

# CANADIAN POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY



What We Heard  
About Poverty So Far



Employment and  
Social Development Canada

Emploi et  
Développement social Canada

Canada

## **Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy – What We Heard About Poverty So Far**

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**CANADIAN**  
**POVERTY**  
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## MESSAGE FROM MINISTER JEAN-YVES DUCLOS

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Over the past year, I have been very fortunate to meet and hear from many Canadians across our country on poverty and how to reduce and eliminate it.

While Canada is a prosperous country, far too many Canadians do not share that prosperity. Our government knows this needs to change. That is why we are developing a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy that will have a real and lasting effect.

Finding solutions to poverty is why I became an economist and a politician.

For 23 years, as a researcher and as a professor of economics, I was focused on facts and analysis. After years of assessing the social and economic impacts of policy decisions made by the federal government, I became passionate about finding practical solutions to reducing poverty in this country. This is what inspired me to run for office, and this is why I'm so proud of the action we're taking with the development of this Strategy.

Last February we launched a nation-wide consultation process to ask Canadians what they thought a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy should look like. We heard from people throughout the country through an online discussion forum and surveys. Canadians shared their stories and emailed us ideas for reducing poverty in their communities. They told us that in order to deliver real results for Canadians, our actions must be informed by data, evidence and engagement.

Parliamentary Secretary Adam Vaughan and I also had the pleasure of meeting with people from across Canada at various town halls and roundtables, as well as a National Poverty Conference last September. We were fortunate to engage with many Canadians, from national and community-based stakeholders to individuals, the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Poverty, organizations and representatives from different cities, provinces and territories; business people and academic experts; youth; Indigenous people; and Canadians with lived experience of poverty.

For us, these discussions and consultations were guided by the spirit of openness, collaboration and innovation. I was humbled to see so many Canadians respond in kind—so many Canadians who wanted to make a difference in their communities.

Across Canada, we heard first-hand accounts of living in poverty, who it affects, what Government measures have been helpful in reducing poverty and how we can help those living in poverty while preventing any further individuals from falling into it.

This report is our effort to summarize the diverse viewpoints that we heard. With this report, we are taking an important step towards creating a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy—one that sets targets for poverty reduction, and builds on and complements efforts already in motion across the country to help lift Canadians out of poverty.

I wish to sincerely thank all those who took the time to reflect on how Canada can become a better country. Hearing your stories has been an eye-opening experience. Although there is no single solution that can be undertaken to overcome poverty in Canada, it is my hope that, by recognizing the voices of those who are too often left on the sidelines, we are taking a step in the right direction.

Yours sincerely,

**The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P.**  
Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a whole, Canada remains among the best places in the world in which to live. However, too many Canadians live in poverty. This is why the Government made a commitment to develop a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy that would set targets to reduce poverty in Canada and measure and publicly report on progress.

In February 2017, Employment and Social Development Canada launched a consultation process to inform the development of a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Although Canada's economy continues to show signs of strength, job creation and growth, we heard that many Canadians are still struggling to make ends meet and satisfy basic needs. Essential things, such as providing for the needs of one's children or taking care of one's health, are simply out of reach for some people.

Many participants told us that stable and quality jobs can be hard to find in some communities and regions, whether they are entering the labour market for the first time or re-entering. Canadians also made it clear that poverty is about more than simply not having enough income—it can also be about discrimination in all its forms, the challenges of physical or mental illness and working hard to reach and stay in the middle class. We also heard some Canadians find paying for a place to live challenging, and that Canada needs better and more affordable housing.

We reached out to individuals for whom we knew there were existing challenges, namely vulnerable seniors, youth, women, the LGBTQ2 community, visible minorities, newcomers, persons with disabilities, single parents and unattached individuals aged 45 to 64. We heard that the Poverty Reduction Strategy should acknowledge the challenges faced by these groups and contain policies and/or supports specifically targeted for them.

Many First Nations, Inuit and Métis participants told us that colonialism, racism and inter-generational trauma have made poverty worse in their communities and for their people in towns and cities across Canada. We heard that we need to rebuild or restore nation-to-nation relationships to help ensure a better future, through reconciliation and greater recognition of First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments, and by working together in practical ways to help overcome challenges and barriers.

We heard that many Canadians are not accessing the government programs and services that are available to them, either due to lack of awareness of their eligibility or obstacles encountered during application processes.

Consultation participants also shared with us their vision for the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, indicating that the Government should set ambitious and measurable targets.

The analysis conducted for the drafting of this report has informed the initial stages of the development of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy and will continue to do so as we work towards the release of the Strategy.

# OVERVIEW OF THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy engagement process started in February 2017. It consisted of several events led by Minister Jean-Yves Duclos, Parliamentary Secretary Adam Vaughan, other Government of Canada ministers and Government officials, as well as projects led by National Indigenous Organizations, the Tamarack Institute and its group Vibrant Communities Canada, and the consulting firm Ference and Company.

During our engagement process, we heard from individuals from a broad range of backgrounds, including:

- Seniors
- Youth
- Single parents
- Unattached individuals
- Persons with disabilities
- Newcomers
- Visible minority groups
- First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals
- First Nations, Inuit and Métis leadership
- Indigenous organizations
- Provincial, territorial and municipal representatives
- Local community and national stakeholder organizations
- Frontline service providers
- Academic experts
- Businesses

The Prime Minister has committed that the Government will work together with Indigenous peoples to make progress on the issues most important to First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and to do more to make sure that their voices are heard in Ottawa. Indigenous-specific engagement activities to inform the development of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy were undertaken—some of which were Government-led, and others led by Indigenous organizations. While not all Indigenous groups and organizations in Canada were directly involved, First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals and organizations were welcome to participate in the broad public engagement, and the Government of Canada sponsored community-based engagement projects that were undertaken by our Indigenous partners: the Assembly of First Nations, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Métis National Council and Native Women’s Association of Canada.

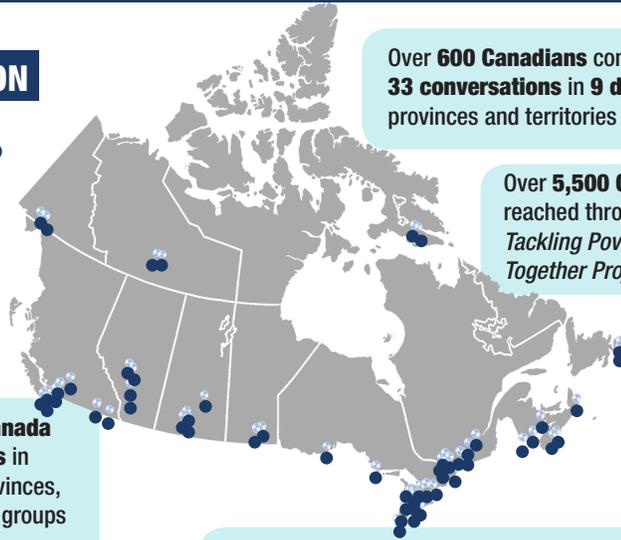
As the Government embarked on its engagement process across the country in February 2017, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities had also begun its study of poverty reduction. The Committee’s final report entitled “Breaking the Cycle: A Study on Poverty Reduction” proved a valuable source of information for the consultation.

## Who Did We Hear From and How?

# POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

## ENGAGING WITH CANADIANS

### IN-PERSON



Over **600 Canadians** consulted through **33 conversations** in **9 different** provinces and territories

Over **5,500 Canadians** reached through the *Tackling Poverty Together Project*

**13 Government of Canada officials-led sessions** in collaboration with provinces, territories, Indigenous groups or organizations  
**29 meetings** with multiple levels of government, including Canadian municipalities

**12 roundtables** with stakeholders  
**4 public** town hall events  
**4 roundtables** with Indigenous Leadership

### ONLINE



**1,127**

EMAIL  
SUBMISSIONS



**584**

COMPLETED  
SURVEYS



**199**

STORIES &  
COMMENTS

Youth Contest  
**#ReducePoverty**  
in Canada



**X 64** YOUTH SUBMISSIONS

As we heard that poverty is a multi-faceted issue with many impacts and causes, we paid close attention to the results of other consultation activities specific to programs delivered by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), as well as consultations and stakeholder engagement led by other departments, including on:

- the renewal of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy – led by ESDC
- an Urban Aboriginal Strategy – led by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
- the Labour Market Transfer Agreements – led by ESDC
- a National Housing Strategy – led by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- the Homelessness Partnering Strategy redesign – led by ESDC and the Advisory Committee on Homelessness
- a Federal Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence – led by Status of Women Canada
- Ways to Modernize Youth Employment in Canada – led by ESDC’s Youth Employment Panel
- A Food Policy for Canada – led by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- the development of new accessibility legislation – led by ESDC
- Nutrition North Canada – led by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
- the Employment Insurance Service Quality Review – led by three Members of Parliament and supported by ESDC
- a Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy – led by ESDC and the Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy Co-Creation Steering Group
- Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care – led by ESDC
- Transforming Canada’s Criminal Justice System – led by the Department of Justice
- Services among Northern Residents – Serving You Better consultation led by the Canada Revenue Agency
- the Opioid Crisis – (Opioid Summit and Ministerial Opioid Roundtables) – co-hosted/led by Health Canada

The results of some of these consultation processes are shared throughout our report in order to highlight the complex nature of poverty and how it touches on various aspects of Canadians’ lives.

