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CANADA



IN FROM THE MARGINS: A CALL TO ACTION ON POVERTY, HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

The Standing Senate Committee
on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Report of the Subcommittee on Cities

The Honourable Art Eggleton P.C., Chair
The Honourable Hugh Segal, Deputy Chair

December 2009

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Order of Reference

Extract for the *Journals of the Senate* of Tuesday, February 24, 2009:

The Honourable Senator Eggleton, P.C., moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Fairbairn, P.C.:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology be authorized to examine and report on current social issues pertaining to Canada's largest cities. In particular, the Committee shall be authorized to examine:

- (a) poverty, housing and homelessness;
- (b) social inclusion and cohesion;
- (c) urban economies;
- (d) models for collaboration and co-operation among governments;

That the study be national in scope, and include a focus on the largest urban community in each of the provinces;

That the study report include proposed solutions, with an emphasis on collaborative strategies involving federal, provincial and municipal governments;

That the papers and evidence received and taken and work accomplished by the Committee on this subject since the beginning of the First Session of the Thirty-Ninth Parliament be referred to the Committee; and

That the Committee submit its final report no later than October 30, 2011, and that the Committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Paul C. Bélisle

Clerk of the Senate

Membership

The Honourable, Art Eggleton, P.C., Chair
The Honourable, Hugh Segal, Deputy Chair

And

The following Honourable Senators participated in this study:

Jane Cordy
Lillian Eva Dyck
Wilbert Joseph Keon
Yonah Martin
Jim Munson

Other Senators who have participated from time to time on this study:

The Honourable Senators: Callbeck, Champagne, P.C., Cook, Fairbairn, P.C., and Pépin.

The committee would like to thank the following staff for their hard work in the preparation of this report:

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Foreword

Our cities are integral to the prosperity of Canada. They are the economic engines, the cultural linchpins, and are also the intersection point for many national, regional and local issues. This vital place that cities hold in the health and vibrancy of Canada is why we decided to study the current state of poverty, housing and homelessness in Canadian cities.

Through a myriad of expert witnesses, site visits, roundtables and most importantly, testimony from those living in poverty and homelessness, we are saddened to report that far too many Canadians living in cities live below any measure of the poverty line; that too many people struggle to find and maintain affordable housing; and that an increasing number of Canadians are homeless. And despite the thoughtful efforts and many promising practices of governments', the private sector, and community organizations, that are helping many Canadians, the system that is intended to lift people out of poverty is substantially broken, often entraps people in poverty, and needs an overhaul.

What does this mean for the millions of Canadians that live with these daily hardships? It means making tough decisions about putting enough food on the table or paying the rent. It means making the decision to stay in school or to drop out to find a job to help the family. It means that by just struggling to get by, these families can not even dream about getting ahead.

This problem reflects on each and every member of society and our inability or unwillingness to commit to significant changes. We believe Canada, the provinces and the private sector can and must do better.

Also, the Committee's testimony clearly underlines that poverty costs us all. Poverty expands healthcare costs, policing burdens and diminished educational outcomes. This in turn depresses productivity, labour force flexibility, life spans and economic expansion and social progress, all of which takes place at huge cost to taxpayers, federal and provincial treasuries and the robust potential of the Canadian consumer economy.

This unacceptable situation has led the Committee to offer some essential, broad and incremental recommendations that go beyond the "path dependency" paralysis that has typified federal and provincial policy under governments of all affiliations for decades.

We believe that eradicating poverty and homelessness is not only the humane and decent priority of a civilized democracy, but absolutely essential to a productive and expanding economy benefitting from the strengths and abilities of all its people.

There are 72 recommendations in this report. Some key examples of recommendations to the federal government include:

- ***Adopt a core poverty eradication goal of lifting people out of poverty [Recommendation 1];***
- ***Establish with the provinces a goal that all welfare recipients receive support totalling at least after-tax LICO levels [Recommendation 4];***

- *Further examine a basic annual income based on a negative income tax [Recommendation 5];*
- *Coordinate a nationwide federal/provincial initiative on early childhood learning [Recommendation 16];*
- *As a step toward eradicating child poverty, increase the National Child Benefit to reach \$5,000 by 2012 [Recommendation 34];*
- *Commit to increasing the WITB (Working Income Tax Benefit) to bring recipients at least to the LICO line [Recommendation 35];*
- *With the provinces, develop a national housing and homelessness strategy [Recommendation 44];*
- *Establish a basic income floor for all Canadians who are disabled [Recommendation 53]; and*
- *Use the Urban Aboriginal Strategy as a platform for greater investment and collaboration in addressing the poverty and housing problems facing urban Aboriginal peoples [Recommendation 66].*

We need - once and for all – to break the cycle of poverty in Canada, and to finally lift its devastating burden. We owe it to the millions of Canadians that struggle day in day out with poverty. But we also owe it to Canada as a whole.

The time for action is now!

The Honourable Art Eggleton P.C., Chair

The Honourable Hugh Segal, Deputy Chair




Executive Summary

Assigned the task of studying social conditions in Canadian cities, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology's Subcommittee on Cities chose to begin with people whose lives in those cities are marginalized by poverty, housing challenges and even homelessness. The most vulnerable among city-dwellers in Canada were our starting place.

We set out to determine how governments, businesses and the voluntary sector were able to help people escape poverty. To our distress, we found that decades of social policy making at different levels of government have had two possibly devastating results.

First, when all the programs are working, when the individual gets all possible income and social supports, the resulting income too often still maintains people in poverty, rather than lifting them into a life of full participation in the economic and social life of their communities. While the Committee heard from and met with a wide range of people with direct experience of poverty and homelessness, government officials, voluntary sector organizations, and analysts who described remarkable initiatives and results, these are generally small scale and exceptional, rather than usual and expected outcomes.

Second, at their worst, the existing policies and programs entrap people in poverty, creating unintended perverse effects which make it virtually impossible for too many people to escape reliance on income security programs and even homeless shelters. Their escape into employment should allow them to support themselves and their families with an income adequate to meet their basic needs. The programs that entrap people also provide too little income to meet those same needs.

The Committee does not believe that these outcomes are inevitable. In fact, the federal programs designed to bring older Canadians out of poverty have proven to be enormously, if not completely, successful, lifting many seniors out of poverty, and ensuring that none are in deep poverty. While federalism can result in complications in programming, it has also proved highly effective when there is a shared goal. For example, many provinces have tailored the Working Income Tax Benefit (a federal program) to build on existing or new initiatives to supplement the income of low-income workers, resulting in enhanced benefits to eligible people in those provinces. We know that the federal government can make a big difference, and that collaboration among government can enhance the benefits from federal programs.

Yet, this has often not been the case. There are federal instruments that supplement incomes of virtually all Canadians, except those who are adults and considered capable of earning a living. The National Child Benefit for children, the Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors, the Working Income Tax Benefit for low-income workers have all proven to be effective, though the benefits to children and workers are not yet sufficient to truly lift them from poverty.

The Committee has also noted that some groups are particularly disadvantaged, in terms of income and housing inadequacy: unattached individuals, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, some newcomers to Canada (recent immigrants and refugee claimants), and lone parents. They are over-represented among the poor, the homeless, high school dropouts and people with limited literacy skills. Despite an extensive array of programs targeted to assist them – especially newcomers, urban

Aboriginal peoples, and people with disabilities - the results being sought are not being achieved. Gender and race seriously complicate the challenges for these groups, resulting in even greater discrimination.

Particularly in the time of recession and economic upheaval, the Committee recognizes the urgency of providing remedies to these groups. The Committee seeks to ensure that the programs and policies in place serve to provide hope with a commitment to education, training and employment as a way out of poverty and into their place in jobs, schools, and communities where they can benefit from the opportunities that must be available to all.

Evidence

In more than 35 hearings, five roundtables and site visits to 20 agencies in nine cities across Canada, the Committee had the opportunity to hear from more than 175 witnesses, some living in poverty and/or homeless themselves, others working for community agencies, and some analysts from universities, think tanks and national voluntary organizations. For each site visit and each hearing, the Committee also read syntheses of recent and seminal research on the three main themes.

We relied on testimony of personal experience, conversations with people living with these problems in Canadian cities, and policy experts, relying on up-to-date data and information. We considered how people are affected by current policies and programs, and we welcomed suggestions on how these could be improved to create real opportunity for those currently marginalized by homelessness and poverty, or the threat of these conditions.

In its research, hearings and site visits to agencies, the Committee learned of “promising practices”, programs and initiatives that were demonstrating remarkable success in taking people out of poverty and insecure housing or homelessness, and supporting them into economic and social security. The full report identifies these community responses in each section, and provides more detailed information about each in an appendix to the report.

The full report which this Executive Summary seeks to summarize provides the testimony, examples and data that support these recommendations.

Poverty

As the Committee studied income security programs, including tax-delivered benefits, social assistance, Employment Insurance, and OAS/GIS, our focus was on adequacy, reliability, and effectiveness of these programs. Did people have enough money to live on? How did the policies and programs fit together? Did all Canadians have an opportunity to upgrade their education and skills, at any stage in their lives? Could people struggling with health and disability issues get the income and services they needed without giving up the possibility of returning to work or school? Did the programs and policies create opportunities or obstacles? Were parents of children in low-income households able to provide for their children’s needs, including their readiness for and completion of school?

An important observation, of particular interest to the Committee, was that many income programs sustain people in poverty, rather than lifting them out of poverty. The Committee therefore offers the following general recommendations with respect to poverty.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- adopt as a core poverty eradication, that programmes dealing with poverty and homelessness are designed to lift Canadians out of poverty rather than make living within poverty more manageable and that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to adopt a similar goal [Recommendation 1] ;
- modify federal income security programs, e.g., Employment Insurance, to better protect Canadians in low-income households who experience short-term gaps in income [Recommendation 3];
- seek to establish with the provinces a goal that individuals and families, regardless of the reasons for their need, receive incomes totaling at least after-tax LICOs [Recommendation 4];
- publish a Green Paper by 31 December 2010, to include the costs and benefits of current practices with respect to income supports and of options to reduce and eliminate poverty, including a basic annual income incorporating a negative income tax, and to include a detailed assessment of completed pilot projects on a basic income in New Brunswick and Manitoba [Recommendation 5] and
- reinstate a federal minimum wage at \$10/hour, indexed to the Consumer Price Index, with suppliers to government paying at least the same amount [Recommendation 6].

The Committee recommends that provincial governments increase current limits on assets for qualifying applicants for the first six to 12 months, to allow those relying on social assistance for short periods of time to retain the assets they need to re-engage in the labour force and regain their economic footing [Recommendation 2].

Poverty reduction strategies

The Committee has heard strong recommendations from national organizations in particular for a national poverty reduction strategy. The Committee has studied provincial and local poverty reduction strategies, with a particular focus on what their recommendations are for federal policy and programs.

The Committee has chosen to focus on concrete changes to federal programs, some of which were recommended by provincial and local initiatives, to raise the income of Canadians through federal income and social insurance programs, and to support the work already underway in more than half of Canada's provinces and many local communities. Detailed recommendations with respect to these income security programs follow; in the short-term, the Committee offers the following recommendation with respect to supporting provincial initiatives.

The Committee recommends that the federal government target "shovel ready" social infrastructure for investment, with their provincial counterparts, specifically housing, income security, and social agencies, whose ability to serve can be quickly enhanced through increased and accelerated investment in the Canada Social Transfer, to parallel its

investment in "shovel ready" physical infrastructure, to combat recession [Recommendation 36].

Employment Insurance

The Committee found that federal programs generally provide the instruments needed to achieve the results that every Canadian would like to see; their failure often rested in program design: eligibility criteria, level of supports or benefits, and duration of support. No-where was this more true than with Employment Insurance. Recent extension of benefits to all eligible claimants, with a special benefit for those with long employment and short EI claim periods, were welcome antidotes to the short-term crisis, but do not address longer term insufficiencies and inequities in the program, particularly with respect to access to training funded through this program.

The Committee also heard evidence about the expansion of EI beyond its social insurance beginnings, to support people working in seasonal industries, and to offer benefits for some intentional periods of unemployment, including parental benefits and compassionate benefits. There were some differences of opinion among witnesses about whether these programs should be maintained within EI or moved to other social programs; the Committee has opted for the short-term expedience of sustaining these initiatives within EI. Therefore, the Committee offers the following recommendations to improve EI, and contribute to poverty prevention.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- **develop a new program to insure against income losses due to long-term employment interruption, that covers those who are not included under the Employment Insurance Act [Recommendation 7];**
- **amend the *Employment Insurance Act* to provide benefits for a longer period to workers who become unemployed after a long attachment to the workforce, and that the longer benefit period not be based solely on regional unemployment rates [Recommendation 8];**
- **remove the two-week waiting period for Employment Insurance benefits for people who are taking compassionate or parental leave funded through the EI program [Recommendation 9];**
- **re-engineer the Employment Insurance program to allow adjustments to anticipated economic downturns, rather than be based solely on past experience [Recommendation 10];**
- **amend the EI program to extend its parental insurance benefits to self-employed individuals, with premiums assessed similar to those being paid by employees who access this benefit [Recommendation 11];**
- **expand EI sickness benefits over time to 50 weeks, to provide appropriate support for eligible beneficiaries experiencing medium-term illnesses or disabilities [Recommendation 12];**

- **include reinstatement of experience rating for consideration in any redesign or substantial modification to the EI program [Recommendation 13] ;**
- **make EI-funded training available to those who have contributed to the EI fund over time, but are not eligible for benefits [Recommendation 14]; and**
- **permit the inclusion of advanced language training and training that could equip those with credentials from other countries to qualify for Canadian recognition be permitted within training funded through the EI program [Recommendation 15].**

Training and education

The Committee's hearings and research also painted a clear picture of the importance of education and training to household income, and the disturbing reality of barriers to access for many, especially those groups over-represented among the poor, whose under-representation in training and education programs is a tragic contributor to their persistent poverty. The Committee learned about and witnessed the importance of middle-school supports for vulnerable children and supports for high-school completion and literacy upgrading for young adults, about the high costs of dropping out of high school for individuals and society, about the importance of skills-building for adults of all ages as they enter the job market or lose a job in a declining industry, and about the strong correlation between post-secondary education and adequate family incomes.

The Committee built on that evidence and research, and recognizing the role of both provincial and federal governments in education and the importance of early intervention, makes the following recommendations.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- **coordinate a nationwide federal/provincial initiative on early childhood learning [Recommendation 16];**
- **emphasize and support initiatives that keep disadvantaged youth enrolled and engaged in schools, including effective counselling, after-school programs, homework clubs, and youth centres through existing programs and initiatives [Recommendation 17];**
- **in conjunction with the Council of Ministers of Education, encourage and support actions to reduce the high-school drop-out rates, especially among Aboriginal students, on-reserve or off-reserve, including the establishment of targets and time-lines, with regular reporting on progress [Recommendations 18 and 19];**
- **monitor and report on new post-secondary student aid programs, including comparisons with affordability and debt load results of the programs that have been replaced [Recommendation 20];**
- **offer additional tax support for post-secondary education targeted to students in groups under-represented in post-secondary education and over-represented among the poor (e.g., Aboriginal students or students with disabilities) and to their families [Recommendation 21];**

- sustain strong financial support for adult and family literacy programs, with a special priority given to groups over-represented among high-school non-completers [Recommendation 22];
- work with provincial governments to collectively amend existing income security programs to provide secure funding to training participants for long enough periods to ensure opportunities for secure employment at adequate incomes [Recommendation 23];
- set aside a fixed percentage of training positions (to match the percentage established for federal employment equity targets) for persons with disabilities in all renewing and new labour market agreements; and until then extend and expand funding for such training through the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities [Recommendations 24 and 57];
- allocate a proportion of training money for immigrants, to match the percentage established for federal employment equity targets, including training to reduce language and other barriers to the labour market in all renewing and new labour market agreements [Recommendation 25];
- at the next meeting of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Labour, take a leadership role in encouraging a harmonization of provincial and territorial workers' compensation programs [Recommendation 50]; and
- sustain and increase the funding for the Opportunities Fund for persons with disabilities, with a clear mission to address barriers to the labour force, and encourage provincial and territorial governments extend supports needed for employment for up to 12 months following employment to persons with disabilities leaving social assistance; and negotiate with employers to provide these supports indefinitely for those earning low incomes. [Recommendations 51 and 55].

Health

The Committee conducted a study on population health concurrent with this study on poverty, housing and homelessness, often holding joint hearings and benefitting from the testimony before both subcommittees. In addition, the Committee held a hearing specifically focussing on the connection between living in a low-income neighbourhood or having a low income, and disproportionately negative health outcomes. Despite the universal health care system that provides access to doctors and hospitals, the evidence demonstrate that results are not the same for rich and poor. The Committee also recognizes that illness can exacerbate existing poverty and can lead individuals and families into poverty.

In recognition of the contribution of poverty and homelessness to health challenges, and in keeping with this Committee's recent report on population health, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- instruct its central agencies to allocate resources to prevent and address negative health outcomes associated with poverty and unemployment [Recommendation 26];

- work with provincial and territorial governments and appropriate other stakeholders to develop a national pharmacare program, building on progress underway in some provinces [Recommendation 27]; and
- with provincial and territorial governments and health researchers across Canada, provide funding for physical health services for people who are homeless [Recommendation 46].

Income transfers through the tax system

Increasingly, the federal government has relied on income support programs triggered by or delivered through the income tax system. Credits and deductions, of course, are available only to people with enough income to pay taxes. However, many credits are now “refundable”, being paid to people who do not owe taxes but who file tax returns. Examples include the Goods and Services Tax (GST) refundable credit paid to low-income tax filers.

Creative use of tax credits have been important contributors to putting money in the hands of low-income individuals and households. These include the National Child Benefit Supplement, described by witnesses as offering the potential to take children out of poverty, and the Working Income Tax Benefit, offering the potential to “make work pay.” To realize that potential, and to contribute to lifting all households out of poverty, the Committee makes the following recommendations.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- analyze gender-based differences in designing benefits and implementing new tax measures [Recommendation 32];
- increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors to ensure that economic households are not below the poverty line as defined by the low income cut-off levels, and that intergovernmental collaboration ensure that such increases do not result in the loss of eligibility for provincial/territorial subsidies or services for seniors [Recommendation 33];
- increase the National Child Benefit, incrementally and predictably, to reach \$5,000 (in 2009 dollars) by 2012 [Recommendation 34];
- commit to a schedule of longer term planned increases to the Working Income Tax Benefit [Recommendation 35];
- make the Disability Tax Credit refundable, as a first step, and move toward a basic income guarantee at or above the LICO level for people with severe disabilities, with provincial investment in support services to all persons with disabilities regardless of their source of income [Recommendations 52, 53, and 54];
- encourage all provincial governments to amend their social assistance legislation to exempt savings under the Disability Savings Plans from calculations of eligibility or benefits [Recommendation 56]; and

- **develop a tax credit for employers who hire newcomers for their first job in their field or area of expertise [Recommendation 59].**

Housing and homelessness

The Committee’s study of housing and homelessness focussed on these as separate policy areas, as many federal programs in particular separate the two. During our research, hearings and site visits, the Committee learned of important and exciting initiatives at the local and provincial levels, and how local and provincial governments, as well as private-sector and voluntary-sector developers, are sometimes constrained by regulations, time-frames, and declining operating support from the federal government.

As well, it has become clear to the Committee that a more integrated consideration of both housing and homelessness offers a better chance of implementing a “housing first” approach. With this approach, individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are stabilized with affordable housing, offering a base from which any other complicating factors in their lives can be addressed.

Further, the Committee is aware that unaffordable and inadequate housing, even for those who are currently able to meet their needs and aspirations, can contribute to poverty, and to a spiral that can include losing jobs, dropping out of school, and being unable to sustain families.

Not all solutions address both the needs of those who are currently homeless and the importance of a housing “system” that supplies affordable and adequate housing to those who are currently housed.

With respect to housing, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- **provide sustained and adequate funding through the Affordable Housing Initiative to increase the supply of affordable housing [Recommendation 37];**
- **issue a White paper on tax measures to support construction of rental housing in general and affordable rental housing in particular, including for the donation of funds, lands or buildings for low-income housing provision [Recommendation 38];**
- **clarify the mandate of Canada Lands Corporation to favour use of surplus federal lands for development of affordable housing and to expedite planning processes to facilitate this use [Recommendation 39];**
- **support the work of local and provincial non-profit housing developers by making housing programs longer term to accommodate five-year development cycles and ten-year planning cycles, and to permit more effective planning at the local and provincial levels [Recommendation 40];**
- **identify civil legal aid as an element to be supported by the Canada Social Transfer to assist tenants facing discrimination in housing [Recommendation 41];**
- **extend the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program as a permanent program, increase the budget allocations for this program, and amend eligibility requirements to take into account differential costs for repairs in different communities across**

Canada, and projects converting housing units for affordable rental accommodation [Recommendation 42]; and

- work with provincial housing authorities, private landlords' associations and non-profit housing providers, to assess impact of housing subsidies provided to individuals rather than landlords on rents [Recommendation 43].

With respect to homelessness, the Committee has heard of the effectiveness of the Homelessness Partnering Strategies and its predecessor programs in supporting communities to reduce homelessness and to move people from the streets into housing. **The Committee recommends that the federal government:**

- expand the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to play a greater coordinating role within the federal government, engaging all departments and agencies with a mandate that includes housing and homelessness, especially for those groups over-represented among those in need [Recommendation 47];
- provide financial incentives to encourage communities already supported through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to use a 10-year time horizon in adjusting and renewing their community plans [Recommendation 48]; and
- continue to provide direct funding for and continued support of related research and knowledge dissemination about a “housing first” approach to eliminating homelessness [Recommendation 49].

With respect to an integrated approach to housing and homelessness, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- in collaboration with provincial governments, representatives of municipal governments, First Nation organizations, and other housing providers, develop a national housing and homelessness strategy to include:
 - priorities established by and for each provincial and territory with respect to meeting existing needs for affordable and secure housing;
 - a 10-year commitment of funds from the federal government, to include similar commitments from provincial and territorial governments that will receive these funds;
 - annual reporting on how the money is being spent, with particular attention to the number of people housed who could not afford to secure housing in the private market;
 - a specific focus, with targets and funding commitments, with respect to meeting the needs for affordable housing for urban Aboriginal peoples;
 - a simpler, more integrated application process for funds, cutting across programs related to housing funded at the federal level;

- the integration of the Homelessness Partnering Initiative, with an expanded mandate and budget to support combined local housing and homelessness plans and the initiatives identified in them;
- a thorough evaluation at the end of the 10-year period to assess achievements and continuing gaps [Recommendation 44]; and
- sustain federal funding focussed on homelessness until a combined strategy on housing and homelessness is developed to guide federal investment [Recommendation 45].

Programs targeted to over-represented groups

While the Committee has chosen to consider impacts of general, or “mainstream” programs on the groups over-represented among those experiencing persistent poverty (i.e. Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, unattached individuals, and newcomers to Canada), only some have been addressed in the previous sections of this Executive Summary. Other policies or programs, specific to these groups, are addressed below.

Aboriginal peoples

The Committee’s city study has focussed on urban Aboriginal peoples, a group that includes diverse cultures and varying levels of economic and social challenges. The Committee understands that the lives of many Aboriginal people are not lived out exclusively on-reserve or negotiated land claims land on the one hand or in cities on the other; rather transitions to and from traditional lands and cities are common. Both on-reserve and in cities, Aboriginal people are generally poorer and less adequately and affordably housed than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Federal policies and programs have sought to redress this differential; recommendations with respect to those policies and programs follow.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- provide on-going subsidies to off-reserve, non-profit Aboriginal housing providers for new and existing units to ensure increased supply of affordable housing [Recommendation 65];
- use the Urban Aboriginal Strategy as a platform for greater investment and collaboration in addressing the poverty and housing problems facing urban Aboriginal peoples [Recommendation 66];
- continue and expand targeted funding and programming for training and employment supports for urban Aboriginal peoples, and their organizations, where appropriate [Recommendation 67]; and
- require an Aboriginal working group to identify priorities for urban Aboriginal people and designate funding for this purpose within all federal funding to communities to address housing and homelessness [Recommendation 68].

Newcomers to Canada

The Committee recognizes the primary responsibility of the federal government with respect to policies and programs for refugee claimants and immigrants to Canada. The Committee is also aware that these refugees and some immigrants face particular economic and social challenges. The Committee also learned that the networks within immigrant communities often prevent absolute homelessness among newcomers, as recently arrived immigrants are often welcomed into the sometimes over-crowded homes of newcomers who arrived weeks or months before.

In addition to the tax measures proposed to ease integration to appropriate employment in Canada, the Committee believes that other initiatives are needed to redress these hardships.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- **work with provincial governments and social housing providers to take the necessary steps to provide larger housing units for larger families [Recommendation 58];**
- **reduce the immigration sponsorship period from 10 years to three years, similar to the regulations pertaining to conjugal sponsorship, and make a commensurate reduction in the residency requirement for entitlement to a monthly pension under the *Old Age Security Act* [Recommendation 60];**
- **extend eligibility for the resettlement assistance program for refugees to two years for regular cases and to four years for joint assistance sponsorships [Recommendation 61];**
- **establish a repayment schedule and loan forgiveness program for travel loan repayment by government-sponsored refugees, that takes into account the time needed to integrate and the household income upon employment [Recommendation 62];**
- **accelerate its work with provincial governments and other relevant agencies to complete and implement a framework leading to the recognition of qualifications from other countries, and report annually to Parliament on its progress [Recommendation 63]; and**
- **support bridging programs, especially for immigrants with professional qualifications from their countries of origin, through immigrant settlement funds and agreements [Recommendation 64].**

Rights-based approaches

Whether the subject was poverty, housing or homelessness, many witnesses described the problems in terms of rights denied. Pointing to both domestic human rights legislation and international commitments made by Canada to United Nations declarations and conventions, these witnesses identified the failure of governments to live up to these obligations, and the importance of providing access for individuals to hold governments accountable and to claim rights in appropriate courts and tribunals.

The Committee understands that these commitments are important – both in terms of assessing governments’ performance with respect to international and domestic law and agreements and in the context of defending one’s rights.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- **establish a fund to allow groups over-represented among the persistently low-income to have legal representation in law reform cases with respect to their human rights [Recommendation 30]; and**
- **in recognition of both Canadian obligations under international human rights law, and their importance in claiming access to appropriate programs and services, explicitly cite international obligations ratified by Canada in any new federal legislation or legislative amendments relevant to poverty, housing and homelessness [Recommendation 31].**

Common cause

The Committee believes that lifting Canadians out of poverty, ensuring they are adequately and affordably housed and eliminating homelessness is the work of all sectors, working in harmony wherever possible. In addition to the recommendations already provided above, the Committee wishes to support such collaboration wherever possible.

In particular, the Committee has noted the critical contribution of local agencies, both voluntary and municipal, to supporting people in their transitions out of poverty into appropriate and affordable housing and into social and economic participation in their communities. The 20 agencies visited by the Committee and the dozens of agencies that submitted briefs, participated in roundtables and appeared as witnesses, all inspired the Committee with their innovations, passion and effective programs.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- **seek and support local voluntary sector and municipal agencies as active partners in design and delivery of federal government initiatives at the community level [Recommendation 28];**
- **review and revise grants and contributions reporting requirements among federal departments and agencies to enhance horizontal and vertical coordination of reporting and encourage multi-year funding among federal granting agencies, where problems that programs are addressing are persistent and longer term [Recommendation 69];**
- **recognize and stabilize the contribution of voluntary sector organizations with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness, by budgeting adequate support for these organizations to accomplish not only the delivery of government-funded services, but also the community-building activities that only this sector can provide [Recommendation 70]; and**

- **use grants and contributions to fund community-based organizations to provide innovative solutions, to share innovation, and where appropriate to replicate successful community-based initiatives involved in poverty reduction, housing affordability, and supporting homeless people [Recommendation 71].**

The Committee has recognized throughout its study that the best and most successful approaches to the problems of poverty, housing and homelessness, emerge and are implemented when all levels of government, employers, and community agencies are all involved. Whether co-ordinating efforts among government departments, finding employment for youth on the streets of Halifax, or connecting newcomers and employers in Toronto, or providing appropriate learning and employment opportunities for Aboriginal youth in Regina, collaborations inside and across governments and across sectors have had remarkable results. The Committee has seen that no single department, level of government, or sector can solve these problems alone.

The Committee recommends that:

- **the federal government explore and implement additional Urban Development Agreements among federal, provincial and municipal governments, in concert with community-identified leaders and priorities [Recommendation 29]; and**
- **federal and provincial governments, acting internally, bilaterally and/or multilaterally, review current policies and programs and new initiatives in the context of eliminating and avoiding both gaps and duplication, through a whole-of-government approach to poverty, housing and homelessness issues [Recommendation 72].**

Knowledge exchange

In its hearings and submitted briefs, the Committee has noted the reliance of individual citizens, local and national voluntary organizations, think tanks and universities and private-sector organizations on data provided by federal departments, notably Statistics Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing. The Committee also heard repeatedly that these and other data shared among agencies allow governments and community groups alike to anticipate needs and respond more appropriately to people with problems with poverty, housing and homelessness.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- **continue and expand support to Statistics Canada for the collection, analysis and more affordable dissemination of data important to the evaluation and improvement of social programs with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness [Recommendation 73]; and**
- **continue to support knowledge exchange with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness [Recommendation 74].**

Section 1 - Introduction

The Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (SAST) has created a subcommittee to study current social issues pertaining to Canadian cities. In anticipation of a lengthy and detailed investigation, the Subcommittee has chosen to approach its work in sections. The first of these focuses on poverty, housing and homelessness in major Canadian cities. A first report, with issues and options, was tabled in June 2008. This report is the final report on this section.

Most of the hearings and all of the site visits were conducted by the Subcommittee. While this is a report of the full Committee, in many instances, the word “Committee” refers to the Subcommittee and its members. Future sections of the study on cities are expected to focus on social inclusion (including immigrant settlement and urban crime and safety), urban economies, and the machinery of government with respect to social issues in Canadian cities.

The study on poverty, housing and homelessness began in May 2007, when the economy was still booming, when a significant focus was on helping the extremely disadvantaged increase their capacity to fill jobs available now and those yet to be created. Despite the positive context, the Committee soon learned that many were not benefiting from economic opportunity:

Even in a booming economy, too many people are poor, inadequately housed and/or homeless.

Through several years of good times we have allowed insecurity to grow and it has left the poorest even more destitute. It is hard to imagine what will happen to Canada when we face times that are not so good or when new challenges arise.

(Greg deGroot-Maggetti, then Acting Chairperson, National Council of Welfare, Evidence, Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (SAST), 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 3 May 2007)

In the last several months of the Committee’s study, while we had little data on the impact of the shifting economy, we heard considerable testimony that got us beyond wondering what would happen to Canada, to recognizing that the disadvantaged were facing even greater challenges to social and economic well-being in their communities.

The Committee realized that some policies and programs are simply “broken”, and no longer respond to the circumstances facing too many individuals and families in the best of economic times. The current economic climate makes improved policies and programs even more pressing.

Method

Since it began its hearings, the Committee has heard from more than 170 witnesses. Based on both research and testimony by witnesses, the Committee released a report¹ in June 2008 outlining Issues and Options with respect to this area of study. Since then, the Committee’s work has been interrupted by an election and a prorogation of Parliament, and the Committee has witnessed deep and profound changes in the national and local economies across Canada. Also in that time,

¹ Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, *Poverty, Housing and Homelessness: Issues and Options*, June 2008.

witnesses from the public, including homeless and poor individuals, universities, think tanks, provincial and local governments, and civil society organizations have submitted briefs, met with the Committee as it has travelled across Canada, and/or appeared before the Subcommittee on Cities to comment on those options, and to add their own recommendations as to appropriate remedies to these critical areas. Details of who has appeared before the Committee are appended to both our earlier report and to this one.

The Committee has focused in its hearings on three distinct policy and program areas: poverty, housing and homelessness. Yet, the Committee has also been aware of and has probed the linkages among these broad areas. For example, the Committee is acutely aware, from both research literature² and witnesses,³ that poverty, especially income poverty, is a key contributor to housing affordability problems and homelessness.

Similarly, those who are paying far too large a proportion of their income to meet their housing needs are often consequently forced to live on far less than is necessary for food, clothes and basic transportation.

If people cannot have affordable housing, they will be in a horrible mess. Most of their money will go toward rent. They cannot feed themselves properly. How will they be able to help their children through school with the stress they live with?

(Michèle Thibodeau-DeGuire, President and Executive Director, United Way of Greater Montreal, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 14 June 2007)

Sadly, the Committee has found that the public policies and programs with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness are generally quite distinct, without adequate consideration of the cross-over effects. At the same time, while an increasing number of analysts and civil society organizations are identifying the linkages among the three areas, government departments' silos and vertical academic disciplines are often focused on only one of the three.

Building on the Past

As the Committee has undertaken this study, it has been informed and inspired by earlier work in the Senate of Canada on these themes.

The Croll report

We know that poverty is about inadequate incomes, but we also know that reducing poverty is about more than an income fix. In 1971, the Croll report laid out critical non-income parameters, and they are the same today as they were then. Those parameters are housing, education, health care, debt and credit issues, and access to fundamental justice.

(Armine Yalnizyan, Senior Economist, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008)

Senator Croll's Poverty in Canada, tabled in 1971, was a major study on *Poverty in Canada*, sweeping in scope and recommendations. With a combination of moral outrage and careful proposals, for many it has been the authority on poverty in our country. More than 35 years later, much has

² Gordon Laird, *SHELTER – Homelessness in a growth economy: Canada's 21st century paradox, A Report for the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership*, Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership, 2007, pp. 85-86; "In the Proper Hands": Margaret Condon and Robyn Newton, SPARC BC Research on Homelessness and Affordable Housing, October 2007, p. 10.

http://sparc.bc.ca/index.php?option=com_rubberdoc&view=doc&id=69&format=raw. Accessed 8 July 2009.

³ See, for example, Sharon Matthews, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 26 April 2007.

changed, and much has stayed the same. To place this report -- its findings and its recommendations -- in context, it is useful to review both persistent trends and newer developments, to contrast and compare.

While the Croll report had a single explicit focus (poverty) and this report has three (poverty, housing and homelessness), both studies found that both problems and solutions extended well beyond the explicit themes. For example, both the Special Senate

In almost 40 years, many of the issues related to poverty have not changed enough.

Committee on Poverty, almost forty years ago, and this Committee recognized that while the simplest proxy for poverty is measured in income terms, the experience of it spreads beyond income to housing; low incomes almost inevitably means inadequate, insecure and/or unaffordable housing. While homelessness is a more modern phenomenon, especially among the young and families and women escaping domestic violence, the devastating impact of not having a reliable and affordable home base from which to operate makes other living tasks unmanageable.

Also true for both Committees was the inevitable exploration of how poverty interacts with education, employment and health, with recommendations related to those policy and program areas as well. And finally, both Committees have identified the importance of research and evaluation in monitoring and improving the status of Canada's most economically and otherwise vulnerable peoples.

The Committee has been interested in exploring what has changed and what has not in the almost 40 years between Senator Croll's study and this one. The Committee heard repeatedly that not much had changed or improved. A review of the Croll report provides fodder for this view.

What has not changed

While Senator Croll did not focus on groups over-represented among the poor to the extent that this study does, both reports make recommendations on some particular populations: Aboriginal peoples, single parents (usually women, both then and now), people with disabilities, and immigrants.

Both reports reach similar conclusions and make similar recommendations with respect to housing, education (from early learning to post-secondary education), employment and health care. This report will highlight those similarities where they exist as recommendations are made.

Poverty is still linked to education, employment and health.

It is tempting to conclude that nothing has improved, but this would ignore at least two important changes. First, the instruments available in public policy and programs are more numerous and arguably more effective. These hold promise for reducing, and possibly eliminating, poverty among children and low-income workers. Second, the poverty of seniors has been significantly reduced, and in some cases eliminated through a federal income program.

What has changed

Senator Croll identified both Unemployment Insurance (as it was then known) and the Canada Pension Plan as important instruments in any fight against poverty and makes recommendations with respect to the former in particular; several innovations since then are important contributors to

reducing poverty for some groups. In particular, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement for those aged 65 and over (and slightly younger for survivors of those in that age group) have radically reduced poverty among seniors, both in terms of the proportion of people who are living below Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) lines⁴ and in terms of how far below that line they are. For parents, the National Child Benefit is improving the income of low-income families, and offers the promise of further reducing both the incidence and depth of poverty.

While employment was a way out of poverty at the time of the Croll report, increasingly "contingent" work -- part-time, part-year, short-term, etc.

— has resulted in the emergence of a new and growing group not evident forty years ago — the "working poor". However, the recently introduced Working Income Tax Benefit supplements the incomes of those who are employed and with low incomes, and offers the promise of doing for this group what is already in place for seniors and families with children, as noted above.

Employment is no longer a sure route out of poverty.

Many of the solutions identified by the Croll report were echoed by recent research, witnesses and submissions. And the underlying principles are largely enduring. This Committee has explored a Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI) approach, a centre-piece among the Croll report's recommendations. The Committee has concluded that if a GAI is both affordable and sufficient to lift people out of poverty, it may be an effective program. To test its ability to meet these criteria, the Committee has recommended a detailed costing of this option, described further in the next section of the report. This Committee agrees that an income floor is an important step ahead, and has recommended this as a goal for the combined income security programs delivered by governments.

Poverty measurement

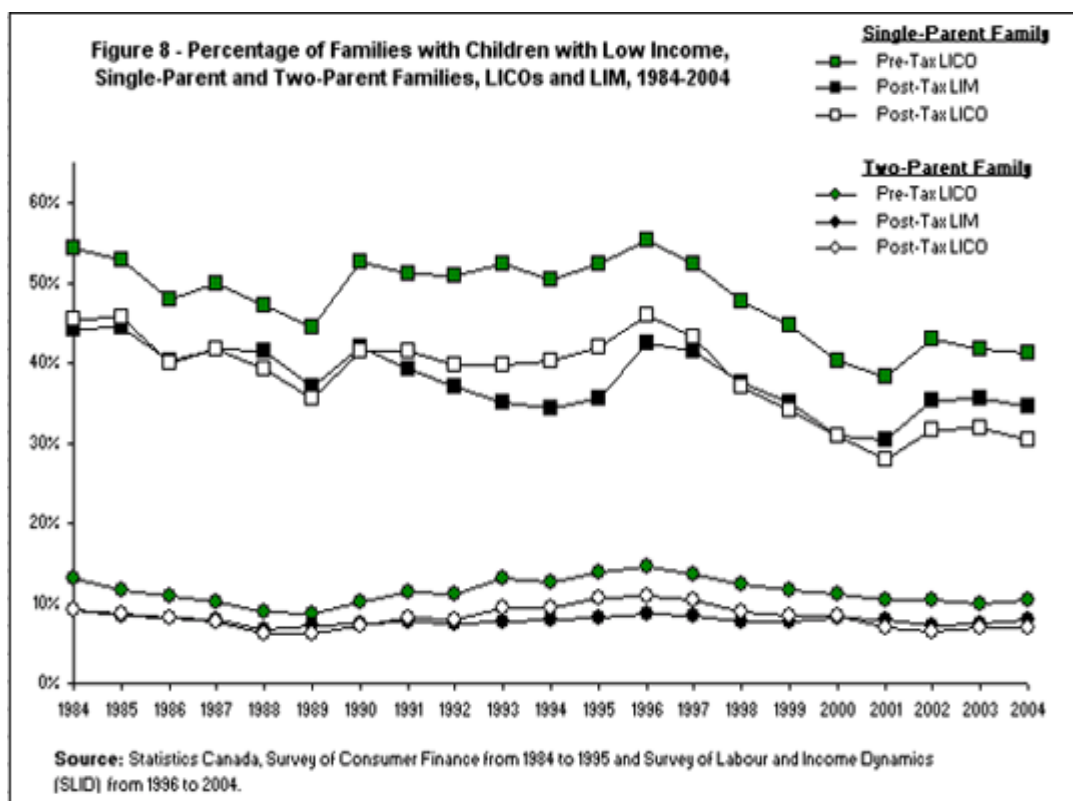
A key focus of the Croll report and its recommendations related to the measurement of poverty, which several witnesses advised the Committee was critical to making progress in the area of poverty reduction. The Committee is aware of considerable attention being given to this topic in other Parliamentary committees, and governments within Canada and beyond.

Canada currently has three measures that serve as proxies for an official "poverty line": Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) lines, the Market Basket Measure (MBM), and the Low-Income Measure (LIM). Of these, the LICOs have been developed for the longest. The first two measures are based on the portion of income a household spends on a certain group of goods; for LICO, those are food, shelter and clothing, while for the MBM, it's a pre-determined "market basket" of goods. LIM is based on a proportion of the median income, 50% for Canadian statistics, and often 60% in European countries.

The figure below, included for illustrative purposes only, demonstrates that the lines are roughly comparable.

⁴ As defined by Statistics Canada, "a LICO is an income threshold below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income on the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family. The approach is essentially to estimate an income threshold at which families are expected to spend 20 percentage points more than the average family on food, shelter and clothing." For more information, see <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/2009002/s2-eng.htm>. Accessed 26 August 2009.

Figure 1 - Comparing poverty rates with LICO and LIM⁵



While comparisons with the MBM might be slightly less aligned, the Committee concluded that the selection or development of a single, official “poverty line” or measure was not a necessary pre-requisite to either assessing the problem or recommending solutions. For the purposes of this report, the Committee has chosen to rely primarily on LICOs (after-tax) as the measurement tool, unless otherwise indicated.

Guaranteed annual income (GAI)

A key recommendation of the Croll report was for a guaranteed annual income. Since that time, other bodies have suggested the same, including the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada⁶, and at least one Senate Committee report (noted below).

This Committee held a roundtable on the subject,⁷ following a seminar sponsored by the Library of Parliament on the subject. Witnesses before the Committee were questioned about the extent to which a guaranteed income for individuals or families would be a preferred approach to reducing or eliminating poverty, and to improving housing affordability and reducing homelessness. There was not a consensus view on this among witnesses, and there was considerable passion on both sides of the question.

⁵“Monitoring Progress: Societal Level Indicators,” *The National Child Benefit Progress Report 2006*. <http://www.nationalchildbenefit.ca/eng/06/chap4.shtml> Accessed 28 August 2009.

⁶ Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada, *Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations*, 1985, p. 39

⁷ Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 June 2008.

There was general agreement that this approach had been very successful with respect to seniors in Canada. There was also agreement that a similar approach would probably work with respect to children. There was less agreement, even among those who had administered experiments with GAIs, about its effectiveness with adults.

There was also significant discussion (and differences of opinion) about whether an adequate GAI could be affordable, and whether any generosity with respect to the income level would be offset by the elimination of programming that would be required even if all incomes were indeed adequate.

As noted above, this Committee has put forward a series of recommendations that together provide an income floor below which no Canadian should fall, and has kept open the possibility of a single income transfer based on more information. The Committee has also asked that a GAI be included in a detailed assessment of completed projects on a basic income in New Brunswick and Manitoba, within a study of costs and benefits of poverty and alternative solutions.

“Sounding the Call”

In 1997, Senator Ermine Cohen wrote a report on child poverty in Canada, entitled *Sounding the Alarm: Poverty in Canada*.⁸ It was intended to “revisit the commitments made in the 1971 Croll Report”⁹ and to evaluate progress a quarter-century later. Her report provided useful snapshots of poverty experienced by those who were working and those who were not, among over-represented groups including Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, youth and seniors. She considered the role of the labour market, our international obligations, and more themes that emerged again in our study. Harshly critical of our “tax and transfer” system, the report called for changes, as did the Croll report before it. Too few have been implemented.

Recent Senate Committee reports

More recently, three other Senate committees have focused on poverty. These are described in more detail below.

Urban Aboriginal youth

The Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples first began examining issues affecting urban Aboriginal youth in Canada in October 2002. In particular, the Committee examined access, provision and delivery of services; policy and jurisdictional issues; employment and education; access to economic opportunities; youth participation and empowerment; and other related matters. The Committee heard from over one hundred witnesses and travelled to Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver. In those urban areas, the Committee heard from several Aboriginal organizations and service providers and conducted a series of Aboriginal youth roundtables. The final report, *Urban Aboriginal Youth: An Action Plan for Change*,¹⁰ was tabled in the Senate in October 2003.

