

2024

Newfoundland and Labrador

Child and Family Poverty Report Card



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Land Acknowledgement

We gratefully and respectfully acknowledge that the lands where we gathered and worked in the preparation of this report are the traditional and unceded territories of the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq peoples, and the homelands of the Innu, Inuit, and Metis of Labrador.

We recognize the ancestral and continued ties of Indigenous peoples to the lands and waters in the region known as Newfoundland & Labrador.

We recognize all First Peoples who were here before us, those who live with us now, and the seven generations to come.

As First Peoples have done since time immemorial, we strive to be responsible stewards of the land and to respect the cultures, ceremonies, and traditions of all who call it home. As we open our hearts and minds to the past, we commit ourselves to working in a spirit of truth and reconciliation to make a better future for all.

We are grateful for the opportunity to meet here, and we thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land and who have been stewards of this land for thousands of years.

We must take every opportunity to commit to the struggle against the systems of oppression that have dispossessed Indigenous people of their lands, and that have denied their rights to self-determination.



Executive Summary

Between 2020 and early 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic forced urgent and innovative responses, proving that when we act decisively, we can change lives. In those years, we saw a 22% reduction in families with children living in poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador—clear evidence that targeted interventions like the Canada Emergency Response Benefit made a tangible impact.

New realities have taken hold since the end of the global pandemic with the costs of living – food, shelter and basic necessities skyrocketing. As well, Statistics Canada reported the lower government transfers post-COVID contributed to the decrease in after-tax income, a 28.9 % decline, or \$4,100 difference.

Rates of child poverty increased in both 2021 and 2022, maintaining the gap between the national rate and the provincial one. Campaign 2000 reported “Newfoundland and Labrador experienced the highest increase in poverty for children under 6 years of age, or +4 percentage points.”

In 2022, Canada’s national rate for children under the age of 18 is 18.1%, while the child poverty rate in Newfoundland and Labrador is 21.4%, a 3.3% increase over 2021. According to the National Poverty dashboard, the average poverty gap increased from 32.4 to 33.3% between 2021 and 2023, a percentage increase of 2.8%.

While racialized children and youth account for 5% of the population of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador, 31% experience poverty. This is double the national rate of 15.5% for racialized children and youth in Canada.

Many rural families struggle to access essential services like healthcare, food banks, and employment opportunities due to a lack of transportation. The stigma around accessing support services in small communities discourages people from seeking help.

Vital Signs 2024 reported 20.4% of households in Newfoundland and Labrador experience housing insecurity. Rents have increased 20% since 2020, while vacancy rates have dropped significantly. The average rental housing increase from 2020 to 2024 was 23.1% across Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Canadian Income Survey reported food insecurity across Canada is highest among lone female parents and among Indigenous and racialized families. In this province, food insecurity rates increased from 19% in 2018 to 26% in 2022.

Poverty contributes to poorer health outcomes for children and youth and also affects school attendance later. Early childhood development programs and policies, particularly affordable child care, can mitigate these negative impacts.

According to the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 79% of younger children in Newfoundland and Labrador live in child care deserts. In St. John's, there is less than one licensed space for every 10 infants.

Campaign 2000 says higher rates of poverty for children under the age of six represents a significant concern as poverty experienced in younger years is strongly associated with negative health, education and work-related outcomes later.

A provincial assessment of youth mental health from 2015-2022 found that children and youth in NL score very poorly on several well-being indicators compared to the other Canadian provinces. Youth aged 12-17 reported a 35% decrease in self-assessed mental health status compared to a 23% decrease nationally; NL ranked 8th in self-assessed mental health (10 being the worst).

However, there is hope. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has had a number of policy approaches and programs addressing poverty reduction in the last 20 years. In November 2023, the provincial government launched a new three-year poverty reduction plan under the broader scope of the province's Social and Economic Well Being Plan. In the 2024 provincial budget, the government allocated \$41 million to the Poverty Reduction Plan. This was on top of the \$1B allocated already for social programming.

The provincial government is also investing \$900,000 over three years to support a food benefit pilot. The Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security has matched this investment, enabling 18 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) in NL to provide \$150 (Newfoundland) or \$225 (Labrador) per month via a grocery gift card. In 2024, the pilot was extended for the FRCs in the pilot.

Government supported intervention and prevention programs have begun to show positive outcomes for children and families. Employment programs for income support recipients are showing promise, and there is growing recognition that community organizations are well positioned to address the needs of vulnerable populations as key partners in addressing and ending child poverty.

While many successful initiatives exist, there are still gaps, particularly in securing stable, long-term funding and improving government-community collaboration. More accurate, region-specific data collection is necessary to ensure policies align with community needs. Past initiatives demonstrated the potential for positive change. Scaling up these effective approaches could help create lasting solutions for poverty across Newfoundland.

Partner Statements

JIMMY PRATT FOUNDATION

The Jimmy Pratt Foundation is dedicated to supporting research and informing policies that promote the resilience and well-being of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador. Our operations are guided by principles of independence, collaboration, equity, and evidence-informed practices. Our vision is a province where all children and youth can thrive, even in the face of adversity. We advocate for the expansion of education to include the early years, universal, affordable child care, the rights of the early childhood educator workforce, and the eradication of child poverty. The child is at the center of everything we do.

CHOICES FOR YOUTH

Addressing child and youth poverty requires deep, sustained collaboration. We know what works—but no single organization or level of government can tackle this alone. Government must be at the table, investing in the bold policy solutions needed to create long-term change.

At the same time, community organizations are the ones meeting young people and families where they are, providing the services that make a difference today. These interventions only work through meaningful partnerships we build across government, community, and the private sector. If we want to reverse the trends of child and youth poverty in Canada, we must strengthen partnership across sectors, turning evidence into action and converting practice into policy, all with the goal of ensuring that every child has the foundation they need to thrive.

COMMUNITY SECTOR COUNCIL

Complex, socio-economic challenges require coordinated, multi-faceted solutions. The 2025 Child Poverty Report Card is the collective effort of not only our valued partners, but also public sector counterparts, community sector organizations, and lived-experience voices. Community Sector Council of Newfoundland and Labrador is proud to support our sector leaders in the development of a data-informed, community-led resource to understand the dimensions of child poverty in our province.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Between 2020 and 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic forced urgent and innovative responses, proving that when we act decisively, we can change lives. In those years, we saw a 22% reduction in families with children living in poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador—clear evidence that targeted interventions like the Canada Emergency Response Benefit made a tangible impact.

Even as we emerged from the pandemic, new realities took hold: skyrocketing costs of living, a 20% increase in average rental rates, and housing vacancy rates plummeting from 7.5% to just 1.5%. Today, as we deal with child poverty rates that have surpassed pre-pandemic levels while navigating a growing housing crisis coupled with global, economic shifts, we are once again at a crossroads.

In April 2024, *Vital Signs 2023*, a province-wide review of the province's quality of life, reported its latest findings: In nine of the 12 regions of the province, about one in every five households earn less than \$30,000/year after taxes.¹

While the federal government does not have an official definition of poverty, the most common description relies on assessing income levels and what is needed to provide the necessities of life: food, shelter and clothing.² Children and youth living in poverty struggle with their education, social development, mental health, and the transition to adulthood. They struggle in accessing post-secondary education and employment, and they struggle with daily survival.

Children learn what they live and life without adequate income and family supports is very difficult indeed. There's a reason income is one of the leading indicators of health in Canada. Its cumulative and compounding effects influence an individual's access to education, employment, food security, housing, and preventative health services. Other impacts on health include childhood experiences, healthy behaviours, economic stability, community and built environments, early childhood development and social inclusion.³

As a result, the lack of adequate income and community and federal/provincial interventions has had far-reaching impacts on all aspects of health and well-being. Campaign 2000's *2024 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty* found "nearly one in five children (18.1%) were growing up with the short- and long-term physical, mental, emotional, economic and social harms of poverty."⁴

In short, poverty makes life difficult. It brings stigma and shame. It presents challenges above and beyond those associated with paying bills. The stress and uncertainty of living in poverty colours all parts of a family's life. Children are likely to have more complex needs, face more barriers to getting the care and support they require at school and in the healthcare system, and to receive fewer supports that will help them to become healthy adults in the future.

In our 2023 report, we found life got substantially more difficult for families between 2020 and 2021. Sadly, not much has changed in our review of 2024. We have continued to hear and see about the negative impact rising inflation and interest rates have had on every part of life – rent, groceries, clothing, and gas to name a few of the key necessities.

Access to child care remains an ongoing issue as child care centres are unable to meet the demand for affordable and convenient child care. Housing continues to be a challenge as rents and heating costs have skyrocketed.

Between 2020 and 2021, the number of families living in poverty increased, and those who were already living in poverty were pushed even further below the poverty line.



How to Use This Report

This is the third child poverty report card written for Newfoundland and Labrador. This report reviews the status and impact of poverty reduction initiatives in Newfoundland and Labrador, especially as it pertains to children and youth. Our report focusses on the data available, documenting the rates of poverty, regionally, and provincially. We also focus on particular regions and experiences of individuals, and those who are working to support them on their experience of poverty. Finally, we present some useful and ongoing approaches at both the government and community levels.

It is important to remember that we are working with the most current data available. As such, the statistics may lag behind in documenting the impact of changes made between each phase of data collection. Nonetheless, the data we present, supported by the qualitative insights offered through focus groups, interviews and community discussions, document the challenges our communities face in addressing the depth of poverty, which continues to be a significant social issue for government, community and citizens in NL.

As with our two previous reports in 2023 and 2024, this report card is a collaborative effort between Choices for Youth, the Jimmy Pratt Foundation, and the Community Sector Council of Newfoundland and Labrador. This year, the project was also guided by a working group of external partners and agencies to inform our work. We also received valuable support from Campaign 2000, the Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security, the NL Statistics Agency, and the NL Department of Families and Affordability (FAMA).

We are grateful to the more than 100 stakeholders representing many different community service agencies and sectors such as education, health and income support, as well as those with lived experience of poverty. We appreciate the time they took to give their input and to recommend policy proposals. We hope that the story we tell in this report reflects that reality and helps you advocate for your work and your community.

This report contains data collected from policy research, insights collected through community engagement sessions and solicited feedback, and interviews documenting the lived experience of people living in poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as commentary from program staff supporting people living in poverty. We analyzed the qualitative material we collected by tracking how often an issue was raised in each regional discussion. We then pooled the priority areas to identify more broadly recommendations for action.

We have also included the voices of people with lived experience with poverty and those in community who support and advocate on their behalf. These quotes offer insights into the particular aspects of poverty we document in this report. Identifying details have been removed to ensure individual privacy.

DATA SOURCES

We received support from Campaign 2000 in the form of access to custom data from Statistics Canada. We received additional support and information from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador through the Department of Families and Affordability (FAMA) (formerly known as the NL Department of Child, Seniors and Social development (CSSD), the Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security, and the NL Statistics Agency (NLSA), Department of Finance, Government of NL. We cannot over emphasize the value having access to the most current data available brings to our analysis of the incidence and prevalence of poverty in our province.

In developing this report card, we consulted as widely as possible between Fall 2024 and Winter 2025. We held five regional consultation sessions using in-person and online participation. We also met with individuals or exchanged emails with individuals representing community organizations working in the area of child and family poverty. We also carried out in depth interviews with individuals who shared their experience of living in poverty or in supporting people who are living in poverty.

We must also acknowledge the many contributions of community workers, program staff, volunteers and individuals with lived experience of poverty for giving their time and expertise to the development of this report. Their insights and observations helped provide important context to the regional experiences of child and youth poverty in Newfoundland and

Our Questions

Question 1: How does poverty affect children's daily lives and well-being in your region?

Question 2: What are the biggest challenges people face when trying to make ends meet in this region?

Question 3: What role do government programs and community initiatives play in addressing child poverty, and where do you see gaps in support?

Question 4: What are three recommendations you make to help end child poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador?

Poverty and Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador

NL POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has had a number of policy approaches and programs addressing poverty reduction in the last 20 years. This province was the second in Canada to introduce a poverty reduction plan in 2005.

In the ten years that followed the strategy's introduction, child poverty decreased to be more in line with the national average, which was one of the key goals of the strategy. This was also the period in which the province was going through an offshore oil boom. The poverty reduction strategy helped the poorest Newfoundlanders and Labradorians keep up with cost of living increases such booms create.

While there was no formal end date to the poverty reduction strategy, the provincial government set targets it wanted the province to achieve by 2014. Despite achieving considerable gains by 2014, rates of child poverty had begun to rise again by 2016, even with the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit. In 2020, the province saw the rates improve in response to the increase in benefits arising from federal and provincial responses to the pandemic.

In November 2023, the provincial government launched a new three-year poverty reduction plan under the broader scope of the province's Social and Economic Well Being Plan.

