

Better is always possible: A federal plan to tackle poverty and inequality ^[1]

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Introduction

Over its 20-year history, numerous policies proposed by the Alternative Federal Budget have been adopted by both Liberal and Conservative governments. While we have consistently underscored the feasibility of living with less inequality and poverty, that budgeting framework has not as yet taken root. This year's federal budget may signal a turning point, building on momentum at the provincial, territorial, and municipal levels. The following technical paper shows what a 21st century war on poverty and inequality could look like.

During the 2015 election campaign, the Liberal party campaigned vigorously on a promise to tackle inequality and substantially reduce child poverty. Now in government, the Liberals plan to introduce a new Canada Child Benefit (CCB) that would boost incomes for low-income families with children by slightly more than what the AFB and Campaign 2000 have proposed in the past. We estimate the new CCB should reduce child poverty by a quarter. A promised 10% increase to the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for low-income seniors should likewise lower the poverty rate among seniors by approximately 20%. The new government has also promised action on Indigenous poverty, and has signalled that improvements are coming with respect to accessing employment insurance (EI) and benefits.

As welcome as these progressive proposals are—they have been advanced in consecutive AFBs for years—the task of adequately tackling poverty and inequality remains far from complete. By creating a false divide between the deserving poor (children and seniors) and other low-income people, we lose sight of the urgent challenges raised by poverty across the board. This paper, which expands upon a chapter on poverty and inequality in the 2016 AFB, proposes the terms of a comprehensive federal poverty reduction plan. If the government is serious about its campaign pledge to bring real economic opportunities to more people, the practical and affordable policy tools outlined here will take them some way toward that goal.

Region: Canada ^[3]

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