inclusion.
- Development of a new income support program for person with disabilities.

- Development of a prescription drug program for “non-insured” citizens by 2012, thereby removing a significant disincentive for people on social assistance who want to work.
- Implementation of a new housing strategy that commits to improving access to affordable housing for persons with disabilities.

New Brunswick’s newly elected government (as of September 2010) has made additional commitments that will help to address poverty faced by people with disabilities. Over the next four years the provincial government will:

- Develop and implement a new Transition to Work strategy for youth with disabilities leaving high school;
- Increase funding for and enhance access to employment supports;
- Increase wage exemptions for people receiving income support benefits;
- Increase the disability supplement benefit by 20%;
- Develop a provincial strategy to ensure accessible and affordable transportation; and
- Create a more responsive rent subsidy program for people with disabilities.

## Nova Scotia

The Poverty Reduction Working Group of Nova Scotia recommended in June 2008 that *“The Province must coordinate the provision of programs and services to people with disabilities across Departments and engage the disability communities in the development of a Disability Strategy for Nova Scotia. This strategy must address, among others: accessible, affordable, and visitable housing, universal access to technical aids, accessible and affordable transportation, and a navigator system. And the Province must enhance disability supports to all people with disabilities (regardless of eligibility for income assistance) so that they may fully participate in the province’s economic, educational and social opportunities.”*

The Minister of Community Services has committed to the development of a Disability Strategy and a working group, including representatives of disabilities communities, has been established.

A number of funding initiatives and tax credits focused on poverty reduction have been put in place in the past year, some specifically targeted for people with disabilities:

- Approximately \$4.1 million in funding to support children with special needs in child care settings in 2009-2010
- \$21.4 million committed to the construction of 159 affordable housing units for seniors and person with disabilities
- October 2009 adjustment, based on Consumer Price Index, to Personal Allowance Rate, resulted in \$6 monthly increase to help people with the cost of meeting their basic needs
- An Affordable Living Tax Credit was implemented to offset the 2% increase in the HST to an annual maximum of \$240 per household
- A Poverty Reduction Credit which provides \$200 annually per household for individuals and couples receiving income assistance who have no children and have an annual adjusted income below \$12,000 (\$50 payments each quarter during the year)
- A commitment to an initiative to reduce the costs of prescription drugs to those participating in the Pharmacare program
- On October 1, 2010 the minimum wage was raised from \$9.20 per hour to \$9.65 per hour

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



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## Ontario

As part of the poverty reduction strategy launched in 2008, the government of Ontario announced plans for a Social Assistance Review. A Social Assistance Review Advisory Council was appointed to develop recommendations on terms of reference and scope of the review. The Advisory Council released their report in June. The report contains many welcome recommendations and in particular highlights the need for a comprehensive review of Ontario's income security system which would look not only at Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (social assistance programs) but also at programs from other ministries and levels of government that impact the lives of social assistance recipients.

The report of the Advisory Council also recommends some specific approaches to social assistance such as unbundling benefits for needs such as a housing or food to be provided outside of social assistance and be made available through a needs test so that people can retain the stability that these benefits offer while transitioning to greater financial independence and security. The report also recommends establishing standards for a livable income in order to assess the adequacy of Ontarians incomes. To view a full report of the Advisory Council visit: <http://www.accesson.ca/en/mcss/sacouncil/index.aspx>

Community Living Ontario has made a response to the report endorsing many of the recommendations made by the council. We will continue to make efforts to ensure that the specific situations of people with intellectual disabilities and their families living in poverty are represented as the social assistance review commences.

## Manitoba

The August 4th Roundtable on Poverty Eradication was sponsored by the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg and Campaign 2000 in collaboration with Council of Canadians with Disabilities and Canadian Council on Social Development. On August 5th, Premier Greg Selinger, Chair of the Council of the Federation accepted the ratified Winnipeg Statement: The Provincial and Territorial Road to Poverty Reduction.

The roundtable, with more than 40 participants in the room in Winnipeg represented a wide range of groups – low-income communities, labour, business, women's groups, people with disabilities, Aboriginal communities, faith communities, recent immigrants, lone parents and others. More than 25 additional participants from across Canada participated by webinar. This roundtable provided an opportunity for dialogue among levels of government, civil society and Aboriginal organizations. The Winnipeg Statement can be found at [www.campaign2000.ca](http://www.campaign2000.ca)

The communiqué of the Council of Federation appears encouraging. This is the first time since Campaign 2000 began its annual communication with the Premiers in 1997 that the Council of the Federation specifically refers to poverty. The August 5th statement says, "Premiers will also continue to promote sustained economic recovery by fostering a culture of innovation, encouraging continued private sector investments, removing barriers to economic development, expanding trade, strengthening Canada's labour market, and reducing poverty." The entire communiqué, "Premiers Working to Sustain Economic Recovery," is available at [www.councilofthefederation.ca](http://www.councilofthefederation.ca)

Community Living-Manitoba was pleased to be at the roundtable discussions and is encouraged by the Council of the Federation response. Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy has the following four pillars:

- Safe, affordable housing in supportive communities
- Education, jobs and income support
- Strong, healthy families
- Accessible, coordinated services

See [http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/misc/pubs/all\\_aboard\\_report.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/misc/pubs/all_aboard_report.pdf) for more details.

## Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability

*DISC – the Disability Income Support Coalition – was created in 2006 to work towards the implementation of a separate income system for people with disabilities that would offer both an adequate baseline income and a user-friendly mechanism to address individual financial needs based on the impact of disability. DISC has grown from 20 to 37 member organizations plus individuals with disabilities and their families.*

### What Progress Has Been Achieved?

- October 2008 – the Government of Saskatchewan announced that they would create a separate, dignified program for people with disabilities: ‘SAID’ (Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability)
- December 2008 – DISC joined the joint Government – Community Task Team to develop recommended design options for the new income program.
- May 2009 – the Government accepted all 50 recommendations of the Task Team and announced that the new income program will be launched on December 1, 2009 with an estimated initial enrollment of up to 3000 individuals. Ultimately, the Government anticipates that between 8,000 and 10,000 individuals will be enrolled on the new income program.
- December 2009 – a limited number of individuals, living in residential care, were enrolled at the launch of the new program. At this time the program mirrors the social assistance program but work is being done, by community and government together, to implement all 50 recommendations.
- The primary focus of the joint task team at this time is on the development of an assessment tool and training of government staff who will be working in SAID.
- Currently DISC is also working to encourage the government to increase the enrollment for SAID and to take the first step towards a socially acceptable level of income by increasing SAID rates in the 2011 – 12 budget year.

Once fully developed, SAID should provide a respectful support system and an adequate income to people with significant and enduring disabilities. DISC is committed to continue working as a partner with government until SAID meets the Coalition’s objectives.

## A Basic Income Plan for Canadians with Severe Disabilities

By Michael Mendelson, Caledon Institute

Despite billions of dollars spent on a complex assortment of social benefits, many working age Canadians with disabilities end up desperately poor and trapped on welfare – the dead-end default program of last resort. While there has been some progress for persons with disabilities since the landmark *Obstacles* report was released 30 years ago, one area in which there has been almost no improvement at all has been that of income security. This tragic state of affairs is neither tolerable nor necessary.

In *A Basic Income Plan for Canadians with Severe Disabilities*, a new report by the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, the authors describe the current situation facing Canadians with disabilities and set out a detailed plan to revolutionize income support and services.

The foundation of this plan is a proposed new federal Basic Income program that would replace provincial/territorial social assistance for most working age persons with severe disabilities. *The Basic Income program* would be a close model of the long-established and well-regarded Guaranteed Income Supplement for low-income seniors. The second reform is to convert the existing non-refundable Disability Tax Credit into a refundable *Disability Tax Credit* that would extend compensation for the extra costs of disability to the lowest-income people with disabilities. The refundable credit would pay \$2,000 through the



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income tax system to every person eligible for the Disability Tax Credit. These federal income security initiatives would free up funding for urgently needed *disability supports and services*, permitting the provinces and territories to set up a coherent, comprehensive system of supports and services for those with disabilities.

This federal and provincial/territorial policy partnership could bring Canada into a new age of enlightened programs for those with severe disabilities, with a modest but liveable assured minimum income and a system of supports for daily living that could be among the best in the world. All this is achievable within the boundaries of our current political and administrative institutions and at a cost which is realistic in light of other fiscal choices.

The report will be posted on the Caledon Institute of Social Policy web site at <http://www.caledoninst.org/>

## End Exclusion

The Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) and the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) are joined by Canada without Poverty in hosting End Exclusion 2010. The End Exclusion initiative first launched in 2006 is an opportunity to bring disability organizations and others together to frame a common vision for an inclusive and accessible Canada. In 2007 the vision was further developed into a national action plan on disability. This year, End Exclusion 2010, invites participants to bring their voice to the national dialogue on poverty and disability. Participants will have an opportunity to learn about poverty and disability and to engage in national efforts to alleviate the staggering poverty faced by people with disabilities and their families. Participants will hear from: esteemed Aboriginal leader and activist, Cindy Blackstock, leading social policy experts like Michael Mendelson from the Caledon Institute, Dr. Michael Prince from the University of Victoria and many others. End Exclusion 2010 will open with remarks from the Honourable Diane Finley, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

## Reform of sickness and disability policies in Canada needed, says OECD

Sickness and disability policy reform has been a priority for Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries wanting to improve employment and social outcomes in this policy area.

As part of this policy research, *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers, CANADA: Opportunities for Collaboration*, appeared in September 2010.

