

# 2014 REPORT CARD ON CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY IN CANADA

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## CHILD POVERTY, 25 YEARS LATER: WE CAN FIX THIS

*More than two decades have passed since the House of Commons' unanimous resolution "to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000" and five years after the entire House of Commons voted to "develop an immediate plan to end poverty for all in Canada." Neither the promised poverty elimination nor plans have materialized.*

*House of Commons' unanimous resolutions, November 24, 1989 & 2009*

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END CHILD POVERTY IN CANADA

*Campaign 2000 is hosted by  
Family Service Toronto, a member  
agency of United Way Toronto*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## *Campaign 2000: End Child Poverty in Canada, through its diverse network of partners, recommends:*

- The Government of Canada introduce a federal action plan with targets and time lines to reduce and eradicate poverty in consultation with provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal governments and organizations, non-governmental organizations and people living in poverty. Secured in legislation, this plan should identify key roles for all levels of government and recognize the particularities of how Québec pursues social policy in the Canadian context.
- An enhanced child benefit for low-income families to a maximum of \$5,600 per child (2014 dollars, indexed to inflation) by streamlining support to families through the taxation and transfer systems.
- A plan to prevent, reduce and eventually eradicate child and family poverty in indigenous families developed in conjunction with indigenous organizations.
- A commitment by federal government to implement Jordan's Principle and by provinces and territories to adopt Jordan's principle to ensure that indigenous children's needs are met expeditiously.
- Enhancements to Employment Insurance that expand access, duration and levels of benefits.
- Proactive strategies, including employment equity in the public and private sectors, and a sensible training strategy accessible to those not on EI to level the playing field for racialized communities and other historically disadvantaged groups.
- A national ECEC program, led by the federal government and developed collaboratively with provinces/territories and indigenous communities, which includes a well-developed policy framework based on the principles of universality, high quality and comprehensiveness.
- In the short term, an emergency fund of \$500 million in federal transfer payments earmarked for regulated child care to provinces/territories and indigenous communities.
- Extended and enhanced maternity/parental leave benefits that include all new parents (adoptive, student, trainee, self-

employed parents, part-time and casual workers), are more flexible and include a "father only leave" benefit.

- A comprehensive national housing strategy reflecting the needs of local communities and First Nations in partnership with provinces, territories, municipalities, First Nations, the non-profit sector and the private sector.

As a first step, reverse the trend of decreasing federal investment in affordable housing by providing funds for affordability, funds for capital renewal and support for transforming the social housing sector for future success.

- Addressing growing income inequality by restoring fairness to the personal income taxation system and re-introducing the principle of taxation based on ability to pay.

## HIGH RATES OF CHILD POVERTY PERSIST—FEDERAL LEADERSHIP IS REQUIRED

*Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. . .*

*—Nelson Mandela<sup>1</sup>*

As Campaign 2000 issues its 23rd monitoring report, we are saddened and distressed by the abysmal lack of progress in reducing child poverty in Canada. The economy has more than doubled in size, yet the incomes of families in the lowest decile have virtually stagnated. The gap between rich and poor families remains very wide, leaving average-income families also struggling to keep up. With considerable evidence from academic, community-based and government research and from extensive testimony from people with lived experience of poverty, we know more about how to eradicate poverty than we did 25 years ago.

