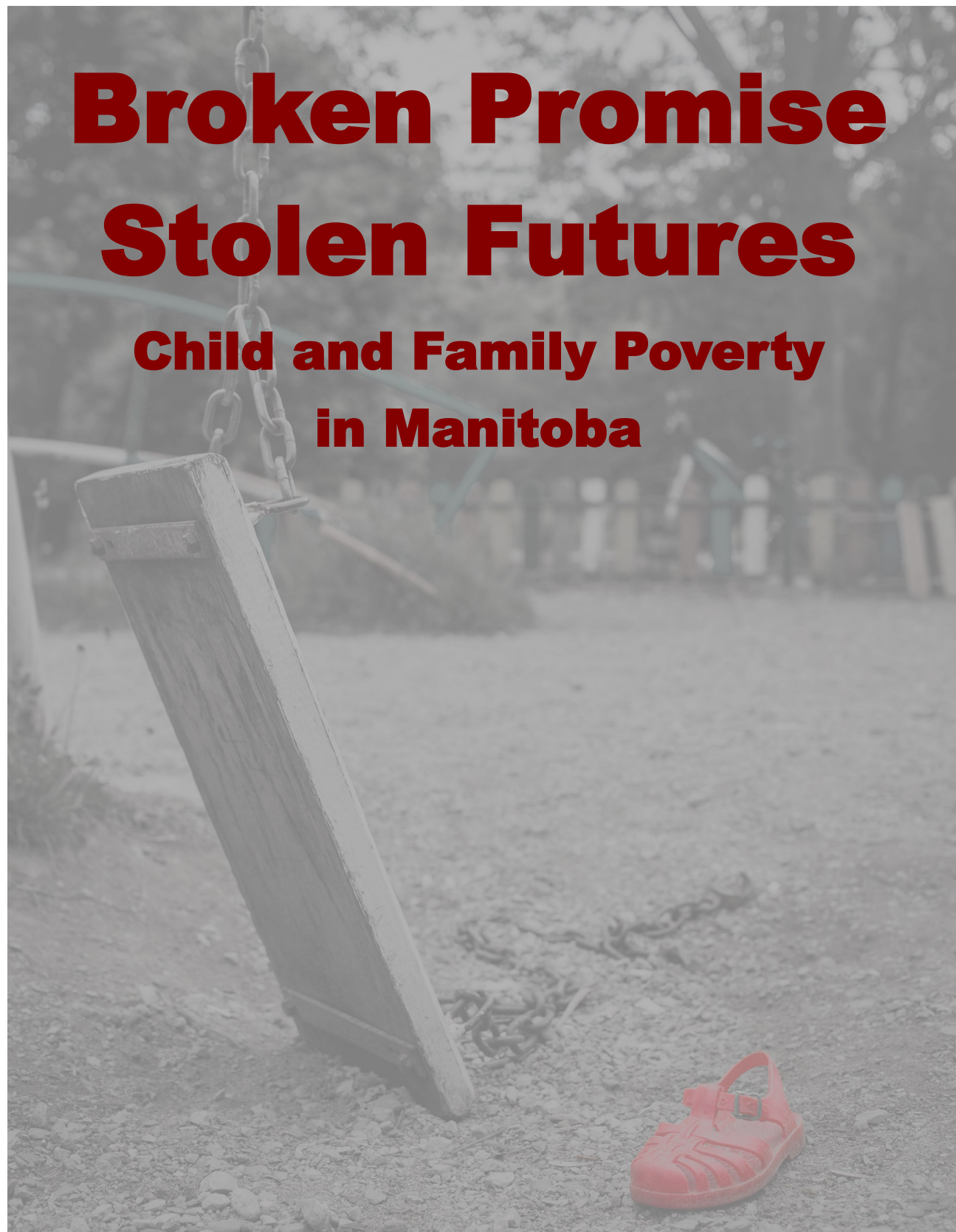


Broken Promise Stolen Futures

**Child and Family Poverty
in Manitoba**



CAMPAIGN 2000
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY

**MANITOBA REPORT CARD
2020**

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We gratefully acknowledge Dave MacDonald and Upstream for providing the data used in Chart 10

Design & Layout: Oke Ojekudo, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

Front page photo by Silvija Kocić of Stivog Photography, Serbia

This report is available for download at the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg's website:

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ISBN # 1-895752-93-0

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Introduction:

Child poverty is playing with the other kids you meet at the food bank. It is haircuts with the kitchen scissors. It is hand-me-downs that don't fit and that other kids tease you for. It is being embarrassed at lunchtime when you have a smaller lunch than the other kids or no lunch at all. It is being hungry after eating at home because food has to stretch to next pay day. Child poverty is moving, often and frequently, due to unsuitable conditions or inability to pay the rent. Child poverty is always being the new kid. Child poverty is feeling like everything you have is temporary, no person or object can ever truly stay. But I can only share my story, and in 2017 there were 85,450 more kids in Manitoba facing this reality.

I often wonder what my life as a resident of the inner city, an Indigenous male and a product of the child welfare system would be like if I didn't have to live in poverty. In Point Douglas, 20% of us experience poverty.^[i] When it comes to the child welfare system, 90% of the kids in state care are Indigenous. That is a direct result of 35% of Indigenous people in Manitoba living in poverty.^[ii] The 2018 Winnipeg Street Census interviewed 1,519 people experiencing homelessness. Of that number 65% were Indigenous and 51% had spent time in state care.^[iii] The cycle is obvious.

Despite the fact that I moved 13 times by the time I was in grade 8, I was successful academically, unlike other kids in areas with concentrated poverty. I was involved in a lot of community activities and as such didn't have time to get into trouble. However, we know that 60% of the kids who live in poverty are also justice-involved.^[iv] I know too many who got involved with the legal system as kids and have never made it out. To quote the well known advocate and many Indigenous kids' honorary Aunty, Cindy Blackstock: "No child should ever have to recover from their childhood".

I was 2 when all the Ottawa decision makers said they would end this situation by the year 2000. I was 13 then. I can only imagine what my teenage years could have been like with more stability and a full belly. I imagine what it would be like for the families I work with and love dearly as my own

relatives today. What if we didn't have to turn to crime, addiction or violence to have our basic needs met, or to numb ourselves from not being able to meet them? What would our world look like?

Child poverty was also not having enough and still watching my family welcome others that had even less to our kitchen table. It is their example that inspired me to work with others to found a volunteer youth movement that aims to create *mino bimadisiwin* (Ininew - the good life). We create family for our peers because the systems that are supposed to help, more often than not, cause harm.

Child poverty has meant becoming intimately familiar with these systems even while they constantly change structurally and change direction politically. And knowing too many can't navigate them. When we have outcomes that tell us a child born in Point Douglas will live 18 years less than a child living in Tuxedo, then it is clear to me that we must all take action.^[v] We can no longer accept words without action or initiatives without clear measurement.

Manitoba's relative ranking in poverty and child poverty, even using the government's own measure, is worsening. We were 4th in both categories of overall poverty and child poverty in 2016. In 2018, there was a 7% increase in overall poverty and 19% increase in child poverty.

*Here we are 30 years later
and 20 years late.*

Campaign 2000 was formed to monitor and report back on the unanimous House of Commons motion to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Here we are 30 years later and 20 years late.

Michael Redhead Champagne, Community Organizer

Definition and Measurement:

Poverty is very real, here, in Canada. Too many experience the harsh realities of sub-standard shelter, lack of access to a reliable supply of nutritious food and adequate clothing, and face barriers to social participation. Poverty is also a concept and it is this concept that is used to develop poverty lines and other means of measuring poverty.

Manitoba's own poverty reduction strategy defines poverty as follows:

“Poverty is complex and multi-faceted. It is often perceived to be only a lack of money, but poverty is more than the absence of material things. Poverty is also inequitable access, absence of opportunities, social isolation, discrimination and stigma. Evidence shows that experiences of poverty have direct links to the health and well-being of individuals and communities.”^[vi]

This definition makes it clear that poverty is more than material deprivation, but also includes barriers to social participation. However, both the federal and provincial governments use the Market Basket Measure (MBM) as their poverty measurement. This measure has serious limitations.