# CHAPTER 1

## INABILITY TO MEET BASIC NEEDS

As we spoke to Canadians across the country about poverty, many said that they struggle with having enough money to provide for their basic needs. We heard about Canadians' difficulty in keeping a roof over their head, whether it is because of the high costs related to housing, or because they have experienced certain life situations beyond their control which have led to homelessness.

Participants with families made it clear that they sometimes struggle to respond to the basic needs of their children. Others shared stories of lived experience indicating that issues related to health can sometimes lead one to live in poverty and make it hard to get out.

We were told that despite working hard, many people who live in poverty find it challenging to make ends meet. We heard a number of stories about low-income families who are forced to make hard decisions. They have to sacrifice some things because the costs of basic living expenses—such as heating, electricity and food—cost more than what they make. This means they often have little to nothing left for anything else, such as participating in local activities. This also results in many low-income Canadians feeling left out of their communities.

*“There is just not enough money and my bills equal more than my income. It causes tough choices. You want to buy things for your kids but rent takes priority.”*

– Participant, Tackling Poverty Together Project

### Everyone needs a place to live

#### Housing

Participants told us that housing-related costs (for example, rent, heat, utilities and repairs) are too high for those with low income. For certain groups of Canadians, high rent costs can mean living in unsuitable housing. These groups include off-reserve First Nations, Inuit and Métis, women, persons with disabilities, seniors, single parents, visible minorities and newcomers.

*“When we have affordable housing we can focus on employment, and raising our families. We can dream of other possibilities.”*

– Participant, National Housing Strategy Consultations

Participants and stakeholders, including First Nations on reserve, said that there is not enough affordable and suitable housing to meet the demand in most communities. Where there are affordable housing units available, people told us that many are in need of repair or are not suited for habitation (for example, there are bed bugs, mould and safety hazards). We also heard about long waiting lists for public housing in parts of the country.

Calls were made for greater collaboration at all levels of government in helping to increase the availability of suitable and affordable housing.



Youth Contest winner Seanna Strassburger focused her submission on providing safe and free housing for qualified families in Canada through a three-stage approach that would see families move from free housing to rent-geared-to-income, to full-market housing.

## What Government Heard Through Engagement on the National Housing Strategy

(Summer and Fall 2016)

- Certain groups of Canadians are more likely to be in core housing need (i.e. lack and cannot afford alternative local rental housing that is adequate, suitable and affordable) and at greater risk of homelessness.
- The Government should take steps to eliminate homelessness, or short of that, make it rare, brief and non-recurring. The needs of homeless Canadians, who fall at the extreme end of the housing spectrum, ought to be prioritized.
- The National Housing Strategy should respond to increasing affordability challenges of low- and middle-income Canadians and support the development and renewal of affordable, sustainable housing and communities.
- Housing policies should centre on people and place and promote inclusivity so that individuals and families have access to jobs, schools and other supports that will help them better participate in their communities.
- Indigenous housing opportunities and challenges are unique and multifaceted. Geographic location (northern, urban, rural and remote) and context (e.g. on-reserve) are important factors that can affect housing conditions and needs.

On November 22, 2017, the Government of Canada announced the National Housing Strategy, built through a comprehensive consultation process that included all levels of government; Indigenous governments and organizations; the private and not-for-profit sectors, co-operative and community-based sectors; housing experts; academia; and Canadians themselves.

For more information, go to: [www.placetocallhome.ca](http://www.placetocallhome.ca)

## Homelessness

We heard that lack of income and affordable and suitable housing are important factors leading to homelessness and poverty. We heard that there are groups of people that are particularly vulnerable to living on the street, for example people struggling with mental illness or youth who are at the age to move out of government care. Homelessness can also sometimes be hidden (for example, couch-surfing or living in one's car).

*“While poverty is not always about homelessness, homelessness is always about poverty.”*

*– Participant, Online Engagement*

Canadians also let us know that a Housing First approach has helped in reducing homelessness for some of the most vulnerable Canadians. However, people pointed out that it can be difficult to meet the full range of needs of all individuals experiencing homelessness because there is limited flexibility in the types of programs and services that can be funded under the Housing First approach. For example, they mentioned the importance of support for transitional housing, emergency shelters, transportation and programs related to food security and literacy.

People also said that more could be done to address hidden homelessness in rural and remote areas of Canada. In these areas, people have unique needs and do not always have access to the same resources as individuals in urban areas. We also heard about the need to help people at risk of homelessness, not just those who are already homeless.

Canadians consistently said that homelessness is a problem in communities of all sizes and across all regions of Canada. Key findings included:

- The needs of youth, women and Indigenous people require flexible solutions.
- Homelessness prevention is important.
- Reducing Indigenous homelessness in partnership with Indigenous peoples and organizations should be an area of greater focus.
- Partnerships within and across communities should be improved.

A full report summarizing what was heard throughout the engagement process will be released.



Things have not always been easy for **FATUMA**, especially moving her family from Somalia to Canada over 20 years ago. Though she feels very fortunate to live in a diverse community in her neighbourhood, living in public housing has presented many challenges.

One of the biggest challenges is the buildings themselves, where she says that there is always something that doesn't work or needs repair, from the elevator stopping or the doors breaking.

Fatuma also says homelessness is an issue in her community. Shelters are often full, especially during cold winter days, and the homeless population will set up camp in her apartment building. This adds more stress and concerns for the residents, who are already struggling with a difficult situation.

Even though she faces many housing challenges, Fatuma considers her neighbourhood her home. "I am not ashamed of what I am going through. Even though I didn't expect this, being in Canada, but at the same time, I am thankful for what I have."

## Help me make a better life for my children

We heard from Canadians in poverty about the importance of giving their children basic necessities and a nurturing environment. Without good nutrition, a positive and healthy space to call home and access to the same learning opportunities as their peers, children living in poverty can often start life with disadvantages that limit their ability to succeed.

Throughout our consultations, we heard that growing up in poverty can continue this cycle over generations. Many children can be trapped on a path toward social exclusion and ongoing poverty. People told us that the federal government's main

***"If we did not receive the Canada Child Benefit every month, we would be homeless and starving, along with our four children. It is absolutely that simple and clear."***

– Online Participant

***"There's no way kids can do homework in a house when it's crowded with 10–15 people living there."***

– Participant, Inuit Roundtable

concern in developing a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy should be to lessen the impacts of poverty on children. Intervening in these early formative years is essential to breaking the cycle of poverty. Stakeholders also said that First Nations children on reserve need to benefit from more equitable federal funding. We were also told that policies in support of Indigenous children need to be designed in direct partnership with Indigenous communities and must be culturally adapted to be effective and respectful.

## Poverty is affecting my health

Many stakeholder organizations, academics and individuals that took part in our engagement pointed out how poverty can affect people's health and well-being.

The stories we heard from participants showed how hardships caused by illness, disability and poverty can be connected. They can create a high level of stress and a sense of lost dignity in someone's life. According to many participants, one of the main reasons for poor health and illness is not being able to meet basic needs, such as food and housing. Some stakeholders said that poverty can indirectly lead to additional costs for Canada's public health care systems and creates challenges in affording pharmaceutical treatments and dental care. We heard that many people who visit emergency rooms or seek urgent help suffer from health issues that are linked to the challenges associated with poverty, such as mental health issues and addiction.

***"Poverty is one of the factors that most strongly affect the health of the population. Low-income individuals are at a greater risk of obesity, activity limitations, cardiovascular diseases, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases and premature mortality."***

– Mémoire des directeurs de santé publique de Montréal et de la Capitale-Nationale (Québec)

During discussions on the links between health and poverty, we heard suggestions for the Government to monitor health indicators as part of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy in order to fully understand how actions to address poverty relate to health.

## Food Security

Canadians told us that living in poverty can mean not being able to afford groceries and seeking help from food banks. We also heard stories from parents who felt frustrated and worried because they often have to decide between paying their bills and buying food for their children.

*“You can go to a fast food restaurant to get a meal for \$4.75 for your kid. What can you buy in a grocery store that can give your child a full meal for \$5? What can you buy that is healthy for that? Poverty becomes an issue of malnutrition, obesity.”*

– Participant, Community Engagement

Stakeholders who sent us submissions highlighted the importance of quality nutrition for children facing poverty across the country. Food security was a key concern among First Nations, Inuit and Métis participants in particular. They said that the high prices of, and limited access to, nutritious food in their communities, particularly in northern, isolated areas, are major issues.

## Mental Health and Addiction

The stories Canadians shared with us emphasized the connection between mental illness and living in poverty. People told us that struggles with mental illness can lead

to job loss, poverty and even homelessness. We heard that the experience of poverty itself can worsen mental health and create a vicious cycle. Participants also shared stories of dealing with a mental illness, and facing significant challenges in either obtaining employment or re-entering the job market.

People told us that addiction to drugs and alcohol can increase a person’s chances of falling into poverty and make it difficult to get out. Being frequently intoxicated can also lead someone to break the law (with behaviour such as theft, assault and domestic violence) which can lead to incarceration and a criminal record. This was identified as an important driver of poverty and a source of significant costs for the justice system.

The needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis facing mental health and addiction issues were also an area of concern frequently brought up. We heard about discrimination that First Nations, Inuit and Métis have faced, and the links between the legacy of residential schools, intergenerational trauma and poverty.

