

Report of the Poverty Reduction Working Group

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Executive Summary

On December 13th, 2007, Bill 94, An Act to Establish a Poverty Reduction Working Group in Nova Scotia was passed unanimously by the House of Assembly.

The purpose of the Act was to appoint a working group to make recommendations concerning a strategy for the reduction of poverty in the Province.

The mandate of the Poverty Reduction Working Group (PRWG) was to prepare a report for Government, by June 30th, 2008, that would:

- (a) compare and contrast programs and supports offered in the Province with best practices offered in other jurisdictions;
- (b) review the results of the public consultations conducted by the Government; and
- (c) make recommendations on strategies and priorities for action to be considered by the Government to address the issue of poverty reduction in the Province, including recommending an implementation plan.

The PRWG met from January to June, 2008. There were sixteen meetings of the full group, and three of a sub-group of report drafters. The PRWG reviewed significant written material, some of which is summarized in the next section, and referred to throughout this report.

The PRWG also sought additional information in the form of presentations on the topics of child care, mental health, housing, the Employment Support and Income Assistance Program, the minimum wage report, the Family Pharmacare program, accessible and affordable transportation and the fiscal situation of the Province.

As well, additional community and government organizations were invited to one of the PRWG meetings in June to provide early comment and direction on the recommendations.

The PRWG identified four overarching and interrelated goals of any strategy or framework to address poverty:

- Meaningful collaboration: Ensure consistent, coordinated and accountable action
- Alleviate poverty: Meeting the needs of those with long-term work-limiting barriers
- Reduce poverty: Meeting the needs of low-income workers and their families
- Prevent poverty: Building the foundation for a prosperous and thriving province

The PRWG developed four recommendations for government and eight targeted areas for action.

The recommendations are:

1. The provincial government must adopt and invest in a Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy must be inclusive, far-reaching, integrated and entrenched in legislation. All political parties must support legislation to ensure that the commitment to alleviation, reduction and prevention survives changes in government, and must include strategic and deliberate commitment of resources.
2. The strategy must be based on collective responsibility, both within the Provincial Government and in the larger community, with all levels of government, academe, business, organizations and individuals having a role to play.
3. Redefine the purpose of social assistance support, away from a “last resort” welfare model to a model of proactive and progressive support.
4. Review and adopt the Implementation Plan as part of the Strategy.

Each recommendation is explored in more detail in the report.

The targeted areas for action are:

- awareness and engagement;
- employment supports and income;
- disability issues;
- transportation;
- education and skills training;
- housing;
- child care and early child development, and;
- health.

The PRWG recommended implementation plan clearly outlines the need for a long-term, strategic approach, with action in all areas starting immediately.

Background: Poverty Reduction Working Group

Mandate

On December 13th, 2007, Bill 94, An Act to Establish a Poverty Reduction Working Group¹ in Nova Scotia was passed unanimously by the House of Assembly.

The purpose of the Act was to appoint a working group to make recommendations concerning a strategy for the reduction of poverty in the Province. The Ministers of Labour and Workforce Development (formerly the Minister of Environment & Labour) and Community Services were tasked with appointing members to this group.

The mandate of the Poverty Reduction Working Group (PRWG) was to prepare a report for Government, by June 30th, 2008, that would:

- (a) compare and contrast programs and supports offered in the Province with best practices offered in other jurisdictions;
- (b) review the results of the public consultations conducted by the Government; and
- (c) make recommendations on strategies and priorities for action to be considered by the Government to address the issue of poverty reduction in the Province, including recommending an implementation plan.

¹ The official version of the Act is available at <http://gov.ns.ca/legislature/legc/>

Composition

Section 4 of the Poverty Reduction Working Group Act required that:

“The Ministers shall appoint a working group composed of such persons as the Ministers may determine, including one representative from each of the following:

- (a) Department of Community Services;
- (b) Department of Labour and Workforce Development (formerly Environment & Labour)
- (c) Community Action on Homelessness;
- (d) Community Advocates Network;
- (e) Face of Poverty;
- (f) FEED NOVA SCOTIA;
- (g) Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities;
- (h) Feminists for Just and Equitable Public Policy;
- (i) a regional development agency [represented by Cape Breton Regional Development Agency (RDA)]
- (j) Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Nova Scotia chapter;
- (k) Social Corporate Responsibility Council;
- (l) a chamber of commerce (represented by the Antigonish Chamber of Commerce);
- (m) Nova Scotia Chiefs of Police Association;
- (n) Nova Scotia Federation of Labour;
- (o) Black Business Initiative;
- (p) a district health authority (represented by the Cumberland District Health Authority); and
- (q) a group representing aboriginal interests (represented by the Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre).

Two of these organizations (the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Nova Scotia Chapter, and the Corporate Social Responsibility Council) declined to be involved in the ongoing working group process due to the time and resource commitment required.

Process

The PRWG met from January to June, 2008. There were sixteen meetings of the full group, and three of a sub-group of report drafters. The PRWG reviewed significant written material, some of which is summarized in the next section, and referred to throughout this report.

The PRWG also sought additional information in the form of presentations on the topics of child care, mental health, housing, the Employment Support and Income Assistance Program, the minimum wage report, the Family Pharmacare program, the Child and Youth Strategy, accessible and affordable transportation and the fiscal situation of the Province.

As well, additional community and government organizations were invited to one of the PRWG meetings in June to discuss early direction for the recommendations.²

Vision and Guiding Principles

The PRWG developed a vision and guiding principles as the foundation for developing an effective framework for a poverty reduction strategy.

Vision

We believe that investing in people is essential to creating stronger communities, a better future and a prosperous Nova Scotia.

We envision a province where community, business and governments work together and invest in the measurable alleviation, reduction and prevention of poverty.

² Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association
NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Disabled Persons Commission
Canadian Association for Community Living
Department for Seniors
Office of Aboriginal Affairs
Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs
Canadian Federation of Independent Business
Corporate Social Responsibility Council
Chamber of Commerce
Deafness Advocacy Association of Nova Scotia
Transition House Association of Nova Scotia
Women's Centres Connect!

Guiding Principles for the alleviation, reduction and prevention of poverty:

Inclusion & Diversity

Equitable and just (both social and economic) recommendations for poverty reduction require meaningful input from those whose daily lives are directly impacted by public policies and the resulting programs and services.

This includes:

- impact assessment and existing evidence-based research and analysis (both qualitative and quantitative)
- review of participatory research with those living in poverty or at high risk of being so
- presentations to acquire the most current information and/or analysis on identified topic areas
- analysis to identify the differing realities in communities across Nova Scotia and from our mosaic of cultures. This will mean the utilization of a variety of analytical tools; for example, gender lens, rural/urban lens, disability lens, racialized lens, etc.

Recommendations developed are feasible in terms of time and in short, medium and long-term investment while being focused primarily on those presently living in poverty or at high risk of being so.

Equity & Social and Economic Justice

The Recommendations for Poverty Reduction will benefit everyone in Nova Scotia, including governments, with a focus of addressing the needs of both those at the greatest risk and the poorest of the poor.

This includes:

- Sustainable and predicable supports that enable self determination, independence and self-sufficiency.
- The recommendations will be based on public policy that recognizes the central importance of social factors in meeting both social and economic sustainability.

Accountability & Transparency

The Recommendations for Poverty Reduction and an Implementation Plan will be developed in a democratic, inclusive and transparent process.

This includes:

- being based upon respectful dialogue, clear communication, meaningful collaboration and strategic actions across sectors, including governments, for the social and economic benefit of all Nova Scotians.
- timely reports in plain language, getting to the people who need it the most, including in alternate formats

Build on existing strengths, programs and services and explore innovative solutions

To develop effective Recommendations for Poverty Reduction and an Implementation Plan it is necessary to address the financial realities of living in poverty and the causes and consequences associated with poverty in our province.

This includes:

- building on what is working now (existing social and economic supports), ensuring accessibility and strengthening where needed
- creating innovative solutions based on evidence based research and impact assessment to enable income and social security for all Nova Scotians.

Flexibility & Responsiveness

In developing effective Recommendations for Poverty Reduction and an Implementation Plan it is essential that flexibility and quick response to changing demands and circumstances be built into the design, development, implementation and evaluation (ongoing monitoring and assessment).

This includes:

- an 'inclusive' and 'integrated' approach to alleviating, reducing and preventing poverty in Nova Scotia
- clear and demonstrated recognition that our province is diverse in terms of rural/urban geography and individual needs and differing realities.
- the need for legislation to enable overarching policies/programs that are able to respond to particular issues and needs facing individuals, families and communities (this again relates to the necessity of using a variety of lenses such as gender based and feminist analysis, age, disability, racialized, rural/urban, etc.).
- an inclusive "people first" integrated approach

Purposeful Collaboration

Recognizing that poverty is complex and requires a variety of interrelated actions, it is essential that all sectors in our society work together.

