

A poverty-free Canada requires Federal leadership: 2017 report card on child and family poverty in Canada ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

English report, full PDF: [A poverty-free Canada requires Federal leadership: 2017 report card on child and family poverty in Canada](#) ^[2]

French report, full PDF: [Pour un Canada sans pauvreté, le gouvernement fédéral doit faire preuve de leadership](#) ^[3]

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Introduction

As Canada's 150th year since confederation closes, it is time to usher in a new poverty-free era. Decades of neo-liberal austerity have eroded Canada's progress towards a strong social safety net. With over 1.2 million children and families in poverty, a transformational response to the complexity of poverty is overdue. It is time for a new social contract with a renewed foundation built on equity and dignity. The goal must be that no person in Canada lives in poverty, no matter their age, ethnicity, gender, religion, ability, sexual orientation or education. To do this, governments need to adopt a poverty reduction lens on all economic, fiscal, taxation and social policy decisions and budgetary priorities.

Committing to poverty eradication must build on social programs that matter in the everyday lives of Canadians, such as child tax benefits, affordable child care and medicare, while turning the tide against significant inequities that bar people in poverty from meeting their basic needs and limiting their potential. For the 4.8 million Canadians living in low income today, a pan-Canadian action plan for poverty eradication cannot come soon enough.

A new social contract can only be effective with strong policy responses to today's challenges. Current programs have not kept enough families from falling through the cracks caused by growing precarious, parttime work; dismal social assistance rates; shortages of affordable housing and quality childcare; insufficient access to training; and limitations on access to vital healthcare supports (medication, dentistry, physio and occupational therapy). Too many people in Canada are forced to suffer hunger and food insecurity; entrenched inequities based on race, gender, different abilities and sexual orientation; and the growing income and asset gap between the rich and poor.

A new social contract can only succeed with strong federal leadership that is collaborative, equitable, flexible and insistent on clear goals and accountability for results. A renewed use of the federal spending power to support provinces and territories to take poverty reduction action within their constitutional spheres is essential. The federal government must set benchmarks for progress against poverty and launch change into action through investments in the programs and solutions needed to make poverty history in Canada. Through a pan-Canadian stance the federal government should address regional variations in income security and social programs that perpetuate poverty by establishing program standards and providing adequate cost sharing.

The federal government has undergone over a year of consultation and study to develop Canada's first Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). Over 20,000 Canadians have raised their voices, demanding a strong strategy.

Campaign 2000 calls for the PRS to be guided by bold targets and clear timelines and for it to be developed in consultation with provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous governments and organizations, non-governmental organizations and people living in poverty. The Strategy must be secured in legislation and identify key roles for all levels of government, recognizing the particularities of how Québec pursues social policy in the Canadian context. Finally, the PRS must be accompanied by a commitment to allocate the required level of investments in income support and services to ensure progress, with stringent reporting requirements to ensure transparency in assessing whether targets are met.

Campaign 2000 welcomes the indexation of the Canada Child Benefit and enhanced funding for the Working Income Tax Benefit in 2017's Fall Economic Statement as positive steps towards responding to Canadians' feedback and recommendations. Our partners working to end child poverty also recommend that progress on an enhanced Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program is critical both to prevent and sustain long-term poverty reduction for families, especially women, who want and need to participate in

education, training and decent work. We call on government to ensure additional funding for the Strategy and other initiatives in Budget 2018 and to earmark funding that ramps up over the long term.

Laying the foundation of a new social contract that leaves poverty behind and ensures health, well-being and opportunity for all Canadians is not a choice. Eradicating child and family poverty is imperative to Canada's future.

-reprinted from Campaign 2000

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