



## **Halton Poverty Roundtable: Report Back on the Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultation**

Wednesday, April 26th, 2017 from 1pm – 3pm  
Open Doors - St. Christopher's  
662 Guelph Line  
Burlington, Ontario L7R 3M8



Attention: Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6  
Canada

**Re: Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultation**

On Wednesday, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017 from 1pm – 3pm, the Halton Poverty Roundtable (HPRT), with support from the Tamarack Institute, and through partnership with Open – Doors at St. Christopher’s Anglican Church in Burlington, scheduled and successfully hosted a community consultation to provide input on the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy currently in development.

Here is a link to the flyer that was developed:

<http://haltonpovertyroundtable.com/?p=2264>

The event was promoted through a series of HPRT email blasts, and with the support of partners who shared the flyer across their respective email networks. The event was also promoted via the participation of HPRT volunteers at two local community dinners, where we were welcomed to a group of over 150 diners (both evenings) to speak about the upcoming consultation, and to share a host of materials supporting the conversation (i.e. our flyer, the two pager that the Federal Government prepared, and a copy of the 8 questions being explored through the consultation). At both of these dinners, we also received completed surveys from diners who wished to make their submissions in the moment.

40 people participated in the consultation in total (representing citizens with the lived experience of poverty, community organizations staff, media representatives, medical professionals, and concerned citizens, academics, etc.). Each table of approximately seven participants completed one survey as a group.



With respect to government representation, the following representatives were in attendance:

- MP and Minister of Democratic Institutions, Karina Gould were in attendance, and we also had representation from
- Nancy Buchan-Terrell, Oakville MP John Oliver's office
- Samantha Lash, Halton MPP Indira Naidoo-Harris's office.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leena Sharma".

Leena Sharma Seth, Director of Community Engagement



**Conversation host(s):** Halton Poverty Roundtable

**Date of conversation:** Wednesday April 26, 2017 from 1pm – 3pm

**Location:** Open Doors – St. Christopher’s 662 Guelph Line, Burlington, Ontario L7R 3M8

**Total number of participants:** 40 participated (6 tables of approximately 7 participants each)

**# of Surveys Completed:** 18

**General description of participants:** 32 female participants, 8 male participants

### **Conversation Findings: What we Heard**

#### **Direct Quotes**

- When responding to Question 2, one female (aged 32 years old) envisioned Poverty Reduction Strategy success as follows: *“Families won’t have to utilize free programs out of need, but rather out of community involvement”*; *“kids won’t require aids to participate in fieldtrips and extra-curricular programs and parents won’t have to plan meals based on cost rather than nutrition.”*
- In response to the question, ***On which groups should we focus our efforts***, this same 32 year old female said: *“All. Poverty does not discriminate.”*

#### **Top Responses to Discussion Questions**

Out of the 18 people who submitted responses to the 8 sets discussion questions, 17 responded to the first set: ***How do you define poverty? How should it be measured? Are there data gaps that need to be addressed to help improve our understanding of poverty in Canada?*** A common theme here is that “poverty is [more than] not having the [certainty] of what you need to exist” (e.g. food, water, shelter, clothing); it’s also about quality of life. One respondent summarized this point by stating, it’s about “the ability to LIVE, not just survive,” which, following respondents’ insights, requires one to have access to healthcare, education, and full-time jobs that match that education, as well to have the ability to purchase and participate in local community services by choice rather than out of necessity. Another common theme here is that poverty is relative; it differs from person to person, from locale to locale, and even over the span of an individual’s life and therefore, all these factors must be considered when understanding, defining, and measuring poverty.



16 of the 18 respondents provided insights into the second set of questions: ***What will success look like in a Poverty Reduction Strategy? What target(s) should we pick to measure progress?*** Access to stable shelter, employment, income, and healthcare emerge as important here, with 14/16 respondents referring to at least one of these as indicators of success. One respondent brings all these factors together by describing success as “more people working fulltime [with a] medical plan [and] affordable housing [and] guaranteed income.” Building on the responses to the first set of questions, another respondent maintained that this means that our progress measures “have to be multi-dimensional [and must include] a government database where not-for-profits and community organizations can report on how frequently people access services related to poverty” (5).

9 people responded to the question ***which indicators should we use to track progress towards the target(s)***. The main themes here are a reduction in people’s need for financial and social assistance and an increase in – as one respondent stated it – the “level of public awareness that poverty is REAL in Canada.” Other responses included: health of children; level of happiness and satisfaction; and monitoring access to shelters and related wait times and use of funding.