In its first year, the Poverty Reduction Plan focused on the following:

- Expanding the prenatal nutritional supplement to the families of children aged 0 -5 years
- Expanding the school breakfast and lunch programs to all Junior Kindergarten-Grade Nine classrooms
- Increasing the Child Benefit (NLCB) by 300% over three years. In January 2024, the NLCB was \$1788
- Streamlining 30 income support benefit rates into six clear and consolidated benefit rates, with implementation over three years beginning in April 2024
- Expanding the Employment Stability program which is intended to help individuals on income support keep more of their earnings and receive incentives for employment maintenance
- Introducing skills training to people ineligible for employment insurance.

In the 2024 provincial budget, the government allocated \$41 million to the Poverty Reduction Plan. This was on top of the \$1B allocated already for social programming.

According to the provincial government website, the province will allocate:

- Close to \$30 million for the Child Benefit, a 300 per cent increase that ranks the NL program as the third highest child benefit in Canada.
- More than \$7 million for improvements to the Income Support Program, which will result in some people receiving almost four times their previous benefits.
- \$4.8 million to implement a targeted basic income pilot for people aged 60-64 currently supported by both the Income Support Program and the NL Health Services' Community Supports Program.
- \$4 million to expand the Prenatal-Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement up to age five, which is the best program of its kind in Canada.
- \$3 million to expand school food programming in all Pre-Kindergarten programs and K-9 schools, beginning in 2024 in schools with the highest need.

GROCERY GIFT CARD PILOT PROGRAM

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is investing \$900,000 over three years to support a food benefit pilot. The Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security has matched this investment, enabling 16 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) in NL to provide \$150 (Newfoundland) or \$225 (Labrador) per month via a grocery gift card. The pilot started in 2024 and was extended to the end of 2026.

In the first year of the pilot, the program reached 288 households (1100+ individuals), one-third of whom were experiencing severe food insecurity when they were enrolled in the program. Although quantitative data are not yet available, FRC staff and grocery card recipients have reported positive impacts for families.

Clients report an appreciation for the confidential nature of the program as well as decreased financial stress, increased purchasing of fruits and vegetables, as well as increased ability to celebrate birthdays and holidays:

“I don’t have to shop for only sale items, I can buy fresh produce and get healthy foods without having to go without. I am so thankful for this program. Even more thankful that it is confidential!!!” – Stakeholder

“This program has helped reduce the financial stress we face. Our son is autistic and only eats certain foods - many fresh fruits which are expensive to purchase at times.” – Stakeholder

In addition to improved healthy eating and food insecurity, FRC staff reported increased positive relationships with families including some families visiting the FRCs for other programming more frequently. The increased trust and visits allow FRCs to achieve more of the family outcomes they are supporting.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Government supported intervention and prevention programs have begun to show positive outcomes for children and families. Employment programs for income support recipients are showing promise. According to the National Advisory Council on Poverty (2025) there is growing recognition that community organizations are well positioned to address the needs of vulnerable populations as key partners in addressing and ending child poverty.⁵ Participants identified several effective strategies and approaches in addressing the challenges faced by individuals and families. It is also important to remember that non-unionized employees in the social and community sectors are under-compensated, volunteers are stretched beyond capacity, and programs are under-funded. Even so, there are creative community-led approaches that offer short-term creative and innovative solutions.

1. Community-Based Initiatives & Partnerships

- Local food programs and donations: Programs like KFC's donation to the Family Resource Centre, Second Harvest, and community-led food pantries (Little Red Pantries) have been effective in providing short-term, immediate food relief.
- School food programs: Initiatives such as the Kids Eat Smart breakfast program ensure children receive nutritious meals without stigma.
- Community-led employment readiness and training programs: Previous programs that were embedded within communities proved to be successful in helping individuals transition into stable employment.
- Family Resource Centres & Community Youth Networks (CYNs): These organizations are making a significant impact by providing essential resources and programs.
- Inter-agency collaboration: While some gaps exist, there are successful examples of partnerships among community organizations that enhance resource sharing and service delivery.

2. Early Intervention & Prevention Programs

- Early Years Resource Project (Western Newfoundland): This was highly effective in mobilizing communities.
- Early childhood education programs attached to schools: These help provide structure and support for young children experiencing poverty and family stress.
- Social workers in schools (historical pilot program): This was once a successful initiative in Western Newfoundland and could be reinstated to address social and emotional challenges in students.
- Sports and recreational programming: Community centres have stepped in to provide free or low-cost sports programs, ensuring children from low-income families can participate.

3. Financial & Policy Support that Works

- Poverty reduction transfers and emergency support funds: While income support remains low, certain one-time grants (e.g., Canada Post Community Initiative Fund for fresh produce) have provided immediate relief.
- New employment program linked with Income Support: This has been acknowledged as a positive step in helping individuals transition to work.
- Living Wage Advocacy: While not yet implemented, there is strong consensus that a shift toward a living wage or basic income would address many root causes of poverty.

4. Flexible, Community-Managed Funding

- Funding for local initiatives rather than top-down approaches: "Arguably, when funds are provided directly to community organizations through a mutually beneficial frame work, they are more effective in addressing local needs (NACP)."⁶
- Social Return on Investment (SROI): Recognizing the long-term benefits of investing in social programs has been key in demonstrating the value of local initiatives.
- Emergency fund flexibility: Programs that allow for quick, responsive financial aid (e.g., paying for urgent bills like power or rent) have been successful in reducing crises before they escalate.

5. Improved Awareness, Education & Advocacy

- Breaking stigma and increasing accessibility: Some organizations have removed income-testing requirements to ensure people in need can access services without barriers.
- Financial literacy programs: More education on budgeting and financial management has been identified as an essential tool for families navigating poverty.
- Lived experience voices in policy decisions: The importance of including individuals with lived experiences of poverty in decision-making has been recognized as crucial for creating effective policies.

While many successful initiatives exist, there are still gaps, particularly in securing stable, long-term funding and improving government-community collaboration. Scaling up these effective approaches could help create lasting solutions for poverty across Newfoundland and Labrador.

How We Measure Poverty

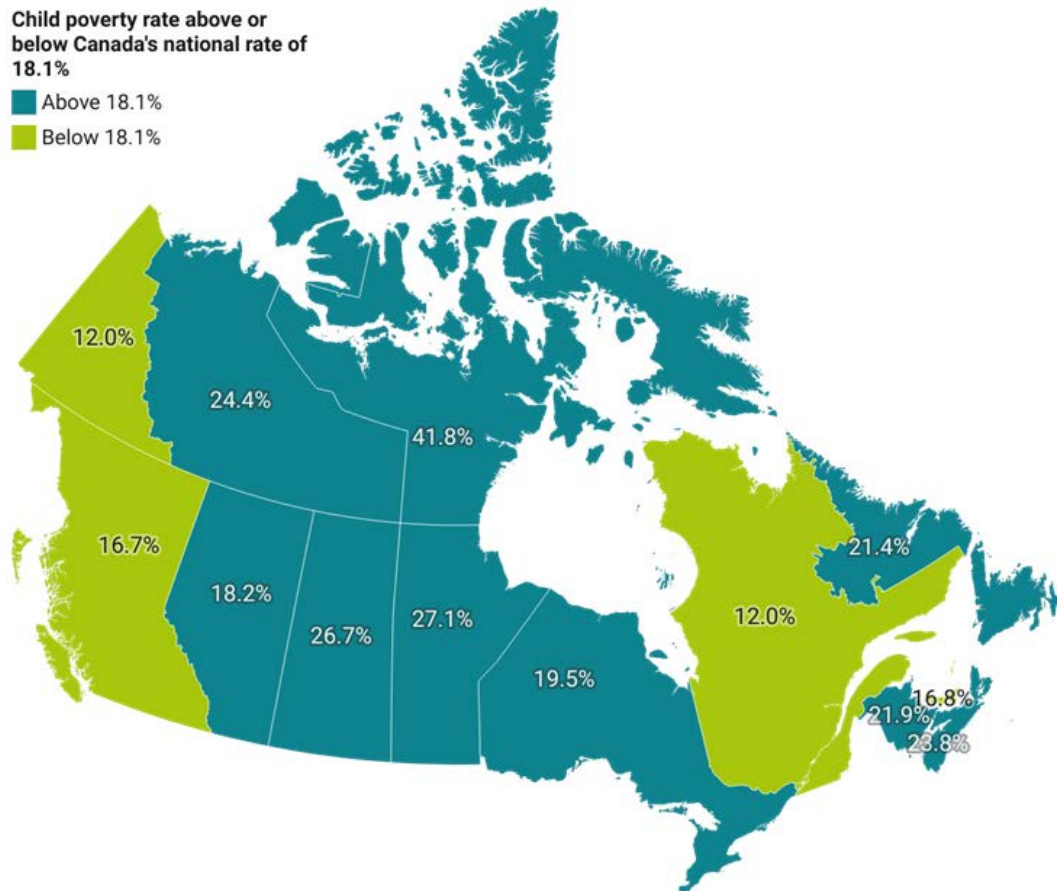
POVERTY RATES INCREASING

According to Campaign 2000's 2024 Report Card, "more children lived in poverty in 2022 than before the onset of the pandemic."⁷ The authors say pandemic transfers helped bring down child poverty rates across Canada.

In Fig. 1, we see Canada's national rate for children under the age of 18 is 18.1%, while the child poverty rate in Newfoundland and Labrador is 21.4%, a 3.3% increase over 2021. Only two provinces and one territory in Canada have a rate below the national rate: British Columbia, the Yukon, and Quebec. Nunavut leads the country with a rate of 41.8%.

Figure 1: Child poverty rates (CFLIM-AT) across Canada under 18, 2022

Child poverty rates by province and territory, under 18, 2022



Source: Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0018-01. After-tax income status of tax filers and dependents based on Census Family Low-Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition. TIFF 2022

CENSUS TABLES

We examined higher-level trends in child poverty for Newfoundland and Labrador based on 2021 T1 Family File (T1FF) data – depth of poverty, inequality, and the effect of social transfers on poverty.

The statistics contained in the tables are broken down by family structure, geography, and the age of children. The 2021 Census provides us with additional insight into how poverty impacts Indigenous communities, racialized children and families, and new immigrants.

Following the lead of Campaign 2000 and its regional partners, this report primarily uses the Census Family Low-Income Measurement - After-Tax (CFLIM – AT) because it is a relative measure of income poverty.

Table 1: Low-Income Measure, After-Tax Thresholds by Family Type, 2022

Family type	CFLIM-AT(\$)
Single person (no child)	25, 418
Lone parent with one child	35, 946
Lone parent with two children	44, 025
Couple with one child	44, 025
Couple with two children	50, 836

Source: Statistics Canada (2024) Technical Reference Guide for the Annual Income Estimates for Census Families, Individuals and Seniors, T1 Family File, Final Estimates, 2022, Table F.

A household is considered low-income if its after-tax income is less than 50% on the median after-tax income. There are several advantages to this measure of poverty as the data has been published by Statistics Canada since 1990. Using the data in this report also makes it easier to track changes in child poverty over time.

Key aspects include:

- The CFLIM – AT is updated every year by Statistics Canada as tax filings are received.
- The CFLIM – AT draws from a wide data set – the T1FF used for filing taxes – which has much higher coverage than the Canadian income survey bracket used for calculation of the MBM) in Newfoundland and Labrador, the coverage is about 98.6%
- As a relative measure of poverty, the CFLIM – AT can capture social exclusion and inequality, even as overall standards of living rise.
- This CFLIM – AT is comparable to low-income measures used internationally; the OECD uses a very similar measure.

This report also uses a second related measure to examine child and family poverty: the Low-Income Measure – After-Tax (LIM-AT). The LIM-AT is calculated almost identically to the CFLIM – AT, but it uses census data instead of T1FF data because the census uses households rather than economic families to determine median income.

The LIM-AT estimates lower levels of child and family poverty. We use it sparingly to supplement T1FF data because the census collects demographic data like Indigenous identity, immigration status, and race, which are all important dimensions of child and youth poverty across Canada.

CENSUS FAMILIES VERSUS HOUSEHOLDS

Statistics Canada defines census families, as married couples, or couples living common law, with or without children, or lone parents with at least one child living in the same dwelling. The residual population is called “persons not in census families,” and is made up of persons living alone and of persons living in a household, but who are not part of a couple family or a lone-parent family. Households are a broader concept, and may include anyone living in a private dwelling unit, regardless of their relationship to one another.



The Market Basket Measure (MBM) as an Indicator of Poverty

The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is an absolute measure of poverty, representing the cost of meeting basic needs in a given location. Statistics Canada calculates the cost of a “standard” basket of goods and services for different locations across Canada. The basket includes healthy food, appropriate shelter, clothing, transportation, and other needs for a reference family. Household poverty is defined when the disposable income of an economic family, or an individual not in an economic family, falls below the threshold for the family size.⁸

In Newfoundland and Labrador, Statistics Canada only calculates four Market Basket Measures representing different population bases. These are:

- Rural
- Small population centres less than 30,000 persons
- Medium population centres with populations between 30,000 and 99,999 persons, and
- St. John’s Census Metropolitan Area.⁹

The province has widely varying experiences of costs depending on location. We know that the cost of food, for example, varies greatly between Nain and Bonavista, both of which count as “small population centres.”