Stakeholders frequently called for increasing funding for mental health services to help prevent mental health and addiction issues from becoming contributing factors to poverty.

## What Government Heard Through Consultations on A Food Policy for Canada

(Summer 2017)

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, the Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, led broad consultations on A Food Policy for Canada between May and September 2017. The issue of food insecurity was a recurring topic identified throughout these consultations. Key priorities identified by participants included, amongst other things:

- increasing food security by reducing poverty and promoting income security;
- improving the accessibility and affordability of nutritious food for all Canadians, and particularly for vulnerable populations, such as Indigenous and isolated northern communities;
- establishing food as a basic human right; and
- promoting and supporting local and community-based solutions to food security, with several respondents mentioning the need to recognize the importance of traditional/country food.

Detailed feedback on this topic will be reflected in a dedicated What We Heard report.

“Our government knows that not all Canadians have sufficient access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, and we are working hard to address these and other challenges related to poverty and food security in Canada.”

*The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food*



Living in poverty over a long period of time takes its toll on a person's life, but especially on a person's health. **NADIA** knows too well what that is like. Having lived in poverty her entire life, her health has often suffered from it.

Life has been difficult, from being raised by an alcoholic father, having to stay in un-livable apartments, and being sexually harassed in her work place. A car accident resulted in a learning disability, and she has suffered the daily stresses of living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet. Despite being on her own since she was 15 years old, Nadia is a survivor.

Nadia reached out to get support where she could. With the help of her social worker in her neighbourhood, she was able to get healthy again and keep going. "If it wasn't for her I don't know how I could survive ... she's been there all the time for me."

Even though she has gone through many difficult periods in her life, Nadia has made it through because of her hard work and perseverance. "I would tell people not to give up ... if a door closes, there is always a door open."

"I am glad where I am today, for myself."

## CHAPTER 2

# CHALLENGES WITH JOINING THE MIDDLE CLASS

While we heard many Canadians express concerns about not being able to meet basic needs, they also said that they are finding it difficult to find opportunities for stable and well-paying work. Other participants shared their struggle in accessing post-secondary education and skills training.

*“When Canadians go to bed at night ... They are thinking about their health, their jobs, or their kids’ education. They might be worrying about piecing together enough part-time work to make ends meet or how changes in their communities will affect their lives. They worry about the growing inequality of access to the full range of supports and services they and their families need to live the highest quality of life.”*

– Bryan Smale, Director, Canadian Index of Wellbeing, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, University of Waterloo

Canadians also told us they are finding it challenging to access affordable and quality child care, which makes it even harder to provide for their families and can also limit their ability to pursue job opportunities or more education. We heard that escaping poverty is about seeing a clear path to financial independence through a good job and having reasons to be optimistic about the future.

### We want to work, help us

We heard how difficult it is for some to find stable employment. People we heard want to work, but they told us they need help.

Stakeholders told us about ongoing changes to the global economy and the nature of work. It was pointed out that some types of jobs are disappearing and new ones are emerging, and there is less chance of someone having a full-time job with one employer all of their working life.

We heard concerns that jobs may be more precarious and short-term than in the past, and that for some finding a stable job that pays well is becoming harder.

People were concerned that youth are taking longer to join the workforce than in the past and that they need help to make the transition from school to jobs. Stakeholders pointed out that a lack of Canadian credentials and language barriers continue to limit the job prospects for recent immigrants. Many people felt that visible minorities continue to face discrimination based on racism and that potential employers sometimes exclude them based on the colour of their skin or the way they look. This was also the case for Indigenous people, many of who reported experiencing discrimination and racism within the workplace as well as during the hiring process.

Participants spoke to us about the negative impacts of discrimination in the workplace. For instance, members of the LGBTQ2 community, in particular LGBTQ2 youth, told us that gender-diverse people face discrimination from employers and may need more help finding work that matches their skills. Age-based discrimination in the workplace was also brought up, and we heard about the challenges faced by older adults in getting and maintaining well-paying and stable jobs.

People living with a disability seeking stable and well-paying work said they do not always have access to the education, training and support that would allow them to participate fully in the workforce. Participants with disabilities also shared stories about how they were unable to obtain employment due to discrimination.

- Insufficient support for costs associated with disability, including assistive devices and services, is a major cause of poverty among persons with disabilities.
- Barriers to employment, whether due to unfair hiring practices or inaccessible workplaces, can perpetuate poverty. Poverty, in turn, poses a barrier to social inclusion.
- Government needs to make sure that federal services and programs are accessible.



**CHRISTIAN** is a single, hearing-impaired man living in poverty. He regularly volunteers in his community and loves helping people. As a child, he had little formal education, which led to literacy issues. He also faced abuse from his caretakers, and these issues follow him to this day.

Throughout his life, Christian struggled to make ends meet and faced employment discrimination because of his disability. “Going to different interviews would be very frustrating ... because there’s a barrier when it comes to the interview ... maybe if there were interpreters [it would help]. I have lots of support when it comes to volunteering, but no support when it comes to working.”



Christian believes that employers should be aware of the difficulties that hearing-impaired people face. He says that support for interpretation services would help deaf people overcome the many challenges they encounter in order to work and in life.

He points out that everyday services, from policing to health care, would also benefit from having interpreters on staff so that hearing-impaired and deaf people can communicate in cases of emergencies.

“If I show up [to get emergency services] and I am deaf, they have to have an interpreter because a lot of times we’re stuck ... if there is an emergency, they need to provide an interpreter.”

# What Government Heard Through the Expert Panel on Youth Employment

(Summer 2016)

## Main findings from consultations

Vulnerable youth face complex and varied barriers to employment, for example:

- younger workers are at a greater risk for food and housing insecurity;
- youth living in rural and remote areas lack access to job opportunities, transportation and the Internet; and
- Indigenous youth are facing unique challenges compared to other youth across the country and want more cultural supports.

While vulnerable youth are most likely to be neither in employment, education nor training, many youth feel insecure or dissatisfied with their employment prospects.

Current programs may not be keeping pace with the changing nature of work.

- Youth lack work experience yet entry-level jobs often require experience.
- Both employers and youth would value more opportunities for experiential and work-integrated learning.

Youth need help navigating the system and understanding the types of supports that are available.

Better data is needed to determine the exact nature of youth employment difficulties and which solutions work best.



Youth Contest Winner Cheyenne Hardy made a number of specific suggestions to improve income security, including making post-secondary education more affordable and accessible for students from low- and middle-income families.

## School is expensive, invest in me

When speaking with Canadians, we heard that education is an important way to lift people out of poverty and increase opportunities to have a better life for all age groups.

People also said that being able to access quality post-secondary education is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty across generations.

People told us that government programs have helped Canadians facing poverty and struggling to pay for education for themselves or their children. We were told that government assistance helped them afford more educational opportunities. However, many participants were not aware of available programs, while others were not sure how to access or apply for them. Others found application processes confusing, with complex forms and multiple steps.

In addition, people spoke positively about programming and supports delivered by Pathways to Education.<sup>1</sup> They said it was valuable for vulnerable youth seeking to graduate from high school and transition into post-secondary education, training or employment.

Despite the available support from governments, people told us that the costs of education and training remain too high and that this can make it difficult for them to upgrade their skills. We heard that the greatest barrier to post-secondary education is the high cost of tuition, related expenses such as textbooks, and housing. We also heard of the struggles of low-income parents trying to put their children through school and adults trying to complete higher education in order to get a better job.

***“Training, training, training. Poverty reduction should start by equipping everyone in society with the tools to adapt to changing employment opportunities, so that we can all be flexible, adaptable and able to seek and find employment in a variety of different areas.”***

– Online Participant

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/>

## What the Government Heard Through Federal-Provincial/Territorial Consultations on the Labour Market Transfer Agreements (Summer 2016)

Employment and skills training programs should:

- aim to develop a workforce that is educated, empowered, adaptable and productive;
- be driven by labour market demand and employers' needs; and
- recognize the needs of vulnerable populations.

Employers play a key role, both in providing training opportunities for job-seekers and employees, and reinforcing skill acquisition in the workplace.

Individuals who are not eligible for Employment Insurance may not be receiving needed skills and training supports.

### I can work, but still need some help

Many people we heard said that having a job is not always enough to avoid poverty because their wages are too low. Low wages were frequently cited as a barrier to having basic needs met and participating in activities that make individuals and families feel truly included in society.