12 out of 18 people responded to the fourth set of questions: ***On which groups should we focus our efforts? Which dimensions of poverty should be prioritized?*** Most people listed historically marginalized groups: youth, single parents, seniors, First Nations and Indigenous groups, people with disabilities, refugees, immigrants, and homeless populations were the most repeated responses. Two respondents stated that all groups should be a focus because, as one person stated, “poverty does not discriminate.” Two other respondents focused on the delivery end of the issue, suggesting a need for more efforts to be directed at ensuring service providers are respectful, effective, and transparent.

Of the 9 responses to the questions, ***Which Government of Canada programs and policies do you feel are effective at reducing poverty? Are there programs and policies that can be improved? What else could we do?***, some respondents simply listed programs/policies, thereby making it difficult to determine if they were meant as effective or in need of improvement. Of the programs/policies explicitly deemed as effective, the most common was Child Tax Benefits (4 respondents) and of the programs/policies explicitly deemed as effective, the most common was access to



affordable housing (2 respondents). Three other respondents noted that improvements can be made to all programs aimed at reducing poverty; as one person put it: “if they were effective, we wouldn’t be here.”

Of the 10 responses to the question, ***How can the Government of Canada align its Poverty Reduction Strategy so that it supports existing efforts by provinces, territories, municipalities, and communities?***, the most common theme (5 responses) was related to the ideas of cooperation so that processes can be standardized and information can be easily measured shared amongst and between all levels. Interestingly, while one person suggested a need to “get people jobs, [and] not keep asking for volunteers,” another suggested that to get support for existing efforts, the Government might provide free education to people who provide a certain amount of volunteer hours in shelters or with other poverty-related programs.

Question 7 reads: ***What are some initiatives/innovations in Canada or elsewhere that other governments, community organizations, academia, or businesses have introduced or proposed to effectively reduce poverty?*** Of the 11 responses to this question, some common responses were: evidence-based community hubs (2); family level support and mentorship programs (2); free tuition (2). Other notable responses were about housing (e.g. rent geared to income, Housing First), income (e.g. living wage advocacy, basic income pilot, income splitting) and employment/wages (e.g. creating jobs for disabled).

The final survey question was, ***How can the Government encourage an on-going dialogue with other levels of government, community organizations, academia and businesses on its poverty reduction efforts?*** and we received 8 responses to this question. When grouped together, 6 of these responses point to a need to promote and support multi-stakeholder, cooperative, and transparent dialogue. Suggested avenues include: roundtables, town hall meetings, and schools. Interestingly, one respondent identified children as stakeholders with important insights on this issue.



## **Appendix A: Summary of All Responses**

### ***#1: How do you define poverty? How should it be measured? Are there data gaps that need to be addressed to help improve our understanding of poverty in Canada?***

- Poverty is/can be assessed by “measur[ing] [your] ability to purchase services within your community” and by comparing “costs [of living] versus [people’s] wage” to determine “what is a living wage” in a certain community **(Respondent 2)**
- Poverty is a “lack of sufficient income”; when someone is spending “more than 30% of income on shelter.” Other factors that need to be taken into consideration are “food insecurity [and “lack of healthcare [and] lack of access to healthcare.” All these factors together mean that one is “forced to live a sub-standard existence.” **(Respondent 3)**
- Poverty is not having access to “housing, clean water, enough food, transportation to doctors, transportation to food stores, [or] access to communication (tv, telephone, newspaper) [or] access to education – Charter of Rights!” **(Respondent 4)**
- Poverty can be measured by “income and access to safe housing” and by “the ability to LIVE, not just survive” and one’s “connection to community.” Other factors to take into consideration are “how do we identify ‘hidden poverty’ (when live in a nice house but can’t afford food) **(Respondent 5)**
- Poverty is “having no income, not [being] able to get financial assistance, having to support oneself on credit cards [because] I don’t fall into guidelines” **(Respondent 6)**
- “If a family runs out of money by the end of the month they live in poverty.” Some reasons for this are that “too few fulltime positions exist, most jobs offer only 12-24 hours a week [and] rent is usually double Ontario Works and ODSP” **(Respondent 7)**
- Poverty can be measured by housing and wages; we need “more geared [to income] housing for the homeless people [and] wages should be \$15/hour” **(Respondent 8)**
- “Poverty is not having the [certainty] of what you need to exist ex. Proper food, shelter and clothing. Each situation is different. You need to measure by needs and how much the economy goes up and down. Measure that to the standard of living and [over time so that we know that someone has] enough to survive from existence until [they] are deceased. To have proper understanding of situation you need to be in their shoes [and] share the wealth evenly” **(Respondent 9)**
- Poverty is having “trouble paying bills” and this can be addressed by “lower[ing] the rent [and] rais[ing] minimum wage” **(Respondent 10)**
- Poverty is “people without homes and food” **(Respondent 11)**
- Poverty is a “lack of sufficient income[,] be[ing] forced to live a sub-standard existence[,] lack of access to medical/pharma[care and] no jobs to match your education level” **(Respondent 12)**
- “Poverty is: no clean water, not enough food, and living in pollution” **(Respondent 13)**
- Poverty is “being in a state of inadequate resources for healthy living” and it should be “measured according to geography, the basic income needed in that locale [and] access to services and adequate services [should also be] part of the measuring” **(Respondent 14)**