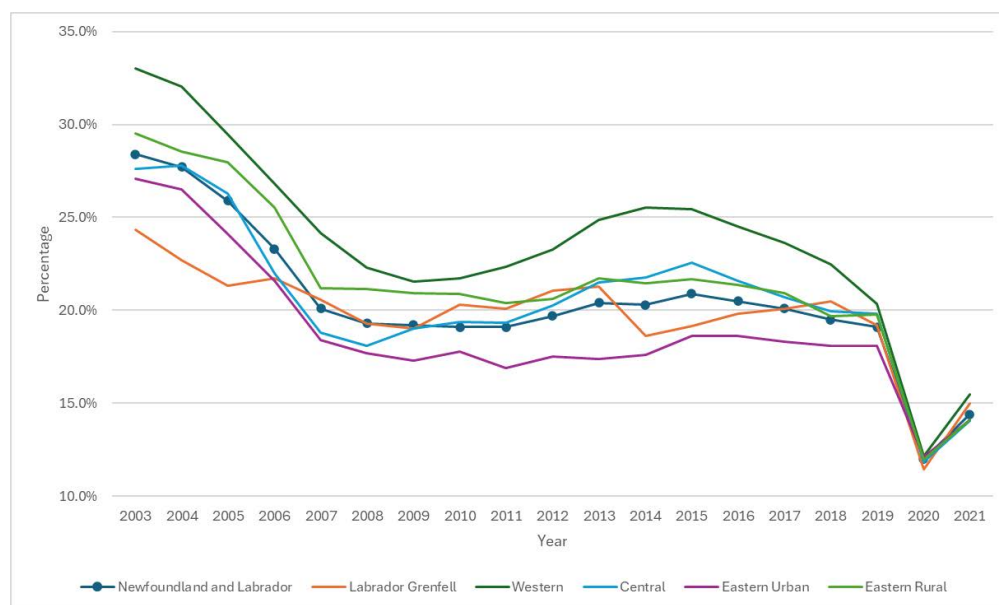
As we reported in last year’s Child Poverty Report Card (2024), there are additional issues with the MBM:

- The baseline Market Basket Measure has only been updated twice to establish base years since the year 2000, first in 2008 and again in 2018. This means the MBM is not responsive to changes in cost of living between base years. This can pose a substantial limitation, especially in the context of large and rapid society-wide changes (such as the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Statistics Canada has still not yet finalized an MBM for Indigenous people living on reserves or for Nunavut.¹⁰ The Northern MBM (MBM-N) for the Northwest Territories and Yukon was introduced in 2022.
- The MBM based on the Canadian Income Survey also excludes households in extremely remote areas, people who are unhoused, people living in institutions and provincial Indigenous reserves. Although this comprises a small percentage of the general population, they experience disproportionately high rates of poverty which can skew our understanding of the prevalence of poverty in these populations.¹¹

While the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador also publishes a Market Basket Measure (the NLMBM) that is more specific to the communities and regions of Newfoundland and Labrador¹² (19), it does not use exactly the same methodology and dataset as the national MBM and it cannot be used for nation-wide comparisons. Nonetheless, as imperfect as it is as a measure, the MBM tools offer an opportunity to observe trends year over year within a broader context of food costs and income disparities.

The MBM and NLMBM shown in Fig. 2 both report a lower incidence of child poverty. The NLMBM reports higher provincial levels of child poverty compared to the national MBM. However, even though the NLMBM reports lower values for child poverty over the years, it still captures the same trend seen with the national data: a steep decrease in child poverty in 2020 followed by a steep increase in poverty. The provincial data has not yet caught up to 2022.

Figure 2: Child poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador (NLMBM)



Source: Newfoundland and Labrador Market Basket Measure of Low-Income. Statistics provided by Income Statistics Division, Statistics Canada, based on methodology developed by the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency.

In Table 2, Statistics Canada presents a comparison between the CFLIM-AT (after-tax income rate) and the Market Basket Measure. As with Fig. 4, we can see the percentage of children living in poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador continued to increase with either measure.

Table 2: Number and percent of children in poverty, Newfoundland and Labrador, MBM and CFLIM-AT

Poverty Rate (%) by year	CFLIM-AT	MBM
2015	21.3	15.2
2016	20	13
2017	20.2	11.5
2018	20.8	11.5
2019	21	15.3
2020	16.4	7.9
2021	18.3	9.9
2022	21.4	11

Sources CFLIM-AT data – Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0018-01. After tax income status of tax filers and dependents based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition. T1 Family File 2022 MBM data – Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0135-01. Low-income statistics by age, sex and economic family type.

FOOD INSECURITY

The federal Poverty Reduction Strategy publishes an annual dashboard of indicators measuring poverty in Canada. In 2022, the number of people in Canada reporting moderate to severe food insecurity increased by more than 30% rising from 12.9% to 16.9%.¹³ The Canadian Income Survey also reported food insecurity across Canada is highest among lone female parents and among Indigenous and racialized families.

In this province, food insecurity rates increased from 19% in 2018 to 26% in 2022.¹⁴

In our community discussions, we heard from participants that many children arrive at school hungry, affecting their ability to focus and learn. Families rely heavily on food programs, which are struggling to keep up with demand. Some children save food from school meals to bring home for their families. Rising food prices make it harder for families to afford nutritious meals. Food banks are seeing a dramatic increase in demand, with more working poor families requiring assistance. Rural grocery stores often charge higher prices to offset higher shipping and transportation costs, making fresh food less accessible.

In 2023, the Newfoundland and Labrador Nutritious Food Basket was calculated with 61 nutritious foods using Canada's *Food Guide* (2019). The NL Statistics Agency determines the cost of the food basket using the prices of specific amounts of food with the nutrient needs of individuals and families.

The 2023 NLNFB consists of 61 nutritious foods from the 2019 Canada's *Food Guide*. The prices of specific amounts of these foods, combined with the nutrient needs of individuals and families, determines the cost of the food basket. The average cost of a weekly food basket for a family of four provincially is \$333.

However, when we look at food costs by region, we see significant differences:

- In Labrador, the food basket costs \$509 on the North Coast, \$359 in Central West, and \$427 on the South Coast.
- On the island, the food basket costs \$388 on the Great Northern Peninsula, \$363 in Western region, \$344 in Central region, and \$317 in Eastern region.

Food costs make up 35% of the threshold components of individual and family expenses. In contrast, other goods related to personal and household needs take up 26%, housing is 19%, transportation is 14%, and clothing is six percent.

Food First NL, in its analysis of data collected in *Vital Signs 2024*, said “A pot of beef stew and a simple vanilla cake costs around 41% more to make and share with family and friends in 2024 compared to 2019.”¹⁵

“Food is big! I have three teenagers and they eat a lot. It costs me \$1800 a month in just food.” – Stakeholder

“I notice when out shopping people are at the checkout asking for a current total and may have to put things back and make those choices.” – Stakeholder

“Getting (the Maple Leaf) gift card helps with my anxiety about having enough food to feed myself and my son. I’m able to make sure that we have the things that we need: school snack food, toilet paper, laundry stuff, supper food, cereal my child likes. Gives me a sense of relief that if I can’t afford everything at the one time I can at least get the necessities that we need.”

– Stakeholder

KIDS EAT SMART FOUNDATION NL is a registered charity that sets up and financially supports the Kids Eat Smart Clubs in schools and community centres throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. In NL, one in four children under the age of 18 live in food-insecure homes. Children who live in poverty are more likely to struggle academically and deal with physical and mental health issues over time. The effects of food insecurity on health, especially in children, are indisputable. Every child in our province deserves to have the best start in life, regardless of their family's circumstances. At the start of the school year 2024-2025, KES:

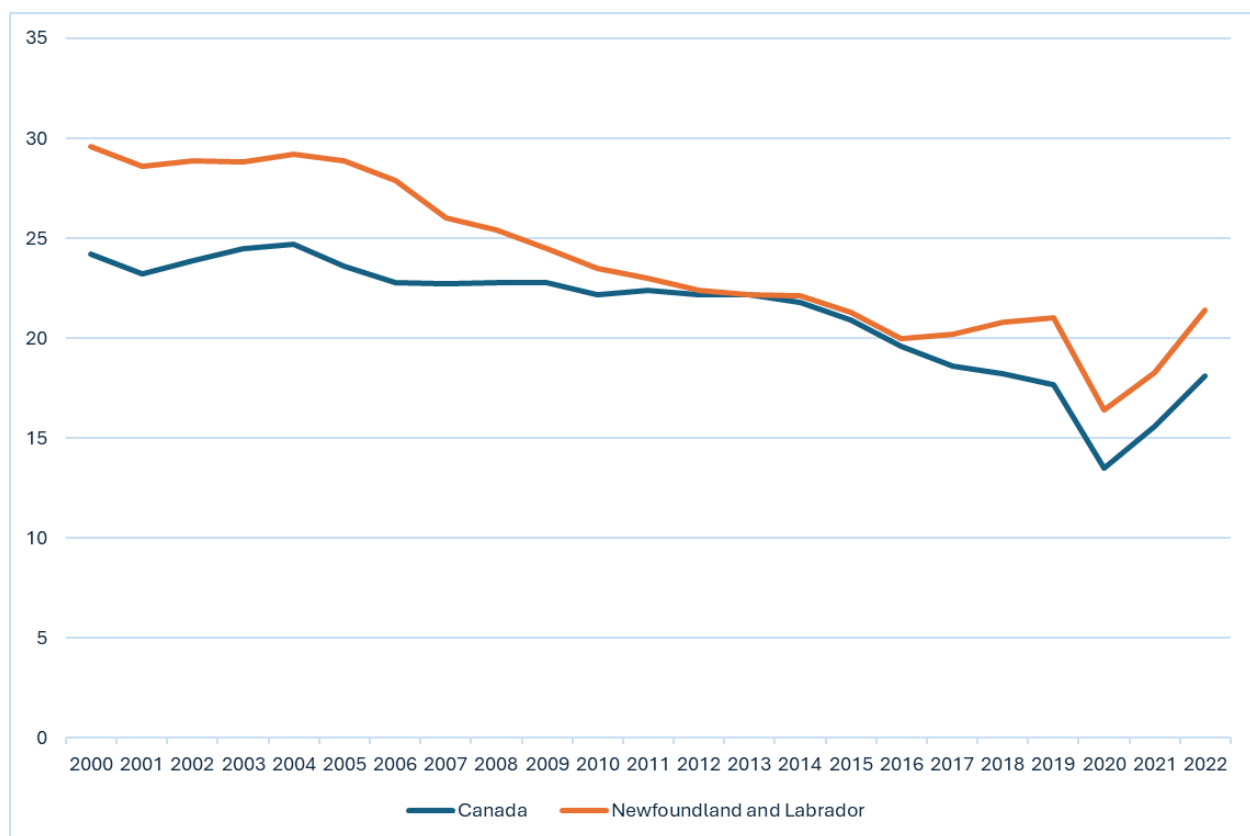
- served more than 47,000+ meals to school age children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador –a 6000+ meal increase over last year.
- expects to serve 6.3 million meals in 2024-2025
- will support 277 Kids Eat Smart Clubs in 256 schools and 21 community centres.



Poverty in NL – The 2022 Data

Figure 3 shows how the rates for child poverty trend for Newfoundland and Labrador between 2000 and 2022. While there was a reduction in the rates of child poverty for 2020 in the province, rates of child poverty increased in both 2021 and 2022, maintaining the gap between the national rate and the provincial one. Campaign 2000 reported “Newfoundland and Labrador experienced the highest increase in poverty for children under 6 years of age, or +4 percentage points.”¹⁶

Figure 3: Child poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador (CFLIM-AT)



Source: Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0018-01. After-tax low-income status of tax filers and dependents based on Census Family Low-Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition. T1 Family File, 2022

The numbers change when we consider rates of poverty for Canadian children under the age of 6. In Fig. 4, we see the rate for children under 6 in Newfoundland and Labrador is 25%, a 6.1% difference from the national rate of 18.9%. It is also the highest increase recorded for all provinces in Canada.