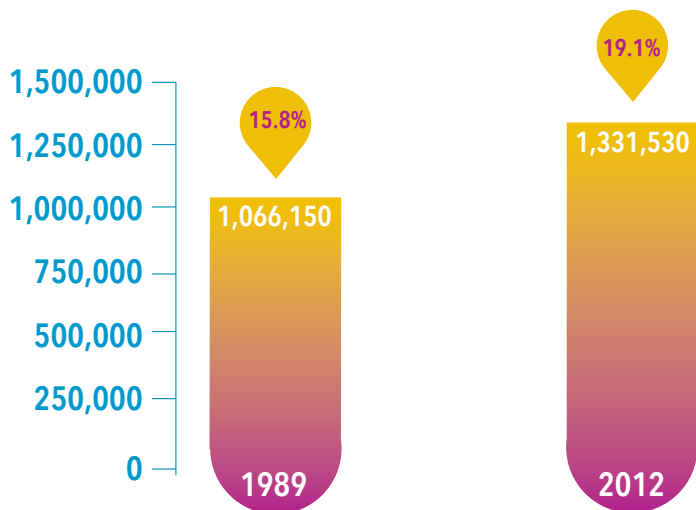
Together, the 120 partner organizations in Campaign 2000 have kept the issue of child poverty on the radar screen for almost 25 years. On behalf of low-income families, women, people with disabilities, food banks, indigenous families, service-providers in health, childcare and affordable housing, many faith communities, teachers, social workers, unions and many others, Campaign 2000 partners have helped to highlight the unacceptable situation for low-income children and have proposed practical solutions. As

a result of on-going discussion and dialogue with government officials and representatives, the media and people with lived experience of poverty, some important initiatives have been achieved. Public policies such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit/ National Child Benefit Supplement and the Child Disability Benefit have made a difference to families—but not a big enough difference to dial down the child poverty rate substantially or to sustain less child poverty. The erosion of the labour market including fewer good, full-time jobs with benefits that prevent poverty and enable parents to lift themselves out of poverty remains a challenge in many parts of Canada.

There are compelling reasons for the federal government to take leadership: First, it is the right thing to do for our children and for all of us and it helps to meet obligations to uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child—also initiated in 1989—and other international agreements; Second, poverty is expensive and child poverty produces disease throughout the life cycle, impairs educational attainment and presages employment vulnerability; Finally, Canada has the fiscal capacity to act. The projected multi-billion budget surpluses beginning in 2015–16 show that money is not lacking.

Now is the time for the federal government to take on its rightful role. If the costs of poverty are ignored, this constitutes nothing less than mismanagement of the economy for which we will all continue to pay in financial and other costs.

**CHART 1**  
**CHILD POVERTY THEN AND NOW: 1989 vs 2012**



Source: Statistics Canada custom tabulation. T1 Family File, 1989 & 2012

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

Over twenty-five years, child and family poverty has increased to 1,331,530 children (19.1%) in 2012 from 1,066,150 children (15.8%) in 1989 according to taxfiler data.<sup>2</sup> More children and their families live in poverty as of 2012 than they did when the House of Commons unanimously resolved to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

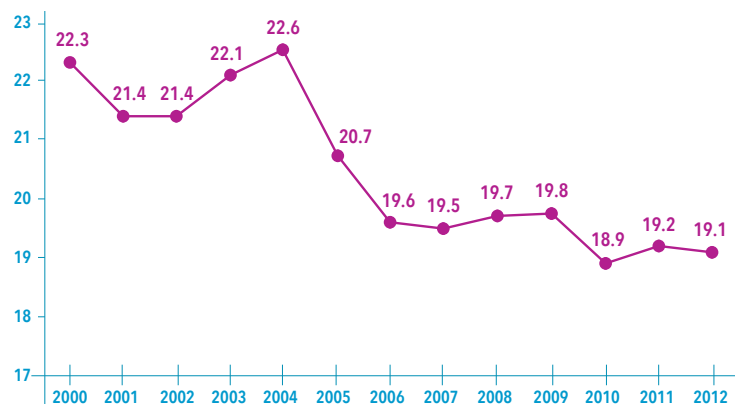
It is most disturbing that 4 in 10 of Canada’s indigenous children live in poverty.<sup>3</sup> Indigenous children include Métis, Inuit, non-status First Nations who live off-reserve and status First Nations children on reserve. **In First Nations communities where the federal government has the major role in funding income support and community services, 1 out of 2 status First Nations children lives in poverty.**

The twenty-three year period that yielded the sharp increase of almost 25 per cent included both an unprecedented period of economic growth from 1998 through 2008 and the following economic recession and slow growth period which continues.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

- Increase the Canada Child Tax Benefit/National Child Benefit (CCTB/NCB) for low-income families to a maximum of \$5,600 per child (2014 \$ indexed) per year.
- The Government of Canada should introduce a federal action plan with targets and timelines to reduce and eradicate poverty in consultation with the provinces and territories, Aboriginal governments and organizations, non-governmental organizations and people living in poverty.