- Poverty is “a state of being where you have nothing (having enough to get by versus not having enough) [and] having to decide between food and hydro, food and rent, eating versus feeding kids” [and/or] relying on food charity” **(Respondent 15)**
- If someone is just surviving, not living (i.e. does not have safe housing, is using food banks, and cannot afford medicine and proper education) that is poverty. Canadian standards need to be higher; Government needs to take initiatives to understand poverty and improve programs and to address hidden poverty **(Respondent 16)**
- Need to consider: “is poverty linked to any demographic and/or geography and/or ethnicity” factors **(Respondent 17)**
- Poverty is: Inability to have a decent home, work. LICO is a difficult term to define – income means different things to some people. What you need is the ability to participate in the community you live in. Participation should be a choice [we] all can make. Should be able to eat, have shelter and security... poverty in different [across] cities because it has different levels. Therefore, income should be relative [to] needs of community. [When defining poverty] government must take into account the circumstances, number of children and caring for aged parents **(Respondent 18)**





## **#2: What will success look like in a Poverty Reduction Strategy? What target(s) should we pick to measure progress?**

- Everybody has a safe and stable place to store their belongings/housing with rent-gearred-to-income so that they are not spending more than 30% of income on housing [and we have] happy and healthy citizens [when] expenses do down in healthcare **(Respondent 1)**
- Success = High employment rates in sustainable full-time employment. Measure success by income (\$) and homeless reduction **(Respondent 2)**
- Success = Communities valuing human beings and valuing people before money. Measure success by prevention in health care **(Respondent 3)**
- “The most important aspect in housing!” **(Respondent 4)**
- “Measures have to be multi-dimensional [and must include] a government database where not-for-profits and community organizations can report on how frequently people access services related to poverty” **(Respondent 5)**
- Success = “Financial Equality” **(Respondent 6)**
- Success = “Families won’t have to utilize free programs out of need, but rather out of community involvement”; “kids won’t require aids to participate in fieldtrips and extra-curricular programs and parents won’t have to plan meals based on cost rather than nutrition” **(Respondent 7)**
- Success = “More people will be in homes [with] ‘better’ housing situations; a raise in minimum wage” and as for target, we “should put more money towards Canadians [rather] than send [it] to other countries.” “Take care of our own.” **(Respondent 9)**
- Success = “Less rent so people will afford it and enjoy it” and as a target, we should “give gift cards for stores instead of food banks [to support] open market [where] people to pick what they want” **(Respondent 10)**
- Success = “Provide more housing [and] more services for people with developmental disabilities [and] create jobs and coaching [and] people shouldn’t have to pay for medication” **(Respondent 11)**
- Success = “Increased income [and] decrease in health care costs [and] increase in hopefulness [and] decrease in helplessness” and this can be measured by “low mental health relapse rate” **(Respondent 12)**
- Success = “A job for everybody [and]no more minimum wage [below] Halton living wage [which is] \$17.50 [because] nobody can live on \$12.50” **(Respondent 13)**
- “Medical costs will go down in people can afford healthy food and good living conditions and basic necessities needed to live comfortably [and there will be] more contributions to society if people are happier and healthier [so there is an] economic benefit – if people have money, they will spend and boost the economy. [Therefore we need to have] housing geared to only 30% of income – no matter what situation you are in.” **(Respondent 15)**
- Success = “more people working fulltime [with a] medical plan [and] affordable housing [and] guaranteed income [and this can be measured by a] basic income pilot” **(Respondent 16)**



- In terms of targets/measuring, the “Government [should] define every level [because] it’s government’s role and responsibility to eliminate crossover [and therefore we must] have standard strategies and metrics and objectives at all levels of government. [We also] need definition of poverty in Charter” **(Respondent 17)**
- In terms of measures, these should be targets:
  - Homelessness
  - However having a place with no money is not the answer – example of new development in Brampton
  - Income level - % of shelter and other expenses
  - How to value shelter and living costs, utility costs, food, which need to be taken into account
  - Can necessities be met at all? Special needs changes pictures
  - Services you can access – transportation, education, recreation etc. Very complicated! @
  - Degrees of needs – healthy food vs. junk food
  - Need to identify for each community and score accordingly **(Respondent 18)**