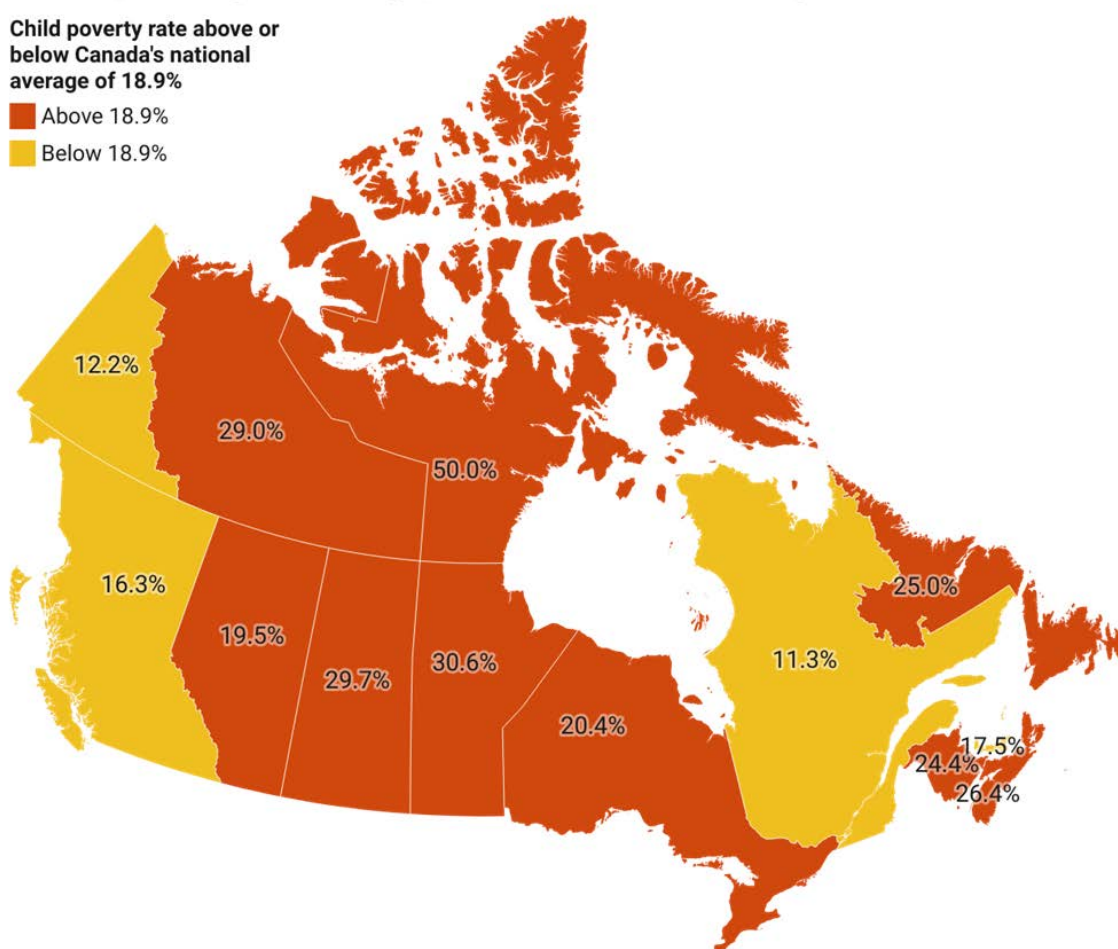
According to Campaign 2000, higher rates of poverty for children under the age of 6 represents a significant concern as poverty experienced in younger years is strongly associated with negative health, education and work-related outcomes later.

Figure 4. Rates of poverty (CFLIM-AT) for children under 6, Canada 2022

Child poverty rates by province and territory, under 6, 2022

Child poverty rate above or below Canada's national average of 18.9%

- Above 18.9%
- Below 18.9%



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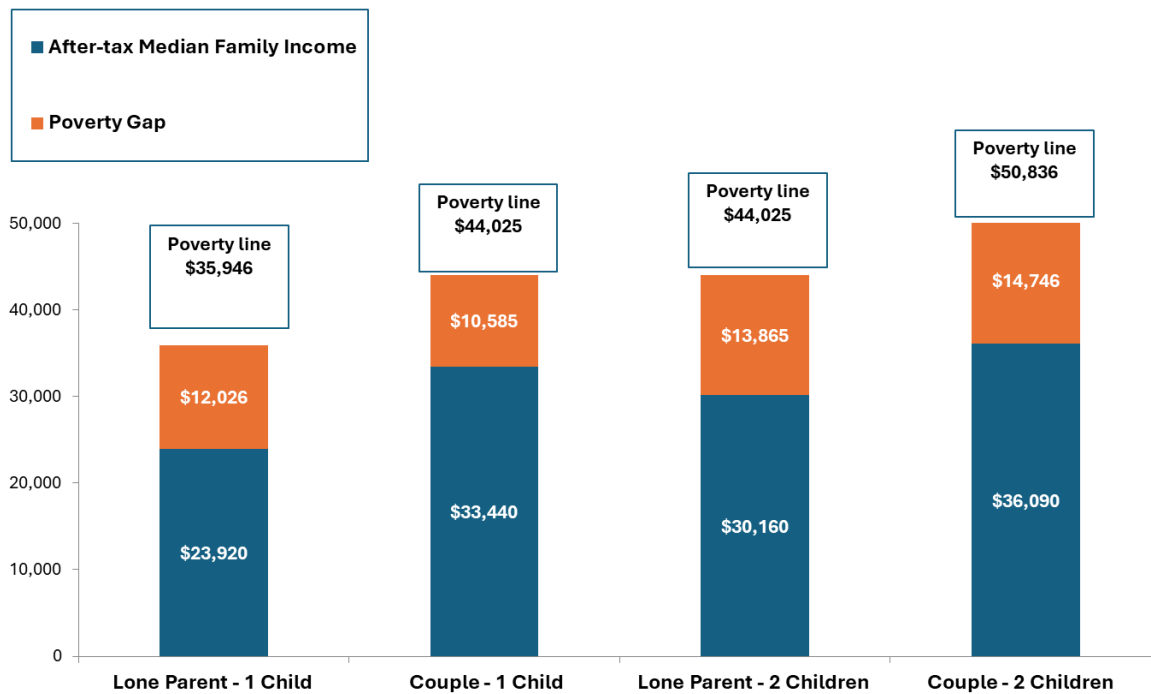
Source: Statistics Canada, Centre of Income and Socioeconomic Well-Being Statistics, Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File), Custom Tabulation. Table 11-10-0018-01. After-tax low-income status of tax filers and dependents based on Census Family Low-Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition. T1 Family File, 2022

Depth of Poverty

Evaluating the impact of poverty involves multiple perspectives. The CFLIM-AT defines its threshold for poverty as anyone living in a household whose income is less than 50% of the national median. However, the CFLIM-AT does not indicate the shortfall in resources that families have at their disposal.

Measuring the depth of poverty gives us more insight into the life experience of these children and families. The difference between the CFLIM-AT threshold and the median income of families in poverty is called the poverty gap. The poverty gap can be expressed as a dollar amount, or as a percentage of the CFLIM-AT. According to the National Poverty dashboard, the average poverty gap increased from 32.4 to 33.3% between 2021 and 2023, a percentage increase of 2.8%.

Figure 5: Depth of poverty by census family type, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2022



Source: Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0020-0. After-tax status of census families based on Census Family Low-Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family composition Low-income threshold: Technical Reference Guide for the Annual Income Estimates for Census Families, Individuals and Seniors. T1 Family File, Final Estimates, 2021, Table F.

Family Structure and Inequality

Inequality is a determinant of health and social well-being. Poverty, as a symptom of inequality, is a social phenomenon as well as an economic one. Social exclusion due to race, gender, ability, ethnicity, sexuality and age contributes to poverty.

Low-income children and youth have fewer opportunities with education and social supports leading to lower social status, increased mental stress and anxiety, and fewer choices in employment. As previously reported by UNICEF, children living at the bottom end of unequal societies perceive less opportunities from their earliest years and they are less hopeful about their futures.¹⁷

Different family types have different levels of income. Table 3 shows lone parent families have significantly lower incomes than couple families with children. As a result, fewer than one in 10 children who are part of couple families live in poverty compared to single parent families where on in two children live in poverty. Figure 5 shows the number of children living in poverty by family type.

Table 3: Average incomes for census families in the lowest, fifth and highest decile, Newfoundland and Labrador

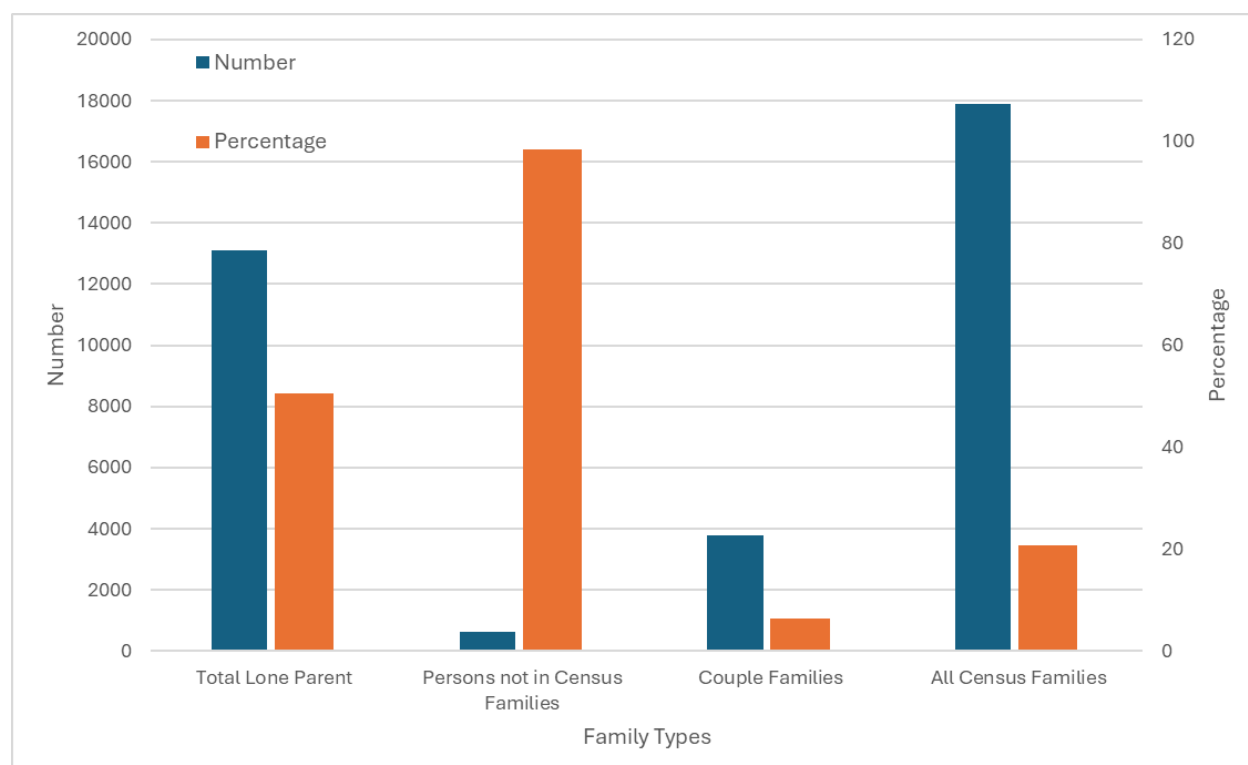
	First decile	5 th decile (Median)	10 th decile
All census families with children	17, 293	81,311	235,361
Couple families with children	38,041	110,020	257,347
Lone-parent families	9,797	40,261	103,889

Source: Statistics Canada (2023). Statistics Canada Centre of Income and Socioeconomic Well-Being Statistics, Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File), Custom Tabulation. T1FF 2022

Most lone parent families are headed by women, with the result that women also face disproportionately higher rates of poverty. Campaign 2000 reported “Census 2021 national (data show) 343,220 children experiencing poverty live in female-led lone-parent families (poverty rate of 29.7%), compared to 69,275 children living in male-led lone-parent families (poverty rate of 22.3%).¹⁸

The 2021 census reported Newfoundland and Labrador had a total of 24,550 lone parent families, with 19,165 headed by women and 5,390 headed by men.¹⁹ The analysis of 2021 Census data for this province shows 41.2% of female-led lone-parent families live in poverty compared to 28.8% of lone-parent or single parent families.

Figure 6: Number and percentage of children in poverty (CFLIM-AT) by family type in Newfoundland and Labrador, 2022



Source: Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0018-01. After-tax low-income status of tax filers and dependents based on Census Family Low-Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition. TIFF 2022.

Limited Access to Child Care

The social determinants of health identify early childhood development as a leading indicator for future health and wellbeing. Poverty contributes to poorer health outcomes for children and youth and also affects school attendance later. Early childhood development programs and policies, particularly affordable child care, can mitigate these negative impacts.

Research by the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation Inc found expanding early education to include Junior Kindergarten is a powerful lever for poverty reduction and economic growth.²⁰

As highlighted in the 2023 Child Poverty Report Card, affordable, reliable early education allows parents—particularly women—to participate in the workforce, thereby increasing family incomes and reducing poverty. The economic returns are profound: greater workforce participation, better job prospects, lower crime rates, and reduced dependency on social services.²¹

The lack of child care options disproportionately impacts women, delaying their return to the workforce. Non-traditional work schedules (e.g., shift work) make it difficult for parents to find suitable child care, especially if their children have special needs.

It is important to recognize that access to quality affordable childcare has evolved in the last five years. The Early Childhood Education Report, produced by the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development found significant changes between 2020 and 2023.²²

In particular, the 2023 Report said for Newfoundland and Labrador, investment in early child education had increased from \$127,753,792 in 2020 to \$250,989,076 in 2023. As well, the proportion of non-profit to profit ECE facilities had changed from a 30% non-profit and 70% profit in 2020 to 41% and 59% in 2023.

