

September 26, 2019



Re: Child and Family Poverty Priorities for Election 2019

As voters head to the polls this fall, Campaign 2000 wants to ensure that ending child and family poverty is responded to as a key issue by all parties. We are writing to the leaders of each federal party to ask a series of questions based on our campaign's recommendations that will allow you to describe your party's approach to child and family poverty. This is an open letter and we will post each party's response, or lack of response, on our web page along with our non-partisan analysis. We will also circulate these materials broadly through our network, to the media, interested organizations and Canadians preparing to cast their votes.

We ask that you respond no later than October 10, 2019 4:30pm Eastern Standard Time.

This year marks 30 years since each federal party represented in the House of Commons committed to ending child poverty by the year 2000. Canada continues to exhibit a structural child and family poverty problem, which is large when placed in an international context. This election and anniversary present the opportunity for government to re-commit and prioritize the urgent need to end child and family poverty in Canada.

Despite Canada's enormous wealth, over 1.4 million children continue to live in poverty with their families according to the Low-Income Measure, After Tax, Taxfiler Data. Research shows that the stress, anxiety, stigma, hunger, poor nutrition and hopelessness that accompany poverty have profound effects on their longevity and life chances and can reverberate over time within families, communities, cities, and, indeed, the entire country.

Campaign 2000: to End Child and Family Poverty is a pan-Canadian movement with partners in every province and territory across the nation. We work with all leaders across party lines on the shared goal of eradicating poverty. We conduct policy analysis, research, and education; and each year we release national, provincial and regional report cards that track the progress of government efforts to tackle poverty. These report cards also propose a number of key policy solutions to address poverty and the social and economic inequities that accompany it.

It is achievable to eradicate poverty. To do so requires responses from across government departments and we must measure poverty appropriately to make sure we are not leaving anyone out of the equation. We cannot only be satisfied with decreasing child and family poverty in general. We must ensure that decreases are equal or larger for groups with disproportionately high poverty rates: Indigenous Canadians, racialized Canadians, children and parents with disabilities, lone-parents and recent immigrants. Assertive policy change is required to improve the role of the labour market in eliminating poverty, to enhance income support programs at the federal and provincial levels, to provide universal access to high quality public services (housing, childcare, medication, dentistry, mental health and rehabilitative services and education and training) and to support civil society in its poverty prevention and poverty reduction activities.



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Middle class Canadians are anxious about their own economic circumstances; but they are also concerned with the following issues related to those living in poverty.

1. Poverty as a priority

We know that governments are faced by many issues and must set priorities.

QUESTION: What priority would your government give to eliminating child and family poverty?

2. Poverty definition and measurement

Canada's official poverty measure is the Market Basket Measure. It is an absolute measure of material deprivation that does not account for social exclusion, exposure to stressful environments and discrimination as well as the relative Low-Income Measure, which is more strongly related to poor health status and negative developmental outcomes.

QUESTION: How would your government further define poverty and what poverty measure would it use?

3. Poverty reduction strategy

It is important that Canada has a poverty reduction strategy. The national strategy needs more ambitious targets than reducing poverty by 50% in 12 years. It requires a clear investment of \$6 billion in the next budget, a comprehensive implementation plan and outcomes framework for policies and programs, and negotiated roles for provincial, territorial and municipal governments.

QUESTION: How would your government strengthen Canada's poverty reduction strategy?

4. Indigenous child and family poverty

Indigenous families suffer from shockingly higher poverty rates than other Canadian families, in general. The Government of Canada must authentically collaborate with First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments and other Indigenous governance organizations to develop plans to prevent, reduce and eradicate child and family poverty in Indigenous communities. It must advance the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and Calls to Justice from the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry. It must also comply with the rulings of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal by providing adequate funding for child welfare services on reserve and ensure the full application of Jordan's Principle for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

QUESTION: What action would your government take to eliminate Indigenous child and family poverty?



5. Inadequacy of income support payments for families with children

For families living in deep poverty the CCB needs to be supplemented by the Dignity Dividend, a GST credit top-up suggested by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' 2018 Alternative Federal Budget. Extra efforts are needed to ensure the CCB is accessed by families with higher poverty rates such as First Nations families on reserve, children whose parents have irregular immigration status and those in families receiving social assistance

QUESTION: Exactly how would you increase the adequacy of income support payments to move families with children out of poverty?

