



Restoring Dignity: A Strong National Anti-Poverty Plan

Submission to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Citizens for Public Justice seeks human flourishing and the integrity of creation as our faithful response to God's call for love and justice.

We envision a world in which individuals, communities, societal institutions, and governments all contribute to and benefit from the common good.

Our mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice, and the flourishing of Creation.

Executive Summary

Canada is one of the world's wealthiest countries, yet 4.9 million people live in poverty.¹ That is 14.4% of us, or 1 in 7 people. The impact of poverty is far-reaching, hitting communities across Canada hard.

Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) is a faith-based organization that works to promote public justice in Canadian federal policy. We believe that the federal government must develop a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy (CPRS) that is grounded in and responsive to the experiences of the most vulnerable in Canadian society.

Since 2009, CPJ has worked in collaboration with social policy, anti-poverty, non-profit and faith-based organizations through *Dignity for All: the campaign for a poverty-free Canada*.

Dignity for All has developed a model *National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada*² that outlines recommendations in six policy areas: income security, housing and homelessness, health, food security, employment, and early childhood education and care.³ It also highlights the importance of a human rights framework guiding the plan, its development, implementation, and reporting.

CPJ recommends that the CPRS reflect the consultation process, human rights framework, and policy recommendations of the Dignity for All model plan, which this brief outlines.

The CPRS must:

1. Be comprehensive, effective, and responsive. It must:

- Include broad consultation, involving people with lived experience of poverty, who know the reality of poverty better than anyone, particularly those disproportionately impacted, including Indigenous peoples, newcomers to Canada, racialized Canadians, and single parent, female-led families.⁴
- Build on the work of anti-poverty, social policy, and faith-based organizations that have prioritized the voices of those with lived experience and have worked for decades on policy analysis.

¹ CPJ, *On the Margins: A Glimpse of Poverty in Canada* (October 2015); <http://www.cpj.ca/sites/default/files/docs/files/OnTheMargins.pdf> Updated Taxfiler data (July 2016) maintain this number.

² *Dignity for All: A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada*; http://www.dignityforall.ca/sites/default/files/docs/DignityForAll_Report-English-FINAL.pdf

³ See *Dignity for All: A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada* for specific recommendations.

⁴ CPJ, *On the Margins: A Glimpse of Poverty in Canada* (October 2015); <http://www.cpj.ca/sites/default/files/docs/files/OnTheMargins.pdf> Updated Taxfiler data (July 2016) show in increased rates of poverty among single parent, female-led families.

- Partner with Indigenous governments and organizations in consultations that are meaningful and responsive to the unique needs of different communities.
- Address *at minimum* six policy areas: income security, housing and homelessness, health, food security, jobs and employment, and early childhood education and care.
- Establish clear targets and timelines, along with a commitment for adequate resources and strong accountability mechanisms to ensure the plan's full implementation and evaluation.

The CPRS can only work if there is dedicated funding attached. Costing for the development and implementation of the strategy should not be a barrier. It already costs governments more to deal with the impacts of poverty, such as health costs, than it would to implement a strategy to end poverty.⁵ According to a 2008 study, poverty in Canada costs us between \$72 and \$86 billion each year.⁶

Housing

2. Include a National Housing Strategy that has clear goals, timelines, and monitoring provisions, and that is supported by legislation and funding.

Increasing numbers of people in Canada are spending 50% or more of their income on housing,⁷ while many others are experiencing periods of homelessness or housing insecurity. People who are already vulnerable, such as those who are unemployed, low-waged, disabled, newcomers, members of single-parent families, Indigenous peoples, or seniors, are often those most affected. CPJ is particularly concerned that refugees and refugee claimants are adequately housed as they face the multiple challenges of settlement.

We applaud the federal government's commitment to invest \$2.3 billion in affordable housing over two years, and to consult with stakeholders to develop a National Housing Strategy. However, increased and long-term funding of at least \$2 billion *per year* (matched by provinces and territories) is needed for improvements to existing affordable housing and additional affordable housing developments to meet the current need, with a focus on energy efficiency.