However, there is still room for improvement with respect to accessibility, affordability and ease of registration for parents in this province:

- The Child Care Resource and Research Unit reported 79% of younger children in Newfoundland and Labrador live in child care deserts (defined as one space for every ten infants).²³ St. John's, for example, has less than one licensed space for every 10 infants.
- Statistics Canada found there were 13,200 children under the age of six in child care, a 20% decrease in attendance in child care over four years.²⁴
- Younger children (0-1 years) are more likely to be on waitlists (47%), compared with older children. But, for both age groups, the proportion of children on waitlists increased since 2019.²⁵

While the federally-funded \$10-a-day childcare program offers many benefits, long waitlists and limited spaces means affordable child care is not accessible for many families in this province.

In May 2024, CBC Newfoundland and Labrador reported, “... at least 1,783 out of 2,621 respondents — or 68 per cent — to the Child care Demand Portal survey have attempted to find child care and, at the time of answering the survey, had not secured a spot. More than 800 of those respondents are on more than five waitlists, while 181 respondents are on at least 21 lists.” The CBC report also said parents were giving up their jobs because they were unable to find childcare for their children.²⁶

Stakeholders reported issues with the implementation of the new child care program and the need for consideration of children with special needs:

“(We see) more barriers to childcare since benefits were announced. (We have) three-year waitlists and had to sign up online. However, people don’t know they need to sign up online. (Then there’s) wait times for federal funding to actually get deposited – how are early childhood centres supposed to stay open with the funding delays?” – *Stakeholder*

“If you are a family with a special needs child, family can’t work because child only gets to go to school part time. Lack of support workers is an issue. Both parents likely can’t work full time there’s a lack of support for neurodiverse children but even less support for special needs and if you don’t have family support – what do you do?” – *Stakeholder*

Government Transfers

Federal government transfers such as the Canada Child Benefit are crucial in bringing many families with children above the poverty line. Campaign 2000 says:

“Government transfers, including federal, provincial and territorial income benefits, reduced the poverty rate for children under 18 by 14.3 percentage points. Without any of these transfers, one third of all children (32.4%) would have been living in poverty in 2022. Instead, government transfers protected 1.1 million children from the harms of poverty and reducing the child poverty rate to 18.1%.”

In 2021, 18.3% of families with children under the age of 18 in Newfoundland and Labrador had an income below the CFLIM – AT. In 2022, that number increased to 21.4%.

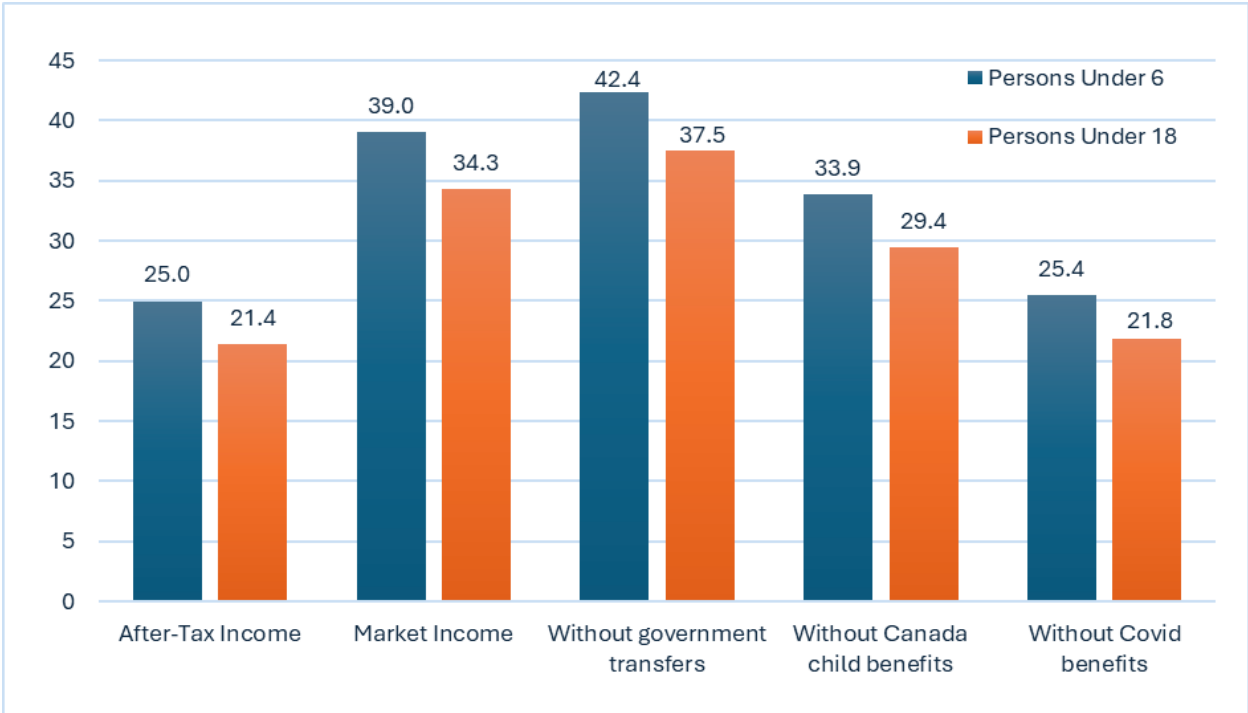
- If all government transfers are subtracted from family income, 37.5% of children in 2022 would have been in families with an income below the CFLIM-AT.
- Without Canada Child Benefits, 29.4% of children would have been in families with an income below the CFLIM-AT.
- Without Covid-19 benefits, 21.8% of children would have been in families with an income below the CFLIM-AT.

Statistics Canada Daily reported the lower government transfers post-COVID contributed to the decrease in after-tax income, a 28.9 % decline, or \$4,100 difference: “The share of government transfers in total income returned to its pre-pandemic level (13% in 2022), after two consecutive years in which these transfers represented a disproportionately high share of total income (15% in 2021 and 19% in 2020).”²⁷

In its most recent report card (2024), Campaign 2000 concluded the Canada Child Benefit has lost effectiveness. Campaign 2000 said the CCB reduced child poverty by 8.8 percentage points annually and in 2022, it reduced child poverty by 7.8 percentage points, “the lowest reduction to date.”

“Government transfers are not enough. You are below the poverty line with the income support program. I know it’s not supposed to be a fix all program, but it’s failing many people. If I need to feed my kids, and I don’t have the money, I’m going to feed my kids. If I have to steal food to feed my kids, I will. Even if the income support yearly money would increase by 10K that would make a huge difference.” – Stakeholder

Figure 7: Percent of children in families with adjusted income below the after-tax LIM, Newfoundland and Labrador 2022



Source: Statistics Canada, Centre of Income and Socioeconomic Well-Being Statistics, Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File), Custom Tabulation. TIFF 2022



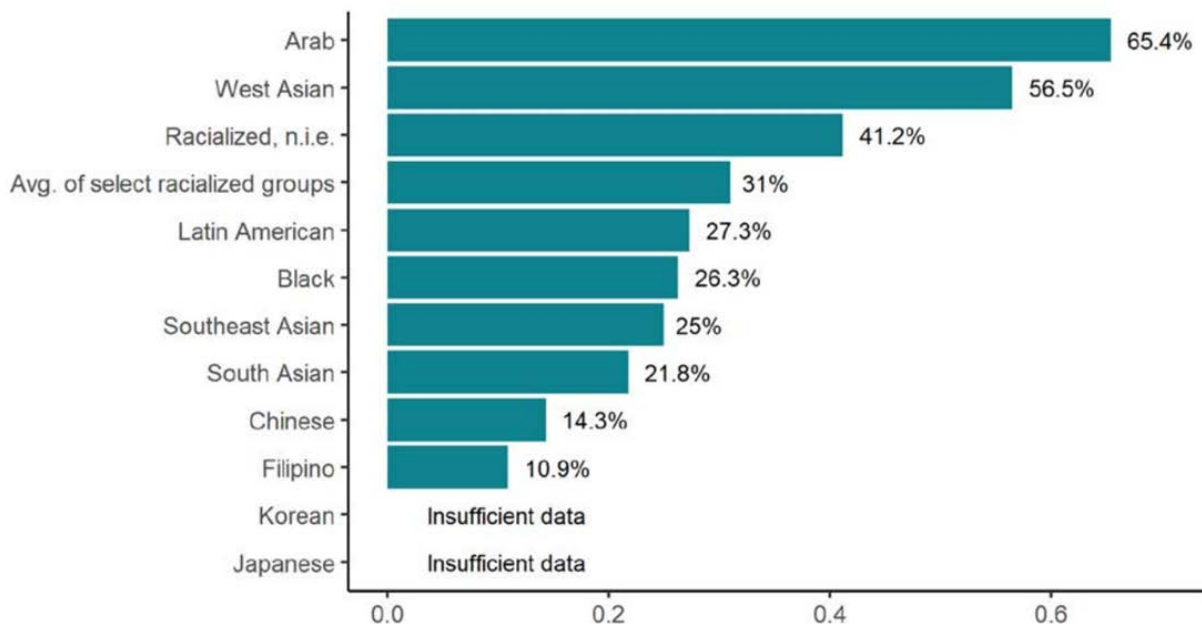
Poverty and Immigrant/ Newcomer Children and Youth

Figures 8, 9 and 10 are the only sources of data we have to quantitatively address the themes of Indigenous and immigrant/newcomer youth. Our discussions with community partners and residents suggest these are continuing concerns.

The absence of new data underscores the need to have current data with which to inform policy and program development that reflects concerns relating to immigrant, Indigenous and racialized lived experiences in NL.

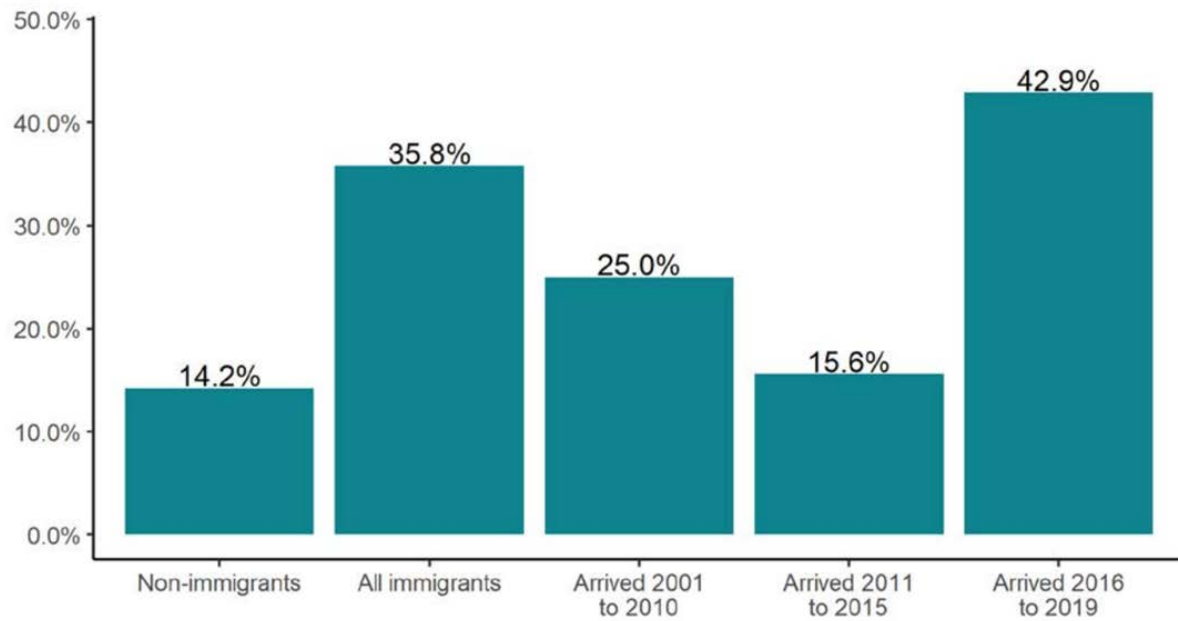
The 2020 data presented in Fig. 8 confirms poverty as a racialized phenomenon. As reported in our 2023 report, while racialized children and youth account for 5% of the population of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador, 31% experience poverty. This is double the national rate of 15.5% for racialized children and youth in Canada.

Figure 8: Percent of children 0-14 in poverty (LIM-AT) for select racialized groups, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2020



Source: Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0332-01. Visible minority by individual low-income status and generation status: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts. Census 2021.

Figure 9: Percent of children in poverty (LIM-AT) by immigration status and period, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2020



Source: Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0314-0. Individual low-income status by immigrant status and period of immigration: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts. Census 2021.



Indigenous Perspectives on Child and Youth Poverty

In its report, the *2023 Update on Child and Family Poverty*, Campaign 2000 found many Indigenous children, especially Inuit and First Nations children on reserves, have disproportionately higher rates of poverty than non-Indigenous children and youth. The data also indicated Metis and First Nations children who live off reserve have lower rates of poverty than non-Indigenous children and youth.