This includes:

- Governments' committed leadership in working cooperatively with many partners and all sectors to take action in achieving results.
- Labour and business organizations, community-based women's, social justice and advocacy groups, academe, and individuals living in poverty working collaboratively with governments at all levels to develop and implement actions that will alleviate, reduce, and in the longer-term prevent poverty and its consequences.
- Ongoing meaningful dialogue, monitoring and assessment, among all collaborative partners, is necessary to ensure that public policies and the resulting programs and services are working to alleviate, reduce and prevent poverty in our province.

Consensus Model of Decision Making

The Working Group uses the “Consensus Model” of decision-making. Refer to Appendix for details.

Jurisdictional Review

The PRWG was required to “compare and contrast programs and supports offered in the Province with best practices offered in other jurisdictions”

No two jurisdictions in Canada are the same, nor do other countries mirror Canada. Populations and their demographics, like family composition, income, and age differ; economic activity is different; and public policies in areas like health, education, income security, taxation and fiscal measures are different.

A jurisdictional scan – including Newfoundland & Labrador and Quebec, the two Canadian jurisdictions at the time of writing with formal poverty strategies – reveals common features of poverty strategies:

- Long term and comprehensive in nature
- Mix of policy solutions
- Include a vision and measurable goals
- Have action plans to achieve those goals
- Based on consultation with stakeholders
- Include accountability mechanisms that provide for regular reporting, where the results are made available to the public
- Focus on gender equality
- Significant level of disability supports
- Recognize that some people are more disadvantaged than others and that their needs must be a priority
- With respect to Canadian jurisdictions, there is a recognition that the success of provincial efforts to reduce poverty is dependent upon the engagement and cooperation of the federal government.

A scan of the policy landscape in Canada reveals a number of common approaches to addressing poverty:

- Improving child benefits
- Improving child care supports
- Increasing minimum wage rates
- Increasing income supports
- Increasing housing supports
- Improving social security measures for people who are not able to work
- Improving access to education and training opportunities
- Providing transitional supports for individuals and families exiting welfare for work
- Providing early intervention initiatives for at risk/high risk groups
- Enhancing medical and drug coverage for low income earners
- Encouraging community development

Newfoundland and Labrador

Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) released in June 2006, is the NL government's poverty reduction strategy. NL was second only to Quebec in formalizing a poverty reduction strategy and many community organizations and poverty advocates point to it as a model for Nova Scotia.

The NL government is taking a long-term approach, with a view to eliminating poverty. The strategy provides a mix of policy options focusing on prevention, and building on partnerships. Since 2006, NL has invested approximately \$104 million on a variety of measures, including such initiatives as indexing basic income assistance rates, expanding child care, enhancing disability supports, supports for youth at risk, and free textbooks for public school children.³

Quebec

In 2004, Quebec introduced the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. This plan focuses on two main principles - that employment is the number one solution for assuring the economic security and social inclusion of Quebecers, and that greater protection will be granted to persons with severely limited capacity for employment. The primary goal of the provincial strategy is to achieve one of the lowest levels of poverty among industrialized societies by 2013. In order to achieve this goal the Quebec government is investing \$2.5 billion over five years. The money is allocated on the indexing of social assistance benefits, investments in social housing and measures for employment assistance recipients⁴.

Ontario

Ontario has recently committed to the development of a focused poverty reduction strategy by the end of 2008. Key measures will include the Ontario Child Benefit, a dental care plan to provide dental services to low-income Ontarians, a school nutrition program supporting volunteers and community organizations in delivering nutritious meals and snacks to children and youth in schools and community settings across the province, and a number of provincial/municipal programs to repair existing housing stock.

³ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Reducing Poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador: Working Towards a Solution*, 2005, p.16

⁴ Government of Quebec, *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, 2004.

Ireland and Scotland

In 1995, the Government of Ireland developed a 10 Year National Poverty Strategy to be implemented by an Inter-Departmental Policy Committee (IDPC). (The Irish strategy is national in scope, applying to all counties.) The goal of the National Poverty Strategy was to reduce the numbers of individuals living below 50-60 percent of the average income, from 15 percent of the population down to 5-10 percent. In doing so, the Irish government has focused on several key objectives, namely: facilitating participation in employment; facilitating universal access to resources, rights, goods and services; preventing the risks of social exclusion; and helping those most vulnerable in society. By 2000, the number of people living in 'consistent poverty' dropped considerably. According to the Department of the Taoiseach, the numbers of such individuals fell from 15.1 to 6.2 percent, meaning over 400,000 individuals have entered the workforce and have risen above the poverty line.

In addressing the country's poverty issue, the Irish government implemented several key initiatives. In training and development, for example, the government invested the equivalent of approximately \$21.7 billion in an Employment and Human Resources Operational Program whereby predominantly vulnerable areas of the country were provided with higher levels of investment. As well, social assistance levels are being significantly increased.

Within the Scottish context, a great emphasis has been placed on community development. In 2004, the Scottish government announced the creation of an approximately \$235 million anti-poverty fund. This fund, officially known as the Community Regeneration Fund, is to be used as the primary tool in regenerating some of the underprivileged neighbourhoods. In doing so, it is hoped that members of these communities will eventually take advantage of job opportunities and thus improve the quality of their life.

Additionally, the government has also proposed a financial inclusion plan as a means of closing the opportunity gap. Some of the chosen methods of reducing this gap include: offering financial services; providing further advice and support; and improving financial education within the aged 3-18 school curriculum.

Review of Public Consultations

The PRWG was required to review the results of the public consultations conducted by the Government. The group chose to review other community-based consultations and reports.

Past Consultations

In recent years, community based organizations and anti-poverty advocates within Nova Scotia and across the country have highlighted the following as areas requiring action:

- Increasing availability of affordable housing
- Improving the child care and early learning system
- Raising the minimum wage
- Increasing income assistance rates
- Improving employment supports
- Increasing the Child Tax Benefit
- Renewing the national social safety net
- Encouraging the development of a national anti-poverty strategy

On October 17, 2007 the Nova Scotia Poverty Reduction Strategy Coalition (now called the Community Coalition to End Poverty in Nova Scotia) released “*The Framework for a Poverty Reduction Strategy in Nova Scotia*”. The Framework articulates six goals:

- Universal access and coordination of services for those in need
- Social policies and programs that enable families and individuals to meet their basic needs, and empower them to participate fully in the social and economic benefits of society
- Entitle all residents to a livable income, decent working conditions and employment benefits
- End child poverty and establish a comprehensive, accessible, co-ordinated early childhood development strategy
- A better educated population
- Communicate the causes and consequences of poverty

National groups such as Campaign 2000, Canada Association of Food Banks, and the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO) call for governments to:

- Raise the minimum wage to a living wage (\$10 per hour) indexed to inflation, increase availability of “good jobs at living wages”, facilitate inclusion of

immigrants, and provide better protection through the Employment Insurance (EI) Program.

- Increase the child tax benefit (to \$4900 per child in a consolidated program).
- Build a universally accessible child care and early learning system so that children experience optimal early development and parents can work or receive training.
- Expand affordable housing.
- Renew the national social safety net including increased federal funding and improved accountability for provincially delivered social services, including social assistance.
- Work with community groups made up of those among whom poverty is predominant.
- The National Council on Welfare has been advocating for a national anti-poverty strategy with a long term vision and measurable targets and timetables.

Other recommendations from groups within the province include:

- Allow income assistance clients who work to retain more of their wage income.
- Support income assistance recipients to attend post secondary education programs of more than two years.
- Implement emergency funding for income assistance clients.
- Provide a telephone allowance as an item of basic need, not special need.
- Provide additional support for transportation in rural areas of the province.
- Recognize the special needs of persons with disabilities, both in determining need and eligibility, and in the provision of income support and support services.
- Improve funding for homelessness initiatives.
- Improve food security in Nova Scotia.
- Develop a policy framework that will diminish the recurrence of social assistance dependency across generations, and consider geographic issues (i.e. rural, urban).
- Create a more accessible, accountable, consumer-focused delivery system.
- Develop a comprehensive strategy that focuses on the needs of children, youth and families.
- Improve cooperation between departments, governments and community groups, to work together to develop a poverty reduction strategy for Nova Scotia.

March 2008 Survey

To help inform the deliberations of the Working Group, the government conducted a public survey in March 2008. A separate report is attached as Appendix "V".

Close to 1,300 surveys were completed, providing insights with respect to:

1. How does poverty affect you and your family?
2. The government works in a variety of ways to reduce poverty. Which programs work best for you? Why?