This report is an assessment of the Canadian situation, through the lens of the federal government and the provinces of Québec, British Columbia and Manitoba. The OECD's analysis is primarily based on a review of major federal initiatives and provincial programmes of the three provinces. The focus is on reviewing how the federal and provincial public programmes interact to induce more persons with disabilities into work while simultaneously trying to secure enough income for them to be able to overcome the risks of poverty.

According to the report, "Much of Canada's sickness and disability policy reform efforts so far have been piecemeal rather than co-ordinated, and had seemingly limited overall impact on a system that remains complex and fragmented. It is well documented that issues arising from overlapping federal and provincial responsibilities have been a cause of this and for dissipating accountability for poor outcomes."

Overall, the report finds that "Canada is facing similar sickness and disability policy challenges to many other OECD countries: low rates of employment and high rates of unemployment of people with health problems or disability; a much higher poverty risk for this population group; and growing dependence on disability benefits (though the latter varies by province). Some global trends are, however, less pronounced in Canada, such as the gradual shift from unemployment to disability and the rising incidence of mental illness as a basis for disability benefit claims. Other problems are more pronounced than on average across the OECD, in particular the large proportion of persons with disabilities facing poverty – an outcome in part related to the lower generosity and limited accessibility of its benefit system."

# Dignity for All: A National Campaign to End Poverty

**D**ignity for All is a multi-year, multi-partner, non-partisan campaign. The campaign is led by Canada without Poverty; its vision is to make a poverty-free and more socially secure and cohesive Canada a reality by 2020. The conviction behind this campaign is that Canadians must respect and defend the right of every person to dignity and security.

Everyone has a role to play in building a poverty-free and more socially secure Canada – governments at all levels, businesses of all sizes and types, community and other civil society organizations, and individuals. The federal government, with its particular policymaking, legislative, taxation and redistributive powers, has an especially critical role. The *Dignity for All Campaign* is therefore aimed primarily to achieve federal action.

The campaign has three goals:

- 1. A comprehensive, integrated federal plan for poverty elimination:** Linked to and in support of current and future provincial and territorial poverty action plans, a federal plan for poverty elimination will provide a pan-Canadian blueprint for reducing and eventually eliminating poverty. The plan will inspire other efforts to combat poverty and to promote a fair and just society. It will require transparency and accountability by the federal government, with inclusion of robust indicators of low income, material deprivation and social exclusion. And it will be comprehensive in its approach, with measures concerning the following and other thematic areas:
  - Income Security
  - Food Security
  - Housing Security
  - Child Care and Early Childhood Development
  - Education and Training
  - Labour Standards
  - Job Creation including a Green Jobs Strategy
  - Unemployment Insurance
  - Health Supports
  - Particular supports for vulnerable populations
- 2. A federal Act to eliminate poverty, promote social inclusion and strengthen social security:** Inspired by similar legislation in other jurisdictions, this Act will ensure an ongoing federal role and responsibility for social development, while demonstrating a lasting federal commitment for leadership and for accountability to citizens for results.
- 3. Sufficient federal revenue to invest in social security:** In order to fulfill its role and responsibility to ensure social security, generally, and to combat poverty, specifically, the federal government must have sufficient revenue, or “fiscal capacity.” The *Dignity for All Campaign* will promote public understanding of the link between the taxes Canadians pay and the supports and services we benefit from as a result. The campaign will also advance policy proposals for sufficient and fair taxation.



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# BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

By **Seth Klein,**  
**BC Office, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives**

**B**ritish Columbia, despite having the highest poverty rates in the country, remains one of a minority of provinces without a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. The BC office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has been seeking to change this fact, as one of the organizational members of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (PRC). In late 2008, the CCPA published a detailed **Poverty Reduction Plan for BC** (readers can find all our poverty-related BC reports at: [http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/search?type=reports&tid=1&keys=&tid\\_1=8](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/search?type=reports&tid=1&keys=&tid_1=8)).

Our BC plan includes specific policy measures to reduce poverty among those with disabilities. We also brought together a network of organizations that have similarly called for a comprehensive plan with legislated targets and timelines, and we are now formally constituted as the BC PRC (see <http://www.bcpovertyreduction.ca>).

One of the key messages of the PRC is that “we all pay for poverty.” We pay in higher costs for social, community and charitable services, in higher costs to the criminal justice system, in lost productivity and lower school success, and higher health costs. There is, consequently, a false economy in failing to act.

The second, more challenging key message is that “there is nothing inevitable about poverty and homelessness in a society as wealthy as ours.” We emphasize this by showing that the cost of ending poverty is well within our means. By highlighting opinion poll results that clearly show a large majority of Canadians want action on poverty reduction. By explaining all the concrete policies that, if implemented, would make a dramatic difference. And by underscoring that those jurisdictions that make poverty reduction a priority are getting results.

