

Campaign 2000 responds to Canada's first Poverty Reduction Strategy ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Campaign 2000 welcomes Opportunity for All: Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy but is disappointed that the strategy's long-term goal of reducing poverty by 50% by 2030 means another generation of children – approximately 600,000 - will grow up in poverty. The Campaign 2000 coalition will continue to call for greater investments to accelerate reductions in poverty given 4.8 million Canadians suffer poverty today.

"The first poverty reduction strategy is an important new starting point in the battle against poverty in Canada," says Anita Khanna, national coordinator, Campaign 2000. "While it is not the exact starting point we called for, the anti-poverty movement has secured many important firsts. We have the first federal strategy, the first commitment to meet targets and timelines for poverty reduction, the first commitment to public reporting on progress and the first official

poverty line. Crucially, we also have the first commitment to enact legislation to ensure this and future governments continually reduce poverty until it is eradicated."

Today, over 1.2 million children suffer serious hunger, illness, stress and indignity caused by poverty. "While the strategy is a significant step forward, we know that its longer term targets and timelines may be cold comfort for children who may not know when their next meal will be, where they will live next month or if they will have a winter jacket when the first snow falls," adds Khanna. "That is why we will continue to urge government to move past taking baby steps to reduce poverty and instead to sprint to the finish line. With such urgent need across Canada, the PRS requires more ambitious poverty reduction targets and timelines and greater investments in programs such as universal childcare and universal pharmacare and a serious good jobs program that will lift children and families out of poverty."

The strategy sets the goals of reducing poverty by 20% by 2020 and by 50% by 2030 from a 2015 base year. It is projected to lift 2.1 million people out poverty, including 534,000 children.

The strategy also sets in place a National Advisory Council on Poverty and selects the Market Basket Measure as Canada's official poverty line. No new funding commitments were announced as part of the strategy.

"Campaign 2000 has consistently called for government to adopt a poverty reduction lens on all social, fiscal and economic policy decisions," says Dr. Sid Frankel, Associate Professor, University of Manitoba. "The PRS should be transformative for Canadians and guide all of Canada's policies and programs by clearly prioritizing investments in children, families and all people in poverty. It is disappointing that almost 3 million Canadians will be left in poverty after 12 years of effort, especially because the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reports that Canada has the 15th highest poverty rate out of 36 OECD countries. Campaign 2000 will be calling for new spending on poverty reduction in Budget 2019 and will call on all parties to release their anti-poverty blueprints in advance of the 2019 election."

Campaign 2000 called for the strategy to name an official poverty line to reduce the confusion over the extent of poverty in Canada long

created by having multiple measures of low income. Campaign 2000 called for the Low Income Measure (LIM) to be adopted rather than the selected Market Basket Measure (MBM). The LIM is the international gold standard in measuring poverty, is easily calculated based on tax filer information and easily understood. In contrast the MBM requires frequent updating so that the basket of goods and services deemed adequate for families remains relevant. Regularly updating the MBM is essential, especially as technology and other norms of adequacy evolve and change among families.

To ensure accountability and prioritization of poverty reduction efforts, the strategy will include a National Advisory Council on Poverty. The council is an important body that will monitor the strategy and report to Parliament annually but the PRS must not fall short of the standard set by government's own National Housing Strategy which will create a dedicated Housing Advocate. It is good news that the responsibility for future governments to reduce poverty will become law through the Poverty Reduction Act.

"Legislating responsibility to meet poverty reduction targets is welcome and responds to recommendations from anti-poverty advocates," says Khanna. "It is critical that after decades of good intentions to reduce poverty, any and all future governments will finally be mandated to take action to ensure poverty rates trend downward. We call on government to ensure passage of this legislation before the 2019 election."

Campaign 2000 will issue further analysis of the plan in the coming days, including a comparison of the plan's content and our recommendations.

Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty in Canada is a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of 120 national, provincial and community partner organizations committed to working to end child and family poverty that is hosted by Family Service Toronto. Website: <http://www.campaign2000.ca> [3] Twitter: @Campaign2000

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