



Ontario Campaign 2000 Responds to Ontario’s New Poverty Reduction Strategy

The release of Ontario’s new Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), “[Realizing our Potential](#)” signals that solving poverty remains on the government’s agenda. Unfortunately, the strategy lacks timelines, a concrete action plan and some of the investments called for by people living poverty during consultations. Too many low-income Ontarians, including children, will be left waiting for improvements in their daily lives unless our networks and other advocates work to shape the implementation of the strategy.

The release of the PRS precedes the 25th year of the November 24th 1989 all party resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. This promise has remained unfulfilled because of the lack of a concrete plan to meet the goal of ending child poverty in Canada. In 2014, the federal government remains missing in action when it comes to implementing progressive solutions to child and family poverty. In the absence of federal leadership, community organizing and advocacy across Canada has been responsible for the introduction or development of poverty reduction strategies in each province and territory except for British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

The leadership of the provinces and territories on poverty reduction is precisely what makes the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy so important in communities across the province and within the national picture. The requirement for the Ontario government to consult with community groups and to introduce a renewed Poverty Reduction Strategy every 5 years is enshrined in legislation. Advocates have forced government to institute a requirement to address poverty – it is up to us to ensure that this requirement is not seen as a formality. We have been clear that eradicating poverty in Ontario requires concrete targets, timelines and investments.

Ontario Campaign 2000 and its partners who advocated for more substantive action on poverty were successful in securing several important measures in the new PRS. It should be noted that many of the measures are a partial fulfillment of our recommendations, as indicated below.

What is included in the new PRS?	What else was recommended to assist families?
Indexation of the Ontario Child Benefit, starting in July 2015.	In addition to indexation, we called for a \$100/year increase to the maximum OCB each year until 2018.
Indexation of the Minimum Wage set at \$11/hour as of June 1 2014	We called for an increase in the minimum wage to \$14/hour and for full time, full year employment to be based on a 35 hour work week.
A commitment to introduce extended health benefit coverage for low income children for prescription drugs, assistive devices, vision care and mental health services and to eventually provide these benefits for all low income Ontarians.	We called for health benefits for all low income Ontarians.

\$42 million for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative for municipalities.	We also called for more units of affordable housing.
Tracking poverty among groups with disproportionately higher levels of poverty including Aboriginal peoples, newcomers, persons with disabilities, unattached individuals aged 45 to 64, and lone parents through disaggregated data	We also called for government to track poverty among racialized Ontarians and women and to introduce specific programs to reduce poverty among marginalized groups.

The biggest commitment made in the new PRS is to the long-term goal of ending homelessness in Ontario. Achieving the goal of ending homelessness will not be possible without additional expenditures to boost incomes – including for people receiving social assistance - and robustly address the need for affordable housing. The government states that the first steps include understanding the issues and consulting experts – we urge them to create an action plan within the next 6 months to begin this work and to resource the achievement of this goal. The PRS makes an important investment in communities through the \$50 million Local Poverty Reduction Fund in place for the next 5 years. The PRS states that the fund will support innovation, help communities build on local strengths, address local needs, collect and build evidence about effective programs.

The PRS falls short in a number of key policy areas. The first is addressing deep poverty among social assistance recipients through significant rate increases and clarifying the next steps for positive social assistance reform. The second is in offering a resourced plan for affordable, high quality childcare for children 0-4, before and after-school care for children enrolled in Full-Day Kindergarten and before and after school care for children 6-12 years old. The third is in committing to building new units of affordable housing or offering a rental supplement for tenants in unaffordable market units. Finally, there is a great need for targeted programs, including employment equity, for groups with disproportionately high poverty rates, including racialized Ontarians.

Moving forward, our network will be pushing government to attach a deadline to the goal of reducing child poverty by 25%. The first strategy fell short of the goal of reducing child poverty by 25% in 5 years, but progress resulted from targeted investments in the Ontario Child Benefit and increases in the minimum wage that were guided by the 5 year timeline. Ontario’s good intentions and bold promises need to be backed up with adequate funding and clear targets that will not leave children and families in poverty waiting for action and relief from poverty.