The recommendations in the report mapped out short- and long-term strategies that addressed the aspirations of youth, laying out the foundations upon which their potential can be nurtured, supported and realized. These recommendations formulated a detailed and concrete plan of action

⁸ Erminie Cohen and Angela Petten, *Sounding the Alarm: Poverty in Canada*, 1997.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

¹⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, *Urban Aboriginal Youth: An Action Plan for Change*, Final Report, 2003. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/37/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/abor-e/rep-e/repfinoct03-e.pdf> Accessed 26 August 2009.

to support the social, cultural and economic well-being of urban Aboriginal youth and developed a proactive, positive and forward-looking strategy for reform.

Rural poverty

In 2008, the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry concluded an 18-month study of the dimensions and depth of rural poverty, Canada's comparative standing relative to other countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and key drivers of reduced opportunity. The Committee heard from hundreds of witnesses and made seven working trips to visit 20 small towns across the country, before tabling its report *Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty*,¹¹ tabled in June 2008. The Committee addressed social policy issues as a specific topic in its report. Within this topic there are six policy themes were explored: income-support policies, education measures, housing, crime, immigration, and access to health services. Recommendations on housing and income-support policies addressed some of the issues raised in this study of poverty, housing and homelessness in Canadian cities, and will be cited in this report.

Aging

Over a period of more than two years, a Special Senate Committee on Aging examined a wide range of complex issues to determine if Canada is providing the right programs and services at the right time to the aging individuals who need them. The Committee reviewed public programs and services for seniors, identified the gaps in meeting their needs, and examined the implications for service delivery in the future as the population ages. During its study the Committee conducted hearings and surveyed seniors' organizations across Canada by questionnaire; it invited expert witnesses to testify at roundtable hearings; and it travelled throughout Canada to hear from Canadians on the issues and options, and especially from seniors to hear their personal stories.

The Committee covered topics related to promoting active living and well being; housing and transportation needs; financial security and retirement; abuse and neglect; health promotion and prevention; and health care needs, including chronic diseases, medication use, mental health, palliative care, home care and care-giving;

In the Committee's final report, *Canada's Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity*,¹² tabled April 2009, the focus of the one of its broad themes is the elimination of poverty among older Canadians. This report will include some of that Committee's findings, and echo some of its recommendations.

Reports from this Committee

Child Poverty

The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (SAST) has a long history of exploring the state of Canada's children, taking us back more than a decade to the 1991 report entitled *Children in Poverty: Toward a Better Future*.¹³ Like this report on poverty, housing and homelessness, the earlier report on child poverty flagged the emergence of the working poor, addressed in some detail in this report. It also focused on particular groups, including women and

¹¹ Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty*, Final Report, 2008. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/agri-e/rep-e/rep09jun08-e.pdf>. Accessed 26 August 2009.

¹² Special Senate Committee on Aging, *Canada's Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity*, Final Report, 2009. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/40/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/agei-e/rep-e/AgingFinalReport-e.pdf>. Accessed 26 August 2009.

¹³ SAST, *Children in Poverty: Toward a Better Future*, 1991. (This report is not available electronically.)

Aboriginal peoples, and particular related themes, including health, education and housing. This report raises similar themes, close to 20 years later. Some of the recommendations with respect to child poverty are reframed in this report; any overlap will be cited.

Mental health

This Senate Committee issued a report in 2006 on mental health in Canada. Entitled *Out of the Shadows at Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada*,¹⁴ this report highlighted the linkages between mental health and poverty, and between mental health problems and homelessness. A wide-reaching study, the report considered income security programs, training and employment issues, stigma and human rights, all common to this study.

Past studies on mental health and population health have shown how health and poverty interact.

Population health

Similarly, a study by this Committee's Subcommittee on Population Health focussed on determinants of health, including poverty, education and housing insecurity.

Entitled *A Healthy, Productive Canada: A Determinant of Health Approach*¹⁵, the June 2009 report's recommendations related to many of the same persistent problems identified and addressed in this study on poverty, housing and homelessness in Canadian cities; some are echoed in this report.

This Committee has sought to build on the work of those who have gone before, rather than replicate it. Hence, some of our recommendations echo those in other reports, where they are consistent with what our Committee has heard and learned, and where those recommendations remain to be implemented.

Analyses

This study has used a number of different “lenses” in its analysis of research and testimony. More complete information about each is included in Appendix 2. They are summarized briefly below.

First, the Committee has recognized the importance of all three sectors – public, private and voluntary – in the current and optimal policies and programs with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness. The Committee has focussed on public policies and programs, but has noted with care the contributions being made by private sector involvement in these issues. The Committee has heard extensively both from witnesses from voluntary organizations and from the staff and clients of agencies in cities across Canada.

Second, the Committee has considered how the circumstances of individuals and families change over the course of their lives, with particular attention to known transition points. It is at these points – going from school to work, having children, caring for elders, losing and changing jobs, retirement, and others – that some Canadians find that their changed circumstances also put them into social and economic distress.

¹⁴ SAST, *Out of the Shadows at Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada*, 2006. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/Com-e/SOCI-E/rep-e/rep02may06-e.htm>. Accessed 26 August 2009.

¹⁵ SAST, *A Healthy, Productive Canada: A Determinant of Health Approach*. Final Report of the Senate Subcommittee on Population Health, 2009. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/40/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/popu-e/rep-e/rephealth1jun09-e.pdf>. Accessed 26 August 2009.

Third, the Committee has paid close attention to the disproportionate representation among those in social and economic distress of particular groups: Aboriginal, people with disabilities (including both sensory, intellectual and mobility impairments and mental illness), lone parents (mostly women) and new Canadians among them. We have considered how these and other characteristics, including gender and race, interact to create particularly complex challenges, and how well policies and programs are responding to support them in addressing these challenges.

Fourth, the Committee has heard clearly that the issues of poverty, housing and homelessness are both experienced and addressed differently in cities in different regions across Canada. Demographic factors contribute to these regional differences, including the numbers and proportions of newcomers and Aboriginal peoples, as do particular local economic factors, such as the availability of land or the relative price of heating fuel.

Finally, the Committee has paid close attention to jurisdictional issues, both with respect to the often complex interaction of levels of government – federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal – and with respect to areas of recognized primacy of federal jurisdiction, including for on-reserve First Nations people and newcomers. This has not prevented us from making recommendations that have impacts on other levels of government, but it has guided us in how those recommendations are framed and expressed.

All governments are important in providing adequate incomes and housing for all.

Constraints

The Committee has held 39 hearings and five roundtables, has heard from 175 witnesses, has visited nine Canadian cities, and has met with more than 20 agencies providing services to people who are poor, who are homeless, and who are struggling with housing issues, and were often able to meet with clients as well. Some witnesses and others who did not appear before the Committee also submitted written briefs or comments.

In addition, the Committee has explored government, academic and other literature for up-to-date information on numbers, programs, policies, and initiatives with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness across Canada's major cities. This report is based on that research and testimony, and those submissions and conversations.

While we have made every effort to provide up-to-date and complete information on the issues under study, this report is necessarily limited. Not every organization doing great work is mentioned. Not every policy, program and initiative in every province or city is identified or described. Even federal programs have been included only if our research and evidence tells us that they are particularly effective, or create particular barriers or problems for people coping with poverty, homelessness, and housing problems. In other words, we have also come to understand that some public policies and programs are “broken” and are not doing what they set out to do in a changing world and economy, while others are proving themselves effective despite sometimes dire circumstances in which individuals and families find themselves.

Some groups are over-represented among those with income and housing problems.

The Subcommittee was privileged to visit some of the many outstanding examples of community-based, not-for-profit organizations that exist across Canada. The staff, clients and volunteers, who together create caring communities, are a source of inspiration. They use a variety of resources, varied funding streams, volunteer effort, determination and persistence, to build resiliency within their communities by their own innovations.

The Committee heard that organizations often started out with a specific service for a specific group and then grew as further needs were identified. While organizations often grew in this way, their community expanded with them. Sometimes organizations can alleviate poverty or homelessness; sometimes they can simply make those conditions more survivable. Sometimes the relationship between the organization and the client is short term, such as a night at a homeless shelter, sometimes it is a much longer term relationship. Whatever the case the Committee was impressed with the service, solutions and people that live the issues of poverty, and homelessness every day. The Committee is grateful for the time and effort that every person contributed to this study.

Community responses are included in promising practices throughout the report, but are also described individually in Appendix 3. Each organization or program that the Committee heard from or visited has been included. These notes are not intended to be a comprehensive description, but rather a snapshot of what the Committee heard and saw during the course of its study.

We have been encouraged by the remarkable progress that has been made when governments, employers, community agencies, and families collaborate to reduce or eliminate the poverty and housing problems of those amongst them.

Structure of report

The Committee recognizes the complexity of the three major topics under study, and the various approaches we have taken in our analysis. The Committee has chosen to focus broadly on each of the three topics in sequence (Section 2 focused on poverty, Section 3 focused on housing, and Section 4 focused on homelessness). We have included a section specifically on over-represented groups and programs and policies intended to redress their disproportionate disadvantage with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness (Section 5). In each section, we have focussed on both persistent problems and promising practices.

A sixth section focuses on how governments and both private and voluntary sectors do and could work together to resolve the complex and interconnected problems with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness.

While we have embedded our recommendations throughout these sections, we have added a concluding section that summarizes and groups the recommendations.

Section 2: Poverty

Fundamentally, people do not want to live better in poverty, they want to get out of poverty. Our public policies and institutions are not designed, in our opinion, to help people get out of poverty. They are designed to allow them to live better and stay in poverty.

We pump an extraordinary amount of public and charitable dollars into managing the effects of poverty — illness, addictions, crime, illiteracy and long-term dependency on social assistance and social housing. Very little of this money improves the socio-economic conditions for low-income families. This has to change.

(Tom Gribbons, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009)

“Fundamentally, people do not want to live better in poverty, they want to get out of poverty.”

Tom Gribbons

The Committee began its hearings with the understanding that poverty was caused by a combination of personal situations and more systemic factors. The former might include when to marry and/or have children, whether to complete high school and whether to continue into post-secondary education, choices that could affect physical or mental health, and so on. Systemic factors might include barriers to education, availability of employment opportunities, and design of public policies and programs. While we did not set out to determine whether individual or systemic factors were more important contributors to income poverty and other forms of marginalization, we learned a great deal about the interaction of the two.

Perhaps most importantly, we learned that poverty may be short-term or may be part of an inter-generational history. Exit for some seems to be as simple as finding a job, and for others may require years of remedial and on-going support including education, health services and more. Some people’s incomes were less than half of Statistics Canada’s Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) lines, while others were very close to that line. And for some, poverty was a one-time occurrence, while, for others, it recurred again and again, despite periods in between with higher incomes.

We also learned that people with inadequate or no income become isolated by these circumstances. They are excluded from many opportunities and activities that most take for granted. However, their experience takes place in a context, often a local community that creates generous and effective responses, but that may be unable to respond with enough expertise and resources over time.

Poor people are excluded from opportunities most take for granted.

And we learned that economic and social struggles with respect to income and housing, are not random. Some particular groups among us are far more likely to find themselves in these situations, often for longer periods of time. These are unattached individuals, lone parents, some newcomers to Canada, Aboriginal peoples and people with disabilities. We have made every effort to assess how mainstream programs are serving these populations, and include that in this broad chapter. We have also described these groups in more detail, and assessed programs that target them specifically in a later section of this report.

2.1 Persistent Problems

The Welfare Wall

[T]he social security system that was conceived in the 1930s and 1940s, built largely in the post-war era, is increasingly not relevant to the social, economic and political character of Canada.

(Ken Battle, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 3 May 2007)

For many Canadians, especially those in over-represented groups, the only income supports come from public sources: social assistance, disability benefits through social assistance or Canada Pension Plan – Disability, Old Age Security, and/or Guaranteed Income Supplement.

Lifting people out of poverty has to be the goal of policies and programs.

The Committee has heard that the amounts of income provided are inadequate, the income flow is often insecure and unreliable, and the supports too often entangle people in programs and policies that make escape almost impossible. This last is referred to as the “welfare wall”, or sometimes the “welfare cliff”. The net impact is summarized by one expert in income security, when he describes welfare as a “subtle form of micro-colonialism of poor people by the state, disempowering them and deterring them from acting to improve their lives.”¹⁶

This patchwork we have is so complex. It is hoops, mazes and barriers. They are creating many of the problems that plague us. It is not like this complexity we talk about just happened. We have created it, which means we can untangle it, but it will be hard.

(Sheila Regehr, Director, National Council of Welfare, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009)

Income programs are a patchwork, with “hoops, mazes and barriers”.

Moving from reliance on social assistance to relying on paid employment creates obstacles and barriers that can leave an individual and/or family worse off than before. The disincentives are enormous. The 1991 report on child poverty made specific recommendations with respect to easing the transition from welfare to work, including the development of a national child care policy, increases to the minimum wage, and greater flexibility in social assistance programs to support transition to employment.¹⁷

As noted at the beginning of this section of the report, one witness, representing the business sector, described how current policies and programs serve not to get people out of poverty, but rather to make life in poverty more comfortable.¹⁸

Another witness described these programs in terms of their perverse effects:

[T]he interaction of programs at the federal level with programs at the provincial level often leads to perverse effects: that is, people working more and having less disposable income.

(Sid Frankel, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

¹⁶ Rick August, from an unpublished paper, cited in Ken Battle, et. al., *Towards a New Architecture of Adult Benefits*, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2006, p. 11.

¹⁷ Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, *Children in Poverty: Toward a Better Future*, 1991, p. 45.

¹⁸ Tom Gribbons, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009.

On a more personal level, one witness described how these interactions affected one family:

In Winnipeg, we know a family that has to talk to seven different silos of federal-provincial governments each month, and they do not have enough money to buy the bus fare to get there. Please ask the silos of government to talk with each other first.

(David Northcott, Executive Director, Winnipeg Harvest, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 1 May 2008)

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the federal government adopt as a core poverty eradication goal that all programmes dealing with poverty and homelessness are to lift Canadians out of poverty rather than make living within poverty more manageable and that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to adopt a similar goal.

Marginal effective tax rate (METR)

An Ontario study pointed out the following changes that would occur if a lone parent left Ontario Works for paid employment:

“[L]oss of social assistance benefits for adult and each child; increased childcare expenses; loss of basic dental coverage for the child; loss of prescription drug coverage that doesn’t require payment upfront; loss of back to school benefits; loss of winter clothing allowance; becomes ineligible for special diet allowances where required; loses community start-up benefits for a medically necessary move; will begin to pay net federal taxes at approx. \$1,600/mo. net income; [and] Ontario sales tax credits could be reduced.”¹⁹

Additionally, the lead researcher for this report, in an appearance before the Committee, told the Committee that an increase in rent could occur, if earnings exceeded the Ontario Works payment and the family was living in rent-geared-to-income housing.²⁰ These barriers are often referred to as the “marginal effective tax rate” (METR), which in some circumstances can exceed 100%, leaving the new worker worse off than before, despite an increase in income.

The Committee has heard that this situation is not unique to Ontario:

Both Ottawa and the provinces have created situations where the working poor above welfare threshold levels are not contemplating taking advanced training because if they get an extra \$100 a month, they lose \$75 of it in the combination of EI premiums, CPP premiums, et cetera.

(John Richards, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 December 2008)

While the specifics vary by province (and sometimes by city), lone parents and others seeking to leave assistance who met with the Committee during visits to agencies in cities across Canada reported such barriers. As all governments design programs intended to support such a transition, in combination, these programs can make it virtually impossible to move to employment-based financial independence from social assistance programs. For example, the Committee heard in several groups that a short-term loss of income between the beginning of employment and the receipt of a paycheque can be an insurmountable obstacle in a household with too little to begin

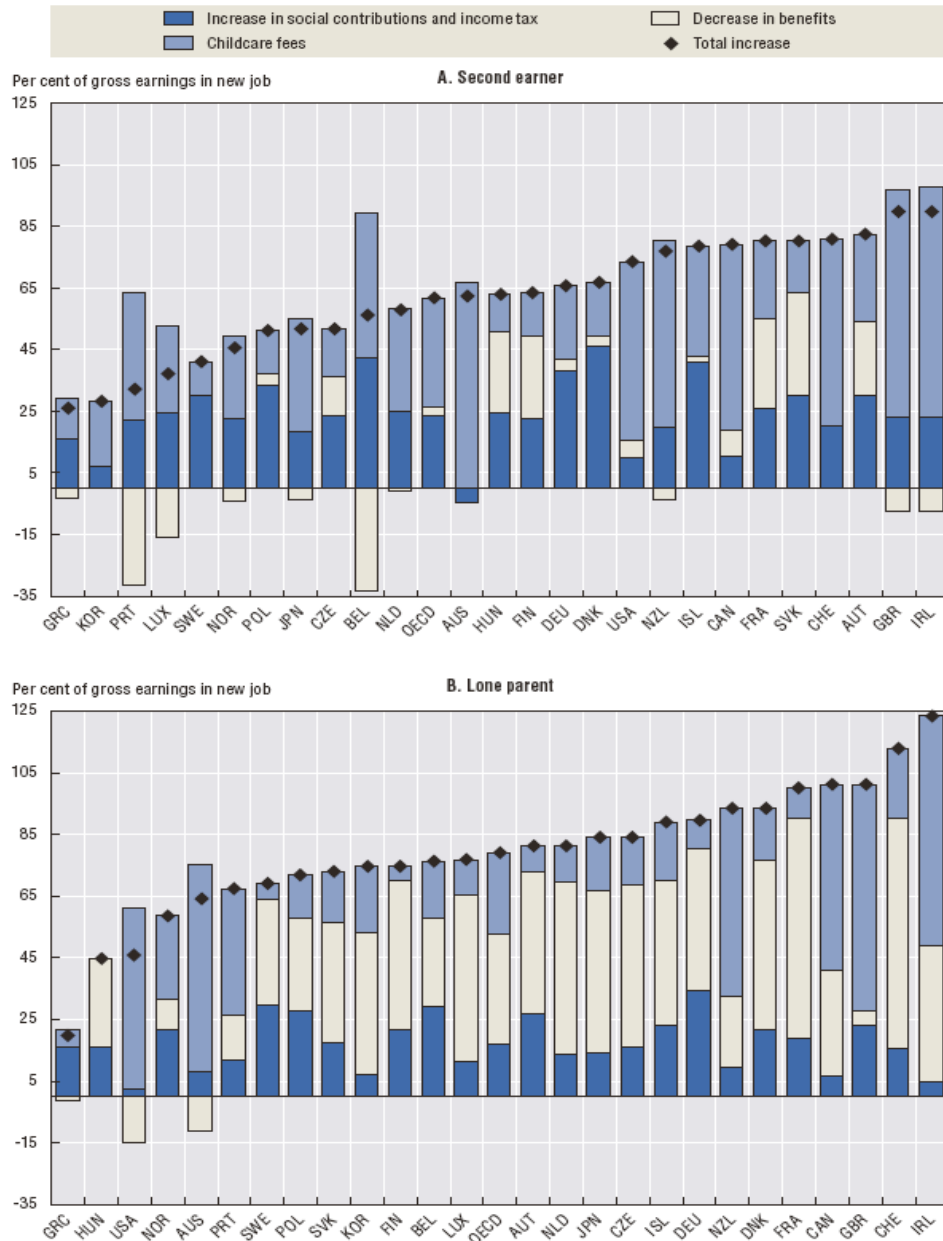
¹⁹ *Time for a Fair Deal. Report of the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA)*, St. Christopher House and Toronto City Summit Alliance, 2006, p. 26.

http://www.torontoalliance.ca/MISWAA_Report.pdf. Accessed 17 July 2009.

²⁰ John Stapleton, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 December 2007.

with. The figures below show that Canada is not alone in imposing such barriers, but it does impose among the highest METRs within the OECD for both second earners and lone parents.

Figure 2 - Implicit tax on returning to work, 2004²¹



1. Taking into account childcare fees and changes of taxes and benefits in case of a transition to a job paying two-thirds of average earnings.

Asset depletion

Witnesses told the Committee of the rigid requirements for asset depletion attached to many income support programs, especially social assistance.²² While we understand the interest in ensuring that higher income Canadians are not drawing on income assistance programs, we have come to

²¹ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Economic Policy Reforms: Going for Growth 2009*, 2009, p. 123.

²² See for example Sid Frankel, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007.

recognize the short-sightedness of requiring people to deplete almost all their assets before qualifying for such assistance. For example, forcing an individual to sell a vehicle or a home simply transfers the expense from payments for an asset (car or mortgage payment) to payments for services (public transit or taxis for example, or rent). Further, loss of home or car not only may make job hunting more difficult, but it's replacing them is an expense that needs to be faced at the same time as people are losing services associated with social assistance.

We strip people of assets when they go on social assistance. Once you get into the hole, how will you get out of it?... You can count on being well and truly impoverished if you have to go to welfare.

(Michael Mendelson, Senior Scholar, Caledon Institute of Social Policy Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

You can count on being well and truly impoverished if you have to go to welfare.

Michael Mendelson

Some witnesses have argued that rather than requiring depletion of resources, more effort should be made to encourage the creation of assets:

We have talked about income a lot, but not about wealth. Governments are doing a lot to reduce inequities in income, but the same policies are increasing inequities in wealth. For example, we can now shelter a part of our money from income tax; that is a great incentive when we have a job that brings in enough money. It enables us to build up our assets. But, for people at the bottom of the ladder, programs to help them build up their assets hardly exist. The federal government could certainly do something at that level.

(Marie-France Raynault, Director, Département de médecine sociale and Programme de résidence en santé communautaire, Université de Montréal Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

The Committee echoes a recommendation from a witness, offered to a very recent social policy conference.²³

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that provincial governments increase current limits on assets for qualifying applicants for the first six to 12 months, to allow those relying on social assistance for short periods of time to retain the assets they need to re-engage in the labour force and regain their economic footing.

Income Insecurity

The Committee has heard from several witnesses, and from some individuals who are grappling with reliance on social assistance and other government income assistance programs, that not only are the benefit amounts inadequate, but the insecurity of the income flow is a major problem.

In the families to whom I provide care on a daily basis, I have seen first-hand the severe stress that comes from worrying about how to make ends meet. The stress affects their daily life and leads to depression, despair and dropping-out.

(Marie-France Raynault, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

²³ Michael Mendelson, "Income Support for the Adult Unemployed," Presentation to Queen's International Institute on Social Policy, 2009, Slide 16.

http://www.queensu.ca/sps/events/qiisp/2009/42_Michael_Mendelson.pdf. Accessed 20 August 2009.

Expert witnesses described for the Committee how the interaction of programs, and the complexity that can happen in the lives of individuals and their families can result in sudden and sometimes devastating reductions in income or ineligibility for income support. Fear of such changes contributes to stress, which has its own negative impacts for adults and their children, and to decision-making based on short and uncertain time-lines.

One witness described the results of increasing both levels and security of income as follows:

[M]oney helps reduce stress within the family, which leads to better outcomes. That is obviously true, but it does a second thing, as well: it tends to extend the time horizon for decision making. If you have enough money, you have residential stability; you can take advantage of the programs that are offered in schools and the NGO programs. You can do all kinds of things. If your decision making is restricted to trying to decide whether to buy milk or Kool-Aid, you are not making those longer-term decisions that are useful for your family.

(Evelyn Forget, Professor, Department of Community Health Services, University of Manitoba Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that federal government modify all federal income security programs, e.g., Employment Insurance, to better protect Canadians in low-income households who experience short-term gaps in income.

Inadequacy of income

The Committee heard from many witnesses²⁴ of the depth of poverty for many who rely on social assistance or other “last resort” income security programs. The National Council of Welfare calculated social assistance benefits as a percentage of Statistics Canada’s after-tax LICO for 2007, and found that benefits for single individuals who were considered “employable” were as low as 19% of LICO, and didn’t exceed 50% of LICO in any province in 2007.²⁵ For families of four people, the benefits ranged from 50% of after-tax LICO, to a maximum of 66%.²⁶

Welfare benefits leave people well below any measure of poverty.

Some witnesses have suggested that the level of assistance (or even minimum-wage employment) is so low that it leads some recipients into criminal behavior, including prostitution.²⁷ This view was confirmed in a conversation some Committee members held with sex-trade workers in Regina.

The Committee believes that collectively, governments must prevent this kind of outcome, and must ensure that people have enough money to support themselves and their families. Historically, Canadian governments have done better. One of our witnesses reported that cuts to social assistance

²⁴ See, for example, Clifford Lee, Submission to Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 August 2009, p. 2.

²⁵ National Council of Welfare, *Welfare Incomes, 2006 and 2007*, 2008, p. 44. <http://www.ncwcnbes.net/documents/researchpublications/OtherPublications/2008Report-WelfareIncomes2006-2007/Report-WelfareIncomes2006-2007E.pdf>. Accessed 25 August 2009.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Greg deGroot-Maggetti, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 3 May 2007.

in 2005 resulted in a reduction in benefits for lone mothers from 81% of the poverty line to 56% in 2006.²⁸

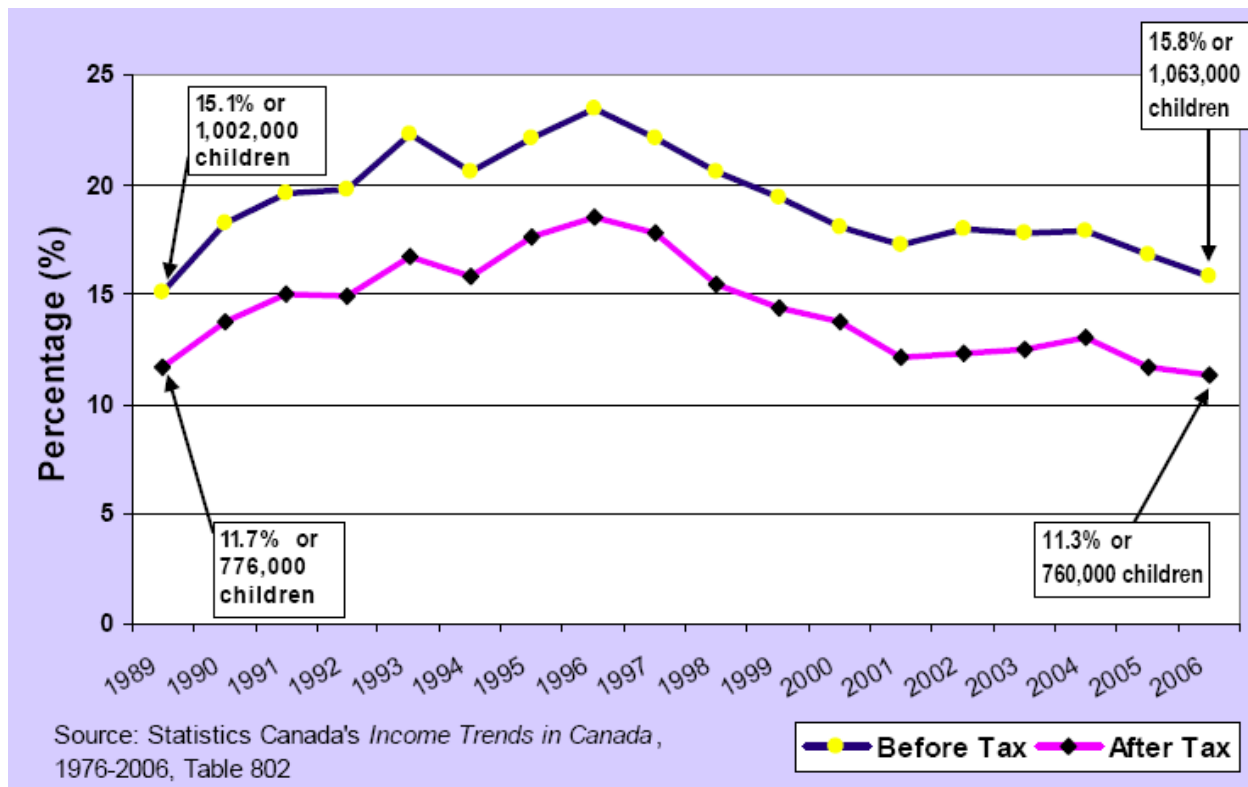
Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the federal government establish with the provinces a goal that individuals and families, regardless of the reasons for their need, receive incomes totaling at least after-tax LICOs.

Child poverty

An all-party resolution from the House of Commons to “seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000” has not proved to be sufficient impetus to accomplish the goal. As demonstrated by the figure below, while the percentage of children living in poverty has declined from its peak in the mid-1990s, it has not declined significantly since the start date of 1989.

Figure 3 - Children in Canada in low income families 1989-2006 (before and after tax)²⁹



The poor families these children live in are often headed by someone in the labour force; in more than 40% of these families in 2006, at least one person was working full-time.³⁰ In the poorest

²⁸ “Lone Mothers: Building Social Inclusion – Community Bulletin #1,” p. 4, February 2008. Submitted to the Subcommittee on Cities by Leah Caragata, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 2 April 2009.

²⁹ Campaign 2000, “Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 2008,” p. 1.

<http://www.campaign2000.ca/rc/C2000%20Report%20Card%20FINAL%20Nov%2010th08.pdf>.

Accessed 10 September 2009.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

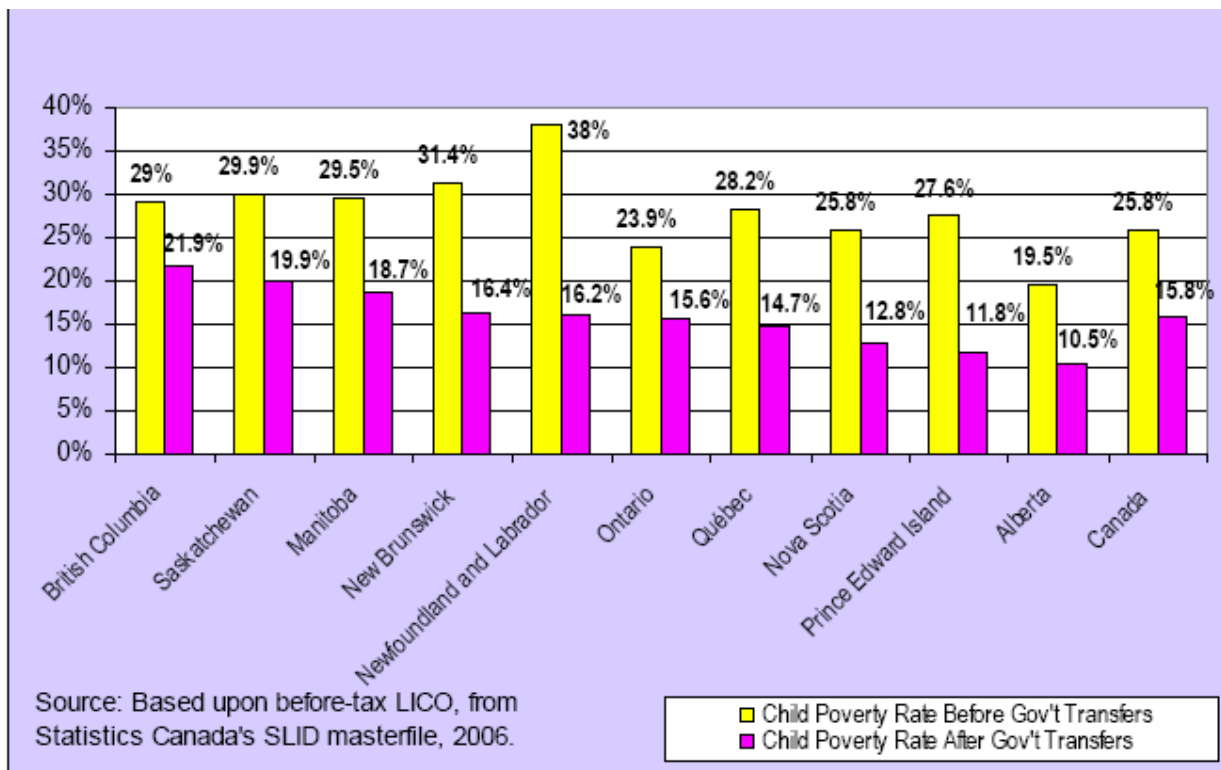
neighbourhoods in Toronto, the Committee heard that 80% of low-income parents are working at least part-time.³¹ One-third of all poor families in 2006 were headed by lone mothers.³² Working poverty is addressed later in this section of the report; the particular hardships of lone parents are addressed in greater detail in Section 5 of this report.

The Committee has heard extensive testimony about the importance of raising incomes of families raising children, and about the urgent need to ensure better access to early learning opportunities and adequate supports for those children, and better training and employment opportunities for their parents. These issues, too, are addressed in later parts of this section on poverty.

We need to raise incomes of families raising children, to get children out of poverty.

Finally, the Committee has seen and heard of the important difference that income transfers can make to poor families with children. The following figure demonstrates that impact, with reductions in the poverty rates among children by at least one-third in every province in Canada. These income transfers and related recommendations are included later in this section.

Figure 4 - Impact of income transfers on child poverty: Canada & provinces, 2006³³



Consequently, the Committee has recommended a significant increase in this program, outlined in more detail later in this section.

³¹ Frances Lankin, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008.

³² Ibid., p.2.

³³ Campaign 2000, p. 3.

The cost of poverty

There is increasing evidence that the cost of doing nothing to reduce or eliminate poverty is large enough that many remedies are probably less costly.

In a panel discussion on income security programs, one expert urged us to address “the continuing cost of doing nothing, that we are paying at the other end in health care costs and in some criminal justice costs.”³⁴ This was not the first time the Committee had considered this issue.

We need better measures to help us understand the economic cost of poverty and the economic benefit of helping particularly our children and young families to get out of poverty. Although people want to do social good, we are even more compelled to act when the business case is made that poverty reduction means that some form of economic gain will be there for all. It is not only social improvements.

(Tom Gribbons, Chair, Vibrant Communities Saint John, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009)

In fact, calculating the cost of poverty, or of “doing nothing” is more complex than it may seem.

*Poverty is costing all of us dearly. Some costs, those of personal human suffering, are simply incalculable but they are nonetheless preventable. Other costs, the more economic ones, may still be very difficult to calculate precisely. What really matters, however, is not that we put an exact number on the cost of poverty. What we as a society need is to set clear goals, compare the benefits to the costs over the short and the long term, evaluate our progress and understand that we get what we pay for. The foundation for a sustainable high quality of life does not come cheaply. But let us invest wisely now, for the public good and the positive results that will benefit all Canadians.*³⁵

Calculating the costs

Since the National Council of Welfare published these words in 2002, analysts have been taking on the challenges associated with calculating economic costs of poverty. They have put aside the incalculable costs mentioned in this excerpt, seeking to measure costs, either of existing income support and programs costs believed to be higher because of poverty, or of the supports and programs necessary to eliminate or reduce these problems; and then to measure savings and/or benefits that would accrue from lowered rates of low-income and housing insecurity.

Detailed work on conceptual frameworks and costing has been done in the US and in the UK, focussing on child poverty. Less has been done in Canada, though the need has been identified repeatedly. In a background paper to its poverty reduction strategy, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador identified the need, and some of the measures it identified as part of the calculation.

While it is difficult to put a dollar figure on how much poverty costs, there are many indicators of the human cost of poverty, such as increased illness, more violence against women, lower labour force participation and more family disintegration.³⁶

As in other jurisdictions, efforts at more precise costing have been made.

³⁴ Sid Frankel, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009.

³⁵ National Council of Welfare, *The Cost of Poverty*, Report No. 15, Winter 2001-02.

<http://www.ncwcnbes.net/documents/researchpublications/OtherPublications/2002Report-TheCostOfPoverty/ReportENG.htm>. Accessed 1 April 2009.

³⁶ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Human Resources, Labour and Employment Department, “Building pathways to poverty reduction: Backgrounder,” *News Releases*, 21 March 2005.

<http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2005/hrle/0321n22.htm>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

In Calgary, for example, in 2004, a study of “external costs” focussed on data that were readily available, related to health care, education, criminal justice, income support and other social supports.³⁷ The figures refer not to the consequences of poverty, but rather to the allocation of public funds needed to address them. The study does not, for example include social assistance payments themselves as costs (as they simply transfer funds from one group or entity to another), but it does include the administration and financing of income support as a cost; without poverty, these costs would not occur.³⁸ This study uses and describes a very technical approach to assessing costs. However, this analysis also sought to determine current spending and anticipated spending to address the consequences of poverty, and to assess the savings of reducing the level or rate of poverty. These figures are reflected in speculative assessments and calculations.

Based on these two approaches, this study calculated a conservative estimate of an annual cost of poverty in Calgary of \$8.25 billion, with a speculative assessment of between \$46 billion and \$56 billion each year.³⁹

The recent Ontario study on the costs of poverty was guided by a strong advisory group including economists and policy experts (Don Drummond of TD Bank Financial Group, Judith Maxwell of Canadian Policy Research Networks, and James Milway of the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity). The study offered the chart below to demonstrate the relationship between individuals and families in poverty, institutions and governments.

The economic and social costs of doing nothing about poverty — more than \$20 billion — are more than we can afford.

The study calculated the portion of public spending for health care and criminal justice attributable to poverty, and the economic loss caused by unemployment and underemployment and low education and skills outcomes that can be attributed to low income.⁴⁰

The calculations in this study include three types of costs:

- remedial costs, treating the symptoms of poverty, relating specifically to criminal justice and health costs;⁴¹
- intergenerational costs, or the low educational achievement costs associated with the poverty of children in low-income families; and
- opportunity costs, or foregone productivity and tax revenues as social costs, and foregone income as private costs.

Although the study is focussed on Ontario, it reports on costs for both the province and for Canada as a whole. For Ontario, the study reported social costs of between \$10 billion and \$14 billion annually. The national social cost is calculated at between \$24 billion and \$30 billion annually.⁴²

³⁷ Alan Shiell and Jenny Zhang, “The External Costs of Poverty: A Conservative Assessment,” United Way of Calgary and Area, June 2004, p. ii. http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/vc/cal_costssofpoverty04.pdf. Accessed 24 August 2009.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 11

³⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁰ Nathan Laurie, *The Cost of Poverty: An Analysis of the Economic Cost of Poverty in Ontario*, Ontario Association of Food Banks, November 2008, p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 19.

The table below provides a more detailed breakdown of provincial and national social costs, and includes private costs for each.

Table 1 - The costs of poverty in Canada and Ontario (2007 dollars)⁴³

CANADA	PRIVATE COSTS	SOCIAL COSTS
Health Care		\$7.6 billion
Crime		\$1 - 2 billion
Intergenerational	\$8.2 - \$10.3 billion	\$3.1 - \$3.8 billion
Lost Productivity	\$35.8 - \$41.2 billion	\$8.6 - \$13 billion
- Adjustment for understatement of productivity loss	+\$4.1 billion	
- Adjustment for transfer payments		+\$4.1 billion
TOTAL	\$48.1 - \$55.6 billion	\$24.4 - \$30.5 billion
ONTARIO	PRIVATE COSTS	SOCIAL COSTS
Health Care		\$2.9 billion
Crime		\$0.25 - \$0.6 billion
Intergenerational	\$3.3 - \$4.3 billion	\$1.3 - \$1.6 billion
Lost Productivity	\$16.6 - \$19 billion	\$4 - \$6.1 billion
- Adjustment for understatement of productivity loss	+\$1.9 billion	
- Adjustment for transfer payments		+\$1.9 billion
TOTAL	\$21.8 - \$25.2 billion	\$10.4 billion - \$13.1 billion
GRAND TOTAL	\$32.2 - \$38.3 billion 5.5% - 6.6% of Ontario's GDP	

Other less comprehensive studies have been done recently that report on the cost of poverty related to specific sectors.

For example, a recent report prepared for Ontario physicians to help them identify poverty among their patients, reported a cost of health disparities, many of which are “due to economic disparities.”⁴⁴ This cost, the report stated, increased health care costs by 20 percent, or about \$35 billion annually.⁴⁵

Another recent study reported on the cost of “poverty-related crime” to the criminal justice system in Alberta. In particular, it considered the costs associated with charges and incarcerations for failure to pay a fine, which results in more than 20,000 people being incarcerated each year.⁴⁶ This report concluded that “Even if all of these crimes were at the level of a transit pass failure to pay offence, the provincial costs for the incarceration of offenders of this crime would be approximately \$29,631,000 annually.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Gary Bloch, et. al., “Poverty and Health: Identifying poverty in your practice and community,” *Ontario Medical Review*, May 2008, p. 41. <http://www.stonegatehc.org/tempindex/Identifying%20Poverty.pdf>. Accessed 24 February 2009.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Poverty Reduction Coalition, “Crimes of Desperation: The truth about poverty-related crime,” United Way of Calgary and Area, March 2008, p. 3.

<http://www.reducepoverty.ca/pdf/Crimes%20of%20Desperation%20ES.pdf>. Accessed 24 February 2009.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

In British Columbia, the Health Officers Council recently released a discussion paper on health inequities, which includes some costing data. It cites the BC Healthy Living Alliance estimation that “three major risk factors associated with poverty and health inequity (tobacco use, physical inactivity and overweight/obesity) cost the BC economy approximately \$3.8 billion annually.”⁴⁸

Like the Ontario article, this paper proposes that if even 20% of health care costs are attributable to health inequities, the costs associated with them would be \$2.6 billion annually.⁴⁹

Finally, the Committee heard of two studies that examined education with economic costs and benefits. The first was a recent study that calculated the economic benefits that could be realized if Aboriginal peoples achieved the same educational outcomes as non-Aboriginal people in Canada,⁵⁰ estimated to take until 2026:

By 2026, we find that if we can eliminate this gap, basically GDP in Canada would be increased by \$37 billion. The cumulative amount over that period would be more than a \$400-billion increase in GDP for Canadians. Again, [revenue from] taxes would be up significantly — by about \$64 billion cumulatively — and government would be spending less money on welfare, crime and housing. That would mean about \$140 billion less in government spending.

(Andrew Sharpe, Executive Director, Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009)

A second study examined the cost (private and public, short-term and long-term) of non-completion of secondary school in Canada, looking first at the per-dropout costs to government:

In terms of social assistance, the [annual] cost to government is over \$4,000 a year. Crime is over \$200 a year. In terms of labour and unemployment, there are a number of different, significant costs. Earning losses to the individual on an annual basis are just under \$3,500 a year, tax revenue lost to government is over \$200, EI loss is just under \$100, and the EI cost of the government is just over \$2,700...

The aggregate numbers are staggering once we look at the number of all the high school dropouts in Canada. Again, just as a few examples, in the area of health it is \$23.8 billion annually, in the area of social assistance it is \$969 million, and in the area of EI costs it is over \$1 billion.

(Olena Hankivsky, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009)

Witnesses have called not only for a comprehensive calculation of costs, costs savings, and benefits,⁵¹ but also for communicating them to the public, so that poverty-reduction initiatives are seen in the context of savings, rather than spending:

It is important to get that message across. Poverty does not only cost people who live in it. It also costs us as a society. Somehow we need to bring the costs of poverty together with investments in human development.

(Greg deGroot-Magetti, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 3 May 2007)

Despite such compelling evidence from so many sources, there is no definitive assessment of the costs of poverty or how they might compare to the costs of various approaches to its remedy and prevention.

⁴⁸ Health Officers Council of BC, *Health Inequities in British Columbia: Discussion Paper*, November 2008, p. 9. http://www.phabc.org/files/HOC_Inequities_Report.pdf. Accessed 24 February 2009.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ These differentials are explored in more detail in Section 4 of this report.

⁵¹ Avy Go, Submission to SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, March 2008, p. 7.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the federal government publish a Green Paper by 31 December 2010, to include the costs and benefits of current practices with respect to income supports and of options to reduce and eliminate poverty, including a basic annual income based on a negative income tax, and to include a detailed assessment of completed pilot projects on a basic income in New Brunswick and Manitoba.

Working poverty

While there is compelling evidence that employment is the most likely route to an adequate or better income in Canada, the Committee has heard that employment alone is often not sufficient to bring individuals or families out of low-income circumstances. The Committee had heard considerable evidence about the restructuring of the labour force in Canada, having been reminded that increasingly a single job is not enough to support a family, even if it is full-time and at minimum wage.

Many poor people are employed, but do not earn enough to support their families.

