

Council urges anti-poverty strategy: Ottawa needs to set clear goals to reduce income disparity, report says -- Initiatives already address problem, minister's spokesperson responds [CA] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS:

In good economic times or bad, single mom Myriam Canas-Mendes wonders why politicians always cry poor when it comes to fighting poverty.

...

The federal government needs a long-term anti-poverty strategy with clear goals to reduce income disparity among children and working-age adults, says the National Council of Welfare.

Canada should follow countries like Ireland and the United Kingdom, and the provinces of Quebec and Newfoundland, which have introduced detailed plans for poverty reduction and deadlines for achieving them, the report says.

"If there is no long-term vision, no plan, no one identified to lead or carry out the plan, no resources assigned and no accepted measure of results, we will be mired in the consequences of poverty for generations to come," it says.

Between 1980 and 2003, poverty rates in Canada rose and fell with the country's economic health, says the council, set up in 1969 by federal law to advise the government on issues affecting low-income Canadians.

But despite ongoing strength in the economy recently, the decline in Canadians living in poverty appears stalled at about 16 per cent, or 4.9 million people, says the report, which looked at data from 2002 and 2003. That's about the same level as in 1980 when the council began reporting regularly on the issue.

...

"Neither political nor economic nor social policy changes seemed to have any dramatic effects on income inequality," says the toughly worded report. "The statistics show no great strides forward over the past two decades for the poorest of Canadians."

The exception is seniors, who as a group have experienced a dramatic decrease in poverty, from 34.1 per cent in 1980 to 15.1 per cent in 2003. The report credits Ottawa's Old Age Security pension and Guaranteed Income Supplement, as well as the Canada and Quebec pension plans for the drop.

In contrast, government measures to address poverty among children and working age adults have been haphazard, uneven and often contradictory in their visions, says the report. ...

A spokesperson for federal Social Services Minister Diane Finley said the government values the council's work but feels it has initiatives already in place to address poverty, including last spring's cuts to personal income tax, and the child care allowance.

Echoing a recent report by Toronto's task force on low-income adults, the council notes that full-time, full-year employment often doesn't pay enough to pull people out of poverty.

...

It notes that most families need both parents in the workforce to make ends meet, making poverty almost inevitable for single parents and the lack of affordable quality child care a serious problem.

...

Quebec's 2004 anti-poverty plan is the result of legislation passed unanimously by the National Assembly in 2002.

Newfoundland adopted a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy last year with Conservative Premier Danny Williams pledging that poverty rates in his province will drop from the highest in the country to the lowest by 2010. And with last spring's budget, the province became the first in Canada to link welfare payments to inflation.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Related link: See report by the National Council of Welfare. ^[2]

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