**CHART 2**  
**CHILDREN IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES IN CANADA, 2000-2012**



Source: Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 111-0015, using Low Income Measure A-T, T1FF data.

# MEASURING LOW INCOME: A CHALLENGE IN PROVINCES, TERRITORIES AND AMONG SELECTED GROUPS

Major changes to the collection of statistics in Canada make 2014 the most difficult year since 1989 to report on child and family poverty. Until 2013, Campaign 2000 partners who produce report cards have relied on the annual release of “Incomes in Canada” for data on the rate and number of people living in poverty collected in the Survey of Labour Income Dynamics (SLID). In 2013, SLID was discontinued and replaced by the Canadian Income Survey (CIS). As of October, CIS data have yet to be released and assessed for their comparability to SLID data, making it difficult to track progress, or lack thereof, against child poverty. The ability to compare and assess trends in child poverty rates was also hampered by the 2010 cancellation of the Mandatory Long-Form Census which was replaced by the National Household Survey (NHS). Data from the Mandatory Long-Form Census was previously used to track and compare child poverty rates for specific groups with the highest levels of poverty, namely recent immigrants, racialized, Aboriginal and disabled people.<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada cautions that the 2011 NHS data is not comparable with previous census data because participation in the survey was voluntary, making the results “subject to potentially higher non-response error” than 2006’s Mandatory Long-Form Census.

Tracking the experiences of marginalized groups through a mandatory census is crucial to the design of effective poverty reduction initiatives by all three levels of government. Campaign

2000 strongly urges the federal government to reinstate the Mandatory Long Form Census or a similarly reliable data source immediately. This report uses Statistics Canada’s T1 Family File (T1FF) to report on poverty unless otherwise indicated.<sup>5</sup> The T1FF is based on Taxfiler data collected from income tax returns and Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) records. Statistics Canada constructs households and family income levels by matching individual tax files, though family income calculations do not include income from other relatives living in the household. Since the introduction of the UCCB in 2006, the process of identifying children under 6 has improved.<sup>6</sup> Compared with the official Statistics Canada population estimates, T1FF has better coverage of children. It is important to note that due to methodological differences, low income rates derived from T1FF cannot be compared or contrasted with those calculated through the NHS and SLID.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

Prosperity has not solved persistent poverty, but established poverty reduction strategies and economic growth have helped to reduce poverty rates in several provinces. Explicit poverty reduction initiatives in Québec (legislated in 2002) and Newfoundland and Labrador (2006) have contributed to reductions in child poverty. Twelve out of thirteen provinces and territories have a poverty reduction strategy in place or are in the process of developing one. British Columbia is the only province or territory that has not committed to a poverty reduction strategy.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

All levels of government (federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and First Nations) need to meet to develop a coordinated poverty eradication strategy.

CHART 3 CHILD POVERTY RATES IN THE PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES, 1989 AND 2012



Source: Statistics Canada custom tabulation. T1 Family File, 1989 and 2012



# THE UNIQUE SITUATION OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

*“... When I was a child growing up as an Aboriginal in the Ontario of the day I was one of those statistics. . . . Grinding poverty remains the major barrier to leading fulfilling lives for Native children across the country. That is why I fully support the youth-led initiative of Keep the Promise to persuade our elected representatives to stop making empty promises about tackling poverty and get on with the job of making Canada a truly equal society.”*

*—Honourable James Bartleman, 27th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario (2002–2007)*