Conceptually, the MBM is an absolute measure of material deprivation. It compares income to the cost of a basket of goods and services. “The disposable income of families surveyed in the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) is compared to the cost of the MBM basket for the size of the family and the region, and families with disposable incomes below that cost are deemed to be living in poverty.”^[vii] The MBM is highly subjective in its construction as choices have been made about what and how much of each item goes in the ‘basket’.

The CIS uses too small of a population sample size to be truly reflective. Certain important non-discretionary items have been left out of the basket including childcare, prescription medication and

mandatory payroll deductions. Housing costs are also underestimated. This all contributes to reduced poverty thresholds. As such, the MBM is the more ‘forgiving’ poverty measure as it allows for claims of much less poverty than actually exists.

As such, the MBM is the more ‘forgiving’ poverty measure as it allows for claims of much less poverty than actually exists.

Instead, this report uses the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM) as a poverty line. A relative measure, the CFLIM is one of the most observed indicators of well-being. It is especially useful in tracking changes in living standards and identifying groups at risk of social exclusion by comparing the situation of low-income individuals and families to that of the rest of society. The CFLIM is defined as 50% of median income adjusted by family size. It establishes a transparent and clearly defined norm. As incomes rise or fall, so does the threshold. We use the After Tax measure (CFLIM-AT) to demonstrate the impact of taxes and government transfers on incomes.

While the MBM is constructed based on survey or Census data, this report relies on T1 Family File (T1FF) tax filer data. T1FF is a more reliable and broad source that includes information on the income situation of 95% of families.^[viii] The T1FF includes communities excluded from Census and CIS calculations of poverty rates. Amongst these are Indigenous Peoples living on reserve, the populations of the territories, people residing in institutions such as hospitals or prisons and parents who are under 18. Given the fact that this is a near census of the Canadian population, the sampling error is much less than in the CIS.

The table below shows the income thresholds for different family types, which are classified as low income based on the CFLIM-AT. For comparison, we also show the equivalent poverty line thresholds for the MBM. Keep in mind that the MBM numbers for Winnipeg do not reflect the high cost of living in many remote and Northern communities.

Table 1: Income thresholds for CFLIM-AT and MBM for Winnipeg (2017)^[ix]

# of family members	CFLIM-AT Threshold	MBM Threshold (Winnipeg)
Single person (no child)	\$21,136	\$18,279
Lone parent with one child	\$29,891	\$25,850
Lone parent with two children	\$36,609	\$31,660
Couple with one child	\$36,609	\$31,660
Couple with two children	\$42,272	\$36,558

In February 2020, Statistics Canada released preliminary data on a revised MBM for 2018.^[x] There are some positive developments in the new measure such as a revision of housing costs and cellular services are now included. However, it still does not include such expenses as childcare or mandatory payroll deductions etc... Most importantly, it still excludes on-reserve households and does not factor for the higher costs of living in Manitoba's remote and smaller centres. As such, it still underestimates the number of individuals in poverty. Moreover, these data are still preliminary. At the time of publication, the child poverty rate for Manitoba using the 2018 MBM measure is not yet available. As a result, we continue to refer to the MBM 2008 base in this report.

Sara's Story

Sara was 13 years old in 2003. She and her family, mother and 6 siblings, arrived in Canada in December after 11 years in Kenyan refugee camps. Upon arrival, they were saddled with a transportation debt that was more than \$10,000. As the oldest daughter, Sara, according to culture, had extra responsibilities. She acted as translator for her mother as they worked to settle into this new culture with systems that too often seemed set against them. She had to navigate Health, Families, Education and yes, Justice systems, to help her mother raise her siblings. In spite of the many obstacles she has faced, Sara graduated high school and then university. She did this by accumulating student debt and working as many hours as possible at an inadequate minimum wage job. Sara became a parent herself and still persevered. Sara even got a job at better than minimum wage. What does this really mean though?

Monthly Revenue:

Net monthly pay:	\$2,062 (gross \$3,200)
Net 2 nd job pay:	\$ 460 (gross \$500)
Federal Child Benefit:	\$ 466
Rent Assist Subsidy:	<u>\$ 170</u>

TOTAL: \$3,158

Monthly Expenses:

Rent:	\$960
Childcare:	\$300 (after school)
Utilities:	\$380
Phone/Internet:	\$200
Car payment:	\$580
Gas:	<u>\$120</u>
	\$2,540

Balance = \$618 for food, drugstore, clothing and any and everything else for her and her child.

Should she give up her car? If she did, she would have to rely on our unreliable and soon to be cut public transit system. If she does not pick up her child on time, her childcare costs will just go up. Besides, she needs her car. Even though she has her own apartment, she is still expected to help the family. She is even expected at times of emergency to send money to family still in Africa.

This report focuses on income levels but as Sara's story shows, what people need to spend that money on can vary widely. At this time, Sara is still able to apply, every six months, to defer her student loan payments but that debt remains.

Sara arrived in 2003. She was 13 and we were already 3 years late on our promise to end child poverty by the year 2000. We weren't just late. We hadn't backed up our promise with any real action. Instead, we left it to the children.

Manitoba: Then and Now

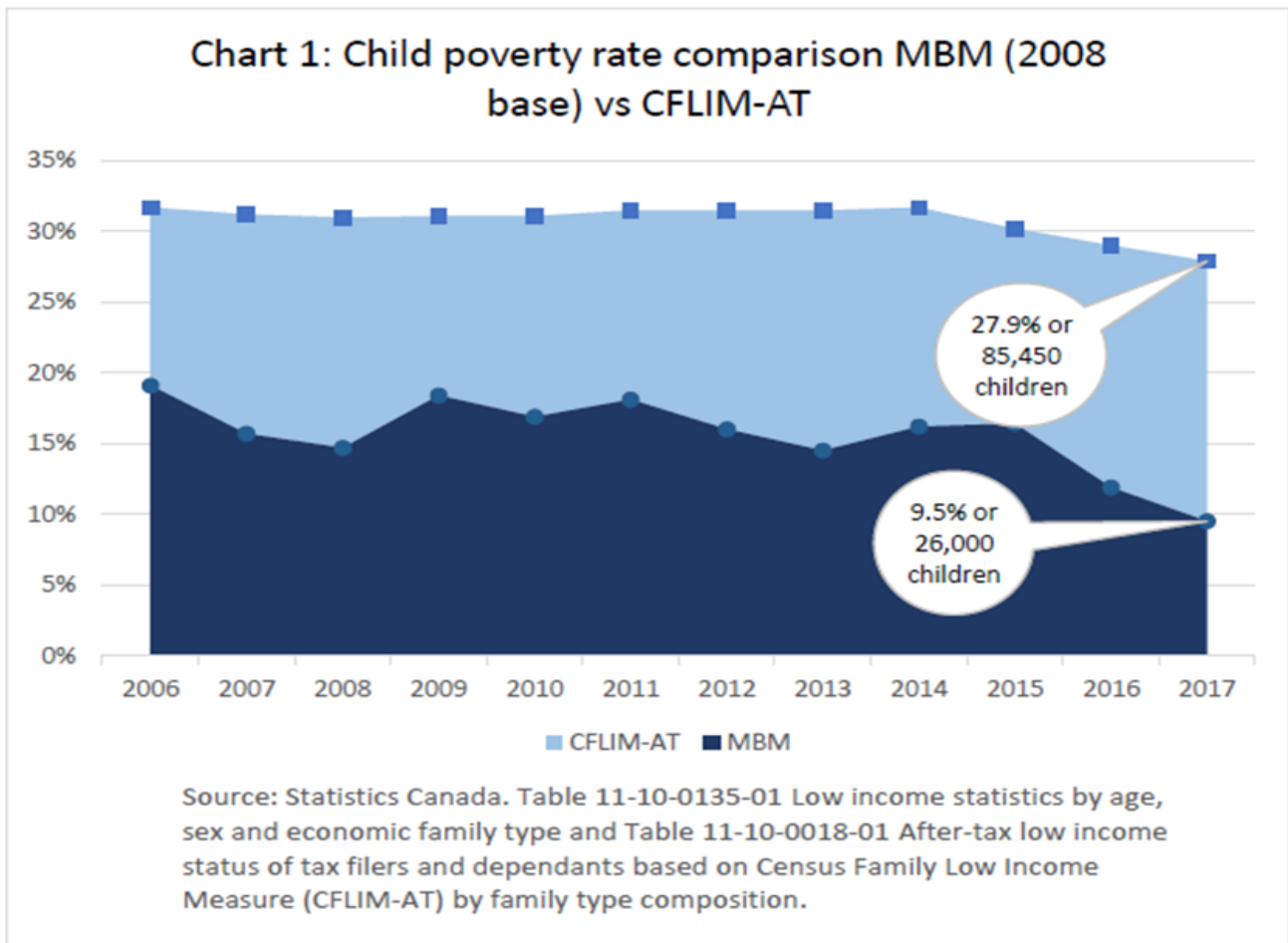


Chart 1 demonstrates that the rate of child poverty in Manitoba has decreased much faster using the MBM from the CIS than using the CFLIM-AT from tax filer data. For example, according to the MBM, the child poverty rate decreased by 42.1% between 2015 and 2017 (from 16.4% to 9.5%). However according to the CFLIM-AT, it decreased by only 7.6% (from 30.2% to 27.9%). According to the MBM in 2017, there were only 26,000 Manitoba children living in poverty. According to the CFLIM-AT, there were 85,450 Manitoba children living in poverty.^[xi]