Six provinces now have poverty reduction plans, although most are still fairly new, the exceptions being Quebec and Newfoundland. What their plans and results tell us is that poverty isn’t inevitable – that policy matters.

When we rely only on the market, economic growth and job creation, the results with respect to poverty reduction are weak. That is what we see in the BC case, where we have recorded very low unemployment in recent years, but poor progress on poverty reduction.

When surveying what other provinces have done, a few key common features emerge:

- Advanced with all-party support; with specific targets and timelines, which in most cases are embedded in legislation.
- Comprehensive (deal with income – both social assistance and other government income supports, as well as measures to boost labour market income; address the social infrastructure such as housing, education, child care, and community health care; have specific measures to address poverty among those populations where poverty is most acute, such as Aboriginal people, recent immigrants, people with disabilities and mental illness, and single parents).
- Accountability mechanisms, such as public consultations, independent monitoring groups, obligations to report annually, and timeline benchmarks that are frequent enough that a government can be held accountable within the life of each mandate.
- Cross-ministry secretariat to coordinate and integrate plans, ensuring that policies do not act at cross-purposes.

Finally, if one questions affordability, consider this: The total needed to take everyone in British Columbia below the poverty line, and raise their income to the poverty line, is about \$2.4 billion. That’s a fair amount of money. But it is only about 1.3% of provincial GDP (in contrast, the cost of poverty in Ontario is estimated to be about 6% of GDP). We can afford to do this. Surely, in a province as wealthy as ours, with an annual GDP of almost \$200 billion, closing a poverty gap of \$2.4 billion should not be seen as insurmountable. Much of the task will fall to government, but the private sector also has a vital role to play, most notably by raising the wages of low-wages workers.

Poverty is not inevitable. We all pay for it. But other places are showing us that when we take focused action, we can get results. But it starts with a plan.

# Disabling Poverty/Enabling Citizenship

The Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) is a proud partner, with the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), in the exciting research project *Disabling Poverty/Enabling Citizenship*. Legal researcher Yvonne Peters, CCD, and Dr. Michael J. Prince, University of Victoria, Principal Investigators for this strategic initiative, will lead a team of disability community and academic researchers dedicated to bringing forward recommendations and plans for alleviating the disproportionate poverty of Canadians with disabilities.

This important research project, which will use a disability lens to investigate poverty as it affects persons with disabilities and also formulate strategies for reducing poverty in the disability community, is funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) competition.

The research will:

- Provide a demographic profile of poverty and exclusion from the perspective of Canadians with disabilities
- Delineate how public and private income programs and disability support services interact in specific jurisdictions
- Outline existing legal protections and identify needed protections for persons with disabilities living in poverty
- Analyze the major poverty alleviation reforms proposed over the past 20 years
- Present reform options that will substantively improve the material living conditions and life chances of people with disabilities and their families
- Incorporate a gender analysis in all aspects of the research

“A consensus exists that the issues of poverty and disability must be addressed however, to date advancement has been very incremental and there has been no clear understanding or consensus on staged policy reforms that would more substantively address the long-term problem,” states Dr. Michael J. Prince, Landsdowne Professor of Social Policy at the University of Victoria. “The Research Alliance will work to build greater knowledge and awareness of the need for reform and present specific policy recommendations that could be implemented to reduce the disproportionate poverty experienced by Canadians with disabilities.”

The project has four key themes:

1. **Poverty and Exclusion:** The Poverty and Exclusion theme examines the relationship between poverty and disability for the purpose of developing a demographic profile.
2. **Income Security and Policy Reform:** The Income Security and Social Policy theme will map the connections between income security and disability-related supports, as well as examine federal tax and income programs.
3. **Poverty/Disability/Equality:** The Poverty/Disability/Equality theme will assess the effectiveness of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and other rights-based statutes, policies and case law in protecting the economic and social rights of persons with disabilities to the necessities of life.
4. **Policy Reform: Roles of State and Society:** The Policy Reform: Roles of State and Society theme will examine the roles of both the state and society in reducing and eliminating the impact of poverty on disability.

For more information contact Anna MacQuarrie, [amacquarrie@cacl.ca](mailto:amacquarrie@cacl.ca).



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### Members of the National Action Committee on Disability Supports, Income and Employment

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 Anna MacQuarrie – Support, CACL

### The Council of the Federation

The Council of the Federation is the forum for bringing the broad Community Living Federation together to work collaboratively on advancing the full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

It is comprised of CACL and each of the 13 Provincial/Territorial Associations for Community Living. Through National Action Committees, members of the Council come together to share and exchange knowledge, to link existing efforts and to identify ways of working together to achieve our shared 10 point agenda.

Poverty Watch was developed with the support of the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) project Disabling Poverty/Enabling Citizenship. CURA is a program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

# 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



Diversity includes.