Statistics Canada Daily reported:

17.5% of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and older lived below the poverty line in 2022). This is nearly double the poverty rate of the non-Indigenous population (9.6%). Although this 7.9 percentage point difference represents the second consecutive year of a widening gap, the gap is still smaller than it was before the pandemic in 2019. The poverty rate among First Nations people aged 15 years and older living off reserve was 22.1% in 2022, nearly double the rate for Métis (11.9%).²⁸

Overall, 23.7% of Indigenous children lived in poverty. While pandemic benefits contributed to the reduction in poverty rates overall, Campaign 2000 concluded their temporary nature resulted in rates skyrocketing after they ended. The data presented earlier supports this conclusion.

Campaign 2000 also reported an update on the poverty rates of Indigenous children in Canada will not be available until 2026. We have already noted the Market Basket Measure for Indigenous peoples off reserve and in Nunavut is still not available. In its 2024 Report Card, Campaign 2000 projects rates of poverty for Indigenous children will continue to rise without immediate investments in interventions.²⁹

The most recent data available from the 2022 Indigenous Peoples Survey finds:

About 4 in 10 Indigenous children aged 1 to 14 (excluding those living on reserve) lived in households that experienced some level of food insecurity during the previous 12 months, with 14% in severely food insecure households, meaning household members reported missing meals, reducing food intake and, at the most extreme, going days without food. (...)In 2022, more than three-quarters (77%) of Inuit children in Inuit Nunangat lived in households that experienced food insecurity.³⁰

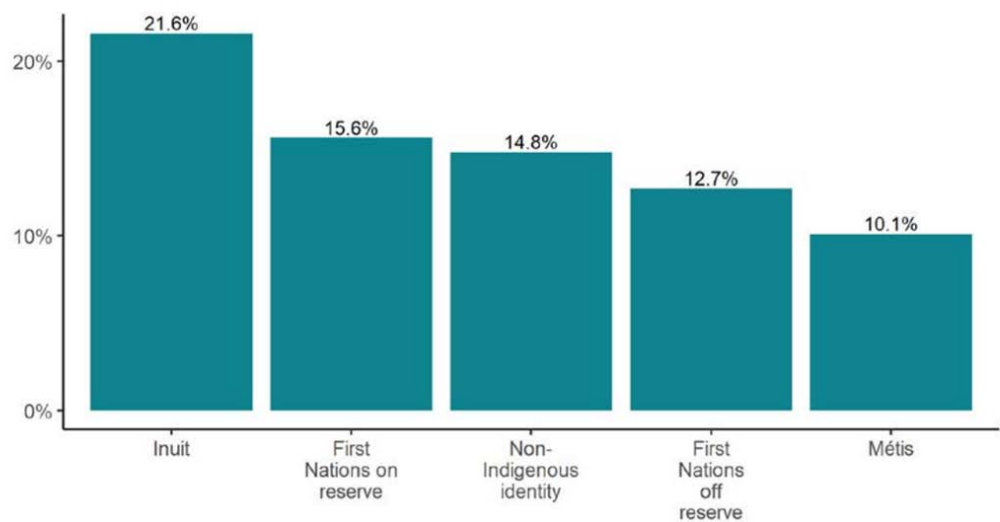
We include Fig. 10 for comparison purposes, but these statistics must be used with caution. The categories used by Statistics Canada – Inuit, First Nations (on and off-reserve), and Métis – are umbrella terms that do not always capture the diversity of Indigenous nations and communities that they include.

While there are certain experiences common to Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador, each of these communities has its own history, culture and governance structure. Respecting the sovereignty of Indigenous people requires recognizing that Indigenous children and poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador are distinct from one another.

Colonization limited traditional knowledge of country foods and settler diets have negatively affected the health of indigenous peoples. The impact of racist policies such as Residential schools has also led to generational trauma affecting mental health, family relationships, and community sustainability. Systemic racism against Indigenous Peoples in Canada has deepened intergenerational poverty and unequal access to the social determinants of health — including housing, education, income, and healthcare — leading to persistent health inequities across Indigenous communities.

“Indigenous communities have been doing collective care work, thinking outside the box and finding ways to be creative and resourceful through this colonial world we live in. We have disempowered marginalized communities to think they have to rely on services and supports to fix violence. How do we empower people to trust themselves to know what they need and that they don’t need to rely on colonial systems to survive but resources they already have? It’s about restorative justice on a community level.” – Stakeholder

Figure 10: Individual low-income status by Indigenous identity and residence by Indigenous geography: Canada, provinces and territories. Census 2021



Source: Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0283-01. Individual low-income status by Indigenous identity and residence by Indigenous geography: Canada, provinces and territories. Census 2021

Mental Health Impacts of Poverty

The Public Health Agency of Canada (2022) reported, “There is a clear relationship between income and perceived mental health that is influenced by increased stress, access to basic needs, opportunities and mental health care.” While there were unmet needs for both sexes across all income groups, PHAC said more people in the lowest income group reported unmet needs than those in the highest income group.³¹

Poverty-related stress contributes to increased anxiety, depression, and emotional struggles among children and caregivers. The Mood Disorders Society of Canada (2019) reported people with the lowest incomes were “3 to 4 times more likely to have poor to fair mental health compared to the general population.”³² In our consultations, one stakeholder reported:

“Families are so worried about the lack of resources and children are not being provided with the resources they need to thrive.”

In our consultations, we heard many families cannot afford private therapy or medications. Waitlists for mental health counselling services are long. The cost of travel from rural communities to larger centres for specialist visits (e.g., ADHD testing, mental health services) prevent families from getting timely care. Parents dealing with financial stress and food insecurity pass on emotional burdens to their children.

A provincial assessment of youth mental health from 2015-2022 found that children and youth in NL score very poorly on several well being indicators compared to the other Canadian provinces.³³ Youth aged 12-17 reported a 35% decrease in self-assessed mental health status compared to a 23% decrease nationally; NL ranked eighth in self-assessed mental health (10 being the worst).³⁴

From 2008 to 2018, mental health hospitalizations for children and youth in NL went up by 65% while hospitalization for all other reasons dropped by 24%.³⁵ According to Choices for Youth, “its 2020 survey of 486 youth across NL found 67% of young people surveyed were struggling with their mental health. In 2022, they did a follow-up survey, and 72% of those whom they engaged said they were struggling with their mental health.”³⁶

“We need to address addictions issues. We can increase money to families all we like but until we address addictions issues, money isn’t going to children. Services are provided in schools by numbers, not by need.” – Stakeholder

Poverty and the Social Determinants of Health

The social determinants of health are factors which influence the overall health and social well-being of individuals. These include income, social status, education, employment and working conditions, social supports and coping skills, family and living arrangements, environment, community, and experiences of racism and discrimination.

The social determinants of health influence an individual or a community's health more than healthcare or lifestyle choices. Income is one of the leading indicators of health in Canada because of its cumulative and compounding effects affecting an individual's access to education, employment, food security, and housing. Transportation, availability of community support services are also useful indicators of individual and community wellbeing.

“(It's about) having fairwork wages, access to more things such as childcare, and having the ability to provide all basic needs plus then some for our families.” – Stakeholder

HOUSING INSTABILITY AND POOR LIVING CONDITIONS

Vital Signs 2024 reported 20.4% of households in Newfoundland and Labrador experience housing insecurity. It also reported, “33% of households that rent their home and 9% of households that own their home spent more than 30% of their income on shelter in 2021.”³⁷ Choices for Youth reported there are more than 200 youth on the CFY waitlist.

Rents have increased 20% since 2020 while vacancy rates have dropped significantly. The most recent CMHC data available shows the average cost of rent has actually increased by 23% since 2020. Average rental housing increase from 2020 to 2024 in St. John's is 25.6% & 23.1% across Newfoundland and Labrador.³⁸

Vital Signs 2024 reported:

- Housing costs were highest in the Avalon Region (\$1070 per month) and lowest on the North Coast of Labrador \$322 per month). The average median cost in the rest of the province ranged from \$412-960/month for owned households and \$680-900/month for rentals.
- In NL, 33% of households that rent their home and 9% of households that own their home spent more than 30% of their income on shelter in 2021.
- 20.4% of households in NL are facing housing insecurity due to affordability (the housing is not affordable or costs more than 30% of their income), adequacy (the housing needs major repairs), or suitability (the housing is not suitable for the size and make-up of the family).³⁹

Families experience housing insecurity due to rising rent, a lack of rent control, and poor living conditions. Some live in shelters, hotels, or overcrowded spaces without proper cooking facilities. NL Housing provides some support, but many homes lack necessary resources. Safe and stable housing is unavailable for many low-income families, creating financial and emotional stress. The increasing cost of living, including electricity and heating, forces families to make difficult choices.

“The housing market is another area that’s struggling right now. Rentals are hard to come by and when you do find one, it’s typically quite expensive. Families aren’t able to purchase homes easily and are stuck paying high rental costs.” – Stakeholder

TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS

Many rural families struggle to access essential services like healthcare, food banks, and employment opportunities due to a lack of transportation. Public transportation options are extremely limited or nonexistent in many areas:

“Lack of reliable transportation can prevent individuals from improving their situation or finding better job opportunities. We are seeing more and more of this. People need to drive anywhere from 40-100 kms for work.” – Stakeholder

Transportation costs in rural communities are significantly higher, adding to financial strain. Without reliable transport, children miss out on educational opportunities and extracurricular activities: "I think income support should provide taxi vouchers for necessities, even \$30 a month. I can't access a food bank because I don't have transportation. \$30 a month would cover an early appointment to the hospital or a grocery trip. If we were not in NL Housing, we would not be able to survive."

GAPS IN SUPPORT SERVICES

While we heard from community organizers the new poverty reduction plan was a welcome approach, they did report that some government programs are outdated, bureaucratic, or difficult to navigate, leading to delays in support. The shift of poverty reduction programs to the provincial Department of Education, for example, has also caused confusion and inefficiencies. Emergency funding programs exist but require excessive paperwork, and this discourages those in crisis from applying.

Nonprofits and community groups representatives reported they are overwhelmed by demand but lack consistent funding. They highlighted the growing disparity between government policy and actual needs on the ground. A disconnect between statistical data and real-life experiences results in policies that fail to address the true needs of families.

As well, while income support has increased, participants reported it has not kept pace with inflation and the rising cost of living, leading to continued hardship for many families. Many community organizations and individuals working directly with those experiencing poverty stress that government analyses fail to reflect lived realities.

More accurate, region-specific data collection is necessary to ensure policies align with community needs. Past initiatives demonstrated the potential for positive change but lost funding despite their success, leaving a gap in much-needed community support. Many stakeholders shared their frustrations:

“Governments have a fiduciary responsibility to their people and (they) have failed in that regard. When we talk about a “social safety net” it cannot be the same for an entire country, or province. It must be tailored to communities and be responsive to needs in Northern areas and recognizing the unique challenges experienced in those areas by the people who live there.” – Stakeholder

POVERTY AND UNMET NEEDS

Food Banks Canada concluded NL has the worst standard of living in the country according to the Material Deprivation Index:

More than 1 in every 3 people reported experiencing a severely inadequate standard of living. This means that they are missing three or more items that are considered necessary for a decent standard of living (e.g., a pair of properly fitted shoes and at least one pair of winter boots, access to transportation, and the ability to pay bills on time).⁴⁰

Participants reported the unmet needs arising from living in low-income families often impact the emotional and social development of children is also being affected, as many are burdened with adult stressors, such as concerns about food security and financial instability at home.

Stakeholders reported some children are showing clear signs of survival mode, appearing disengaged and reluctant to eat during community programs, knowing they need to save food for later.



Community Capacity and Compassion Fatigue

Not-for-profit services have also experienced greater demand for support from their communities. Funding pressures, including reduced financial support, have contributed to stressful environments. Many community programs that successfully addressed poverty and employment have been defunded despite demonstrated success.

Nonprofits also struggle with aging volunteer bases, burnout, and difficulties in recruiting younger people. We heard from community organizations that one of their biggest challenges is recruiting volunteers:

“With the lack of volunteers, there’s more pressure put on staff to do the additional work that is needed beyond our mandate. We are seeing a lot of compassion fatigue; we are seeing staff working beyond retirement age as people can’t afford to retire.” – *Stakeholder*

Participants in regional community discussions also reported government funding for community programs has not increased despite rising costs and demand. Program managers report short-term, one-time grants do not provide the stability their organizations need to create lasting change. The lack of reliability in funding status creates uncertainty for staff as well as the people they serve.

“We haven’t had an increase for our organization since 2010, so we need to fundraise. Our programs have increased and our needs have increased, but our money hasn’t increased to match. The last increase came from the Poverty Reduction Strategy back in 2010.” – *Stakeholder*

An emerging concern is the impact the cost of living has on staff whose salaries have remained stagnant or underfunded. One stakeholder said:

“Truly one of the things that keeps me up at night as a leader is thinking how the social issues we are trying to address and advocate for as an organization are directly impacting my staff. We can’t pay our staff enough to live off of and to expect them to do what needs to be done in their roles in the organization. Staff are experiencing gender-based violence, food insecurity and housing issues just like the clients we serve. You can imagine how hard that is for a staff to show up and be present when they are also going through these things as well.” – *Stakeholder*

Child and Youth Poverty in Labrador: Geographic Disparities

In 2021, the disparity between poverty rates across census divisions was 15% at its lowest in Labrador and 31% at its highest in St. Georges, Newfoundland. In 2022, rates increased significantly, with the lowest rates again in Labrador at 18% and the highest rates in St. Georges at 37.4%.