*According to the CFLIM-AT, there were **85,450** Manitoba children living in poverty.*

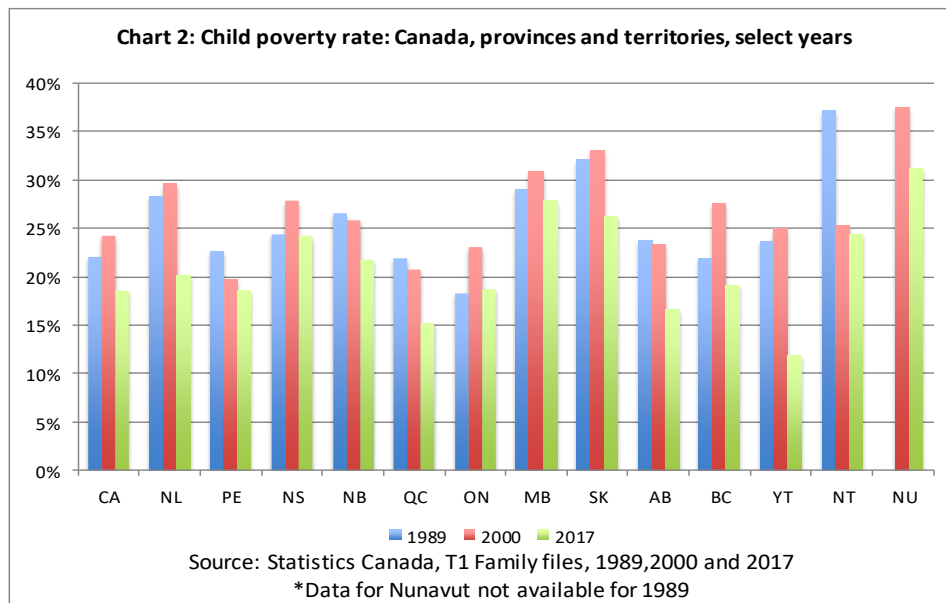


Chart 2 portrays the child poverty rate for Canada, and all provinces for 1989, 2000, and 2017, the latest year for which we have data.^[xii] The 59,450 Manitoban children who in 2017 make up the difference between the MBM and our CFLIM-AT are all still at risk of the stress, decrease in health status and poor developmental outcomes related to poverty. The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority’s recent Community Health Assessment is just the latest report linking poverty and poor health outcome proving that it can lead to as much as an 18 year difference in life expectancy.^[xiii]

The 59,450 Manitoban children who in 2017 make up the difference between the MBM and our CFLIM-AT are all still at risk of the stress, decrease in health status and poor developmental outcomes related to poverty.

Only the territory of Nunavut had a higher rate at 31.2%. There, as in Manitoba, the multi-generational effects of colonialism are a leading cause of child poverty.^[xiv] Cultural disruption and dispossession of the land in Canada has created amongst Indigenous Peoples a “near total psychological, physical and financial dependency on the state”^[xv]

Chart 2 also represents the deterioration in Manitoba from its 1989 position. Then we had a child poverty rate of 29.0%, second only to Saskatchewan (32.1%) amongst the provinces. In 2000, Manitoba’s child poverty rate had worsened to 30.9%, again second only to Saskatchewan at 33.1%. However, again in 2017, Manitoba is at 27.9% but Saskatchewan has managed better and dropped to 26.2%.

However, again in 2017 Manitoba is at 27.9% but Saskatchewan has managed better and dropped to 26.2%.

Methodological Note: In prior years we have reported the 1989 child poverty rate for Manitoba as 23.0%. This year we report the 1989 rate as 29.0 %. This is because methodological changes instituted in March 2018 required a re-calculation of the 1989 rate by Statistics Canada. These changes include instituting the square root of family size as the family size adjustment and calculating family median income using the adjusted family income assigned to each individual. Pinard, D. (2019). Methodology changes : Census family low income measure based on the T1 family file . Statistics Canada

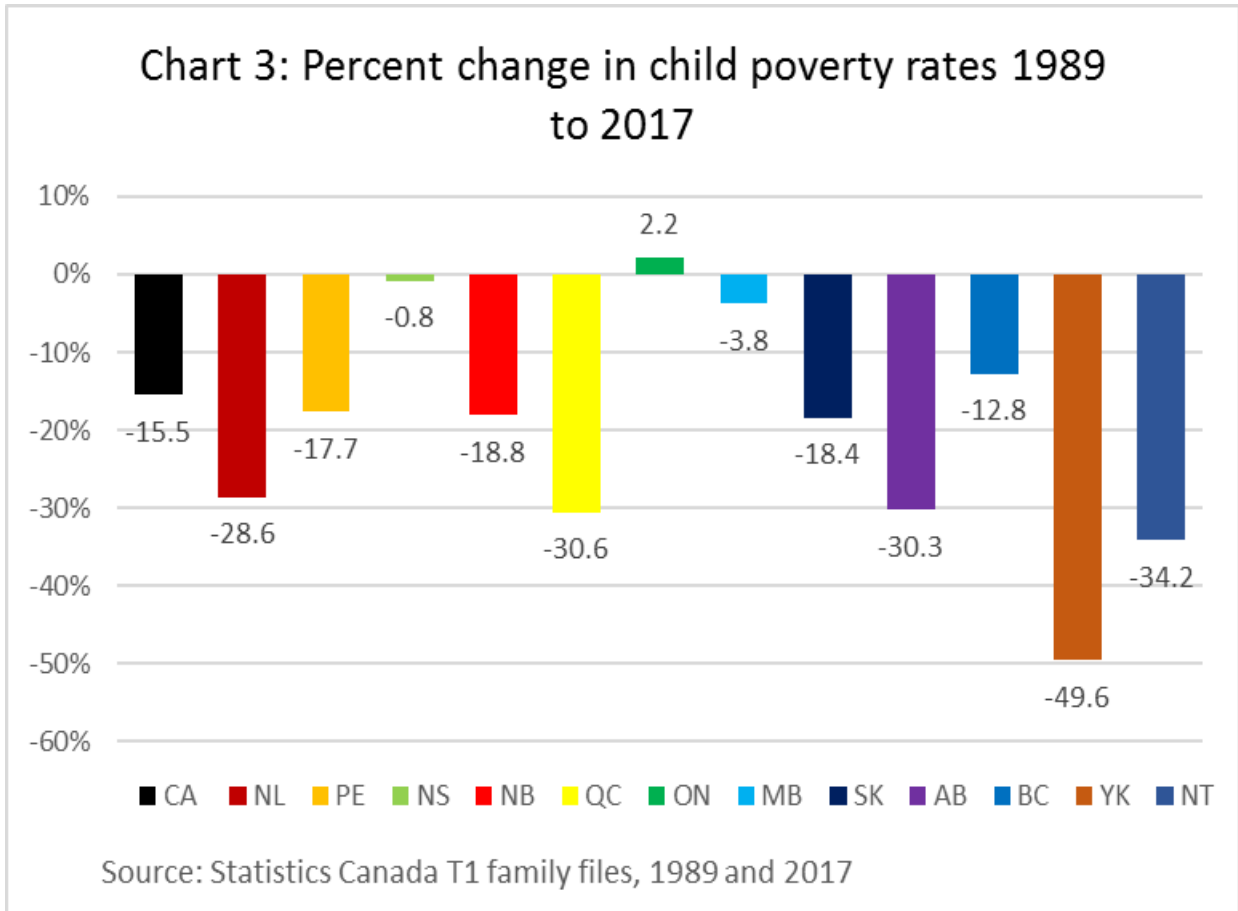


Chart 3 describes the percentage change in child poverty rates between 1989 for Canada as a whole and all provinces and territories.^[xvi] The percentage decrease in Manitoba was 3.8%, well below the national rate of decrease of 15.5%. Only Ontario and Nova Scotia had a worse rate of decrease.