3. If the government could do one more thing to reduce poverty in the province, what should it be?
4. What would help reduce poverty in your rural areas?
5. What would help reduce poverty in our cities?
6. Reducing poverty costs money. We all pay for these programs through our taxes. What five things would reduce poverty, be a good use of our tax dollars and invest in the future?
7. Any other comments?

The survey results indicate that while almost all of the respondents feel they are in some way affected by poverty, well over half were either unfamiliar with the government's programs and services, or believed that those government services and programs had no impact on poverty.

In order of responses, those who did answer the question, *Which programs work best for you? Why?*, said programs such as income and employment supports, literacy/training/education, housing, health, awareness and collaboration, and transportation worked best.

In answering the question, *If the government could do one more thing to reduce poverty in the province, what should it be?*, respondents listed income and employment supports, literacy/education/training, housing, health, awareness and collaboration, and transportation.

With regard to, *What would help reduce poverty in our rural areas?*, respondents overwhelmingly listed income and employment supports and transportation as the answers. These were followed by literacy/training/education, awareness and collaboration, housing and health.

When asked the same question about poverty in the cities, income and employment supports led the list of answers, followed by housing, literacy/training/education, awareness and collaboration, health, and transportation.

The introductory statement to Question 6, "Reducing poverty costs money", resulted in a number of respondents stating that they felt reducing poverty is an investment, not a cost. In response to the five things that would reduce poverty, a quarter of respondents cited employment and income assistance programs. Literacy/education/training programs, housing, awareness and collaboration, health, and transportation were also cited as good uses of tax dollars in reducing poverty.

Grounding the Work of Poverty Reduction

What is Poverty?

The Poverty Reduction Working Group (PRWG) recognizes that there is no consensus on how to define or measure 'low income' nor how to best measure poverty broadly. In Canada, there is no agreement on the best measure of poverty nor is there an official poverty line. However, Statistics Canada produces three statistical measures of low income, often referred to by others as 'measures for poverty'. These are:

- Low-Income Cut-off (LICO) both before and after tax
- Low-Income Measure (LIM) and
- Market Basket Measure (MBM)⁵

Statistics Canada rightly insists that these measures are not poverty lines but measures of low income – however, they are widely used as poverty lines by most individuals and groups. The most 'commonly used' statistical measure for defining poverty is the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) and since the purchase of necessities is made with after-tax dollars, using people's after-tax income seems logical.

The PRWG reviewed current statistical information based on LICO, LIM and MBM measures, as well as other measures such as the Genuine Progress Index. Poverty is a complex issue that is best discussed using a suite of measures. The PRWG focused on defining poverty for deliberation purposes as based on the relative concept that poverty "*be viewed and understood in relation to the prevailing standard of living in our society at a specific time.*"⁶ The PRWG agrees with the Community Coalition to End Poverty in Nova Scotia "*that poverty exists when people are 'excluded' from taking part in activities that are an accepted and respected part of daily life within our society.*"⁷ And that poverty is "*linked to various forms of inequality and inequity associated with, but not limited to, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, (dis)ability and geographical location - in that they are all contributing factors.*"⁸

The PRWG also agrees with government in recognizing government's responsibility in supporting prosperity for all Nova Scotians by its development of a *Framework for Social Prosperity*. In *Weaving the Threads: A Lasting Social Fabric* the government of Nova Scotia sets a vision where "*every Nova Scotian has the opportunity to live well and contribute in a meaningful way within a province that is caring, safe and creative – now and into the future.*"⁹

⁵ See Appendix III

⁶ Framework for a Poverty Reduction Strategy in Nova Scotia, NS Poverty Reduction Strategy Coalition - now the *Community Coalition to End Poverty in Nova Scotia* (CCEP-NS), October 17, 2007.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Weaving the Threads: A Lasting Social Fabric*, Our (government) Framework for Social Prosperity, 2007, p.5

To reach this vision, government has identified connecting threads, or goals:

These are:

- **Health, Well-Being:** *All Nova Scotians have access to the information, services, care, and support they need to be as physically and mentally healthy as they can be.*
- **Lifelong Learning:** *All Nova Scotians have opportunities to gain useful skills, knowledge, and experience that contributes to their personal growth throughout their lives.*
- **Access, Inclusion:** *The talents and contributions of all Nova Scotians are recognized, valued, and celebrated – and all Nova Scotians have equitable access to opportunities to meet their full potential and contribute to our social prosperity.*
- **Citizenship Development, Engagement:** *All Nova Scotians have meaningful, relevant opportunities to contribute to their communities and to understand their shared responsibility for their individual and collective well-being.*
- **Safety and Security:** *All Nova Scotians are and feel safe in their communities and workplaces and feel secure in meeting their own basic needs, either by themselves or with support.*¹⁰

Government recognizes that only by ‘weaving’ these goals and common threads successfully – “*through effective co-ordination and collaboration – will it be possible to create a lasting social fabric to sustain our province.*”¹¹

This Framework for Social Prosperity demonstrates “*how social prosperity, economic prosperity, and environmental sustainability are linked and depend on each other.*” Understanding and making the link between social and economic prosperity is seen as leading to sustainable prosperity and calls on shared responsibility.¹²

This Framework speaks of beginning with “*identifying and recognizing realities and challenges – not trying to hide from them*” and “*recognizing that some individuals and families struggle at certain times, or throughout their lives - and that some communities also face persistent or transitional challenges.*”¹³

The ‘*reality*’ for people living in poverty in our province, including those working for ‘low wages’ is the inadequacy of economic means sufficient for their basic needs. This is not income alone, but can mean limited access to necessities - such as quality, affordable housing; affordable energy; education and training; health care; quality, affordable child care; and justice – which directly and negatively impacts the freedom, autonomy and economic independence of those living in poverty. In addition, social and recreational activities that are taken for granted by many, are out of reach for anyone living in low income.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.16

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. p.10

¹³ Ibid. p.30

One of the five priority areas listed by government in ***Weaving the Threads: A Lasting Social Fabric*** is “poverty reduction.” The Poverty Reduction Working Group asserts that by *alleviating* the impacts of poverty, *reducing* the number of individuals and families living in poverty, and taking action to *prevent* poverty in our province; we will have a healthier, safer, sustainable and prosperous province for everyone.

Overarching goals

The PRWG identified four overarching and interrelated goals of any strategy or framework to address poverty:

Meaningful collaboration: Ensure consistent, coordinated and accountable action

Alleviate poverty: Meeting the needs of those with long-term work-limiting barriers

Reduce poverty: Meeting the needs of low-income workers

Prevent poverty: Building the foundation for a prosperous and thriving province

Meaningful collaboration

Poverty research and best practices point to the need for all levels of government and community partners to work together to meet the needs of low-income Nova Scotians. This goal is about building capacity - within government, between levels of government and with community partners – to communicate, coordinate and support an integrated framework for a Poverty Reduction Strategy. Success will require the establishment of an ongoing meaningful dialogue with monitoring and assessment among all collaborative partners and all stakeholders –particularly those most impacted by poverty. This must include significant strategic and deliberate investment in programs and services that alleviate, reduce and prevent poverty in our province.

Alleviate poverty

For low-income Nova Scotians challenged by long-term work-limiting barriers, and their families, we will work to alleviate the *depth* of their poverty, improve their quality of life and fulfill their potential, and eagerness, to make a contribution.

A segment of Nova Scotia’s population requires the ongoing support of the community to meet their basic needs and fulfill their potential, and eagerness, to make a contribution. Individuals within this group may be challenged by a work-limiting disability, or be too elderly to actively participate in the labour force. One thing they have in common: they all experience chronic, long-term poverty.

Though there has been some improved economic performance, combined with targeted social support programs, that has resulted in less dependence on income assistance, not all individuals and families can take advantage of improved employment opportunities to increase their incomes and career opportunities. The declining low-income population highlights the needs and challenges of those who continue to struggle with poverty. More can be done to address the *depth* of their poverty and in the process help them improve their quality of life, make a contribution and be included in the economic and social life of the province.

Poverty is more complex than an employment based solution alone. The above discussion is not intended to direct the type or level of support, and does not preclude an emphasis on labour force participation. Rather, it constitutes an acknowledgement that individuals within this group require targeted interventions and solutions recognizing their unique circumstances.

Reduce poverty

For low-income Nova Scotians where support is required to enable their transition to independent and sustainable employment, Nova Scotia must work to reduce the *incidence* and *number* living in low-income, with a particular focus on improving economic security.

