

Campaign 2000 E-Bulletin April 2009



END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY IN CANADA

Momentum on Poverty Reduction Grows: Donate Today and Help Us Continue Our Work

Campaign 2000 continues its work with its partners to convince governments that effective poverty reduction is part of economic stimulus and recovery. As Canada enters this period of economic insecurity, it is even more crucial that public policies focus on vulnerable individuals, families and communities.

As we approach twenty years since the November 1989 resolution to end child poverty in Canada, the good news is that more and more provincial governments have recognized the importance of having a poverty reduction strategy. Some have developed and implemented concrete plans. In both Quebec and Newfoundland & Labrador, the child and family poverty rate continues to go down.

At the federal level, the House of Commons recently voted unanimously to urge G8 and G20 leaders to make reducing poverty a priority in their economic stimulus plans considered at their April meeting, and the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (the *HUMA Committee*) is conducting public hearings on the study of the federal role for combating poverty in Canada. With our partners we're urging the federal government to develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy for Canada that's long overdue.

We're beginning to make some progress, and your on-going support is particularly crucial now. Send your donation cheque payable to Campaign 2000, at c/o Family Service Toronto, 355 Church Street, Toronto, ON M5B 1Z8 or donate online through Canada Helps at www.campaign2000.ca Thank you for your support!

National Update

Women and Children last: No thank you, Mr. Flaherty!

Campaign 2000 responded swiftly to the landmark federal budget (January 27, 2009) that included billions of dollars of spending and wrong-headed tax cuts but offered little for our most vulnerable families – especially the 760,000 low income children and their mothers – who feel the double burden of job loss at the workplace and at home. With only minor adjustments but no increases to the child benefit, no change to Employment Insurance eligibility or rates, and no spending on early childhood education and care services, the budget left women and children off the lifeboat in this recession. To read our full media release, please click here:

<http://www.campaign2000.ca/C2000%20responds%20to%20fed%20budget%202009.pdf>

On the Hill and beyond: Parliamentarians seek your opinion

In March, the HUMA Committee has resumed its study of the federal role in poverty reduction/eradication, building on its earlier work in 2008. The Committee heard evidence from Newfoundland & Labrador, Ireland and the United Kingdom regarding measurement of poverty and poverty plans. (For a summary of the evidence, contact Liyu Guo at liyugu@familyservicetoronto.org.) Most recently, phase two had presentations from HRSDC, Quebec and Ontario.

The third phase, in which organizations & individuals can present to the committee, recently began in Ottawa. The Committee is expected to travel but details of where and when are expected the week of April 20.

If you or your organization has not already done so but would like to try to appear as a witness before the Committee, contact the Clerk of the Committee by email or fax (name and contact information below). It is important that you indicate why you want to present.

Christine Holke David, Clerk of the HUMA Committee, *E-mail:* HUMA@parl.gc.ca; *Fax:* 613-996-1626;
Tel: 613-996-1542

Time to Fix EI: sign the petition and circulate it widely

Campaign 2000 and its national labour partners, believe that our Employment Insurance program must protect workers in tough times as we are experiencing now. With massive job losses totaling 61,300 in the month of March and a rise in the national unemployment rate to 8%, the federal government must be called to action to help Canadians who are struggling with job loss and inadequate access to EI. Without EI, many will have to turn to social assistance.

We urge the federal government to immediately fix EI program, including raising benefits to 60% of earnings calculated on a worker's best 12 weeks, increasing the period for which benefits can be collected to a maximum of 50 weeks, supporting incomes by raising minimum wages and tax credits for low-income workers, expanding eligibility criteria for unemployed workers, and investing part of the EI surplus on better training.

To take action, just click on this link <http://goodjobscoalition.ca/images/stories/eipetition.doc> and download a copy of the *Fix EI petition*. We encourage you to gather a minimum of 25 signatures in your riding and present it to your MP. By law, s/he will be required to read it in the House of Commons.

Write to Voice Your Opinion on poverty reduction and homelessness

The Subcommittee on Cities of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology is preparing its final report on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness to be released in September and wants to hear your preference for the options outlined in its June 2008 report

You may recall the extensive range of options to reduce poverty and homelessness and proposals for housing in the Subcommittee's June 2008 report. It is entitled *Poverty, Housing and Homelessness: Issues and Options – Final Report of the Subcommittee on Cities of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology*. Click here for full report: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/soci-e/rep-e/repfinaljun08-e.pdf> Campaign 2000's recommendations were outlined in detail in this Senate Report (see *Appendix III: Proposals for a National Poverty Reduction Strategy*, pp. 76-77).