To put this in perspective, in the 28 years between 1989 and 2017, the child poverty rate in Manitoba decreased by only 1.1 percentage points. This amounts to an average decrease of .04 percentage points per year, and at this rate it will take another 697.5 years to eliminate child poverty in Manitoba.

*...at this rate it will take another **697.5 years** to eliminate child poverty in Manitoba.*

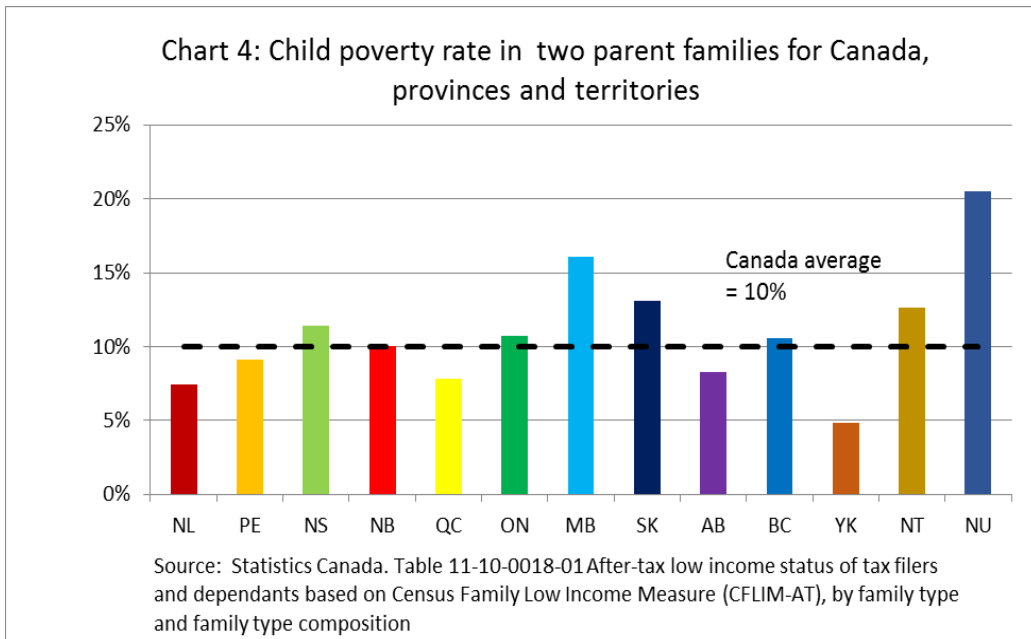


Chart 4 describes the poverty rate for children in two-parent families in Canada, and in every province and territory.^[xvii] Manitoba exhibits the highest rate of any province at 16.1%, 6.1 percentage points above the national rate. One out of every 6.2 children living in a two-parent family in Manitoba is living in poverty.

***1 out of every 6.2 children living in a two-parent family in Manitoba is living in poverty.
1 out of every 1.6 children living in a single parent family is living in poverty in Manitoba.***

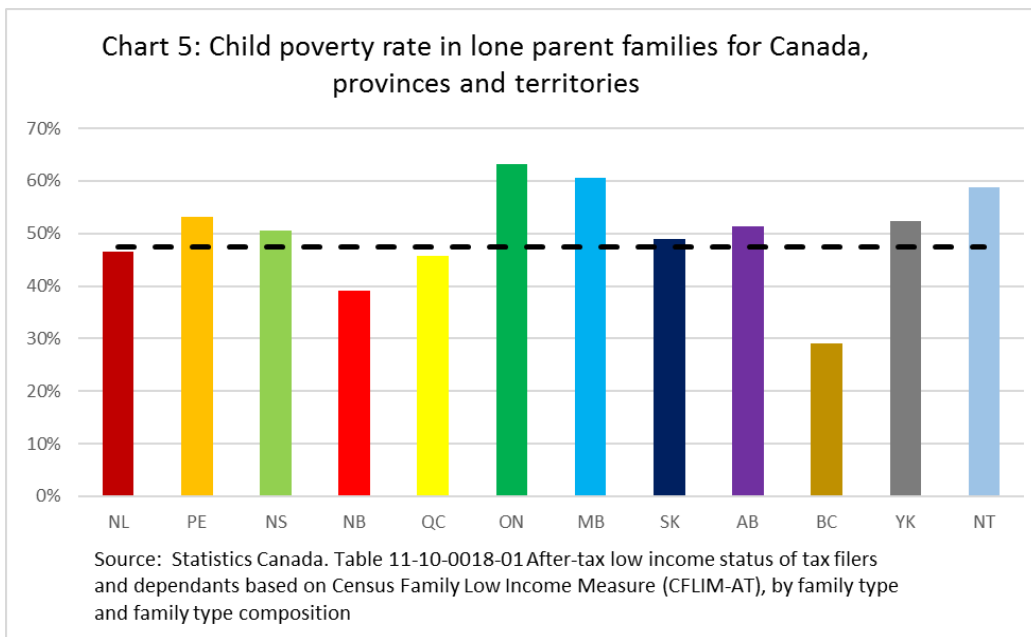
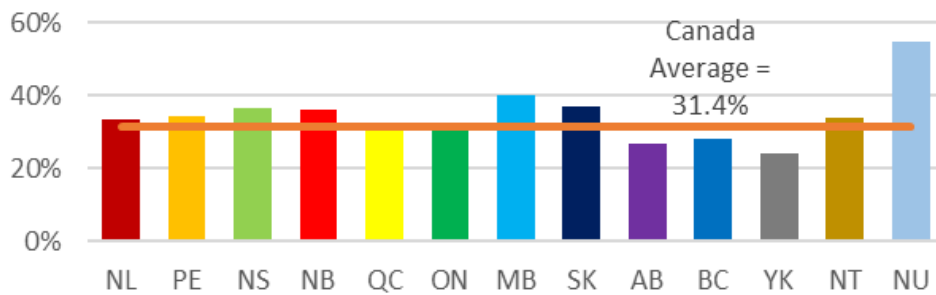


Chart 5 demonstrates the poverty rate for children in single parent families.^[xviii] Manitoba has the highest rate of any province or territory at 63.1%, 15.7 percentage points above the national rate. One out of every 1.6 children living in a single parent family is living in poverty in Manitoba.

Chart 6: Percentage of Children in families with adjusted market income below the CFLIM After Tax threshold

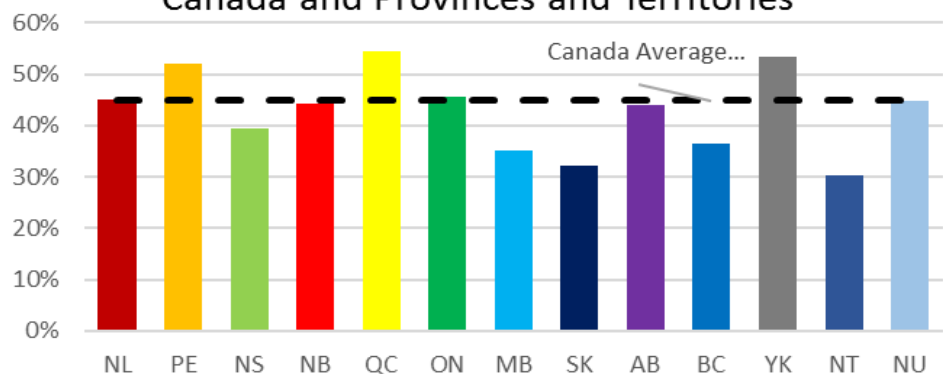


Source: Statistics Canada T1FF 2017

*Manitoba exhibits the highest rate of market child poverty of any province at **40.1%**, 8.7 percentage points above the national rate. Low wages play an important role in this.*