A key component of this poverty reduction strategy is to do just that – reduce the incidence and number of Nova Scotians living in low-income situations. Nova Scotia's low-income population requires varying levels of support to enable people to make the transition to independent and sustainable employment. Understanding their unique situations, needs, challenges and strengths is integral to a successful poverty reduction strategy. This will require multi-sector approaches to develop an accommodating workplace, paying liveable wages and a full range of supports (e.g. transportation, child care, etc) to enable employment.

Prevent poverty

A broader goal that in some measure will involve all Nova Scotians, we will work to ensure we build the proper foundation and social capital to prevent the occurrence of poverty and continue to build a thriving and prosperous province.

Prevention will necessarily require engagement with a wider group, and in some measure will involve all Nova Scotians, to ensure we build the proper foundation and social capital within the entire population to continue to build a thriving and prosperous province. Poverty prevention requires a long-term view and commitment, and will need to focus on a wide range of strategies. Investment in individuals, families and communities will enable a healthy, thriving, prosperous Nova Scotia.

Recommendations

1. The provincial government must adopt and invest in a Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy must be inclusive, far-reaching, integrated and entrenched in legislation. All political parties must support legislation to ensure that the commitment to alleviation, reduction and prevention survives changes in government, and must include a commitment of resources.
 - a. The strategy must be based on the vision, guiding principles and overarching goals articulated by the Bill 94 Working Group.
 - b. The strategy must include targeted goals/measures for the alleviation, reduction and prevention of poverty, based on indicators that illustrate the differing realities of Nova Scotians.
 - c. The strategy must include an accountability framework requiring regular monitoring and reporting of progress and outcomes against the goals and measures.
 - d. The strategy must include a collaborative process for continued multi-sector involvement and input. This process will include meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders and an advisory body similar to the Occupational Health & Safety Advisory Council and Minimum Wage Review Committee.
 - e. The strategy requires a significant strategic and deliberate investment that enables public policy for long term well-being and prosperity.

2. The strategy must be based on collective responsibility:
 - a. All provincial government departments must share the work and responsibility for the strategy, and jointly consider the impact of their policies and resulting programs and services on poverty alleviation, reduction and prevention.
 - b. All individuals and sectors –including all levels of government, communities, business, labour and academe- have a role and responsibility to alleviate, reduce and prevent poverty.

3. Redefine the purpose of social assistance support, moving away from a “last resort” welfare model to a model of proactive and progressive support.

4. Review and adopt the Implementation Plan developed by the PRWG as part of the Strategy.

Target Areas for Action:

Awareness and Engagement

Poverty exists when people are excluded from the activities normally accepted and respected as part of society's daily living. Although anyone can become poor, some are more vulnerable than others. In Nova Scotia, the most significant incidence of poverty impacts women, single parent families, the disability community and youth. The federal Guaranteed Income Supplement has made significant strides in addressing poverty for seniors. However many seniors, particularly senior women, still live in poverty. Therefore, the province must engage the federal government in ongoing Pension Reform.

We believe the solutions to poverty lay in a collaborative commitment by governments, business and community; we also assert that success hinges upon the dismantling of stereotypes and myths about poverty. There are still individuals within government and the general public who believe that poverty only touches those with little ambition to gain financial independence or those who habitually abuse the social safety net. However, statistics and real life stories paint a very different picture.

The truth is that any Nova Scotian, from any socio economic background, can experience poverty during their life span. The PRWG learned that the majority of clients in the Employment Supports program have multiple barriers to overcome and enter the paid workforce. People do not chose to live in poverty - Nova Scotians want to contribute, they want to take care of their families, and they want to be engaged in their communities. We must confront social myths that unintentionally, but systemically, create the conditions that enable and elevate the impacts of poverty.

The PRWG reports to the Ministers of Community Services and Labour and Workforce Development. We believe that these departments should be joined by the Departments of Health and Health Promotion and Protection as champions for change. All of government must be engaged in this effort, and demonstrate commitment to alleviate, reduce and prevent poverty by changing the way that government has traditionally worked and making a significant strategic and deliberate investment.

It is vital that all levels of government- federal, provincial, municipal and First Nations- work together and with the community to alleviate, reduce and prevent poverty. The jurisdictional division of responsibilities must not place barriers to the health and well-being of all members of society. A "siloed" approach to the provision of services creates gaps, inconsistency and duplication in service.

Nova Scotia is blessed with a vibrant volunteer sector. While struggling financially, the non-profit and community organizations continue to provide vital services to Nova Scotians at the local community level. As needs continue to grow and be more complex, these organizations require stable and increased investment.

The business sector must recognize that they have a leadership role in working collaboratively with governments and community to enable an effective poverty reduction strategy.

The recent survey confirmed that the myriad of programs and services presently in place is confusing and difficult to navigate. Many people are unaware of the services and programs currently available that they are eligible to access.

Implementation Plan Actions: Awareness and Engagement

- The Province must advocate for a National Anti-Poverty strategy, and work with all levels of government to coordinate programs and services.
- The Province, with collaborative partners, must develop and implement an innovative and targeted communication and awareness campaign about the causes and consequences of poverty. This campaign must target the public and private sector, all levels of government, communities and individual citizens in new ways.
- The Province must continue to implement the recommendations from the “Talking with Volunteers: Recommendations for Government Action, 2006”
- The Province, in its community economic development work, must encourage the engagement of the business communities in poverty reduction.
- The Province must invest in community based services that increase awareness of programs and services available, and assists individuals to effectively navigate and access programs and services.
- The Province must engage the Federal Government to ensure ongoing Pension Reform to ensure economic security for seniors, particularly senior women, in their aging years.

Employment Supports and Income

The Employment Support and Income Assistance Program, like most welfare programs across the country, is a program of “last resort”. For individuals to “qualify” for programs and supports, they must exhaust all means of support to demonstrate need. The problems this model creates include: stigmatization of people experiencing poverty, crisis-driven response to societal need and often creates an unintentional trap behind the “welfare wall.” Policies must reflect the need for and benefit of social inclusion, and facilitate opportunities to individuals to thrive in and contribute to their communities.

Most income assistance clients have multiple barriers to employment. Attachment to the labour market is encouraged, but supports to facilitate transition and long term success are not consistently available.

There was considerable discussion amongst PRWG members about how the current policy of “clawback” of 70% of earned income acts as a disincentive to employment. Current treatment of training allowances for persons with disabilities also acts as a disincentive. Additionally, to lower the welfare wall requires the provision of supports outside the ESIA program. The system must not provide a disincentive or penalty for those participating in the paid workforce.

Current ESIA policy includes telephones only as a special need. For economic and social inclusion, a telephone is a necessity.

The PRWG was particularly interested in the Saskatchewan Employment Supplement program that increased supports to low-income working families. This program removes the employment incentive policy from the income assistance program, thus providing a guaranteed income level. (The program has other features that result in better coordination of eligibility for services, such as the Rental Housing Supplement)

Newfoundland has recently introduced a new Market Basket Measure specific to that province, and has a series of innovative measures.

Personal income tax is a burden for people living in low income. The present basic exemption means that those at the lowest level of income are still required to pay income tax. The majority of the province’s revenue comes from income tax, and the PRWG recognizes that to appropriately fund social investment, there must be a thriving tax base. The PRWG asserts that individuals living at or less than LICO must not be required to pay provincial income tax.

Implementation Plan Actions: Employment Support and Income Assistance Program

- The Province must develop poverty measures specific to Nova Scotia, taking into account a suite of measures, including LICO, MBM and GPI, that will allow for better measurement of progress and outcomes.
- The Province must enhance the ESIA program by:
 - increasing rates, for both food and shelter, with particularly attention to the special needs of persons with disabilities
 - allowing individuals to retain greater earned income, while maintaining eligibility for other programs
 - reviewing the entire “special needs” list to reflect the actual cost and individual experience, and to ensure that special needs policy is clear and communicated
 - providing funding for telephones and disability supports
 - supporting participation in the workforce by maintaining open files which would allow individuals to cycle in and out of the workforce as their situation changes.
- The Province must adopt a program consistent with the Saskatchewan Employment Supplement model.
- The Province must modify tax policy to create a new tax bracket so that individuals living at or less than LICO do not pay provincial income tax.
- Employers must be required and assisted to pro-rate benefits for part-time, casual and other non-standard forms of employment.

Disability Issues

Disability can affect anyone at any time. Twenty per cent (20%) of Nova Scotians self-identify as persons with disabilities (Canadian Census, 2006). As the population ages, that rate will increase. There is a higher rate (50%) of unemployment for persons with a disability than those without a disability. While social acceptance of persons with disabilities has greatly increased over the past twenty to thirty years, many people still live in poverty. Still, even in 2008, employment; safe, accessible and affordable housing; post-secondary education; accessible and affordable transportation, disability supports and technical aids and social inclusion evade many people.

