



Who Are We?

Poverty Free Saskatchewan (PFS) is a new network of individuals, organizations, governments and businesses working toward poverty elimination. PFS recognizes there have been anti-poverty groups working hard for decades in all regions of our province and we wish to support a province-wide movement.

PFS believes people living in poverty are key to all our work and should be involved in all our decision-making.

All regions of the province should be involved because everyone has valuable insights into their own unique situations – from northern communities to urban neighbourhoods and existing local anti-poverty groups.

Our goal to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty in Saskatchewan will require involvement and commitment from *all* levels of government, business, community organizations and individuals. PFS values and promotes respect for all perspectives in its poverty elimination campaign.

What are the components for an effective and comprehensive poverty elimination plan for Saskatchewan?

Poverty could be eliminated more quickly if organizations and governments at all levels, federal, provincial and municipal, developed strategies for their jurisdictions to contribute to poverty elimination. Poverty-Free Saskatchewan is getting the ball rolling by gathering input to develop a framework for a poverty elimination plan to impact the situation in our province. While the role of all governments, business and organizations are important, provincial government involvement will be a key component of success in eliminating poverty within our province.

We do not need to start from scratch. Many other provinces and regions have already implemented their own poverty reduction plans. Below are some of the defining traits of successful poverty reduction/elimination plans from other jurisdictions.

FOCUS ON MARGINALIZED AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

We recognize many people live in poverty, but we must begin with efforts must to identify those groups that are most affected by poverty in order to understand and address the unique needs each group may have.

- The plan must include measures that focus specifically on populations where poverty and marginalization are most acute – namely, Aboriginal people, recent immigrants, female-headed single parent households, single senior citizens, people with disabilities, and people with severe mental illness, addictions and other health problems. Homeless people and those with inadequate housing require dedicated support programs.

COMPREHENSIVENESS AND COORDINATION

Any successful plan to reduce or eliminate poverty must address the multi-faceted nature of poverty and inequality:

- The government-led component of such a plan must be cross-cutting and integrated, providing resources from all levels and departments within government to ensure that the problem of poverty is attacked from every conceivable angle.

ACCOUNTABILITY

To ensure that governments and other organizations are held to their commitments and that anti-poverty efforts survive successive governments, accountability is key:

- Accountability mechanisms are key to an effective and credible plan.
- The plan should lay out overarching goals for the whole of the provincial government, and include the development of implementation plans within key ministries.
- The lead minister responsible should be required by legislation to submit an annual progress report to the Saskatchewan Legislature.
- Measurement of performance, monitoring progress and reporting are fundamental to ensure the success of a poverty elimination program. For example, an Anti-Poverty Act could be passed by the Saskatchewan Legislature and the creation of a Provincial Poverty Elimination Commissioner's Office could ensure independent monitoring of the province's progress.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Solutions to poverty cannot be imposed from above. Real solutions require the active participation of those who have lived experience with poverty and those who work daily to address the needs of the poor:

- An official government strategy should be the product of a meaningful province-wide engagement process one that hears in particular from those most affected by poverty. It should also include community-based organizations that provide programs and services to vulnerable populations.
- Other groups such as business organizations, First Nations and labour organizations, etc, should have opportunities to respond to the strategy framework. The public engagements should be well advertised and invitations should be sent to specific groups.

WHAT TARGETS, PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND TIMELINES NEED TO GUIDE THE PLAN?

In order to evaluate progress towards the goals of reducing and eventually eliminating poverty, a comprehensive poverty plan must include achievable benchmarks, timelines and targets so we can measure our success:

- Building a plan requires identifying a manageable set of goals, dealing with issue areas such as: affordable housing, job creation and income support for those in need, strong healthy families, enabling and rewarding work, preventative health care initiatives, education and training and early learning and childcare. Some provincial plans focus on just a few of these issue areas, the most comprehensive plans focus on all of them.
- Once goals are identified, specific objectives relating to each goal are agreed upon. Success/performance indicators are then created to measure progress on individual objectives. Because poverty is multi-causal, there are a very large number of priority actions that can be put in place to support different vulnerable groups and reduce poverty. Identifying a manageable number that will have most impact on poverty reduction is a major challenge.
- The plan must have clear targets and timelines, using multiple and widely accepted measures of progress. For example, most provincial plans set out a broad target to reduce the overall number of people living in poverty. Usually a baseline year is established using specific performance indicators such as the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) or the Market Basket Measure (MBM). There could be a firm target such as reducing the number of low income people by X per cent by Y year.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION BRIEFS

An engagement process could focus on a short presentation of the above anti-poverty plan framework and seek input regarding its components. However, most of the engagement time should ensure that priority actions in the goal areas below are identified. There are many community-based organizations that have the ability to describe specific actions in regard to particular goals and objectives. Obtaining their participation and cooperation should be organized well in advance of a public engagement session.

KEY ISSUE AREAS

The following are six key issue areas that we believe *must* be a part of any successful plan to eliminate poverty in our province. In each area, we outline some of the more innovative policies developed in other jurisdictions as a means to stimulate discussion on how best to address these issue areas in Saskatchewan. These policy options are only suggestions. We are not necessarily advocating for any of the examples we put forward in this document. We offer them as a way to get people talking about what sort of policies and programs would best suit Saskatchewan. We invite your comments and suggestions on each issue area. Are we missing something? What can we do better? Help us with your ideas on how to eliminate poverty in Saskatchewan.

1) Housing Access and Affordability

Secure and affordable housing are an essential element in any program to reduce poverty. Saskatchewan's low-vacancy rate and soaring rents make this issue area particularly important for any provincial initiative to reduce and eliminate poverty. Below are some possible options to help address this problem:

- * While recognizing that rental subsidies are a short-term solution, increase the amount of the Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement and expand eligibility to include single persons.

- * The provincial government should meet its commitment for 3,000 immediate new units of social housing with a commitment for the construction of more units in the future.
- * Implement province-wide rent controls that caps rental increases to the Saskatchewan Consumer Price Index.
- * New incentives to aid low-income home-buyers transition to home ownership
- * Municipalities should reserve 10% of new development for affordable housing
- * Recommend the federal government pursue a national affordable housing strategy along the lines of Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians.

Comments _____

2) Income Security for Vulnerable Groups

Ensuring that people receive an income that both covers basic needs and offers some degree of dignity not only combats the economic effects of poverty; but also reduces the psychological stresses that are such a debilitating aspect of living in poverty. Below we offer some suggestions for increasing income security among vulnerable groups in the province:

- * Immediately increase social assistance (SAP) payments by 20 percent, with a commitment to further increases in the future.
- * Elimination of the Transitional Employment Allowance (TEA). Income security programs need to provide full coverage of utilities and provision of special needs
- * Increase the earning exemption for all SAP recipients by another \$100.00
- * Implement a provincial disability income that maintains enough financial support to meet individual needs, not just basic needs with a goal to reach with the goal of reaching an adequate income.
- * Recommend that the federal government expand eligibility for the Canada Pension Plan Disability Program (CPPDP) and the extension of Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness benefits
- * Increase the Seniors Income Plan (SIP) provincial benefit. Recommend the federal government expand Old Age Security provisions (CPP, OAS, GIS).
- * Recommend that the federal government incrementally increase the annual amount of the Canada Child Tax Benefit including both the base benefit and the National Child Benefit Supplement to reach a minimum of \$5,000 per child within five years’ time

- * Recommend that the federal government increase the goods and services tax (GST) credit by more than the scheduled increases tied to the Consumer Price Index

Comments _____

3) Education, Training and Early Childhood Learning and Development

Poverty robs our society of its potential. Removing barriers and providing the opportunities and skills to allow people to achieve their full potential is an integral part of achieving a poverty free Saskatchewan. Here are a few ideas that could provide low-income people with greater access to education and skills development:

- * Increase amount of subsidized childcare spaces to coincide with the average for Canada. Saskatchewan currently has licensed child-care spots for 9.1 per cent of children between the ages of zero and five, compared to the 20.3 per cent national average.
- * Restoration of voluntary “Life-Skills” and career planning programs for SAP recipients.
- * Increase the Provincial Training Allowance (PTA) grant for low-income students.
- * Provide a \$75.00 school materials grant for low-income students in the province.
- * Institute a tuition freeze for post-secondary education.
- * Expand provincial scholarships and grants for Aboriginal students.
- * Enhance distance learning and access to education for northern communities.
- * Increase financial support for community schools and enable more integrated service delivery.
- * Increase the number of pre-Kindergarten programs

Comments _____

4) Enabling and Rewarding Work and Participation in our Communities

Secure and rewarding employment can provide a way out of poverty. We need to reduce the obstacles to securing meaningful employment and ensure that work provides people with a living wage. Here are some ways we might achieve this in Saskatchewan:

- * Immediately increase the provincial minimum wage to \$10.75 per hour, with a commitment to fully index the minimum wage to annual cost of living increases.
- * Increase the “Job Start” allowance to \$250.00 to assist those re-entering the workforce.
- * Job creation targets for the public, co-operative and community sectors to ensure needed employment and services not provided by the market, particularly for inner-city urban and northern communities.
- * Equity legislation to ensure greater equity of opportunity and remuneration for women, Aboriginal people, visible minorities and people with disabilities.
- * Expand the eligibility for the Discount Bus Pass Program to include all low-income people. Ensure adequate public transportation in all regions of the province.

Comments _____

5) Improving Access to and Quality of Services for Low Income People

Low-income people deserve respect and dignity when they access programs and services. Below are some possible reforms that could restore fairness and improve access to the system:

- * Income security caseloads should be capped to ensure workers can give clients the attention they need and deserve.
- * End the punitive culture of social assistance by placing the burden of proof on the government, rather than the client.
- * Institute clients’ right to appeal for overpayments caused through departmental error.
- * Ensure transparency of calculation for benefits (SAP, RHS, SES, etc).
- * Encourage a province-wide education campaign to alert citizens to the programs and services available to them.

Comments _____

6) Promoting Health and Preventing Illness

We know that people of limited income suffer disproportionately from poor health outcomes. Here are some ways we might address the health disparities in our own province:

- * Expand the provincial Healthy Babies initiative and federal programs relating to maternal and infant health.
- * Expand eligibility for the Family Health Plan to \$35,000 per year for qualification.
- * Provide basic dental care and improved optometric services for adults under the Family Health Plan.
- * Reduce the co-payment on prescription drugs for adults under the Family Health Plan to 25% of total cost.
- * Recommend providing partial coverage for smoking cessation drugs and treatments under the Family Health Plan.
- * Reduce fees for municipal recreation and leisure activities.
- * Expand access and affordability to healthy foods, particularly in northern communities.
- * Offer integrated and comprehensive services in low income neighbourhoods including public health, mental health, addictions and primary care services.
- * Ensure all low income seniors and people with disabilities have full access to affordable home care and/or support programs.

Comments _____

Next Steps

The information provided to Poverty Free Saskatchewan in this framework document will be used to develop goals, objectives and measures that will inform the creation of an anti-poverty strategy for Saskatchewan. We require the benefit of your wisdom and experience on the issue of poverty to ensure that we consider all the relevant factors that contribute to poverty in our province. In order to provide a comprehensive solution to poverty we must be open to all potential policies and programs and their suitability to address poverty in Saskatchewan. By contributing your ideas and suggestions, you will help shape an anti-poverty strategy that can be used to engage government and other sectors of our province in our effort to eliminate poverty.

Final Comments or Suggestions

Contact Us

Poverty Free Saskatchewan

Send mail to: Poverty Free Saskatchewan c/o Social Policy Research Unit (SPR), Faculty of Social Work, Rm 464 Education Building, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, S4S 0A2.

E-mail: povertyfreesask@gmail.com

Website: www.povertyfreesask.ca