



END CHILD POVERTY IN CANADA

**FUNDAMENTALS FIRST:
AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FROM BIRTH
FOR EVERY CHILD**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

on

A CAMPAIGN 2000 DISCUSSION PAPER

by

Marvyn Novick

Professor of Social Work, Ryerson Polytechnic University

November, 1999

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TO BEGIN to honour a decade-long commitment to work to end child poverty in this country, the Canadian government must commit 50% of the net federal surplus over the next five years to social investments in children and families.

The social investments proposed by Campaign 2000 are fiscally achievable over the next five to seven years, based on the expert forecasts of a net surplus (after debt repayment) of close to \$30 billion.

The proposed investments in children and families direct tax relief to where it is most urgently required – to support the healthy development over the life cycle of succeeding generations of Canadians, and to reverse the drift towards increasing economic and social polarization in our society.

There are almost 1.4 million Canadian children living in families who are struggling to provide the basic material resources necessary for their children's healthy development. There are 463,000 more poor children in Canada than there were in 1989. It is especially alarming that one-quarter of all children in Canada are born and raised in poverty during the critical early years of development up to age six.

The scale of child poverty in Canada is a collective liability on the integrity of the nation. Large numbers of children are poor because we have failed to create the conditions of well-being for all families. As we approach the year 2000, child poverty in Canada has become entrenched. The fact that child poverty has increased even during a period of strong economic growth demonstrates that Canada cannot "grow" its way out of this crisis. General tax cuts threaten to make matters worse by reducing government revenues to benefit the well-off the most, thus widening the gap between rich and poor.

Campaign 2000 urges the federal government to take action through the following initiatives:

- Consolidate the existing child benefit scheme and replace it with a comprehensive Canada Child Benefit System that:
 - includes all low-income families with children, including those receiving social assistance, who are excluded from the current benefit supplement in most provinces;
 - improves the benefit for the lowest-income families to a minimum of \$4,000 per child (which doubles the maximum benefit of \$1,975 that is slated to come into effect July 2000), raising their living standards by 20%;
 - provides benefits for modest-to-middle income families with children on a sliding scale so that families with incomes of \$30,000 see their living

- standards improve by 10%, those at \$40,000 by 5%, and those with incomes up to \$60,000 receive higher benefits than currently;
- adds a supplement for early childhood development to be cost-shared with provincial governments.
- Create three new National Infrastructure Funds for Children and Families to fund federal investments in:
 - early childhood development services, including quality child care services and family resource centres, available to all families in every community across Canada;
 - affordable housing to improve the health and economic well-being of families and to ensure availability of an adequate supply of affordable housing across the country; and
 - improved access to post-secondary education through the freezing and lowering of university and college tuition fees.

It is expected that the Campaign 2000 proposals, costed at approximately \$16 billion when fully implemented, would be phased in as part of a five-year federal social investment plan.

Implementation of these initiatives will require discussions with provincial governments and with municipal governments. Most provinces have balanced their books or are on the verge balancing them, and must demonstrate their willingness to invest in new initiatives on behalf of children and families. Local communities also assume a critical role in shaping prospects for children, and municipal governments should be involved in helping to shape the national agenda for children.

The initiatives give concrete reality to the “benchmarks” that Campaign 2000 outlines for Budget 2000. The budget benchmarks highlight the focus and scale of the national effort required in the next federal budget, including a five-year social investment plan, initial implementation of the proposed new child benefit and establishment of the national infrastructure funds.

The benchmarks also call for a federal-provincial commission to develop strategies to improve the availability of good jobs with living wages for family providers and adults in poverty.

Campaign 2000 has consistently adopted a life cycle approach. The approach focuses on the many social environments that contribute to the well-being of children. Each life cycle period through to adulthood has its own significance in determining how children fare. Predictable transitions include birth, the start of school, entry into adolescence, and leaving secondary school. Negative transitions at one phase of the life cycle can reverse healthy gains in another phase.

This approach provides the context for recommendations to improve the National Children's Agenda (NCA), in which nine provinces (excluding Québec) and two territories have outlined their priorities and directions for children – without, however, identifying the scale of their fiscal commitments to enhancing the well-being of children and families. The NCA should be broadened to address four important policy issues that emerged from Campaign 2000 consultations:

1. The NCA framework extends only to age 18. Transition of youth to young adulthood from ages 16 through 24 is a critical period of development and should be included in the framework.
2. The status of recreation as an essential public service should be reviewed by the National Children's Agenda. The importance of recreation services for children and youth is undervalued across the country.
3. The work of the NCA should address the circumstances of immigrant and refugee children living in poverty.
4. The knowledge and experience in civic communities across Canada should contribute to a national agenda for children, either through active consultations with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and/or through federal support for prototype initiatives in different regions of Canada.

Campaign 2000 urges the national government to make investing in Canada's children a defining mission for the new millennium. The mission would commit the nation to an equal opportunity from birth for every child, and to a healthy start for every parent. Creating the conditions of well-being for all children is the first foundation for national continuity and essential to:

- assuring the integrity of our democratic values as a nation;
- honouring our international commitments to the United Nations on the rights of children and the first call on national resources;
- discovering and nurturing the special talents of every young person in Canada;
- enhancing the capacities of all families and communities to meet their responsibilities to children;
- promoting the social cohesion of our cities and communities across the country;
- enriching the cultural and economic fabric of our society.

CAMPAIGN 2000 IS a cross-Canada public education movement to build Canadian awareness and support for the 1989 all-party House of Commons resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Campaign 2000 began in 1991 out of concern about the lack of government progress in addressing child poverty. Campaign 2000 is non-partisan in urging all Canadian elected officials to keep their promise to Canada's children.

Since 1989, the number of children living in poverty has increased by 463,000 and child poverty is clearly a signal of the increasing hardship for Canadian families.

Our partners support the need for serious consideration and public discussion of the options promoted. However, the authors assume full professional responsibility for the details of the paper. For a complete listing of Campaign 2000 partners across the country, please refer to the back page for more details.

Also available in French (Disponible en français) under the title:
L'essentiel pour commencer: une chance égale pour chaque enfant dès la naissance.

**Copyright ©1999 by Campaign 2000. All rights reserved.
ISBN 1-894250-04-4**

To reach the author, please contact: Marvyn Novick, at 416-979-5000 ext. 6218

For further information, or to order more copies of the paper (\$15.00/copy), and/or to order other Campaign 2000 publications, please contact:

Liyu Guo, Campaign 2000
c/o Family Service Association of Toronto
355 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5B 1Z8
Telephone: (416) 595-9230 ext. 244
Fax: (416) 595-0242
E-mail: liyuguo@web.net
Web site: <http://www.campaign2000.ca>

Funding support for the preparation of this paper is provided by Health Canada. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of Health Canada.