In many cases, disability is not a health issue. Disability is about a physical, mental and/or health limitation that can lead to difficulties with daily activities. These limitations may or may not be constant, but cyclical in nature. This is especially true for people living with a mental illness.

The working group recognizes that neither post-secondary education nor employment, for instance, are viable options for everyone. Rather, disability-related supports are to be person-centered and include timely and efficient service provision and the flexible interpretation of policies to enable full participation of all Nova Scotians in their communities. We envision persons with disabilities, or their chosen representatives, taking their rightful place as equal partners in the identification, development and implementation of supports and services appropriate to meet their short, mid and long-term goals.

There are currently two programs within the Department of Community Services that deal with income supports for people with disabilities. The Services for Persons with Disabilities Program is set up for those people who are “in care” and receiving supports for their disabilities. These, for the most part, are people living with a mental illness and people labeled with an intellectual disability. They are living in supervised apartments, small options homes and group homes.

The other program is the Employment Supports and Income Assistance Program. This is based on the old “welfare” model that was set up short term for people needing transitions to employment. There are 28,000 people in this program in which 13,000 are persons with disabilities. These people are not receiving any supports for their disabilities and only receiving their basic living expenses of rent plus \$204.00 a month personal allowance. This also provides people with Pharmacare.

The PRWG recognizes that issues around disability, supports and inclusion require a fuller dialogue between government and community. Our recommendations need to be supplemented by additional review.

Implementation Plan Actions: Disability

- The Province must coordinate the provision of programs and services to people with disabilities across Departments and engage the disability communities in the development of a Disability Strategy for Nova Scotia.

This strategy must address, among others:

- Accessible, affordable and visitable housing
 - Universal access to technical aids
 - Accessible and affordable transportation
 - Navigator system
- The Province must enhance disability supports to all people with disabilities (regardless of eligibility for income assistance) so that they may fully participate in the province's economic, educational and social opportunities.

Transportation

Transportation has always been linked to access to education, employment, health and social inclusion. With an aging population and rising gas prices, obtaining transportation has become increasingly challenging for low-income Nova Scotians.

One of the common themes to come out of the public consultation was that transportation in rural Nova Scotia is a large hindrance to both social and economic prosperity. While respondents indicated that a policy focus on income assistance and employment supports could provide the most help in both rural and urban communities in Nova Scotia, the second priority differed. In response to the question, “what would help reduce poverty in our rural areas?” transportation was listed behind income and employment supports. In contrast, when respondents were asked, “what would help reduce poverty in our cities?” housing received the second most attention.

Objective 1.5 within the *Framework for a Poverty Reduction Strategy in Nova Scotia* is to “ensure access to transportation – making transportation available to all Nova Scotians, no matter where they live.”¹⁴ The report, *Follow-up to Social Assistance Reform: Making it Work for Women!* Recommended that Government, “provide an allowance for basic, regular transportation.” They did not want this allowance to reduce the special needs allowances for medical transportation and travel to work, education, and training.¹⁵ Goal #6 of the *Strategy for Positive Aging in Nova Scotia 2005* recommends that Nova Scotia “explore innovative ways to better utilize the transportation resources within communities” and “encourage better coordination, collaboration and sharing of transportation resources within communities”.

Many long term care facilities and sheltered workshops purchase and operate buses and vans for the sole use of their residents. Many veterans’ residential facilities also own buses. These funds -private and public, federal, provincial and municipal- would be more effectively used by providing community based transportation to the whole community including those residential users.

The working group agrees that transportation in Nova Scotia needs to be addressed in a poverty reduction strategy for Nova Scotia.

¹⁴ *Framework for a Poverty Reduction Strategy in Nova Scotia, produced by the Nova Scotia Poverty Reduction Strategy Coalition, October, 2007*

¹⁵ *Follow-up to Social Assistance Reform: Making it Work for Women!*, July, 2004, Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre, Pictou County Women’s Centre, Every Women’s Centre, Sydney

Implementation Plan Actions: Transportation

- The Province must work with both the federal and municipal governments to establish a Transportation Strategy.
- The Province must work with the municipalities and the community to explore innovative transportation solutions that make use of all transportation resources, such as under-utilized vans and buses.
- Community-based transportation and transit programs should be extended across the Province, and funded to provide service on evenings and weekends.
- The Province must promote the availability of community based transportation systems and Dial-a-Ride to seniors and others who are transportation disadvantaged.
- The Province must expand the ability for income assistance clients to obtain bus passes and fares for recreation and other important quality of life activities.

Education and Skills Training

Education is the most significant factor in determining income; the higher the level of education, the lower the likelihood of having a low income¹⁶. The income assistance caseload provides some insights into this relationship. While 70% of the Nova Scotian population (aged 20+) has completed high school and beyond, a relatively small 35% of income assistance recipients have achieved similar levels of education.¹⁶

Nova Scotians are below the national average for high school completion rates and hence have lower literacy rates than the national average.¹⁷ Poverty, literacy and health are closely linked. Lower education, lower literacy less employability. Literacy levels affect a person's ability to comprehend and use health information both from a preventative side and a disease management side.

A 2004 report on transitions to better jobs for the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women noted that research indicates that many low-paid workers are employed full time, but that an increasing number work in precarious jobs – temporary, part-time, casual, or other non-standard forms of employment that are characterized by low wages and few benefits.¹⁸

The current percentages of those working for minimum wage in Nova Scotia are:

- 5 % of our workforce - 22,000 (total workforce in NS 452,200 as of Jan. 08)
- 60% live at home with parents (84% under 25)
- 43% work full time
- 40% less than high school education
- 63% are female
- 63% work retail, accommodation & food service and other services (minimum wage workers are clustered in key sectors: hospitality, tourism and retail)
- Big employers (40% over 500 employees) and small employers (35% under 20).¹⁹

However, the NS Economy is changing, and we are facing a skills shortage. NS's population grew a modest 0.6% in 2006 over the previous 5 year period, compared to 5.4% growth nationally. NS has the oldest workforce population in Canada, with a median age of 41.8 years. The youth population, under age 25, declined by 6.5% in the years 2001-2006, meaning there will be fewer workers coming along to replace retiring workers.

¹⁶ Department of Community Services Administrative data.

¹⁷ <http://www.ns.literacy.ca/literacy/Fact3.pdf>

¹⁸ Stella Lord and Anne Martell, Building Transitions to Good Jobs for Low-Income Women, Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, May 2004

¹⁹ Minimum Wage Report Highlights, Environment and Labour, Feb 12, 2008

A great deal has been done to increase the minimum wage in NS over the past 4 years. The current plan is to raise minimum wages to LICO levels by 2009-10. The Province is preparing to take over the Labour Market Development Agreement and Labour Market Agreements from the Federal Government, which will help workers retrain for new job opportunities, and develop the skills required for the modern workplace.

The group brought together for the November and January consultation envisioned Nova Scotia becoming, “a culture of learners.”²⁰ They believed that in order to achieve this vision, barriers needed to be eliminated, such as access to child care, transportation, and overcoming financial barriers. In addition, they believed that more needed to be done in improving education and apprenticeship opportunities. This could best be achieved if government and community partners worked together. This collaborative approach was also endorsed in other reports and studies we have read. One of the public consultation respondents noted, “Poverty is a vicious cycle...education is only one tool to break the cycle, but is extremely important, and has long-term effects.”²¹

Research from the Family Mosaic Project (FMP), a 20 year longitudinal study, showed that starting a family early, especially without having completed high school, is a strong indicator of poverty and leads to a greater reliance on income assistance programs.²² This type of longitudinal research helps inform the causes of poverty, its long-term consequences, and can provide insight into the design of effective solutions. As one of the tools, education must be based on a model that focuses on individual needs and differences and actively works against stigmatization.

Employers are going to have to work harder to attract and retain skilled workers in the coming years. Employers that provide incentives to students in community colleges and universities, as well as in the workplace, will have more success in the recruitment and retention. Ensuring that disadvantaged groups have access to these opportunities will be a key to reducing poverty, as will be ensuring that students and the unemployed have accurate information about job opportunities and the skills required to compete for those jobs. It is government’s role to target the skills required to meet the demand of employers. Creating incentives and funded seats in key occupational areas will assist students, women, the disabled and others in transitioning into these jobs. Employers that offer training and apprenticeships should be given incentives to continue these practices.

²⁰ Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultations, November 1 and 2, pg. 9

²¹ Poverty Reduction Strategy Public Consultation Report

²² For a discussion on why lone parents are poor see Dechman, Margaret, *Family Mosaic Project: Executive Summary; Social Exclusion and Social Assistance : A Longitudinal Study of Lone-parent and Two-parent Families*, Province of Nova Scotia, 2001.

