

# Sober child poverty stats should prompt action, advocates say <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Toronto Star

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 24 Nov 2016

## AVAILABILITY

Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Canada must move from laggard to leader when it comes to fighting child poverty, says Campaign 2000 in its annual report being released Thursday, the 26th anniversary of Ottawa's 1989 pledge to eradicate the problem by the millennium.

Despite the all-party resolution, child poverty has jumped from 15.8 per cent a generation ago to 18.3 per cent today. It soars to 60 per cent for First Nations children living on reserves.

For those under age 6, the rate is almost 20 per cent nationally and closer to 45 per cent for young children in Nunavut, according to the report based on Statistics Canada tax filer data for 2014, the most recent available.

"Nearly one in five children in Canada live in poverty today because their families are forced to navigate the uncertainty of precarious work, skyrocketing housing costs, and uneven and unaffordable child care services while they try not to slip through the holes in Canada's social safety net," said the group's spokeswoman Anita Khanna.

Ottawa's new Canada Child Benefit and a commitment to reduce and monitor child poverty are "important steps forward," says Campaign 2000, a non-partisan coalition of 120 national, provincial and local groups dedicated to the issue.

But with 1.3 million children still living in poverty and UNICEF ranking Canada 26th out of 35 wealthy nations for child inequality, more work needs to be done, Khanna noted.

As an immediate measure, the coalition is urging the federal government to index the child benefit to inflation next year so families can keep up with the cost of living. Ottawa isn't scheduled to begin indexing the benefit until 2020.

The group also wants Ottawa to improve access to child benefits for children living on reserves where many parents don't file tax returns and therefore aren't eligible. Eligibility should also be extended to parents appealing refugee claim denials, the report says.

The child benefit, introduced by the Trudeau government in July, provides up to \$6,400 annually for every child under age 6 and up to \$5,400 for those under age 18. The government says the measure will lift about 300,000 families out of poverty within the first year.

The report also repeats its longstanding call for a national child care program, noting that just one-quarter of Canadian children under age 12 have access to a regulated spot.

Children in families led by single mothers and parents who are racialized, newcomers, indigenous, or facing disabilities are more likely to live in poverty which exposes them to ongoing social and economic inequality, the report says.

Toronto single mother of three Dorothy Noble, 28, became homeless three years ago when her abusive partner was deported and she could no longer afford the rent.

With family shelters full and a five-year wait list for subsidized housing, Noble spiraled into depression, addiction and life on the streets while her mother struggled to care for the kids.

"It was awful," Noble says. "Not being able to have a safe place to lay my head. I was really scared."

Noble credits counsellors with the Jean Tweed Centre for helping her battle depression and beat her addiction to prescription painkillers. The support gave her strength to find a two-bedroom apartment on the Etobicoke lake shore she shares with her mother. They moved in June 2015.

"The child benefit has been a lifesaver," Noble says of the \$1,855 she receives every month for Faith, 6, Nyla, 3, and Gabriel, 3 months. "I am able to pay my bills and feed my family."

The stability has allowed Noble to participate in Working for Change, a program that helps people with histories of homelessness and addiction find their voice and chart a future.

"I am doing so much better now," says Noble. "My plan is to study social work so I can give back."

Ontario Campaign 2000 representatives will be at Queen's Park on Thursday to remind the provincial Liberals that 2016 marks the half-way point of its second five-year poverty reduction strategy.

More than 500,000 Ontario children, or 18.8 per cent, are living in poverty, according to the group's annual report, putting the rate of child poverty in the province slightly above the national average.

The provincial report urges Queen's Park to step up efforts to create safe and affordable housing, good jobs, affordable, high quality child care and to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Toronto is the child poverty capital of Canada with 133,000 children living in low-income families, a rate of 27 per cent, according to a report released earlier this month.

-reprinted from Toronto Star

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

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**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/16/11/sober-child-poverty-stats-should-prompt-action-advocates-say>

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<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2016/11/24/sober-child-poverty-stats-should-prompt-action-advocates-say.html> <sup>[3]</sup>

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