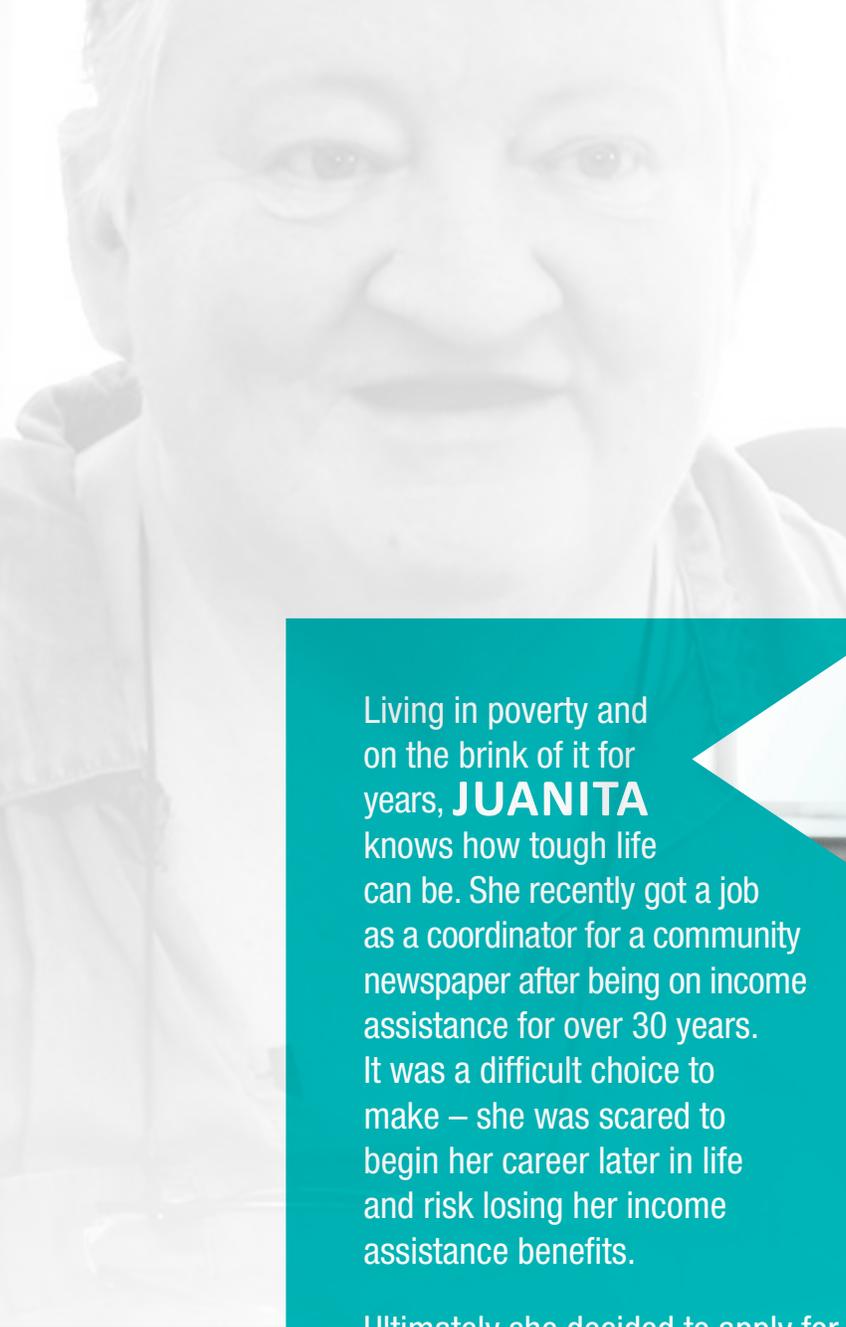
Others told us that their social assistance benefits were reduced or stopped when they found work, which resulted in continued financial difficulties and acted as a disincentive to stay in the workforce.

We also heard that re-entering the workforce after facing difficult life situations such as serious illness or the loss of a loved one can be a difficult process that requires support, particularly for those returning to work after a long absence.

We heard from Canadians living in remote and rural areas about having one or two part-time jobs and still finding it difficult to get by, and about how they struggle to get a decent paying full-time job, because these types of jobs are becoming harder to find in their communities.

*“Once you’re stuck below the poverty line, it is so hard to get out of it. When I get a job, they take away benefits even though I am still struggling. How am I supposed to move up? It’s impossible.”*

– Participant, Tackling Poverty Together Project



Living in poverty and on the brink of it for years, **JUANITA** knows how tough life can be. She recently got a job as a coordinator for a community newspaper after being on income assistance for over 30 years. It was a difficult choice to make – she was scared to begin her career later in life and risk losing her income assistance benefits.



Ultimately she decided to apply for the job, but there were more challenges to face. For example, when she initially applied, she didn't know what a cover letter was. Fortunately, she learned how to successfully write one with the help of a community empowerment group that teaches development skills to women to help improve communities.

Juanita says that leaving income assistance was a major accomplishment for her. She hopes that people coming together in her community can help solve many of the persistent poverty issues.

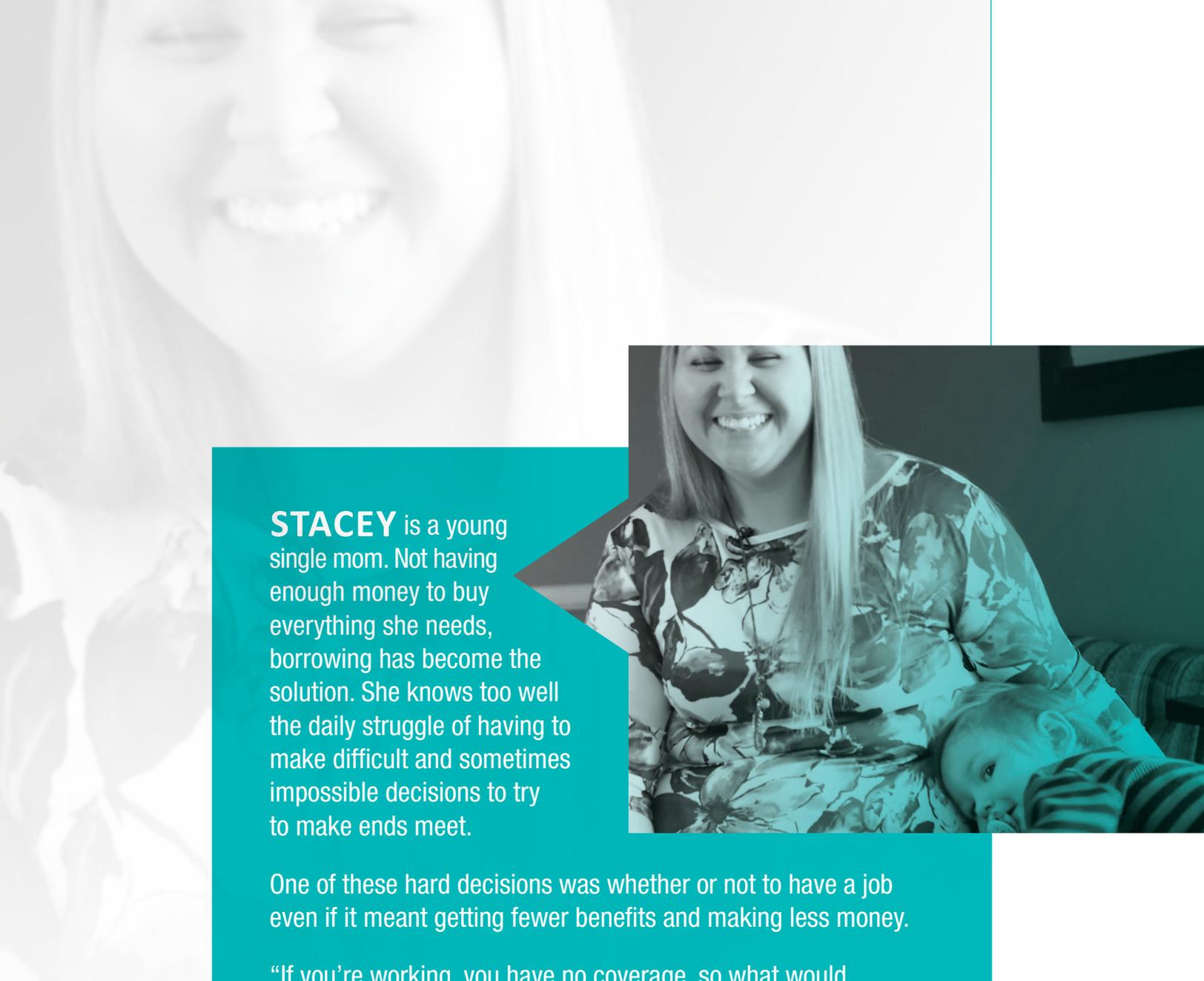
## Who is going to take care of my kids or my loved one while I work or go to school?

Many told us about how parents with low or modest incomes must spend a large part of their money to pay for child care, which acts as a barrier to finding a job or upgrading skills. We also heard that parents who have non-standard work or school schedules often struggle to find child care services that meet their needs, and that this can limit the opportunities to improve their families' financial situation.

Participants told us that the struggle to find affordable child care services that allow parents to fully participate in the workforce or get an education is an issue that especially affects women.

Indigenous participants also told us there is not enough access to culturally appropriate early learning activities and care services for their children. An Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework is currently being co-developed with Indigenous partners to reflect the needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children across Canada. We also heard about the need to empower First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to stop poverty from passing from one generation to another.

Finally, we heard that being responsible for the care of a loved one who is severely ill or elderly brings pressures and commitments. These can create barriers for caregivers who are struggling to meet their own basic needs and/or to improve their job prospects.



**STACEY** is a young single mom. Not having enough money to buy everything she needs, borrowing has become the solution. She knows too well the daily struggle of having to make difficult and sometimes impossible decisions to try to make ends meet.

One of these hard decisions was whether or not to have a job even if it meant getting fewer benefits and making less money.

“If you’re working, you have no coverage, so what would you rather? [...] I would rather work in my opinion.”

As a working mom, if she didn’t have a good job and help from friends and family, she would not be able to provide for her family. “I would owe my life pretty much to payments [...] I would not be able to go forward.”