Chart 6 demonstrates how many children in Manitoba would be poor based on market income alone.^[xix] Market income is a household's total pre-tax income obtained from its activities in the formal economy, including wages and salaries, investment income, and small business profits. Manitoba exhibits the highest rate of market child poverty of any province at 40.1%, 8.7 percentage points above the national rate. Low wages play an important role in this. In 2018, Manitoba had the lowest annual average earnings (industrial aggregate excluding unclassified businesses) of any province west of Ontario, at \$936.85.^[xx]

Chart 7: Percentage Improvement in Child Poverty Rate due to Government Transfers: Canada and Provinces and Territories



Source: Statistics Canada T1FF 2017

*For all of Canada there is a **44.8%** improvement, but only **35.1%** for Manitoba.*

Chart 7 exhibits the percentage improvement in the child poverty rate due to transfer payments from the federal, provincial and municipal governments for all of Canada and each province and territory.^[xxi] For all of Canada there is a 44.8% improvement, but only 35.1% for Manitoba. The only other province to experience less improvement from government transfers is Saskatchewan but, again, they have still managed to lower their child poverty rate more than Manitoba has. Federal transfers are consistent across the country. It is clear that the Manitoba government must do more.

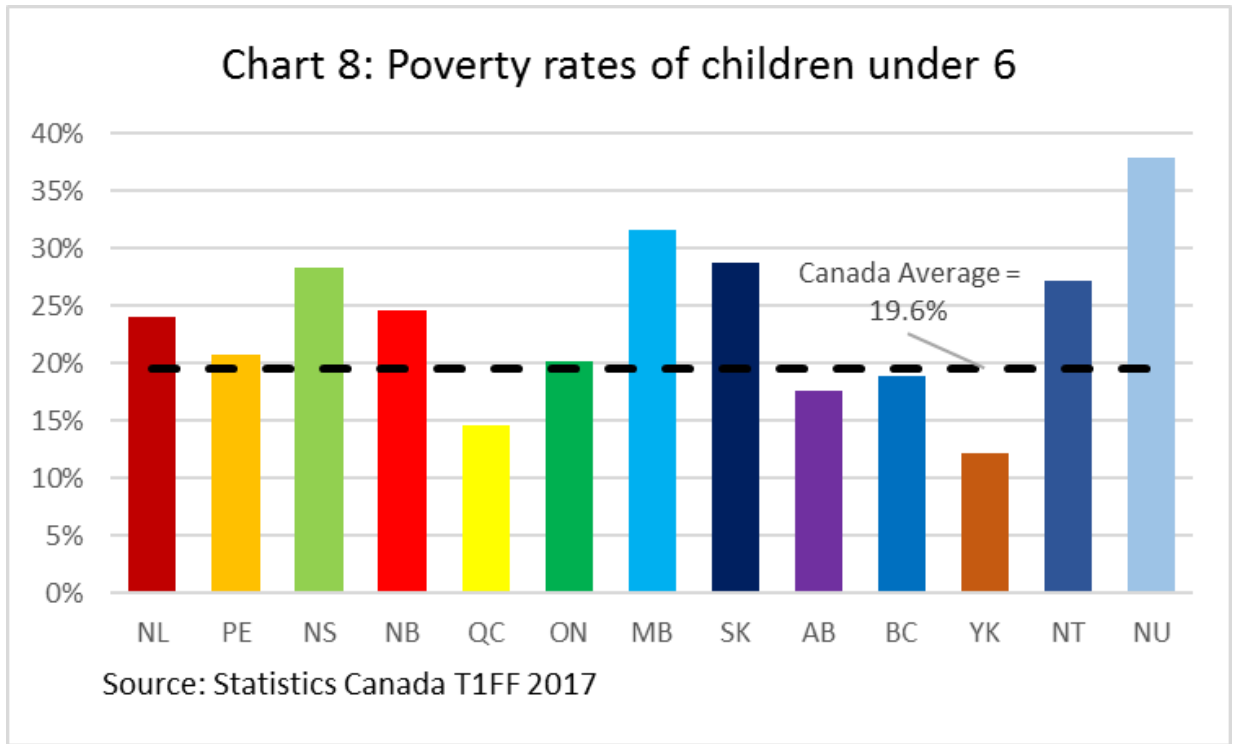
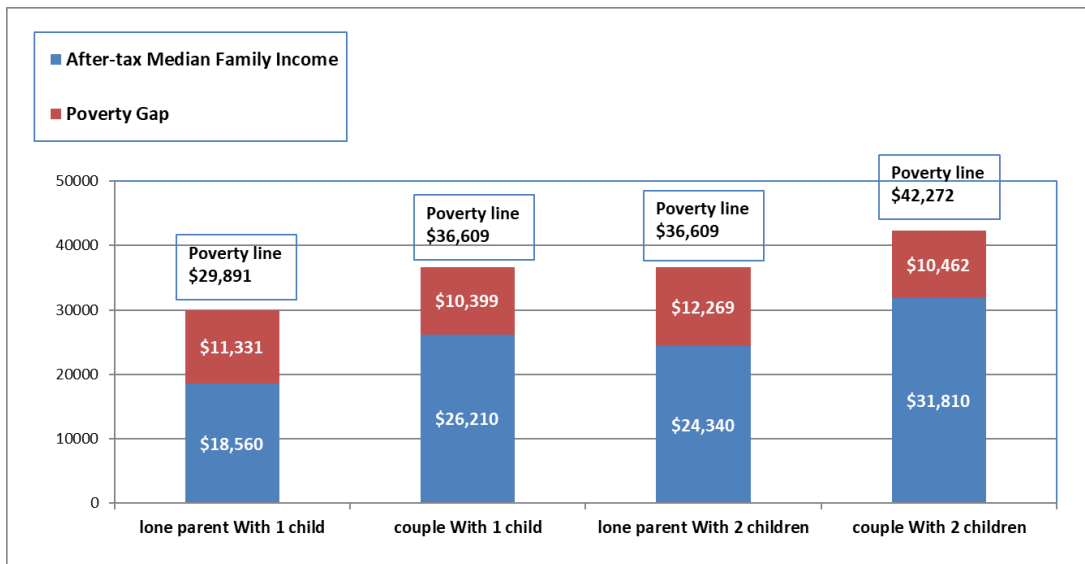


Chart 8 describes the poverty rate for children under 6 years of age for Canada, the provinces and the three territories.^[xxii] These early years are an important developmental phase, especially in terms of laying the basis for school readiness and academic success. Unfortunately, these rates for pre-school children are somewhat higher than the overall child and family poverty rate.

Again, Manitoba has the highest rate of any province at 31.6%. Almost one third (exactly 1 in 3.2) children under 6 in Manitoba live in poverty. This is 12% above the national rate.

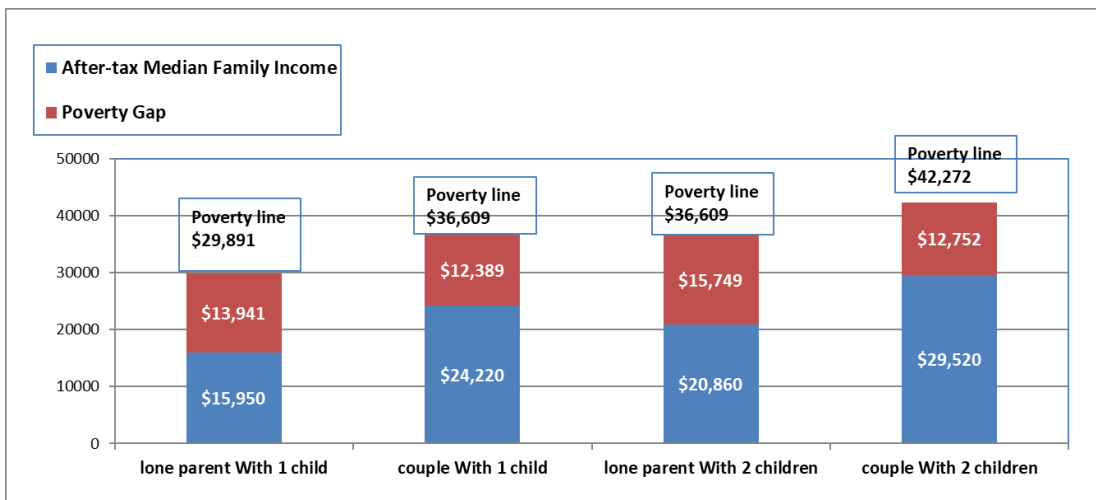
Again, Manitoba has the highest rate of any province at 31.6%. Almost 1 in 3 of children under 6 in Manitoba live in poverty. This is 12% above the national rate.