Indigenous children and their families remain at high risk of poverty in Canada. The umbrella term ‘indigenous’ includes the three primary groups with Aboriginal rights as outlined in Canada’s constitution. They are: First Nations or Indian, Métis and Inuit. The conditions that indigenous peoples now experience are rooted in the legacy of colonialism and harmful policies that separated children from their families for many decades.<sup>8</sup>

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

Canada’s Aboriginal population is young and growing rapidly—more than four times faster than the non-Aboriginal population from 2006 to 2011.<sup>9</sup> Recent statistics show that nearly 60% of Aboriginal peoples lived in urban areas.<sup>10</sup> More than one in four (27%) of urban Aboriginal peoples were 15 years of age or younger, compared to about 17% of the urban Canadian population.

Poverty is a critical issue for indigenous communities. Recent research confirms that the average child poverty rate for all indigenous children is 40% in contrast to the average child poverty rate for all children at 17%. The status of indigenous children as well as their location is linked to their poverty rate. One in two (50%) of Status First Nations children lives in poverty in First Nations communities.<sup>11</sup>

In First Nations communities, the federal government is mandated to fund the health care, education, social services, housing and income support programs. The cap on transfers for community services and health expenditures from the federal government to First Nations since 1996 has had a distressing effect of limiting the capacity of First Nations communities to meet the needs of their rapidly growing populations.<sup>12</sup>

For status First Nations children, education and child welfare are essential services that have the potential to improve their well-being and long-term economic status significantly. Yet neither system has sufficient physical nor financial resources to meet the needs of the children and families that they serve.

The chronic underfunding of First Nations child welfare agencies continues. This is despite a complaint first filed in 2007 by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (Caring Society) and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) against the government of Canada at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal alleging discrimination in the provision of child and family services in First Nations communities.

First Nations child welfare agencies receive 22% less per capita funding than provincial agencies under a funding formula that has not been reviewed since 1988.<sup>13</sup> The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal will complete hearings in 2014 with a decision expected in 2015. The outcome of this complaint will be significant, indicating the degree to which the Canadian Human Rights Act can be a vehicle for achieving change in First Nations communities.<sup>14</sup>

## JORDAN’S PRINCIPLE PUTS CHILDREN FIRST

**Jordan’s Principle calls on all government institutions and departments to ensure that children’s needs are met first and to resolve jurisdictional disputes later. In 2007 the House of Commons unanimously voted to support Jordan’s Principle. In 2013 the Federal Court upheld Jordan’s Principle as binding on the Government of Canada.**

The state of public education in First Nations communities requires culturally relevant, community-led reform. The 515 Schools in First Nations communities under federal jurisdiction are held to the same standards as provincially-funded schools, yet funding is inequitable.<sup>15</sup> There are no funds for libraries, computers, teacher training, special education, for example.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the lack of recognition of isolated locations and the intergenerational trauma resulting from residential schools, First Nations schools receive \$2000–\$3000 less per capita funding.

School retention rates, although up slightly, remain low. In 2006, 51% of Aboriginal adults (25–34 years) in First Nations communities had not completed high school. Off reserve, the non-completion rate was 29% compared with 10% among the non-Aboriginal population.<sup>17</sup> It is encouraging that Aboriginal students who complete high school do as well as their non-Aboriginal counterparts in postsecondary programs.<sup>18</sup>

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

- A plan, developed in conjunction with indigenous organizations, to prevent, reduce and eventually eradicate child and family poverty in indigenous families.
- A commitment by federal government to implement Jordan's Principle and by provinces and territories to adopt Jordan's principle to ensure that indigenous children's needs are met expeditiously.

## IMPROVING INCOMES FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

*"... Thousands of accumulated studies have come to the same basic conclusion: The incidence of poverty is a severe – if not the most severe – threat to the health and quality of life of individuals, communities, and societies in wealthy industrialized societies such as Canada."*

*– Dennis Raphael, York University<sup>19</sup>*

To prevent families from falling into poverty and also to support other families in their efforts to lift themselves out of poverty, **Canada needs a two-track approach: strengthening the public policies that have a direct impact on family incomes and improving the labour market opportunities for parents.** Together these strategies build on the government of Canada's central role in managing the economy and its historic leadership in creating and sustaining a resilient social safety net.