## CHAPTER 3

# RISKS OF SLIPPING INTO POVERTY

Throughout the engagement we heard about the daily struggles that some middle-class Canadians face while being on the brink of falling into poverty. Even Canadians who have jobs or are only experiencing temporary unemployment indicated that they were struggling to make ends meet. Many working Canadians said that having a job does not guarantee that they can afford to cover basic living expenses for themselves and their families. Canadians living paycheque to paycheque spoke of how unexpected life events, such as job loss, sickness or family crisis, could mean falling into poverty. Living on the edge of poverty can also create added stress and compound other problems such as physical and mental health issues.

### Living paycheque to paycheque

We heard from Canadians and stakeholder groups alike that Canadians who are working but still on the brink of poverty need more support and better awareness of supports that exist.

We also heard that Canadians receiving benefits, such as social assistance, face challenges in finding a job that pays enough money to replace the loss of non-income benefits from social assistance, such as pharmaceutical or dental care. This has led many people to conclude that they are better off by not working at all.

Youth also told us that they feel insecure in low-wage employment, particularly when in precarious, part-time work with little to no benefits. It was noted that this creates difficulty in planning for their future or moving to the next stage of life, like getting married or having children.



Youth Contest Winner Donia Arfaoui calls for more training opportunities and work placements for young people, especially vulnerable youth, so that they can get started on successful careers as part of a three-part plan to reduce poverty.

Members of vulnerable groups also discussed the risk of slipping into poverty. Some seniors mentioned the need for increased support in their retirement years. We also heard that governments should better support women who take time off during their career to raise children once they reach retirement age.

We heard many calls to make disability benefits more generous and to allow people who can work to keep more of their earnings.

***“People with disabilities should be able to go out and work. They should be able to make more money that is not clawed back.”***

– Participant, Tackling Poverty Together Project

***“I had a good job. Then I got in an accident and when I returned to work I asked if they could give me accommodations for my disability and they said no and fired me.”***

– Participant, Tackling Poverty Together Project

***“When you are poor and you are a senior, you can’t afford to get into debt. It is far easier to get into debt than it is to get out.”***

– Participant, Tackling Poverty Together Project

***“The Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) should be reviewed and extended. Although the WITB will be increased in 2019 to offset the increase in CPP contributions, there should be an independent increase that will see an increase in individuals’ ‘take-home’ income. WITB returns should also be automated in order to ensure that all those eligible benefit.”***

– Submission by Feed Nova Scotia

## What if I lose my job?

Many Canadians spoke of their experiences with living in poverty as a result of job loss. While Employment Insurance supports Canadians who temporarily lose their job through no fault of their own, Canadians told us that the program is not reaching everyone.

Some stakeholders told us that Canadians from marginalized groups (for example, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities and those identifying as LGBTQ2) tend to have more unstable, low-wage work. They said that Employment Insurance benefit rates for these jobs either are not available or are very low. This means that these groups have little to rely on when or if they lose their jobs. As for people who do receive Employment Insurance, we heard that current benefit amounts were not enough to help them remain financially secure through periods of unemployment.

***“You know, people often ask why women stay in abusive relationships; well the reality is that in some ways women are safer to stay. When they leave, they often end up with years of insecure housing and poverty. First of all, they often end up staying at a transition house with a whole bunch of other women from all walks of life having also fled an abusive relationship. Not necessarily what every little girl dreams of for herself.”***

– Poverty Reduction Strategy Forum

## What the Government Heard Through Consultations on a Federal Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence (Summer 2016)

During the engagement process for the Federal Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence, the Government heard that the Strategy needs to link to broader social issues including poverty, child care, pay equity, homelessness and affordable housing, which contribute to gender inequality and serve as barriers to well-being and freedom from violence.

We also heard of unique challenges faced by women. We heard that unpaid caregiving responsibilities tend to fall disproportionately on women, meaning that many women sacrifice careers or leave secure jobs in order to do this important work for their families, which may leave them at greater risk of being in poverty. Women fleeing domestic violence are also at risk of falling into poverty.

The risk of falling into poverty is even higher when leaving work or experiencing a life setback or family crisis. We heard that losing a partner, especially suddenly, can have devastating emotional and financial impacts. Participants explained that people who did not work before, or were not the primary income source for their households, are particularly vulnerable to income insecurity and may face challenges getting or keeping well-paying jobs.

We also heard about unique challenges in receiving sufficient income support when unable to work. Some individuals let us know they were unable to receive disability benefits because their case did not sufficiently meet eligibility criteria. Other participants and stakeholders spoke of difficulties that seniors with disabilities and chronic illnesses face in accessing decent retirement incomes. It was also noted that people who have been disabled over long periods and are not able to work often cannot access private and public pension plans that depend on sustained employment.

*“It’s very hard to accept having to go on social assistance after losing your husband when you never had to go on it. Starting from scratch when you are 59 is not easy. C’est une bataille de la vie.”*

*– Participant, Tackling Poverty Together Project*



Youth Contest Winner Mehr Saini suggested a number of innovative ways to reduce poverty, including encouraging Canadians to volunteer their time to help out in their communities.

## CHAPTER 4

# EXPERIENCES OF FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS

In keeping with Canada's commitment to a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership, and to make progress on the issues most important to First Nations, Inuit and Métis, we undertook a number of Indigenous-specific engagement activities. Some were Government-led, and others were led by First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations.

*“Poverty is often hidden in the name of pride.”*

*– Participant, First Nations Engagement*

This chapter presents key themes that we heard from First Nations, Inuit and Métis across Canada. There was considerable diversity amongst the people we spoke with and there was not always consensus in views. Participants included both status and non-status First Nations, some of whom lived on reserve, and others who lived off reserve. We spoke with Indigenous people from isolated and remote communities, rural communities, and urban centres, who shared many insightful comments, stories, ideas, and experiences. Their input is appreciated and will be invaluable to the development of the Strategy.

Five National Indigenous Organizations, namely the Assembly of First Nations, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Métis National Council and Native Women's Association of Canada submitted input that will be used to inform the development of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, and we will continue to work with them on the implementation of the Strategy.

Indigenous people raised many concerns that were similar to those raised by other Canadians. However, First Nations, Inuit and Métis have unique histories in Canada and have been subject to policies and other circumstances that have not applied to the general population. The imposition of colonial control over First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples resulted in a forced disconnection from their lands, cultural practices and communities. This failure by the federal government to fully recognize and implement Indigenous rights, including the inherent right to self-determination and self-government, has had direct negative consequences on the socio-economic outcomes of Indigenous people, and has perpetuated cycles of poverty and marginalization over many generations.

As a result, certain barriers and challenges are unique to or greater for Indigenous people, and may be even more pronounced for those living in northern or remote communities, women, LGBTQ and Two-Spirit people, and those with disabilities or functional limitations.

## We need to change the relationship, to support a better future

### Colonialism, Racism and Exclusion

***“If you’re going to break the cycle of colonialism, it needs to start by the Government admitting that they don’t have the answers.”***

– Participant, Inuit Roundtable

In speaking with First Nations (status and non-status, on and off reserve), Inuit and Métis, we heard that colonialism has contributed to higher rates of poverty and continues to increase the risk. They also highlighted that poverty must be understood from a multidimensional lens, as it permeates all aspects of their communities (for example, social well-being, health, economic development, environment, justice, culture, housing and infrastructure, water, education) as a result of colonialism.

***“There is no word for poverty in the Inuit language.”***

– Participant, Inuit Roundtable

We also heard that the term “poverty reduction” is not culturally appropriate for some Indigenous groups, because it takes a negative view rather than a strengths-based approach. People told us that we should be talking about well-being and supporting resiliency instead.

We were told that racism is pervasive in all supports and services, and absolutely must be addressed. It was suggested that First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultural values and identities have been devalued and marginalized in Canada, and their voices have too often been disregarded. Several Indigenous people said their people have been viewed as incapable, when in fact they are capable and resilient.

We heard there has not been enough recognition of First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments. Participants told us that mainstream (federal, provincial and territorial) policy approaches have been based on inappropriate assumptions, while the issues are only really understood, and answers found, within the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities themselves.

Indigenous women, in particular, said that social, political and economic exclusion has limited their access to supports. For example, when they go to cities for services they are likely to experience feelings of social exclusion, which leads to them not seeking or receiving the help that they need.

***“There is systemic racism in the social and health services. That poor level of service impacts Indigenous people in every aspect of their lives.”***

– Participant, First Nations Engagement

***“The top-down approach doesn’t work. The solutions need to come from the First Nations themselves ... They live there – they know what will work.”***

– Participant, First Nations Roundtable

***“Government partners need to get out of the way sometimes rather than creating roadblocks or just an additional layer of bureaucracy.”***

*– Participant, First Nations Engagement*

Indigenous women also told us that poverty is about more than a lack of income—it is also social disconnection—and explained that cultural activities promote social and economic well-being by improving self-confidence and building identity.

People said the Government should support more culturally appropriate approaches by providing funding and then stepping back, so that First Nations, Inuit and Métis can design and deliver solutions tailored to their particular needs. We also heard that people are encouraged by, and want to see the Government fully implement, the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,<sup>2</sup> and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>3</sup>

## **Working together for strong and healthy people, families and communities**

### **Funding**

Many First Nations, Inuit and Métis told us that the process to get government funding is culturally biased and that, as a result, organizations that may be best suited to provide culturally relevant supports are losing out. We heard that the impact of cultural bias may be worse in places with a higher proportion of unilingual or first-language Indigenous speakers.