We advise caution in assuming that lower rates mean interventions are not necessary. Rates of poverty have continued to increase in all census divisions, with some divisions reporting slower rates of increase and others faster and higher rates of increase.

Table 4: Comparison of child poverty rates by census division 2021 & 2022

Division	2021	2022
Nunatsiavut	29.7%	32.9%
Labrador	15.0%	18.0%
Northern Peninsula	15.1%	20.2%
Humber District	17.9%	21.6%
St. Georges	31.0%	37.4%
Central	21.3%	24.5%
Notre Dame Bay	18.9%	23.9%
Bonavista	19.0%	23%
South Coast	16.8%	20.4%
Burin Peninsula	21.2%	25.6%
Avalon Peninsula – St. John's	17.2%	19.7%

More accurate, region-specific data collection is necessary to ensure policies align with community needs. Past initiatives demonstrated the potential for positive change but lost funding despite their success, leaving a gap in much-needed community support. Many stakeholders shared their frustrations:

“Governments have a fiduciary responsibility to their people and (they) have failed in that regard. When we talk about a “social safety net” it cannot be the same for an entire country, or province. It must be tailored to communities and be responsive to needs in Northern areas and recognizing the unique challenges experienced in those areas by the people who live there.” – Stakeholder

Spotlight: Nunatsiavut

Addressing poverty in the Labrador region presents unique challenges. Income disparities and infrastructure resources contribute to wide variances in rates of poverty. High costs of living, limited access to resources, and harsh environmental conditions contribute to higher costs for food, energy and transportation.

In Labrador itself, the residents of the Nunatsiavut census division and its remote communities face higher rates than the other census division in the North, called Labrador Division, which includes Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Wabush, Labrador City and Churchill Falls – communities which are centres of natural resource industries and their accompanying high wages.

The Nunatsiavut Census Region comprises five Inuit communities along the northern Labrador coast — Rigolet, Postville, Makkovik, Hopedale, and Nain. It is part of the Labrador Land Claims Settlement Agreement, and is governed by the Nunatsiavut Government. Approximately 2300 people live in Nunatsiavut. Inuit across Canada are a young population, and 33% of people in Nunatsiavut are under 19, compared to 18.4% for all of Newfoundland and Labrador.⁴⁰

The high costs of food, fuel, housing, and transportation, combined with limited employment opportunities, create significant barriers to financial stability. Energy costs are especially challenging, with hydro bills reaching \$800 per month in some cases. Many households rely on diesel generators, further increasing expenses. Additionally, heating costs are exacerbated by long and severe winters, forcing families to choose between keeping their homes warm and affording other necessities.

The cost of travel is another major concern. Many essential services, including medical care, require travel outside Labrador, often at exorbitant prices. A return flight for a family from the North to South Coast can cost nearly \$10,000, making it nearly impossible for many residents to access necessary healthcare and services.

Traditional food sources have also been affected by climate change. Many residents can no longer hunt or fish as they once did due to environmental changes impacting wildlife populations. This loss of traditional food sources not only contributes to food insecurity but also results in a cultural disconnect, particularly for Indigenous communities that rely on traditional foods for sustenance and cultural preservation.

Spotlight: St. Georges

The 2021 Census counted 19,253 people in the Census Division, 44% of whom identified as Indigenous. The region includes nine communities: Cape St. George, Gallants, Kippens, Lourdes, Port au Port East, Port au Port West-Aguathuna-Felix Cove, St. George's, Stephenville and Stephenville Crossing.

There appears to be significant variation in poverty levels across different communities, such as Corner Brook and Stephenville, where local economic and social conditions vary greatly. The historical and cultural context also plays a significant role in shaping current poverty-related issues.

The cod moratorium, intergenerational trauma, and marginalization of Indigenous and Francophone communities have all contributed to economic and social struggles. In some cases, attempts to address historical injustices have inadvertently created further divisions, as certain groups receive targeted benefits while others do not, leading to tensions within communities.

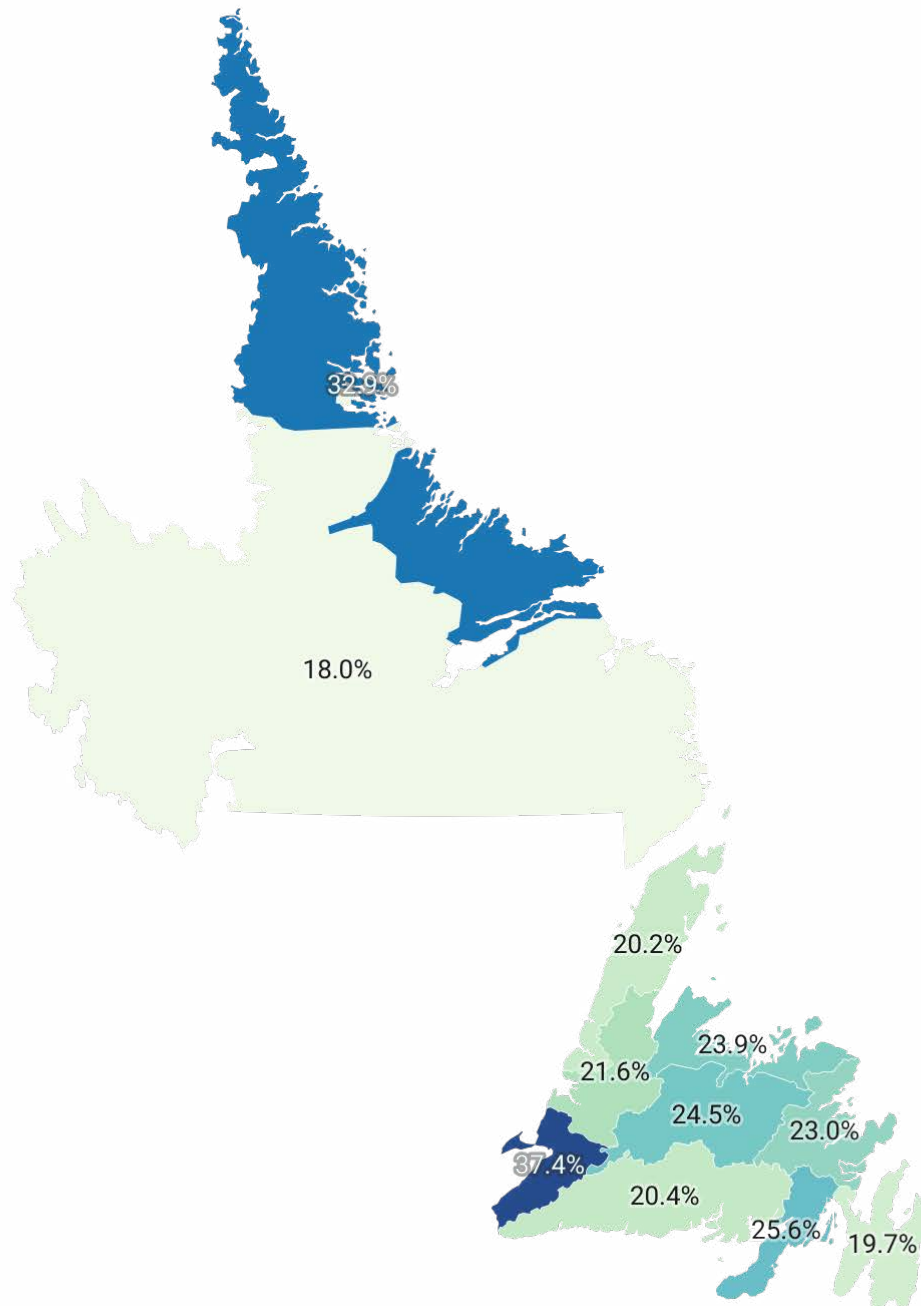
Community consultation participants highlighted the growing disparity between government policy and actual needs on the ground. While income support has increased, it has not kept pace with inflation and the rising cost of living, leading to continued hardship for many families.

Many community organizations and individuals working directly with those experiencing poverty stress that government analyses fail to reflect lived realities. More accurate, region-specific data collection is necessary to ensure policies align with community needs. Past initiatives demonstrated the potential for positive change but lost funding despite their success, leaving a gap in much-needed community support.

Child Poverty Rates by Census Division, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2022

Child Poverty Rate (%)

18.0% 37.4%



Regional Disparities in Context

As previously reported, community discussions and key informant interviews provided significant material to increase our understanding of the lived experiences of poverty in NL. The data collected was analyzed for trends across regions. The following section provides insights into the disparities regions report and the differing impacts of poverty experienced by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians by geography.

LABRADOR REGION

Labrador faces significant economic and social challenges, deeply affecting the well-being of its residents. The exceptionally high cost of living, particularly in Nunatsiavut, places a severe burden on families. Essentials such as food, housing, heating, and transportation come at exorbitant prices, with hydro bills reaching up to \$800 per month and reliance on expensive diesel generators. The region's long, harsh winters further escalate heating costs. Additionally, travel for essential services, including medical care, is prohibitively expensive, with family return flights costing as much as \$10,000.

Access to affordable and nutritious food remains a persistent struggle, impacting both physical health and cultural traditions. Frequent food shortages, poor-quality produce due to shipment delays, and extreme weather conditions exacerbate the issue. Climate change has further reduced access to traditional food sources like hunting and fishing, contributing to both food insecurity and cultural erosion.

Employment and Income Challenges – Limited job opportunities and insufficient income support programs prevent many families from achieving financial stability. Employment is particularly scarce in small communities, while government assistance programs fail to reflect the high cost of living. Families face additional financial strain due to necessary expenses such as warm clothing, heating supplies, and school materials. Furthermore, limited internet access and technological infrastructure restrict residents from participating in online job opportunities and services.

Gaps in Government and Community Support – Although government and community programs exist to alleviate poverty, systemic barriers and accessibility issues hinder their effectiveness. Lengthy wait times and bureaucratic inefficiencies prevent timely assistance, while many residents are unaware of available resources or lack the means to access them. Community-driven initiatives offer crucial support but cannot address systemic poverty alone.

CENTRAL NEWFOUNDLAND REGION

The decline of traditional industries such as forestry, fishing, and mining has led to widespread job losses and economic insecurity in Central Newfoundland. Seasonal employment dominates the labor market, resulting in inconsistent income and financial instability. The ongoing outmigration of younger generations further weakens community resilience and local economies, making long-term economic recovery more difficult.

Energy poverty forces families to choose between heating their homes and buying food. Meanwhile, the lack of affordable rental housing has led to substandard living conditions, and homeownership remains out of reach for many, limiting opportunities for financial security.

Grocery costs continue to rise, particularly in rural areas, where limited access to supermarkets forces residents to rely on convenience stores with higher prices and fewer healthy options. Transportation barriers and shipping delays further disrupt food availability, increasing demand on food banks and community programs, which are struggling to meet the growing need. Poor nutrition contributes to chronic health issues such as diabetes and heart disease, worsening the cycle of poverty.

A lack of affordable and reliable transportation restricts access to employment, healthcare, and essential services. In smaller communities, the absence of public transit isolates residents, making car ownership essential but costly. Poor road conditions add to vehicle maintenance expenses, while long-distance travel for work, medical care, and education places additional financial burdens on low-income families.

Limited access to healthcare professionals and mental health services exacerbates poverty-related stress and illness. Family doctor shortages and long wait times make it difficult for residents to receive timely medical care, forcing many to travel long distances for specialized treatment at significant expense. Mental health services remain inadequate, with long waitlists and high demand, while poverty-related stress and trauma contribute to rising rates of anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.

A lack of affordable child care prevents parents from securing stable employment and improving their financial situation. Child care spaces remain limited, disproportionately affecting single parents and low-income families. Many parents face barriers to workforce participation and career development, perpetuating cycles of financial hardship.

WESTERN NEWFOUNDLAND REGION

Poverty in Western Newfoundland varies widely across communities, with distinct local economic and social conditions shaping different experiences. While community organizations actively work to address these challenges, the lack of a central coordinating body limits the effectiveness of their efforts. Historical factors, such as the cod moratorium and intergenerational trauma, continue to affect economic stability. Additionally, the marginalization of Indigenous and Francophone communities has contributed to social tensions, as targeted benefits for some groups have unintentionally caused resentment among others.

Educational underperformance in the region reflects deeper systemic issues that are not adequately addressed due to a lack of coordinated services and the centralization of decision-making. The centralization of services under the provincial health board has reduced responsiveness to community needs. Schools lack the necessary resources and trained personnel to fulfill these expanding roles effectively.

Government policies and programs often fail to reflect the realities of families living in poverty, underscoring the need for more community-informed decision-making. Existing processes often lack insight from lived experiences, highlighting the need for more region-specific data collection to ensure policies align with actual community needs. Many successful past initiatives lost funding despite their proven effectiveness, creating gaps in essential services that could have otherwise improved economic and social outcomes.

Structural changes in employment readiness and child care programs have introduced new barriers for low-income families. The discontinuation or merging of employment readiness programs with income support has increased stigma and reduced participation, making it harder for individuals to find stable work.

