

Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy: Break the Cycle of Poverty

A Submission from the Halton Poverty Roundtable

Re: Review of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy

October 2013



Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy: Break the Cycle of Poverty

It has been five years since Ontario launched its first Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2008. As the Province develops its 2014-2018 Poverty Reduction Strategy; it is seeking public input on priorities and policy options with which to shape the Strategy.

About the Halton Poverty Roundtable

As a community builder, the Halton Poverty Roundtable (HPRT) continues to focus its efforts to convene, engage, educate and act as a catalyst for systemic change and social inclusion in three over-arching areas:

- Housing, with priority focus on affordability and accessibility;
- Income Security, with priority consideration to long-term stability through livable incomes, training and education, and opportunities for engagement by overcoming barriers, e.g. discrimination, lack of access to childcare and disability services.
- Healthy Families, with priority consideration to food, recreation, education, and transit;

HPRT Recommendations

Housing

- Ensure a sufficient supply of adequate, secure and affordable housing,
- Offer a housing benefit for low income households contingent on local housing costs.

Income Security

- Raise the minimum wage to 10% above the Low Income Measure so that a full time, full year worker does not live in poverty.
- Immediately raise the base rate of social assistance by \$100 a month.
- Implement a strategy to raise social assistance rates to a level that brings all recipients out of deep poverty (i.e. above 80% of the Ontario Low Income Measure).
- Do not merge Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program, as this will disadvantage ODSP recipients.
- Understand the reality that not everyone, however willing to work, is able to work in the current labor market conditions.

Healthy Families

- Build financial literacy to help those living in poverty to empower themselves to leverage existing resources to break the cycle of poverty.
- Support greater transit accessibility, recognizing the impact that immobility has on social exclusion for those living in poverty.
- Support place based initiatives to increase food security for the community's most vulnerable.

Closing Comments

We hope that the Provincial Government will now act decisively to ensure that our social assistance program provides an adequate income for a healthy quality of life. We do not need another consultation to know that our current system is inadequate, Research shows us that our inadequate response to reducing poverty has not only a huge personal, emotional and health cost to those living in poverty, but that the result of this response is a significant social cost. These costs include increased health care costs, increased security costs, lost productivity and lost tax revenues from under employment and child poverty.

In 1971 Senator David Croll said “We are pouring billions of dollars into a social welfare system that merely treats the symptoms of poverty, but leaves the disease untouched.” That system that he spoke about in 1971 is relatively unchanged today. The current system is in need of deep innovation to see different results. So, we ask the Provincial Government to encourage the Federal Government to work with all stakeholders (business, not for profit, all levels of government, faith groups, lived experience and communities) to develop a national housing strategy and to consider developing a national approach to poverty reduction.

Along with many community organizations, we hope that the government remembers that poverty is a systemic issue and will persist regardless of any individual’s behavior, attitudes or choices – unless together we make systemic societal changes.

The Halton Poverty Roundtable is one of a growing number of community collaborative organizations dedicated to poverty reduction across the province and the country. We want to thank the Provincial Government for considering our input and for the recent meetings with the Deputy Ministers. We understand the current fiscal constraints, and we support your decisive actions to achieve the goal of a meaningful poverty reduction strategy. We look forward to continuing to work with you towards that end.

Halton Poverty Roundtable