Witnesses identified the trend in their own communities, starting with Calgary:

If employment was the answer to poverty, then Calgary is most certainly the city where that answer should have been found. Was it? According to the most recent census, 14% of Calgarians continue to live in poverty, virtually unchanged from 2001, and less than one third of those were receiving welfare. The rest were presumably working.

(Derek Cook, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 23 April 2009)

Toronto witnesses described the very high proportion of working people among low-income families:

[O]ver 80% of the poor families living in the poorest neighbourhoods in Toronto are working. This story is about the working poor, and so it remains important for us to look at income security across a range of social supports.

(Frances Lankin, Chief Executive Officer, United Way of Greater Toronto, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008)

The Committee also learned that 70% of non-seniors in Toronto Community Housing “gain some or all of their income through employment.”⁵²

In Montreal, we learned of the very high percentage of people who are working and using food banks:

We [in Montreal] have over 300,000 people, we were told, who work and are poor and must go to get food at the end of the month. People who work for minimum wage and are the sole provider are getting half of what they need to be at the poverty level. They must work between 50 and 60 hours a week at that salary to be able to cope. Something is drastically wrong.

(Michèle Thibodeau-DeGuire, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 14 June 2007)

Several witnesses pointed out the particular vulnerability of people who are employed and still poor, as many do not access many of the supports and programs available to people who receive social assistance.⁵³

⁵² Derek Ballantyne, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007.

⁵³ See for example testimony from Ken Battle before the Committee on 28 February 2008, or from Gina Browne before the Committee on 29 November 2007.

Precarious Employment

Much of the evidence on the failure of employment to provide the anticipated route out of poverty focussed on the increase in precarious employment; this is defined as “the shift in labour markets from full-time and more or less permanent jobs to those with at least some of the following characteristics: temporary, part-time, irregular hours, low wages, and few if any benefits.”⁵⁴

Witnesses before the Committee highlighted the importance of the “new” labour market as a factor in the failure of current programs to meet their goals of leading people to employment as an escape route from poverty:

[T]he trend in the Canadian labour market over the last 25 years ... [shows] a strong increase in more unstable work and part-time work, and an increase in the new category called the working poor. Twenty-five or 30 years ago, the fact of having a steady income was enough to keep a person above the poverty line. This is no longer the case. The working poor are found in all provinces.

(Jean-Claude Icart, Representative, Table de Concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrants, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008)

Temporary and part-time work has been rising, reaching 40% of jobs,⁵⁵ and more people in these jobs are earning minimum wage than people in “standard” jobs. In 2004, for example, 15% of part-time workers were earning minimum wage, compared to less than 5% of full-time workers.⁵⁶

More and more jobs – 40% of the total – are part-time or temporary.

The Committee has learned that precarious employment “is spreading especially rapidly in urban areas and among women, youth and racialized groups who are over-represented in the most precarious employment forms and work arrangements.”⁵⁷ The Committee was also reminded that in addition to low incomes, precarious employment often means fewer benefits and supports from employers, which has a disproportionate impact on women raising children⁵⁸. Similarly, the Caledon Institute, in proposing new architecture for income security programs, noted that one-third of working people were in non-standard or “precarious” employment, which was defined as “self-employment, multiple job holders, contract workers and part-time workers.”⁵⁹

Those at greatest risk of non-standard work are those who have higher-than-average poverty rates:

*Groups at high risk of nonstandard work include young people who have less than or only high school education, women who leave the workforce for extended periods to care for their children or aging family members, displaced older workers with limited education and obsolete work skills, Aboriginal Canadians, visible minorities, persons with disabilities and recent immigrants.*⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Patricia Evans, “Challenging Income (in) security: Lone Mothers and Precarious Employment,” Paper prepared for the 12th BIEN Congress - Inequality and Development in a Globalised Economy—The Basic Income Option, Dublin, Ireland, June 20-21, 2008, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Morley Gunderson, “Minimum Wages in Canada: Theory, Evidence and Policy,” Prepared for the Federal Labour Standards Review Commission, updated December 2005, pp. 44-45.

⁵⁶ Statistics Canada, “Fact sheet on minimum wage,” *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, September 2005, p. 22.

⁵⁷ Leah H. Vosko, “Precarious Employment in Canada: Taking Stock, Taking Action,” *Just Labour*, 2003, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Glenn Drover, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007.

⁵⁹ Ken Battle, et. al. *Towards a New Architecture for Canada’s Adult Benefits*. Caledon Institute of Social Policy, June 2006, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Finally, the Committee has learned that those in precarious employment are less likely to qualify for Employment Insurance benefits, leaving them to rely on lower, less secure incomes under social assistance.⁶¹ Both Employment Insurance and social assistance are addressed in more detail below.

Minimum Wage

People talk about how businesses cannot afford a higher minimum wage. People cannot afford to live on the minimum wage the way it is.

(Marika Morris, Research and strategic communications consultant, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 4 June 2008)

People cannot afford to live on the minimum wage the way it is.

Marika Morris

Other witnesses have identified the declining real value of minimum wages, and the need to establish “living wage” policies as central to “making work pay”, at least enough to escape poverty.

With respect to the minimum wages, because our group is heavily involved with minimum-wage and living-wage campaigns across the country with partner organizations, we feel this change is one of the most fundamental ones that needs to happen, and it would make a major difference for the working poor.

(Rob Rainer, Executive Director, Canada Without Poverty, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 3 May 2007)

One Canadian journalist identified a “living wage” policy as having originated in Baltimore in 1994; in this context, the policy included not only a minimum wage well above the legislated level, but also a procurement policy that required a similar wage be paid to all contractors working for the City of Baltimore and their employees as well.⁶² The same article warned that this policy was “on its way to becoming a social policy affectation for some of Canada’s richest cities.”⁶³

The campaign for living wage policies has been especially strong in Calgary. City Council received a report on the impact of a living wage, and directed staff to report back by January 2009 with a policy and implementation plan.⁶⁴ In addition, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce was designated a “living wage leader” by Vibrant Communities Calgary, which has been promoting the living wage policy. This designation means that

*[T]he chamber is committed to paying a living wage of \$12 per hour with benefits, or \$13.25 without benefits, to all employees, be they full-time, part-time or casual, and to contracted employees who work there for two days or more per week.*⁶⁵

Finally, the Calgary’s 10-year plan to end homelessness indicates that funding for case management will operate on a living wage basis.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Carole Vincent, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008.

⁶² Peter Shawn Taylor, “Killer Living Wages,” *National Post*, 4 November 2008.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ “Living Wage,” City of Calgary website. Accessed from

http://www.calgary.ca/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_780_237_0_43/http%3B/content.calgary.ca/CCA/City+Hall/Business+Units/Finance+and+Supply/Policies/Sustainable+Environmental+and+Ethical+Procurement+Policy+SEPPP/Living+Wage.htm 16 February 2009. Information no longer available on website as of 21 April 2009.

⁶⁵ Gina Teele, “Chamber sets ‘living wage’ example; Award honours fairness amid financial crisis,” *Calgary Herald*, 5 February 2009, p. D3.

⁶⁶ Calgary Homelessness Foundation, *Calgary’s 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness*, 2008, p. 28.

A similar policy was also being considered, with an impact assessment having been submitted by city officials in August 2008,⁶⁷ in the Region of Waterloo. The City of Ottawa also began study of such a policy in the spring of 2009.

While the federal government has, in the past, legislated a minimum wage for workers in federal sectors, e.g., transportation and banking, it stopped doing so in 1996, and employees in federal sectors have been governed by provincial and territorial minimum wage legislation ever since.

There has been considerable debate in recent years, with many front-line agencies and social policy advocates arguing that a higher minimum wage is an important element in any poverty reduction strategy, and is part of “making work pay.” These views have been heard before the Committee.⁶⁸ Others have argued that since most part-time workers are second-income earners and/or youth living at home, a higher minimum wage is not going to reduce poverty, and could, in fact, result in fewer low-wage jobs, making things worse for youth and low-income households.⁶⁹ The Committee learned that in 2004, half of workers under the age of 25 were earning minimum wage, while fewer than 2% of workers over the age of 25 were minimum-wage earners.⁷⁰

In addition, a recent Australian study of both Australian and American data found that increases in minimum wages resulted in longer spells on social assistance for single mothers, not shorter spells.⁷¹

One expert on minimum wage concluded:

As an anti-poverty device, however, they are an exceedingly blunt instrument and not well targeted towards the poor for various reasons: many of the poor do not work; those that do often work few hours; there is the risk of an adverse employment effect; minimum wages disproportionately affect teens who are distributed throughout the family income distribution; and minimum wages affect individual wages while poverty is defined in terms of family income and need.⁷²

Recent analysis has shown an increase in the proportion of workers over the age of 20, not in full-time studies, who are working for less than \$10 an hour.⁷³ As well, several provinces have announced increases in minimum wages, including scheduled increases over time; in some cases, these changes were made in the context of poverty reduction strategies or plans.

Recommendation 6

To demonstrate a federal commitment to adequate minimum wages, the Committee recommends that the federal government reinstate a federal minimum wage at \$10/hour, indexed to the Consumer Price Index, and that suppliers of goods and services to the federal government be required to pay its employees at least that amount.

⁶⁷ Community Services Committee of Region of Waterloo, *Minutes*, 19 August 2008. Accessed from <http://www.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/Region.nsf/8ef02c0fded0c82a85256e590071a3ce/5c6989441b77f5cf852574ad005734cc!OpenDocument>, 16 February 2009.

⁶⁸ Nancy Burrows. Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 4 June 2008.

⁶⁹ Gunderson, p. 9.

⁷⁰ Statistics Canada, p. 20.

⁷¹ Peter Brandon, “Examining Effects of Minimum Wages: Single Mothers’ Exits from Welfare,” Employment Policies Institute, June 2008, p. 18.

⁷² Gunderson, pp. 44-45.

⁷³ Ron Saunders, “Globalization and the Changing Nature of Work in Canada,” Presentation to Conference on: Global Strategies: Improving the Conditions of the Working Poor, Canadian Policy Research Networks, May 2008, slides 2 and 3.

Employment insurance

We need a national conversation on Employment Insurance. This is the first post-UI recession, so Canadians are coming to realize the gaps and the inadequacies in the social insurance program into which they have been paying premiums faithfully. They are discovering to their consternation and horror that the program is not there for them.

(Michael Prince, Professor of Social Policy, University of Victoria, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

Canada's unemployment insurance system (now called Employment Insurance – EI) was first introduced in 1940, and has been through several generations of changes since. Originally intended to provide partial wage replacement for employees who experienced involuntary unemployment, it excluded large groups of employees, including those in jobs with low risk of unemployment and those for whom unemployment was highly probable or certain, e.g., employees employed in seasonal industries such as agriculture, fishing, lumbering and logging.⁷⁴ The Committee has heard from experts that the program has since evolved and now has three major goals: income support for new parents and caregivers, insurance against income loss due to unemployment, and training for unemployed workers.⁷⁵

Until 1990, the program was financed by contributions from employers, employees, and the federal government, which contributed 20% of the combined employer-employee contribution and the cost of program administration. Today, employers and employees are the sole contributors.

The last major reform of the UI/EI system occurred when the *Employment Insurance Act* was implemented in 1996.⁷⁶ Major changes included a new qualification requirement and benefit structure based on hours instead of weeks of insurable employment, with the first hour of work covered. Employees whose annual earnings were \$2,000 or less could apply for a premium refund. The calculation of average weekly insurable earnings for benefit purposes was also changed to encourage individuals to work more than the minimum qualification requirement.

Compared to the UI program prior to the 1971 reforms, which essentially restricted support to regular benefits and benefits to self-employed fishers, EI provides benefits to employees who are sick (sickness benefits), pregnant (maternity benefits), caring for a new-born or adopted child (parental benefits), or caring for a close family member whose death is imminent (compassionate benefits); work-sharing; and other labour market adjustment assistance (employment benefits and support measures). Despite these reforms, the Committee has heard that it has not responded to economic restructuring over the past decades, nor to the economic downturn over the past months.

Limited access

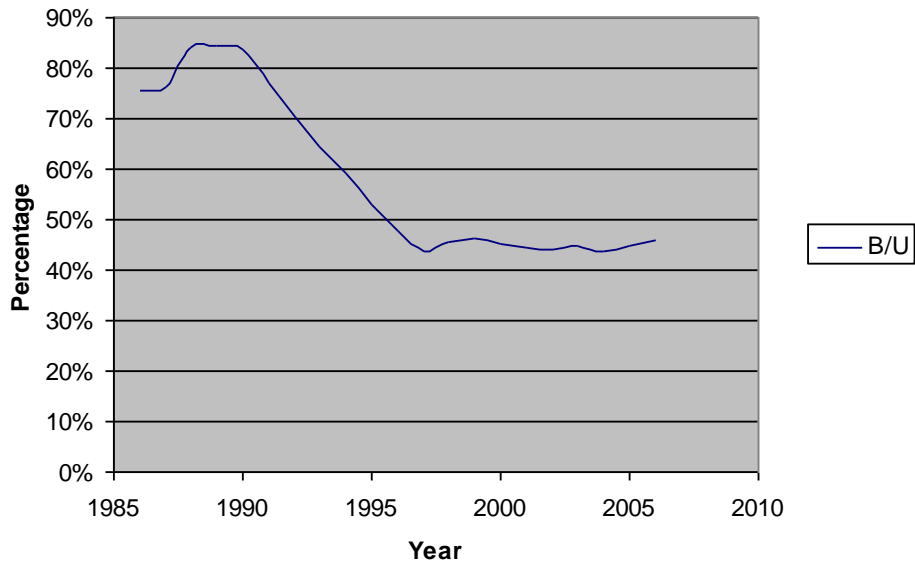
There is considerable evidence, captured in the figure below, that starting as early as 1990, Unemployment Insurance (UI), as it was then known, began to shrink in terms of what percentage of unemployed persons were able to draw UI benefits.

⁷⁴ Gary Dingleline, *A Chronology of Response: The Evolution of Unemployment Insurance from 1940 to 1980*, Employment and Immigration Canada, 1981, pp. 9–10.

⁷⁵ See, for example, testimony by Miles Corak and Evelyn Forget, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 29 May 2009.

⁷⁶ *Bill C-12: An Act Respecting Employment Insurance in Canada*, 1996.

Figure 5 - Beneficiaries as a proportion of unemployed (B/U)⁷⁷



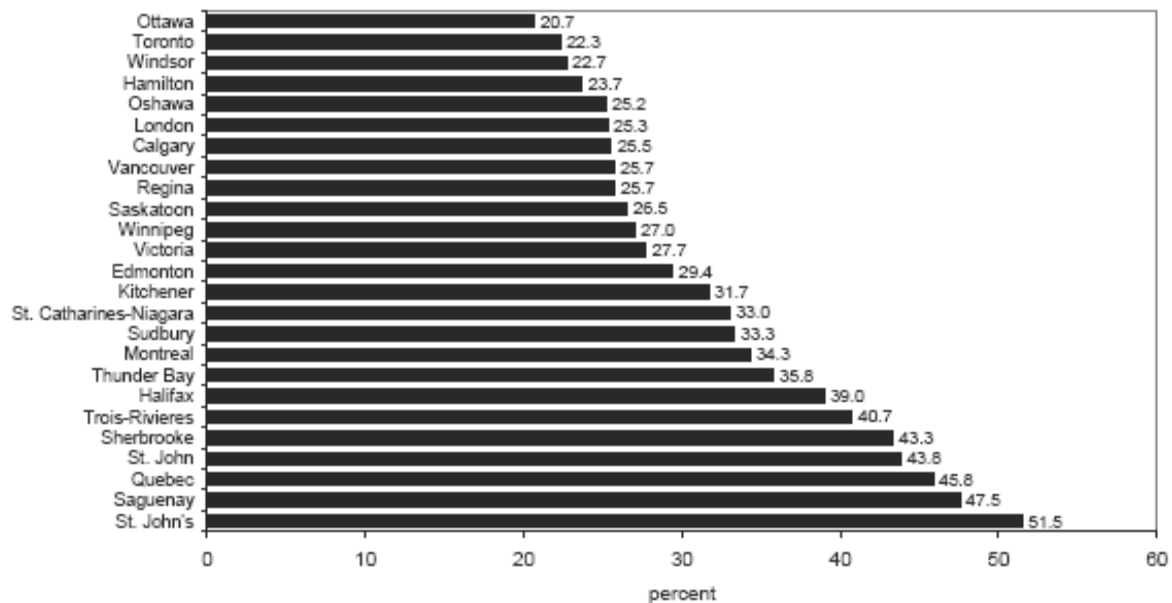
In 2008, 571,800 unemployed people had contributed EI premiums; of those, 17.8% had not worked enough hours to qualify for benefits.⁷⁸

At the same time, eligibility requirements and the duration of benefits are based on the employment rate in one of more than a dozen economic regions, resulting in widely divergent coverage across Canada. The figure below provides evidence of the variations in cities across Canada in 2004.

⁷⁷ Data taken from "Impacts and Effectiveness of the Employment Insurance Program," *Employment Insurance: 2007 Monitoring and Assessment Report*, from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada website, http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/employment/ei/reports/eimar_2007/chapter5.shtml. Accessed 16 October 2009.

⁷⁸ Statistics Canada, "Employment Insurance Coverage Survey," *The Daily*, 23 July 2009. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090723/dq090723a-eng.htm>. Accessed 24 August 2009

Figure 6 - Percentage of unemployed receiving regular EI benefits, by major city, 2004⁷⁹



Among the groups generally excluded from receiving EI benefits are “the long-term unemployed, recent immigrants, the underemployed, new workers, part-time workers (including persons with disabilities and Canadians working part time due to family care responsibilities) and workers in precarious jobs.”⁸⁰

Witnesses before the Committee noted that women and youth are particularly over-represented among those who do not collect benefits,⁸¹ and individuals who have been working in the informal economy, carrying out legal activities, but with employers who are not making contributions to the EI fund.⁸² All of these groups are over-represented in precarious employment, as well, suggesting that the existing EI program is not equipped to respond to this new labour force.

While the Committee is aware of the short-term urgencies with respect to reforming the current program, addressed below, the access issues are likely to persist in the long term. As explained to the Committee,

The [new] program would be a new, income-tested program that would provide benefits for unemployed Canadians who are not eligible for Employment Insurance... I see merit in having a social insurance program but it is incapable of serving the needs of all unemployed Canadians, so we are looking at creating another federal program to be financed through general revenues.

(Ken Battle, President, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008)

⁷⁹ Ken Battle, Michael Mendelson and Sherri Torjman, *Towards a New Architecture for Canada's Adult Benefits*, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2006, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Ken Battle and Sherri Torjman, “The federal role in poverty reduction,” Presentation to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 10 March 2009, p. 8.

⁸¹ Carol Vincent, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008.

⁸² David Gray, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the federal government develop a new program to insure against income losses due to long-term employment interruption that covers those who are not included under the *Employment Insurance Act*.

In the shorter term, the Committee has considered changes that can be made to meet the needs of those who are currently entitled to benefits.

Limited benefit periods

Particularly in an economic downturn of the scale currently underway, the duration of benefits does not reflect the reality facing many of the more than 300,000 Canadians who have recently become unemployed. The Committee believes that more permanent changes to the program are needed to provide longer-term support to beneficiaries as was announced by the government in January 2009.

Older workers

Statistics Canada reported that the number of EI beneficiaries had increased more than 80% from June 2008 to June 2009, with increases of up to 400% in particularly hard-hit regions.⁸³ For males over the age of 55, the number of beneficiaries has doubled; for women there has been a 50% increase.⁸⁴ The latter number is evidence that many of those losing their jobs were employed over longer periods of time, allowing them to qualify for benefits.

The Committee learned that many long-service workers who are laid off have a particularly difficult time finding new employment or benefitting from employer-sponsored or other training opportunities, leading to the following suggestion:

I advocate providing additional benefits to long-tenured workers who have not had very many recent EI claims because the research has shown that they have the most difficulty in finding re-employment. An equity case can be raised in that case because these are workers who have sometimes contributed to the system without interruption for 30 years and often receive no more than 20 weeks worth of EI benefits. For some of these older long-tenured workers, I favour lengthening the benefit entitlement period.

(David Gray, Evidence, Associate Professor, University of Ottawa, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008)

A similar, more detailed proposal was made by the Expert Panel on Older Workers, appointed by the then-Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Canada in January 2007. This Committee echoes the Panel's recommendation.⁸⁵

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the federal government amend the *Employment Insurance Act* to provide benefits for a longer period to workers who become unemployed

⁸³ Statistics Canada, "Employment Insurance," *The Daily*, 25 August 2009. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090825/dq090825a-eng.htm>. Accessed 25 August 2009.

⁸⁴ Statistics Canada, "Beneficiaries receiving regular benefits by age group, sex, province and territory," *The Daily*, 25 August 2009. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090825/t090825a2-eng.htm> Accessed 25 August 2009

⁸⁵ Expert Panel on Older Workers, *Supporting and Engaging Older Workers in the New Economy*, 2008, p. iv. http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications_resources/lmp/eow/2008/older_workers_2008.pdf. Accessed 20 August 2009.

after a long attachment to the workforce, and that the longer benefit period not be based solely on regional unemployment rates.

Other workers

There have been calls for expansion of the system to its previous coverage or more, from unions and think tanks, including the Canadian Labour Congress,⁸⁶ the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA),⁸⁷ and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.⁸⁸

Further, two reports by those appointed to advise Cabinet Ministers in the current government have called for expansion of the existing program. The committee formed to advise the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development on child care spaces recommended the following:

*Amend Employment Insurance Maternity and Parental Benefits to align more directly with the supply of child care spaces through extending the length of the benefits period and expanding eligibility for benefits, including increasing the duration of the benefits period, increasing fathers' access to benefits, introducing a new benefit for grandparents in the paid labour force and creating incentives for employers to offer benefit top-ups.*⁸⁹

More recently, the advisor to the Minister of Health on children's issues recommended that the government "... increase the length of the Employment Insurance (EI) benefit availability for Compassionate Care leave for parents with a child with a terminal illness."⁹⁰

The Committee welcomed the temporary improvements made to the system in Budget 2009, in response to the current economic downturn. Nonetheless, the Committee has been persuaded that the current system is not adequate, as has been demonstrated by massive increases in the number of people needing benefits, and the harsh outcomes that can be expected if benefits expire before employment opportunities appear. Witnesses before the Committee flagged the importance of sustained extensions of eligibility and enhancement of benefits, to reflect the new labour market and fluctuating economic circumstances.⁹¹

Finally, the Committee heard testimony suggesting that the two-week waiting period, while possibly compensated for by final paycheques in the case of lay-offs, make no sense in terms of access to parental and compassionate leave benefits, where there is no final paycheque once leave has begun.⁹²

⁸⁶ Canadian Labour Congress, "Towards A Better Employment Insurance (EI) System for Workers in Today's Job Market," February 2007, pp. 9–12.

⁸⁷ *Time for a Fair Deal*, p. 30.

⁸⁸ Monica Townson and Kevin Hayes, *Women and the Employment Insurance Program*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2007, pp. 36–38.

⁸⁹ *Supporting Canadian Children & Families: Addressing the Gap Between The Supply and Demand for High Quality Child Care*, Report from the Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Government of Canada's Child Care Spaces Initiative, October 2007, p. 14, http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2007/hrsdrc-rhdsc/HS4-29-2007E.pdf. Accessed 12 May 2008.

⁹⁰ Dr. K. Kellie Leitch, *Reaching for the Top: A Report by the Advisor on Healthy Children & Youth*, Health Canada, 2007, p. 9.

⁹¹ See for examples testimony from Andrew Sharpe, Subcommittee on Cities, 22 April 2009, or from Miles Corak, Subcommittee on Cities, 29 May 2009, both during the 2nd Session of the 40th Parliament; and from Diane Swinemar, SAST, 3 May 2008, during 1st Session of the 39th Parliament.

⁹² Richard Shillington, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the two-week waiting period for Employment Insurance benefits be removed for people who are taking compassionate or parental leave funded through the EI program.

Responding to economic change

More specifically, the Committee heard that both entry requirements and benefit periods are based on past regional performance. Thus, it is unable to respond to even an anticipated drastic change in the economies of regions. While the Government did respond in Budget 2009 with extended benefits and increased funding on a temporary basis, the fundamentals still need change, so that the program itself is able to respond, without the requirement of extraordinary and temporary measures:

We all at some point saw this recession coming and saw that more benefits would be needed and that people in what was a low-unemployment-rate province, Ontario, would need these benefits. However, the eligibility rules in the program are tied to the recent past of the unemployment industry, so in that particular case we knew the future would change rapidly and we needed to get those people in, yet the program was backward looking by a moving average of three or four months. That gave impetus to this kind of discussion in the short term.

(Miles Corak, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the federal government re-engineer the Employment Insurance program to allow adjustments to anticipated economic downturns, rather than be based solely on recent but past experience.

Supporting parents

The Committee heard testimony on the parental benefits provided under EI, which are among the most generous in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In this instance, parents who are eligible for benefits can qualify for benefits to replace some of their income immediately before and for up to a year after the birth of a child. While the period of coverage is relatively generous by international standards, the coverage is spotty:

Maternity benefits are only available to about half of new mothers. Maternity benefits are not available to self-employed new mothers, except in Quebec. About half of new mothers who do not get maternity benefits worked in the last year, but they did not work in the ways and at the intensity required by EI.

(Richard Shillington, Senior Associate, Informetrica Limited, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008)

The program was also compared to the parental insurance plan and benefits provided in Quebec, which covers people who are self-employed, and others who may not qualify for EI benefits, and found lacking. The Committee saw the Quebec plan as a useful model, but has recognized that such a program, dissociated from EI, is a strictly provincial jurisdiction. In the hopes that other provinces may choose to offer such programs, the Committee is suggesting an expansion of the benefits under EI as an interim measure.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the federal government amend the EI program to extend its parental insurance benefits to self-employed individuals, with premiums assessed similar to those being paid by employees who access this benefit.

Medium-term and intermittent illness

The Committee heard of the difficulties created by medium-term illness or incapacity to work due to disability. Given the asset-depletion requirements of most provincial disability income schemes through social assistance, this form of income support is not appropriate for someone facing work absences that are not expected to be long-term. CPP-D is also not the answer for many people in this situation:

Currently, women with breast cancer are told they are not sick enough to qualify for CPP disability. People with MS are told they are not sick enough to qualify. They exhaust the 15 weeks provided for EI sickness benefits, which has not been changed since 1971, when it was first introduced. We have changed every other benefit under EI or UI – maternity, parental, fisher benefits, you name it; the only one we have not touched for 37 years is sickness benefits.

(Michael Prince, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 17 April 2008)

Keeping in mind our understanding from the life-course perspective, the Committee is aware that this sort of life-event can change from a temporary problem needing a temporary solution to a probably permanent dependence on inadequate income support programs. Evidence before the Committee suggests that EI is an appropriate mechanism, with an extended sickness benefit designed to allow for flexibility in benefit periods, to provide that temporary solution to more than seven million Canadians in the labour force who experience episodic illness.⁹³

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the federal government expand EI sickness benefits over time to 50 weeks, to provide appropriate support for eligible beneficiaries experiencing medium-term illnesses or disabilities.

Deteriorating insurance base

The Committee heard testimony about the responses within the EI system to identified needs beyond those related strictly to short-term loss of employment. Examples included regional differentials in benefit periods and parental and compassionate leave benefits.

Most significantly, the Committee received conflicting testimony and advice with respect to this erosion of the strict insurance base. Some saw the new programs as responsive to emerging needs

⁹³ See Michael Prince, “Bold Feasibilities: A New Policy Social Architecture for Canadians With Disabilities,” Submission, Subcommittee on Cities, 22 June 2009, <http://ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/poverty-citizenship/boldfeasibilities>. Accessed 16 October 2009, and Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 17 April 2009. This proposal has also been supported in “From Vision to Action: Building an Inclusive and Accessible Canada – A National Action Plan on Disability, 2007”, p. 5. <http://ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/actionplan/inclusive-accessible-canada>. Accessed 28 August 2009.

and improvements to the program,⁹⁴ while others saw it as detrimental to the sustainability of the system and its capacity to meet its insurance goals.⁹⁵

One proposal that does not require stripping back the program to its narrower insurance base still allows for some progress toward strengthening the insurance base of the program: experience-rating. Re-introducing experience-rated premiums for employers has been seen by some as a mechanism to remove any incentive for employers to attempt to reduce their labour costs by laying people off and having them collect EI benefits.

One witness, reporting on recent research by the Social Development Research Corporation, explained this trend:

[A] considerable number of firms are predictably and persistently receiving subsidies through the EI program in that their employees' receipt of EI is higher than the premiums paid into the program. Our research also shows that the firms' own human resource practices and other characteristics are twice as important as the industry or geographic location of the firm in explaining whether it is subsidized by EI.

(Carole Vincent, Principal Research Associate, Social Research Development Corporation, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008)

A strong argument has been made that the current program should revert to a system that charges higher premiums to companies that rely repeatedly on EI because of frequent lay-offs of employees. Proposals to introduce such changes, known as 'experience rating' employers' premiums, have been made by organizations including the C.D. Howe Institute,⁹⁶ the Canadian Chamber of Commerce,⁹⁷ the OECD,⁹⁸ the Institute for Competitiveness & Prosperity,⁹⁹ and the Certified General Accountants – Canada.¹⁰⁰ Some of these organizations see experience-rating as a mechanism for lowering premiums for some companies; others made the argument on principle alone.

The Committee heard the same in witness testimony:

One innovation was structured financially to be sustainable by, if you will, experience rating the tax side. That meant differential premiums according to the number of layoffs that firms had. That is where the financial discipline came in that original proposal in 1970. That experience rating of premiums was immediately taken off the table. When the legislation came through, it went through without that experience rating.

(Miles Corak, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

The Committee recognizes that such a premium on repeated reliance by any employer on EI benefits could adversely impact seasonal businesses, including fisheries and tourism for example.

⁹⁴ Michael Prince, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009.

⁹⁵ For example, see testimony by David Gray, to the Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008

⁹⁶ F. Poschmann and W. Robson, *Reprogramming the EI Cash Machine: Matching Employment Insurance Premiums and Payouts*, C.D. Howe Institute Backgrounder 51, 2001.

⁹⁷ Chamber of Commerce, "Employment Insurance Program," 2007, <http://www.chamber.ca/cmslib/general/FINEI.pdf>. Accessed 20 May 2008.

⁹⁸ *Economic Surveys: Canada*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006, p. 70.

⁹⁹ Institute for Competitiveness & Prosperity, *2020 Challenge: Agenda for Canada's prosperity*, 2007, p. 55.

¹⁰⁰ CGA-Canada, "Prudent, Competitive & Efficient: Submission to House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance," 2004, p. 21.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the federal government include reinstatement of experience rating for consideration in any redesign or substantial modification to the EI program.

EI-funded training

The Committee heard that far too few people who pay EI premiums and find themselves unemployed are not able to take advantage of training opportunities funded through this program. Under current regulations, an individual must qualify for benefits in order to participate in these programs.¹⁰¹

Training funded through EI must be available to people who have paid premiums but may not qualify for benefits.

The Committee learned that the success of such programs, as seen internationally, depends on a positive economic climate to begin with:

[T]he [training] services provided by the public employment office tend to be extremely effective when macroeconomic conditions are good. In other words, you have to have the jobs first before you can have an effective public employment service. This is, of course, a whole different ball game in terms of policy-making. Tinkering with the EI system itself will help, but it will only help optimally in favourable macroeconomic conditions.

(Axel van den Berg, Professor, Department of Sociology, McGill University, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008)

Nonetheless, the Committee understands that those who have contributed to the EI fund but are not eligible for benefits are likely to have had precarious employment, which is often all that is available to low-skilled workers, who are most in need of training.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the federal government make EI-funded training available to those who have contributed to the EI fund over time, but are not eligible for benefits.

The Committee also heard of restrictions on the kind of training that EI provides, which prevents these funds from being used in way that could assist with immigrant integration into the labour market. While a more detailed analysis of challenges facing immigrants with respect to the labour market is provided in a later section of the report, the Committee wishes to identify changes to the general programs that could be of assistance.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the federal government permit the inclusion of advanced language training and training that could equip those with credentials from other countries to qualify for Canadian recognition be permitted within training funded through the EI program.

¹⁰¹ Debbie Douglas, Submission to Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009.

Education and training

The relationship between education and poverty is a reciprocal one: education has an impact on alleviating poverty and poverty has an impact on educational outcomes. Within this broad framework, it is worth considering the following:

- Education is a term that encompasses learning taking place throughout the lifespan. It includes childhood development and early intervention, K-12 education, trades and apprenticeship education, post-secondary education, adult literacy and education, and training and development programs.
- Educational outcomes are affected by socio-economic and health factors. As one report notes, in order for children and youth to achieve their full potential, they require more than a favourable school environment. “Developments in economic security, health policy, recreation and culture, child protection and justice” also have an impact on student achievement and well-being.¹⁰²
- There exists a causal web of relationships that has to be accounted for and analyzed when developing policy solutions related to poverty and education. As an example, it is simplistic to say that poverty causes poor reading scores. A more complex understanding may demonstrate that poverty is caused by lack of employment opportunities that pay a decent living wage, which in turn forces families to move frequently, resulting in inconsistent school attendance and hence in low reading scores.¹⁰³

In an appearance before the Committee, John Richards offered the following assessment:

Over the last century the income that you can get without formal education has either declined or stagnated in all industrialized countries. The result has been that those without formal education or limited formal education working full time can often find themselves in poverty

(John Richards, Professor, Public Policy Program, Simon Fraser University, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 December 2007)

Those without formal education or limited formal education working full time can often find themselves in poverty.

John Richards

The Committee heard that the solution to the low education status associated with low socio-economic status of parents is multi-pronged, and touches on all the areas under study:

Strategies and policy recommendations that could have a positive impact on inadequate educational opportunities linked to families' social economic status include an increased minimum wage, a restoration of broad eligibility for Employment Insurance, a major investment in social housing and improved accessibility and affordability of post-secondary education and training.

(Emily Noble, President, Canadian Teachers' Federation, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 7 February 2008)

¹⁰² Rianne Mahon, *School-aged Children across Canada: A Patchwork of Public Policies*, CPRN Study No. F10, 2001.

¹⁰³ Joseph Flessa, *Poverty and Education: Literature Review*, Toronto Elementary Teachers' Federation, 2006, p. 10.

Early childhood education

In an article, one analyst emphasized that to address persistent poverty, government policy should focus on alleviating the “inequalities in acquisition of human capital among the young.”¹⁰⁴ These inequities can arise at an early stage for children. Studies suggest that early childhood intervention programs have contributed to improving the life chances for children.¹⁰⁵ In addition, parental leave policies have provided parents with the opportunity to nurture and care for their children thereby contributing positively to their social development.¹⁰⁶

Quality child care is important to outcomes for the child and availability for paid work for parents.

The Committee has heard of the importance of the early years in previous studies, including in its 1991 study on child poverty and more recent studies on population health and on early childhood development, both of which resulted in reports tabled in the Senate in 2009. Not surprisingly, the subject came up repeatedly in our consideration of poverty, housing and homelessness in Canadian cities as well.

Campaign 2000, a coalition of 120 national and regional groups focused on social issues in Canada that continues to remind Parliament of its commitment to end child poverty by 2000, continues to emphasize the importance of funding for early child development as a contributor to reaching that goal:

[A] universal, accessible, high quality early learning and child care program is absolutely crucial both for the developmental outcomes of poor children and to allow parents to seek work and training. We would like to see an investment of an additional \$1.2 billion over the foreseeable future.

(Sid Frankel, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007)

Many other witnesses made similar recommendations, including the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, which pointed to the importance of early childhood services and supports in ensuring that all children benefit from school.¹⁰⁷ In particular, the Committee noted that the importance of significant federal investments in early learning to the success of Ontario’s poverty reduction strategy:

We have a real problem in Ontario, with the ending of the federal funding for early learning and child care. We are facing some very difficult decisions. I want to stress how important it is to kids in this province that the federal government reconsider the decision to cancel the early learning and child care agreement. It is important for the kids in terms of their early development; but if a mom cannot get access to child care, she will not be at work. She will be on social assistance. It is as simple as that, so it is very important.

(The Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister responsible for Women’s Issues, Government of Ontario, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Sedgwick, “Human capital and social inclusion: We are all human capital now!”, paper presented at the Brotherhood of St Laurence’s Social Inclusion Down Under Symposium, 26 June 2008, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Canadian Teachers’ Federation, “Child Poverty and Schools,” Submission to SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 7 February 2008, p. 3.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the federal government coordinate a nationwide federal/provincial initiative on early childhood learning.

Primary and middle school education

During later stages of a child's life, governments need to ensure that all students, particularly those who are marginalized, have access to good schools and are able to complete high school.¹⁰⁸

In visits to agencies in cities across Canada, members of the Committee saw first-hand the positive results that can be achieved with disadvantaged youth when parents, teachers and other community leaders engage youth, providing support for their educational achievement.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that federal funding programs and allocations emphasize and support initiatives that keep disadvantaged youth enrolled and engaged in schools, including effective counselling, after-school programs, homework clubs, and youth centres.

High-school completion

Research demonstrates that “[p]eople who do not graduate from high school have relatively lower labour force participation rates and higher unemployment rates over their lifetime.”¹⁰⁹ In 2006, the unemployment rate for 25- to 29-year-olds with less than high school stood at 13% compared with 4% for university graduates. In 2006, the unemployment rates of university-educated 25- to 29-year-olds were between 2% and 7% in all provinces. In contrast, unemployment rates for those who did not complete high school ranged from 6% in Alberta to over 20% in the four Atlantic provinces.¹¹⁰

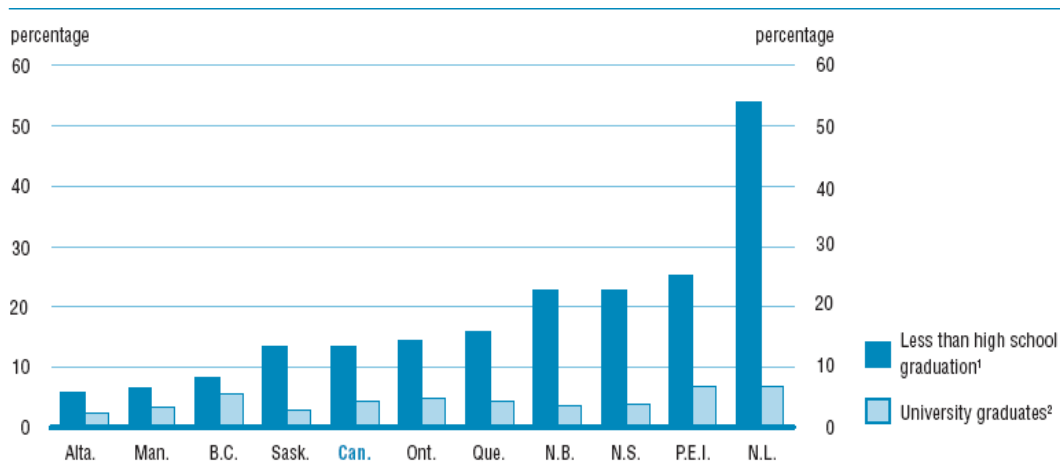
Unemployment rates for university graduates are less than half the rate for high-school drop-outs.

¹⁰⁸ Richards, p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) and Statistics Canada, *Education Indicators in Canada*. Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program, 2007, p. 57, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-582-x/81-582-x2007001-eng.pdf>. Accessed 17 September 2009.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Figure 7- Unemployment rates of 25- to 29-year-olds, selected levels of education, Canada and provinces, 2006¹¹¹



1. Includes individuals having no education or education below high school graduation.
 2. Includes individuals with bachelor's degree or university degree/certificate above bachelor's level.
 Note: The unemployment rate is based on a monthly average from January to December.

The Committee also heard compelling evidence of the connections between educational attainment, health status, employment rates, and income from earnings.

There is a causal link between education and health: If you have a high level of education, you are able to use medicines effectively and have a better lifestyle. Of course, if you have better health that will help your income in terms of finding jobs and being able to work longer hours, et cetera. That is one pathway: Lower education, poor health and lower income.

(Andrew Sharpe, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009)

Government policies need to also consider improving the educational attainment of less skilled and less educated adults because such measures improve labour market outcomes.¹¹² More specifically, less educated adults are at “great risk of being ‘left behind’ in a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy, and are likely to face low wages and a higher likelihood of unemployment over the course of their careers.”¹¹³ Some analysts have argued that “less-educated learners may be more likely to gain from additional well-targeted learning” since this would significantly improve their labour market outcomes.¹¹⁴

At the high school level, graduation rates have improved in Canada. Between 1997-1998 and 2002-2003, Canada’s typical-age graduation rate¹¹⁵ rose from 62% to 67%. In Canada as a whole, in 2002-2003, graduation rates were higher for females (78%) than for males (70%). However,

Some are more likely to drop out than others: poor students, Aboriginal or visible minority students, and disabled students.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 139.

¹¹² Karen Myers and Patrice de Broucker, *Too Many Left Behind: Canada’s Adult Education and Training System*, Research Report W|34, CPRN, June 2006, p. iii, http://www.cprn.org/download.cfm?doc=1479&file=43977_en.pdf&format=pdf&l=en.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 3. http://www.cprn.org/download.cfm?doc=1479&file=43977_en.pdf&format=pdf&l=en.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p iv.

¹¹⁵ Graduation at the typical age or younger generally equates with starting school at the prescribed time and completing and graduating without interruptions or repetition of grades or of significant numbers of courses.

graduation rates varied across the provinces and territories. In 2002-2003, overall graduation rates were highest in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The lowest were in the three territories. Among the provinces, the lowest overall graduation rate occurred in Alberta where it was 67%.¹¹⁶

According to the Council of Minister of Education, Canada (CMEC) and Statistics Canada, “youth with low educational attainment are most at risk of economic marginalization, especially in weaker labour markets.”¹¹⁷ As of 2006, 14% of Canadians aged 20 to 24 had not completed high school.¹¹⁸

As noted above, there are high costs, to both governments as well as individuals, in terms of both public expenses and foregone private earnings resulting from high-school non-completion.

A number of groups are over-represented among non-completers: “students living in poverty, youth with disabilities, and youth from visible minority and Aboriginal communities.”¹¹⁹ More information on educational attainment for these groups is provided in Section 5 of this report.

Two in five young Aboriginal adults did not complete high school.

The Committee was advised that an economic downturn can provide the incentive for high-school completion, or even higher educational attainment.¹²⁰ However, witnesses reminded the Committee that students with parents of low-income and low socioeconomic status are more likely to be streamed into non-academic programs, which may also have an impact on both completion rates and earnings following completion.¹²¹

The Committee heard from one of Canada’s most successful non-government programs with respect to school completion, Pathways to Education; our witness offered the following call to action:

What will it take to make our cities great again? What will it take to reduce poverty, crime and drug use, restore hope, pride and dignity to our youth and to their parents, and prepare new Canadians and our entire workforce to be competitive in this vast changing economy? The answer is, keep kids in school, educate them, excite them, inspire them and wrap them in supports, both in school and in the community. We are already spending so much money to get our students through the first eight to ten years of school; let us not let them fall off the path in the last mile. Lowering the high school dropout rate or increasing the graduation rate will be the best return on investment that any government can make.

(David Hughes, President and Chief Executive Officer, Pathways to Education Canada, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009)

Finally, in its site visits to agencies across Canada, the Committee met with agency staff and students who seem to be struggling against forces that would keep youth out of school, and who are persisting and succeeding in spite of those forces.

¹¹⁶ CMEC and Statistics Canada, pp. 57-58.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 138.

¹¹⁸ Michael Mendelson, *Improving Education on Reserves: A First Nations Education Authority Act*, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, July 2008, p. 1, <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/684ENG.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ Jodene Dunleavy, *Public Education in Canada: Facts, Trends and Attitudes*, Canadian Education Association, 2007, p. 5. http://www.cea-ace.ca/media/en/CEA-ACE_PubEd.07_E_FinalWEB.pdf. Accessed 24 August 2009.

¹²⁰ Andrew Sharpe, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009.

¹²¹ See testimony from Alison Taylor and Harvey Krahn to the Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the federal government, in conjunction with the Council of Ministers of Education, encourage and support actions to reduce the drop-out rate, including the establishment of targets and time-lines, with regular reporting on progress.