Implementation Plan Actions: Education and Skills Training

- Government departments and agencies must work collaboratively with multi-sectors to improve education and apprenticeship opportunities; and to ensure accessibility and affordability for all Nova Scotians.
- The Province must ensure equitable access to literacy, adult education and training for all Nova Scotians.
- The Poverty Reduction Strategy adopted by government must align with the Child and Youth Strategy to ensure that all programming aimed at children and youth reflects the diverse needs of youth and families at risk. This must include strategic interventions to break the “cycle of poverty” at a young age.
- The Province take a leadership role in promoting the value of education; and implement targeted mentoring programs to help the province’s children and youth experience the positive benefits of education.
- In collaboration with community, the province must increase access and supports to a full spectrum of training and education from community-based training to post secondary education, with a particular focus on those with barriers.
- The Province must identify shortages in labour and link to skills training and invest in education that matches these labour opportunities.

Housing

The State of Affordable Housing in Nova Scotia – A Community Roundtable Series and Symposium Report, found that recurring themes emerged across the province, some uniquely rural and while others parallel urban situation issues:

- Poverty is the underlying cause of housing affordability problems;
- Homelessness in rural areas is often hidden and shows up as couch surfing, especially among youth;
- Stigma and discrimination limit access to affordable market housing for Income Assistance recipients;
- Absence of emergency and other services in rural areas causes people to migrate to larger centres;
- Seniors in rural areas need affordable and assisted/supportive housing;
- Depopulation / migration away from rural areas is creating a range of social and economic problems;
- Single women/women living in dangerous situations lack housing options;
- Rising taxes and the cost of utilities put low income homeowners at risk;
- Affordable housing should meet the needs of a range of households, including supportive housing for youth;
- Lack of access to affordable housing is often exacerbated by poor location, lack of public transportation and access to services;
- Current affordable housing programs do not reach people in greatest need;
- Slum landlords and private apartments in atrocious conditions are common;
- Public housing is under-resourced and lacks operational funding which results in vacant units for extended periods.
- Public housing has become “housing of last resort”.

Safe, secure, adequate, and affordable housing is a requirement of a poverty reduction strategy. Housing is a social determinant of health, as well as a form of social and economic inclusion. As the single largest expenditure in a household budget, housing costs crowd out other necessities and exacerbate an already inadequate income. Housing policy is a high priority in several European PRS plans. Social housing is an integral part of vibrant, prosperous communities.

Canada Mortgage and Housing, based on Statistics Canada data from the 2001 census, reports that 15% of households in Nova Scotia are in core housing need. This means that 52,000 households in Nova Scotia experience issues related to affordability, suitability and adequacy.²³

²³ *Possible Directions for Housing Policy in Nova Scotia, October 2006, Steve Pomeroy Focus Consulting Inc.*

HRM does not have a supply problem but rather an affordability problem which is not addressed by the private market. Furthermore, initiatives to stimulate market responses are not applicable in much of rural Nova Scotia where markets are weak.

Social housing reduces the risk of losing housing. For special needs populations, social housing with supportive housing variants facilitates semi independent and supported living. Presenters identified the lack of supportive, safe and affordable housing for mental health, addiction/homeless, women moving from shelters, and for some seniors Rent geared to income through rental subsidies to low income families is a useful model.

Communities with economic challenges require a restorative program that uses techniques directed both at the individual and the neighborhood to become stronger through a number of programs. Existing social housing programs lack a strategic approach to poverty reduction and tend to “blame” individuals for the failure of the community to thrive economically. Housing policy requires creative design and flexibility, and must avoid “ghetto” development by ensuring adequate social housing, in “mixed” housing settings.

Implementation Plan Actions: Housing

- The Province must undertake a review of its housing policy to ensure housing assistance actually assists in reducing poverty. This review must result in a Housing Strategy linked to the Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy must address:
 - policies which support the capacity of non-profit housing organizations to purchase existing property and therefore preserve longer term affordability.
 - need for an increased range and availability of transitional, supportive, as well as social housing to address the needs of the most vulnerable.
 - homeownership programs that are more flexible and include programs to educate citizens on how to access affordable energy and entry level home ownership
 - targeted rent supplement programs in specific areas, including portable rent supplements.
- The Province must develop policy to revitalize and regenerate areas that experience concentrated poverty and distress.
- The Province must advocate for a National Housing Strategy.

Child Care and Early Childhood Development

Child care enables parental participation in the labour forces, and it provides important educational development for children ages 0-5.

Child care has often been identified as an obstacle or barrier to obtaining employment or training, making it particularly difficult for women to enter the workforce. A report issued by the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada states, "There are strong social and economic arguments for a child care program that concurrently supports women, families and children. Quality programs provide an advantage to children, regardless of their parents' workforce participation or the family's social or economic status. Nurturing, stimulating child care helps strengthen children's dispositions to be life long learners and productive participants in society."²⁴ Accessible and affordable child care must be available to allow people to participate in and contribute to the economy.

There is a concern about the possibility that "big box" daycares could move to Nova Scotia and possibly diminish the quality of care and lure workers away from smaller centres. The sector must recognize the importance of educated, skilled early childhood educators, and the need to improve the compensation of the professionals in this field, and aid with attraction and retention. The Canadian Labour Congress indicates that 67% of child care workers have post-secondary qualifications, yet the average annual income is less than \$22,000/year.

The representatives from the Department of Community Services highlighted a number of programs that were benefiting families across Nova Scotia. These include the recent decision on April 1, 2008 to increase the income eligibility for child care. Now, families with up to two children and a net income of about \$62,000 may be eligible, up from \$55,000. Subsidies are given in proportion to net income. The minimum child care fee for a parent receiving a subsidy is being lowered to \$1 per day, per child, from \$2.25.²⁵

The Framework for a Poverty Reduction Strategy in Nova Scotia recommended increasing supports to families in the early years, and urged collaboration with complementary health providers, such as public health and dieticians.

²⁴ *From Patchwork to Framework: A Child Care Strategy for Canada*, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, September 2004, p. 7

²⁵ Department of Community Services data

Implementation Plan Actions: Child Care and Early Childhood Development

- The Province must continue to increase supports to families during early years and to enhance child development. The current and proposed child care strategy should be built more on the identified needs and the outcomes clearly articulated.
- The Province must ensure that child care options are flexible, both in the portability of spaces and the design of service (to meet shift and seasonal work schedules).
- The Province must continue to create spaces for infants and children with special needs.
- The Province must advocate for a National Child Care Strategy that recognizes the need for quality, universal, accessible, developmentally appropriate child care.

Health

The social determinants of health are intimately related to poverty reduction.²⁶ A healthy province can only come from a prosperous province, and prosperity can only be achieved when people are able to take action to sustain their own health.

We are taught that good, nutritional food and exercise are the cornerstones to a healthy life. People in poverty do not have adequate resources to purchase the food they need (food insecurity). *Thought About Food?, A Background Paper and Policy Lens, October 2006, prepared by Policy Working Group of the N.S. Participatory Food Security Projects* indicates that people who are food insecure tend to have poor or fair self-rated health and are more likely than food secure people to have reduced physical activity, suffer from multiple chronic conditions and have reported that they suffer from heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and food allergies. Food insecure women who were caregivers experienced much stress related to providing food for themselves and their households.

Health played a factor in all discussions of the PRWG, and the rising health care costs looms large in the discussion of economic sustainability. Anti-poverty investment is investment in health. Prevention is the best way to deal with escalating costs and needs.

Compared to other Canadians, Nova Scotians have particularly high rates of chronic illness. The province ranks first in the country for people with arthritis and rheumatism and for deaths from cancer and respiratory disease. Nova Scotia ranks second in Canada for psychiatric hospitalization and for deaths due to diabetes and circulatory problems. Cardiovascular disease (heart disease, stroke and atherosclerosis) claims the lives of 2,800 Nova Scotians each year, and accounts for 36% of all deaths in the province. An estimated 2,400 Nova Scotians will die of cancer every year, accounting for 30% of all deaths in the province.²⁷

Low-income women under the age of 40 are 62% more likely to be hospitalized than higher-income women; over the age of 40, they are 92% more likely to be hospitalized. In Nova Scotia, those without a high school diploma use 49% more physician services than those with a B.A., while low income groups use 43% more physician services than higher-income groups. This is just one example of the interwoven causes and consequences of poverty.

Low-income groups have higher rates of smoking, obesity, physical inactivity and cardiovascular risk. The report suggests that Nova Scotia could avoid an estimated 200 deaths and save \$214 million per year if all Nova Scotians were as heart healthy as higher-income groups.

