

30 YEARS LATE: Ending Poverty for the Next Generation

WINNIPEG AND TORONTO – On the eve of a new parliament being sworn in, the new and returning cohort of federally-elected politicians have the opportunity to make history by recommitting to the elimination of child and family poverty.

November 24, 2019 marks 30 years since the signing of the all-party resolution in the House of Commons to end child and family poverty. In the three decades since the motion was signed, movement on poverty reduction has stopped and started, and in the meantime an entire generation of children have grown up in poverty. Nearly 1 in 5 children across the country are living in poverty, and the numbers are much higher for children from Indigenous communities and marginalized groups.

“Significant rates of child poverty exist in every federal riding across the country, with statistics showing higher poverty rates for of Indigenous children, racialized and newcomer children, and children from female led lone parent households,” said Leila Sarangi, National Coordinator of Campaign 2000. “In a country as wealthy as Canada, this is completely unacceptable.”

While the Canada Child Benefit has shown to be an important tool to reducing child poverty, the progress has been uneven across the country, and with 28 federal ridings experiencing an increase in child poverty between 2015-2017. Exacerbating the challenge of reducing poverty is the limitations with the official poverty measure adopted by the federal government, the Market Basket Measure. There is no costed-out basket for northern communities and First Nations reserves and it has not been updated since 2010. The current use of it underestimates the cost of living therefore underestimating the rate and prevalence of poverty.

“Unfortunately, the government established an absolute measure of material deprivation as the official poverty line rather than the Low-Income Measure which is a more comprehensive relative measure and strongly related to health status and child development” said Dr. Sid Frankel, University of Manitoba. “It is also the international gold standard used by UNICEF and OECD.”

Measurement of poverty must not be misleading or politicized – doing so results in children in the deepest poverty being left out and left behind from the marginal improvements being seen across the country.

The development of a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, National Housing Strategy, an updated Food Policy, and the consideration of a national Pharmacare plan are steps in the right direction towards addressing the major structural issues that keep many low income people precariously housed, hungry, and in poor health. Without significant investments in these areas targeted towards children and families from marginalized groups, and in a universal childcare system, these strategies simply remain plans on paper.

“The 2018 Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy is a modest beginning – now it is time for Members of Parliament to demand a more ambitious strategy and to back it with investments and updated timelines,” said Sarangi. “The government has a responsibility to ensure that life is improved for all children. It is not enough to lift children just over the poverty line, or to apply a measurement that makes it look like the numbers are going down when they’re not – the goal must be to make sure families thrive.”

Making poverty history must be a key driver across all government sectors. Solutions must be place-based and community-driven. The United Nations Social Development Goals and indicators help ground poverty

reduction in a human rights framework, but we'll never get there unless we recommit our efforts to the total eradication of child and family poverty.

We cannot afford to wait another 30 years.

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Key Messages

- **Nearly 1 in 5 children in Canada (18.7%) live in poverty.**
- **From 2015 to 2017, almost 134,000 children were lifted out of poverty (a decline of 9%) according to the Low-Income After-Tax Measure.** This is compared to 278,000 children using the Market Basket Measure.
- **Of all Indigenous communities, status First Nation children experience the highest level of poverty with 53% living in poverty in First Nations communities on reserve and 41% living in poverty in all other communities.** 25% of Inuit children live in poverty, 22% of Metis children live in poverty and 32% of non-status First Nations children live in poverty.
- **Poverty discriminates against children in families that are lone female-led, racialized, immigrant and Indigenous or affected by disabilities.** 35% of recent immigrant children live in poverty. 47.4% of children in lone-parent families live in poverty.
- **The Canada Child Benefit is reducing poverty and material deprivation, but the effects are unevenly distributed across communities.** Child poverty was reduced in 308 out of 338 federal ridings between 2015 and 2017, but reductions ranged from 24.1% in Scarborough-Guildwood to a mere .1% in Brampton West. 28 ridings experienced increases to child poverty in the same time period.
- **Canada still needs a universal childcare system that ensures access for low income families.**
- **Canada needs a good jobs strategy and decent wages:** The federal government should lead by example and restore a \$15/hour minimum wage for workers in federally regulated industries and improve the accessibility of Employment Insurance.

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Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of 120 national, provincial and community partner organizations committed to working to end child and family poverty that is hosted by Family Service Toronto. For all of Campaign 2000's report cards, visit <http://www.campaign2000.ca>.