6. Inaccessibility of high-quality early learning and childcare (ELCC) services for children living in low-income families

Early learning and childcare services are necessary to provide safe care while mothers work and to enhance the development of all children, but it is especially important in buffering the effects of poverty on child development. We recommend building on federal/provincial/territorial/Indigenous early learning and childcare frameworks and agreements by:

- making federal transfer funds conditional on provincial/territorial action plans using evidence-based approaches to building accessible, affordable, high quality, inclusive ELCC systems;
- In 2019-20, transferring \$1 billion to provinces/territories/Indigenous communities to build these ELCC systems with the understanding that earmarked ELCC funds will grow by an additional \$1 billion each year;
- strengthening collaborative childcare system-building through key elements including a childcare workforce strategy, national ELCC legislation, a federal Secretariat and supporting the capacity of the childcare community.

QUESTION: How would your government go about enhancing access and the quality of early learning and childcare for children whose families live on low incomes within a universal system?

7. Limitations in the Canadian Social Transfer

We recommend increasing funding for the Canada Social Transfer by \$4 billion and removing arbitrary growth restrictions to provide sufficient, stable and predictable funding that recognizes regional economic variations, and ensures that both federal and provincial governments are accountable for meeting their human rights obligations to provide adequate income support for all low income Canadians. This will require the development of minimum standards for income benefits and social services funded through the Transfer, which allow necessary flexibility to provinces and territories. As part of this, it is necessary to ensure that important income supplements are not deducted from social assistance benefits. Children in lone-parent families should retain child support payments, child-related Employment Insurance (EI) benefits should not be deducted from provincial income or disability benefits and the federal government should initiate binding agreements with provinces and territories to ensure no portion of the CCB is deducted.

QUESTION: Exactly how would your government improve the Canada Social Transfer?



8. Canada's labour market is not effective enough in decreasing poverty

It is necessary for the federal government to focus on creating and sustaining high quality employment opportunities and restoring the minimum wage for federally regulated industries, to be set at \$15/hour and inflation-indexed annually. Employment insurance should be improved by reducing the number of qualifying hours to 360 and raising inadequate benefit levels.

QUESTION: How will your government improve the performance of Canada's labour market in reducing poverty?

9. Women, Indigenous Canadians, racialized Canadians, Canadians with disabilities and 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians experience discrimination and inequity in Canadian workplaces

Discrimination contributes to high child and family poverty rates in these communities. The federal government should enact proactive strategies, including improved employment equity, in the public, non-profit and private sectors.

QUESTION: How will your government work to end workplace discrimination?

10. Many low-income families live in substandard unaffordable housing

We recommend enhancing the National Housing Co-investment Fund with an additional \$1 billion in grant money to provide between 10,000 and 15,000 new units annually. We also recommend an allocation of \$1 billion/year to a new supportive housing initiative for vulnerable populations, and an allocation of \$1.5 billion for the immediate implementation of the Canada Housing Benefit. In addition, we recommend the federal government accelerate work to co-develop the Indigenous Housing Strategy, recognizing the critical need for adequate housing both on- and off-reserve.

Question: What would your government do to enhance the availability, affordability and quality of housing for poor families with children?

11. Publicly insured services under the Canada Health Act do not include all goods and services required for health care

We recommend implementation of an enhanced Medicare program that includes national universal pharmacare, preventive and restorative dental care and various rehabilitation services.

QUESTION: How and when would your government enhance Medicare?

12. Inequality of income and assets in Canada is high with many aspects increasing

This leads to many negative health and social outcomes. Part of the solution is to continue to restore fairness to the personal income taxation system and to re-introducing the principle of taxation based on ability to pay.

QUESTION: What will your government do to reduce income and asset inequality for families with children?



Please do not hesitate to have your staff contact Campaign 2000's National Coordinator, Leila Sarangi, for any clarifications. She can be reached at leilasa@familyservicetoronto.org or 416.595.9230 x230.

Our national network from coast to coast to coast looks forward to your responses.

Sincerely,

The National Steering Committee of Campaign 2000:

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