⁵ Poverty policy costing recommendations are outlined in the 2016 Alternative Federal Budget (to which CPJ is a contributor);

www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2016/03/AFB2016_Main_Document.pdf

⁶ These estimates are in 2007 dollars, and include healthcare, crime, inter-generational impacts, and lost productivity. Ontario Association of Food Banks, *The Cost of Poverty* (2008); <http://www.cwp-csp.ca/poverty/the-cost-of-poverty/>. See also Canada Without Poverty estimates; <http://www.cwp-csp.ca/poverty/the-cost-of-poverty/>

⁷ Housing Rental Index; rentalhousingindex.ca and *Raising the Roof, Beyond Housing First: A Holistic Response to Homelessness in Canada* (2015); homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/2015_HousingFirstReport_EN-WEB.pdf.

3. Partner with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments and organizations to develop focussed Indigenous infrastructure development strategies that are responsive to the unique needs of Indigenous communities (on and off reserve and in Inuit and northern contexts).

CPJ calls on the government to dedicate immediate funding to address safe housing and safe water, as well as funding in resilient infrastructure in areas vulnerable to melting permafrost and rising sea levels and upgrades to emergency preparedness and response systems.

The federal government's commitment to invest \$8.37 billion over five years in Indigenous communities is a significant first step as it has increased overall investments, along with a commitment to eliminate the 2% funding cap.⁸

A further \$250 million per year is required for investments in ecosystems that function as natural infrastructure⁹ and \$514 million per year should be provided for green infrastructure.¹⁰

Education and Training

4. Include a National Jobs Creation and Training Strategy.

Such a strategy would work to ensure the development of secure employment, with access to benefits and labour standard protections. It would also develop training and education opportunities in secure employment areas, particularly directed toward Indigenous communities and marginalized populations.

In addition, funding for training and skills development in low-carbon sectors, directed to marginalized populations, is needed. Research indicates that “by investing up to 5 per cent¹¹ of the annual federal budget in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and public transportation over five years, Canada could create one million new jobs while reducing our annual GHG emissions by 25 to 35 per cent.”¹²

5. Invest an additional \$500 million per year over the next five years (\$2.5 billion total) for Indigenous education, skills training and economic development.

⁸ Assembly of First Nations statement (March 22, 2016); www.afn.ca/en/news-media/latest-news/16-3-22-afn-national-chief-says-federal-budget-a-significant-step-in-c.

⁹ Green Budget Coalition, “Recommendations for Budget 2016: Infrastructure and Climate Change Adaptation,” (2016); greenbudget.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/GBC-Infrastructure-and-Climate.pdf.

¹⁰ Green Budget Coalition, “Recommendations for Budget 2016: Green Infrastructure for First Nations Communities,” (2016); greenbudget.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/GBC-FN-Infra.pdf.

¹¹ With a federal budget of \$290 billion (Budget 2016), 5 per cent equals \$14.5 billion.

¹² Green Economy Network, One Million Climate Jobs; <http://greeneconomynet.ca/>

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #7 calls on the federal government to work with Indigenous organizations to develop a “joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.”¹³

The federal government has committed to investing \$15 million over 2 years on a pilot to renew and expand the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy,¹⁴ which has been in place since 2009. It is clear that meaningful consultation and additional funding are needed to ensure that improvements are made for the program to respond to community needs.

6. Include a national early childhood education and care (ECEC) program that is universal, publicly funded, high-quality, and regulated.

A national ECEC program would be legislated with Canada-wide goals and principles outlined, including quality, access, and respect for diversity, and culturally appropriate programming. It would be accessible to children ages 0-5 (preschool) and school-aged up to 12 years. This ECEC program would also require federal transfers to assist in the development of these services to achieve high quality and accessibility.¹⁵

Government administered savings, entitlement, and income security programs

7. Include provisions for improved access to Employment Insurance (EI), including setting a national eligibility threshold of 360 hours.

The federal government commitments to EI reform in Budget 2016 included fewer insurable work hours (420-700 hours, depending on the region) for eligibility and extension of benefit weeks in 12 regions (extra five weeks to a maximum of 50).