Chart 9a: Depth of Poverty Canada



Poverty is deeper in Manitoba than in Canada as a whole.

Chart 9b: Depth in Manitoba



Charts 9a and 9b contain the depth of poverty for various family types in Canada and in Manitoba.^[xxiii] The median income for families living in poverty is the midpoint, with half of families living above and half below it. The poverty gap is the amount of income required for those at the median to reach the Low Income Measure poverty threshold.

These charts demonstrate that, on average, children who live in poverty in Manitoba live in very deep poverty, especially those in single parent families. Poverty is deeper in Manitoba than in Canada as a whole. For example, half of lone parent families with two children in Manitoba would need more than \$15,749 just to reach the poverty line but \$12,438 in Canada as a whole.

The typical couple struggling in poverty with two children in Manitoba is living at \$12,752 below the poverty line, while in Canada as a whole, they would be \$10,462 below. For them the poverty gap is \$2,290 more in Manitoba than in Canada.

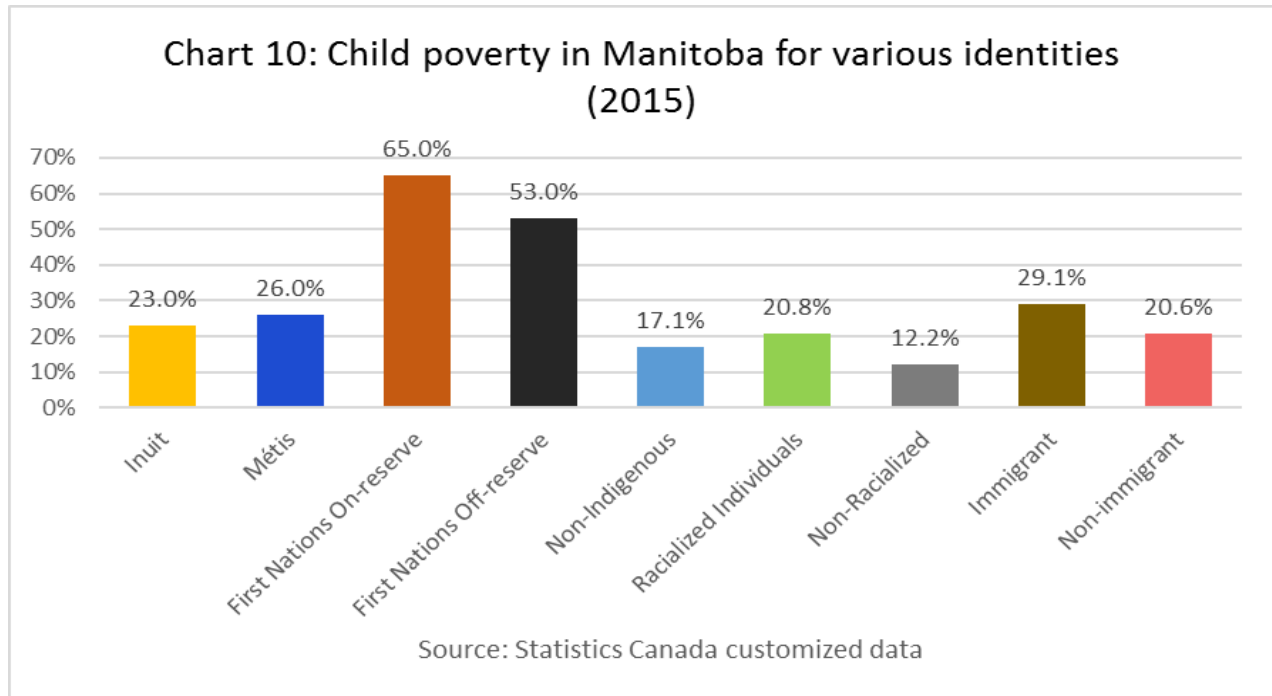


Chart 10 provides the poverty rates for Indigenous children^[xxiv, xxv], immigrant children (children of persons who are or have ever been landed immigrants or permanent residents)^[xxvi] and racialized children (persons other than Indigenous Peoples who are non-Caucasian in race, or non-white in colour)^[xxvii].

It is apparent that all of these groups have poverty rates above the general population rate for children in Manitoba.

Indigenous children on reserve exhibit the shameful rate of 65.0%, while more than half (53.0%) off-reserve live in poverty. Also, more than 1 in 4 (26.0%) of Metis children and almost a quarter (23.0%) of Inuit children are living in poverty. This compares with a rate of 17.1% of non-Indigenous children in Manitoba.

Almost 3 in 10 (29.1%) of immigrant children as compared to 21.0% of non-immigrant children live in poverty.

More than 1 in 5 (21%) of racialized children live in poverty as compared to only 12.2% of non-racialized children.

More than 1 in 5 (21%) of racialized children live in poverty as compared to only 12.2% of non-racialized children.

Sid Frankel, National Campaign 2000 and Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba
Josh Brandon, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

Systems Change:

This section is focused on Child and Family Services (CFS), as failures there permeate Health, Education and Justice. While all need reform to work in concert for our children, concerns over recent changes to CFS need highlighting.

In October 2017, without consultation with First Nations and First Nation Child and Family Services Authorities or Agencies, the provincial government announced its plan to reform CFS in Manitoba. The reform includes 4 pillars: prevention, reunification, funding and legislative reform. To an already under-funded system and as part of the block funding initiative, Manitoba introduced a pilot project with eight CFS agencies.

The two main changes of the provincial block funding were: child maintenance amounts based on the 2016-2017 fiscal year plus a 1% increase; and core operation cost based on 2013/14 funding amounts. Even though agencies had an opportunity to determine their priorities for their own CFS budget, at the same time, they were inheriting the debt created by the provincial government.

*For the 2017/18 fiscal year, Manitoba spent **\$543 million** dollars in the area of Child and Family Services. But come April 2020, the provincial government will **cut \$108 million**, providing only **\$408 million** dollars of funding to agencies under block funding.*

For the 2017/18 fiscal year, Manitoba spent \$543 million dollars in the area of Child and Family Services. But come April 2020, the provincial government will cut \$108 million, providing only \$408 million dollars of funding to agencies under block funding.

In 2006, the 'clawback' system was initiated, where the provincial government would keep the federal Children's Special Allowance (CSA) that CFS agencies had given to children in care. The CSA was a tax credit that children would receive either yearly or in a trust fund to be given to a child in care when they left the CFS system. The provincial

government began keeping the CSAs from First Nations children living off-reserve.

However, as of April 2019, the provincial government eliminated the enforcement of the 'clawback' system. One of the main reasons for this sudden change was the government's reform plan to transfer financial responsibilities to CFS agencies. In reality, the government only transferred its financial burden to CFS agencies. The provincial government created a clean slate for itself while cutting the funding to the agencies tasked with providing these essential services.

As we end the first year of CFS agencies forced into block funding, we are seeing the impacts it has on children in care and their families. Block funding is an arbitrary budget that is not designed to help CFS agencies deal with unexpected influxes. Instead of lessening financial burdens of CFS funding to allow for more focus on prevention, agencies maintained the same level of apprehension while cutting back on services for the family. For example, parents have been limited and/or denied visitation due to block funding cuts.

Under the imposed block funding model, there are less extensions of care granted. For children that are under extensions of care aged 18 to 21 years old, we are seeing cases where agencies are simply dropping off children at the Salvation Army when they turn 18. Without proper transition supports and/or training, former children in care are immediately propelled into homelessness.

For children that are under extensions of care aged 18 to 21 years old, we are seeing cases where agencies are simply dropping off children at the Salvation Army when they turn 18.