We were told by First Nations, Inuit and Métis that their communities and organizations are underfunded and that there is a lack of equity in funding. We also heard that sometimes one or more Indigenous groups are excluded from programs or services that other groups are funded for.

Most First Nations, Inuit and Métis groups we spoke with told us that short-term funding cycles have negative impacts. We were told that communities and organizations require long-term sustained funding to offer high-quality community-based programs.

***“The Aboriginal Head Start program has been successful, but the Métis are not funded through it.”***

*– Participant, Métis Roundtable*

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

## Resources and Economy

We heard that job opportunities are lacking in many communities, and that First Nations, Inuit and Métis have not been included in or had access to opportunities in the natural resources sector. People also told us that traditional economies that help people meet their basic needs (for example, fishing, hunting and trapping) have been diminished or lost. As one example, in some communities the animals are disappearing because their habitats have been destroyed by resource extractive industries (for example, mining and forestry) and climate change.

## Remote Communities and Cost of Living

People told us that the rates and effects of poverty are higher in remote and isolated communities. The cost of living (for example, the prices of food and housing materials) is so high that most people cannot afford a decent standard of living. They often face a lack of services or lower-quality services compared to urban communities. The costs of leaving the community to get help can be very high, both financially and personally.

The absence of quality supports in northern and remote communities forces Indigenous people to migrate to cities, away from their families and cultural supports, which can cause mental health changes including loneliness, disconnection and depression. These structural gaps can cause some people to not seek help when they need it, or to settle for low-quality care.

*“In some of our remote communities, a bag of milk costs anywhere from \$14–\$20, a bag of apples \$16, and two litres of orange juice costs \$22! People who need to rely on social assistance are doomed to live in abject poverty.”*

– Participant, First Nations Roundtable

## Child Welfare

People pointed out that poverty contributes to the over-representation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in the child welfare system. We heard that there are more children in care today than there were at the height of the residential schools.

*“Canada is repeating the 60’s scoop/residential schools through the child welfare system.”*

– Participant, Métis Roundtable

***“When a kid in child welfare turns 18 they’re on their own – they’re expected to be independent. Why? Other kids can depend on their families way past that age! If you ask homeless youth on the street, you’ll find out that for so many, their past includes child welfare.”***

– Participant, Inuit Roundtable

We also heard there are not enough supports for youth when they reach the age to leave child welfare. While other children (not in child welfare) can typically depend on their families as they grow into adulthood (into their 20s and longer), children in child welfare often face an abrupt end to support at the age of 18. Due to the high rates at which Indigenous children are placed in the child welfare system, this puts Indigenous children at higher risk of experiencing poverty and its negative impacts.

## Justice System

We know that Indigenous people are over-represented in the criminal justice system, both as victims and offenders, and the rates are particularly high for Indigenous women.<sup>4</sup> First Nations, Inuit and Métis told us that the justice system is broken, including the police, courts, custodial institutions, and probation and parole programs.

We heard there are not enough culturally appropriate programs in jails, such as spiritual and healing supports, or for people when they are released from custody. As a result, when Indigenous people leave institutions they often end up impoverished, homeless and far from their home communities with little to no supports. We heard this is especially true for Indigenous women, and causes them to be more vulnerable to violence once they are released.

## Homelessness

The people we spoke with noted that First Nations, Inuit and Métis are over-represented in the homeless population, while they acknowledged that exact numbers are difficult to track. Low income, lack of affordable housing, lack of culturally appropriate housing, racism, addictions, mental health concerns, disabilities, being released from incarceration and family violence were all cited as contributing to homelessness. We also heard that Indigenous women and families who are fleeing violent situations are sometimes unable to access emergency services and supports.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/jf-pf/2017/jan02.html>

## Housing and Infrastructure

We heard that First Nations, Inuit and Métis face a number of challenges associated with housing and infrastructure. For example, some First Nations and Inuit communities lack basic infrastructure such as roads, clean water, sanitation and sewage, face critical housing shortages leading to overcrowding and have homes in need of repairs.

*“We need funding for infrastructure. We can’t apply for program dollars if we don’t have the infrastructure to support it. How can we apply for childcare funding if we don’t have anywhere to put a daycare?!”*

– Participant, First Nations Roundtable

People told us that existing efforts to address housing issues may not always be culturally appropriate. Inuit participants, in particular, noted that the Housing First model<sup>5</sup> does not work well with the collectivist nature of their culture. They told us that when an Inuk is in a homeless shelter, they have the support of the other Inuit who are there, but when you take them from that close-knit community and put them in a small apartment they are isolated—their community connections have been broken and they can become despondent. People explained that this has led to people going back onto the streets to reconnect with others.

## Urban Transitions

For people who leave a reserve or remote community, moving to an urban setting is a challenge that can be made harder by discrimination, stigma and exclusion. For example, we heard that many people struggle to find affordable housing and face issues of discrimination and racism; for example, when landlords refuse to rent to them.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/housing-first.html>

# What the Government Heard Through Engagement on the Urban Aboriginal Strategy

(June to September 2016)

Key issues raised included the need for local programs and services that focused on:

- youth;
- transitional culture and language;
- supporting families;
- housing and homelessness;
- mental health and addictions; and
- health care.

There was significant support during engagement for a more holistic approach to programs and services that are culturally sensitive and focused on the needs of individuals and communities.

## Food Security

People told us that food security is a major concern related to poverty, especially given the much higher cost of living in many northern, remote and isolated communities.

We also heard that food is an important part of culture and belonging for First Nations, Inuit and Métis. For example, an Inuk participant described the monthly feasts and community kitchens that take place with their organization, which helps clients feel included and connected with their Indigenous identity. We also heard about the NunatuKavut Community Freezer program, which provides country food for people who are unable to fish, hunt or gather.

*“When you’re trying to teach a kid math, and you’re thinking he has home issues, when really he’s just hungry.”*

– Participant, Inuit Roundtable

*“Food is more than nourishment—it’s social cohesion.”*

– Participant, Inuit Roundtable

It was pointed out that Indigenous people may not access social services (such as food banks) affiliated with religious institutions, especially given the history and inter-generational trauma associated with residential schools.

# What the Government Heard Through Nutrition North Canada (NNC) Engagement 2016

(Summer 2016)

- Everything in the North is expensive given the high cost of living paired with the prevalence of a fixed income.
- Even with the program, many families are not able to afford healthy food.
- Consistently throughout the engagement, it was heard that the NNC subsidy is not having a big enough effect on the price of food.
- Climate change will have an impact on food availability in the future through the reduced availability of country/traditional food, and the impact on seasonal transportation routes (specifically winter roads).
- All communities and the vast majority of participants indicated a desire for increased support for country/traditional food and locally produced food as part of NNC or as a separately managed program.

## Coordination of Supports

People mentioned that often if a person receives one benefit they will lose another—especially when one of the benefits is provincial or territorial and the other is federal. For example, in Saskatchewan if a First Nation person has been receiving provincial social assistance and they get approved for post-secondary education funding (a federally funded program), their eligibility for social assistance ends. It was noted that the amount of education funding alone is not enough to survive on.

*“I have poor health and can’t afford to pay for health benefits, dental, or prescriptions.”*

– Participant, Non-status/non-registered Indian, urban

*“I’m supposed to be going back to school in the fall, but I don’t know if I’m going to be able to. The education funding isn’t enough – I can pay my rent, but I won’t have any money left for food. I looked for a cheaper place to live, but I couldn’t find one – my place is already small – rent is just expensive here. I could work part-time for money to buy groceries – but I can’t even do that, because I don’t get to keep what I earn – my pay will get taken off my education funding. I’m really discouraged. So right now, I’m trying to decide whether I’m going to stay in school and not have enough money to eat, or drop out of school so I can pay rent and buy food, but never get ahead in life. I’m not sure what I’m going to do at this point.”*

– Participant, First Nations Engagement

## Education

We heard from participants that elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools are not welcoming spaces where Indigenous students can feel like they belong. People explained that when their children go to school, most of the teachers do not speak an Indigenous language and do not understand or value Indigenous cultures. One Inuk participant said that when he went to university, the culture of the school and people there made him feel that his identity as an Indigenous person would not be accepted.

People pointed out that there is a high turnover rate among teachers in First Nations communities. There is also low enrolment for children and youth in cases where schools are located far from their communities.

*“When I was going to university, I had to pretend to be somebody else just to get through. People thought I was Chinese! They think Inuit aren’t as smart.”*

– Participant, Inuit Roundtable

*“In the public system, it felt like Métis history was a ‘two-line tack-on’ to the lesson plan ... We’re an afterthought because there’s no Métis-specific curriculum. Teachers in Batoche didn’t know the true history of Batoche ... We still read books that talk about the Riel Rebellion. It wasn’t a rebellion, it was a resistance! It’s still the colonial perspective in the history books.”*

– Participant, Métis Engagement

When youth have to leave home to attend school in urban centres, they face new challenges. For example, in Thunder Bay, Winnipeg and Yellowknife, we heard that children from surrounding First Nations need to leave their homes to finish high school. There is no school in their community, or the school does not go up to grade 12.