The Sub-Committee is preparing its final report and people are strongly encouraged to write and recommend their preferred options. We suggest you send a letter to the Committee c/o echenh@parl.gc.ca. It would be great if you copied us on the letter at: liyugu@familyservicetoronto.org.

Momentum on Poverty Reduction Grows

Nova Scotia released Poverty Reduction Strategy on April 3rd

Following extensive work by the Poverty Reduction Committee composed of community and government representatives (including Campaign 2000 partner Paul O'Hara of North End Community Health Centre), the government of Nova Scotia became the fourth province to adopt a poverty reduction strategy. (<http://www.gov.ns.ca/govi/povertystrategy/>). The strategy provides a framework for addressing the needs of those most vulnerable and those at risk of falling into poverty, while promoting the prosperity necessary for Nova Scotia to grow, according to the official announcement.

Does this announcement include the key elements of a poverty reduction strategy as identified by Campaign 2000, National Council of Welfare and others?

- Targets and timelines; C2000 calls for a minimum 25% reduction in child & family poverty over 5 years, and 50% reduction over 10 years;
- Indicators for measuring and tracking progress in key policy areas such as income security, good jobs, early childhood education & care services, affordable housing;
- A coordinated, multi-year action plan across government departments with budget allocations;
- Annual monitoring and evaluation to ensure accountability.

The Community Coalition to End Poverty in Nova Scotia (CCEP – NS) co-chair Paul O'Hara described the announcement as “a small start in reducing poverty across the province”. He expressed support for the establishment of a “coordinated, collaborative, government-wide framework”, the appointment of a provincial coordinator, and the funds for housing. At the same time, CCEP – NS added that the government’s strategy “lacks focus” on those most in need and at higher risk. CCEP – NS called for substantive and strategic investment immediately to help those in need now, and in the future.

Newfoundland and Labrador continues to implement its Poverty Reduction Strategy with the goal of moving from a province with the most poverty to one with the least over a ten year period. The strategy includes initiatives and programs which target the groups most vulnerable to poverty. Budget 2009 increased the ongoing annual investment in new initiatives to prevent, reduce and alleviate poverty to 132 million dollars. New initiatives include a significant additional funding to increase foster care rates, funding to remove disincentives and barriers to work, increases to child care subsidy rates and new spending on homelessness and housing including energy retrofit.

Newfoundland and Labrador will host a symposium (either late spring or in the autumn) through the Council of the Federation on best practices on Labour Market Policies including Poverty Reduction.

New Brunswick has just finished a series of 17 Dialogue Sessions across the province in its first phase of developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy. New Brunswickers can expect to see a “What Was Said Report” which will also be presented to those who participate in the 2nd phase, the Round Table Sessions to be conducted in fall 2009. The participants will review the final “What Was Said” Report, engage in a debate on the issues and identify options for taking action on how to reduce poverty. A Poverty Reduction Options document will be produced and presented to the participants of Phase III – The Final Forum. The Final Forum is scheduled to be conducted in late November 2009; the participants will be engaged in a one and a half day session to debate the Poverty Reduction Options document, agree on which options should be undertaken to reduce poverty, determine how to implement the actions and decide how the plan will be monitored. It will be fascinating to see what approach to poverty reduction is developed through this process with opportunities for public input at various stages. We look forward to a New Brunswick Poverty Reduction Plan by November 2009.

Québec to begin ‘War on Poverty II’ with broad consultations

Status Report on Québec’s Family Policy, which accompanied the March provincial budget, documents key policies to support families and facilitate poverty reduction <http://www.budget.finances.gouv.qc.ca/Budget/2009-2010/en/documents/pdf/FamilyPolicy.pdf>. Québec’s family policy includes financial support for parents, access to affordable child care services and parental leave. This investment of \$10 billion (\$6.5 B provincial and \$3.6 B federal) contributes to poverty reduction. The child assistance and work premium measures established in 2004 -05 are major contributors to the decreasing child and family poverty rate which was 9.4% (2006 LICO after-tax). No major changes are noted in the budget.

In early April, Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity Sam Hamad declared Quebec's second multibillion-dollar war on poverty. "It is the War on Poverty II, which will start with a consultation," he told The Montreal Gazette reporter who was conducting an interview with le Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté, an umbrella organization of anti-poverty groups from across the province, who were at the National Assembly on April 9th for their annual breakfast meeting with MNAs from all parties.

Hamad is proposing a provincial-wide public consultation similar to the Bouchard-Taylor commission on reasonable accommodation of cultural differences. Official announcement will be made on June 15.

