



Communities Respond Highlights: PFS Consultations 2011-2012

Recently Saskatchewan has experienced an increase in economic activity – a “boom”, but this monetary gain has not been experienced by everyone. Many people struggle daily without adequate income, food, or housing.

Poverty affects a very wide range of people. Groups that are particularly hard hit are Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) people, newcomers, women (especially senior women), single men, students, youth, people with disabilities, people with addictions and mental health issues, people leaving prisons, and vulnerable and special needs populations, including those with intellectual challenges. Poverty is a problem in urban, rural and northern locations. Poverty excludes many Saskatchewan residents from full participation in our province.

Yet Saskatchewan is the only province in Canada without a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to deal with poverty. People in every part of Saskatchewan have decided that it is time for action and are seeking solutions.

Previously, PFS published two documents: **Let’s Do Something About Poverty** and **Strategies to Eliminate Poverty in Saskatchewan**. To gauge citizen response and advance the work of eliminating poverty in the province, PFS conducted a series of consultations in 2011 and 2012.

Several organizations were involved in leading and supporting this work: the University of Regina, Regional Intersectoral Committees, Tribal Councils, a Health Region, anti-poverty groups, faith-based organizations and professional and human services organizations. In these meetings, discussions were held around the six key issue areas in **Strategies to Eliminate Poverty in Saskatchewan**. Over 170 people from a range of backgrounds attended the sessions; women and men experiencing poverty, people working in health, social and educational services, First Nations and Métis people, people with disabilities, members of faith communities, and many others.

North Battleford (April 18, 2011)	Tisdale (January 24, 2012)
Moose Jaw (September 23, 2011)	Nipawin (January 25, 2012)
Regina (November 21, 2011)	Melfort (January 26, 2012)
Saskatoon (November 22, 2011)	

The **Communities Respond** report outlines the input received from the community discussions. These ideas will be used in future to develop an integrated and comprehensive poverty elimination plan. This plan will be built on the results of the community consultations, and a review of successful strategies in other provinces and in local Saskatchewan communities.

<p>Poverty Free Saskatchewan (PFS) is a network of volunteers representing a wide array of organizations across the province. We believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty is not inevitable and everyone is better off if we address poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic, coordinated, and deliberate effort is required • Working together can make a difference. <p>Contact Us: povertyfreesask@gmail.com Website: http://www.povertyfreesask.ca/</p>
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WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS SAID – THE HIGHLIGHTS

1. **HOUSING** : Everyone must have access to adequate and affordable housing. Communities should be inclusive with support for integrated housing and neighbourhood development, and should provide different types of rental housing and paths to home ownership. Dialogue with landlords and enforcement of rights is needed for renters. Engaging the business community, trades, non-profit organizations and whole communities will contribute to housing solutions. Municipal, provincial and federal governments must fulfill their respective responsibilities to ensure affordable, adequate housing.
2. **INCOME SECURITY FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS** : Our overall goals in the income security policy area must go beyond “looking after those who are less fortunate” toward improvements in economic equality and ensuring a decent life for all. Income assistance programs should provide a reasonable standard of living, allow greater earnings exemptions, and be accessible in ways that do not create stigma. Supports provided should create capacity and empower people.
3. **EDUCATION, TRAINING & EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT** : From pre-K through secondary, post-secondary education and lifelong learning, education can improve our well being and prevent many of the worst features of poverty. Addressing barriers to participation in education and training programs can assist people to gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Well-supported community schools, addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, and improving First Nations education will contribute to poverty elimination.
4. **ENABLING & REWARDING WORK & PARTICIPATION IN OUR COMMUNITIES** : Society should recognize the value in all types of work – jobs, volunteer and community work, and raising a family. Creating new jobs, ensuring that all jobs are secure and include good benefits, and eliminating workplace racism and discrimination will make work more secure and meaningful, and will increase self-worth and social inclusion for a larger number of people.
5. **IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES FOR LOW INCOME PEOPLE** : It is very important to treat people accessing services with respect and as individuals. Integrated and coordinated services, well trained staff with reasonable workloads, and effective delivery mechanisms will enhance service delivery. People will benefit from “wrap around” counseling, Ombudsman and advocacy services, and greater support for the transition from assistance to paid work.
6. **PROMOTING HEALTH AND PREVENTING ILLNESS** : Health is affected by what goes on in communities and the health care system. Adopting a healthy communities model would promote a holistic view of people and their health. People could live healthier lives if they did not have to engage in a daily struggle for survival to meet basic needs, and if the social determinants of health (adequate income, decent housing, good food, etc.) were addressed. Preventing illness, better coordinating a range of services, and ensuring programs are affordable would lead to healthier populations.

GENERAL THEMES: Fundamental change is needed in society and in social and economic programs. We must redefine the concept of community and look at our common needs. “What happens in one neighbourhood affects us all.” We must address the situation of those groups that are most affected by poverty. Changes to systems may cost initially, but increasing our allocation of resources in the short-term will have long-term benefits. We must engage communities in creating innovative solutions and involve people living in poverty at decision-making tables. Poverty is a complex issue and we need all sectors of society to be involved in achieving its eradication.

CONCLUSIONS : The participants reinforced the understanding that although Saskatchewan is in a period of growth, the benefits are not evenly distributed. They identified numerous factors leading to the difficult and often intolerable living situations experienced by many people. Yet the mood of the consultations was not one of despair. The participants provided many positive practical solutions. These ranged from major recommendations about awareness and changing the overall goals of society to implementing local and individual activities. Participants said that addressing poverty requires the involvement of actors ranging from the global community, to federal, provincial, and municipal governments, health regions, First Nations and Métis organizations, businesses and employers, community organizations, service delivery organizations, schools, health care organizations, families and individuals. The overall message was that we need to define ourselves as a community of communities and work together to create a more empowering and inclusive society.