As noted earlier, high school completion rates are especially low for Aboriginal young adults. In 2001, 43% of Aboriginal young adults aged 20 to 24 did not have a high school certificate. In the same year, 58% of Aboriginal young adults on reserves and 35% of Aboriginal young adults living in cities did not complete high school.¹²² Recent 2006 Census data indicate that high school completion rates have not improved for Aboriginal young adults on reserve and remains at approximately 60%.¹²³ One researcher suggested that this means that the door to post-secondary education for the majority of Aboriginal young adults on reserve remains shut.¹²⁴

In visits to agencies, particularly in the Prairie cities, Committee members saw firsthand the struggle of many Aboriginal youth to put together funding from a multitude of sources, to get the supports they need (often ably provided by remarkable local agencies), and succeed in spite of barriers. The Committee believes that initiative displayed by youth and support offered by agencies needs encouragement and sustained investment to become widespread among Aboriginal youth.

The Committee also noted that the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples made a recommendation calling for a national strategy focused on this issue.¹²⁵

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that federal government, in conjunction with the Council of Ministers of Education, encourage and support actions to reduce the drop-out rates among Aboriginal students, on-reserve or off-reserve, including the establishment of targets and time-lines, with regular reporting on progress.

Post-secondary education

Post-secondary education attainment levels have been increasing in Canada. In 2005, 72% of Canadians aged 25 to 34 had some type of postsecondary education, compared with 54% in 1980. Among Canadians aged 35 to 54, 65% had some type of postsecondary education in 2005 compared with 43% in 1980. In 2001, only 39% of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 graduated with some type of postsecondary education.¹²⁶

2006 Census data indicate that there have been substantial increases in the number of higher education degrees since 2001. Of the university degrees, the biggest increase during the five-year period occurred in the number of adults who had a master's degree, which increased 32% in this

¹²² Michael Mendelson, "Improving Primary and Secondary Education on Reserves in Canada", *Caledon Commentary*, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, October 2006, <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/608ENG.pdf>.

¹²³ Mendelson, (2008), p. 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, *Urban Aboriginal Youth*, p. iv.

¹²⁶ Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, "Changing Course: Improving Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in Canada," Millennium Research Note #2, p. 3, <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/mrn-changing-course-en.pdf>.

time period. The smallest increase (11%) occurred in the number of adults who had a degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry.¹²⁷

In the past few decades, governments have expanded access to higher education in order to increase the supply of skilled workers in the knowledge-based economy.¹²⁸ OECD reports described “substantial rewards associated with attaining tertiary education and substantial penalties associated with failing to reach at least the upper secondary standard.”¹²⁹ This was confirmed by testimony to the Committee.¹³⁰

According to the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), an “accessibility gap” exists between those who can afford to pursue a post-secondary education and those who cannot. The CFS states that “[a]pproximately 350,000 students in Canada are forced to borrow to finance their education every year. Average student debt for a four-year program now ranges between \$21,000 [and] \$28,000 depending on the province of study.” To improve access for low-income students, CFS has recommended that the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation be replaced “with a national system of needs-based grants.”¹³¹

In its 2008 Budget, the federal government announced that it will be terminating the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation in 2009. The government launched a new consolidated Canada Student Grant Program which became available to students in the fall of 2009. Students who qualify for the Canada Student Loan Program and are studying in university, college or trade schools are automatically eligible to receive the new Canada Student Grant and can receive it throughout their program. Students from low-income families receive \$250 per month and students from middle-income families receive \$100 per month. The new grant is expected to reach 245,000 college and undergraduate students.¹³²

As this is a new program, and its reach and impact cannot yet be known, the Committee looks forward to learning of its results.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the federal government monitor and report on new post-secondary student aid programs, including comparisons with affordability and debt load results of the programs that have been replaced.

As with other programs and policies, data drawn from surveys of youth over time demonstrate that different groups have different educational achievement levels. The following figure shows that both visible minorities and youth born outside Canada have higher university graduation rates than non-visible minorities and Canadian-born youth,

People born outside Canada and visible minorities are more likely than others to complete university.

¹²⁷ Statistics Canada, “Educational Portrait of Canada, 2006 Census: National picture,” <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/education/historical.cfm>.

¹²⁸ OECD, *Education at a Glance 2007*, 2007, p. 12.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

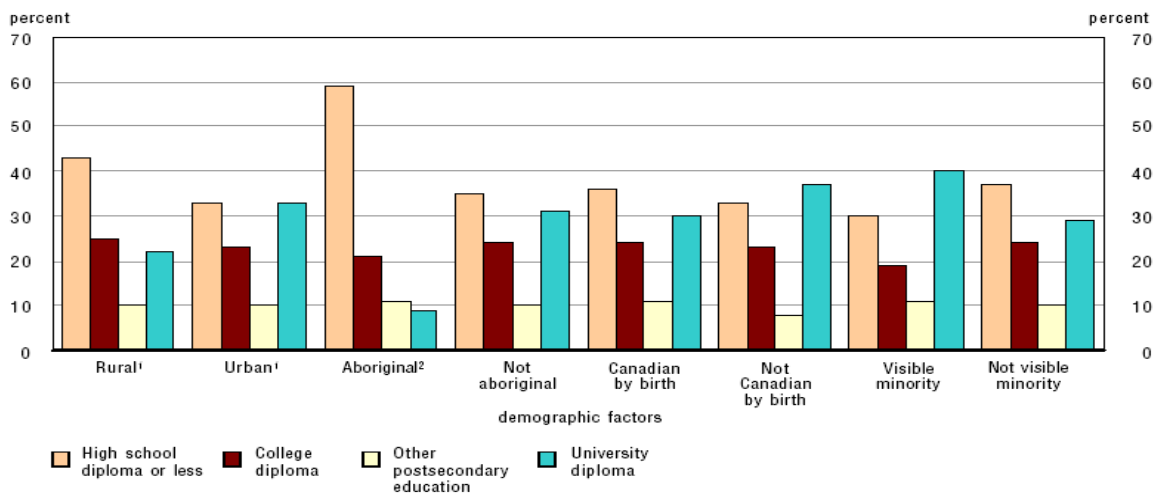
¹³⁰ Alison Taylor, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009.

¹³¹ Canadian Federation of Students, Submission to the 2007 Pre-budget Consultations, August 2007, <http://www.cfs-fcee.ca/html/english/research/index.php>.

¹³² Government of Canada, *The Budget Plan 2008*, pp. 110-111 and HRSDC, “Student financial assistance – Canada Student Grants,” <http://www.canlearn.ca/eng/main/spotlighton/bdg2008/csg.shtml>. Accessed 16 October 2009.

respectively, yet Aboriginal youth are significantly over-represented among those with high school graduation or less, and under-represented among those with university degrees.

Figure 8 - Highest level of education attained by selected demographic factors¹³³



1. Type of community where they lived at 18-20 years old.
 2. Off-reserve Aboriginal population only.
 Source: Statistics Canada, Youth in Transition Survey, cycles 1 to 5.

Access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples and funding for Aboriginal post-secondary institutions requires special attention since the federal government does not view itself as responsible for Aboriginal post-secondary education under the *Indian Act*.¹³⁴ In its February 2007 report, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development recommended that funding of post-secondary education programs be increased and that financial assistance to Aboriginal learners be expanded.¹³⁵

In addition, Aboriginal students face several barriers which hinder their ability to achieve their educational aspirations; these include inadequate financial resources, poor academic preparation, lack of self-confidence and motivation, absence of role models with higher education experience, lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture, and experience of racism on college and university campuses.¹³⁶ The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples report also highlighted barriers to funding because of status distinctions in access to some funds.¹³⁷

Recommendation 21

To redress the under-representation of low-income people from some groups, e.g., Aboriginal people and people with disabilities, among students in post-secondary

¹³³ Danielle Shaienks and Tomasz Gluszynski, *Education and Labour Market Transitions in Young Adulthood*, Statistics Canada, July 2009, p. 14. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-595-m/81-595-m2009075-eng.pdf>. Accessed 9 July 2009.

¹³⁴ Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, *No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*, February 2007, p. 3, <http://cmte.parl.gc.ca/Content/HOC/committee/391/aano/reports/rp2683969/aanorp02-e.html>.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 3.

¹³⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, *Urban Aboriginal Youth*, p. iv.

education, the Committee recommends that the federal government offer additional tax support for post-secondary education targeted to these students and their families.

Literacy

Adult functional literacy in reading, writing and numeracy skills is essential to functioning in today's society and economy. Due to developments in information and communications technology, there is a growing need for a highly literate workforce. Literacy skills are associated with positive labour market outcomes.¹³⁸

A literacy survey administered in 2003 to 23,000 Canadians age 16 and over found that a significant proportion of Canadian adults showed low levels of literacy.¹³⁹ According to CMEC and Statistics Canada, these individuals are likely to face real challenges in coping with emerging skill demands of a knowledge-based economy.¹⁴⁰

Research shows that “those with the weakest basic capabilities, as identified by their literacy scores, are the least likely to benefit from the increased opportunities to participate in organised forms of adult learning.”¹⁴¹

One significant barrier identified by researchers is associated with time and costs. Even though tuition is free, learners are not provided with any financial resources for living expenses.¹⁴²

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the federal government sustain strong financial support for adult and family literacy programs, with a special priority given to groups over-represented among high-school non-completers.

Other training

While the Government of Canada and provincial and territorial governments invest billions of dollars in training programs outside the formal school system, the Committee has heard that funding for many of those programs is complex and unstable, and that barriers to access are many.

Inadequate income support

In site visits, Committee members were inspired by the persistence of people in training programs, despite income security programs that provided insufficient and unreliable financial support, and rules that mitigated against participation in training. In an effort to move people quickly from either EI or social assistance, for example, the Committee heard that support for training was often too short-term to allow people to participate in more secure jobs with adequate salaries.¹⁴³

Income supports for students are often too low and too unreliable.

¹³⁸ David Green and Craig Riddell, *Literacy, Numeracy and Labour Market Outcomes in Canada*, Statistics Canada, 2001.

¹³⁹ The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey assessed adult literacy across four domains: prose, document, problem-solving, and numeracy. For more details see CMEC and Statistics Canada, p. 103.

¹⁴⁰ CMEC and Statistics Canada, p. 104.

¹⁴¹ Kjell Rubenson, et. al., *Adult Learning in Canada: A Comparative Perspective*, Statistics Canada, 2007, p. 34. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-552-m/89-552-m2007017-eng.pdf>. Accessed 17 September 2009.

¹⁴² Myers and de Brouker, *Too Many Left Behind*. 71

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that federal and provincial governments collectively amend existing income security programs to provide secure funding to training participants for long enough periods to ensure opportunities for secure employment at adequate incomes.

Lack of access

It was also clear to Committee members that the demand for intensive training leading to certification and skills in demand in the labour market far exceeded supply. Qualified applicants are often unable to access such training in a timely way.

This is particularly true for immigrants to Canada, who are not among those targeted by funds transferred through labour market development agreements,¹⁴⁴ as well as persons with disabilities and Aboriginal peoples, for whom existing targeted programming is inadequate.¹⁴⁵

Recommendation 24

The Committee recommends that the federal government set aside a fixed percentage of training positions (to match the percentage established for federal employment equity targets) for persons with disabilities in all renewing and new labour market agreements.

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that the federal government explicitly identify immigrants as a population to be targeted in training programs, including training to reduce language and other barriers to the labour market in all renewing and new labour market agreements.

Access to health

The Committee heard from witnesses before a subcommittee focused on population health as well as those testifying with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness, that poverty had a strong impact on both health outcomes in urban neighbourhoods with concentrations of low-income residents and on access to benefits outside the coverage of publicly funded health care programs.

People in poorer neighbourhoods have worse health outcomes than others.

These are in addition to the general correlation between poverty and lower health outcomes:

*Today, the links between poverty and health are well-established and the resulting inequalities in health have proven to be persistent. Indeed, the population groups with the worst health status are materially underprivileged and socially excluded, leading many analysts to single out poverty as one of the primary determinants of health.*¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Glenn Drover, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007.

¹⁴⁴ Naomi Alboim and Maytree, *Adjusting the Balance: Fixing Canada's Economic Immigration Policies*. Maytree, July 2009, p. 61. <http://www.maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/adjustingthebalance-final.pdf> Accessed 31 July 2009.

¹⁴⁵ More information on programs for these populations is provided in Section 5 of this report.

¹⁴⁶ Élisabeth Mercier, "An Act to combat poverty and social exclusion (R.S.Q., chapter L-7)," *Briefing Note Number 1 – History*, National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy and Institut National de santé publique, June 2009, p. 1. <http://www.ncchpp.ca/docs/Loi112HistoryEN.pdf>. Accessed 25 August 2009.

Geography, income and health

Building on the study of population health by this Committee, tabled in June 2009, the Committee explored the relationship between low-income neighbourhoods and lower health status. While a universal health care system implies equal access, this does not translate to equal outcomes. Witnesses before this Committee have provided us with stark evidence:

Tracking issues in the [low-income] neighbourhoods [the United Way of Toronto has] identified, there are higher rates of diabetes, higher rates of teen pregnancy, lower birth weights for the children born, and a higher youth involvement in gangs, guns, violence and kids dying.

(Frances Lankin, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008)

The Health Council of Canada, created by First Ministers to monitor the state of Canada's health care system, reported relationships between neighbourhoods with lower incomes and poorer health outcomes in its 2005 annual report:

The biggest health problem in Canada is inequality. The overall improvement in our health status masks the grim reality that health inequalities among social classes are growing — as they are in most highly developed countries. In Canada:

- Healthy life expectancy is three to four years less in low-income neighbourhoods than in high-income neighbourhoods.
- The infant mortality rate in low-income neighbourhoods is almost double that in high-income neighbourhoods.
- The average birth weight for babies born in low-income neighbourhoods is one-quarter pound less than for those born in high-income neighbourhoods.¹⁴⁷

City studies

In 2008, the Toronto Medical Officer of Health and a team of researchers published a report outlining the income and health inequalities issues facing the City of Toronto. This report divided Census tracts in Toronto in five based on the percentage of the population living under Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) lines, and identified health outcomes for each of the quintiles. From low birth weights to school readiness to life expectancy to deaths from all causes, those in the lowest quintile (with the highest percentage of residents living below LICO) had significantly worse health outcomes. For example, the teen pregnancy rate per 1,000 population was more than twice as high for the bottom quintile as for the top.¹⁴⁸ While there were notable exceptions, including obesity among men and breast cancer incidence among women, in almost every case, people in lower-income neighbourhoods were facing greater health risks and problems.

Although the report did not provide direct recommendations to the federal government, it did highlight how the City has monitored levels of absolute income and income inequality, and identified particular ways in which recent trends have indicated increasing hardship for those with low incomes. For example, the report indicated that in recent years, it became apparent that those

¹⁴⁷ Health Council of Canada, *Health Care Renewal in Canada: Clearing the Road to Quality – Annual Report to Canadians 2006*, February 2006, p. 89.

http://www.healthcouncilcanada.ca/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=90&Itemid=92#. Accessed 17 September 2009.

¹⁴⁸ David McKeown, et. al., *The Unequal City: Income and Health Inequalities in Toronto, 2008*, Toronto Public Health, October 2008, p. 14. http://www.toronto.ca/health/map/pdf/unequalcity_20081016.pdf. Accessed 11 June 2009.

with low incomes could not afford to eat nutritious diet, based on comparing income levels with the costs of such a diet.¹⁴⁹

As early as 2006, Saskatoon's health disparities were being assessed, comparing low-income and high-income neighbourhoods across a number of health factors. The scope of the differences was startling according to one witness:

While no one was surprised to learn that health was related to poverty, people were surprised by the extent and persuasiveness of the issue across so many of the conditions. Compared to high-income neighbourhoods, the low-income residents were 1,458% more likely to attempt suicide; over 3,000% were likely to have hepatitis C; and 1,186% were likely to be hospitalized for diabetes. The list went on and the numbers were not small but there were huge discrepancies.

(Dr. Cory Neudorf, Chief Medical Health Officer for Saskatoon, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 18 June 2009)

A follow-up report in Saskatoon in 2008 found similar results, in terms of low-income neighbourhoods and poor health outcomes. Its update in 2009 summarized improving health status among many, and continued differences in health outcomes between those with low incomes and those more affluent:

*Significant gaps in health equity between rich and poor permeate the region. Life expectancy is decreasing in our core neighbourhoods and these residents continue to have poorer health outcomes than those in the most affluent areas with infant mortality rates at double those of the region as a whole and higher low birth weight rates. Close to half of core neighbourhood residents live below the poverty line. Access to grocery stores in Saskatoon's core is lacking. HIV rates are up. Our smoking rates are increasing. And this list also goes on.*¹⁵⁰

The 2008 report included a review of evidence-based policy interventions that had been demonstrated to reduce poverty in other countries or provinces, and a series of recommendations. While most were directed to either the municipal or provincial government, the report did comment on some steps the federal government could take to contribute to better health outcomes. These included increasing the National Child Benefit to \$5,100 annually (which would reduce child poverty in Saskatchewan by 37%),¹⁵¹ and increasing the maximum benefits under Employment Insurance for parental benefits from 55 to 80% of maximum insurable earnings.¹⁵²

Other studies

While there are numerous studies looking at neighbourhood income differences and health outcomes, three are recent and reinforce testimony from many witnesses. For example, a recent report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information confirmed that there was a higher incidence of mental illness, including depression, among people with low socioeconomic status (SES) than in the population at large, and provided evidence that lower-income Canadians also make

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁵⁰ C. Neudorf, et. al., *Health Status Report 2008: A Report of the Chief Medical Health Officer*, Saskatoon Health Region, 2009, p. 2.

http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/documents/PHO/shr_health_status_report_2008_full.pdf.

Accessed 11 June 2009.

¹⁵¹ M. Lemstra and C. Neudorf, *Health disparity in Saskatoon: analysis to intervention*. Saskatoon Health Region, 2008, p. 261. http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/documents/PHO/HealthDisparityRept-complete.pdf. Accessed 11 June 2009.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 265.

more use of medical health services.¹⁵³ For this study, low SES was identified by considering the neighbourhood income, and was based on studies of 13 Canadian cities. This report demonstrated that the rate of hospital discharge for depression decreases with each income quintile.¹⁵⁴

This research is consistent with testimony from witnesses that linked low income to parental depression in particular, highlighting some of its longer term impacts with respect to health care costs¹⁵⁵ and child literacy.¹⁵⁶

A Vancouver study based on a 15-year follow-up of patients diagnosed with stable coronary artery disease sought to determine whether neighbourhood SES and mortality from this disease or other causes were correlated. The results showed that there was no correlation of deaths from heart disease and measures of neighbourhood SES, but that the differences were significant for deaths from other less acute causes:

The rates of death for cancer, for example, increased an average of 60% with each quintile of increased unemployment, and 42% for each decline in neighbourhood median income... [After controlling for a range of possible contributing factors], It seemed more likely to us that a combination of factors from care access to healthy lifestyle opportunities and psycho-social stress were playing a major role.

(Claire Heslop, Graduate student, joint MD-PhD program, University of British Columbia, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 18 June 2009)

Such drastic differences in outcomes for people with low incomes reinforce the need for the population health approaches suggested in this Committee's report in June 2009, particularly with respect to intergovernmental collaboration in developing a pan-Canadian population health strategy. This Committee echoes this recommendation:¹⁵⁷

Recommendation 26

In recognition of poverty's effect on health, the Committee recommends that the federal government instruct its central agencies to allocate resources to prevent and address negative health outcomes associated with poverty and unemployment.

Access to health-related services

While the Committee is aware that many health services are not covered by the *Canada Health Act*, and are therefore not funded through the Canada Health Transfer, witnesses before the Committee focussed almost exclusively on prescription drugs among the excluded services.

Whether for families in low-income communities or individuals in homeless shelters, the lack of access to prescription drugs was viewed by witnesses as a failure of both the income security and the health care systems,¹⁵⁸ and

Lack of access to prescription drugs can make small problems grow into larger ones, with higher health care costs.

¹⁵³ Canadian Institute for Health Information, "The Association Between Socio-Economic Status and Inpatient Hospital Service Use for Depression," *Analysis in Brief*, 24 February 2009, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Gina Browne, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008.

¹⁵⁶ John Stapleton, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 December 2007.

¹⁵⁷ SAST, *A Healthy, Productive Canada: A Determinant of Health Approach*, June 2009, p. iii.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, John Richards, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 December 2007.

as exacerbating the health inequities identified above.¹⁵⁹ Further, the lack of prescription drugs can lead from a bad situation to one that is much worse:

[A] significant portion of the population does not have access to common drugs. As small problems are left untreated, they grow into large problems, costing the health system unneeded dollars. We need a national pharmacare program that does not leave anyone out.

(Rebekah Peters, Nurse-Practitioner, Saul Sair Health Centre, Siloam Mission, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007)

The Committee had these messages reinforced by an official from the Newfoundland and Labrador government, who advised us that the first action in the provincial strategy was to increase access to prescription drug coverage.¹⁶⁰ Extensions to these benefits are being introduced in other provinces as well, including Manitoba¹⁶¹ and Ontario.¹⁶²

Recommendation 27

The Committee recommends that the federal government work with provincial and territorial governments and appropriate other stakeholders to develop a national pharmacare program, building on progress underway in some provinces.

2.2 Promising practices

Place-based approaches

An urban perspective concentrates on physical infrastructures and the powers available to municipalities. A community perspective focuses on social infrastructures and the networks for democratic participation. The place-based framework recognizes the importance of both perspectives and seeks their integration through a mix of public policies responding to the needs of cities of all sizes and locations.¹⁶³

Approaches to limiting and reducing poverty can be broken down into two basic categories: those that are directed towards individuals and those that go beyond the individuals to focus on the communities within which they live. The former have been described as person- or people-based approaches to poverty and consist broadly of government transfers to individuals (such as income-support programs including tax expenditures, social assistance, employment insurance and pension benefits) and programs designed to facilitate the transition of individuals from welfare to work (such as training and education programs) and to make work pay (such as the Working Income Tax Benefit, or WITB).

Local contexts are an important contributor to poverty and to its elimination.

In contrast, place-based approaches begin from an acknowledgment of the importance of the relationship between poverty and the context within which it occurs. An obvious distinction can be made, for example, between rural and urban poverty and therefore between the kinds of programs and services that are required to address problems unique to both. Other distinctions can be made,

¹⁵⁹ Rebekah Peters, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007.

¹⁶⁰ Aisling Gogan, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 17 June 2007.

¹⁶¹ Sid Frankel, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007.

¹⁶² The Honourable Deb Matthews, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009.

¹⁶³ Neil Bradford, *Place-based Public Policy: Towards a New Urban and Community Agenda for Canada*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, March 2005, p. v.

for example, between communities that receive the majority of immigrants and those whose immigrant populations are relatively small, between those with differing mixtures of high- and low-skilled workers, and those whose economies are resource-based or in which manufacturing is the dominant economic activity. Within the boundaries of cities, the approach further allows for recognition of potentially significant differences between neighbourhoods, a factor that is becoming increasingly important as some urban neighbourhoods become at once more diverse ethnically yet more uniform in terms of the concentration of low-income citizens.

In summary, then, a place-based approach to poverty recognizes that the attributes of communities within which low-income Canadians live have a significant influence on their economic and social status and their ability to exit from poverty. On that basis, the best possible mix of programs, services, service-providers, and stakeholders to respond to each the unique circumstances of a given community, or place can be identified and implemented.

An article by one of the Committee's witnesses identified the elements of a place-based approach:

*Tapping in to local knowledge; balancing a mix of economic and social policies which combine place-based programs with broad income security and services such as health and education; governing through collaboration with civil society and each other; and recognizing the emerging roles of municipal governments.*¹⁶⁴

One of our witnesses described why place-based approaches are so important:

We have the big levers of public education, health care, income security programs and social policy programs flying at 30,000 feet, while down on the ground we have pockets of quite severe poverty.

(Judith Maxwell, Past President and Senior Fellow, Canadian Policy Research Networks, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 15 May 2008)

Another witness told the Committee of the role that place can play in helping people to escape poverty:

Our research and our practice is now showing how a neighbourhood or community affects physical and mental well-being. The way we design communities and the amenities that are available are now becoming understood as important mediating factors in the pathways into and out of poverty.

(Sherri Torjman, Vice-President, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Evidence, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 15 May 2008)

This approach has underpinned the Vibrant Communities initiatives, which witnesses described as building on the resources of each community, and focusing on the priorities identified by those in that community.

[F]unding must continue to come from senior governments, but the responsibility for delivery of the service needs to reside at the level of the community.

(Don Fairbairn, Consultant, Streethome Vancouver, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 March 2008)

¹⁶⁴ Judith Maxwell, Foreword, p. iii, in Neil Bradford, *Place-based Public Policy: Towards a New Urban and Community Agenda for Canada*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, March 2005, http://www.cprn.org/documents/35238_en.pdf. Accessed 16 October 2009.

Recommendation 28

Recognizing the importance of local contexts with respect to identifying and implementing programs to reduce poverty, the Committee recommends that federal policy initiatives seek and support local voluntary sector and municipal agencies as active partners in design and delivery of federal government initiatives at the community level.

Witnesses also described the value of multi-partite approaches that begin with community initiatives, and then bring all levels of government into the process, bringing financial and other resources that can be allocated to issues identified locally as the highest priorities.¹⁶⁵

Recommendation 29

To facilitate support for local approaches and solutions to complex social and economic problems, the Committee recommends that the federal government explore and implement additional Urban Development Agreements among federal, provincial and municipal governments, in concert with community-identified leaders and priorities.

Rights-based approaches

It must be remembered that poverty is not just an economic issue. Fundamentally, it is a denial of rights.

(Nancy Burrows. Coordinator, Fédération des femmes du Québec, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 4 June 2008)

Domestic legislation

Provincial and federal human rights legislation, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and international laws to which Canada is signatory all imply certain obligations with respect to allocation of resources and entitlements of individuals. Human rights laws apply to governments, non-government organizations, corporations, and individuals. Human rights commissions are responsible for enforcing these rights. The Charter addresses the relationships between individual citizens and their governments, and can be enforced by courts in response to cases brought by individuals. International covenants have traditionally been closer to moral obligations than enforceable rights, but Canadians courts have used these covenants to interpret Charter obligations.¹⁶⁶

Human rights legislation prohibits discrimination on certain grounds, articulated in each Act. The federal *Human Rights Act* does not include any prohibitions related to housing status or income, either explicitly or under the more general rubric of “social condition.” Social condition is explicitly included in the provincial human rights legislation of Quebec, New Brunswick, and the Northwest Territories.¹⁶⁷ In Manitoba, “source of income” is a prohibited grounds for discrimination.¹⁶⁸

The Charter, while not explicitly recognizing social condition, poverty or homelessness, does guarantee equality rights, with special recognition of the remedial efforts that might be required to ensure the equality of women, visible minorities (people who are not Caucasian), persons with disabilities, and Aboriginal peoples. As the Committee has heard, these groups are all over-represented among the poor – in terms of both social and economic marginalization.

¹⁶⁵ Sherri Torjman, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 15 May 2008.

¹⁶⁶ A. Wayne MacKay, “Social and Economic Rights in Canada: What Are They and Who Can Best Protect Them?” *Canadian Issues*, Fall 2007, CBCA Reference, p. 37.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁶⁸ Section 9(2)(j), *Human Rights Code* (Manitoba), 1987.

The Committee recognizes that Charter protections must be defended to be meaningful. For people on low incomes, this requires financial support, likely beyond that provided by provincial legal aid programs. Successive governments have reversed decisions with respect to funding for the former program that financed law-reform litigation for those claiming Charter rights. Funding for litigation with respect to minority language rights has been reinstated. The Committee has heard that similar support is needed for people struggling with breaches of the Charter with respect to poverty, housing or homelessness, identified as important by witnesses before the Committee.¹⁶⁹

Recommendation 30

The Committee recommends that the federal government establish a fund to allow groups over-represented among the persistently low-income to have legal representation in law reform cases with respect to their human rights.

International obligations

Finally, there are two International Conventions and one International Covenant that Canada has signed and ratified¹⁷⁰ with specific obligations with respect to housing status and poverty.

In 1965, the United Nations passed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which Canada signed. It guaranteed “the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law,” and cited the enjoyment of specific rights, including the right to housing.¹⁷¹

In 1966, the United Nations passed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), in which Article 11 (1) specifies:

*The States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.*¹⁷²

Finally, in 1989 the United Nations passed the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, in which Article 27(3) specifies:

*States Parties in accordance with national conditions and within their means shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in the case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.*¹⁷³

Although these international obligations cannot be litigated, they are subject to review, by the UN Committees on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and on the Rights of

Poverty and human rights (or their denial) are intertwined.

¹⁶⁹ Avy Go, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 March 2008; David Northcott, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 1 May 2008.

¹⁷⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Status of Ratifications of the Principal International Human Rights Treaties (as of 9 June 2004),” 2004, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ Cited in *Legal Resources for Housing Rights: International and National Standards*, Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), Geneva, 2000, p. 15.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

the Child respectively. While the Government of Canada submits reports as requested, Canadian non-government organizations have sent experts to the review of Canada's compliance with the CESCR, both in 1998 and in 2006.

In its report following its review of Canada's compliance in 2006, the UN Committee made specific recommendations related to income and social supports including increases to the amount people on social assistance get for shelter allowances to reflect what rent actually costs; the provision of adequate supports for persons with disabilities; and the establishment of a national strategy to combat homelessness and poverty.¹⁷⁴

As noted by one of the Committee's witnesses on this subject, Canada's performance is assessed against the resources it could bring to bear on these problems:

The standard under international human rights, which is the cornerstone of our protection of social rights in Canada ... is related to the application of what they call "available resources." That is, the maximum of available resources is to be applied to protect these fundamental rights... [I]ssues of growing poverty and homelessness in Canada are seen as egregious violations because in this country these are avoidable. They are not caused by a scarcity of resources. In fact, we have seen homelessness and poverty become increasingly worse as Canada has become increasingly richer.

We have seen homelessness and poverty become increasingly worse as Canada has become increasingly richer.

Bruce Porter

(Bruce Porter, Director, Social Rights Advocacy Centre, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 8 May 2008)

The Committee has heard that poverty and human rights (or their denial) are intertwined. A report of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights describes the linkages:

*Poverty is not only a matter of income, but also, more fundamentally, a matter of being able to live a life in dignity and enjoy basic human rights and freedoms. It describes a complex of interrelated and mutually reinforcing deprivations, which impact on people's ability to claim and access their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. In a fundamental way, therefore, the denial of human rights forms part of the very definition of what it is to be poor.*¹⁷⁵

Closer to home, Quebec's legislation to combat poverty and social exclusion includes a preamble that "refers explicitly to Quebec's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and presents poverty as an obstacle to the protection of and respect for human dignity that is necessary in a society committed to rights and freedoms."¹⁷⁶ Section 10 of Quebec's Charter includes a prohibition of discrimination based on social condition.

Similarly, Canada's *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* with respect to protection of refugees includes a specific reference to Canada's international obligations. The Committee believes that such references can contribute to Canada being aware of our international obligations and to our meeting them.

¹⁷⁴ Cited in *The Right to Adequate Housing: How to Fight for Your Rights*, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, 2006, p. 14.

¹⁷⁵ Louise Arbour, "Preface," *Principles and Guidelines*, 2006, p. iii.

¹⁷⁶ Alain Noël, *A Law Against Poverty: Quebec's New Approach to Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, December 2002, p. 5.

Recommendation 31

In recognition of both Canadian obligations under international human rights law, and their importance in claiming access to appropriate programs and services, the Committee recommends that the federal government explicitly cite international obligations ratified by Canada in any new federal legislation or legislative amendments relevant to poverty, housing and homelessness.

Income transfers to individuals for poverty reduction

The Committee has heard consistently that the federal government has a long history of involvement with income security, dating back to early in the last century with support for veterans, to currently providing the vast majority of income support to Canadians through its contributions to seniors' income security.¹⁷⁷ We have also heard that while the federal government has both fiscal capacity and monetary policy levers that allow it to be a major contributor to income security programs, its expertise lies in programs that transfer funds directly to Canadians:

[T]he federal government is good at programs that require the paying of a cheque and not much interaction with citizens. The payment of a cheque can be determined by a few simple tests and by using the income tax system, and the federal government is quite able and competent to do that. It can operate a program that can be coherent and hopefully consistent across Canada in a way that ties us together and provides significant support to Canadians.

(Michael Mendelson, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

In their passionate concern about low-income individuals and families, many advocates cite data demonstrating the inadequacy of current programs and policies. As noted above, the Committee appreciates that more needs to be done, and much needs to be done differently. However, the Committee has also concluded that at least some federal income security programs are having a demonstrable impact, and some others show promise, in terms of design if not benefit level, to reduce poverty substantially among some groups.

The responsiveness of the federal income tax system is getting better and better all the time. If we go back to 1978, we first saw yearly benefits. Provided through the tax system with the Goods and Services Tax Credit, the credits became quarterly and, finally, with the National Child Benefits Supplement, the benefits are provided on a monthly basis.

(John Stapleton, Principal, Open Policy, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 December 2007)

The Committee also recognizes the important contribution these programs are making, and their potential for removing more Canadians from the ranks of the poor. Some of these are described below. The Committee is also aware, however, that transfers delivered through the tax system often have the unintended impact of benefiting men more than women.¹⁷⁸

Recommendation 32

The Committee recommends that the federal government analyze gender-based differences in benefits to men and women when designing and implementing new tax measures.

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, testimony provided during a roundtable on income security, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009.

¹⁷⁸ Claire Young, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 4 June 2008.

Supporting seniors: Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement (OAS/GIS)

As already noted, Canada's income security system for seniors has had a remarkable impact on reducing poverty among Canadians over the age of 65. While some remain below the Low-Income Cut-Off lines, depending on where they live, the general income situation of seniors has improved by any standard:

Canada's income security system for seniors has had a remarkable impact on reducing poverty among Canadians over the age of 65.

There is one success story in federal intervention against poverty, and it regards people over age 65: pensions. Canada is sort of a success story internationally with respect to the income support for people over 65. This is not a success that we can rest assured is sustainable. It is to some extent sustainable, but a crisis is unfolding in private pensions that will have very important consequences for people over 65, so that is an issue that the federal government should be concerned with.

(Alain Noël, Director, Interuniversity Research Centre on Economic and Social Change, Université de Montréal, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009)

[E]lderly poverty has almost been eliminated — that is, for couples at least; not single people. That is because of the Old Age Security, OAS, and also the Guaranteed Income Supplement. That is a public policy that targeted elderly poverty and has done a great job.

(Andrew Sharpe, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009)

To make the program more successful as a poverty-elimination program for seniors, an increase in benefits would be necessary, as recommended by the Special Senate Committee on Aging.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, this Committee echoes that recommendation.

Recommendation 33

The Committee recommends that the federal government increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors to ensure that economic households are not below the poverty line as defined by the low income cut-off levels, and that intergovernmental collaboration ensure that such increases do not result in the loss of eligibility for provincial/territorial subsidies or services for seniors.

As noted earlier in this section, not all seniors in Canada qualify for these benefits, and some qualify for only partial benefits. As these barriers exclude people who have immigrated to Canada, they are discussed in greater detail in Section 5 of this report.

Supporting children and their families: National Child Benefit (NCB)

Designed to support parents, especially those with low incomes, the National Child Benefit (NCB) is “one of the most important but often misunderstood and underappreciated tools for combating child poverty.”¹⁸⁰ Further, it is an implementation, many years later, of a recommendation made by a study by this Committee of child poverty in 1991.¹⁸¹

The expanded National Child Benefit has contributed to “a massive decline in single-parent poverty.”

Andrew Sharpe

¹⁷⁹ Special Senate Committee on Aging, *Canada's Aging Population*, p. 101.

¹⁸⁰ Ken Battle, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008.

¹⁸¹ SAST, *Children in Poverty: Toward a Better Future*, 1991, p. 44.

Despite changes to the NCB in the 2006 Budget, witnesses reported that it continued to be an instrument that had already resulted in a reduction in child poverty:

[T]he Canada Child Tax Benefit has made and continues to make a significant contribution to the reduction of child poverty from what it otherwise would have been.

(Michael Mendelson, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

There has just been a massive decline in single-parent poverty. The key reason for that is public policy contribution. Obviously, a strong economy and a low unemployment rate have also contributed. The seminal program was the National Child Benefit Program, which has been expanded significantly in recent years. That has had a major impact on child poverty.

(Andrew Sharpe, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009)

In its proposed new architecture for income security programs, and before the Committee, the Caledon Institute has called for substantial increases to this benefit:

Currently, the federal government spends \$13 billion on its three child benefit programs. Our proposed \$5,000 Canada Child Tax Benefit would cost an estimated \$17 billion. Thus, the net cost for our proposal would be \$4 billion. In other words, we would spend \$4 billion more than what we now spend to finance our better benefit. To put that \$17 billion total cost in perspective, we spend \$33 billion on Old Age Security.

(Ken Battle, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008)

Recommendation 34

Recognizing the important contribution the National Child Benefit (NCB) can make to reducing child poverty, the Committee recommends that the NCB be raised, incrementally and predictably, to reach \$5,000 (in 2009 dollars) by 2012.

Goods and Services Tax Credit

As noted above, witnesses before the Committee identified the refundable tax credits to low-income taxpayers to offset the Goods and Services Tax and to supplement low earnings as well-designed programs that could provide the model for expanded support.

Transfers to provinces: Canada Social Transfer

The Canada Social Transfer provides both cash and tax transfers in support of post-secondary education, social assistance and social services, and programs for children. It is governed by Finance Canada through the *Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act*.¹⁸² In order to receive the transfer, the province or territory must agree to the sole condition on the transfer: no minimum residency period on eligibility to receive social assistance.¹⁸³

This transfer has been a major contributor to funding related to poverty reduction, yet the Committee noted that planned increases have been targeted to child development programs and to

¹⁸² R.S., 1985, c. F-8.

¹⁸³ Auditor General of Canada, *Report to the House of Commons*, December 2008, chapter 1, p. 7. *Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act*, R.S., 1985, c. F-8, s. 25.1.

post-secondary education, while the funding for social assistance remained unchanged from 2007-2008.¹⁸⁴

Making work pay

Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB)

This new tax instrument, introduced in 2006, supplements the earnings from employment of people with very low incomes, including those whose incomes are too low to actually pay federal income taxes. At its introductory levels, it supported people only with very little earnings, but the levels have been increased, most recently in the 2009 Budget. The increase in the Budget plan was expected to “double the total tax relief provided through the WITB.”¹⁸⁵

Witnesses who addressed the inability of many jobs to provide adequate incomes for many highlighted the importance of WITB in helping families reach adequate incomes.¹⁸⁶

Such increases contribute to the potential for this benefit, identified by witnesses before the Committee:

The Working Income Tax Benefit has bi-partisan support and general support among the social policy community. [I]t is not a magic bullet but it is an important instrument. I hope to see growth in future to make it a more generous program that reaches a larger group of working poor.

(Ken Battle, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008)

Recommendation 35

The Committee recommends that the federal government commit to a schedule of longer term planned increases to the Working Income Tax Benefit to bring recipients at least to the LICO line.

Poverty reduction strategies

At the provincial and even the local level, departmental silos have been overcome, and private, public and voluntary sectors have come together to develop strategies to reduce poverty. The Committee flags both existing strategies and emerging initiatives as harbingers of rising public commitment across sectors and departments to address the “wicked” problem of poverty and its related symptoms, including, in some cases, housing and income inadequacy and insecurity and homelessness.

In some provinces, community pressure is building for a provincial poverty reduction strategy, while other provinces have already begun consultations toward that end. Five provinces have announced their strategies. Quebec was first in 2002, followed by Newfoundland and Labrador in 2006. Ontario’s plan was announced late in 2008, while Nova Scotia and Manitoba released their strategies in April and May, 2009 respectively. These four are outlined in some detail in Appendix 4.

¹⁸⁴ Michael Prince, “Disability Income Policy in Canada: Trends and Reform Ideas,” Presentation to Income and Employment Sector Forum, Toronto, 2 November 2007, Slide 9.

¹⁸⁵ Finance Canada, Canada’s Economic Action Plan: Budget 2009, Annex 5, p. 312.

<http://www.budget.gc.ca/2009/pdf/budget-planbugetaire-eng.pdf>. Accessed 14 August 2009.

¹⁸⁶ Carole Vincent and Richard Shillington, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 May 2008; Dianne Swinemar, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 3 May 2007.

New Brunswick recently reported on the results of a series of public consultations, described as the first phase in the development of a provincial poverty reduction strategy.¹⁸⁷

The Committee has heard widely varying opinions on how the Government of Canada can and should support current poverty reduction strategies, especially at the provincial level, and how it could encourage the development of such strategies in other provinces. Many witnesses testified that a national poverty-reduction strategy was an important step, including those from the National Council on Welfare, Canada Without Poverty (formerly the National Anti-Poverty Organization), the Canadian Co-Operative Association, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Senate's own Standing Committee on Forestry and Agriculture in its report on rural poverty.

The Committee respects this view, recognizing that it is born from a desire to tackle poverty in every province and territory, with a Canada-wide set of goals and targets. However, as others have pointed out, most of the policy levers with respect to poverty are in provincial and territorial governments' jurisdiction, and most provinces are already moving forward with such strategies.

Other witnesses, particularly those who have appeared since the *Issues and Options* paper was published in June 2008, have had a more nuanced view. For example, one Quebec witness highlighted that Quebec's strategy was well entrenched, and had been established on a parallel track, rather than to interact with federal policies and programs. His advice was to concentrate on what the federal government does best, within its own jurisdiction:

The idea is not so much to have the federal government design what everyone in the country should do but at least have the federal government consider the implications for poverty reduction of its own policies, which are there nevertheless and have to be considered in that light.

(Alain Noël, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009)

Similarly, a business leader in Saint John, New Brunswick, where the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative is at the forefront of a local poverty reduction initiative, argued that government support for communities is a better approach than national or even provincial programs:

Our work in Saint John would be progressing at a much faster pace if there were a federal-provincial program in place to help our city undertake this work. Tripartite agreements would be an effective way to help cities reduce their poverty rates. Why is this? Poverty reduction solutions are different for every city, every neighbourhood and every family. It is at the local level that diverse sectors are best able to join together to understand how to interlock services and fill the gaps.

(Tom Gribbons, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009)

Another witness, also from a local poverty reduction initiative, emphasized that existing federal programs are essential components of a national poverty-reduction strategy, including "early learning and child care, affordable and accessible housing, employment opportunities and meaningful income supports."¹⁸⁸ In the submission from this initiative to the Subcommittee, the call for national co-ordination, targets and reporting was tempered by a call for flexible and sustainable investments.

Based on this and similar advice, rather than focus on a broad strategy, this Committee has chosen to focus on the specifics of these and other programs, making both short-term and long-term recommendations to make them more effective instruments of poverty reduction across Canada.

¹⁸⁷ Government of New Brunswick, *A Choir of Voices: The "What Was Said" Report*, A Dialogue on Poverty, June 2009.

¹⁸⁸ Liz Weaver, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009.

Nonetheless, the Committee recognizes the importance of supporting provincial governments that have taken the initiative to put poverty reduction strategies into place. Such a focus also meets the requirement that federal investments in poverty reduction be flexible and sustainable, and “allow provinces and municipalities to effectively use the investments to meet local needs.”¹⁸⁹

The Committee recognizes that provincial and local strategies are examples of “implementation-ready” initiatives with respect to social infrastructure, offering a parallel to “shovel-ready” physical infrastructure initiatives, funded through adding to and accelerating investments from existing transfers. The Committee is aware that some advice to the federal government with respect to stimulus spending included attention to projects “designed to improve Canada’s long-term economic competitiveness **and social well-being**.”¹⁹⁰ [emphasis added]

Some stimulus money should be used to support a stronger social infrastructure in Canadian cities.

One of our witnesses told the Committee:

When we asked our 25 economists across the West what the stimulus package should be, their emphasis was very much on strengthening the social safety net rather than doing particular things for particular firms or industries.

(Roger Gibbins, President and CEO of the Canada West Foundation, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 2 April 2009)

Noting the government’s firm commitment to flow funds quickly where there are projects to support, the Committee believes the federal government can provide similarly accelerated and expanded support to jurisdictions with implementation-ready poverty reduction strategies.