Parents with dual roles as breadwinners and caregivers require the necessary supports to achieve a situation of decency and dignity for their families. Labour markets do not distinguish between workers who are parents and those who are not, but public policies that recognize the value of child-rearing and help to reduce poverty can make a significant difference.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

A full child benefit of \$5,600 (2014 dollars, indexed to inflation) coupled with fair minimum wages are needed to achieve a substantial reduction of child and family poverty. The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) for low- and modest-income families, a joint federal, provincial and territorial initiative launched in 1998, has played an important role in preventing and reducing child and family poverty.<sup>20</sup> Currently, eligible families can receive up to the maximum combined CCTB/NCB annual payment of \$3,687. The child benefit (CCTB/NCB) is paid monthly to eligible families and is non-taxable, non-refundable, and is based on the previous year's family net income according to one's tax return.

It is important to note that the child benefit is progressive; those with lower incomes receive a larger benefit while those with higher incomes receive a lower benefit. In a sense, the CCTB/NCB begins to address the inequality that many families face. In 2013 eligible families with net incomes of up to \$25,356 received the maximum CCTB/NCB while families in the net income range of \$25,584 to \$43,500 may receive the full CCTB and part of the NCB.<sup>21</sup> At higher net incomes families may receive some portion of the CCTB.

The CCTB/NCB has a good track record of contributing to lower child poverty rates. A recent evaluation of the CCTB/NCB confirmed that the combined benefit reduced the child poverty rate and the depth of poverty. For every \$1,000 of NCB, there was less likelihood that a lone parent would be in poverty (as defined by the Low-Income Cut-Off), and for low-income lone parents, the depth of poverty was reduced by \$760–\$1,120.<sup>22</sup> In 2012 Campaign 2000 commissioned a simulation to model the impact of an enhanced child benefit of \$5,400 maximum NCB. The simulation showed that the poverty rate would fall by 15% and 174,000 children would be lifted out of poverty.<sup>23</sup>

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

The CCTB/NCB maximum, that has only increased by annual indexation since 2007, needs to go up to a maximum of \$5,600. This enhanced benefit, when coupled with full-time work, would enable a lone parent with one child to lift her family out of poverty.

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*Source, facing page, left: Angella McEwen. "Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Job Numbers", blog posting on The Progressive Economics Forum, September 5, 2014.*

*Source, Right: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' custom tabulation, using Statistic Canada's SLID pre-tax data 2011*

# LABOUR MARKET ABANDONS FAMILIES

*“With far too few job vacancies, and record low proportions of unemployed workers receiving EI (especially in urban areas), the Canadian labour market is looking pretty depressing”.*

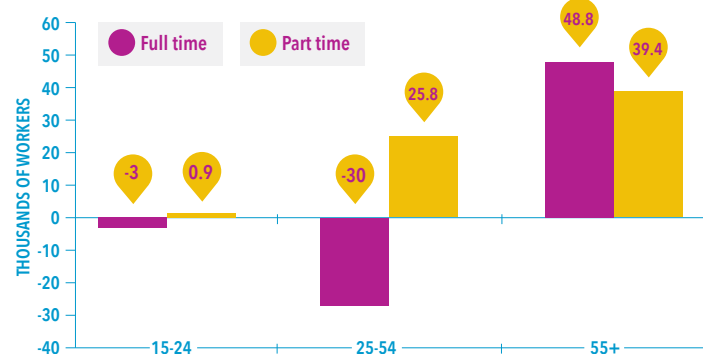
– Economist Angella McEwen<sup>24</sup>

“A job is the best social policy,” politicians used to say. While a bit simplistic, there was truth in this saying. This is no longer the case. In Ontario, for example, about 40% of children living in poverty reside in a household with a parent with full-time, full-year employment.<sup>25</sup> In Canada overall, most recent figures show that more than 1 in 3 low-income children had at least one parent working full-time during the year but were still in poverty.