People said that there is not enough funding for schools on reserves, that school curricula should be culturally relevant, and that education in the North does not prepare young people well enough for higher education or participation in the job market.

## Training and Employment

First Nations, Inuit and Métis told us about the lack of training and job opportunities in their communities. They told us programs could be doing better at ensuring that training is targeted to available jobs. They also said that when it comes to public service positions, governments are not doing a good job of training Indigenous people to advance in their careers, though there are some successful programs that could be enhanced for better outcomes.

*“The ASETS program has been effective at eliminating poverty and reducing working poverty, but it is micro-managed and the Métis receive less funding.”*

– Participant, Métis Roundtable

***“When the Government comes in and builds houses, what are the advantages to the people in the community? They get a few houses, but nothing has been done in terms of building capacity or leaving a lasting, longer-term impact.”***

– Participant, Inuit Roundtable

Inuit participants told us about a model for on-the-job training, the Housing Internship for First Nations and Inuit Youth program, where community members are taught to build houses, which provides more housing in the community and strengthens the community itself as its population develops new skills.

Racism was frequently cited as a barrier that prevents Indigenous people from obtaining meaningful and rewarding employment.

Extensive engagement on design and delivery of Indigenous labour market programming took place with Indigenous leadership, service delivery organizations, academic institutions, and provincial and federal partners. Key findings included:

- Funding levels should reflect diverse and unique realities.
- Programming should reflect the different cultural contexts and needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis.
- Funding should be stable and long term.
- Reporting and administrative oversight can be cumbersome.
- Program flexibility is important.
- Efforts and successes on the path towards employment should be recognized.
- Existing early learning and child care investments are insufficient.
- Indigenous leadership and community members should be more involved in decisions made on the future of programming.

# CHAPTER 5

## SERVICE DELIVERY

Many Canadians are unaware of the supports available to them. Applying for help can be difficult for people who are in need. People asked for clear and convenient resources to get the services they require. People also said that the federal government should continue making information about its programs and services more accessible and easy to understand.

### Accessing Programs and Services

Some Canadians told us they did not know about programs and supports that could be helpful. People also thought the federal government should improve its advertising about programs and services and work harder to reach low-income clients where they live.

***“You can’t access what you don’t know about.”***

*– Participant, Tackling Poverty Together Project*

We heard from stakeholders and local organizations that there is a lack of knowledge about federal programs and services including among rural and remote First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. People told us that residents of these communities find it difficult to seek out supports and services, or even pursue employment opportunities, since they do not have access to government offices or affordable broadband Internet.

People shared the difficulties they experienced with filling out forms and the administrative processes when applying for federal programs and services. They said that the language used in forms and their design is too complex, especially for individuals with low literacy. Many people with lived experience of poverty told us they find the process of filing their income tax difficult to understand, and that they could benefit from guidance or support. Stakeholders also asked that government messages be tailored for key audiences and the language simplified.

## What the Government Heard During Employment Insurance (EI) Service Quality Review Consultations (Summer 2016)

- EI service delivery needs to be more focused on understanding the needs and priorities of citizens.
- Canadians generally find it difficult to communicate with Service Canada (for example, difficulty understanding language used in application forms, and difficulty getting accurate and clear information from service agents).
- Information available on the EI program is sometimes difficult to understand which can lead to mistakes during the application process.
- More needs to be done on the part of the EI program to inform citizens of what is available to them in terms of training and other support measures.
- Call Centre accessibility is the primary frustration for Canadians and needs to be improved.

- Not everyone in the North knows how important it is to file a tax return in order to claim the benefits they are entitled to. Participants called for more information and assistance on claiming benefits, credits and deductions.
- Telephone and mail services in the North are not always reliable. Making payments can also be difficult because of limited banking and Internet capabilities.
- There is a need for CRA employees to interact with clients in a way that is sensitive to northern realities.
- Some taxpayers in the North are not aware of the northern residents deductions and it can be difficult to meet some of the requirements. Some participants also think that the CRA conducts repeated and unnecessary reviews of tax returns from those who claim these deductions.

People also told us that they have trouble accessing programs and services when they have to deal with multiple layers of administration. They often have to interact with different departments, jurisdictions and organizations. Participants felt that this increased the number of requirements that

they have to meet, as well as the likelihood of miscommunication or lack of communication between different levels of government and jurisdictions. Some people said that going through this complicated process frustrated them and caused them to give up. Stakeholders asked for one-stop options for service delivery to learn about services relevant to their needs. They also asked for increased financial support for community organizations that help guide low-income people through the process.



Youth Contest winner Ritika Arora suggested the creation of “HelpingHubs” that offer a one-stop resource point to support people living in poverty, focusing on all aspects that impact each person living in poverty.

## In-person Service Delivery

Canadians also told us about difficulties during face-to-face interactions with service delivery officials. We frequently heard about applicants feeling judged and discriminated against due to their appearance, their background or for lacking basic knowledge about programs and rules. People said that these experiences made them hesitant to seek out much-needed support. A lack of assistance in languages other than English and French was also identified as an issue.

We also often heard about the stigmatizing effects of applying for and maintaining access to social assistance benefits across the country. Some participants indicated that they continually have to prove to service providers that they are “poor enough” to continue receiving social assistance. They also felt that they were being perceived as lazy or as taking advantage of this form of support. We were told that such situations made living in poverty demoralizing and contributed to poor mental health.

While it was clear that there is no single or direct measure that can help reduce discrimination or eliminate social stigmas, participants were hopeful that having their voices heard during the consultation would help raise awareness of the daily challenges they face.

*“We need to offer support under a practice of ‘no wrong door.’”*

– Participant, Tackling Poverty Together Project

# CHAPTER 6

## TARGETS AND INDICATORS

Canadians told us they want a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy that is focused on achieving real results that can be measured in precise, innovative ways. They also called for ways to make the Government accountable for the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy's goals.

### Problems with Current Approaches to Measuring Poverty

Statistics Canada has three indicators of low income, including (1) the Low Income Cut-off, (2) the Low Income Measure and (3) the Market Basket Measure. However, there is no official measure of poverty for Canada. We heard that this situation can be confusing because the existing low income measures rely on different methods and produce different results.

Some participants told us that not having an official measure prevents the Government from being able to establish clear targets and being accountable for meeting them. They pointed out possible problems with the existing measures and the surveys where data comes from, including that income thresholds are not always up to date or responsive to changes in society or the economy. Data gaps on-reserve and in the North were also frequently discussed.

Stakeholders also told us that current income-based approaches to measuring poverty do not give a complete insight into poverty. This can lead to a limited understanding of a multi-dimensional problem that can also be about feeling socially excluded, illness, discrimination and not having specific goods and services.

We heard that measuring and addressing poverty should not be done without considering other indicators that reflect the multiple dimensions of poverty, such as health, housing conditions and access to quality food. People told us that government programs can sometimes have more of an impact on these indicators than on overall income trends, which are strongly influenced by economic factors.

*“An effective anti-poverty plan must have clear and realistic goals, as well as realistic timelines to achieve these goals, using widely accepted measures of progress. The benchmarks for the timelines must be concrete enough, and frequent enough, that a government can be held accountable within its mandate. While the goals are an important part of the plan, other and emerging factors should always be taken into account.”*

– Dignity for All campaign submission:  
“A National Anti-Poverty Plan  
for Canada”

We also heard that making more data on poverty available to the public could help increase Canadians' understanding of poverty issues and facilitate improvements to service delivery and innovative research.

## Setting Targets

People told us that it is essential to set clear targets for success as part of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, so that the Government can deliver and demonstrate real results for Canadians. On the one hand, some participants stressed that targets should be ambitious and inspire long-term poverty reduction efforts across the federal government, different levels of government and the stakeholder community. On the other hand, many felt that short-term targets would lead to more immediate actions to help those who are struggling in poverty today.

## Accountability and Governance

Participants also discussed the importance of developing ways to keep current and future governments accountable for reducing poverty. We heard that because poverty is such a wide-ranging and complex issue, it will take a long time and continued efforts by current and future governments to make real progress. People also told us that leadership will be required across government departments.

While some stakeholders felt that Canadians should have a right not to be poor, many others felt that the better way to hold governments to account would be through legislation that entrenches an obligation to reduce poverty.

***“Government should be ambitious in setting targets and timelines to reduce and eradicate poverty – the credibility of the strategy depends on it.”***

– Campaign 2000 submission:  
“Federal Action to Eradicate Poverty”

***“Setting explicit, public and visible targets for social indicators, such as the incidence or depth of poverty, can serve as an element of the ‘social contract’, help focus policy-maker efforts, and work as an enabler for civil society.”***

– Francisco H. G. Ferreira,  
Senior Advisor, Development and  
Research Group, The World Bank

## What Government and the Co-Creation Steering Group Are Hearing Through Consultations on the Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy

(June 2017 – ongoing)

Canadians expressed strong interest in the Government pursuing innovative approaches to persistent social challenges. Community practitioners and other stakeholders called for a federal Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy that:

- focuses on improving outcomes and quality of life for people in vulnerable circumstances, including those living in poverty;
- aligns with and reinforces other federal initiatives, such as the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Innovation and Skills Plan and the National Housing Strategy;
- improves the capacity of on-the-ground actors, including not-for-profit organizations, social enterprises and government service providers, to deliver existing programs better and to innovate and collaborate with diverse partners;
- invests in new social innovation and social finance funding platforms that are community-based as well as national-scale; and
- supports knowledge sharing between community practitioners, including efforts to increase data collection, impact measurement and community-academic research partnerships.