Recommendation 36

The Committee recommends that just as the federal government invests in "shovel-ready" physical infrastructure to combat recession with their provincial counterparts, so too should "shovel-ready" social infrastructure be targeted for investment, specifically housing, income security, and social agencies, whose ability to serve can be quickly enhanced through increased and accelerated investment in the Canada Social Transfer.

Community responses

In its visits to agencies across Canada, the Committee heard that while income transfers are essential, people often need more. From those living in poverty, we heard that life can be complicated: by illness, mental illness, violence, family disintegration and social isolation. Community-based organizations, such as the ones visited by the Committee, provide an essential role in helping people who are living in poverty.

Community responses provide on-the-ground support and personal connections for people living in poverty.

Sometimes the help is simple assistance with an application form for an income-support program. Sometimes help takes place over a period of years and is given in several different ways – help

¹⁸⁹ Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, “A National Poverty Reduction Strategy: Presentation to the Subcommittee on Cities,” 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009, p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ Roger Gibbins, et. al., *Taking Action on the Economy: Advice from Western Canada*, Canada West Foundation, October 2008, p. 1.

getting settled in a new community or help when leaving an abusive relationship. Community-based organizations serve many purposes, but in essence they provide on-the-ground support and personal connections. Organizations are capable of building communities within and among vulnerable people: organizations are both the response and the community in the community response.

The Committee visited or heard from the following community organizations¹⁹¹ that help to address the challenges of poverty and have as their clients those that are living in low income:

- Stella Burry Community Services¹⁹², Stella's Café - St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador
- North End Community Health Centre¹⁹³ - Halifax, Nova Scotia
- Dalhousie Legal Aid Services¹⁹⁴ - Halifax, Nova Scotia
- Montreal Diet Dispensary¹⁹⁵ - Montreal, Quebec
- Collingwood Neighbourhood House¹⁹⁶ - Vancouver, British Columbia
- Hospitality Project¹⁹⁷ - New Westminster, British Columbia
- Circle Project¹⁹⁸ - Regina, Saskatchewan
- Rainbow Youth Centre¹⁹⁹ - Regina, Saskatchewan:
- Urban Circle Training Centre²⁰⁰ - Winnipeg, Manitoba
- Community Kitchen Program of Calgary²⁰¹ - Calgary, Alberta
- Sun Youth Organization²⁰² - Montreal, Quebec
- Pathways to Education Canada²⁰³

Of these responses, some provided assistance to people who are living in poverty, while others programs aimed at moving people out of poverty by providing a 'springboard'.²⁰⁴ Whether to give comfort or a 'springboard', community responses all had these key elements:

- a unique capacity to respond quickly with innovative solutions to emerging community needs;

¹⁹¹ Further details about these organizations and programs can be found in Appendix 3. What follows is a brief introduction to some of what the Committee saw and heard during site visits to cities across Canada, brief introductions that highlight aspects of what the Committee was privileged to experience during their fact finding missions.

¹⁹² Stella Burry Community Services <http://www.stellaburry.ca/>. Accessed 18 August 2009.

¹⁹³ North End Community Health Centre <http://www.nechc.com/>. Accessed 10 August 2009.

¹⁹⁴ Dalhousie Legal Aid Services <http://law.dal.ca/Institutes/Dalhousie%20Legal%20Aid%20Service/>. Accessed 10 August 2009.

¹⁹⁵ Montreal Diet Dispensary <http://www.ddm-mdd.org/en/>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

¹⁹⁶ Collingwood Neighbourhood House <http://www.cnh.bc.ca/>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

¹⁹⁷ The Hospitality Project <http://www.newwesthospitalityproject.org/links.html#>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

¹⁹⁸ The Circle Project Association Inc. <http://www.circleproject.ca/index.html>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

¹⁹⁹ Rainbow Youth Centre <http://www.rainbowyouth.com/>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

²⁰⁰ Urban Circle Training Centre Inc. <http://www.urbancircletraining.com/home.htm>. Accessed 7 August 2009.

²⁰¹ Community Kitchen Program of Calgary <http://www.communitykitchenprogram.com/>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

²⁰² Sun Youth Organization <http://www.sunyouthorg.com/>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

²⁰³ David Hughes, Pathways to Education Canada, Submission to Subcommittee on Cities 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 2009, 22 April 2009.

²⁰⁴ Tom Gribbons, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities 2nd Session, 40th Parliament 5 June 2009.

- wrap-around service that can meet individuals ‘where they are’ and help with more than one aspect of their life at a time; and
- filling in gaps, the particular domain of community-based responses, as they are most adept at identifying and responding with innovative measures that fill in where other services stop short.

Springboards

Education

Education programs all had in common their capacity to adapt to the complex needs of the students, helping to keep them focused on their education achievements. In discussion with students, Subcommittee members heard from young people who were trying to attain their high school or post-secondary diploma while living complicated lives. We have heard about the important impact education can make on alleviating poverty. Students told us that going to school was made more challenging by their living situations: in poverty, without family support, frequently with children of their own to care for and sometimes while they transitioned out of street-involved lifestyles that included gang attachment, addictions and violence. The Committee heard that high school completion and post-secondary education are vital for improving the socio-economic status of teenage mothers and improving the employment rate for Aboriginal young people. Subcommittee members were impressed by the accomplishments of the young people we met in these education focused programs.

Young people at the Circle Project Association in Regina told Subcommittee members of the particularly beneficial approach that is based on an Aboriginal vision of wholeness, balance and healing, a fundamental of the Circle Project education program. The Aboriginal-rooted approach gave students support as they made changes in their lives while working toward completion of their high school diploma. About 95% of the students at the Circle Project are Aboriginal; many of them are young single mothers. The Circle Project added childcare services, having identified that finding stable, affordable childcare was an essential element in the students’ capability to complete their studies. The Circle Project is an example of a wrap-around service, providing emotional support while getting the students to stay focused on their studies.

The Urban Circle Training Centre in Winnipeg describes its college-level training program as a ‘ladder’ out of poverty. A life skills development unit, with a strong Aboriginal foundation, is the first part of all training programs. The program participants described how that unit helped to shape their own approach to learning, to ensure greater success in attaining their goals and to set life priorities and focus on their studies, despite life’s complications. Eighty-five per cent of the Urban Circle students successfully complete their diploma and get a job. The program is particularly helping to break down the barriers faced by Aboriginal people in post secondary education achievement.

Pathways to Education Canada serves younger people by helping to keep them in school and to prevent high school drop-out among youth in low-income neighbourhoods. The Pathways program has learned that young people in these neighbourhoods need more support than that which is available in the classroom alone. Home and community issues are addressed along with the development of success strategies for educational attainment.

The Pathways to Education model, with audited results, is reported to provide a \$25 ‘social return on investment’ for every dollar invested in the program.²⁰⁵ It helps the student to manage the day-to-day challenges at home that might be distracting and those in the community that might be a temptation away from school. The Boston Consulting Group reported an 80% reduction in the drop-out rate of participants in the Pathways program in 2007.²⁰⁶ Subcommittee members enjoyed meeting some of the young people in the Pathways Program during a site visit to Regent Park in Toronto. We were impressed with the changes that the program appears to be having on the individuals and on the greater community.

Subcommittee members visited youth-specific poverty-focused programs, targeted to those as young as middle school age. It was evident that the drop-in centres can become like a second home. The Rainbow Youth Centre is just such a place for youth in a low-income community in Regina. The place, the staff, programs and events combine to create a special kind of wrap-around service to youth in disadvantaged communities, helping to keep them engaged with their community and enrolled in school. At Rainbow Youth, programs have expanded to fill the needs of the youth community, as and when needs have arisen. Sports, recreation, access to computers and an evening meal are offered. There is quiet space, active space and space to get individual attention. Staff are there to help, support and even comfort any in need. Subcommittee members saw how the building itself had been adapted, renovated and rejuvenated to make room for the multitude of programs and services.

Newcomers

Community responses that we heard from almost always included some help in gaining access to other services, programs and financial assistance. The Collingwood Neighbourhood House, centered in a Vancouver community with a high proportion of newcomers, is a case in point. Among an extensive list of programs, services and supports available to all in the community, there is also a 24-hour information and referral service for recent immigrants designed to help them connect with services for housing, school, employment, and language classes. The information service is offered in multiple languages, which are always adapting to newcomers in the community. Such support assists newcomers as they settle and gain access to the labour market. Collingwood Neighbourhood House is often filling the gaps where targeted programs fall short. Their offerings specifically help with what we heard in evidence as the first and second stages to the settlement process.²⁰⁷ The connections that happen at Collingwood House may also help with the third and final settlement stage of economic and social integration.

Nutrition

The Montreal Diet Dispensary makes an impassioned plea for greater acknowledgment of the link between diet and poverty.²⁰⁸ Their efforts are focused on prevention of intergenerational poverty, especially with pre-natal dietary supplementation. The Dispensary addresses poor diets of pregnant women living in low-income areas, using good nutrition to reduce the risk of low birth-weight babies and to help ensure the best start for babies’ development. The Dispensary program directly addresses a problem identified by the Health Council of Canada (as quoted earlier in this report) that

²⁰⁵ David Hughes, Submission to the Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009.

²⁰⁶ Boston Consulting Group, BCG Assessment of Pathways to Education: Executive Summary, p. 10, July 2007. <http://pathwaystoeducation.ca/PDF/BCG.pdf>. Accessed 22 September 2009.

²⁰⁷ Sarah Wayland, Evidence, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament 13 March 2008.

²⁰⁸ Marie-Paul Duquette, Evidence SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament 7 February 2008.

the average birth weight for babies in low-income neighbourhoods is one-quarter pound less than for babies born in high-income neighbourhoods.

Good nutrition is also a focus of the Community Kitchen Program of Calgary. Their community kitchen program helps small groups cook good food together, saving both money and time. The program helps those with limited income, and their families, to have a better overall diet; it also provides an opportunity to make friends and avoid social isolation. The Committee has already heard that those with low income cannot afford to eat nutritious diets based on comparing income levels with the costs of such a diet. This program is an example of a wrap-around service. While the focus is on nutrition, cost savings and improving the diets of those with low income, the program also addresses a common problem of poverty: social isolation.

Economic Isolation

Community responses are also about creating community, they bring people together no matter what their circumstances. In discussion with clients Subcommittee members heard stories, often whole life stories. These stories were shared with us, but it was apparent that they had also been shared amongst themselves, creating a sense of community among people who live in poverty every day and struggle to gain stability. As one client put it, in our visit to St. John's, sometimes it's just about finding home, work and friends all in the same place.

Discussions held with clients and program participants at Stella Burry Community Services in St. John's, were held at Stella's Café, a place where clients may be serving or sitting. Sharing stories in a supportive community means people can learn from each other, know that they are not alone in their own struggle, and get help navigating life.

Stella's Café provides jobs in the café for people living in poverty with mental health issues. This social enterprise café operation is about meeting people 'where they are' for employees and visitors alike. For some, the Stella's Café work experience may even lead to stable employment elsewhere. While helping to prevent social isolation, this model can also help to address economic isolation.

Providing Comfort

Health

The Committee has heard about the greater level of illness among those living in poverty and the related health care costs. North End Community Health Centre of Halifax creates a healthy community with a growing collection of health services. When it began, the centre simply wanted to bring medical services into the neighbourhood, to make access easier for the local, largely low-income, residents. Since then, the Health Centre has added many more services to meet the health needs of the community. Subcommittee members have heard that poverty has a strong impact on health outcomes; we were encouraged see a community-based response helping to improve health outcomes. The North End Community Health Centre also encourages clients to become members and participate in the governance of the centre. Community-based actions such as these help to create a sense of community while providing a specific response.

Legal Aid

A very specific and targeted community service is provided by Legal Aid clinics. The costs of retaining professional legal services might otherwise be prohibitive, but the legal aid is provided free of charge to those who meet the criteria. Dalhousie Legal Aid Services is a partnership between community groups, law students, community legal workers and lawyers. Its location, in the Halifax North End neighbourhood, is part of its connection with the community. While providing a very

specific service, the clinic also does community outreach and advocates on behalf of people with low income. This sort of service fills a gap in the system, eliminating cost as a barrier to accessing legal services.

Place-based Community Responses

Subcommittee members visited the Sun Youth Organization, which first offered recreational sports opportunities to urban, low-income youth in the 1950s in Montreal. The converted school building, now owned by the organization, is home to the many services all developed in response to community need over the past decades. There are programs and services for people of all ages. The Subcommittee visited only small parts of the old, rambling building. Over the past 50 years it has clearly become a hub of activity in the community, providing emergency response service for people in distress, community crime prevention, a food bank which is open 365 days a year, and comprehensive seniors' programs. For a very long time, the organization has been creating innovative solutions to community needs. As a place-based response, Sun Youth is an example of an organization that has responded to neighbourhood attributes and helped to improve the characteristics of the community.

The Hospitality Project in New Westminster was born of a simple act of kindness. Staff at a food bank, based in a church, decided to invite those waiting in the line-up outside the Church to come inside the recreation space and wait inside instead of outside on the sidewalk. From that simple act, a full and rich community response has been developed. A system was developed that would allow people to keep their place in line while they got free coffee and snacks and chatted with friends and neighbours. The Hospitality Project grew from there. Subcommittee members were impressed with the capacity to identify needs in this very diverse community and provide an innovative response. Now the space is the hub for a visiting dental clinic, school supports, cooking classes and meetings with social workers. This is in addition to the continuation of its original food-bank function, distributing about 500 bags of food weekly.

Section 3 – Housing

Housing stabilizes families. If they are constantly on the move for decent housing, the children are moved from school to school and their education is affected with each move. When families are in decent housing, they can concentrate on the other areas of their lives, such as education and employment.

(Lawrence Poirier, Manager, Kinew Housing Inc., Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 29th Parliament, 29 November 2007)

Housing – accommodation – that is affordable and adequate provides an important foundation for healthy social and physical development. For those attempting to emerge from poverty as well as those who work to reduce it, appropriate housing is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for success.

Adequate housing is the right of all, regardless of economic or social status.

Researchers and witnesses before the Committee have also argued that adequate housing is the right of all, regardless of economic or social status. Yet according to a 2004 report released by the Canadian Policy Research Networks, Canada “has not been able to meet the housing policy objective of providing adequate and affordable housing for all citizens.”²⁰⁹ Policy researchers and others often refer to affordable housing as a “policy orphan” that no one level of government is taking responsibility for and the building industry avoids because of low profit margins.

3.1 Persistent problems

Witnesses before the Committee have argued that while there may not be a housing policy in Canada, there is a housing system,²¹⁰ with the largest component provided by the private market in the form of owned homes, a lesser part supplied by the private market that is rental accommodation, and a smaller part still provided by government and non-government not-for-profit organizations in the forms of privately or jointly owned housing or rental accommodation.

Affordability

Despite recent economic growth, the income of the poorest 20% of families remained stagnant as shelter costs increased. There is a housing affordability gap tied to the shortage of supply of affordable housing and declining income at the lower end of the income spectrum.

(Bayla Kolk, Acting Associate Deputy Minister, Homelessness and Partnering Strategy, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 26 April 2007)

There is a housing affordability gap tied to the shortage of supply of affordable housing and declining income at the lower end of the income spectrum.

Bayla Kolk

In its site visits in cities across Canada, Committee members met with Aboriginal people, with newcomers, with long-time Canadians; almost without exception, when

²⁰⁹ Tom Carter and Chesya Polevychok, *Housing is Good Social Policy*, Research Report F/50 Family Network, Canadian Policy Research Networks, December 2004, p. v.

²¹⁰ See, for example, testimony by Margaret Eberle to Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009.

asked what governments could do to assist them, they identified housing-related issues, including affordability and maintenance of units. With the exception of Montreal, everyone who was in poverty indicated that the shelter component of their social assistance cheques was not sufficient to meet the costs of even the lowest-rent units available in their communities. A Winnipeg witness described the situation in that community:

The rooming house resident, the hotel resident, or the single person gets either \$236 or \$284 a month to find accommodation. Most times they are stuck in the inner city in rundown places. The kicker — and this goes back to the industry of poverty — is that \$236 or \$284 is not the rent that is being charged. The rent is \$275 or \$300-plus. Someone on assistance then takes 30% to 40% of their \$80 or so of disposable income to pay for shelter.

(Jino Distasio, Director, Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 17 May 2007)

A witness from a food bank in Winnipeg described the difficult choices this forces on people:

[A] terrible choice faced by two-parent families, single mothers, people with physical and mental disabilities or mental illness, people who need education and training and others who have been forced by circumstances to turn to welfare [is] to make this decision: feed themselves and their children or pay their shelter costs. Money that should have gone to food is used to pay rent and utilities.

(David Northcott, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 1 May 2008)

The Committee also heard from witnesses about how finding housing they could afford often put social assistance recipients, particularly women,²¹¹ at risk in terms of the safety of their families. Committee members visiting Prairie agencies and their clients heard first-hand reports of this reality.

Participants in an evaluation of the Refugee Assistance Program, both refugees and service providers, also said that the funding provided for shelter costs were particularly out of sync with the needs of refugee families, which are often large.²¹² Recent research shows that refugees experience more significant problems in accessing appropriate and affordable housing than other immigrants.²¹³

Further, this does not take into account the disproportionately high costs for heating fuel identified in hearings and site visits in eastern Canada.

In Charlottetown last winter, there were senior citizens who had to choose between buying their medication, buying food or heating their homes. In many cases, these people could not afford all three of these basic needs. With the increase in home heating fuel since last winter, this level of poverty will only increase.

(Clifford Lee, Mayor, City of Charlottetown, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 August 2008)

While the Committee is conscious that increases in social assistance shelter allowances can result in increases in rents in the most affordable units in any community,²¹⁴ it remains clear that without an increase in supply of affordable housing, some increase in these allowances may be the only solution.

²¹¹ Marika Morris, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 4 June 2008.

²¹² Sarah Wayland, "The Housing Needs of Immigrants and Refugees in Canada," Paper prepared for the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2007, p. 9.

²¹³ Daniel Hiebert & Pablo Mendez, *Settling In: Newcomers in the Canadian Housing Market, 2001-2005*, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, July 2008, p. 37.

²¹⁴ Marion Steeles, "Comments on housing proposals in the Senate Report, Poverty, Housing and Homelessness: Issues and Options." Submission to the SAST, 26 June 2009.

Further, the Committee recognizes that this approach often does not assist people who are employed and not receiving social assistance benefits; regional differences make it likely that even the most generous Working Income Tax Benefit might not solve this problem for low-income earners in Canada's most expensive rental markets.

The Committee also learned that there is a disproportionate affordability problem for particular groups:

Those vulnerable to poverty, such as Aboriginal people, single mothers, immigrants, refugees and people with disabilities bear the brunt of the effects of inadequate housing, which impacts their education and health outcomes.

(Molly McCracken, Manitoba Board Member, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (Manitoba), Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 17 May 2007)

Those vulnerable to poverty, such as Aboriginal people, single mothers, immigrants, refugees and people with disabilities bear the brunt of the effects of inadequate housing.

Molly McCracken

While affordability is particularly a problem in Canada's largest cities, there are similar disproportionate impacts in smaller cities as well. For example, Newfoundland and Labrador's new social housing plan shows that one-person households, Aboriginal off-reserve households, and lone parents are among those in greatest core housing need, and that the greatest contributor to this need is lack of affordability.²¹⁵

Inadequate supply

The Committee gathered ample evidence on the lack of affordable housing in either the private market or social housing.

While different experts have put forward different analyses of the failure of the private market to provide affordable rental housing, there were two major reasons: changes to the treatment of income generated from developing rental housing coincided with the emergence of condominium housing,²¹⁶ and the costs of land and construction in large cities simply made the cost of new housing unaffordable to those on low incomes.²¹⁷

According to Canada Mortgage and Housing (CMHC), in 2005, 13.5% of Canadians living in cities were in "core housing need."²¹⁸

Core housing need refers to households which are unable to afford shelter that meets adequacy, suitability, and affordability norms. The norms have been adjusted over time to reflect the housing expectations of Canadians.

²¹⁵ Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, *A Social Housing Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador 2009: Secure Foundations*, 2009, p. 3. <http://www.nlhc.nf.ca/SocialHsingPlan/report.pdf>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

²¹⁶ For an example of this argument, see J. David Hulchanski, "Canada's Dual Housing Policy: Assisting Owners, Neglecting Renters," *Research Bulletin #38*, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, September 2007, p. 3.

²¹⁷ For an example of this argument, see Nick Falvo, "Addressing Canada's Lack of Affordable Housing," Presentation for PEF Panel: "Interdisciplinary Approaches to Economic Issues" at the Canadian Economics Association Annual Meetings, Dalhousie University, 2007, p. 4.

²¹⁸ CMHC, "2008 Canadian Housing Observer — Key Findings." <http://www.cmhc.ca/en/corp/nero/nere/2008/2008-11-13-0815.cfm>. Accessed 27 August 2009.

*Affordability, one of the elements used to determine core housing need, is recognized as a maximum of 30% of the household income spent on shelter.*²¹⁹

As is the case with poverty, some groups are over-represented among those in this situation. In 2001, 36% of immigrants were in core housing need, by CMHC's definition, compared to only 13% of non-immigrants.²²⁰ A Toronto witness put these numbers in a more local context:

[A]bout 25,000 people, over 50% of [non-senior] residents [in Toronto Community Housing] are under the age of 21. About 85% are non-white and about 25% are new Canadians. The face of poverty and the face of social housing in large urban centres have transformed rapidly and continues to transform.

(Derek Ballantyne, Chief Executive Officer, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007)

Data also demonstrate that a higher proportion of Aboriginal households in major Canadian cities are in housing that needs major repairs than their non-Aboriginal counterparts; more than twice as many Aboriginal as non-Aboriginal households fit this category in Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg and Toronto.²²¹ At the same time, a greater proportion of Aboriginal families than their non-Aboriginal counterparts on waiting lists for social housing are reported to be homeless.²²²

These data were echoed in testimony before the Committee:

Beyond ... housing statistics are the real people who pay the price for Canada's lack of affordable housing... The Canadians who get hurt the most are those who are most vulnerable, the young, the old, lone-parent families, Aboriginal households, new immigrants and renters, who account for more than two thirds of those in core housing need.

(Nicholas Gazzard, Executive Director, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007)

Beyond ... housing statistics are the real people who pay the price for Canada's lack of affordable housing... The Canadians who get hurt the most are those who are most vulnerable.

Nicholas Gazzard

Federal support

Expiry of Operating Agreements

Federal investment in affordable housing is scheduled to diminish dramatically, simply as a result of key long-term operating subsidies expiring, as the mortgages they support expire:

Federal investment in affordable housing is scheduled to diminish dramatically, simply as a result of key long-term operating subsidies expiring.

²¹⁹ CMHC, "Affordable Housing." http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/corp/faq/faq_002.cfm. Accessed 24 August 2009.

²²⁰ Wayland (2007) p. 4.

²²¹ Statistics Canada, cited in Ryan Walker, "Social Housing and the Role of Aboriginal Organizations in Canadian Cities," *IRPP Choices*, Institute for Research on Public Policy, May 2008, p. 4. <http://www.irpp.org/choices/archive/vol14no4.pdf>. Accessed 10 August 2009.

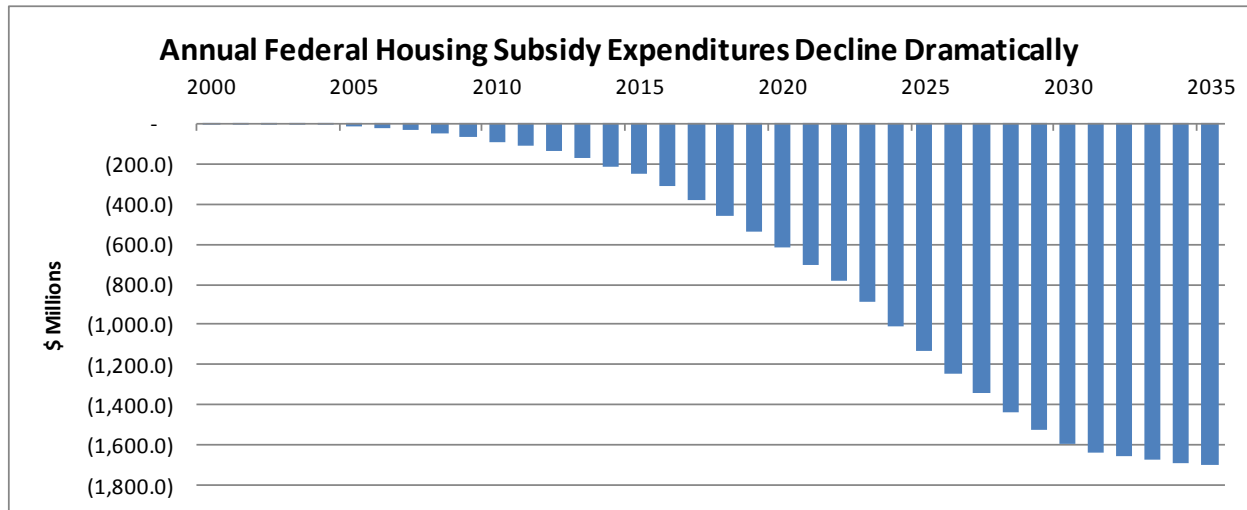
²²² The International Housing Coalition, Case Study 3, *Aboriginal Housing in Canada: Building on Promising Practices*, 2006, p. 6.

Typically, a federal program will have a commitment to a project for 30 to 35 years. At the end of that time, the project's mortgage will be repaid completely and the federal subsidy will end. The problem there, however, is that although the federal subsidy will end, the need to continue to house low-income families will not.

(Nicholas Gazzard, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007)

The impact is massive, in terms of federal savings, and in terms of the impact on the supply and affordability of subsidized units in social housing. The figure below captures the rapid decline, if governments do not reinvest in a long-term way.

Figure 9 - Decline in federal housing subsidy expenditures²²³



Maintenance of funding investment

While most witnesses who addressed housing with the Committee strongly recommended that funding levels be maintained at least current levels, some described what could be accomplished with that funding in the social housing sector:

[I]f the federal government were to say that it will hold the line on the existing budget, if not increase it, 80% of that budget could be used to create new housing. By the time mortgages are paid off, that could add 21,000 units of housing a year. If the provinces keep their pedal to the metal and partner, that could double.

(Sharon Chisholm, Executive Director, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007)

The Committee commends the Budget 2009 commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing in Canada, while seeking a more sustained approach.

Recommendation 37

The Committee recommends that the federal government provide sustained and adequate funding through the Affordable Housing Initiative to increase the supply of affordable housing.

²²³ Steve Pomeroy, "Where's the Money Gone? An Analysis of Declining Government Housing Expenditures," Prepared for Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, August 2007, p. iii. <http://www.chra-achru.ca/english/DocumentAccess.asp?docName=../CMFiles/documents/chra+pomery+E+final+1MBQ-6242008-6971.doc>. Accessed 27 August 2009.

Private sector supply

The Committee also recognizes that the private sector has been a major developer of rental housing in Canada. The Committee learned from many witnesses of the decline in the construction in rental housing and of the loss of rental units to conversion (to condominiums) and redevelopment.

Several witnesses, many providers and managers of social housing, suggested that various changes in federal tax policy over the years had been contributing factors to this reduction in the proportion of housing units available to tenants, and that changes to the tax system could reverse this trend.²²⁴

These witnesses suggested that tax measures could be part of the solution, but cautioned that the housing market in Canada had changed sufficiently that simply reinstating an earlier program or replicating one from another country was not wise. For example, one submission from an expert in these matters suggested that any tax measures should include

Tax changes could support an increase in the supply of rental housing built by the private sector.

*provisions to ensure that some at least of the following are true: (a) the subsidies will attract investors in addition to those currently in the business; (b) the subsidies will not be largely inframarginal (i.e. given to investors for behaviour which would occur anyway); (c) they will not be too expensive per housing unit produced in terms of tax revenue lost (that is, in terms of tax expenditure); and (d) they will be targeted, at least in the case of some changes.*²²⁵

Specific suggestions have varied from amendments to the *Income Tax Act* to allow investments in social housing, including donations of hard assets, to be subject to the same tax treatment as charitable donations²²⁶ to the implementation of a low-income housing tax credit modeled on the same credit in the United States.²²⁷ General and more specific suggestions with respect to tax treatment have also come from provincial and local working groups and housing and homelessness plans.²²⁸

The Committee also recognizes the complexity of both the tax and housing systems in Canada, and wishes to avoid any further incompatibilities between programs across levels of government.

²²⁴ See for example, testimony by Steve Pomeroy and Phil Browne, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009; by Jill Davidson, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 28 May 2009; and by Derek Ballantyne, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007.

²²⁵ Marion Steeles, "Comments on housing proposals in the Senate Report, Poverty, Housing and Homelessness: Issues and Options." Submission to SAST, 26 June 2009, p. 6.

²²⁶ Don Fairbairn, Consultant, Streetohome Vancouver, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 March 2008.

²²⁷ Marion Steeles, Submission, p. 6.

²²⁸ For examples, see Edmonton Task Force on Affordable Housing, "Improving Opportunities for Affordable Housing in Edmonton," City of Edmonton, February 2003, p. 9, http://www.edmonton.ca/for_residents/CommPeople/ETFAHBackground.pdf (accessed 5 May 2009); Calgary Committee to End Homelessness *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* January 2008, <http://www.endinghomelessness.ca/users/getdownload.asp?DownloadID=158>. Accessed 16 October 2009; and Metro Vancouver, *Affordable Housing Strategy*, 2007, p. 1, <http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/development/housingdiversity/AffordableHousingStrategyDocs/AdoptedMetroVancAffordHousStrategyNov302007.pdf>. Accessed 23 April 2009.

Recommendation 38

The Committee recommends that the federal government issue a White Paper on tax measures to support construction of rental housing in general and affordable rental housing in particular, including the donation of funds, lands or buildings for low-income housing provision.

Land costs

Increasingly in Canadian cities, the Committee has heard the cost of land can be prohibitive to any organization (government or non-government) seeking to build affordable housing, for purchase or rent. Municipalities are contributing to a reduction in development costs through instruments such as waived development fees and deferral or temporarily waived property taxes, and even through donated or discounted land. In at least some cases, there have been calls for the provision of federal lands for this purpose.²²⁹

The cost of land can be prohibitive to any organization seeking to build affordable housing, for purchase or rent.

As part of its homelessness initiatives, the federal government's Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative (SFRPHI) "provides surplus federal property to community organizations, the not-for-profit sector, and other levels of government for projects that alleviate and prevent homelessness."²³⁰ At the same time, surplus federal policy is transferred to the Canada Lands Company for disposal, which has a mandate with two requirements: "to optimize both the financial value of government assets no longer needed for program purposes, as well as the community value of the company's development projects."²³¹ Its process for redevelopment of federal lands also involves consultation with local stakeholders, and work on an overall development plan for the property; this process can lengthen an already long development process, while funding programs are often time-constrained.

Recommendation 39

The Committee recommends that the federal government clarify the mandate of Canada Lands Corporation to favour use of surplus federal lands for development of affordable housing and to expedite planning processes to facilitate this use.

Short-term funding

Federal funding has been uneven, with heavy investment in the 1960s and 1970s, withdrawal and transfer of responsibility to provincial governments in the 1990s, and more recently, new investments in the construction of affordable housing. Witnesses told the Committee that while the new money is welcome, a more coherent and strategic approach is important to meeting the housing needs of Canadians, especially for those with low incomes.

Federal housing programs need to accommodate a five-year development cycle and a 10-year planning cycle.

²²⁹ See, for example, Metro Vancouver, *Affordable Housing Strategy*, 2007, p. 9.

²³⁰ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, "Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative." http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/homelessness/surplus_federal/index.shtml. Accessed 15 August 2009.

²³¹ Canada Lands Company Limited, "Mandate and Values." <http://www.clc.ca/learn-more-about-clc/mandate-values>. Accessed 15 August 2009.

Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any coherency in the way that we do housing policy or housing programs in Canada. Certainly, there is nothing within the last 10 years that I could point to and say that this is the federal government's view on housing and the investments they are making are strategic in this particular way. Instead, a collection of programs has erupted as a result of political decisions and election campaigns. Some programs, like the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program, go back 35 years and continue to chug along. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy was announced in 1999. The dollar amounts that we get for that today are the same as we got 10 years ago.

There does not seem to be any coherent policy approach. There is little strategic approach on the issue of housing, and there is certainly no long-term thinking, so we bump along from here to there and from there to here.

(Sean Gadon, Director, Affordable Housing Office, City of Toronto, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 28 May 2009)

Another component of the lack of longer term thinking is short-term funding programs: the short-term nature of the funding creates severe constraints on the ability of government, not-for-profit agencies and their private-sector partners to actually deliver the units anticipated in funding announcements.

Leaders and representatives from the provincial and local levels, from the corporate, government and community sectors, and from across Canada have emphasized the importance of a longer funding commitment with respect to housing development. All have highlighted the importance of being able to plan, and of the duration of the development cycle, which only begins with the commitment of funds.

For example, the Government of Nova Scotia, in an appearance before the Committee, described the “holding pattern” that had resulted when several current programs were scheduled to expire, and called for long-term funding to support provincial housing development programs.²³² The Halifax Regional Municipality made a similar recommendation, calling for predictable as well as sustainable social housing funding from the federal level.²³³

Several local and provincial housing and homelessness strategies also recommended that any commitment of funds for housing development be over a longer period of time.²³⁴ Witnesses repeated the message to the Committee:

The amount of time that folks [at the municipal level] and community agencies have to spend around the country managing these on-again, off-again programs, let us get that predictable, ongoing sustainable funding so that we can spend all that energy innovating better client service and better service delivery.

(Phil Brown, General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, City of Toronto, representing Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009)

[W]e need to have a long-term, sustainable program. All across Canada we have suffered from the stop-go programs... [W]e wait for programs to be announced. They go for a certain period of time and then we do not know what the next

²³² David Ryan, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 August 2008.

²³³ Geri Kaiser, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 August 2008.

²³⁴ For examples, see *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* January 2008; City of Ottawa, *City Housing Strategy: 2007 to 2012*, September 2007, p. 39-40, http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/housing/housing_strategy/strategy_overview_en.html. Accessed 23 April 2009.

step will be. We have suffered from a development community in stop-go mode — gearing up and gearing down — which has been very dysfunctional.

(Jill Davidson, Assistant Director of Housing Policy, City of Vancouver, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 28 May 2009)

One witness told the Committee about Australia’s approach to funding social housing and homelessness programs, which gets around the short-term funding problems despite jurisdictional differences and complexities:

In [Australia’s] system — with their federal division of powers and housing — they essentially have a rolling four-year agreement called the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement that sets out a framework of conditions and principles under which the federal government will fund the housing and homeless area. Within that, there are specific outcome requirements that the states must deliver on and then the federal government gets out of the way and lets the states — provinces — get on with it.

The most successful approaches to providing affordable housing have been developed at the local level, and supported financially by the federal government.

(Steve Pomeroy, President, Focus Consulting Inc., Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009)

Recommendation 40

The Committee recommends that the federal government support the work of local and provincial non-profit housing developers by making housing programs longer term to accommodate five-year development cycles and ten-year planning cycles, and to permit more effective planning at the local and provincial levels.

Discrimination

The Committee heard repeated testimony, from all visible minority groups – newcomers, Aboriginal people, other long-time Canadians of colour – of discrimination from landlords in housing. While the discrimination is illegal, it is often not so explicit as to violate the non-discrimination clauses of human rights legislation. An example was provided by a witness:

[L]andlords check a person's credit rating before renting an apartment to them. New arrivals often have no way of providing a landlord with their credit rating. This applies to all new arrivals and not only to coloured women. And then, landlords want references. A landlord may not accept the references given by an immigrant. Things can get even more difficult if the landlord learns that the person is a refugee or that they are underemployed or precariously employed at two or three small jobs in different places. If a landlord asks for proof of income and the applicant can only provide a few nondescript pieces of paper, there is a systemic barrier.

(Roberto Jovel, Policy and Research Coordinator, Ontario Council of Immigrant Serving Agencies, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007)

The Committee recognizes that defending one’s rights before Human Rights Commissions or landlord-tenant tribunals provided for in provincial programs can present enormous challenges for the individuals affected by such discrimination. While criminal legal aid is understood to be essential to the protection of individuals interacting with the criminal justice system, the same recognition is not extended to civil legal aid.

Under the Canada Assistance Plan, which governed transfers to provinces for social assistance and social services prior to 1995, civil legal aid was explicitly identified as a service for which cost-sharing would be provided. Under the Canada Social Transfer, this explicit reference is lacking, which may contribute to less financial support from provincial governments.

Fighting discrimination in housing requires federal transfers for civil legal aid, which should be included in Canada Social Transfer purposes.

Recommendation 41

To assist tenants facing discrimination in housing, the Committee recommends the explicit identification of civil legal aid as an element to be supported by the Canada Social Transfer.

3.2 Promising practices

Place-based approaches

The arguments made above that favour a place-based approach with respect to poverty have their parallel in a housing context. The Committee heard testimony about the importance of both provincial and local particularities in housing policies and programs.

The Committee heard testimony, for example, on the role of local land-use policies in the supply of housing:

[T]here is increasing international evidence and Canadian evidence demonstrating that affordability is primarily caused by local and regional supply and demand factors rather than national factors. Factors affecting affordability vary completely even between provinces. Things such as resources, demographic change, population, increase in growth, income growth, physical climate, history, owner-to-renter ratios, urban-rural divide and, particularly, local land use policies all dictate considerable differences between cities, regions and provinces. This lack of uniformity creates different provincial priorities with respect to housing.

(David Snow, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009)

The Committee also heard from witnesses²³⁵ that a failure of federal housing programs in the past was their rigidity, and that better results would be achieved with more flexibility for provinces in designing their programs and policies.²³⁶

Citing the community-based solutions required in the federal government's homelessness programs, witnesses compared it to the more prescriptive nature of federal housing programs historically:

[I]f we go back and think about whether we have been successful in dealing with some issues of homelessness, we have been most successful when there was the ability for communities to take the funding available and to shape a plan that had to meet certain outcomes and targets. When everyone agreed those plans would work, they were funded on that basis, their determination of how they mix their resources together.

²³⁵ Diane Swinemar, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 3 May 2007.

²³⁶ Steve Pomeroy, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009.

In that sense, we go away from being prescriptive and saying, “This is the solution” — because that is ultimately what has always got us in trouble — towards being prescriptive about what outcomes we are looking for community by community.

(Derek Ballantyne, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007)

Even in calls for a national housing strategy (discussed in more detail below), witnesses have emphasized that it “needs to be informed by all the front-line experience, savviness and information we have as service providers.”²³⁷

Rights-based approaches

As noted above with respect to poverty, several witnesses cited the value and importance of considering housing and homelessness issues in the context of human rights commitments. For example, Section 7 of the Canadian Charter cites the right to “security of the person,” which is often argued to include shelter. Courts have not interpreted the section in precisely this way.

After the 1998 hearings, the UN Committee reviewing Canada’s performance with respect to the right to adequate housing, said it was “gravely concerned that such a wealthy country as Canada has allowed the problem of homelessness and inadequate housing to grow to such proportions that the mayors of Canada’s ten largest cities have now declared homelessness ‘a national disaster.’”²³⁸ The UN Committee specifically referred to a decrease in housing affordability, shortage of adequate housing for Aboriginal people, and cuts to social assistance.²³⁹

At the provincial level, housing is often specifically mentioned in human rights legislation. Manitoba’s *Human Rights Code*, for example, prohibits discrimination in the provision of employment, housing and services,²⁴⁰ and, as noted above, prohibits discrimination based on source of income, thereby providing some protection to social assistance recipients with respect to housing. Ontario’s human rights legislation provides protection against discrimination based on receipt of social assistance, but only with respect to housing.²⁴¹

Other provinces provide similar protection against discrimination with respect to housing, based on prohibited grounds of discrimination, which generally include sex, race, physical disability, and place or origin.

In a comparative article on human rights and housing, two Australian authors point out that the protections are only the beginning:

Needless to say, adopting the language of human rights to assert a claim to adequate housing is only the first, and perhaps the easiest, step. What must follow is the translation of this claim into laws and policies that will enable the

²³⁷ Tim Crooks, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007.

²³⁸ CESCR, Concluding observations: Canada, 10/12/98, E/C.12/1/Add.31, cited in Dan Nicholson, *The Human Right to Housing in Australia*, Victorian Council of Social Services, Shelter Victoria, Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, and Women’s Housing Ltd, 2004, p. 26.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Manitoba Human Rights Commission, “Housing Guidelines,”

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/hrc/english/publications/housing.html>. Accessed 14 April 2008.

²⁴¹ Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, “Ontario’s Human Rights Code,” in *Guide to Human Rights in Housing*, p. 2, <http://www.equalityrights.org/cera/docs/CERA%20-%20Overview%20of%20Code%20and%20HR%20in%20Housing%20-%20FINAL.doc>. Accessed 14 April 2008.

*enforcement of the right to adequate housing through legal and political mechanisms that hold governments accountable.*²⁴²

Their conclusions with respect to Australia may be equally applicable in Canadian jurisdictions:

*Recognition of the right to adequate housing as a 'right' that is concrete, realisable and enforceable will require concerted and coordinated local, national and international action to develop objective measures and standards pursuant to which implementation and progressive realisation can be measured. It will also require that courts and other complaints and dispute resolution bodies overcome their reluctance about economic and social rights adjudication and ... provide effective remedies for housing rights violations.*²⁴³

Witnesses and submissions cited the right to housing as a compelling argument for continued and increased investment in affordable housing in Canada.

A caring society has a responsibility to ensure that the basic human needs of all citizens are met, including the need for decent and appropriate shelter. From a legal perspective, Canada is a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, which affirms the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including housing.

(Phil Brown, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009)

Others described how a rights framework shifts the responsibility from the individual without affordable housing to the state and its commitment to ensuring that everyone has adequate and affordable housing:

The rights-based approach takes the housing question away from whether someone is sort of pathetic, whether their life is miserable and they deserve compassion and pity, and whether they are more pathetic than someone else who has been brought forward. It is the public pleading for some sort of benevolence on the part of government to simply say that this is a fundamental entitlement that all Canadians have, and recognize international law signed by Canada, and there is a fundamental obligation on the part of governments to ensure that right is realized. That does not necessarily mean building every stick of housing in the country, but to ensure that the people have access to housing.

(Michael Shapcott, Director of Community Engagement, Wellesley Institute Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009)

In his general observations following an October 2007 visit to Canada, the former Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing assigned by the United Nations Human Rights Council described the right to housing “as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living.” He identified breaches of both women’s and Aboriginals’ right to housing as well as a general federal government failure to provide “a properly funded national poverty reduction strategy” as a cause of the crisis of homelessness.²⁴⁴ The Rapporteur offered specific and wide-reaching recommendations, including a national housing strategy, a national poverty reduction strategy (both to be developed in conjunction

²⁴² Dianne Otto and Philip Lynch, “Housing, homelessness and human rights,” *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 2004, p. 3, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AJHR/2004/1.html>. Accessed 15 April 2008.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁴⁴ United Nations, “United Nations Expert on Adequate Housing Calls for Immediate Attention to Tackle National Housing Crisis in Canada,” Press Release, <http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/90995D69CE8153C3C1257387004F40B5?opendocument>. Accessed 18 October 2009.

with provincial and where appropriate municipal governments), and a National Aboriginal Housing Strategy.²⁴⁵

He also highlighted the value of rights-based approaches in meeting the needs of over-represented groups:

A rights-based approach would mean that the rights of the most vulnerable are looked at first. It would mean committing programs, policies and funding to the principle of non-retrogression, which means you cannot go back on past achievements that were there. It would mean adopting an indivisibility of a human rights approach. If people are compromising on their right to food because they have to pay too much for rent or a mortgage, that is not acceptable.

(Miloon Kothari, former Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, UN Housing Rights Council, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 8 May 2008)

Among over-represented groups, several made the case that respecting a rights-based approach would improve their situations. For example, the National Aboriginal Housing Association (NAHA) cited non-Aboriginal-specific human rights instruments as the root of the right to housing for all Aboriginal peoples:

NAHA takes the position that the right to housing for all aboriginal people is rooted in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 16, 1966 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and the conventions of the International Labour Organization that express social and economic rights, including a right to housing.²⁴⁶

The Committee has recommended greater recognition of Canada's international human rights obligations in the previous section of this report.

Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP)

The Committee heard both from witnesses and during site visits of the disturbingly low quality of most rental housing that was available in the private market, even at rents twice what social assistance provided for shelter. As noted above, when clients of agencies were asked what governments could do to make things better, most identified maintenance of property standards as a very high priority. While setting and enforcing property standards are clearly not in the federal jurisdiction, the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) has been an important contributor to the maintenance of both privately owned and rental accommodation across Canada.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has identified RRAP as a critical element in their national action plan on housing and homelessness:

The Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) is a proven vehicle to both help improve conditions in privately owned older properties and to control rents (the RRAP agreement is a de facto form of rent control as a quid-pro-quo for the RRAP loan).²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ National Aboriginal Housing Association, "A Time for Action: A National Action Plan to Address Aboriginal Housing." June 2009, p. 4.

²⁴⁷ Federation of Canadian Municipalities, "Sustaining the Momentum: Recommendations for a National Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, 23 January 2008, p. 14. <http://www.fcm.ca/CMFiles/hstrat1SSA-2242008-4643.pdf>. Accessed 28 August 2009.

Despite its demonstrated success, the program is always time-limited, requiring renewal every few years. Local housing strategies have identified the need to make it permanent.²⁴⁸ The Committee also heard of the importance of the program to maintaining the quality of housing for particularly disadvantaged groups:

[F]ederal government policies in the area of rental housing, especially of the Rental Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program ... will be crucial for what happens to the housing quality for Montreal's immigrant communities because they depend so much on private rental housing in the existing stock. We have a big problem with housing quality in Montreal, and it will get worse without those grants renewed.

(Damaris Rose, Professor, Urban and Social Geography, Institut national de la recherche scientifique, Centre Urbanisation Culture Société, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009)

At the same time, the Committee also learned that RRAP eligibility was sometimes constrained by the high costs of repairs in some urban centres, like Vancouver,²⁴⁹ while the FCM has recommended that it be extended to include costs associated with conversion of properties for rental accommodation for low-income households.²⁵⁰ Further, the rural poverty report released in 2008 also called for increases in the government's home repair programs, many part of RRAP, to contribute to poverty reduction in rural Canada as well, and a commitment of at least five years to the program.²⁵¹

Federal support for renovation of residential housing (owned or rented) is widely supported, but needs to be secure, rather than face possible non-renewal every few years.

Recommendation 42

The Committee recommends that the federal government extend the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program as a permanent program, increase the budget allocations for this program, and amend eligibility requirements to take into account differential costs for repairs in different communities across Canada, and projects converting housing units for affordable rental accommodation.

Affordable Housing Initiative

In 2001, federal and provincial/territorial housing ministers agreed to some broad principles that would underpin bilateral housing agreements for transfers of federal funds. Under the Affordable Housing Initiative, a first phase, announced in that year, was targeted to adding to the supply of rental housing, and to conversion and renovation, with per-unit federal contributions not to exceed \$25,000. A second phase, announced in 2003, permitted federal contributions of up to \$75,000 per unit, and was more clearly targeted to low-income people. Under this Initiative, provincial and territorial governments were required to match federal funds with their own spending. These agreements were extended, and targeted with new funding, to support the construction of affordable housing for seniors and persons with disabilities in Budget 2009.

²⁴⁸ For example, see City of Ottawa, *City Housing Strategy: 2007 to 2012*, pp. 39-40.

²⁴⁹ Metro Vancouver, *Affordable Housing Strategy*, 2007, p. 9.

²⁵⁰ FCM, *Sustaining the Momentum*, p. 14.

²⁵¹ Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Beyond Freefall*, p. 143.

Witnesses across the country, and individuals grappling with income and housing problems, told Committee members that social housing was the surest way to provide affordable housing in Canadian cities. The boost to these bilateral agreements with provincial governments in Budget 2009 was exactly what several of our witnesses recommended as an appropriate response to the economic crisis, especially in major cities.

Affordable housing makes economic sense. It provides a targeted stimulus to the construction industry. It is a way of ensuring that when we come out of the recession, we are better off than we were going in. There is an economic argument, a social argument and a sustainability argument for affordable housing.

(Roger Gibbins, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 2 April 2009)

Other witnesses reminded us of the human face of new social housing units:

This year, approximately 2,500 low-income residents in Toronto will get a new lease on life with the opening of 1,000 new affordable homes, made possible through federal investments from the affordable housing program.

(Sean Gadon, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 March 2008)

The Committee has made recommendations with respect to extension and expansion of these investments earlier in this section.

Housing trust funds

Trusts can be used by the Federal Government in order to respond to short-term priority issues for specific purposes by transferring money to a trustee (normally an independent financial institution) who holds the funds in trust for the provincial or territorial government who is the trust fund beneficiary/recipient for a set/short number of years.²⁵² Provinces and territories confirm their commitment to and understanding of the purposes of the trust in writing and in public announcements. Non-binding operating principles for the trusts make the provinces accountable to their residents about outcomes and how the funds have been spent.²⁵³

In 2006, the federal government created a three year Affordable Housing Trust to provide funding for the construction of affordable housing responding to shortages of affordable housing.²⁵⁴ Operating principles provided the provinces with great flexibility but suggested the provinces spend the funds on constructing new affordable rental units and increasing the supply of transitional and supportive housing.²⁵⁵ The operating principles stated that the trust money: "...is not intended to support ongoing operational funding for existing social housing stock, rent subsidies, or to replace provincial and territorial investment in affordable housing."²⁵⁶ Provinces were encouraged to report to their citizens and to acknowledge federal government contributions to housing built with funds from the Affordable Housing Trust.²⁵⁷

²⁵² Auditor General of Canada, *Report to the House of Commons*, December 2008, chapter 1, p. 11.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Department of Finance, *One-time Funding to Provinces and Territories*, 8 October 2006, http://www.fin.gc.ca/n06/data/06-048_1-eng.asp

²⁵⁵ Department of Finance, *Affordable Housing Trust Operating Principles*, 2006.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The Committee heard from departmental officials that the three housing trusts created in 2006, for affordable housing in general, for Northern housing, and for Aboriginal housing, as one-time allocations of \$800 million, \$300 million, and \$300 million respectively.²⁵⁸

The Committee noted that some witnesses questioned whether all funds under this program were reaching their intended target.²⁵⁹

[W]ith the last round of funding in trust funds, every province is coming up with its own list of programs and experimenting with a variety of things. Sometimes they hit the mark and probably spend their money, our money, quite wisely, and in other cases not at all. Those programs are not necessarily being evaluated. There is no requirement to evaluate them. The accountability framework is not back to the federal government, it is to their own constituents.

(Sharon Chisholm, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007)

The Committee has recommended an extension and expansion of these programs earlier in this section, and has recommendations relating to accountability in Section 6.

Supported home ownership

Home ownership has long been supported by the federal government, primarily through mortgage insurance offered by CMHC. One analyst argued that federal support, beginning as early as the 1940s, has helped maintain Canada's home ownership ratio at two-thirds. He continues:

Most of the history of the role of Canadian government housing policy and programs is therefore a history of efforts targeted at the ownership sector. There was never a policy of tenure neutrality – assisting owners and renters equally. The policy focus on ownership means that over the years, Canadian homeowners have been able to take advantage of various federal subsidy programs, such as the Assisted Home Ownership Program, the Canadian Homeownership Stimulation Plan, the Registered Homeownership Savings Plan, and the Mortgage Rate Protection Program.²⁶⁰

Policy benefits and considerations

There is a generally accepted view that ownership contributes to the stability of households and communities, better maintenance, and a higher quality of life.²⁶¹ Further, public policy is often built on the notion of a continuum with respect to shelter, from emergency shelters at one end, through transitional then rental accommodation to ownership as the best possible outcome.²⁶² Similarly, a result of a survey of households in Canada about their quality of life in towns or cities indicates that those with more education, those with higher incomes, and those who own rather than rent enjoy higher satisfaction ratings.²⁶³

At the same time, ownership is supported by the private sector, both as a way to support developers and builders, and as a way to minimize the public spending necessary to provide adequate affordable housing. For example, the Toronto Board of Trade, in its call for a national housing strategy,

²⁵⁸ Sharon Matthews, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 26 April 2007.

²⁵⁹ A discussion of accountability connected with intergovernmental transfers is included in Section 6.

²⁶⁰ J. David Hulchanski, *Canada's Dual Housing Policy*, p. 2.

²⁶¹ Duncan MacLennan, "Trunks, Tails and Elephants: The Economic Case for a Modern Housing Policy," p. 13; *4th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2008 Ratings for Major Urban Markets*, Frontier Centre for Public Policy, 2008, p. 2; City of Toronto, *Housing Opportunities Toronto 2008-2018*, 2008, p. 6.

²⁶² For an example, see *Housing First: An Investment with a Return in Prosperity*, Report of the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, March 2007, p. 13.

²⁶³ "National Overview of Findings from a National Survey on the Quality of Life in Canadian Communities," A Report to Infrastructure Canada (The Cities Secretariat), 2005, p. 26.

included affordable home ownership in programs to be supported;²⁶⁴ the same was true for Alberta's recent task force report on housing and homelessness.²⁶⁵

There have been several public policy goals that have been at the centre of affordable home ownership initiatives. These include macro-economic stimulation,²⁶⁶ neighbourhood revitalization,²⁶⁷ asset-building for low-income Canadians,²⁶⁸ and increased participation of women in the labour force.²⁶⁹ There is also an apparent assumption that home ownership is a good financial investment for families, even low-income households.²⁷⁰

There are also several policy considerations that come into play when determining whether and how to allocate funds to affordable ownership programs. For example, virtually all home ownership programs are accessible only to those with incomes sufficient to sustain even cost-reduced mortgages. In general, this means these programs serve the "best-off of the worst-off," in terms of income levels.²⁷¹

Nonetheless, the Committee has heard that some of the more vulnerable groups, including Aboriginal peoples, would benefit from support for home ownership:

[W]e cannot focus only on homelessness; we have to look also at home ownership and being able to have a place so that people do not have to be as mobile. We do have people who are doing all right and who are working well and earning a decent salary. However, there are still barriers for them to be able to own a home.

(Jocelyn Formsma, Program Officer, National Association of Friendship Centres, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007)

Although every province has some sort of supported home ownership program,²⁷² some question whether it is the best use of public dollars, in terms of supporting housing affordability, because of its limited beneficiary group.²⁷³ This becomes an even more important consideration as affordable rental units are lost.

²⁶⁴ Toronto Board of Trade, "Affordable, Available, Achievable: Practical Solutions to Affordable Housing Challenges," 2003, p. 10.

²⁶⁵ *Housing First*, p. 4.

²⁶⁶ Ian Skelton, Cheryl Selig and Lawrence Deane, *Social Housing, Neighbourhood Revitalization and Community Economic Development*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2006, p. 4.

²⁶⁷ Ian Skelton, et. al., "Understanding Housing and Neighbourhood Dynamics: An Analysis of Housing Strategies in the Daniel McIntyre and St. Matthews Neighbourhoods, Winnipeg," Understanding Housing and Neighbourhood Dynamics project report, 2006, p. 1; and T. Williams, "Canada-Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Agreement," *Affordable Housing Handbook: Affordable Housing Programs in the Halifax area*, Halifax Regional Municipality, 2005, p. 11.

²⁶⁸ *Housing Policy and Practice in the Context of Poverty and Exclusion – Synthesis Report*, Policy Research Initiative, 2005, p. 18.

²⁶⁹ Laura C. Johnson and Allison Ruddock, "Building Capacity: Enhancing Women's Economic Participation Through Housing," *Status of Women*, 2000, p. 87.

²⁷⁰ Michael Mendelson, "Building Assets Through Housing," Caledon Institute of Social Policy and Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2006, p. 36.

²⁷¹ *Housing Policy and Practice in the Context of Poverty and Exclusion* p. 18.

²⁷² Yvon Chouinard and Robert Gagnon, *Inventory of provincial and territorial housing programs in Canada*, Société d'habitation du Québec, 2007, p. 12.

²⁷³ For example, see Skelton, et. al., p. 7; Hulchanski, p.3.; and Mendelson (2006), p. 7.

Further, while some models of home ownership maintain some element of affordability by attaching conditions to resale timing and price, others do not. The latter group provides affordability assistance only to the first household to purchase the unit; the former group undermines the asset-building goal by constraining any increase in equity created by market forces.

Finally, some analysts have argued that favouring ownership over rental units favours the wealthy over the poor, encourages sprawl, and abandons some urban communities. Further, one detailed assessment of the financial costs and benefits of home ownership for low-income Canadians suggests that it may not be their wisest use of resources.²⁷⁴

Models of affordable ownership

There are almost as many models for providing affordable home ownership to low- and/or moderate-income households as there are programs. Many, but not all, involve governments at the municipal, provincial and/or federal levels, along with non-profit, real estate, building, and other organizations.

While supported home ownership rarely houses people who are low-income, it often makes the difference for moderate-income earners, and deserves on-going federal support

In communities with affordable, possibly run-down housing in inner city neighbourhoods, creative partnerships have been involved in purchasing and renovating houses, often at a reduced cost, and then in supporting low-income households to secure the necessary financing to purchase these houses. In some cases, these programs have managed to undertake their work with only an initial investment, and have not required on-going subsidies. This has changed in some communities, and can be expected to change in others, as the supply of such housing is reduced.

Examples include the Housing Ownership Partnership of Winnipeg, which receives funding from four sources: Manitoba Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Winnipeg Development Agreement Home Equity Program, Winnipeg Real Estate Board, and Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative.²⁷⁵ While in the past, costs could be recovered even with an affordable price on renovated housing units (between \$89,900 and \$139,900),²⁷⁶ this has become less possible with rising prices and costs. In order to maintain affordability to moderate-income households (with incomes not exceeding \$49,999), a subsidy of approximately \$10,000 per unit is now required.²⁷⁷

A similar example is the Home Ownership Affordability Partnership in Hamilton, Ontario. In this model, volunteer realtors work with a local institution providing training in the building trades, to ensure low-cost renovations and to provide a reality-based training opportunity to students.²⁷⁸ Purchasers are social assistance recipients, and are involved in finding, redesigning and renovating their homes, offering “sweat equity” and further reducing costs, with the result of a zero-down-

²⁷⁴ Mendelson (2006), p. 36.

²⁷⁵ Skelton, et. al., p. 10.

²⁷⁶ “Affordable Housing Ownership,” <http://www.zappiagroup.com/programs.php>. Accessed 19 October 2009.

²⁷⁷ “Housing Opportunity Partnership Fund – Winnipeg, Manitoba,” Case Study of Trust Funds, Canada Mortgage and Housing, http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/tore/afhoid/fite/hotrifu/hotrifu_006.cfm#full. Accessed 19 October 2009.

²⁷⁸ Information about this program is drawn from “Home Ownership Affordability Partnership,” Inform Hamilton, <http://www.inform.hamilton.ca/details.asp?RSN=70820&PrintMd=on&>. Accessed 19 October 2009.

payment mortgage. Partners in this program are REALTORS Association of Hamilton-Burlington (RAHB), City of Hamilton, Scotiabank, and Threshold School of Building.

In many cities, such housing is no longer available or affordable, and affordable ownership plans involve new construction, usually in condominium or stacked townhouse developments. Again, models vary.

A new-construction-based program is also offered by the Centretown Affordable Housing Development Corporation,²⁷⁹ which is a subsidiary of the Centretown Citizens (Ottawa) Corporation. This program operates without any government subsidies, and involves cross-subsidization of a proportion of units in a new development by the sale of the other units.

Vancity Enterprises in Vancouver has created a legal mechanism referred to as a 'resale control agreement' to ensure affordability housing to initial and subsequent homeowners of the units, which Vancity Enterprises builds with community partners.²⁸⁰ The agreement between purchasers and Vancity Enterprises stipulates a initial sale and resale price of 20% below market price of a comparable unit. The owner's equity increases over time exactly at market rates, and subsequent buyers get the same affordability: purchase at 20% below market. Vancity Enterprises uses building design, location and construction combined to create units that can be initially priced at 20% below market price while still being commercial viable for the community partners.

An agreement prevents owners from renting, ensuring that units are always owner occupied, except by special arrangement. No income test is required of the purchasers. The model has been replicated by Vancity Enterprise in other locations since the completion of the first project, Verdant at Simon Fraser University.

The Affordable New Home Development Foundation in Saskatchewan, a non-profit organization, provides education and support for would-be home owners with annual household incomes of \$52,000 or less. At this income level, few affordable options are available to first-time buyers. Those in this group, which includes low-income working families with two minimum-wage jobs, face a barrier of between \$70,000 and \$100,000, which is the gap between affordable payments on a 25-year or even a 40-year amortized mortgage and the average price of an entry-level home, about \$250,000.²⁸¹ This Foundation combines mechanisms to keep entry-level pricing low and finding ways to assist first-time buyers. Education about home ownership and financing options is an important component of this assistance.

Options for Homes,²⁸² a Toronto-based non-profit organization building affordable ownership units that the Committee visited, is described below.

While recognizing the valuable contribution made by these initiatives, the Committee also heard that these programs serve a relatively small part of the population:

²⁷⁹ Information about this program is drawn from the organization's website. <http://www.cahdco.ca/>. Accessed 19 October 2009.

²⁸⁰ Dan Paris, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 5 June 2008.

²⁸¹ Keith Hanson, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 5, June 2008,

²⁸² Information about this program is drawn from Options for Homes, *The Key to Home Ownership for Everyone: Frequently Asked Questions* 2002 and Sarah Barmak, "Affordable Housing: Making ownership an option" *Toronto Star*, 15 March 2008. <http://www.thestar.com/article/339512>. Accessed 19 October 2009.

The Government of Canada, through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, has different programs to assist those in need of decent, affordable housing. However, it becomes clear that when we consider the income level they must meet to qualify for assistance, they simply cannot afford to own a home.

(Clifford Lee, Mayor, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 18 August 2008)

The Committee commends the federal government for including affordable home ownership for low- and moderate-income households as an approach that can be funded under housing agreements with provinces. Further, the Committee believes that these models may be of benefit in other communities, and may be worthy of federal support for replication. A more detailed recommendation is provided in the final section of this report.

Housing allowances

Some witnesses have suggested that housing allowances, currently provided in some provinces, are an effective mechanism for increasing the affordability of rental housing. In particular, the Committee has learned that subsidies paid to individuals, based on income and real housing costs, is more effective and less expensive than subsidies negotiated to landlords.²⁸³ These allowances are also a quick solution to a problem:

Rent subsidies paid to individuals are the quickest way to make housing affordable, especially in communities with low vacancy rates

[I]nterventions can be made that are quicker [than building new housing]. For instance, one thing we have been piloting in Toronto over the last number of years is a housing allowance where a household that is paying over 50% of its income on housing would be eligible for rental assistance... [A] housing allowance recognizes that while the person may have a housing issue, he or she also has an income problem and that can be addressed. In the short term, where you have housing markets with vacancy rates, housing allowances can be quite effective.

(Sean Gadon, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 March 2008)

However, the Committee has heard that simply increasing rental allowances or subsidies paid to individuals outside the social assistance programs is not a simple solution:

If you increase the rental amount that you provide, the rents all go up to that amount as the minimum rate, and then other people living in poverty, the working poor, can end up having to pay more for their rent. It is a difficult problem for provincial governments to tackle.

(Aisling Gogan, Director, Poverty Reduction Strategy, Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 17 June 2007)

Among those supporting portable housing allowances that go to individuals is the Canadian Federation of Apartment Associations, which describes this concern as a myth, pointing to British Columbia, Manitoba and Quebec where such programs have existed as having avoided inflating rents “either for recipients or for the housing market as a whole.”²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Marion Steeles (2009), p. 5.

²⁸⁴ Canadian Federation of Apartment Associations, “Portable Housing Allowances – Facts and Recommendations,” September 2008, p. 3. http://www.cfaa-fcapi.org/pdf/CFAA_Portable_housing_allowances_facts_0809.pdf. Accessed 27 August 2009.

Recommendation 43

The Committee supports the use of rent supplements to provide faster access to affordable housing and recommends that the federal government, with provincial housing authorities, private landlords' associations and non-profit housing providers, assess the impact of portable housing allowances on rents.

Housing strategies

During the life of the Affordable Housing Initiative, many provincial governments have initiated provincial strategies with respect to housing. These strategies, combined with more local approaches, have been described in more detail in Appendix 4 to this report.

Many witnesses before the Committee have called for a national housing strategy,²⁸⁵ to be combined with a homelessness strategy, or to stand alone. While there have been varying components recommended for such a strategy, an inclusive description was offered by one witness:

[T]here is a role for the federal government, not just in providing money for five years and then go away. We are hoping it will be a partnership between all levels of government. It must come at the leadership of the federal government because this is a country-wide issue.

Mayor Anne Marie deCicco-Best

*A National Housing Strategy which focuses on a continuum of housing options from social housing to affordable home ownership will help families build for their futures while ensuring prospering communities.*²⁸⁶

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and several of its member cities have appeared before the Committee, presenting a detailed proposal with respect to the federal role in housing, including the development of a national housing strategy. In testimony before the Committee, an FCM representative was clear in her call for federal leadership over time:

[T]here is a role for the federal government, not just in providing money for five years and then go away. We are hoping it will be a partnership between all levels of government. It must come at the leadership of the federal government because this is a country-wide issue.

(Mayor Anne Marie deCicco-Best, Mayor of London, Ontario, representing Big Cities Mayors' Caucus, FCM, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 March 2009)

The Committee also heard, in testimony and during site visits, of the urgent need for a focus on affordable housing for urban Aboriginal populations. Several witnesses recommended a specific Aboriginal housing strategy, connected to or independent of a broader national housing strategy.²⁸⁷

The Committee recommends a national housing and homelessness strategy, with collaboration with all partners and a special focus on urban Aboriginal housing needs.

²⁸⁵ Examples include Anna Hunter, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 13 June 2007; Jan Donio, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 14 June 2007.

²⁸⁶ Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, "A National Poverty Reduction Strategy: Presentation to the Subcommittee on Cities", 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 3 June 2009, p. 5.

²⁸⁷ Miloon Kothari, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 8 May 2008; Verna Pawis Tabobondung, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007.

Such a strategy could dove-tail with another proposal put before the Committee: that the federal government pool the funds it currently devotes to housing, including RRAP and homelessness (addressed in greater detail in the next section):

We are suggesting that a comprehensive and coordinated housing program is required that pools the federal resources and resources from other partners. We suggest that there be a single proposal call every year that invites proposals to address the full range of housing need and opportunity — homeless services, renovation, capital projects, et cetera.

(Jill Davidson, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 28 May 2009)

Recommendation 44

The Committee recommends that the federal government, in collaboration with provincial governments, representatives of municipal governments, First Nation organizations, and other housing providers, develop a national housing and homelessness strategy to include:

- **priorities established by and for each provincial and territory with respect to meeting existing needs for affordable and secure housing;**
- **a 10-year commitment of funds from the federal government, to include similar commitments from provincial and territorial governments that will receive these funds;**
- **annual reporting on how the money is being spent, with particular attention to the number of people housed who could not afford to secure housing in the private market;**
- **a specific focus, with targets and funding commitments, with respect to meeting the needs for affordable housing for urban Aboriginal peoples;**
- **a simpler, more integrated application process for funds, cutting across programs related to housing funded at the federal level;**
- **the integration of the Homelessness Partnering Initiative, with an expanded mandate and budget to support combined local housing and homelessness plans and the initiatives identified in them; and**
- **a thorough evaluation at the end of the 10-year period to assess achievements and continuing gaps.**

Additional detailed recommendations with respect to homelessness are provided in the next section of this report.

Community responses

The Committee was particularly interested in housing options for people living in low income. As discussed earlier, community responses have the unique capacity to meet people where they are, offering a program or service tailor-made to individual needs. Subcommittee members were privileged to visit a variety of housing options for people living in low income. The Subcommittee members heard in these site visits, as they had in testimony, that housing is not affordable for those living in low income, especially those on social assistance. In the absence of the national housing and homelessness strategy recommended above, community responses are finding ways to fill in the gaps in the affordable housing market.

Subcommittee members conducted site visits to the following housing providers, each in their own way offering community-based options for affordable housing:

- Regent Park Revitalization,²⁸⁸ Toronto, Ontario
- Gabriel House Corporation, Regina, Saskatchewan
- Supportive Housing for Young Mothers,²⁸⁹ Halifax Nova, Scotia
- Options for Homes,²⁹⁰ Toronto, Ontario

Housing as a starting place

The Committee has heard that housing is often the best starting place, the base from which individuals can access the other services to escape disadvantage. This is certainly the case for the women who have found a home at the Supportive Housing for Young Mothers in Halifax, Nova Scotia. During the visit, Subcommittee members spoke with the women who live in this renovated school building: they were all teenage mothers who did not have adequate family support, many of whom have escaped abusive relationships. Housing with on-site support, including self-defined programs and regular community engagement gives the teen mothers confidence as people, as adults and as parents. They can stay for up to two years in this environment; this base helps them get stability in their lives and prepares them for the next stage into independence.

Social Housing

The Subcommittee visited Canada's oldest and largest publicly funded community: Regent Park in the eastern downtown area of Toronto. The community is in the midst of a complete revitalization. At the end of the 12-year project there will be little remaining of the 60-year-old neighbourhood, except the outer boundaries. That is a good thing as far as the residents are concerned. Committee members heard that what was conceived of as a 'garden city' became the cause of community isolation, as the large park areas became 'no man's land' home to drug deals, gang activity and crime.

The new Regent Park blends rather than isolates, on all levels, including mixed incomes among residents, commercial space combined with housing, and modern architecture alongside recreational space. Regent Park may become the new model for social housing in Canada; it certainly has already modernized the funding mechanisms for social housing projects, involving a variety of partners including private and commercial interests. The residents, although likely to be temporarily relocated during the construction, were convinced of the improvements the revitalization project would make to the neighbourhood. They reported that already youth and adults alike were more hopeful about the future.

Expiry of Operating Grants

As operating agreements for non-profit housing begin to expire, the Committee has heard that long-term affordability will be difficult to preserve. This is expected to be particularly acute for affordable housing stock in the urban Aboriginal portfolio. That message was heard by Subcommittee members during a site visit to Gabriel House in Regina. Gabriel Housing Corporation, a non-profit collaboration of six Métis groups in Saskatchewan, currently owns and operates 303 housing units. It is in part the operating grants that allow the organization to offer units for lower than market level rents. That will become more challenging as the subsidies expire. At the moment the difference between market rent and the rent charged by Gabriel Housing is as much as \$200 for some units. Affordability is not the only thing that this community-based organization delivers; one of its

²⁸⁸ Regent Park, Toronto Community Housing <http://www.torontohousing.ca/regentpark>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

²⁸⁹ Supportive Housing for Young Mothers <http://www.shym.ca/>. Accessed 7 August 2009.

²⁹⁰ Options for Homes <http://www.optionsforhomes.ca/>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

projects provides transitional housing for homeless women. As a community-based organization, Gabriel Housing can provide access to housing that is free from the discrimination that is faced by urban Aboriginal peoples from some private landlords.

Affordable Home Ownership

As described above and noted earlier in this report, there are a number of models for affordable home ownership. In Toronto, the Options for Homes model visited by Subcommittee members offers a ‘no frills’ approach to building design and location that helps to keep the initial purchase price lower than comparable units provided by other developers. While the units are affordable primarily to those who are ‘the best-off of the worst-off,’ they offer an opportunity for asset building to moderate income earners. Options for Homes management works with individual buyers in exploring all financing and funding options that might make the home affordable. The shared-equity second mortgage, financed through an Options for Homes affiliate is available to every buyer. Options for Homes is a not-for-profit corporation and functions as a private housing developer without government funding. However Committee members were encouraged by Options for Homes staff to recommend that federal policy instruments be used to make home ownership affordable for low-income people.

Section 4 – Homelessness

The most visible sign of the failure of our income security and housing systems and programs to meet the basic needs of individuals and families is homelessness. By definition, homelessness is difficult to measure, but witness after witness reported increases in demand for shelters and food banks, even among those who are employed.

As described by one witness, homelessness is not just a problem of failed public policies and programs: it is also “a bone-crushing, right-to-the-core experience of loss of all of those things that we value and believe to be so near and dear to us.”²⁹¹ A significant contributor to homelessness, as described in the previous section of this report, is the lack of affordable and secure housing in virtually every city in Canada. The Committee has learned, however, that there are other factors, particularly among those who are homeless over a long period of time, or several times, with only intermittent periods of being housed.

As described by one government witness before the Committee, homelessness in Canada has changed, and is more wide-reaching than before:

A range of social and economic factors contribute to multiple barriers and homelessness from marginalized populations, including persons with mental and physical disabilities, youth at risk, seniors, single parents, new immigrants and Aboriginal persons. The previous stereotype of the single, middle-aged man homeless on the street is an old stereotype. It is not only multi-faceted, it affects all aspects of our Canadian population.

(Bayla Kolk, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 26 April 2007)

4.1 Persistent problems

*It is our collective duty to apply rigorous critical analysis and action in an effort to bring about the changes needed to usher in a new world where homelessness is no longer a lived reality; any less in a country so rich is tantamount to failure.*²⁹²

Cost of homelessness

People should be pushed to do something simply out of humanity, but if you want to talk about money, it costs \$48,000 a year to leave someone on the street. It costs \$28,000 a year to house them. That argument has been around for a long time. It does not seem to make any difference.

(Kim Kerr, Evidence, Executive Director, Downtown Eastside Residents Association, Vancouver, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 13 June 2007)

In addition to a compelling moral argument, the economic arguments with respect to homelessness are even more persuasive. A rough estimate suggests Canadians are spending about \$1-billion a year in taxes to deal with the homelessness crisis.²⁹³ In part, these costs reflect the complexity of the lives

²⁹¹ Tim Crooks, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007.

²⁹² Marc Spooner, “Taking Stock, Taking Action 2009: Select Passages,” Submission to the Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, July 2009, p. 2.

²⁹³ “No Way Home,” Fifth Estate, CBC, March 2004. http://www.cbc.ca/fifth/main_nowayhome_cost.html. Accessed 24 February 2009.

of people who are homeless, intertwining health, social and family circumstances often contributing to a cycle of homelessness.

Making the economic argument for reducing or eliminating homelessness has focussed more on the relative costs of the status quo on the one hand, and the alternatives on the other. Although homelessness and poverty are almost always linked, most analysis with respect to homeless has compared the costs of providing emergency shelter and perhaps other homelessness-related services with the costs of other housing alternatives, including those that provide supports to people who are in need of more than housing. Others have looked only at non-housing costs associated with homelessness.

In addition to analyses provided to the Committee by shelter providers themselves, more scholarly analyses have also been done in Canada. In 2001, the British Columbia government commissioned a series of studies on homelessness, focussed on causes and effects. One of these studies reported on costs, based on case studies of people who were homeless at the time of the study, and those who had been homeless and were housed at the time of the study; for these individuals, the researchers considered use of a variety of services: health care, social services, criminal justice, and compared costs for study cases who were homeless with those for study cases who were housed.²⁹⁴

The study concluded, based on the experience of study participants, that costs for services for those who were homeless at the time of the study was 33% higher than for those who had been homeless but were then housed.²⁹⁵ The study also considered the shelter and housing costs for the two groups, and compared them. The study concluded:

When combined, the service and shelter costs of the homeless people in this study ranged from \$30,000 to \$40,000 on average per person for one year (including the costs of staying in an emergency shelter). The combined costs of services and housing for the housed individuals ranged from \$22,000 to \$28,000 per person per year, assuming they stayed in supportive housing.²⁹⁶

These results are represented graphically below. The author concluded:

“Focusing on reducing the use of costly government funded health care, criminal justice and social services through the provision of supportive housing for homeless people makes good sense from financial perspective.”²⁹⁷

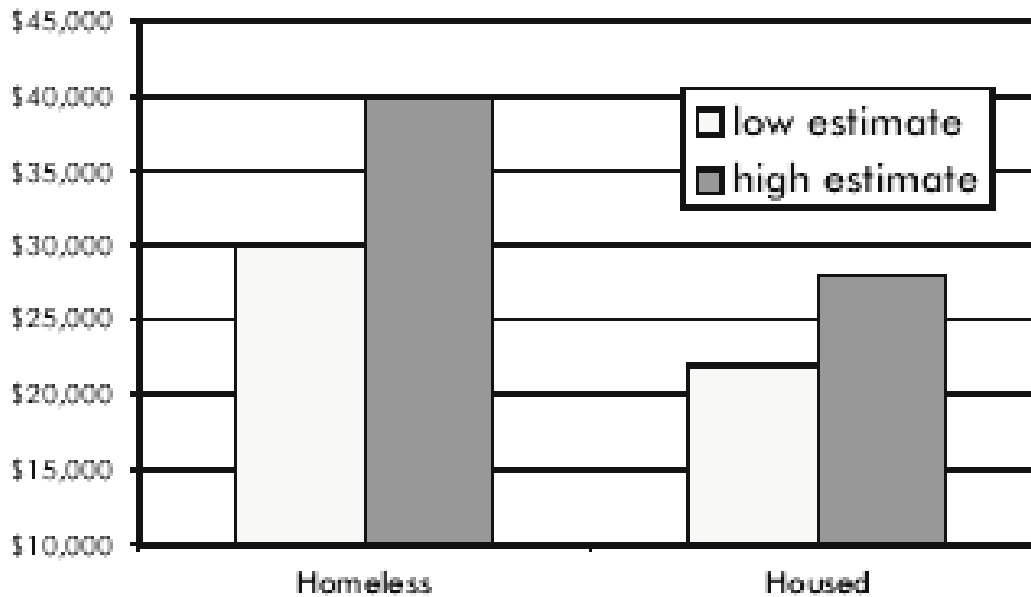
²⁹⁴ Margaret Eberle, et. al., *Homelessness: causes & effects - The Costs of Homelessness in British Columbia*, Volume 3, BC Ministry of Housing, 2001, p. 2. <http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/housing/docs/Vol3.pdf>. Accessed 19 October 2009.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

Figure 10 - Cost of homelessness versus cost of housing²⁹⁸



These per-capita costs have recently been applied to a National Homelessness Initiative estimation of 150,000 homeless in Canada, to arrive at a national cost of between \$4.5 and \$6 billion annually.²⁹⁹

A more recent BC study focussed on costs associated with the status quo for people with severe addiction and/or mental illness (SAMI), and the costs of an alternative approach. Extrapolating from calculations from other studies, this document considered the status quo costs based on costs of capital construction of facilities, operating costs for the provision of housing and residential support, and the costs of other social services “including health care, criminal justice (corrections institutions), and social services that are known to be affected by housing tenure.”³⁰⁰ The costs for the “ideal” alternative were also developed for comparison purposes.

This study, like many of the others cited in this paper, provides very detailed information about the calculations. As a final result, however, the study reported that the net cost of remaining with the status quo, compared to the costs of implementing the ideal configuration, was \$694.5 million annually for the absolutely homeless population. For the “at imminent risk” among British Columbians with severe addiction and/or mental illness, the net cost of the status quo over the proposed alternative is \$384.3 million per year.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁹⁹ Gordon Laird, 2007, p. 84.

³⁰⁰ Michelle Patterson and Julian Somers, *Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia*, Centre for Applied Research in *Mental Health & Addiction*, October 2007, p. 75. http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2007/Housing_Support_for_MHA_Adults.pdf. Accessed 19 October 2009.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

Recently, the province of Alberta has produced an affordable housing plan, and both Calgary and Edmonton have produced plans to eliminate or reduce homelessness in approximately 10 years. Research on costs predated these developments by several years.

In 2003, a paper outlining “societal costs” of homelessness in Calgary and Edmonton was released.³⁰² It based the costs of providing services based on survey results from 68 agencies providing services to homeless individuals and families. The study also calculated the capital costs of emergency shelter provision, based on then-recent data. Finally, the researchers estimated costs avoided, in the absence of homelessness, with respect to ancillary services, including health and criminal justice services. The researchers extrapolated from these costs a national annual cost of \$1.4 billion.³⁰³

Based on these data, and other US research, both Edmonton and Calgary issued plans with extrapolated costs. The Edmonton plan focussed more on costs, reporting the following:

- To provide emergency shelters for just 40% of the homeless population (as we do now), the cost of shelters alone would be more than \$54 million per year by 2018. By comparison, the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness estimates operating costs of \$90 million in 2018 to implement the 10-year plan.
- Shelters comprise just a fraction of the overall cost of homelessness, which includes frequent emergency room visits and ambulance trips, longer hospital stays, and police, court and incarceration costs.
- According to Alberta Health Services, health-care costs related to homelessness were \$33 million in 2008. Ambulance costs were \$4.7 million.³⁰⁴

In recent years, several cities have issued “report cards” and other analyses considering the current costs of sheltering or housing people who are homeless, sometimes compared to alternative approaches.

The following chart provides costs of various kinds of shelter and housing, from single-family apartments through group homes, detox, and prisons, in four Canadian cities: Halifax, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.³⁰⁵ It captures in one over-arching analysis the relative costs (and therefore savings) of each kind of shelter or housing, and demonstrates that prisons, psychiatric hospitals and emergency shelters are many times more costly than rental housing.

In Canada’s major cities, daily per-person costs for psychiatric hospital stays and even emergency shelters are many times more costly (in money terms alone) than the per-day per-person costs for permanent housing, even with supports.

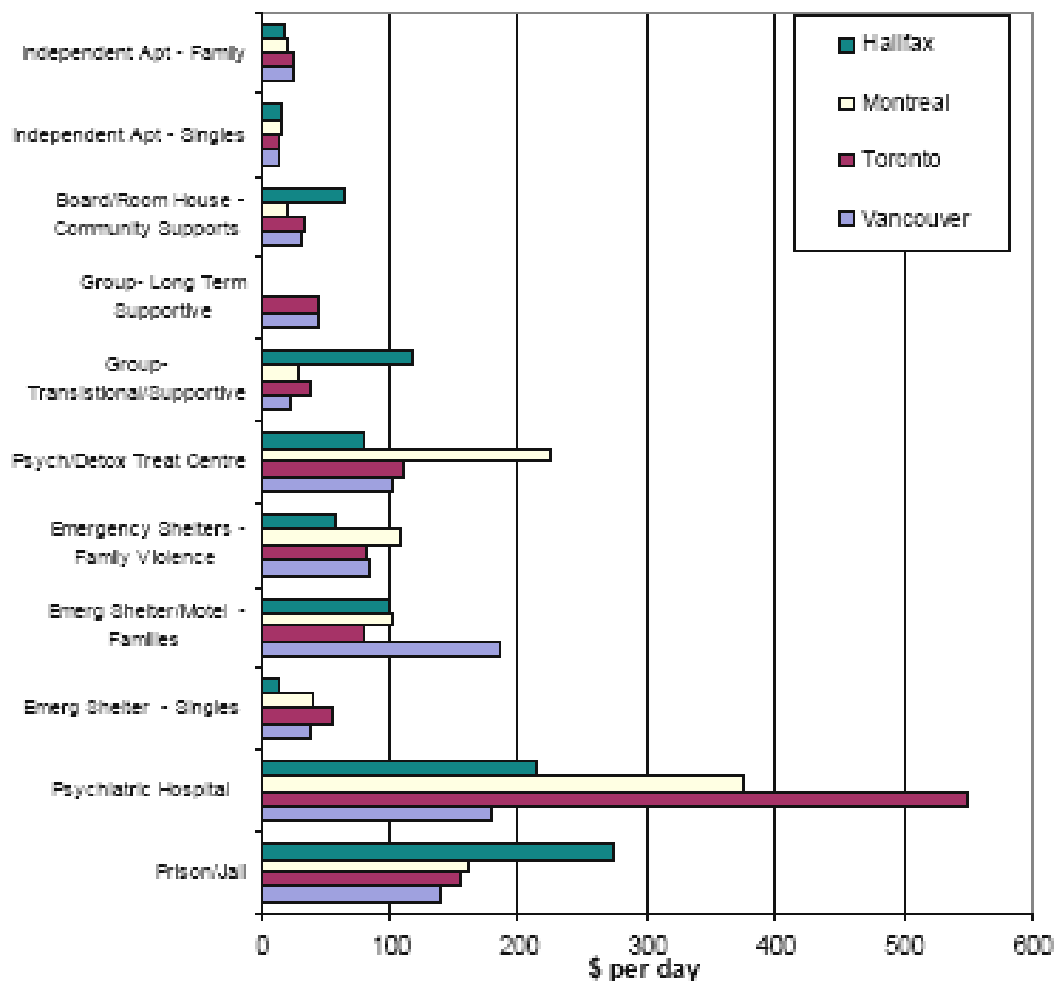
³⁰² “Societal Cost of Homelessness,” released for Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing and the Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2003.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Steve Pomeroy, “The Cost of Homelessness: Analysis of Alternate Responses in Four Canadian Cities,” National Secretariat on Homelessness, 2005, p. 19.

Figure 11 - Typical daily cost of various forms of shelter and housing



Similar, more specific studies of Waterloo³⁰⁶ and Ottawa, Ontario³⁰⁷ and Halifax, Nova Scotia,³⁰⁸ demonstrate comparable result.

The Committee also heard testimony that homeless individuals are more likely to use hospital services, including in-patient and emergency services, than others in Canada.³⁰⁹ In addition, the Committee heard testimony that not only would shelter costs be reduced, but additional benefits would accrue that would both save public funds and increase the quality of life for individuals and communities:

We could have a national housing program that would virtually eliminate homelessness. We could do that by building more places for people to live. That is an example of the case of housing — how providing adequate housing for people

³⁰⁶ Steve Pomeroy, "Pro-Active Versus Reactive Responses: The Business Case for a Housing Based Approach to Reduce Homelessness in the Region of Waterloo," Region of Waterloo, September 2007.

³⁰⁷ Steve Pomeroy and Brodie Berrigan, "Costs of Responding to Homelessness in Ottawa: Pro-Active versus Reactive Responses," City of Ottawa, October 2007.

³⁰⁸ Frank Palermo, et. al., "The Cost of Homelessness and the Value of Investment in Housing Support Services in the Halifax Regional Municipality," Cities & Environment Unit of Dalhousie University, June 2006.

³⁰⁹ Elizabeth Votta, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007.

could create savings in other areas. It would also create opportunities for cities to enhance the quality of life that all of their residents enjoy.

(Frances Abele, Professor, School of Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009)

As with the cost of poverty, the Committee was also reminded that communicating how investments in homelessness elimination would result in savings is important:

It should not be an insurmountable task to convince the public that failing to allocate resources to homelessness carries a far greater price, over the long term, than the cost of positive intervention over the short and medium terms.³¹⁰

Government programs investing in homelessness have been in existence for more than 10 years, but have been extended for periods of two to three years each time. The Committee believes this funding has been critical to understanding and working toward the elimination of homelessness across Canada, and believes that a longer term commitment is needed to offer communities the stable resources they need to reduce and work toward eliminating homelessness.

Recommendation 45

The Committee recommends that federal funding focussed on homelessness be sustained until a combined strategy on housing and homelessness is developed to guide federal investment.

Health and homelessness

While many individuals and families are homeless as a result of sudden and perhaps temporary drops in income or other circumstances, the Committee recognizes that many of Canada's homeless have more persistent problems that go beyond simple income inadequacy.

Income inadequacy is just one contributing factor to persistent homelessness. Others include mental health and addiction issues.

With the widespread closure of psychiatric institutions in Canada, many people with mental health issues were released into communities that were not resourced to meet their needs. This was commonly referred to as de-institutionalization. Now, several decades later, many people who would have been institutionalized are in homeless shelters and on the streets in communities, large and small, across Canada.

As individuals are released from psychiatric wards, even today, they move from hospital to streets and shelters. Canadian scholars have noted that "even well-run shelters are not appropriate places for recovery from mental illnesses."³¹¹

There is compelling research that people who are homeless need health treatment more frequently, as lack of access to preventive health services, nutritious food, and warm and safe accommodation often compromises their physical health. As even middle-class Canadians can have to search for

³¹⁰ Mark Spooner, p. 11.