While this can be considered a positive step, the impacts of unemployment are being experienced significantly by people across the country. EI regional variation for eligibility should be replaced with a standard, universal threshold of 360 hours, so that those with precarious work (often from marginalized and racialized populations), have better protection and support.¹⁶

¹³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action;

http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

¹⁴ Federal Budget 2016; http://www.budget.gc.ca/2016/docs/plan/ch3-en.html#_Toc446106729

¹⁵ CUPE and Child Care Advocacy Association advocate for \$500 million federal transfer to provinces/territories: FINA pre-budget report March 2016;

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=8137950&Language=E>

¹⁶ See the Alternative Federal Budget 2016 recommendation of 360 hours;

https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2016/03/AFB2016_Main_Document.pdf

8. Include improvements to the Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) programs, increasing the GIS by the amount required to lift seniors out of poverty and modifying the residency requirement for seniors' programs.

Recent data are showing increasing poverty rates among single seniors (most of whom are women).¹⁷ The federal government decision not to increase the age of eligibility for OAS/GIS will help prevent further disparity, but increasing the GIS (indexed to average wage rates¹⁸) is required to further assist low income seniors.

9. Include a plan to reinstate a federal minimum wage at \$15/hour.

National minimum wage standards can be promoted through reinstating a federal minimum wage at \$15/hour (indexed) and promoting the phase in of provincial/territorial minimum wages of \$15/hour (indexed).¹⁹ These standards must reflect living wage policies, recognizing that costs of living vary in different regions and communities.²⁰

Neighbourhoods and Community Care

10. Include a universal, publicly funded National Pharmacare Program that provides prescription drug coverage at little to no cost to all, regardless of income, age, or region.

CPJ is pleased to see that the federal government has been exploring the possibility of a National Pharmacare Program through a Standing Committee on Health study.²¹ A CPRS should include a National Pharmacare Program that would be a publicly funded, universal prescription drug insurance plan that would cover essential drug costs.²²

11. Include the development of a comprehensive National Right to Food Policy and improvements to the Nutrition North program.

Statistics from 2012 show that over 4 million people in Canada can be considered moderately or highly food insecure, with the rate of household food insecurity reaching a staggering rate of 45.2% in Nunavut.²³

¹⁷ Statistics Canada CANSIM table July 2016 (2014 data) puts the single senior poverty rate at 28.8%; <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&retrLang=eng&id=2060041&&pattern=&stByVal=1&p1=1&p2=-1&tabMode=dataTable&csid=>

¹⁸ See the Alternative Federal Budget 2016 recommendation (p. 135); https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2016/03/AFB2016_Main_Document.pdf

¹⁹ Currently, only two provinces and one territory index their minimum wages, with some having a number of exceptions. See the Service Canada database; <http://srv116.services.gc.ca/dimt-wid/sm-mw/rpt1.aspx>

²⁰ See the Canadian Living Wage Framework: http://www.livingwagecanada.ca/files/3913/8382/4524/Living_Wage_Full_Document_Nov.pdf

²¹ Standing Committee on Health; <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Committees/en/HESA>

²² Kyle Duggan, "MPs begin study on pharmacare, warned of high drug costs" iPolitics, April 13, 2016; <http://ipolitics.ca/2016/04/13/mps-begin-study-on-pharmacare-warned-of-high-drug-costs/>

²³ In Nunavut, 62.2% of children live in food insecure households; <http://proof.utoronto.ca/>

A comprehensive national food strategy should include food safety, healthy food, household food security, industry prosperity, and environmental sustainability,²⁴ as well as better access to traditional food and country food for Indigenous communities.²⁵

Enhancements to the Nutrition North program should include increased funding and better supports for Inuit and Northern communities to access traditional food.

²⁴ Conference Board of Canada, Canadian Food Strategy Report; <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/cfic/cfs.aspx>

²⁵ Sima Sahar Zerehi, "National Food Strategy will include Aboriginal input, says Agriculture Minister" CBC News (Feb 5, 2016); <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/national-food-strategy-1.3434908>

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