²⁶ Social Determinants of Health

²⁷ *The Cost of Chronic Disease in Nova Scotia 2002*

For the most part, the PRWG was happy to learn about the new Family Pharmacare program initiated. There are concerns about the co-pay costs, the upfront cost of the deductible, and the lack of coverage for medications they are presently receiving, which might mean that the client's need to shift to not-as-effective generic/cheaper drugs. Currently, there are four Pharmacare programs in government: for income assistance recipients, for seniors, for families and for low-income children. The PRWG was confused by the duplication and urges both streamlining and transparency in these programs.

Implementation Plan Actions: Health

- The Province must review and implement recommendations from the “Cost and Affordability of a Nutritious Diet in Nova Scotia” report.
- The Province must expedite the shift to a prevention and promotion model. All Nova Scotians must recognize that investment in people, through anti-poverty measures, will lead to healthy outcomes and reduce health care costs.
- The Province must consolidate and enhance the existing Pharmacare programs in the province.

Recommendations and Implementation Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION PLAN		
	Program and Policy target completion dates		
	Short Term (by end of fiscal year 08/09)	Mid Term (by 2013)	Long Term (by 2020)
<p><i>The provincial government must adopt and invest in a Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy must be inclusive, far-reaching, integrated and entrenched in legislation. All political parties must support legislation to ensure that the commitment to alleviation, reduction and prevention survives changes in government, and must include a commitment of resources.</i></p>	<p><i>The Province adopt a Poverty Reduction Strategy. The strategy must:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The strategy must be based on the vision, guiding principles and overarching goals articulated by the Bill 94 Working Group.</i> <i>The strategy must include targeted goals/measures for the alleviation, reduction and prevention of poverty, based on indicators that illustrate the differing realities of Nova Scotians.</i> <i>The strategy must include an accountability framework requiring regular monitoring and reporting of progress and outcomes against the goals and measures.</i> <i>The strategy must include a collaborative process for continued multi-sector involvement and input. This process will include meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders and an advisory body similar to the Occupational Health & Safety Advisory Council and Minimum Wage Review Committee.</i> <i>The strategy requires a significant strategic and deliberate investment that enables public policy for long term well-being and prosperity.</i> <p><i>The Poverty Reduction Strategy adopted by government must align with the Child and Youth Strategy to ensure that all programming aimed at children and youth reflects the diverse needs of youth and families at risk. . This must include strategic interventions to break the “cycle of poverty” at a young age</i></p>	<p><i>The Province must undertake a review of its housing policy to ensure housing assistance actually assists in reducing poverty. This review must result in a Housing Strategy linked to the Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy must address:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>policies which support the capacity of non-profit housing organizations to purchase existing property and therefore preserve longer term affordability.</i> ○ <i>need for an increased range and availability of transitional, supportive, as well as social housing to address the needs of the most vulnerable.</i> ○ <i>homeownership programs that are more flexible and include programs to educate citizens on how to access affordable energy and entry level home ownership</i> ○ <i>targeted rent supplement programs in specific areas, including portable rent supplements.</i> <p><i>The Province must coordinate the provision of programs and services to people with disabilities across Departments and engage the disability communities in the development of a Disability Strategy for Nova Scotia. This strategy must address, among others:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Accessible, affordable and visitable housing</i> ○ <i>Universal access to technical aids</i> ○ <i>Accessible and affordable transportation</i> ○ <i>Navigator system</i> 	<p><i>The Province must advocate for a National Housing Strategy.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must advocate for a National Anti-Poverty Strategy, and work with all levels of government to coordinate programs and services</i></p> <p><i>The Province must advocate for a National Child Care Strategy that recognizes the need for quality, universal, accessible, developmentally appropriate child care.</i></p>

Recommendations and Implementation Plan

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	Program and Policy target completion dates		
	Short Term (by end of fiscal year 08/09)	Mid Term (by 2013)	Long Term (by 2020)
<p><i>The strategy must be based on collective responsibility.</i></p> <p><i>This means</i></p> <p>a. <i>All provincial government departments must share the work and responsibility for the strategy, and jointly consider the impact of their policies and resulting programs and services on poverty alleviation, reduction and prevention.</i></p> <p>b. <i>All individuals and sectors – including all levels of government, communities, business, labour and academe- have a role and responsibility to alleviate, reduce and prevent poverty.</i></p>	<p><i>The province must work with the municipalities and the community to explore innovative transportation solutions that make use of all transportation resources, such as under-utilized vans and buses</i></p> <p><i>The Province must continue to increase supports to families during early years and to enhance child development. The current and proposed child care strategy should be built on the identified needs and the outcomes more clearly articulated.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must consolidate and enhance the existing Pharmacare programs in the province.</i></p>	<p><i>The province must work with both the federal and municipal governments to establish a Transportation Strategy</i></p> <p><i>Government departments and agencies work collaboratively with multi-sectors to improve education and apprenticeship opportunities; and ensure accessibility and affordability for all Nova Scotians.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must identify shortages in labour and link to skills training; and invest in education that matches these labour opportunities.</i></p> <p><i>Employers must be required and assisted to pro-rate benefits for part-time, casual and other non-standard forms of employment.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must promote the availability of community based transportation systems and Dial-a-Ride to seniors and others who are transportation disadvantaged.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must develop policy to revitalize and regenerate areas that experience concentrated poverty and distress.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must ensure that child care options are flexible, both in the portability of spaces and the design of service (to meet shift and seasonal work schedules)</i></p> <p><i>The Province must continue to create spaces for infants and children with special needs.</i></p>	<p><i>The Province must ensure equitable access to literacy, adult education and training for all Nova Scotians.</i></p> <p><i>In collaboration with community, the province must increase access and supports to a full spectrum of training and education from community-based training to post secondary education, with a particular focus on those with barriers.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must expedite the shift to a prevention and promotion model. All Nova Scotians must recognize that investment in people, through anti-poverty measures, will lead to healthy outcomes and reduce health care costs.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must enhance disability supports to all people with disabilities (regardless of eligibility for income assistance) so that they may fully participate in the province's economic, educational and social opportunities.</i></p> <p><i>Community-based transportation and transit programs should be extended across the Province, and funded to provide service evenings and weekends.</i></p> <p><i>The Province, in its community economic development work, must encourage the engagement of the business communities in poverty reduction.</i></p>

Recommendations and Implementation Plan			
RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION PLAN		
	Program and Policy target completion dates		
	Short Term (by end of fiscal year 08/09)	Mid Term (by 2013)	Long Term (by 2020)
		<p><i>The Province must review and implement recommendations from the "Cost and Affordability of a Nutritious Diet in Nova Scotia" report.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must modify tax policy to create a new tax bracket so that individuals living at or less than LICO do not pay provincial income tax.</i></p> <p><i>The Province must continue to implement the recommendations from the "Talking with Volunteers: Recommendations to Government, 2006"</i></p> <p><i>The Province must invest in community based services that increase awareness of programs and services available, and assists individuals to effectively navigate and access programs and services.</i></p> <p><i>The Province, with collaborative partners, must develop and implement an innovative and targeted communication and awareness campaign about the causes and consequences of poverty. This campaign must target the public and private sector, all levels of government, communities and individual citizens in new ways.</i></p> <p><i>The Province take a leadership role in promoting the value of education; and implement targeted mentoring programs to help the province's children and youth experience the positive benefits of education</i></p>	<p><i>The Province must engage the Federal Government to ensure ongoing Pension Reform to ensure economic security for seniors, particularly senior women, in their aging years.</i></p>

Recommendations and Implementation Plan			
RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION PLAN		
	Program and Policy target completion dates		
	Short Term (by end of fiscal year 08/09)	Mid Term (by 2013)	Long Term (by 2020)
<i>Redefine the purpose of social assistance support, away from a "last resort" welfare model to a model of proactive and progressive support.</i>	<p><i>The Province must enhance the ESIA program by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>increasing rates, for both food and shelter, with particular attention to the special needs of persons with disabilities</i> ▪ <i>allowing individuals to retain greater earned income, while maintaining eligibility for other programs</i> ▪ <i>reviewing the entire "special needs" list to reflect the actual cost and individual experience, and to ensure that special needs policy is clear and communicated</i> ▪ <i>providing funding for telephones and disability supports</i> ▪ <i>supporting participation in the workforce by maintaining open files which would allow individuals to cycle in and out of the workforce as their situation changes.</i> 	<p><i>The province must expand the ability for income assistance clients to obtain bus passes and fares for recreation and other important quality of life activities</i></p> <p><i>The Province must develop poverty measures specific to Nova Scotia, taking into account a suite of measures, including LICO, MBM and GPI, that will allow for better measurement of progress and outcomes.</i></p>	<i>The Province must adopt a program consistent with the Saskatchewan Employment Supplement model</i>

Appendices

Appendix I: Consensus Model of Decision

This means that representatives will “seek agreement” among themselves after a full discussion and consideration of varying views on a given issue/topic or strategy approach.