³¹¹ Forchuk, C, et. al., "From psychiatric ward to the streets and shelters," *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 13 (3), 301–308, p. 301.

primary care physicians in some Canadian cities, for people who are homeless, such a resource is usually not available.³¹²

Witnesses before the Committee and clients of agencies Committee members visited identified health issues – especially mental health and addiction issues — as significant factors among those who are persistently homeless in Canadian cities. Local research in Ottawa also identified that while adults with children, mostly women, were likely to be homeless for economic reasons, a larger proportion of unattached women were likely to be homeless as a result of complex physical and mental health issues, while unattached men were more likely to be coping with addiction issues.³¹³ In more general terms, the correlation between homelessness and these health and addiction issues is evident:

Compared to the general population, various Canadian studies show higher prevalence levels of alcohol and substance abuse disorders, depressive disorders, psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, and both suicidal thoughts and attempts among the homeless.

(Elizabeth Votta, Program Lead, Reports and Analysis, Canadian Population Health Initiative, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007)

Witnesses from Statistics Canada provided new analyses that demonstrate that people living in shelters have significantly shorter life expectancies, even compared to people in the bottom quintile of income distribution who are housed.³¹⁴ There is a six-year difference in life expectancy between men who are homeless and those in the bottom quintile, which increases to a 13-year difference between homeless men and those in the top quintile of income distribution. The comparable differences for women are smaller, but still pronounced: four years and nine years respectively.³¹⁵

Poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancies are associated with homelessness, regardless of which comes first: homelessness or illness.

The Committee also had the opportunity to visit shelters and to hear from staff at shelters and health services within them. Several of the programs intended to support people, either on the streets, or in more permanent housing have been included in Appendix 3, focussing on promising practices.

One of the lines of exploration for the Committee was trying to determine the interrelationship between health problems (including mental health) and homelessness: which came first? A recent study released by Canadian Population Health Initiative identified gaps in knowledge about the causal relationships among mental health, mental illness and homelessness, having described how mental illness and homelessness could be cause or affect of the other. Interviews with 300 homeless youth in the US, Australia and Canada identified that one-quarter of the youth became homeless because of drug use, while one-quarter began using drugs after they became homeless.³¹⁶

³¹² Rebekah Peters, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007.

³¹³ Fran Klodawsky, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 4 June 2008.

³¹⁴ Russell Wilkins and Jillian Oderkirk, Submission to the Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 18 June 2009.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Mallett, Shelly, et. al. "Young people, drug use and family conflict: Pathways into homelessness," *Journal of Adolescence*, Volume 28, Issue 2, April 2005, pp. 185-199.

American studies have gone further, and suggested that symptoms of mental illness may be an effect of homelessness, rather than a cause. Similarly, US studies demonstrate that 30% of homeless participants in the research project had increased drug use after becoming homeless, suggesting substance abuse may also be an effect rather than a cause of homelessness.

Witnesses have also been hesitant to reach hard and fast conclusions:

The relationship between mental health and homelessness is complex. However, while it is not always clear what comes first, it is clear that many factors that affect patterns of health are also linked to determinants of homelessness. People with severe mental illness may experience limited housing, employment and income options. People who are homeless tend to report higher stress, lower self-worth, less social support and less effective coping strategies.

(Elizabeth Votta, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007)

What is clear to the Committee, however, is that health services provided to people who are homeless can be remarkably effective as prevention strategies, and that supports are an important part of the housing solution for people facing these physical and mental health challenges. The Committee commends the federal government for its investment in the Mental Health Commission and the pilot projects that will provide funding for and develop knowledge about effective supports for people who are mentally ill and homelessness. However, the Committee notes that there is no similar funding stream for agencies and communities to respond to the physical health needs of people who are homeless.

Federal support for community planning is a widely supported approach to reducing homelessness in Canadian cities.

Recommendation 46

The Committee recommends that the federal government, with provincial and territorial governments and health researchers across Canada, provide funding for physical health services for people who are homeless.

4.2 Promising practices

National Homelessness Initiative/Homelessness Partnering Strategy

The Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative and Homelessness Partnering Strategy have been widely praised and held up as a model for how the federal government can work with all stakeholders to tackle a problem in its local peculiarities. Most witnesses who addressed either homelessness in particular or approaches to local issues more generally flagged these programs as examples to be sustained and replicated in other areas.

The balance between national and community roles is very interesting, and we do have a program now through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, which replaces the National Homelessness Initiative. One of the excellent things about that program was that it put in place a community process. Communities across the country were forced to get together and decide how to tackle homelessness in their community.

(Deborah Kraus, Housing Policy and Research Consultant, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007)

Where we have seen a bit of a difference is around the national Homelessness Partnering Strategy, where there has been flexibility for local communities to help design what the community requires. There is some challenge around the shortness of that funding option, but it has allowed government, citizens, service providers and the development

community in Hamilton to come together and identify strategies for that whole continuum of social housing that is effective and relevant to our community. That is the type of solution we are looking for.

(Liz Weaver, Director, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 June 2009)

The Committee has been aware of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, and its effectiveness in mobilizing community engagement and in coordinating activity across 20 federal agencies, and other national stakeholders. The Committee has also heard that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) has played this role with greater or lesser authority, and is well positioned to play such a role formally in Canada.

The HPS is great framework. It is already in 61 communities. Relationships have been established with entities that are leaders at the local level. It is a great way to leverage and build on those relationships. You should definitely support the coordinating body across ministries.

(Alina Tanasescu, Manager of Research and Public Policy, Calgary Homeless Foundation, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009)

Recommendation 47

The Committee recommends that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy be expanded to play a greater coordinating role within the federal government, engaging all departments and agencies with a mandate that includes housing and homelessness, especially for those groups over-represented among those in need.

Homelessness Plans

One of the things that SCPI or the Homelessness Partnering Strategy has done is to bring players to the table that were not involved before. If you look at some of the homelessness tables around the country, foundations and private-sector people are involved. Local governments are definitely on board.

(Margaret Eberle, Housing Policy Consultant, Eberle Planning and Research, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009)

Building on the work begun in the development of plans under the National Homelessness Initiative, some communities have developed broader plans, focused on current resources and directing new ones strategically toward the elimination of homelessness. Also as noted above, these strategies often use a “housing first” approach, which necessarily means that homelessness plans and housing plans become one and the same. More detailed information on these strategies is provided in Appendix 4.

Both the work of these initiatives and the success of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness have inspired the Committee, and provide evidence that 10-year plans, developed with support from all sectors including government, are a strong contributor to local results.

Recommendation 48

The Committee recommends that the federal government provide financial incentives to encourage communities already supported through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to use a 10-year time horizon in adjusting and renewing their community plans.

The Committee heard from local housing officials of the value of bringing the homelessness stakeholders together, and proposed that this approach could be expanded to address housing and

homelessly in a more integrated way.³¹⁷ As noted in Appendix 4, which describes local housing and homelessness strategies, many cities have introduced both; however, only the homelessness plan would need to include other stakeholders in order to receive funding.

The Committee supports integrated approaches and engaging all appropriate stakeholders in the development and implementation of any local plans, having seen evidence of the success that can result. A recommendation to this effect has been included in the proposed national housing and homelessness strategy, in the previous section of this report.

Housing First

[Housing] practitioners used to think that clients had to be clean and sober before getting housing. The result was that many clients became homeless. Some agencies came to believe that housing needs to come first — before treatment or regardless of treatment. This is the essence of housing first. Housing First is defined as the direct provision of permanent housing to people who are homeless. But it is not just housing. Central to this idea is that clients will receive the services they need and want.

(Deborah Kraus, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007)

The Committee has heard of the evolution of approaches to homelessness from one of a continuum of housing, which would provide transition stages between homelessness and permanent housing, sometimes including detoxification or medical treatment for mental health problems, to the current practice of “housing first.” This approach is based on the understanding that secure housing is the most important foundation on which other stabilizing activities can be based.

Housing first – moving people from the street into secure affordable housing before addressing other issues they may have – has proven to be highly effective.

Witnesses and agency staff during site visits have emphasized the importance of “starting where people are,” and supporting them there, rather than requiring changes in health or addiction status as prerequisites to housing and related supports. A submission from one expert described housing first as a human rights-based approach,³¹⁸ while another expert on mental health and homelessness testified of the effectiveness of this approach:

Research shows that some housing programs, such as those with a housing first approach, are effective at helping the homeless achieve stable housing. Housing First approaches provide clients with housing first and then any necessary training or treatment they may require, on a voluntary basis.

(Elizabeth Votta, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007)

At a more local level, the Committee heard of the great success of housing first initiatives:

At the end of that [Halifax] study, the estimate was that there is a 40%, on average, cost saving from a housing First strategy that provides supportive housing as opposed to the absence of that and trying to deal with it through our traditional mechanisms.

(Tim Crooks, Executive Director, Phoenix Youth Programs, Halifax, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007)

³¹⁷ Sean Gaden and Jill Davidson, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 28 May 2009.

³¹⁸ Marc Spooner, “Taking Stock, Taking Action 2009: Selected Passages,” Submission, SAST, 29 July 2009, p. 5.

The Committee commends the federal government for encouraging a “housing first” approach in its recent extension to funding programs on homelessness, and recognizes the need for a continued investment.

Recommendation 49

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue to provide direct funding for and continued support of related research and knowledge dissemination about a “housing first” approach to eliminating homelessness.

Community responses

The Subcommittee has heard about the prevalence, the costs and the complex relationship of mental health, addictions and homelessness. The organizations and the people that we met during site visits were living this reality. As noted above, the Committee heard evidence that people who are homeless, particularly those who are persistently homeless, are more likely to be suffering from mental health or addiction abuse disorders. Subcommittee members were privileged to have discussions with the staff, volunteers and clients at homeless shelters, shelters that play a vital role in modifying the risks of homelessness.

Communities have responded to people who are homeless with a wide range of programs, each responding to the needs of a particular population, including youth and people with mental health issues.

Subcommittee members saw, during site visits, that there was a lot more offered than simple shelter. Services were sometimes targeted at a specific group or were otherwise focused, but in all cases it was the depth and breadth of service that impressed us. Subcommittee members participated in fact-finding site visits to these organizations that serve the homeless:

- Housing Support Centre, Metro Non-Profit Housing Association³¹⁹ - Halifax, Nova Scotia
- Lookout Emergency Aid Society³²⁰ - Vancouver, British Columbia.
- Boyle Street Community Services Co-op³²¹ - Edmonton, Alberta
- Sage House³²² - Winnipeg, Manitoba
- Building Futures³²³ - Winnipeg, Manitoba
- L’Abri en Ville³²⁴ - Montreal, Quebec
- Youth Emergency Shelter Society³²⁵ - Edmonton, Alberta
- Avenue 15 and RADAR³²⁶ - Calgary, Alberta
- WoodGreen Community Services, Homeward Bound Program³²⁷ - Toronto, Ontario

³¹⁹ Metro Non-Profit Housing Association, Housing Support Centre

http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/mnpha/support_centre.html. Accessed 10 August 2009.

³²⁰ Lookout Emergency Aid Society <http://www.lookoutsociety.bc.ca/>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

³²¹ Boyle Street Community Services Co-op <http://icaf.ca/boylestcoop.html>. Accessed 6 July 2009.

³²² Sage House, a program of Mount Carmel Clinic, <http://www.mountcarmel.ca/>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

³²³ Siloam Mission, Building Futures program http://www.siloam.ca/building_futures.html. Accessed 7 August 2009.

³²⁴ L’Abri en Ville <http://www.labrienville.org/homepage.html>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

³²⁵ Youth Emergency Shelter Society <http://www.yess.org/cgi-bin/news/news.pl>. Accessed 28 August 2009.

³²⁶ Boys and Girls Club of Calgary <http://www.boysandgirlsclubsofcalgary.ca/programs/shelter-and-outreach/avenue-15.html>. Accessed 28 August 2009.

In all locations, we were told stories of lives that included mental health problems, addictions, physical challenges and incarceration, frequently all combined in one life story. The attachment of these individuals to the organization appeared to be based in the sense of safety once inside the shelter doors. Such security would appear to have been rare in their lives; gaining access to space in the shelter was highly valued. These shelters offered space to everyone coming through their doors. People were greeted as they were.

A staff member at one shelter described their services as going beyond ‘three hots and a cot’, referring to basic food and shelter, to offer ‘three hots and a cot’ *plus*. The plus, in the opinion of the commentator, could be any other service that helped to make a personal connection in the context of the mental and physical health issues faced by homeless people. The connection could significantly reduce dire outcomes for the persistently homeless.³²⁸ The kind of services that we saw included connection to addictions counselling, housing including transitional or supportive housing, access to mental health or social workers, or participation in addiction harm prevention programs.

Emergency Shelters

Some shelters visited offered assistance and support to those who continued to live homeless, while others offered more stable living arrangements to people transitioning from homelessness to housing, often with support. This made it possible for a homeless person to establish a connection with the organization while still homeless and then get support from the same people during a transition.

Lookout Emergency Aid Society is located in the downtown eastside of Vancouver. The shelter began over 25 years ago with the thought that service would be needed only temporarily. Since that time it has expanded and added services and still responds 365 days a year, 24 hours a day to those who need emergency shelter. Everyone is welcome.

In discussion with shelter users, Subcommittee members heard that the ‘wrap-around’ services were vital. Lookout staff described what they offer as a safety net of last resort for people who had been unable to cope in any other shelter. They explained that an important feature of their model was offering emergency shelter in semi-private rooms rather than dorm style; pets and shopping carts could be accommodated.

Boyle Street Community Services Co-op in Edmonton’s inner city similarly accepts everyone who walks through its doors. A wide range of services are offered on a drop-in basis during the day only; no shelter beds are available here. However just about every other form of support is available to those who drop in. Boyle Street has been actively working to house some of their clients, based on a housing first model, by partnering with local private landlords. By collaborating with many other community-based services, Boyle Street was able to support to a wide variety of clients, young and older. Many of Boyle Street’s clients face multiple barriers of addiction, mental and physical health issues. Subcommittee members could see evidence of the strong connection made between the centre’s staff and community members during a group discussion.

At the site visit to the Housing Support Centre in Halifax, Subcommittee members heard that about 100 people come every day for coffee and company. Originally the plan of the organization was to

³²⁷ WoodGreen Community Services <http://www.woodgreen.org/about/whoarewe.html>. Accessed 29 July 2009.

³²⁸ See Russell Wilkins and Jillian Oderkirk, Submission to the Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 18 June 2009 for data on life expectancy and the homeless.

help those who came to the drop-in centre to find affordable housing. However, it turned out that the drop-in itself provided much-needed comfort to its clients, most of whom were homeless. While the clients could get information and support from the Centre's support workers, the primary benefit was their chance to socialize in a safe supportive environment, helping to alleviate social isolation. A place of stability and support was offered to all. From this place, there has also grown the Shining Lights Choir, a performing choir of about 30 homeless people with three recordings to its credit.

Subcommittee members met a group of workers and volunteers at Sage House, in Winnipeg. Sage House provides support and services to those particularly vulnerable among the homeless population: street sex-trade workers. Sage House gives them access to day-time shelter, a shower, a meal, somebody to talk to, more specialized supports. The Subcommittee heard about the experiences of these women and transgendered individuals with living on the street, prostitution and drug use. We heard that for at least some of them, drug use came after homelessness; drugs, they told us, were what they use to stay warm, stay awake, and stay alive. Their connection with the staff and support workers at Sage House is a life line for them, and again in this setting, people are accepted as they are, where they are and are given support without judgement.

Paths out of homelessness

While the shelters that the Subcommittee visited offered a variety of supports and pathways out of homelessness, we spent time with two organizations that offer a different kind of approach: the program is for a more limited number of individuals and is accompanied by intensive one-on-one support.

In Winnipeg, Subcommittee members visited Building Futures. Just over a year since its inception, this program provides what might be termed an 'employment-first' opportunity. Homeless people are offered a job in the woodworking shop. During their employment, expected to be for about one year, they get a lot of training with the equipment to develop skills in fine wood-working and personal support within the work space; in return, they are expected to maintain regular hours and good quality work. The six employees, all men so far although women are welcome to participate, receive minimum wage and work full-time hours. In discussion, Subcommittee members heard that the living arrangements of these men are less stable than their work lives at the moment, but that they perceive this work-based program as a positive step toward transitioning out of homelessness.

L'Abri en Ville in Montreal provides supportive housing specifically for people with a mental illness, shared affordable housing with intensive support. The program, which has been operating for more than a decade, supports 30 residents in 10 three-bedroom apartments. Roommates are carefully selected with a view to compatibility, and each group of apartment mates is supported by a small team of dedicated volunteers. The team works with the apartment residents to provide general support, which might include grocery shopping or bill payment, or access to more specialized care. The volunteers and the staff of L'Abri work together to engage the residents in L'Abri-centred and more general community activities. While program participants are geographically dispersed, they function as a community of support to each other. Their camaraderie was evident in our discussions.

Subcommittee members were particularly interested in the potential to replicate this model, as it has the qualities that could make replication possible: clearly definable program elements, a need that is

likely to occur elsewhere, and a track record of effectiveness.³²⁹ L'Abri staff were able to tell Subcommittee members of their own experience with groups that wish to replicate the model in other cities. Further discussion and recommendations relating to fostering replication efforts appear in Section 6 of this report.

Homeless Youth

Youth are a distinct group among the homeless and Subcommittee members also visited shelters for homeless youth. Here the clients were as young as 12 years old. Subcommittee members had heard that some very young people were homeless, choosing the streets as a safer environment than their homes. The organizations that serve the younger people spoke with urgency about their attempts to get teens off the street before they became 'street-involved' or engaged in street-based activities of gangs, drugs and crime. In discussion, we heard that young people do not feel safe at shelters for adults: their issues are often different and their paths out of homelessness are likely to be different too. The shelters for youth visited by Subcommittee members offered basic emergency shelter plus support and a more intensive connection intended to provide a path out of homelessness. Subcommittee members met youth aged 16 years who said that they had already been homeless for years.

Edmonton's Youth Emergency Shelter Society (YESS) gives shelter to homeless youth nightly but also encourages them to take a spot in the supportive housing beds. In the part of the building providing supportive housing, there are more rules about behaviour, but there is also more help to achieve goals such as high school graduation. Young people themselves explained to Subcommittee members that after living on the street for a while, ordinary parenting is not going to work for them. While the intent of the program is to encourage youth to take a different path, into education, work and stabilized living arrangements, we were advised that it cannot be done by controlling their lives. YESS staff created a positive home-like environment from which their young clients could transition into independent living. Allowing youth to cycle through the stages, often more than once, is critical to the organization's success, Committee members were told. That, in part, describes the alternative form of 'parenting' offered by Youth Emergency Shelter Society programs.

Avenue 15 in Calgary offers similar stages through which youth can progress at their own pace, as they are ready to take on more responsibility and when they are ready to adhere to more rules. In this model, Subcommittee members heard, more rules are accompanied by more privileges. In discussion we heard that there are many reasons why youth become homeless. Avenue 15 begins with supporting attempts for family reunification, and will provide steps toward stable alternative living when reunification is not possible. While youth try to stabilize their lives, we heard that the shelter gives them a family-like setting helping them to develop relationships, support and obligations among the members of the 'household' in a shared home-like space.

WoodGreen in Toronto has developed one of the more comprehensive packages of support for young mothers who have been living in shelters. Women accepted into the program are offered housing, education, child care and counselling support all in the same location. They create a community with the other women in the program and support each other as they grow to be confident parents while getting a college diploma. It is hard work and it is not for everyone, program participants told Subcommittee members. The women we spoke to said that many of their friends in similar situations had declined the offer to participate.

³²⁹ Geri Summerville, *Laying a Solid Foundation: Strategies for Effective Program Replication*, Public/Private Ventures, 2009. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/298_publication.pdf. Accessed 17 September 2009.

Going further than other programs we visited that offer “wrap-around services,” this might be more appropriately described as service that ‘clings’, by making all the basics easily accessible and giving emotional and academic support as these women move out of homelessness and into a sustainable job with a salary that will support their family, within three years.

The Subcommittee learned that the achieving success with homeless youth and supporting homeless adults as they transition takes intensive attention, adaptability and devotion. The Subcommittee is left in awe of the quality of the staff, volunteers and those homeless people who we have had the pleasure to meet.

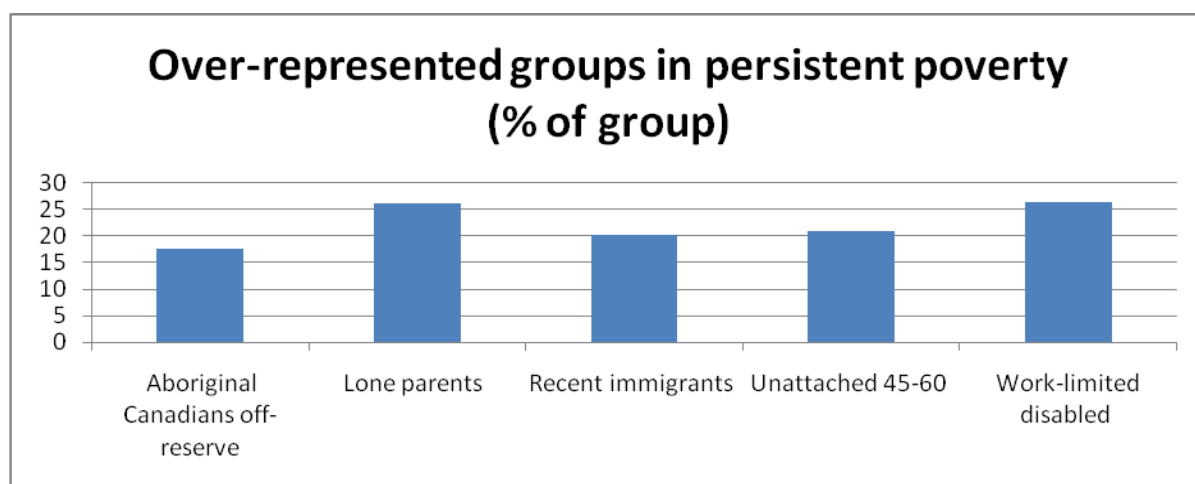
Section 5 - Over-represented groups

As noted above, some groups identified by the Croll report as over-represented among the poor have benefitted from improved income security programs, most notably seniors. Others identified by Croll continue to be over-represented: Aboriginal peoples, lone parents (mostly women), some newcomers to Canada and people with disabilities. Finally, one new group has emerged as over-represented: unattached adults, especially between the ages of 45 and 65. Within these four groups, people are not only more likely to be poor; they are also more likely to be poor over longer periods of time.³³⁰

While this report addresses the issues facing all Canadians who have low incomes, and who are therefore often challenged by housing affordability issues and are more likely to find themselves homeless, the Committee also wished to address the particular situations and concerns of these groups, and to identify specific solutions, wherever possible.

While witnesses have reminded the Committee that reductions in the social safety net affect all vulnerable Canadians, some rely more heavily on these services and programs than others. In addition, the Committee heard from witnesses, for example, of the importance of highlighting the particular marginalization experienced by some of these groups – most notably Aboriginal peoples and some recent immigrants. The figure below illustrates the disproportionate poverty rates among these groups.

Figure 12 - Percentage of population aged 18-60 in 2002 experiencing persistent low income between 2002 and 2006³³¹



³³⁰ Dominique Fleury, *A Study of Poverty and Working Poverty among Recent Immigrants to Canada*, HRSDC, 2007, p. 1.

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications_resources/research/categories/inclusion/2007/sp_680_05_07_e/sp_680_05_07e.pdf. Accessed 19 October 2009.

³³¹ Based on data in Table 6A, HRSDC, "Low Income in Canada: 2000-2006 Using the Market Basket Measure – Final Report," October 2008, p. 25.

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications_resources/research/categories/inclusion/2008/sp-864-10-2008/sp_864_10_08e.pdf. Accessed 30 August 2009.

While this report has covered disproportionate impacts on these groups of initiatives, programs and policies targeted more generally, this section provides more information about these groups and their current status, and examines persistent problems and promising practices for programs specific to three of the groups: recent immigrants (and refugee claimants), Aboriginal peoples, and persons with disabilities.

Not all Canadians have the same risk of poverty and housing insecurity: people with disabilities, urban Aboriginal peoples, unattached adults, lone parents and some immigrants are more likely to have the problems, and they are likely to last longer than for others in Canada.

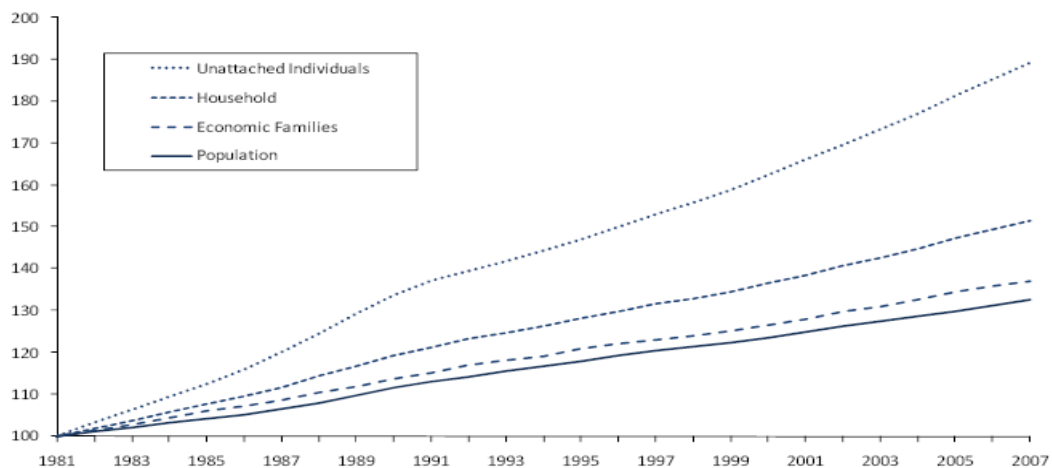
5.1 Unattached individuals

Snapshot

As noted above, unattached older working-age individuals were not identified among the groups with the highest incidence of poverty in the Croll Report in 1970. As the figure below demonstrates, the number of unattached individuals has increased significantly since 1980, even relative to economic families which include households of more than one person related by blood or marriage. Between 1980 and 2006, the number of non-elderly (i.e., 18 to 64 years of age) unattached individuals living in low income rose from 530,000 to 1.18 million.³³² In 2005, non-elderly unattached individuals accounted for 35% of all Canadians living in low income, while they represented only 11% of the Canadian population.³³³

More than one in three unattached people under the age of 65 have lived with low incomes in Canada over several years.

Figure 13 - Growth in population, number of households, unattached individuals and economic families Index (1981 = 100), 1981-2007³³⁴



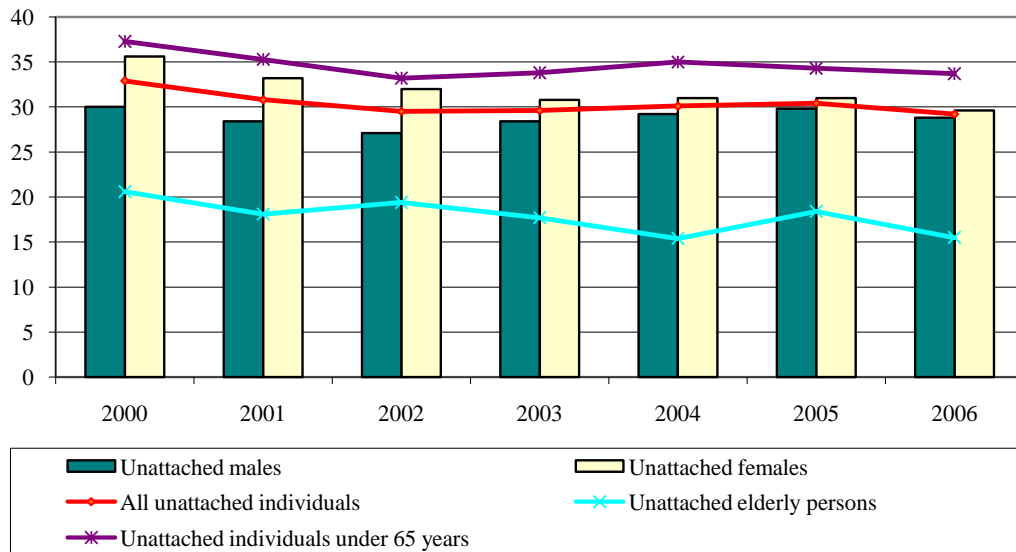
³³² Statistics Canada CANSIM Table 202-0802.

³³³ Yan Feng, Sangita Dubey and Bradley Brooks, *Persistence of Low Income among Non-elderly Unattached Individuals*, Income Research Paper Series, Statistics Canada, June 2007, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-bin/af-fdr.cgi?l=eng&loc=/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2007005-eng.pdf>. Accessed 2 December 2009.

³³⁴ Andrew Sharpe and Jean-Francois Arsenault, *Living Standards*, Institute of Well-being, 2009, p. 34.

Since 2000, the gap between the percentage of unattached males and females in low income has converged. In 2006, 28.8% of unattached males lived in low income, compared with 29.6% of unattached females. In 2000, this gap was more than five percentage points, where 30% of unattached men and 35.6% of unattached women lived in low income. In 2005, the gap between the percentage of unattached elderly men and women was almost seven percentage points. In 2006, the gap had significantly narrowed, with 14% of unattached elderly men and 16.1% of unattached elderly women living in low income.

Figure 14 - Percentage of unattached individuals in low income (After Tax LICOs) 2000–2006³³⁵

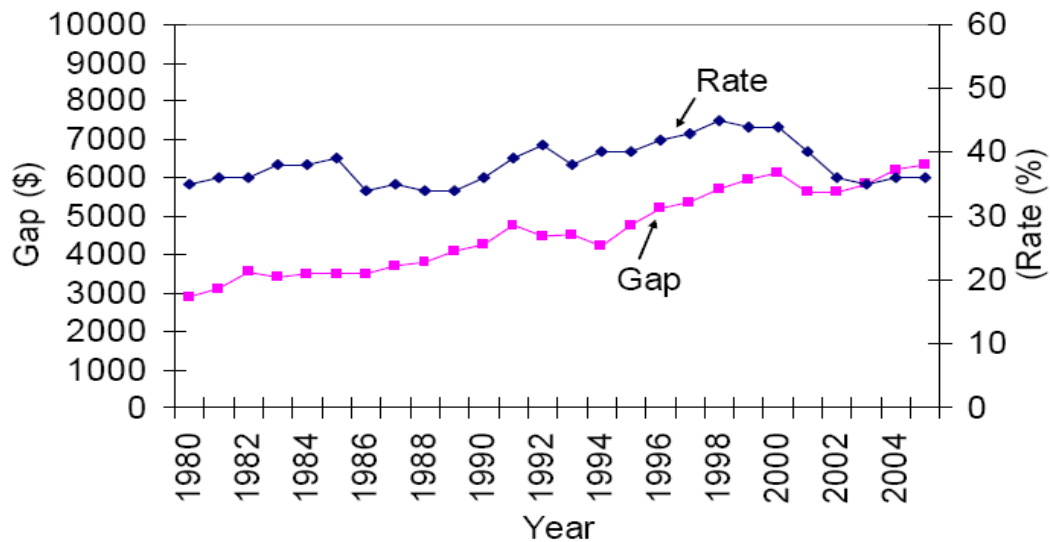


Narrowing the focus to unattached individuals between the ages of 45 and 64, one recent analysis put the low-income rate (based on the Market Basket Measure) for these individuals at more than one in three in 2004.³³⁶ Statistics Canada data also demonstrate the persistence of high levels of poverty among unattached individuals in this age group, and the growing gap between their incomes and the income needed to bring them above the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) line.

³³⁵ Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 202-0802 and the Library of Parliament.

³³⁶ Nathan Laurie, *The Cost of Poverty: An Analysis of the Economic Cost of Poverty in Ontario*, Ontario Association of Food Banks, November 2008, p. 28.

Figure 15 - Unattached individuals 45-64, rate and gap³³⁷



As noted by a witness before the Committee, this is the group that is often not covered by existing targeted programs:

Many government responses to poverty, for good reasons, are focused on families and especially families with children, but single people, and in particular older single people — not seniors, but those in the 55- to 64-year-old age group — are most vulnerable to poverty because they do not yet qualify for Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security. If you are single and in that age group, there is unfortunately a high likelihood that you will be living in poverty.

(Aisling Gogan, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 17 May 2007)

The Committee has noted that with the exception of the level of benefits established under various public programs, there are no particular programs or policies, promising or problematic, targeted to this population group. However, the recommendations with respect to establishing an income floor at the LICO level for combined income security programs and changes to EI to benefit older workers in earlier sections of this report would support unattached individuals.

5.2 Persons with disabilities

Snapshot

During this study, the Committee came to understand that disability may mean a sensory or motor impairment caused by a physiological condition, and that it might mean reduced capacity due to mental illness and/or severe addiction.³³⁸ Building upon the work of this Committee’s landmark study on mental health, tabled in May 2006, the Committee has paid particular attention to the role

³³⁷ G. Picot and S. Michaud, “Low Income in Canada, 1980 to 2006,” Presentation, Statistics Canada, August 2008.

³³⁸ The overlap between mental health and addiction was described in more detail in SAST, *Out of the Shadows at Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada*, Final Report, May 2006, pp. 37-38.

<http://parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/soci-e/rep-e/pdf/rep02may06part1-e.pdf>. Accessed 10 August 2009.

of mental illness in poverty, housing and homelessness, and the impact of these issues in terms of emerging or exacerbated mental illness. That report highlighted the correlation of homelessness in particular to mental illness alone, and in combination with other disorders: "... somewhere between 30% and 40% of homeless people have mental health problems, and that 20 to 25% are living with concurrent disorders, that is, with both mental health problems and addictions."³³⁹

In a submission to the Committee in response to our *Issues and Options* paper, the Canadian Mental Health Association made a similar case with respect to mental illness and poverty:

*In Canada, the mentally ill constitute a disproportionate percentage of persons living below the poverty line, thus exacerbating problems associated with mental illness and contributing to stresses which cause poor mental health.... The correlation between a high incidence of poverty and poor mental health profoundly affects families and creates barriers to education and other economic opportunities.*³⁴⁰

More generally, both the number and proportion of Canadians reporting a disability in the 2006 Census and the follow-up Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) increased from the previous Census and PALS survey. The number of people reporting a disability increased from 3.6 million to 4 million, or from 12.4% to 14.3% of the population as a whole.³⁴¹

People with disabilities are less likely than non-disabled people to complete high school and go on to college or university.

While the rate of disability increased with age, only 40% of the growth in disability was attributable to age.³⁴² The survey also showed a more gradual increase in the proportion of working-aged people with a disability.³⁴³ While mild disability rates rose the most, every category, from mild to severe showed some increase over five years earlier.³⁴⁴ The data also indicate that for both children and adults, where there is one disability, there are often others identified as well, with only one in five disabled adults reporting only one disability, and more than half of disabled children aged from 0 to 4 reported more than one disability.³⁴⁵

As a group, people with disabilities face two constraints in their participation and activity levels: those directly linked to the impairment, and those imposed by social, structural and other barriers. The latter are known as "handicaps". While the impairment-induced limitations are a function of their physical or psychological state, handicaps are barriers that could be removed, that could be accommodated, to permit fuller participation of the impaired.

Although it is not clear whether impairment or handicap is the reason, people with disabilities have less education than those without disability, have lower employment rates, and are over-represented among those with the

In 2001, more than half of disabled persons had incomes under \$20,000, compared to less than 40% of the non-disabled population.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 118.

³⁴⁰ Dr. Taylor Alexander, Submission to the Subcommittee on Cities, 17 July 2009, pp. 1-2.

³⁴¹ *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) 2006: Analytical Report*, Statistics Canada, 2007, p. 9. The PALS did not include on-reserve Indians and people living in institutions.

³⁴² Ibid., p. 13.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 27, 35.

lowest incomes in Canada. Data from 2001 show that the average income of someone of working age with a disability was \$22,228, compared to \$31,509 for the same age group without a disability.³⁴⁶

More detailed comparisons with the respect to educational attainment, employment status and income are provided in the three figures below.

Figure 16 - Highest level of educational attainment for adults, ages 15 to 64, by disability status, Canada, 2001³⁴⁷

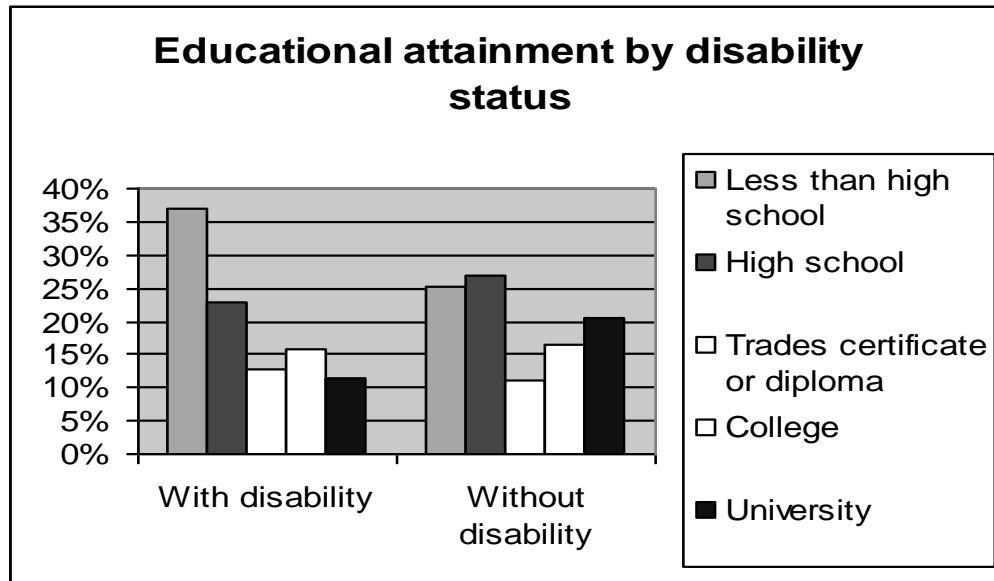
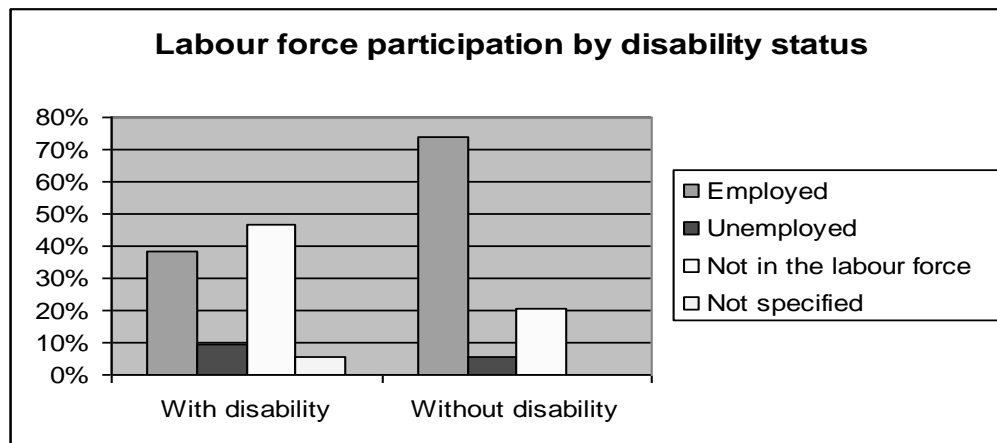


Figure 17 - Labour force participation rates for adults, ages 15 to 64, by disability status, Canada, 2001³⁴⁸

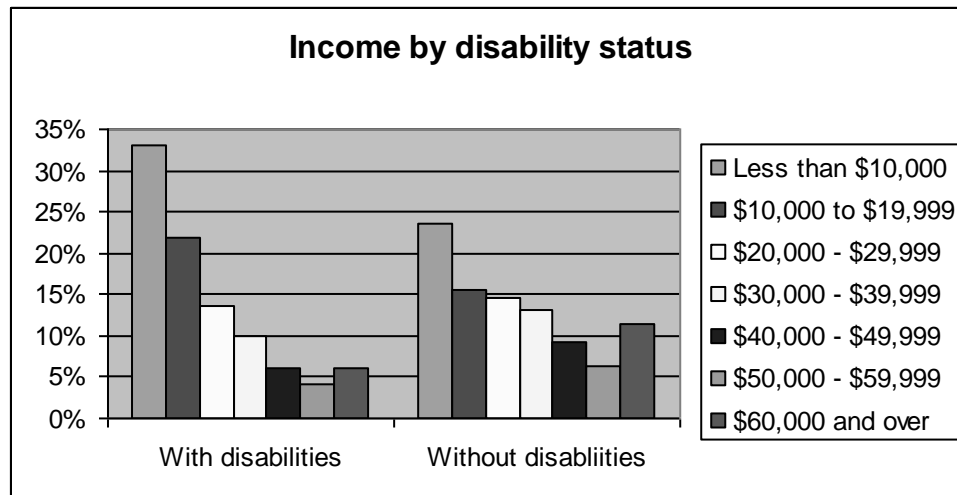


³⁴⁶ Education, employment and income of adults with and without disabilities – Tables, 2001 PLAS Survey, Statistics Canada, 2003, p. 62. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-587-x/89-587-x2003001-eng.pdf>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 8, 29

³⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 40, 51.

Figure 18 - Income for adults, ages 15 to 64, by disability status, Canada, 2001³⁴⁹



While not all people with disabilities are poor, the source and level of income of someone with even a severe disability would depend on a number of factors, primarily when and how one became disabled, and the extent to which private or public insurance payments were available to the individual upon disablement. The disability income securities policies in Canada have been described as a “dual benefit system [which] combines programs based on contributory insurance for labour force participants with means-tested disability benefits for those not qualifying for income protection insurance arising from labour market participation.”³⁵⁰ One analysis that compares the Canadian system with that of other OECD nations characterizes Canada’s dual benefit system as “poorly integrated.”³⁵¹

For example, some employers, particularly large employers, provide disability insurance as part of the compensation package, or as an option among benefits available. In these cases, income after disablement would be a proportion of the income provided to the employee prior to disablement, and often continues to age 65. And some individuals carry private disability insurance, which is more likely to pay a fixed amount per month following disablement.

Unattached individuals with a disability who rely on social assistance are living well below the low-income lines, even if they are considered unable to earn a living from work.

There are public programs that provide income support to a disabled person. The more generous of the programs are funded by employers and employees through their contribution to Employment Insurance (EI) (which provides sickness benefits), and the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (which provides disability benefits). However, in both cases, individuals must qualify through their labour market participation over time.

People without sufficient labour market participation who become disabled are eligible for social assistance benefits, generally at a higher level than is provided to non-disabled recipients.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 62, 84.

³⁵⁰ Cameron Mustard, et. al., “Disability Income Security Benefits for Working-Age Canadians,” Institute for Work and Health, Toronto, May 2007, p. 1.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

As a significant portion of people with disabilities rely on social assistance, the Committee learned that while provincial and territorial governments provide higher benefit levels for people with disabilities who are not expected to work than for “employable” recipients, the benefit levels had declined in real dollars in the period from 1997 to 2005, by percentages ranging from 1.5% in New Brunswick to 19.2% in Prince Edward Island.³⁵² In seven of 10 provinces, assistance rates in 2005 for persons with disabilities were the lowest they had been since at least 1986.³⁵³

Finally, anyone born with a disability or who becomes disabled as a child does not receive any direct income support, unless their parents qualify for welfare.

Also, as noted above, the lower rates of educational achievement and labour force participation contribute to their poverty. However, a wide range of services and benefits transferred through the income tax system assists both parents of disabled children and adults with disabilities.

There are two constitutional references to federal jurisdiction with respect to disability. The first is in the *Constitution Act of 1867*, which gives the federal government the right to make laws with respect to old age pensions and supplementary benefits, “including survivors’ and disability benefits irrespective of age”, while prohibiting federal laws that affect provincial legislation in the same area.³⁵⁴ This is implemented in the Canada Pension Plan disability benefits (CPP-D).

The second constitutional reference comes in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, in Section 15, which outlines equality rights. This section states that

*“every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”*³⁵⁵

However, the legal references do not capture the extent of federal involvement in supporting people with disabilities and/or their families.