### **#3: Which indicators should we use to track progress towards the target(s)?**

- Credit card debts, for the unemployed who have no financial assistance (**Respondent 6**)
- Tax returns; number of OW and ODSP recipients; food bank users; free program utilizers; surveys; homeless shelters; school surveys (**Respondent 7**)
- Less need for social assistance (**Respondent 10**)
- More money (**Respondent 11**)
- Health of children; level of happiness and satisfaction; level of public awareness that poverty is REAL in Canada (**Respondent 12**)
- When you can save money from income (**Respondent 13**)
- Monitor programs; assess all of the info into a data base; find out if numbers are increasing or reducing. Keep doors open to programs that assist people living with disabilities. Where did the funding go? Communities need to work together to help and be voice for those who can't speak. No cut backs for people receiving disability that are working at small jobs to better themselves (**Respondent 16**)
- Public awareness metrics (**Respondent 17**)
- Possible indicators to use to track progress:
- Homelessness fundamental and the food
- Access to services and wait times for example: housing, food, healthcare.
- Should be handled immediately with a long term solution available
- What can government do?  
Remove hiring impediments CPP EI Insurance which are onerous
- Provide incentives and tax breaks to hire people.
- Small business drive economy and find little to help them train people not just for the short term but to keep them.
- Improve credential certification processes. Too many able people not using their skills and knowledge
- Employer supports - training often not relevant define and then invest in Canada's needs
- Measurable Outcomes
  - # above poverty line (defined)
  - # Living wage employment
  - Employment levels of graduates in their field
- Living wage – good guide Region wide (**Respondent 18**)



#### **#4: On which groups should we focus our efforts? Which dimensions of poverty should be prioritized?**

- Youth, lone mothers, seniors, racialized and immigrants [people with] disability, [and] indigenous **(Respondent 2)**
- First Nations, seniors, disabled, low income workers, single mothers, refugees, newcomers, single males, single fathers, family caregivers of older adults **(Respondent 3)**
- Youth, children, homeless, seniors, newcomers, First Nations → this will have to be a ten year plan with a phased roll out to different groups **(Respondent 5)**
- All groups **(Respondent 6)**
- All. Poverty does not discriminate **(Respondent 7)**
- Family groups. Homeless **(Respondent 10)**
- [People with] mental illness. Families **(Respondent 11)**
- First Nations. Children. Seniors. Single Parents. Single adults. **(Respondent 12)**
- The people that are marginalized. Handicapped that are not hired. Every company has to hire two disabled. **(Respondent 13)**
- Affordable housing servers – means testing should be done with total respect, ensuring dignity of participants [and also need] processes to access what's available – community resources made known, information shared. **(Respondent 14)**
- Create a matrix to define available programs/eligibility/process **(Respondent 17)**
- Groups to focus on
  - Youth, indigenous people, racial minorities, seniors, lone parents, disabled.
  - Seniors lack support and means
  - Immigrants poorly served - do not need to be impoverished. That is preventable
  - Lone parents childcare provides ability to work. Re-evaluate programs
  - Child care for all would enable people to work and reduce poverty
  - Gender component too, women trained for low paying jobs. Liveable income should be the goal
  - OW is a trap that robs people of self esteem
  - One-stop offices – to be more effective with workers time.
  - Silos of funding and lack of cooperation amongst different departments
  - Centralizing more programs would also improve data collection for long term results **(Respondent 18)**



**#5: Which Government of Canada programs and policies do you feel are effective at reducing poverty? Are there programs and policies that can be improved? What else could we do?**

- [Cannot read] Simplify the process **(Respondent 4)**
- Child tax benefit. Free education for low income families **(Respondent 5)**
- Education: all programs can be improved **(Respondent 6)**
- Work programs → free fast track education programs in high demand fields: ece, mechanic, teachers license **(Respondent 7)**
- Housing: takes a long time to get into unless you come straight from shelter. [Should have] less wait time. If someone needs to upgrade, its easy; if they're under-housed they're on it **(Respondent 10)**
- By the time they implement a new program, years are over **(Respondent 13)**
- Canada Child Benefit; improvements needed to affordable housing; living wage/guaranteed annual income **(Respondent 14)**
- If they were effective, we wouldn't be here. A national childcare strategy [is one that needs improvement]. What to do: "alignment between all levels of government; only one access point for all government benefits [and] stop claw backs when people get jobs" **(Respondent 15)**
- Child tax credit – basic income – free education for low income families – living wage **(Respondent 16)**
- Which current policies are effective?
- Safety net, Health care,
- Old age pensions
- Child allowance
- Student loans
- Universal child tax
- CLB
- Wage subsidy for low wages
- Family care for terminal diseases also care for the care-givers
- Second career training assistance **(Respondent 18)**