Not only does a job no longer protect families from poverty, the “depressing” employment situation is actually contributing to child and family poverty in this country. Decent full-time jobs with benefits that prevent poverty and enable parents to lift themselves out of poverty are being replaced by low-waged work, precarious employment and part-time jobs.

In 2014, part-time employment became a prominent feature of the Canadian labour market landscape, raising concerns that it was becoming the “new normal”.<sup>26</sup> The only people to see an increase in full-time work were workers over 55.<sup>27</sup> In the past, about one in four part-time workers in Canada stated that they would prefer to work full-time but that full-time jobs were not available. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in some European countries where well-paid, part-time work with benefits is a choice made by parents for family reasons.

**CHART 4**  
**NET CHANGE IN FULL AND PART TIME EMPLOYMENT (AUG. 2013-AUG. 2014)**



The picture is similar for temporary work. Between 2009 and 2012, the number of Canadians in temporary jobs grew at more than triple the pace of permanent employment.<sup>28</sup> When parents complete those temporary jobs, they are unlikely to be eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) and may have to rely on social assistance, the program of last resort.

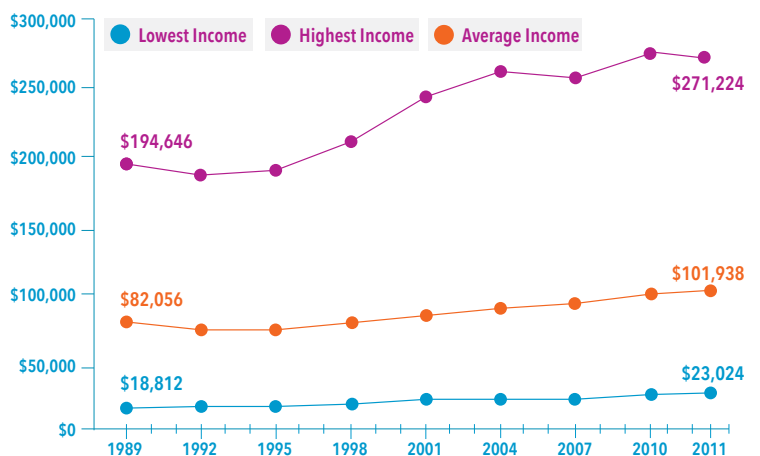
Families with children are particularly at risk in this changing labour market. A 2014 UNICEF report pointed out that the presence of a child or children in a household translates into an increased risk of ‘working poverty’ (working, but below the poverty line) for families—from 7 % to 11%.<sup>29</sup>

Precarious employment also makes it harder to raise children. As many of these jobs are part-time and low-wage, parents may have to work multiple jobs at one time. The nature of this type of work makes it difficult for workers to schedule childcare for their children, budget for household expenses, and spend time with family.

## PROMISING DEVELOPMENTS

Calls to raise the minimum wage and living wage policies are promising initiatives that can address the shortcomings of the current labour market. Many communities in Canada have calculated their local ‘living wage’ and are looking to follow the lead of the City of New Westminster which has become one of several dozen certified Living Wage Employers in BC, helping to raise family incomes.<sup>30</sup> Recently the call to increase the minimum wage was given a boost by new research demonstrating that raising the minimum wage does not have a negative effect on employment and, in fact, “can be an important and effective tool in boosting earnings for low-waged workers, promoting greater equality across employed persons, ...and reducing poverty.”<sup>31</sup>

**CHART 5**  
**AVERAGE INCOME FOR LOWEST, MIDDLE AND HIGHEST DECILE FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18 IN CANADA, 1989-2011**



# CANADA STILL NEEDS THAT NATIONAL CHILDCARE PROGRAM . . . NOW MORE THAN EVER

Since Campaign 2000 published its first report card in 1992, a childcare program for all has been part of Campaign 2000's plan to eradicate child and family poverty. This program of early childhood education and care (ECEC) has the potential to: enhance children's well-being, healthy development and lifelong learning; support parents in education, training and employment; help to build strong, inclusive communities; help to provide inclusive environments for children with disabilities; and strengthen women's equality.