The steps to support consensus are as follows:

1. The Co-Chairs/facilitators will do a round of the representatives present to establish if agreement has been reached.
2. It will begin by articulating the decision - “We have agreed to...”
3. Silence is not to be presumed, as ‘agreement,’ so must be conscience of getting verbal agreement in doing the round of all representatives present.

If consensus/agreement cannot be reached:

1. Negotiate – have further discussions/consideration of the varying views
2. Following this further discussion, poll the representatives again to see if an agreement can be reached.

If consensus/agreement still cannot be reached:

- I. **If the decision can be tabled**, table it until the next meeting and efforts can be made for gathering more information on the varying views to help with the decision at the next meeting – if at the next meeting, a decision can still not be reached, then look at alternative ways to resolve – e.g. outside facilitation, mediation, etc.
- II. **If the decision cannot be tabled**, the decision goes to a vote of the representatives present. 75% of the attending representatives are required to carry the vote.

Note: Should a decision be moved to the next meeting, and some of the representatives or their alternates cannot attend (either in person or by video conferencing), they can send their input to the Co-Chairs electronically to be tabled on their behalf during the discussions at the next meeting. However, those absent from the meeting, cannot “block” a vote conducted among the representatives at the meeting when the vote is taken to establish a decision.

Appendix II: Other Provincial Measures

Other jurisdictions in Canada are also addressing poverty through a variety of measures. As in Nova Scotia's case, jurisdictions are also finding that low-income individuals with no children are often facing the most difficulty. Alberta has extended their Adult Health Benefit (AAHB) to singles and childless couples. Now all Albertans who leave Income Support due to employment income are eligible for the AAHBⁱⁱ. Alberta has also created The Families First Edmonton community-based research project to generate information, in an Alberta context, as to whether delivering health, family support and recreation services in a coordinated way can lead to better outcomes for low income familiesⁱⁱⁱ.

In Manitoba, a four-year plan *Rewarding Work - Gateway to Opportunities* began implementation in 2007. The plan is designed to help low-income working families and Manitobans move from welfare to work. In 2003, Manitoba had one of the highest incidents of poverty in Canada^{iv} and the government is now focusing its efforts on enhancing employability, easing the transition to employment and providing support for employment retention^v. Measures include introduction of a Manitoba Child Benefit, reduced child care fees for low-income families, introduction of an employment stipend of up to \$1,200 per year to cover work clothing and transportation, and for persons with disabilities in receipt of income assistance an increase of \$300 per year in income assistance and a doubling of the cash asset exemptions^{vi}.

New Brunswick has created a Youth at Risk Unit to coordinate regionally-based services including: a new Youth at Risk Income Supplement Program; a reduction of the barriers to eligibility for social services payments to youth identified to be at risk; development of a youth homelessness strategy; and examination of best practice options for alternative learning environments. In 2008 New Brunswick introduced a tuition freeze to enable the province's four universities to freeze fees.

Appendix III: Poverty Measures

- Unlike the United States and some other countries, Canada has no official, government-mandated poverty line. It is generally agreed that poverty refers to the intersection of low-income and other dimensions of 'social exclusion', including things such as access to adequate housing, essential goods and services, health and well-being and community participation.
- A major challenge to defining poverty measures is to ensure that they allow for reliable estimates, consistent trending, and measurement of the duration and depth of poverty. In Canada, there is no consensus on the most accurate way of measuring poverty; however, while the magnitude of poverty may vary depending on the measure used, research suggests that the differences are not pronounced and trends remain consistent.
<http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/75F0002MIE/75F0002MIE2004011.pdf>
- Three measures frequently mentioned in poverty literature include:
 - ***The Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO)***
Produced by Statistics Canada on a yearly basis, the LICO represents the income level at which a family may be in straitened circumstances because it has to spend a greater proportion of its income on necessities than the average family of similar size. There are separate cut-offs for seven sizes of family – from unattached individuals to families of seven or more persons – and for five community sizes – from rural areas to urban areas with a population of more than 500,000. The LICO is presented both before- and after-tax.
<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/75-202-XIE/2006000/technote1.htm>
 - ***Low-Income Measure (LIM)***
For the purpose of making international comparisons, the LIM is the most commonly used low income measure. It explicitly defines low income as being much worse off than average, and it is calculated at one-half the median income of an equivalent household.
 - ***Market-Basket Measure (MBM)***
This measure attempts to calculate the amount of income needed by a household to meet its needs, defined not just in bare subsistence terms, but also in terms of what is needed to approach "creditable" community norms. Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) views the MBM as falling somewhere between a subsistence standard of living and a more generous social inclusion basket.

- There are pros and cons associated with each of these measures. See the following link for a discussion:
<http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2001/povertyp.htm>

Appendix IV: Glossary of Terms

The following terms are defined in relation to how they are used in this report. It is recognized that other definitions may exist from different perspectives or relevant to other circumstances.

‘Big Box’ Child Care – Childcare being provided by large multi-national companies directed by corporate boards and shareholders’ interests.

Core Housing Need - Acceptable housing is defined as adequate and suitable shelter that can be obtained without spending 30 per cent or more of before-tax household income. Adequate shelter is housing that is not in need of major repair. Suitable shelter is housing that is not crowded, meaning that it has sufficient bedrooms for the size and make-up of the occupying household. The subset of households classified as unable to access acceptable housing is considered to be in core housing need.²⁸

Determinants of Health, the Population Health Approach – The Population Health Approach measures and analyzes the full range of factors – commonly referred to as the ‘determinants of health’ – and their interactions that influence and contribute to the state of health and well-being of a population or individuals.

These are factors such as, income and social status, social support network, education, health services, employment and working conditions, physical environment, biology and genetic endowment, personal health practices and coping skills and child health and development.

Disability Supports – We define a disability support as any good, service or environmental adaptation that assists persons with disabilities to overcome limitations in carrying out activities of daily living and in participating in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the community.

²⁸ Source: CMHC (census-based housing indicators and data)

Feminist Analysis - Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, or philosophical ground. Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression and patriarchy (system of male authority).²⁹ More simply put, feminist analysis critically examines all policy to ensure social, political and economic rights for women are equal to men. This means examining policy to see the effect on women.

Food Insecurity – For the purposes of this report, it means that people living in poverty do not have adequate resources to purchase the food they need to maintain good nutrition and health.

Food Security – This means different things to different people. For the purposes of this report it means being able to get all the healthy food you need to enjoy it with friends, family and your community.

Gender-Based Analysis (GBA) – GBA is a tool to assist in systematically integrating gender considerations into the policy, planning and decision-making processes. It corresponds to a broader understanding of gender equality using various competencies and skills to involve both women and men in building society and preparing for the future.³⁰

Government Departments - Government departments, when used, is meant to include relevant government agencies, boards and commissions in taking coordinated action and responsibility.

Governments – Governments means all levels of government – Federal, Provincial/Territorial, Municipal and First Nations. We use plural at times in the report to indicate that it is more than one level of government required to take action.

²⁹ **References**

1. Gilligan, Carol, 'In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and Morality' in *Harvard Educational Review* (1977)
2. Chodorow, Nancy J., *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (Yale University Press: 1989, 1991)
3. Lerman, Hannah, *Feminist Ethics in Psychotherapy* (Springer Publishing Company, 1990) ISBN 9780826162908

³⁰ An Integrated Approach to Gender-based Analysis - 2004 Edition, GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS DIRECTORATE, Status of Women Canada

Measurable – Established benchmarks that reflect individual, family and community realities to demonstrate the ‘actual’ alleviation, reduction and prevention of poverty – this means both the incidence and depth of poverty.

Participatory Research – Research findings/outputs based on ‘real-life’ circumstance and impacts of poverty, as provided by those ‘most impacted’ by public policies and the resulting programs and services at the local community level.

Self-determination –A term used to describe an individual’s freedom to choose and take action.

Transportation disadvantaged: - Individuals having limited access to transit or who cannot use an automobile due to either economic, social or physical constraints; this includes people who cannot afford to own a private vehicle as well as those who are unable to operate such a vehicle.

Well-being - Well-being is seen as both an ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ responsibility and ability. It means that all in our province require a safe environment that supports health, spirituality and security.

Appendix V: March 2008 Survey

The survey results are available at
http://gov.ns.ca/coms/specials/poverty/documents/Report_on_Poverty_Survey.pdf