

# Canada has a long way to go to improve child poverty rates <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

When it comes to reducing poverty a report says Canada has a long way to go. The report *Reduced Poverty = Better Health for All* looks at how far Canada has come compared to 21 years ago.

Twenty-one years ago Parliament resolved to end child poverty by 2000. The report found that 610,000 children and their families lived in poverty even before the recession hit in 2008. Although the poverty rate is slightly less at 9.1 per cent compared to 1989's 11.9 per cent there is still much to be done.

"This is the moment for our government leaders to demonstrate their commitment to work together to eradicate poverty during the next decade. There is growing recognition within Canada and internationally that persistent poverty is a serious health issue which erodes the social fabric of communities and is a moral blight on the democratic integrity of nations," says Campaign 2000's Laurel Rothman in a press release. "We are encouraged that all political parties supported the new report "Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in Partnership Towards Reducing Poverty in Canada" tabled last week by Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and Status of Persons with Disabilities. This report recommends that the federal government commit to an action plan to reduce poverty and specific actions including Campaign 2000's long-standing call for an increased child benefit. This reflects an emerging consensus among all the parties that poverty must be addressed as a national priority."

One in ten children still live in poverty in Canada. For First Nations children the figure is much worse with one in four growing up poor. Childhood poverty is not always the result of parents being unemployed, 1 in 3 low-income children lives in families where at least one parent works full-time year round and almost 400,000 adult full-time workers earn less than \$10 per hour.

Rates of child and family poverty are in the double digits in all provinces with a widening gap between the rich and the poor. For every dollar the poorest families had in 2008 the richest had almost 13 times as much.

"Public investments to eradicate poverty make good sense. Given the fragile economic recovery and the weak job market, now is not the time for spending cuts," says Andrew Jackson, Director of Social and Economic Policy, Canadian Labour Congress. "Well under one half of Canada's 1.5 million unemployed workers are collecting EI benefits today, even though the national unemployment rate is still almost 8%. Workers in hard hit communities across Canada tell us that job loss is affecting their families who are worried about the prospect of bankruptcy and welfare."

It is known that poverty affects a child's health. Children in low-income homes are more likely to have low birth weights, asthma, type 2 diabetes; children in working-poor families are unlikely to have benefit plans for prescription drugs, vision and dental care. Children with disabilities, in racialized, new Canadian and Aboriginal families are the most likely to be living in poverty. Often these children are living in housing that is unaffordable, sub-standard and/or overcrowded.

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