Although the rapid rise in numbers of working mothers is considered to be one of the key social changes of the last century—Canada still has no societal response to the need for childcare. Although at least seven provincial/territorial governments have begun expanding public early childhood education (kindergarten), the terms “patchwork” and “woefully inadequate” still apply to ECEC across Canada. It is most regrettable that in 2014, none of the 14 Canadian jurisdictions (10 provinces, three territories and the federal government) has a plan to develop high quality ECEC for all.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

Data and research, media reports and parents' accounts are in agreement that Canada is failing to meet the early childhood

education and childcare needs of the majority of children and families. Canadian parents are desperate for high quality childcare spaces in all provinces; outside Quebec, they pay sky-high fees.

Mothers' labour force participation continues to rise year after year while childcare expansion and growth in public funding have slowed to a crawl despite a substantial increase in the birthrate. Most families are presumed to rely on unregulated arrangements that are sometimes legal, sometimes not (data detailing this are not collected).

The most recent data show that in the last two years, availability of regulated childcare spaces increased slightly to cover only 22.5% of 0–5 year olds in centres (full and part-day) and 20.5% of 0–12 year olds in all regulated spaces, with much lower coverage for infants and toddlers.<sup>32</sup> But space availability alone doesn't mean that childcare is accessible.

To be accessible, fees must be affordable. In most provinces, the fees that parents pay for childcare are greater than the cost of attending university.<sup>33</sup> Data from 2012 show Canada-wide median monthly fees of \$761 (infant); \$701 (toddler) and \$674 (preschooler). However, the medians don't tell the whole story; Quebec fees are \$152/month for all ages.<sup>34</sup>

Low-income families are poorly served. All provinces/territories except Quebec provide fee subsidies for low and modest income families, but these frequently fail to make childcare financially accessible even to eligible parents. Ontario's subsidy rationing means long waiting lists while in some other provinces, even very low-income families are expected to pay hefty surcharges above the rate provincial fee subsidies cover—these can be as much as \$500/month. Data from 2010 showed that since 2001, the percentage of children subsidized has generally been static or even dropped in some instances.

CHART 6 CHILDREN, WORKING MOTHERS, AND CHILDCARE CENTRE SPACES: 1992–2012



Source: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, State of ECEC 2012



## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

- A national ECEC program, led by the federal government and developed collaboratively with provinces/territories and indigenous communities which includes a well-developed policy framework based on the principles of universality, high quality and comprehensiveness.
- Extended and enhanced maternity/parental leave benefits that include all new parents (adoptive, student, trainee, self-employed parents, part-time and casual workers), are more flexible and include a “father only leave” benefit.
- In the short term, an emergency fund of \$500 million in federal transfer payments earmarked for regulated child care to provinces/territories/and indigenous communities

## SUBSTANTIAL AND SUSTAINED COMMITMENT ON HOUSING IS NEEDED

Ample evidence makes the case that low-income individuals and families with children across Canada are often forced to make difficult choices between paying for housing, buying nutritious food or engaging in recreational activities which would improve their health. Far too many Canadians are still struggling to stay housed and they are in “core housing need,” meaning they are in need of housing that’s affordable, adequate and suitable for their family members.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014 finds as many as 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness annually, costing the economy \$7 billion.<sup>35</sup> On a given night, more than 35,000 Canadians are homeless.

Over the past 25 years, Canada’s population has increased by 30% and yet annual national investment in housing has decreased by 46%.<sup>36</sup> More alarming is the fact that nearly 1 in 5 households experience **extreme housing affordability** problems, meaning they have low incomes and have to spend more than 50% of their income on rent.

