

# Ottawa needs plan to fight poverty <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Ottawa needs a comprehensive plan and dedicated funding to ease the plight of 3.1 million Canadians living in poverty, including more than 600,000 children and 700,000 working poor households, says a landmark parliamentary report.

The 300-page report, tabled in the House of Commons Wednesday, calls on Ottawa to start work immediately on a federal poverty reduction plan in consultation with provinces, municipalities and Aboriginal governments.

Key recommendations of the report by the Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development include:

- A new federal transfer fund to support provincial poverty reduction initiatives;
- Increasing the Canada Child Tax Benefit and Supplement to \$5,000 from the current \$3,436 within five years;
- A long-term national housing and homelessness strategy;
- Measures to help the most vulnerable including a refundable Disability Tax Credit, improved Employment Insurance; improvements to the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors; and a national child care program;
- More funding for Aboriginal housing, education and social services.

The committee defined poverty as Statistics Canada's after-tax Low Income Cut-Off, which in 2008 was \$34,738 for a family four in a city the size of Toronto.

"This report is a road map for a just and inclusive society," said NDP Poverty Critic Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie) who proposed the study in 2007. "Solving poverty is a national issue and the Harper government needs to act."

Six provinces have anti-poverty laws or plans that are beginning to make a difference, the report notes. Meanwhile, federal initiatives such as the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors, enacted in 1967 and the National Child Benefit, introduced in 1998, show that federal policies can make a significant impact, the report argues.

Seniors' poverty has dropped by half since the 1960s to less than 6 per cent today. Meanwhile, child poverty has dropped by 38 per cent since the late 1990s.

Without the National Child Benefit, child poverty would be about 15 per cent today, the report notes. If Ottawa hiked the benefit to \$5,000, Canada's child poverty rate would drop from 9.9 per cent to 8.3 per cent, the report says.

In a supplementary report, Conservative members of the committee said they "strongly support the intent of the report" but that a lack of costing for most of the recommendations "weakens... credibility."

"Canadians need to comprehend what impact implementing the report's recommendations will have on their pocketbooks and their ability to provide for their families," they said.

In their "minority report," Liberals on the committee said "limited resources ...cannot be an excuse for inaction."

Anti-poverty group Make Poverty History, said it was encouraged by the qualified support of Conservative members of the committee.

Campaign 2000, which fights child poverty, said it expects all parties will address the issue in the next federal election, expected in 2011.

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-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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