

Put poverty on premiers' agenda [CA]^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

As they meet in Moncton this week, we urge the premiers to ensure that no child suffers the debilitating effects of poverty. More than 1 million children and their families still live in poverty in Canada despite prosperous times &em; that's one out of every six children. We can, and must, do much better.

We urge that each premier commit to a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy and that the Council of the Federation press the federal government to develop a national poverty reduction strategy.

As revenues in many provinces and at the federal level continue to grow, this is the time for action. An effective strategy will not be a "one size fits all." It will include good jobs at living wages; affordable, high quality child-care services; investments in health and education for aboriginal communities, including urban aboriginal peoples; a comprehensive child-benefit system, significant expansion of affordable housing and accessible post-secondary education and training.

We would all be better off if there were less poverty. A comprehensive poverty reduction strategy would include indicators for measuring poverty; measurable targets and timelines; a co-ordinated plan of action, including budget commitments; and a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating progress to ensure accountability.

In its 2005 study of child poverty in rich nations, UNICEF challenged Canada to reduce its rate of child and family poverty from 16.8 per cent down to single digits over a defined period of time. A poverty reduction strategy would serve as a road map showing how governments would lead; it would also guide the contributions of the community, non-profit and private sectors of society.

We are impressed that it has been provincial governments, such as those in Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, that have assumed leadership in developing comprehensive poverty reduction strategies. In other provinces, too, bold initiatives are establishing the groundwork: Ontario has focused on child poverty with the establishment of the Ontario Child Benefit; Alberta has indexed its minimum wage to inflation to protect working poor families; Manitoba and British Columbia have provided leadership in calling for action on aboriginal poverty; Saskatchewan has developed new benefits for the working poor.

While this is not a comprehensive list, it does demonstrate the variety of actions that could be enhanced within an overall strategy. A common strategy involving the provinces, territories and the federal government would be a good opportunity to build on the effective collaboration they have forged on energy and climate change.

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Canada's child population is barely growing. With baby boomers moving into retirement and the fertility rate slowing, we need to invest in our children and youth to build a healthy, productive working-age population.

Poverty is a key determinant of health. The evidence is clear that reducing poverty will help to contain provincial health-care expenditures.

Rarely has Canada as a country and its provinces and territories been in a stronger position to express this nation's unwillingness to tolerate poverty. We are a country with much to share. We ask our provincial and territorial leaders to make this a priority by calling on the federal government to commit to a poverty reduction strategy now.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Canada^[2]

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federalism^[4]

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