In the 2018 Winnipeg Street Census, it was determined that at least 50% of homeless people interviewed were involved in CFS. It was also determined that 66% of those who were involved in CFS were homeless within the first year of aging out of care.^[xxviii]

There are links between child poverty and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). In 2016, Manitoba released a statistic of 9,700 missing persons with 87% being children under CFS care, and 70% were girls.^[xxix]

Colonial policies and laws imposed upon First Nations, chronic underfunding on reserve, poor education and health outcomes, poor housing conditions, poverty and homelessness contribute to chronic system involvement. The CFS system is another colonial system that funnels First Nations into vulnerable situations, which places them at a higher risk of becoming exploited, missing and/or murdered.

Further, First Nations children in the child welfare system spend considerable amounts of time running away from foster home placements because they may be experiencing worse abuse and neglect than what led to initial apprehension or because they are trying to get back to their families. As a result, children are vulnerable and at significant risk for sexual exploitation and violence.

Through the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) First Nations Family Advocate Office (FNFAO), First Nations families involved with the child welfare system access supports and services to overcome challenges and barriers. The FNFAO has heard many accounts of former children in care who did not receive adequate supports to meet their basic needs. As a result, they were exploited just to meet their basic needs.

In December 2018 the AMC with the support of the Public Interest Law Centre (PILC), prepared a Closing Oral Submission for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The following recommendations regarding child welfare were included:

- That all levels of government implement Articles 7 and 22(2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and fund initiatives to implement the goals and objectives pertaining to the right and freedom from all forms of violence, including the forcible removal of children and genocide;

- That all levels of government meaningfully support and fund First Nations governments' efforts to reclaim and assert jurisdiction over First Nations children. Recognizing that certain families may continue to experience crisis, with the recodification and revitalization of First Nations laws, processes would be established in each language nation to support individuals and families when it's required; and
- That all levels of government meaningfully support and fund First Nations governments' efforts to bring First Nations children home and return them to their families and nations.

With more than 150 years of steady assimilation policies and the removal of Indigenous children through the Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop, the current child welfare system has reached crisis levels. Over 11,000 children are in care. 90% are Indigenous and a staggering 77% are First Nations.

With more than 150 years of steady assimilation policies and the removal of Indigenous children through the Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop, the current child welfare system has reached crisis levels. Over 11,000 children are in care. 90% are Indigenous and a staggering 77% are First Nations. The AMC has committed more than thirty years of political advocacy specifically for the support of First Nations to realize full jurisdiction over children and families regardless of where they reside.

On June 21, 2019, the federal Bill C-92, *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and Families*, received Royal Assent.^[xxx] The new federal legislation was enforced on January 1, 2020. The purpose of this was to create a shift in child welfare for Indigenous Nations by affirming the inherent rights and jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution.

The federal government has made no commitment of funding to implement the new child welfare legis-

lation. The origins of the deficiency in funding of on-reserve child welfare matters goes back to the 1950s and likely even earlier, and has never been rectified. In fact, the gap in funding of on-reserve and similar off-reserve child well-being and access to services funding has been forced upon Canada through the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (Jordan's Principle), which is being implemented into Bill C-92 without First Nation consultation. There continues to be a lack of clarity and accountability in Bill-C92 as there remains too much ministerial discretion on how funding is distributed.

The substantive content of the Act does not meet treaty obligations to support First Nations control over child welfare because it does not provide clear and sufficient financial, governance, cultural or other supports, and specifically does not give First Nations sufficient autonomy to operate their own child welfare system.

Lastly, Bill C-92 legislates the provincial CFS model and participation, but there are no requirements for Provinces to modify or harmonize existing provincial CFS legislation with Bill C-92 nor subsequent First Nation CFS laws. Until Bill C-92 is enforced and implemented, existing CFS agencies will continue to provide services to Indigenous children and families. A determination still needs to be made on which standards will be applied, national or provincial. Once again, there has not been the necessary consultation, so the uniqueness between First Nations, Inuit and Metis will continue to be ignored. This is a pan-Indigenous approach that does not change the status quo; as a result, children, youth and families will continue to fall through the cracks due to gaps in services and little to no change to the current child welfare system.

Once again, there has not been the necessary consultation, so the uniqueness between First Nations, Inuit and Metis will continue to be ignored. This is a pan-Indigenous approach that does not change the status quo; as a result, children, youth and families will continue to fall through the cracks due to gaps in services and little to no change to the current child welfare system.

Cora Morgan, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

Poverty in Manitoba: Big Picture

Getting Serious about Ending Poverty in Manitoba - for everybody

In October 2019, Manitoba released its Annual Report of our province's current strategy, *Pathways to a Better Future*^[xxxii], reporting on the state of poverty measurements for the 2018-2019 year.^[xxxii] The report indicates that the overall poverty rate and child poverty rate has reduced, which is promising news. Understanding how this is measured and the timing is important though. The baseline year that the province is measuring from is 2015. This also happens to be the year before the Canada Child Benefit was introduced. Rent Assist, Manitoba's portable housing benefit, was introduced in 2014, and was fully implemented by December 2015.

Manitoba's overall goal is to reduce child poverty by 25% by 2025, according to 2015 levels. Using the Province's preferred MBM metric, child poverty stood at 16.4 per cent in 2015. In 2017, child poverty fell to 9.5 percent, well below the target government had set for itself. The same data show that Manitoba had already exceeded this target in 2016, the year the current provincial government took power. Given that 2016 was the first year that the Canada Child Tax Benefit was fully implemented it is clear that any progress made should be attributed to that initiative. Manitoba must commit to building on that success and not diminish it through changes made to their own programs such as Rent Assist.

Make Poverty History Manitoba agrees with the province's Annual Report that much more needs to be done to reduce poverty in Manitoba.

There's progress on only 4 out of the 13 indicators of the province's poverty reduction strategy. There's no progress in addressing core housing need, with no new social housing built. Poverty remains worse for single adults, single parents/youth-led families, off-reserve Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, and women, with no target & timeline to address poverty for these groups.

There was a 12% regression in youth aged 15-24 not in employment, education, and training. There was a small regression in people over 15 in employment. A tenet of the government's strategy is to transition people off EIA into employment, but there is not yet a strategy to achieve that goal, particularly taking into account the multitude of supports needed to achieve meaningful employment and social inclusion for those that are willing to work but have faced barriers to date.

While it is good news that child poverty has reduced slightly in Manitoba, the province clearly needs a much more ambitious target and an adequate plan to address poverty and increase social inclusion for all. Ending Poverty in Manitoba is a collective responsibility, one that deserves to be on the top of the priority list for any government plans. Poverty hurts communities.

To address crime, we have to address poverty.

We know that many instances of recent violence, theft, and crime in Winnipeg, and in the past, stem from the root cause of poverty and social exclusion. We will not stop crime without addressing the root cause. To address crime, we have to address poverty.

We know that for many, poverty is a cycle, emanating from the intergenerational traumas of colonization and the attempted genocide of Indigenous Peoples. Unless there is adequate support for basic needs, healing, and a hand up out of poverty, the cycle will only continue. Poverty is a pervasive reality in our province, one that impacts us all, whether first hand or because we share this community called Manitoba.

We know that austerity, cuts and cancellations, and policies that favour the wealthier, have made

income inequality in Canada and Manitoba grow rapidly over the last three decades. And, while cuts have served to reduce budget expenditures in the very short term, poverty is costly, putting a burden on health, policing, justice, and family budgets. Austerity costs, poverty costs.

We know that the impact of climate change will disproportionately affect low-income and Indigenous communities in our province, as well as children and youth, and will greatly alter our economy impacting urban, rural, and Northern Manitobans.