The consultation and engagement process is ongoing. A full report summarizing what we are hearing will be released.

# CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSION

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Perhaps the most important thing we learned through this national engagement is that despite the hardships experienced by many Canadians living in poverty, they continue to show a great deal of resilience and courage as they face their challenges. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the importance and urgency of the many issues and calls to action that participants shared to help us develop Canada's first national Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Canadians told us that jobs can be hard to come by in some communities. However, the problem of poverty is complex and we must consider other factors such as discrimination and physical or mental illness, to name a few.

They also told us that we must take into consideration the specific challenges that vulnerable segments of our population face.

We also need to acknowledge that reconciliation and renewed nation-to-nation relationships between the Government of Canada and First Nations, Inuit and Métis must involve us working collaboratively toward effective and culturally appropriate solutions—this is the only way to truly help better support the resilience and well-being of Indigenous children, families and communities.

Overall, participants made it clear that more supports and investments are needed to reduce poverty in this country, and that there needs to be greater awareness of and access to existing government programs.

While the engagement process for the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy has concluded, our conversation with Canadians does not end here. As we work toward the unprecedented steps of releasing and implementing a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, we intend to make sure that Canadians' voices continue to be heard.

We will ensure that all input and feedback we have received is reflected in our discussions within the federal government, and with other levels of government, First Nations, Inuit and Métis, private-sector and non-governmental organizations, academics and any other stakeholders who share an ambition to lift Canadians out of poverty. This report will help the Government set the path for immediate and long-term courses of action on poverty reduction and contribute to informing a whole-of-government approach to the Strategy.

Thank you to each and every person who contributed to this cross-Canada engagement.

# ANNEX A

## LIST OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

As we travelled across the country to speak one-on-one with Canadians, we held multiple events. These included:

### Ministerial and Parliamentary Secretary Events

- Engagement with provincial and territorial ministers through the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Social Services Ministers Forum.
- Stakeholder roundtables were held in:
  - Edmonton, Alberta
  - Gatineau, Quebec (2)
  - Halifax, Nova Scotia
  - Hamilton, Ontario
  - Montréal, Quebec
  - Ottawa, Ontario
  - Québec, Quebec
  - Toronto, Ontario (3)
  - Vancouver, British Columbia
- Ministerial Indigenous Leadership roundtables and meetings held in:
  - Toronto, Ontario
  - Ottawa, Ontario (1 roundtable, 3 meetings)
  - Thunder Bay, Ontario
  - Winnipeg, Manitoba
- Ministerial town halls held in:
  - Montréal, Quebec
  - Ottawa, Ontario (broadcast live online via Facebook)
  - Québec, Quebec
  - Thunder Bay, Ontario

### Non-Ministerial Events

- Officials-level engagement held via the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Poverty Advisory Committee.
- Community conversations, 33 in total, hosted in partnership with the Tamarack Institute and its network of 54 partner communities.

- The 33 community conversation locations included:
  - Abbotsford, British Columbia
  - Brampton, Ontario
  - Burlington, Ontario
  - Calgary, Alberta
  - Cape Breton, Nova Scotia
  - Charlotte County, New Brunswick
  - Cranbrook, British Columbia
  - Edmonton, Alberta (2)
  - St. Thomas, Ontario
  - Halifax, Nova Scotia
  - Kamloops, British Columbia
  - Kitchener, Ontario
  - Leeds and Grenville, Ontario
  - Mississauga, Ontario
  - Nelson, British Columbia
  - Niagara Falls, Ontario
  - Ottawa, Ontario (2)
  - Prince Edward Hastings, Ontario (2)
  - Red Deer, Alberta
  - Revelstoke, British Columbia
  - Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (2)
  - Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario
  - St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador (2)
  - Sydney, British Columbia (2)
  - Whitehorse, Yukon
  - Windsor, Ontario
  - Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
  
- National Indigenous Organization-led community engagement: Five engagement projects led by the five National Indigenous Organizations were included as part of the engagement process to obtain views from First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.
  
- Government of Canada officials led engagement activities (13 in total) with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, groups and organizations in:
  - Iqaluit, Nunavut (2)
  - Moncton, New Brunswick
  - Niagara Falls, Ontario
  - Ottawa, Ontario (5)
  - Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (2)
  - Whitehorse, Yukon (2)
  
- An online engagement platform was launched on February 13, 2017, where people could read background materials, connect and share their ideas on poverty in multiple ways, including:
  - an online survey;
  - an online discussion forum;
  - share your story submissions; and
  - submissions of papers and reports via email.
  
- Through the Tackling Poverty Together Project, we heard directly from Canadians with lived experience of poverty from six different communities:
  - Regent Park (Toronto), Ontario
  - Saint John, New Brunswick
  - Tisdale, Saskatchewan
  - Trois-Rivières, Quebec
  - Winnipeg, Manitoba
  - Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

A final report on what was heard during the Project was released on October 4 and is available online at [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca).

The #ReducePoverty in Canada Contest was held between May and August 2017, where youth aged 12 to 24 could submit their thoughts and ideas on how to reduce poverty in Canada. We received 64 submissions and 5 were selected to be presented at the National Poverty Conference on September 28, 2017.

## ANNEX B

# LIST OF STAKEHOLDER ORGANIZATIONS OR INDIVIDUALS THAT MADE FORMAL ONLINE SUBMISSIONS DURING CANADIAN POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY CONSULTATIONS

- À Coeur d'Homme
- Alberta Urban Municipalities Association
- Alternatives North
- Association of Local Public Health Agencies and the Ontario Public Health Association (Health Equity Work Group)
- Basic Income Canada Network
- BC Poverty Reduction Coalition
- BC Raise the Rates Coalition
- British Columbia Council for International Cooperation
- Calgary Homeless Foundation
- Campaign 2000
- Canada Without Poverty
- Canadian Alliance of Student Associations
- Canadian Association for Community Living & People First of Canada (Joint Submission)
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Canadian Coalition Against LGBTQ+ Poverty (CCALP)
- Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children
- Canadian Federation of Apartment Associations
- Canadian Poverty Institute (Ambrose University)
- Canadian Public Health Association
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada
- Citizens for Public Justice
- City of Calgary
- City of London
- City of Montréal
- City of Vancouver
- CNIB

- Coalition des organismes communautaires pour le développement de la main-d'œuvre
- Colchester East Hants Health Centre Social Work Committee
- Collectif des entreprises d'insertion du Québec
- Community Food Centres
- Community Society to End Poverty – Nova Scotia
- Congrégation des Sœurs de Sainte-Anne
- DeafBlind Ontario Services
- Deafness Advocacy Association Nova Scotia (DAANS)
- Dignity for All
- Directeurs de santé publique de Montréal et de la Capitale-Nationale
- Disability Action Hall
- Doug May, Ph.D., Department of Economics and Faculty of Business Administration (Memorial University)
- Dr. Cory Giles, Senior Research Consultant, Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Finance, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
- Dr. Cong Dung Tran, MD and Dr. Mark-Andrew Stefan, BSc, MD, MSc, FRCPC (Université de Montréal)
- Dufferin County Poverty Reduction Task Force
- East Village of Calgary “Community Voices”
- Elaine Laberge (doctoral candidate at the University of Alberta)
- Elaine M. Power, Ph.D. (Queen's University)
- Face of Poverty Consultation
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Feed Nova Scotia
- First Call – BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
- Food Banks Canada
- Food Secure Canada
- Friends Helping People End Poverty
- Hailey Arsenault, Emma Boulay, Katherine Houser and Patricia Malinski in collaboration with Dr. Mary McKenna (University of New Brunswick)
- Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction
- Income Security Advocacy Centre
- Inn from the Cold
- Jewish Family Service Agency
- Kerri Wall, Community Health Facilitator, Interior Health Authority (Central Okanagan community consultation)
- Kinna-Aweya Legal Clinic
- Living SJ
- London's Child & Youth Network
- Momentum
- MS Society of Canada
- NDG Dépôt alimentaire/Food Depot
- Neighbourhood Legal Services (London & Middlesex)
- Nelson United Church
- North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (NBPSDHU)

- North Okanagan Early Years Council & the City of Vernon's Partners in Action Committee
- Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction
- ODSP Action Coalition
- Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health
- Provincial Health Services Authority (BC)
- Public Health Association of BC and the Health Officers' Council of BC
- Region of Peel
- Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM)
- Road to Empowerment
- Seniors Action Quebec
- Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul (Kingston)
- Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto
- Social Planning Council of York Region
- South Cariboo Poverty Reduction Coalition
- Speech-Language & Audiology Canada
- St. Peter's Lutheran Church (Ottawa)
- Tamarack Institute
- The Centretown Churches Social Action Committee (CCSAC)
- The Salvation Army
- Town of Carman, Manitoba
- UNICEF Canada
- United Way Calgary and Area
- United Way Canada
- United Way Elgin Middlesex
- Upstream
- Wellesley Institute
- West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (West Coast LEAF)
- Women's Habitat of Etobicoke
- Woodgreen Community Services
- Yonge Street Mission
- YWCA Canada