## THE INVISIBLE AND PRECARIOUS HOUSING IN CANADA

About one-quarter (3.3 million) of all Canadian households are precariously housed, living in housing that is unaffordable, over-crowded, below standard, or a combination of all three.<sup>37</sup> Those who are in most housing needs are often “invisible” and the precarious housing situation is like the “tip of the iceberg”. Statistically, the number of **visible homeless** population is around 150,000 to 300,000, but the **hidden homeless** number is at least 3 times higher, between 450,000 and 900,000.

## CHILD & FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

Child and family homelessness is a serious and growing issue. More than 37% of Canadian households<sup>38</sup> are having difficulty maintaining housing and more and more families are relying on emergency shelters. **Specifically, about one-in-seven users of shelters across Canada is a child.**<sup>39</sup> **Compared to children with permanent homes, homeless children suffer more from lack of educational opportunities, health issues and injuries.** Prevention and early intervention are key to addressing Canada’s homelessness and hidden homelessness.

There are many reasons that contribute to child and family homelessness, and the impact on children and families is profound. Structural and individual/familial causes, as well as system failures too often combine to result in an unacceptable situation. Evidence suggests that precarious housing and poverty is linked to poorer physical/mental health and developmental outcomes for children. Precarious housing is also associated with multiple school interruptions and challenges in academic success.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

- A comprehensive national housing strategy reflecting the needs of local communities and First Nations in partnership with provinces, territories, municipalities, First Nations, the non-profit sector and the private sector.

As a first step, reverse the trend of decreasing federal investment in affordable housing by providing funds for affordability, funds for capital renewal and support for transforming the social housing sector for future success.

# HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY PLAGUE TOO MANY FAMILIES

More than two decades after food banks emerged as a community response to hunger and poverty, they have become an expected source of support for many low-income families. With insufficient improvements to income supports across the country and with the collapse of many decent jobs, too many families cannot afford to provide the basic food necessities. When the help of family and friends has been exhausted, they often have no other option than food banks.

Most recent statistics confirm that more than 841,000 people use food banks each month. Almost half of those are families with children. Of those families, almost 50% are led by two parents. Children represent more than one in three (37%) of those users in Canada.<sup>40</sup>

A snapshot of those using food banks provides an impression of the current state of income insecurity in Canada. One in six households being served has income from employment or Employment Insurance (EI).<sup>41</sup> The situation of these families demonstrates that jobs are not necessarily a pathway out of poverty.

The impact of inflated housing costs especially in large urban areas is one factor influencing household budgets. The majority of food bank users live in rental accommodations, and almost two-thirds pay market rent. For these families, the choice of paying the rent or putting food on the table is all too frequent.

Most families that seek help from food banks are food insecure, yet all those who lack food security do not all turn to food banks.<sup>42</sup> Food insecurity, linked to income insecurity, exists when people do not have enough food or do not have the quality of nutritious food which is required.<sup>43</sup> People will experience food insecurity differently. While some may use up food before they have income to purchase more, others may not be able to afford the nutritious choices they need and others may have to skip meals.<sup>44</sup>

**In 2012, four million people—including 1.15 million children—experienced food insecurity of some form.<sup>45</sup> The highest rates of food insecurity occurred in the North and in the Maritimes. It is not surprising that 70% of households with the majority of income from social assistance were food insecure. The fact that almost two-**

**thirds (62%) of food insecure households relied on income from wages or self-employment reflects the loss of good jobs in many regions of Canada.**

The prevalence of hunger and food insecurity in a wealthy developed country like Canada is a serious concern, in particular for the life chances of children. The attention and action of all levels of government is needed in order to improve health now and to avoid the long-term damage to our collective health and well-being.

## ENDNOTES

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- 3 Macdonald, D. & Wilson, D. (2013). Poverty or Prosperity: Indigenous Children in Canada. Retrieved from [http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2013/06/Poverty\\_or\\_Pro Prosperity\\_Indigenous\\_Children.pdf](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2013/06/Poverty_or_Pro Prosperity_Indigenous_Children.pdf).
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