



End Child & Family Poverty in Canada

April 7, 2011 (Final Revised)

Federal Election 2011: Key Questions to Leaders of All Parties

This letter is being sent to the following federal parties: the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party of Canada, the Green Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada, and the New Democratic Party of Canada.

Background:

Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of more than 120 national, provincial and community organizations united in securing the implementation of both unanimous resolutions of the House of Commons: the 1989 pledge to end child poverty by the year 2000 and the 2009 commitment to develop an immediate plan to end poverty for all in Canada.

The latest data from Statistics Canada indicate that 610,000 children and their families live below the poverty line for a national poverty rate of 9.1% (Low Income Cut Off after tax). The rate is much higher for specific groups: new immigrant families, First-Nation communities and urban Aboriginals, visible minority families, children with disabilities, and children in female lone-parent led families.

It is shameful that such a high rate of children and family poverty persists in a country as wealthy as Canada and 22 years after a commitment was made to end it. Campaign 2000 urges all political parties to develop and implement a National Plan to Make Canada Poverty-Free, and to secure this plan in legislation. The plan must include a clear timetable, targets and investments to track progress on the goal of eliminating poverty in our country.

We are asking each party to respond to the following questions (a total of 10 questions):

The most recent Focus Canada poll by Environics found that 'reducing child poverty' ranks as one of the five top spending priorities for government according to Canadians. A robust majority (88%) of Canadians believe the gap between the rich and poor has widened in the past decade and 81% believe that government should reduce that income gap.

Question 1:

An effective Plan to Make Canada Poverty-Free must include a multi-year strategy with targets, timetables and transparent accountability.

- Is your party willing to adopt specific targets and timelines to significantly reduce poverty? Will your party commit to reducing poverty by 25% in five years, and 50% in ten years with the goal of eradicating poverty within a generation?

Question 2:

The Canada Child Tax Benefit and National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) together play an important role in reducing poverty for low-income families, but it has not been increased (beyond annual indexing) since 2007.

- Will your party raise the combined Canada Child Tax Benefit and NCBS to a maximum of \$5,400 (\$2011) per child per year? Will you ensure that all low income families, including those on income assistance, receive and keep the full benefit?

Question 3:

A universal, affordable system of early childhood education and care services (ECEC) that are developmental for children while supporting parents in work, training and education is a critical element in a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. But the patchwork of services in most of Canada means there are only enough regulated ECEC spaces for 20% of children (0 – 5 years).

- With our partners in Code Blue for Child Care, we ask whether your party will commit to make a system of high quality early childhood education and child care a reality by the end of the next decade for all who want it? If so, what steps would you take to implement that commitment?

Question 4:

Housing is the single largest expense for low-income families. One in every 4 households pays more than 30% of their income on housing. Children under age 15 comprise more than half the number of Canadians living in housing that is unaffordable, substandard and over crowded.

- Will your party commit to developing a national strategy for affordable housing enshrined in legislation, and including substantial federal funding for social housing?

Question 5:

One third of low income children live in families where at least one parent works full-time, full-year. An effective anti-poverty plan needs to ensure that every adult working full-time, full-year earns a living wage that enables her/him to lift their family out of poverty and avoid financial stress. This would require higher wages and an enriched Working Income Tax Benefit.

- Will your party commit to undertaking strategies to achieve sustaining employment that pays living wages?
- Will you increase the Working Income Tax Benefit to \$2,400 per year for all employed adults?

Question 6:

Only approximately 40% of Canadians are currently eligible for Employment Insurance should they temporarily be without work, even though EI was designed to protect workers from falling into poverty during periods of wage loss.

- How will you improve eligibility for Employment Insurance?

Question 7:

The poverty rate for new immigrant families and racialized communities is alarmingly high.

- What plans do you have to improve the economic conditions of new immigrants and racialized communities living in poverty?

Question 8:

The persistence of high poverty rates among Aboriginal peoples is a continuing shame for Canada.

- Will your party commit to a poverty reduction strategy for Aboriginal peoples that addresses the basic needs of every Aboriginal child and youth?
- What strategies will your party develop to ensure those in First Nations communities have adequate food, clothing, clean drinking water, safe housing, early childhood education and child care?

Question 9

Post-secondary education and training are crucial elements to develop a productive workforce.

- What will your party do to improve access to post-secondary education as well as opportunities for up-to-date training and skills upgrading for low-income adults?

Question 10

Canadians with disabilities are often subject to ineffective and stigmatizing systems of income support and are more likely to live in poverty than other Canadians.

- What steps will your party take to address the income needs for those who will not soon enter the labour market? Will your party immediately make the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) refundable?

We look forward to receiving your response by the end of the business day on April 14th. During the week of April 25th, we will be releasing a statement to the media to let Canadians know where your party stands on these key poverty issues.

Sincerely,



National Coordinator
Campaign 2000

Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of over 120 national, provincial and community organizations united in securing the implementation of the 1989 House of Commons' resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000. A list of Campaign partners is available at <http://www.campaign2000.ca/about/partners.html>.