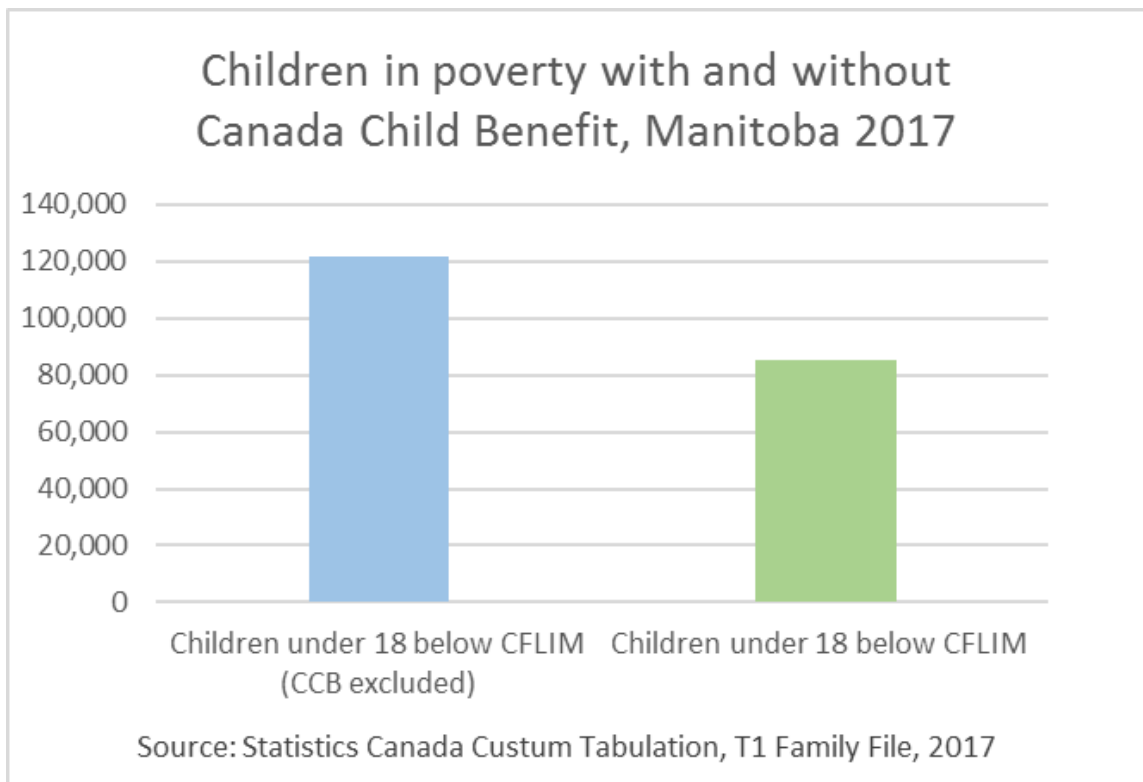
We also know that our communities are resilient, strong, and resourceful. There are countless innovative efforts at the community level to address and reduce poverty across Manitoba. To really make a dent in the cycle of poverty in this province, and to achieve more ambitious targets of reducing both child poverty rates *and* general poverty rates, we need the provincial government to spend more on these proven initiatives.

We can't end poverty in Manitoba without a whole-of-government plan, connected to key economic, social, and environmental goals. Bold targets and

timelines focus attention on what is to be achieved and by when. By setting goals, targets and timelines, there is a better chance that a policy will succeed and meet established outcome targets. **Make Poverty History Manitoba released *The View From Here: Manitobans call for a renewed poverty plan*** in 2015. Endorsed by over 100 organizations, it offers a blueprint for what our province's poverty reduction strategy could include.

Campaign 2000 has calculated that without the Canada Child Benefit, child poverty in Manitoba would have been 42% higher in 2017. In other words, the CCB lifted more than 36,000 children out of poverty. Without this federal benefit, there would have been no reduction in child poverty in Manitoba. Rather, poverty would have increased significantly.

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Michael Barkman, Make Poverty History Manitoba

Recommendations

Child and family poverty continues to exist in Manitoba, negatively affecting our communities. The child poverty rate in Manitoba remains the highest amongst the provinces. Poverty leaves too many children without enough for their basic survival needs and denies them happy, healthy childhoods.

A broken promise and minimal progress towards fixing it is leaving many even further behind. As a nation, province and community, we have a responsibility to protect and support our children and advocate for all Manitobans to have equal opportunity to succeed. It is in the best interest of our province to make a real effort to reduce poverty, especially child poverty. The negative effects of poverty on children are detrimental to their developmental outcomes, personal growth, mental health, and education. We can do better.

Reviewing the most recent suite of proposed bills, Bill 37 is concerning. This “Reducing Red Tape and Improving Services Act 2020” includes changes to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act. “The Committee responsible for monitoring the poverty reduction strategy is no longer required to meet four times each year. The minister’s annual report is no longer automatically referred to the Legislative Assembly’s Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.”^[xxxiii]

To be more effective, the Government of Manitoba must be more ambitious and strategic with their poverty reduction targets. More importantly, it needs to put poverty elimination at the forefront of all of its policies and programs. It then must report regularly on successes and setbacks so the public can have confidence in their promised outcomes.

Accountability, Targets and Timelines

- ◆ The Government of Manitoba must immediately rescind their proposed Bill 37 and re-commit to full accountability for and community oversight of their poverty reduction strategy.
- ◆ The Government of Manitoba must immediately revise its poverty reduction strategy, committing to a bold target and timeline within a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy, to reduce poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba. Such as: Reduce the rate and depth of child poverty, with immediate emphasis on Indigenous, immigrant and racialized children, by 50% by 2025 from its 2015 level as per the T1FF measurement using taxfiler data.
- ◆ The Government of Manitoba must commit to meaningful engagement with the communities most affected by child poverty and ensure leadership from amongst these communities in solution development and resource delivery.
- ◆ The Government of Manitoba should adopt the Census Family Low Income Measure After Tax (CFLIM-AT) as its official measure of poverty. This measurement is comprehensive; including well-being, living standards and comparing social exclusion among the population. The CFLIM-AT provides a more accurate poverty measure that allows for comparison of future success and failures.
- ◆ The Government of Manitoba use T1 Family File (T1FF) taxfiler data to measure poverty. It is a reliable and broad source with a more inclusive sample of family’s income situations.

Employment Supports

Employment is one path out of poverty. Time and again, it has long been proven that when people are supported to enter the work force, they do. The pride and self-worth that comes with a job has meaningful effects far beyond the simple economic benefit. The Government of Manitoba needs to invest in opportunities that support people who are able to enter the labour force.

- ◆ Implement a plan to prioritize job creation for well-paying jobs and training opportunities that reduce barriers for people seeking employment and accessing education.
- ◆ Increase the minimum wage to \$16.58 to align with a living wage that allows for people to afford their basic needs.

Improving Income Supports

Strategic investments and income support programs can support Manitobans and their children who live with a low income.

- ◆ Immediately introduce a Livable Basic Needs Benefit that lifts all Manitobans up to or above the Census Family Low Income Measure After Tax (CFLIM-AT). The Liveable Basic Needs Benefit will transform EIA as a first step towards introducing a basic income by removing conditionality from assistance, increasing its universality and improving its adequacy. Progressive steps to improving this benefit will provide a basic income guarantee for all Manitobans.
- ◆ End the practice of Child and Family Services retaining the Children's Special Allowance. It should be kept in trust for children in care until they age out of care.

Accessible, High Quality Public Services

Accessible and quality public services are essential in the reduction and prevention of child and family poverty.

- ◆ Provide adequate transition supports and resources for youth aging out of Child and Family Services.
- ◆ Improve oversight to all third-party providers in Child and Family Services to ensure the safety and well-being of all children in state care.
- ◆ Establish a fully independent complaint process that both protects the complainants and creates a fairer, more transparent and effective complaint process.
- ◆ Commit to a Child and Family Services reform that:
 - Prioritizes solutions and leadership from the communities most affected by it.
 - Provides these communities with the resources necessary to implement and sustain services rooted in culture and community, given evidence of their effectiveness.
 - Support families by fulfilling the now suspended promise to end birth alerts, shifting the current funding model to incentives prevention over apprehension, creating more supports for parents victimized by intimate partner abuse over simply apprehension of any child and committing more resources to family reunification.

- ◆ The Government of Manitoba must create 17,000 public, accessible, subsidized and quality childcare spaces allowing for access to education and support for children while meeting employment and/or educational needs for their parent(s) such as cost geared to income child care and available after usual work day hours.
- ◆ Increase adequate public, suitable and affordable housing and commit to building at least 300 new social housing units per year while increasing maintenance on existing units.
- ◆ Increase investment in Rent Assist (\$8 million to reinstate the 25% of household income tenant contribution rate).
- ◆ Engage with and invest in community-led programs that support children and families.
- ◆ Increase funding to double investment in community-based mental health services for low-income Manitobans .

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