Welfare incomes declining among singles [CA] [1]

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EXCERPTS

The incomes of single people on welfare have become discouragingly low, says a report released by the National Council of Welfare.

The report found that welfare incomes for single people were worth as little as 15 per cent of the average income in their province or territory and as little as 20 per cent of the poverty line income.

In its examination of welfare incomes in Canada in 2002, the council found that across the board, the gap between the poverty line and welfare incomes "remained large and relatively unchanged in 2002."

The National Council of Welfare (NCW), a citizen's advisory group to the Minister of Human Resources Development, looked at welfare incomes for four different types of households in 2002-a single, employable person, a single person with a disability, a single-parent family with a two-year-old child and a two-parent family with two children ages 10 and 15.

The council found that families on welfare fared a bit better than single people. For example, in Alberta, the income of a single-parent family was worth 27 per cent of the average income and 48 per cent of the poverty line income (which is calculated using the Statistics Canada measurement called the low-income cutoff). The low-income cutoff is a measurement that determines the income threshold below which families spend a disproportionate share of their incomes on food, clothing and shelter.

Provinces and territories are also contributing less and less to welfare incomes for families with children. However, the federal government is contributing more through the National Child Benefit.

"Provincial and territorial governments realized savings on welfare - and all at the cost of the poorest of parents and children," the report said.

The report noted that since the National Child Benefit began in 1998, the federal government has allowed provinces and territories to claw back some of the money that goes to families who rely on welfare.

"Circumstances would be a lot less difficult for families if governments stopped clawing back the federal child benefit," Mr. Murphy said.

The council said welfare programs in Canada must provide more incentives to encourage people to go back to work. One of those would be a more comprehensive national child-care program.

Mr. Murphy said he was encouraged by the federal government's new child-care program, announced in February's federal budget.

"We need a national system of child care with high standards, and that is what we are now putting in place," he said.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail.
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