EASTERN NEWFOUNDLAND REGION

Food insecurity has become a growing crisis in Eastern rural Newfoundland, with an increasing number of families relying on community food programs. Demand for food banks surged by 67% between 2022 and 2023, and participation in summer food programs in Marystown more than doubled. Many working families struggle to afford basic necessities. Many families in need do not qualify for income-based assistance programs, leaving them without support. Community organizations play a critical role by offering non-stigmatized services such as breakfast programs at resource centers, but the demand continues to outpace available resources.

Limited access to child care presents a major barrier to workforce participation, particularly for women. Parents working non-traditional hours face additional challenges due to rigid daycare schedules, which typically run from 9 AM to 5 PM. As a result, many women are delaying their return to work until their children reach school age, further widening gender disparities in employment.

The increasing costs of electricity, food, and other essentials have not been met with corresponding wage increases or adjustments to financial assistance programs. Income support remains critically low, with single supplements stagnating since 2010. Mental health struggles are becoming more prevalent among parents, affecting children who witness stress and instability at home.

The nonprofit sector, which plays a crucial role in supporting struggling families, is facing sustainability challenges due to aging volunteers and inadequate funding. Without renewed investment and a fresh wave of volunteers, nonprofits are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain essential services, raising concerns about long-term sustainability.

Greater collaboration among community groups is necessary to reduce duplication of efforts and enhance service efficiency. Establishing a regional resource directory and appointing a facilitator could improve communication and streamline service delivery. Without targeted long-term planning and financial investment, poverty in the region will continue to deepen, placing additional strain on families and community networks already struggling to meet growing needs.

URBAN AVALON REGION

Despite the availability of urban resources, many children and working families continue to experience severe food insecurity, relying heavily on community programs and schools for basic nutrition. In afterschool programs, children frequently ask for extra food or save meals to take home, illustrating the extent of chronic hunger. While community food supports play a critical role, they are increasingly stretched thin, highlighting the growing demand even in urban areas.

A lack of access to affordable afterschool activities has contributed to rising youth violence and behavioral issues in schools. Post-pandemic cuts to free and structured programs have left many children without safe recreational outlets, increasing disengagement and disruptive behavior. Community organizations attempt to fill this gap by offering free sports and extracurricular activities, but limited resources prevent them from meeting the growing demand. The absence of accessible afterschool programs has had direct consequences on youth development and community safety.

Financial instability and chronic stress are taking a toll on children's mental health and emotional well-being. Many children are acutely aware of household financial struggles, with some in "survival mode," choosing to eat less during programs to save food for later. Anxiety and depression are also rising among parents, with the emotional strain trickling down to children, further impacting their development and sense of security.

Single parents face immense difficulties in meeting their children's basic needs due to outdated child support tables and weak enforcement. Federal child support payment tables have not been updated since 2017, leaving many families struggling to afford rising costs. Inadequate enforcement mechanisms further prevent families from receiving the financial support they are entitled to, exacerbating financial instability.

Many families remain unaware of available support programs while bureaucratic complexities make access difficult. A significant number of low-income individuals do not file taxes, resulting in missed benefits and tax credits that could alleviate financial hardship. Government systems are slow to respond to urgent needs, leaving families in crisis without timely support.

Newcomers to Canada face systemic barriers that further deepen financial insecurity, including racism, limited employment opportunities, and child care shortages. Government support application processes are often confusing, with outdated eligibility criteria that do not reflect current economic realities.

Grandparents and extended family members who step in to care for children often receive little to no financial support. Bureaucratic red tape delays access to essentials such as diapers and formula, leaving caregivers in kinship situations struggling to meet children's basic needs. These families are left to manage emergency care situations with little government assistance, despite playing a crucial role in providing stability for vulnerable children.

Government policy decisions often fail to reflect the realities of those experiencing poverty, perpetuating systemic challenges. Many social assistance programs keep recipients below the living wage, reinforcing financial instability rather than providing a pathway out of poverty. The exclusion of individuals with lived experience from policy discussions results in ineffective and misaligned solutions, making it difficult to implement meaningful change.

Community organizations which serve as essential lifelines for struggling families, face significant challenges. Inconsistent funding and timing delays contribute to staffing challenges, undermining program continuity. Additionally, individuals over the age of 30 often fall outside the eligibility criteria for employment and training programs, limiting their ability to access opportunities for financial stability. Community workers themselves experience job insecurity and low wages, making sustained advocacy and support difficult.

Recommendations

In its 2024 Report Card, Food Banks Canada said Newfoundland and Labrador had made a promising start re: poverty reduction policies. Nonetheless, the authors said “follow-through with concrete planning and long-term targets is needed if (the province) is to turn things around as one of the provinces with the worst grades in 2024.”⁴¹ Given the most recent data available, it is clear the provincial government needs to continue its investment in effective poverty reduction strategies. We expect the significant investments made by the province in the past two years to be reflected in the data to come.

Throughout our consultations, stakeholders offered many suggestions for improvements and investments in poverty reduction and income support programs. We have distilled these ideas into recommendations as a guide for continued community advocacy.

Action 1. Expand Affordable Housing and Improve Living Conditions

The shortage of rental housing further exacerbates poverty. There are not enough rental units at affordable rates to meet demand. Limited affordable housing options force some individuals into substandard living conditions, where insulation and heating are often inadequate. The cost of homeownership remains out of reach for many low-income residents, further limiting their financial mobility and stability. Private landlords may overlook or discriminate against low-income families, limiting their options for safe, affordable and appropriate housing. Fuel oil heating costs, as well as electric heat and light, continue to rise affecting the ability of low-income families to manage fixed and flexible living expenses.

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Increase provincial investment in affordable housing, rental assistance, and emergency shelters.
- Implement stronger rent control policies to prevent sudden price hikes.
- Provide home repair and energy efficiency grants for low-income households through NL Housing.
- Expand transitional and supportive housing options for vulnerable families
- Support municipal efforts to address zoning regulations to allow for more family friendly, affordable housing option such as low and medium rise apartment buildings.

Action 2. Address Food Insecurity and Improve Nutrition

Food security issues are significant. The cost of groceries continues to rise, as documented by the Consumer Price Index, and rural communities in particular face additional challenges due to limited access to supermarkets and fresh produce. We heard parents are making sacrifices, often skipping meals to ensure their children have enough to eat. At grocery stores, it is common to see customers putting items back at the checkout, making difficult decisions

about what they can afford. Low income families also report rising costs are not offset by existing funding supports. However, we are seeing positive results from the Grocery Card Gift Program, breakfast clubs in every NL school, and school lunch program expansion.

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Expand universal school meal programs, including summer and after-school initiatives.
- Expand the Grocery Gift Card program to all Family Resource Centres
- Provide long term, sustainable and appropriate funding to food banks and other community food support programs.
- Partner with local grocery stores to reduce food waste and provide discounted products and meals.

Action 3. Improve Access to Child Care for All Families

Participation in early childhood development programs such as child care and full-day kindergarten support future health and well-being. The child care deserts in NL are caused by many issues including limited spaces and limited numbers of qualified early childhood educators (ECEs). The Jimmy Pratt Foundation ⁴² has identified five pathways for action. These are: 1) supporting recruitment and retention, 2) building the public system, 3) introducing Junior Kindergarten, 4) leveraging the school system, and 5) developing targeted strategies to increase rural and Indigenous child care spots. However, while the province has been working hard to increase the number of child care spaces available, the ECE workforce crisis is a major barrier.

Even with the CWELCC funds and the pre-kindergarten pilot, the province does not have enough qualified ECEs, especially in rural and remote areas.

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Develop and implement an ECE workforce recruitment and retention strategy.
- Extend the \$10-a-day child care program and ensure subsidies cover full costs for low-income families.
- Extend child care hours to include evenings and weekends for shift workers.
- Invest in more non-profit child care, particularly in rural areas.
- Improve communication and simplify application processes for parents.

Action 4. Reform Income Support and Remove Barriers to Employment

The cost of living in Canada has experienced significant fluctuation. While Newfoundland and Labrador is considered one of the more affordable provinces, wages and benefits have not kept pace with inflation, even with modest increases in the provincial minimum wage. The variations in costs between regions, such as Labrador and urban St. John's are significant. Low-income families do not have sufficient resources to meet their needs. Other barriers include eligibility criteria which do not account for changing financial circumstances. For example, many single mothers on maternity leave find themselves ineligible for essential support programs because eligibility is based on the previous year's income rather than current financial need.

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Increase income support payments to meet the poverty line.
- Introduce gradual income phase-outs to encourage employment without losing benefits.
- Allow families to retain drug cards and child care subsidies for six months after returning to work.
- Implement a regional living wage policy aligned with the cost of living.

Action 5. Invest in Employment Readiness and Economic Mobility

Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest unemployment rate in Canada, at 10%. The National Dashboard on Poverty reported low literacy and numeracy among 15-year-olds had increased 31.2 and 32.5% respectively.⁴³ We also heard employment readiness programs that once supported individuals in securing stable work have been discontinued or integrated into income support services, creating stigma and deterring participation.

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Reintroduce community employment readiness centers with wraparound supports.
- Expand job creation programs in rural areas.
- Offer targeted employment programs for parents, including flexible work arrangements.
- Provide financial literacy and life-skills education in schools.

Action 6. Improve Transportation Access

Access to reliable, affordable transportation is a significant barrier for many residents, particularly those in smaller communities without public transit options. In our consultations, we heard from participants that limited access to affordable transportation makes it difficult for individuals to seek employment, attend medical appointments, or access essential services like healthcare, food banks, and employment opportunities. Car ownership is often necessary but expensive, further increasing financial strain on low-income families.

“Lack of reliable transportation can prevent individuals from improving their situation or finding better job opportunities. We are seeing more and more of this. People need to drive anywhere from 40-100 kms for work.” – Stakeholder

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Repurpose school buses during off-hours for community transportation.
- Provide transportation subsidies or ride-sharing initiatives for low-income families.
- Expand public transportation systems to better connect rural communities.
- Implement a diesel subsidy for north coast to reduce household costs

Action 7. Strengthen Mental Health and Healthcare Services

Investing in the mental health and wellbeing of children and youth has always been important. Investing in the mental health and wellbeing of children and youth who are living in poverty has implications for future health. Canada's National Dashboard on Poverty reported 9% of Canada's youth aged 15-24 who were not engaged in employment, education or training.⁴⁴

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Increase funding for school-based and community mental health services.
- Establish and support mobile health units in rural areas for medical and mental health services.
- Offer direct-to-family health subsidies for uninsured medical costs (pharmacare, vision care, and dental care).

Action 8. Strengthen Local Decision-Making and Community Collaboration

Local and decentralized decision-making supports capacity building, resulting in stronger, more responsive communities. Stakeholders in our consultations highlighted that collaboration among governments, municipalities, and community organizations enables more effective advocacy and resource-sharing. Some suggested developing actionable plans for better service delivery and realignment of existing resources.

Most importantly, stakeholders emphasized how crucial it is to engage directly with residents, including youth and educators, while allowing those on the ground to act as consultants in shaping policies with compassion and dignity. They recommended policymakers immerse themselves in rural realities to create meaningful change. Finally, stakeholders believe governments must stop relying on nonprofits to fill systemic gaps. Instead, government must ensure adequate funding, long-term financial commitments, and simplified reporting mechanisms.

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Decentralize decision-making and reinstate regional leadership roles.
- Establish regional funding formulas to ensure equitable service delivery.
- Provide stable, multi-year funding for poverty-reduction programs and community-led initiatives.
- Create regional Social Development Roundtables to improve cross-sector coordination.

Action 9. Improve Government Services and Reduce Administrative Barriers

While provincial government has invested significantly in poverty reduction in the last two years and identified new approaches to support low-income families, the implementation of these initiatives has not always been as smooth as hoped for. We heard that local decision-making has been reduced since health system restructuring, with most decisions being made in St. John's instead of affected communities. Participants supported greater collaboration between government and nonprofit organizations to ensure consistency and to avoid duplication of efforts.

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Simplify application processes for social programs and financial aid.
- Establish community resource hubs where residents can get in-person support.
- Improve digital literacy programs to help families navigate online applications.
- Ensure rural services receive adequate funding to meet local needs
- Develop a regional directory of services to improve greater local access to resources.

Action 10. Promote Public Awareness and Policy Advocacy

Greater education and public awareness on poverty and its impacts create support for effective public policy and programs. In our community consultations, we heard community-led initiatives, such as clothing donation programs and food sharing networks, help alleviate some of the hardships, but they cannot fully address systemic issues. We heard stigma and shame are still issues that impede progress. Throughout all our conversations, we heard frontline workers and people with lived experience say they should be involved in shaping policies to ensure these interventions and supports reflect real needs and regional differences.

Specific improvements can come from implementing the following:

- Launch a public education campaign to reduce stigma around poverty and government aid.
- Mandate consultation with individuals experiencing poverty when designing policies.
- Establish a permanent advisory council of people with lived experience of poverty.
- Conduct annual poverty impact assessments to evaluate government programs.

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