Ontario

Following the December '08 announcement of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy with a target to reduce the child poverty rate by 25% within 5 years, the Ontario government introduced Bill 152, Poverty Reduction Act 2009. The proposed poverty reduction legislation calls for all future governments to introduce a poverty reduction strategy with a specific target, and to update the strategy and target at least every 5 years. It calls for annual reports on the strategy and regular public consultation.

Committee hearings will take place in Toronto on April 20 and 21. Anti-poverty advocates will be seeking ways to strengthen Bill 152 such as ensuring that it reflects the goal of a 'poverty free Ontario', that the annual report and 5 year review be tabled in the Legislature, and that the review be undertaken by an independent body.

The March 26 Ontario budget included two recommendations from Ontario Campaign 2000: an increase to the Ontario Child Benefit to a maximum of \$92/child/month effective July 1st, and an investment in construction and retrofit of affordable housing of \$600 million over two years to access federal housing funds. But the budget failed to include any new provincial funding for child care - this puts 22,000 subsidies at risk and directly affects low income families. Social assistance rates will rise by only 2% in 2009 and the budget did not include a \$100 monthly Healthy Food Supplement for adults on social assistance. In Ontario, as in other provinces, the vulnerability of single adults is acute and poverty reduction strategies need to address these needs also.

Ontario Campaign 2000 partners will be focusing efforts in the upcoming months on lobby efforts to secure provincial funding for child care. We will also be encouraging community partners to get involved in the promised provincial review of social assistance, public consultations later this spring to develop an affordable housing strategy, and the \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement campaign.

Manitoba

Manitoba's March budget, with no increases to income assistance and very small investments in affordable housing, "holds an umbrella over the heads of the affluent in Manitoba by providing steady-as-she-goes tax cuts during this economic storm, while the poor are left to shiver in the rain," responded the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, a Campaign 2000 partner. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) Manitoba is developing a poverty reduction plan, to be released in May that will incorporate some of the Make Poverty History Manitoba actions as well as other recommendations from various community groups.

Saskatchewan

Despite a \$425 million dollar surplus, Saskatchewan's March 2009 budget did not adopt a poverty reduction strategy. Announcements included inflationary adjustments to social assistance, increases to shelter rates for income assistance recipients, additional funding for child welfare and capital funding to develop additional child care services. At the same time, there are no rent controls in place; when landlords continually increase rents, many people are left behind in meeting rents despite the "economic boom". Children's advocates will monitor the impact of the shift in funding of public education away from the property tax base to a greater share paid by the province.

At least one candidate in the upcoming NDP leadership race has committed to poverty reduction. Former Minister Deb Higgins committed to reducing poverty and its negative impacts on citizens by implementing a poverty reduction plan, including a target of 25% poverty reduction in the first term. We'll look forward to announcements of other candidates.

Alberta

After consecutive surplus budgets for 14 years, Alberta projected a multi-billion dollar deficit in its 2009-10 budget. As our partner, Edmonton Social Planning Council summarized in its April Fact Sheet, some measures in the budget, such as increases to benefits for the disabled, will benefit low income people. Other measures, including the reductions in funding for affordable housing and support for renters, represent a step backwards. Once again, there is no commitment to a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

Community activism gathers steam in British Columbia

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, a long-time Campaign 2000 partner, commented that the February Budget Speech contained little for children and their parents, at a time when the number of vulnerable children and families is growing and BC's child and family poverty rate has remained the highest in the country for the past five years. Plans for expanded all-day kindergarten were shelved and no commitment was made to a poverty reduction plan. At the same time, community activists from more than 270 organizations and community leaders from across BC have signed an open letter to BC political parties, calling on them to commit – prior to the May election – to a comprehensive poverty reduction plan, with legislated targets and timelines. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – BC released a well-researched poverty reduction plan for BC, and the media has shone a serious light on the issue. Opinion polls show that 87% of British Columbians believe that it's time for political leadership in the province to focus on poverty reduction. We'll watch closely to see what the May election brings.

Meanwhile community activists are very busy holding marches and rallies on homelessness, and the Metro Vancouver and Victoria Living Wage campaigns are gathering steam. A recent report by the provincial Ombudsman, recommending a range of changes to the welfare system to remove access barriers and improve government's accountability, has been largely accepted by government, but only for delayed implementation, due to "extraordinary demands for service at this time."

Campaign 2000's E-Bulletin provides updates on activities to reduce and end child and family poverty in Canada with news and views, political analysis, commentary on party platforms and government action (and/or inaction), and links to the latest research and reports. To unsubscribe from *Campaign 2000's E-Bulletin* at any time, please e-mail us at lijugu@familyservicetoronto.org. Thank you. For more info, please visit www.campaign2000.ca and www.familyservicetoronto.org

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