**#6: Which Government of Canada programs and policies do you feel are effective at reducing poverty? Are there programs and policies that can be improved? What else could we do?**

- Canada Child. 300, 000 [unreadable] are needed of money. Housing is needed! If a roof is over the head for mother and child is important! **(Respondent 4)**
- Memorandums of understanding with the national government and provincial, territory, and municipal governments as well as communities **(Respondent 5)**
- Don't know **(Respondent 6)**
- Work in a circle. Offer free education for x amount of volunteer hours in shelters/programs to reduce costs so money can go back **(Respondent 7)**
- Put more money in this cause. Get people jobs, not keep asking for volunteers **(Respondent 9)**
- Increases to OW, ODSP, CPPD, seniors' pensions. Affordable rent/rent to income. Daycare/childcare **(Respondent 12)**
- Impose a law for all walks to help in the same way **(Respondent 13)**
- So that they can become independent. Having to cash out savings and investments in order to apply for government benefits. OW/ODSP – owing money upon reassessment and having to pat from minimal amount of income **(Respondent 15)**
- Positive and measurable successful incomes **(Respondent 16)**
- Create a matrix to define available programs/eligibility/process **(Respondent 17)**
  - How to align Strategy to support existing efforts?
  - Streamline the processes and make information more accessible
  - Funding is scattered
  - Housing is the most important
  - Need a food strategy – food is too cheap because of industrial farming. Cheap food also leads to obesity. We spend less than other countries on food.
  - We need education on diet requirements, eating locally grown foods to cut transportation costs' encouraged to grow our own food
  - People are misinformed about topics like GMO **(Respondent 18)**



**#7: What are some initiatives/innovations in Canada or elsewhere that other governments, community organizations, academia, or businesses have introduced or proposed to effectively reduce poverty?**

- Rent geared to income (30%) **(Respondent 1)**
- Evidence based outcome community hubs **(Respondent 2)**
- Family level peer support and mentorship (host family model) → long-term governmental impact → help with navigating services and providing social supports **(Respondent 5)**
- Not sure **(Respondent 6)**
- Not sure. Free education is a fantastic place to start. The issue now is the limitations on free tuition. My family makes just too much for us to qualify but we have to rely on free services because we are low income **(Respondent 7)**
- Have more groups “like United Way” – have churches have food banks, stores, and other parts of our community help out **(Respondent 9)**
- Create employment for the disabled **(Respondent 13)**
- Hamilton – living wage advocacy, “Do the Math” **(Respondent 14)**
- Housing First. Leap. Basic income pilot. Halton Sport Leadership. Canada Learning Bond. OSAP free tuition program. Hydro-Ontario Electrical Support Program **(Respondent 15)**
- Mass support system for families in poverty re: mental health, role models and offer counselling for trauma **(Respondent 16)**
- What initiatives/innovations have effectively reduced poverty?
  - Community hubs,
  - Evidence-based research,
  - Measuring success differently
  - OW
  - Lived experience valued
  - Financial literacy, cooking courses,
  - Canadian nutrition plan,
  - Simple mechanical skills, living skills
  - Resilience for all
  - Change mat leave to more than 1 year and employer to top up.
  - Paternal leave not equitable,
  - Self-employment has different rules
  - Mat leave makes family stronger
  - Averaging incomes
  - Income splitting **(Respondent 18)**



**#8: How can the Government encourage an on-going dialogue with other levels of government, community organizations, academia and businesses on its poverty reduction efforts?**

- Stop having consultations **(Respondent 1)**
- Transparency → Who does what? What's the criteria? How do you access finders? **(Respondent 2)**
- Round tables very effective – town hall meeting – focus group discussions – brainstorming sessions **(Respondent 5)**
- ? **(Respondent 6)**
- Open communication and publicity? → also get schools involved as children love to help and their opinions are simple, pure, and relatively effective! **(Respondent 7)**
- Have more meetings, gatherings in government – have the people join in on meeting **(Respondent 9)**
- Local, provincial, federal, NGO, research university level **(Respondent 12)**
- Hire disabled employees **(Respondent 13)**