Specific federal programs that benefit people with disabilities, as of 2002, included: attendant care deduction, Canada Study Grant, CPP-D, caregiver credit, Child Tax Benefit, Disability Tax Credit, EI Sickness Benefit, Infirm Dependant Credit, Medical Expense Tax Credit, Refundable Medical Expense Supplement, and Veterans Pensions and War Allowances.³⁵⁶

By 2007, additional federal programs were in place: Canada Access Grants for college and university students, Child Disability Benefit, Disability Supports Deduction (replaces Attendant Care Deduction), Registered Disability Savings Plan (with Canada Disability Savings Bonds and Canada Disability Savings Grants), New Veterans Charter with Disability Awards and Allowances, Earnings Loss Benefit, and Disability Supplement.³⁵⁷

³⁵² Michael Prince, “Disability Income Policy in Canada: Trends and Reform Ideas,” Presentation to Income and Employment Sector Forum, Toronto, 2 November 2007, Slide 11.

³⁵³ Ibid., Slide 12.

³⁵⁴ *Constitution Act of 1867*, Section 94A.

³⁵⁵ Charter of Rights and Freedoms, *Constitution Act*, 1982, Section 15.

³⁵⁶ Prince (2007), “Disability Income Policy in Canada: Trends and Reform Ideas”, Slide 4.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., Slide 5.

Persistent problems

People with disabilities are one of two groups whose poverty has persisted, both in depth and duration, since the time of the Croll Report.

Lack of coherent policy

While several programs and initiatives have emerged in the intervening years, a coherent approach to the barriers facing persons with disabilities in terms of education, training, employment and housing has been intermittent at best, and usually short-lived.

On the disability side, the Government of Canada has a disability agenda or vision from 1999. That is the last time we actually bothered, as a government of this country, to articulate a vision around some of the most vulnerable people in this country. There are 600,000 Canadians of adult age with disabilities who want to work. Unfortunately, we did not pay much attention to them during the good years. It will be even harder over the next two, three or four years. There is a huge loss of human capital and dignity there.

(Michael Prince, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

Disability income “system”

Complexity

The disability income security policies in Canada, as noted above, have been described as a “dual benefit system [which] combines programs based on contributory insurance for labour force participants with means-tested disability benefits for those not qualifying for income protection insurance arising from labour market participation.”³⁵⁸ Each source of income protection applies different eligibility criteria and provides different benefits. There is some difference in what is available for short-term leave from work and a longer term disability. Most injured workers begin with the provincial Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB). The coverage of provincial labour forces by the WCB ranges from approximately 70% in Ontario to 95% in Quebec.³⁵⁹

The Committee heard that the current definitions in use in the workers’ compensation programs across provinces and territories focuses on the impairment rather than on social barriers that can be removed to make participation possible despite the impairment.³⁶⁰ The Committee also heard that the provincial Workers’ Compensation programs are inconsistent across provinces, and are limiting eligibility and the level of benefits for people with work-related injuries, off-loading to other assistance programs:

We have to look at the role of the Workers' Compensation Boards across Canada and its responsibility to Canada's working families in dealing with disability, expediting medical diagnosis and treatment while maintaining a necessary income.

(Darrell Powell, National Advocate – Mental Health and Disability for Disabled Workers, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 18 June 2009)

³⁵⁸ Mustard (2007), p. 1.

³⁵⁹ Mustard (2007), p. 3.

³⁶⁰ Dr. Lisa Doupe, “Creating a Safer Society: Supporting People,” Submission, Subcommittee on Cities, p. 10, 16 August 2009.

Recommendation 50

The Committee recommends that the federal government, at the next meeting of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Labour, take a leadership role in encouraging a harmonization of provincial and territorial workers' compensation programs.

While income support is available for any disabled working-age person, the system can be difficult to navigate. The June 2003 Report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) noted that “We were constantly reminded that persons with disabilities find it difficult to determine which federal and provincial programs they may be eligible for, which programs to apply for and how to apply.”³⁶¹ According to Cameron Mustard:

*The five sources of disability income security in Canada have different definitions of disability, differing conditions for eligibility and duration of entitlement, different levels of benefit generosity and different incentives to encourage and support return to labour force participation.*³⁶²

The Committee has heard that the solutions rest with collaboration among all levels of government, along with other economic and social actors in Canada:

Any strategy designed to fight the poverty experienced by persons with functional disabilities must involve all government departments and agencies, at the regional as well as municipal levels, along with unions, private sector and community agencies and anyone else who is committed to fighting poverty and social isolation. This issue cuts across all sectors of society and concerns all stakeholders.

(Walter Zélaya, Représentative, Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 17 April 2008)

The complexity of current programs and their interactions can leave too many people with disabilities without inadequate incomes, and even without any income, as they are bounced from one “system” to another.

Supports

In addition to gaps and duplications in the income security portion of supports to persons with disabilities, the federal and provincial governments have failed to resolve how persons with disabilities can maintain the non-cash supports they need to get and stay employed, when these supports are often dependent on being eligible for income support programs that end when earnings reach a certain level.

When talking to people with disabilities and their representative groups, this issue [the need to separate income support from services] comes up again and again. The adult income system is a complicated mess, but the disability system is much worse. Services are absolutely crucial to people with disabilities, and we must deal with that need as well.

(Ken Battle, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008)

Recommendation 51

The Committee recognizes the importance of support services for persons with disabilities entering jobs, and that these supports are often lost when employment earnings begin.

³⁶¹ HUMA, June 2003, p. 84.

³⁶² Mustard (2007), p. 2.

Therefore, the Committee recommends that provincial and territorial governments extend these supports for up to 12 months following employment to persons with disabilities leaving social assistance, and that these governments negotiate with employers to provide these supports indefinitely for those earning low incomes.

Disability Tax Credit

The Disability Tax Credit “recognizes the costs of some disability-related items on an individual’s ability to pay tax,”³⁶³ but is payable only to people who having sufficient income to pay income tax. It is not “refundable” to those who do not earn enough to pay taxes, and therefore does not reach those with the lowest incomes. Disability organizations have called for making this credit refundable as an important first step to redressing the poverty of many with disabilities.

The government must commit to addressing poverty and reforming Canada's income support programs for persons with disabilities, and first steps [...] could include making the Disability Tax Credit refundable.

(Marie White, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 17 April 2008)

As well, recommendations for broad reform are based on a refundable Disabled Tax Credit as an important building block, that could be expanded and targeted to significantly reduce poverty in this group.

We need a new federal vision on disability. We need to make the Disability Tax Credit refundable in some way. We need to review all the other little tax credits for the infirm, dependent or attendant care, et cetera. We have a dozen of them now, and we need to rationalize that sector.

(Michael Prince, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

Recommendation 52

The Committee recommends that the Government make the Disability Tax Credit refundable.

Overhaul of disability income support system

The Caledon Institute has proposed a basic income for persons with severe disabilities that would build on a refundable Disability Tax Credit (DTC), and would use definitions and eligibility tests already in place for other federal income security programs, e.g., Canada Pension Plan – Disability (CPP-D), and the DTC. It is proposed for those who cannot reasonably be expected to earn a living from employment.

Like the Guaranteed Income Supplement, it would be income-tested, and would reduce benefits proportional to earnings; as noted, however, it is not expected that those eligible for the benefit would have substantial earnings. Providing an income about twice what would be paid on social assistance, the annual benefit would be approximately \$13,300 for an individual and \$21,000 for a couple in 2007 dollars.³⁶⁴ The impact on people with disabilities in terms of income would be positive, and it would mean enormous savings to provincial and territorial social assistance

³⁶³ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, “Tax Measures to Assist Individuals with Disabilities and Their Caregivers: Disability Tax Credit,” *Advancing the Inclusion of People with Disabilities: 2008 Federal Disability Report*, 2008, p. 116. http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability_issues/reports/fdr/2008/fdr_2008.pdf. Accessed 15 August 2009.

³⁶⁴ Michael Mendelson, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 17 April 2008.

programs, allowing them to reinvest in disability supports for all people with disabilities, regardless of their reliance on income support programs:

That will take about a half a million Canadians with disabilities off social assistance rolls. That will be a huge windfall to provinces. There would need to be a federal-provincial-territorial discussion on a reinvestment strategy on that. That would mean a major injection of reallocated dollars into personal supports, education, inclusive schools, inclusive parks and recreation, family supports and public transit so that people can move around in their communities, and full citizenship for Canadians who face tremendous barriers and obstacles.

(Michael Prince, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

This recommendation was also explicitly supported by the Nova Scotia government at a hearing in Nova Scotia.³⁶⁵

Recommendation 53

The Committee recommends that the federal government develop and implement a basic income guarantee at or above LICO for people with severe disabilities.

As noted above, the Committee has also learned of the critical importance of the supports to persons with disabilities currently provided under social assistance programs at the provincial level, and other income-tested programs at all levels of government. These supports are pre-requisite to the labour market participation of many people with disabilities, yet may be discontinued if they are able to earn an income from work that would end their income benefits under other programs.

Particularly in light of the proposed income program for persons with severe disabilities, there is an opportunity for provincial governments to increase their investment in such supports from the savings they would realize when these persons were no longer in need of social assistance income support. Further, such supports could be income-tested, regardless of the source of income.

The combined impact on people with disabilities could be substantial: We argue that the federal government should proceed with the program only if there is agreement with the provinces to reinvest those savings into disability support programs. Frankly, if we did that package, I think we would end up going from a class D country for people with disabilities to a class B+ country for people with disabilities — not quite A+ yet, but we would be much better.

(Michael Mendelson, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 17 April 2009)

Recommendation 54

The Committee recommends that provincial and territorial governments use the savings realized in social assistance spending with the introduction of the basic income guarantee for people with severe disabilities to redesign and enhance delivery of disability supports to all persons with disabilities, regardless of the source of their incomes.

³⁶⁵ Lynn Hartwell, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 August 2008.

Promising practices

Opportunities Fund

The federal Opportunities Fund is “designed to help people with disabilities prepare for and obtain employment or self-employment ... [and] to develop the skills they need to keep a new job.”³⁶⁶ Witnesses have described its contribution:

[The Opportunities Fund] is a small fund, about \$25 million a year, to provide innovative approaches to employability across the country. It is a low-profile program that is very important. It is one those of little programs that could easily fall between the cracks or be snuffed out; but, again, the voices of Canadian with disabilities need to be heard and that program needs to be maintained.

(Michael Prince, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 17 April 2008)

In a National Action Plan on Disability, supported by a wide range of disability and other organizations, proposals call for the continuation and expansion of this Fund “ensure greater capacity at the provincial/territorial level to address barriers, and ... demonstrate innovation in labour force inclusion.”³⁶⁷ The Action Plan also specifically recommends that the Opportunities Fund NOT be rolled into labour market development agreements, specific or general, with provincial governments.

Recommendation 55

The Committee recommends that the federal government sustain and increase the funding for the Opportunities Fund for persons with disabilities, with a clear mission to address barriers to the labour force.

Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP)

The federal government introduced the RDSP in the 2007 budget, with implementation the following year. As described the Department of Finance,

*The Registered Disability Savings Plan is a tax-assisted savings vehicle intended to help parents and others save to ensure the long-term financial security of a child with a severe disability. Direct government assistance will be provided through Canada Disability Savings Grants and Canada Disability Savings Bonds. The investment income earned in an RDSP will accumulate tax-free. Grants, bonds and investment income earned in the plan will be included in the beneficiary’s income for tax purposes when paid out of an RDSP.*³⁶⁸

The plan permits parents and others to register savings plans for disabled dependents who are eligible for the Disability Tax Credit, and to get matching funds of up to 300% of their contribution, depending on the income of the individual making the contributions.³⁶⁹ This program was modelled on a similar savings plan for education of dependents, and most provinces have exempted these

³⁶⁶ HRSDC “Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities.”

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability_issues/funding_programs/opportunities_fund/index.shtml. Accessed 28 August 2009.

³⁶⁷ “From Vision to Action: Building an Inclusive and Accessible Canada – A National Action Plan on Disability, 2007”, p. 5.

³⁶⁸ Department of Finance, *Government of Canada, 2008 Federal Disability Report: Advancing the Inclusion of People with Disabilities*, 2008, p. 119.

³⁶⁹ Minister of Finance, *The Budget Plan 2007: Aspire to a Stronger, Safer, Better Canada*, 19 March 2007, p. 83. <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2007/pdf/bp2007e.pdf>. Accessed 28 August 2009.

“assets” from the depletion requirements and/or exempt the income when determining eligibility and calculating benefits for social assistance claimants. Some provincial and territorial governments have already moved to do the same for RDSP assets.³⁷⁰

The Committee commends the federal government for introducing the Registered Disability Savings Plan, and provincial governments that have already exempted these assets from the asset-depletion requirements to qualify for social assistance.

Recommendation 56

The Committee recommends that all provincial and territorial governments amend their social assistance legislation to exempt savings under the Disability Savings Plan from any asset depletion requirements with respect to qualifications for or benefits from social assistance and social services programs.

Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities

While the Committee has recommended that the general labour market programs be amended to allocate a set percentage of training seats to persons with disabilities, witnesses have also testified that the existing labour market agreements for persons with disabilities have provided important access to training.

Training opportunities must intentionally include people with disabilities, immigrants, lone parents and Aboriginal peoples.

The federal government described the goal of these agreements as follows:

*The goal of the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities is to improve the employment situation of Canadians with disabilities, by enhancing their employability, increasing the employment opportunities available to them, and building on their existing knowledge base. The Agreements facilitate coordination in labour market programming targeted to persons with disabilities through agreements with provinces.*³⁷¹

Although disability organizations have identified a preference for an integrated labour market program, their national action plan called for an increase in funding for these programs as an interim measure.³⁷²

Recommendation 57

Until mainstream training programs provide training opportunities for persons with disabilities proportionate to their representation in the population, the Committee recommends that the federal government extend and expand funding for such training through the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities.

³⁷⁰ These include British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan.

³⁷¹ HRSDC, *2006-2007 Estimates: A Departmental Performance Report*, p. 202.

³⁷² “From Vision to Action: Building an Inclusive and Accessible Canada – A National Action Plan on Disability, 2007”, p. 5.

5.3 Newcomers to Canada

Snapshot

In Canada, everyone, with the exception of First Nations and Inuit and their descendants is either a recent immigrant, a refugee claimant or a descendant of immigrants. From the first explorers, through to workers who built the Canadian Pacific Railway, to the recent past, Canada has built the country, its communities and institutions through sustained immigration. In more recent years, population growth has depended on immigrant and refugee populations as the fertility rate among Canadian-born women has been dropping.³⁷³

The Committee heard testimony that reminded us that barriers facing immigrants are barriers to the social and economic development of Canada as a whole:

These barriers that immigrants face impede their accession to being full and equal members of Canadian society. The barriers are costly, not only to newcomers themselves but also to the broader communities in which they live. Immigration has been and will continue to be a key component to the development of Canadian economic, social and political fabric. We are increasingly aware of the problems that newcomers face in this country, and these are documented in excruciating detail in the report. However, beyond the details, my point is these problems and barriers must be recognized as Canadian problems rather than immigrant problems. It is in our own interests that newcomers be able to utilize their skills and resources.

(Sarah Wayland, Research Associate, Ontario Metropolis Centre, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008)

Canada's immigration program welcomes three broad groups of people for permanent residency. It facilitates the entry of immigrants who can contribute to the labour market and economy through their skills or business experience, or through the capital they invest. It welcomes family class immigrants who are sponsored by close relatives. Finally, the immigration program maintains Canada's humanitarian tradition by resettling refugees from abroad and providing an opportunity for asylum seekers to find protection. In addition, temporary resident permits are issued each year for workers, visitors and students, and people whose refugee claims have not been determined. While the Committee's focus has been on permanent residents, impacts of programs on other groups of newcomers have been considered.

Poverty

Immigrants

As most immigrants and refugees still settle in Canada's three largest cities, their poverty is closely related with broader issues of urban poverty. Statistics Canada researchers point out, "In the three major immigrant-receiving cities (Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal), virtually all of the increase in the cities' low-income rate during the 1990s was concentrated among the immigrant population."³⁷⁴

Further, recent immigrants experienced their poverty in ways that the Canadian-born, at least in Toronto, did not. In particular, the specific immigrant experience included "... spatial entrapment

³⁷³ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *Canadians in Context – Immigration*, <http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=38>. Accessed 30 April 2009.

³⁷⁴ Garnett Picot, Feng Hou and Simon Coulombe, *Chronic Low Income and Low-income Dynamics Among Recent Immigrants*, Statistics Canada, 2007, p. 10.

and delayed mobility; poverty, deprivation plus isolation, desperation; stigmatization of immigrant status, poverty circumstance and place of residence; and hopelessness and regret.³⁷⁵

Although the Committee has heard testimony that economic outcomes for newcomers to Canada vary by the class of immigrant, their country of origin, their language skills and other factors,³⁷⁶ generally, the incidence of poverty among immigrants makes them one of the most “at-risk” populations in Canada.³⁷⁷

The experience of immigrants varies with their country of origin and whether they are admitted to reunify a family or based on their own credentials.

However, the risk of poverty among immigrants decreases with the length of time spent in Canada, and reaches the same level as for the general population (Canadian-born and immigrants in Canada 10 years or more) after about three years.³⁷⁸ However, comparing immigrants and Canadian-born with similar levels of education and skills, researchers find that the length of time for convergence of incomes is increasing; in fact, first-generation immigrants may never catch up entirely.³⁷⁹

[T]he number of low-income immigrants has risen over the past 25 years. Immigrants remain poor for longer and longer periods. The catch-up period, that is, the time needed for an immigrant professional to reach the same salary level as his or her Canadian counterparts, was 16 years then and is 19 to 20 years now. The catch-up period is lengthening and the proportion of low-income immigrants is increasing.

(Jean-Claude Icart, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008)

At the same time, the education level of immigrants has increased significantly in the last 25 years. With a change in policy that favoured skilled and highly educated immigrants, the newcomer population now has a higher rate of university completion than among the Canadian-born.³⁸⁰ Yet the rate of chronic poverty was reduced by only two percentage points for immigrants who arrived in 2000, compared to those who arrived in 1992.³⁸¹

The different categories of immigrants experience different economic outcomes. One study from 2003 found that after 15 years in Canada, skilled workers earned on average almost double the

³⁷⁵ Heather Smith and David Ley, “The Immigrant Experience of Poverty in Toronto Neighbourhoods of Concentrated Disadvantage,” Vancouver Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis (RIIM), presentation to 9th National Metropolis Conference, March 2007, p. 15.

³⁷⁶ See testimony from Evidence, Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 June 2009.

³⁷⁷ Jeff Frank and Jean Lock Kunz, “New Approaches for Addressing Poverty and Exclusion,” Policy Research Initiative, Government of Canada, December 2004, p. 6, https://policyresearch.gc.ca/doclib/DecConf/Frank_Kunz_E.pdf. Accessed 26 February 2008.

³⁷⁸ Picot et al., 2007, pp. 13, 16.

³⁷⁹ Sarah Wayland, *Unsettled: Legal and Policy Barriers for Newcomers to Canada – Literature Review*, Community Foundations of Canada and Law Commission of Canada, 2006, p. 72; Marc Frenette and René Morissette, *Will they ever converge. Earnings of immigrant and Canadian-born workers over the last two decades*, Statistics Canada, 2003, p. 8.

³⁸⁰ Cheryl Teelucksingh and Grace-Edward Galabuzi, “Impact of Race and Immigrants Status on Employment Opportunities and Outcomes in the Canadian Labour Market,” *Policy Matters*, No. 22, Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement, November 2005, p. 1.

³⁸¹ Picot, et. Al, (2007), pp. 4, 8.

earnings of other immigrant categories, such as refugees and family class. They were also less reliant on social assistance and unemployment benefits.³⁸²

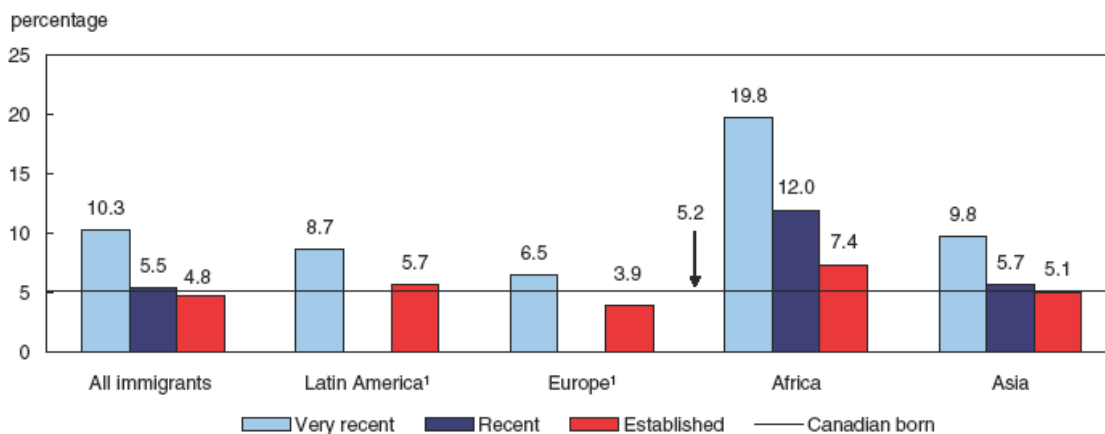
Also in recent years, the countries of origin of immigrants have changed significantly. A smaller proportion of immigrants are from Western or even Eastern European countries, while a larger proportion come from Asian and African countries.

As noted above, there are significant differences in the risks facing newcomers, based in part on their country of origin. A recent study by Statistics Canada found the following patterns according to country of origin:

- Immigrants born in Southeast Asia, particularly those from the Philippines, had the strongest labour market performance of all immigrants to Canada in 2006, regardless of when they landed in the country;
- Those born elsewhere in Asia (including the Middle East) as well as individuals born in Latin America, Europe and Africa all had higher unemployment rates and lower employment rates in 2006 than their Canadian-born counterparts;
- Immigrants born in Africa experienced difficulties in the labour market, regardless of when they had landed. The estimated 70,000 very recent African-born immigrants had an unemployment rate of 20.8%, more than four times higher than that of the Canadian born.³⁸³

The figure below shows differences in unemployment rate, which highlight the impact of the intersection of race and period of immigration on risk of poverty.³⁸⁴

Figure 19 - Unemployment rate for male immigrants aged 25 to 54, by period of landing, 2006



1. Data for recent immigrants suppressed because of coefficient of variation (CV) >33.3% and/or very small estimates.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

³⁸² Longitudinal Immigrant Data Base, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (IMDB).

³⁸³ Jason Gilmore, *The Canadian Immigrant Labour Market in 2006: Analysis by Region or Country of Birth*, The Immigrant Labour Force Analysis Series, Statistics Canada, Research paper, 2008, p. 19.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

A witness summarized the situation:

[F]or the past 15 years, the vast majority of the people who come to settle in Canada, as immigrants or refugees, arrive from southern countries and belong to racially distinct communities. The influence of race on poverty, together with the systemic barriers encountered by new immigrants, is a factor in creating poverty and inadequate housing.

(Roberto Jovel, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007)

Refugee claimants

The main source countries for refugees resettled to Canada have remained fairly consistent over the last five years and include Afghanistan, Columbia, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mexico was the top source country for refugee protection claims in Canada during 2006–2007, followed by China, Haiti and Colombia.³⁸⁵

Since refugees are not selected for immigration to Canada on the basis of their labour market skills, their characteristics such as language ability, formal schooling, and work experience vary considerably. There is little research on the economic well-being of resettled refugees or refugee claimants. Data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) indicate that refugees have a significantly higher incidence of social assistance use than other immigrants (especially initially) and that average employment earnings increase over time.³⁸⁶ Don DeVoretz found in his study that employment was critical to moving refugees out of poverty. He wrote:

*[E]conomic poverty was an endemic and growing problem for refugees. For those refugees who received social assistance, their total income level was extremely low or less than \$12,000 (1992 dollars) per refugee. This weak performance occurred seven years after their arrival! Thus, whether a refugee fared well in Canada's labour market ultimately depended upon employment prospects.*³⁸⁷

Housing

Immigrants are also over-represented among those with housing affordability problems. The Committee heard testimony that quantified the short-term affordability crisis that strikes newcomers:

Almost three times as many immigrants as Canadian-born have housing affordability and housing security problems.

According to the Longitudinal Study of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) survey data that we analyzed in our comparative project, six months after their arrival in Canada, at least half of new immigrant renters in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver were spending 50% or more of their income on housing. This 50% threshold is considered by specialists to be an indication of extreme vulnerability because other essentials in the household budget have to be cut to cover housing costs. There is an increased risk of eviction and homelessness if unexpected additional expenses mean that the rent goes unpaid.

(Damaris Rose, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009)

In 2001, 36% of immigrants were in core housing need, by CMHC's definition, compared to only 13% of non-immigrants.³⁸⁸ One researcher cited data from the LSIC, finding that “close to four in 10 respondents reported difficulties finding housing during the first six months after becoming

³⁸⁵ Immigration and Refugee Board, *2006–2007 Departmental Performance Report*, p. 14.

³⁸⁶ Longitudinal Immigrant Data Base, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (IMDB).

³⁸⁷ Don DeVoretz et al., “The Economic Experiences of Refugees in Canada,” Discussion paper no. 1088, Institute for the Study of Labor, March 2004, p. 30.

³⁸⁸ Wayland (2007), p. 4.

permanent residents.”³⁸⁹ The researcher also identified different kinds of barriers: some barriers are intrinsic to the immigrants themselves, e.g., ethnicity and age, others are transient (like family size, or income level), and still others are outside the influence of the individuals completely, like the structure of the housing market and the availability of affordable housing or subsidies.³⁹⁰

Immigrant organizations have identified the importance of housing in addressing and alleviating poverty among newcomers. For example, the program co-ordinator for the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba identified an increase in the supply of affordable housing as the first policy change that would alleviate hardship for immigrants in that province.³⁹¹ Yet the Committee heard testimony that housing was not among the services funded through federal immigration settlement funding to civil-society organizations.³⁹²

Research in preparation for Calgary’s 10-year plan to end homelessness also identified the possible need for larger housing units to accommodate larger families among the immigrant population.³⁹³ This need was echoed in a national context in testimony before the Committee:

[In] some national research on the housing needs of immigrants...everyone told us that they need larger units because families are cramped, or extended families want to live together so that one person can be the caregiver and the other people can go to work, and they cannot live together, because we do not have the housing stock for that.

(Barbara Wake Carrol, Evidence, Professor, Department of Political Science, McMaster University, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 17 May 2007)

Recommendation 58

The Committee recommends that federal government work with provincial governments and social housing providers to take the necessary steps to provide larger housing units to larger families.

Homelessness

The experience of homelessness among immigrants, however, varies, even across major “gateway” cities. Studies in both Vancouver and Calgary found that ethnocultural groups acted in ways that mitigated against absolute homelessness, even for newcomers with very low incomes.³⁹⁴ However, the authors concluded that many

Newcomers in need rely more on extended families and earlier arrivers from their country in times of housing crisis than on conventional services.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁹¹ Abdikheir Ahmed, cited in “Head of Manitoba organization says immigrants struggling in poverty,” Canadian Press, 14 August 2008.

³⁹² Dan Hiebert,, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009.

³⁹³ Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Submission, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009, p. 4; Sharon M. Stroick, “Homelessness: What Do We Know?,” Presentation for Community Summit on Calgary’s 10-year plan to end homelessness, City of Calgary, 23 April 2007, slide 51, http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/cns/homelessness/homelessness_what_do_we_know.pdf. Accessed 30 April 2009.

³⁹⁴ Daniel Hiebert, et al., “The Profile of Absolute and Relative Homelessness Among Immigrants, Refugees, and Refugee Claimants in the GVRD: Final Report,” May 2005, p. vi; and City of Calgary, “Background Research for the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Calgary,” February 2007, p. 67,

newcomers were among the “hidden homeless,” with no secure accommodations of their own.³⁹⁵ Yet a Toronto study two years earlier found that an increasing proportion of shelter users were in fact immigrants, and called for culturally and linguistically accessible shelters to accommodate what was anticipated to be a growing clientele.³⁹⁶

A more recent study in Toronto of homeless women with children found that women who had not achieved permanent resident status were particularly vulnerable to homelessness.³⁹⁷ Their use of the shelter system was sufficient to warrant the suggestion that a housing program for women awaiting status resolution would better serve these women, and would free up spaces in family shelters intended for transitional housing.

This is consistent with the identification of groups at risk of homelessness by a York University geographer: people without status in Canada, refugee claimants, visible minorities, single parents, young people, and women leaving situations of family violence.³⁹⁸ This research also confirmed that among some immigrant groups, reliance on informal supports from already-settled members of that group supplants reliance on more conventional services.³⁹⁹

Second generation

According to the 2001 Census, approximately one in eight Canadian-born residents has at least one parent who was not born in Canada.⁴⁰⁰ This makes children of immigrants and refugees a significant portion of the population. There is evidence that their education and economic outcomes are

While immigrants can usually “catch up” with the Canadian born, in terms of family income, it is taking them longer to do so than in past generations.

*in the least no worse and in many ways better than those whose parents were born in Canada. Second generation Canadians are less likely to lack high school credentials and more likely to have a university degree; their incidence of reliance on government transfer payments and rates of employment and unemployment are no different; and their average earnings are greater.*⁴⁰¹

Given that immigrant families tend to move out of low-income neighbourhoods within five years of their arrival in Canada,⁴⁰² this suggests that many of the poverty problems associated with immigration are not carried over from the arriving generation to the next.

http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/cns/homelessness/background_research_10_year_plan_end_homelessness.pdf. Accessed 30 April 2009.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. x.

³⁹⁶ Access Alliance, “Executive Summary: Best Practices for Working with Homeless Immigrants and Refugees,” March 2003, p. 4, http://www.settlement.org/downloads/BP_Executive_Summary.pdf. Accessed 30 April 2009.

³⁹⁷ Emily Paradis, et al., “Better Off in a Shelter? A Year of Homelessness & Housing among Status Immigrant, Non-Status Migrant, & Canadian-Born Families,” Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, July 2008, p. iii, <http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/researchbulletins/ParadisetalBetterOffinaShelter7-2008.pdf>. Accessed 30 April 2009.

³⁹⁸ Robert Murdie, “Immigrants, Housing, & Homelessness: What Do We Know?.” Presentation, Slide 5, <http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/researchbulletins/ParadisetalBetterOffinaShelter7-2008.pdf>. Accessed 30 April 2009.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., Slide 6.

⁴⁰⁰ Abdurrahman Aydemir, Wen-Hao Chen and Miles Corak, *Intergenerational Earnings Mobility Among the Children of Canadian Immigrants*, Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 19.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

Data on men and women whose parents were immigrants to Canada show that their high-school completion rates were higher than those of children of Canadian-born parents, but their income comparisons depended on gender: women who were children of immigrants had higher incomes than women of Canadian-born parents; this was not true for men.⁴⁰³ Among men who were children of immigrants, their income differential was even larger if they were also a visible minority.

Persistent problems

The Committee has learned of the particular challenges faced by most newcomers to Canada, especially in recent years as the source countries have shifted. We are particularly concerned at this time, because we are aware that the economic transition for immigrants is closely tied to the business cycle at the time of their arrival.⁴⁰⁴ This could mean even greater challenges for newcomers arriving during this economic downturn.

Immigration policy has favoured more educated immigrants, and their children are enrolled in post-secondary education in higher numbers than the children of Canadian-born parents.

The Committee also learned that there are three stages to the settlement process:

[F]irst, newcomers face immediate needs for assistance and reception services, including basic language instruction; second, intermediate needs such as access to the labour market, housing, health service, upgrades to education and such; and, third, long-term needs to become equal participants in Canadian economy and society....

(Sarah Wayland, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008)

Of the three, the Committee has been advised by this witness that settlement organizations, with the support of federal funding, are providing for support at the first stage, but that the second stage is providing much more of a barrier to full integration. This is consistent with other testimony and submissions to the Committee.

While the Committee will address integration of immigrants in the next section of this study, we understand that for some, these barriers become the causes of poverty, housing challenges, and even relative homelessness.

Employment

For newcomers, as for the Canadian-born, employment is a critical factor in preventing poverty or in overcoming it. The Committee has heard of barriers to employment for immigrants and refugee claimants, across the classes and categories of newcomers.

Credential recognition

The first of these barriers, for those who are being admitted as skilled immigrants, is having the credentials earned in their own countries recognized by Canadian employers:

A huge mismatch exists ... between the admissions policy, or selection policy, in Canada and integration success. [T]hat is a crisis for immigrants. [I]t is frequently a matter of anguish and, indeed, anger amongst immigrants that

⁴⁰² Philip Oreopoulos, *A Critique on Neighbourhood Effects in Canada*, Working paper, Series 004, Policy Research Initiative, 2005, p. 1.

⁴⁰³ Boris Palameta, "Economic integration of immigrants' children," *Perspectives*, Statistics Canada, October 2007, p. 14.

⁴⁰⁴ David Ley, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008.

the terms under which they entered Canada, the valuing of their credentials during the admission process, are quite contrary to the devaluation of those credentials when they look for work.

(David Ley, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008)

This barrier is widely recognized, and has been the focus of considerable public attention, including from provincial and federal governments.

The Committee has learned of both the efforts being made by the federal and provincial governments and by non-government settlement agencies to match the credentials and education of newcomers to the available jobs, and of the continuing barriers to the recognition of credentials from other countries. The Committee applauds those current efforts, including the federal co-ordination role being played by the Foreign Credentials Referral Office in an effort to work with the hundreds of professional and trade organizations that establish standards and requirements in Canada. The dilemma was summarized by a witness:

The recognition of qualifications and credentials from other countries is a critical step in economic security for many newcomers to Canada. Canadian job experience is a second critical contributor.

New immigrants, by and large, come with higher levels of education and professional accreditation than ever before — certainly higher than the average Canadian-born family — and our economy is unable to absorb those people, their skills and their contribution to the economy appropriately.

(Frances Lankin, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008)

As the federal government has begun to address these problems, a recommendation is included in the description of these initiatives, later in this section of the report.

Lack of Canadian experience

The Committee recognizes that recognition of credentials from other countries does not necessarily lead to employment, even for the skilled immigrant:

Credentialing does not guarantee someone a job. Just because an immigrant has a piece of paper that interprets their credentials does not mean an employer will hire them. This is the real issue. The federal government has standards for entry into this country, but the federal government, for the most part, has nothing to do with hiring immigrants. Access to the labour market is essentially through the private sector and the public sector. The federal government could lead by example in this. Credentialing is one small piece of it.

(Sarah Wayland, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008)

As noted in an earlier chapter, the barriers to employment for newcomers are many. In particular, potential employers often require Canadian experience, making it virtually impossible for immigrants to get jobs in fields for which they are educated and/or trained. Racism and discrimination also pose significant barriers. A submission to the Committee suggested that

*... government give an incentive to companies that give an immigrant their **first** job in Canada in **their** field of expertise. This will immediately do away with that all too infamous response 'No Canadian experience'.⁴⁰⁵*

⁴⁰⁵ Nick Noorani, "Comments on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness: Issues And Options," Submission to the SAST, p.2.

The same proposal came from two expert witnesses:

We have heard that perhaps we should have bridging programs. We will provide funding or subsidies for employers to hire these individuals, who are already accredited yet lack the Canadian experience, then they would be able to at least enter the profession on that bridging program. Hopefully, they would gain the Canadian experience needed to further advance their career in that field. Perhaps the government could consider funding bridging programs for these professionals.

(Avy Go, Clinic Director, Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008)

[W]e are really going to have to grapple with the idea that we need to look at incentives. We need to look at issues like employment equity, but we also need to look at incentives beyond that.... We have to be able to say to employers that immigration is our future. As a government and as a country, this is what your write-off is... we are going to have to take a huge breath and say, yes, we are going to have to give some money to some employers in the private sector.

(Debbie Douglas, Executive Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009)

The Committee believes that the government bears some responsibility in helping immigrants, particularly those selected through the federal skilled worker stream, succeed in the labour market. Providing an incentive to employers to hire newcomers may help the latter overcome both the hurdles of Canadian experience and racism. The federal government should look into providing a tax credit to employers who offer newcomers their first job – the Employment Integration Program for Immigrants and Visible Minorities in Quebec provides an interesting model.

Recommendation 59

The Committee recommends that the federal government develop a tax credit for employers who hire newcomers for their first job in their field or area of expertise.

Access to income

Sponsorship

As a means to reunification, newcomers' Canada-based family members are often required to "sponsor" the income family members. Under binding sponsorship agreements, the sponsor agrees to take responsibility for the immigrating family member for 10 years; should a newcomer apply for and receive benefits from a wide range of income security programs, including social assistance, the sponsor is legally liable to repay any funds received.

This is likely the cause of under-representation of newcomers on social assistance roles, as described by a witness:

In British Columbia, 3.5% of the population claimed on their 2005 tax form that they received social assistance. Within the immigrant community, that is the non-Canadian-born community, that was 1.5%. This is an extraordinary statistic when we realize that this is a group with low average incomes, and yet they are receiving very low rates of social assistance. We should think long and hard about what that means.

(Dan Hiebert, Professor of Geography, University of British Columbia, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009)

Immigrants who are sponsored by family members, for 10 years after arrival, may be vulnerable to poverty and worse, depending on the relationship with and health of the sponsor(s).

Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement (OAS/GIS)

While Old Age Security is often considered the equivalent of a “guaranteed annual income” for Canadians over the age of 65, without consideration of other sources or levels of income, this is often not the case for immigrants.

Residency requirement

Immigrants who entered Canada under the “family class”, and who have been in Canada less than 10 years do not qualify to receive OAS. This residency requirement has been described as a “significant crack that many immigrant seniors fall through.”⁴⁰⁶

Canadian agreements with other countries

Canada has signed social security agreements with some other countries, which provides for benefits under OAS (and possibly the Canada Pension Plan) to be paid by Canada or the country of origin to seniors who have not been resident in Canada for the required periods of time.⁴⁰⁷ However, not all immigrants benefit from such agreements:

People who come from China, India, Pakistan and Russia, which for the last 10 years have been among the top ten source countries for immigration, and seniors who are coming in, if you look at our selection policies around immigration, these are the people coming in on family reunification. The fact they have not been able to work within Canada and the fact that Canada does not have an agreement with those countries means they are not able to access our pension plans. That puts an undue burden on the families coming in.

(Debbie Douglas, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009)

1/40th rule

In addition, to qualify for the maximum amount of OAS benefits, an individual must have been in Canada for 40 years past the age of 20. Anyone turning 65 who has not lived in Canada for that period of time will never receive the full benefit under current regulations.⁴⁰⁸

The final report of the Special Senate Committee on Aging gave both attention and a recommendation with respect to how the restrictions in access to these programs contributes to newcomer poverty⁴⁰⁹ The Special Committee also cited the injustice of denying people who have lived in Canada long enough to become citizens access to a program offered to all Canadians regardless of circumstance. The Committee echoes that Committee’s recommendation, recognizing that it would contribute to an overall reduction in newcomer poverty, including with respect to OAS/GIS:

Recommendation 60

The Committee recommends that the federal government reduce the immigration sponsorship period from 10 years to three years similar to the regulations pertaining to conjugal sponsorship, and make a commensurate reduction in the residency requirement for entitlement to a monthly pension under the *Old Age Security Act*.

⁴⁰⁶ Alternative Planning Group, Citizenship Matters: Re-examining Income (In)Security of Immigrant Seniors, Wellesley Institute, May 2009, p. 6. <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/files/APG%20report%20final.pdf>. Accessed 23 August 2009.

⁴⁰⁷ Service Canada, “What is a social security agreement?” <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/isp/ibfa/socagree.shtml>. Accessed 23 August 2009.

⁴⁰⁸ Alternative Planning Group, p. 6.

⁴⁰⁹ Special Senate Committee on Aging, *Final Report*, p. 31.

Refugees income support

Resettled refugees may be eligible for financial assistance under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) for a period of up to one year for regular cases and up to two years for special needs cases resettled through the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) program.

Since the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* came into force in 2002, the government has prioritized protection need over ability to establish economically in Canada as the principle for selection of resettled refugees. This policy change may help explain the changing characteristics of resettled refugees, who since 2002 have higher and more varied needs than previous refugee populations.⁴¹⁰ Researchers in British Columbia, for example, have observed that government-assisted refugees are increasingly “medically compromised clients” who have endured protracted stays in refugee camps, and many have little to no formal education experience and low literacy rates.⁴¹¹

Given the poverty resettled refugees experience and the multiple barriers they face to self sufficiency and integration, the resettlement assistance program is a valuable policy tool available to the federal government to improve the income security of this vulnerable group:

Canada is choosing to bring refugees from protracted refugee situations, people who have tremendous challenges. It will take a long time for these people to integrate fully into Canadian society. We ought to be adjusting our social programs and housing programs to take that into consideration. When Canada chose in 2002 to do the right thing, which is to emphasize need in terms of the selection of overseas refugees to be brought to Canadian cities over adaptability, they did not increase the budget for social integration of that population, and this was a public policy mistake that ought to be rectified.

(Dan Hiebert, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009)

The Committee is concerned that this period of assistance is not sufficient to permit refugee families to settle in Canada and become financially self-sufficient. Refugees themselves made this argument in the evaluation conducted of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) in Ontario, giving financial assistance the lowest score among RAP programs and talking about the difficulties the low level of support created for their families.⁴¹²

Recommendation 61

The Committee recommends that the federal government extend eligibility for the resettlement assistance program for refugees to two years for regular cases and to four years for joint assistance sponsorships.

Travel loan repayment

The Committee has heard that when the federal government sponsors refugees and brings them to Canada, the cost of the travel involved is considered a loan that these newcomers must repay, often before they are fully integrated economically. Although this group is eligible for social assistance, the Committee has seen (and discussed earlier in this report) the inadequacy of the income received to

⁴¹⁰ CIC, *Departmental Performance Report 2007–2008*, p. 37.

⁴¹¹ Gulalai Habib, “Government-Assisted Refugee Settlement in B.C.”, presentation at the Metropolis BC Policy Research Symposium, November 2008, http://www.riim.metropolis.net/knowledge/ppt/Habib_Metropolis%20BC%20Symposium%20%5BNov702008%5D.ppt. Accessed 22 May 2009.

⁴¹² Power Analysis Inc, *Evaluation of the Resettlement Assistance Program: Final Report*, January 2002, p. 74.

cover even minimal household expenses, much less repay large debts. A witness described the situation these refugees find themselves in:

I find it a great tragedy that our government-assisted refugee program requires that the people who are brought to Canada repay the cost of their transportation. That means in practice that a family that comes from another country and has settled in a Canadian city is given a very large bill six months after they arrive. They have a very large debt. This debt must be paid out of social assistance, because this is before these people have had a chance to find a job or to integrate economically in Canadian society.

This puts a tremendous burden on the households, and the lifestyles, of our government-assisted refugees. I wish your committee could do something to convince the Government of Canada that this is wrong-headed policy. It puts these people at too big a disadvantage.

(Dan Hiebert, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009)

Recommendation 62

The Committee recommends that the federal government establish a repayment schedule and loan forgiveness program for travel loan repayment by government-sponsored refugees, that takes into account the time needed to integrate and the household income upon employment.

Barriers to training

The Committee has heard of barriers to training for many, caused by federal funding being focused (though not exclusively) on funding training through the Employment Insurance system. While many are not eligible, which is discussed more fully elsewhere in this report, it is a particular barrier for newcomers, who have not yet been employed in Canada.⁴¹³

Our problem with immigrants, particularly in Ontario, is that not only are most immigrants, particularly women, in contingent work ... but immigrants are not even qualifying for the retraining dollars.

(Debbie Douglas, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009)

Some of the solutions to these barriers are included among promising practices in this chapter, and others are included in recommendations in the Common Cause section of this report.

Promising Practices

Settlement services

The Committee has heard consistently about the importance of the services offered by non-government organizations across Canada in helping newcomers to access programs and services for which they are eligible, including income and housing support for refugees, and language support for immigrants. While the Committee will deal more extensively with these services in the next block of this Cities study, we wished to highlight the importance and value of these organizations in moving newcomers closer to integration into employment and communities.

Across Canada, community agencies are helping newcomers get settled upon their arrival, but can rarely offer enough support to help them become full social and economic participants in Canadian cities.

⁴¹³ Sarah Wayland, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008; and Debbie Douglas, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 6 May 2009.

Credential recognition in initiatives

The Committee is aware of the considerable attention and funding by the federal government to encourage, facilitate and co-ordinate processes and policies to recognize the education and credentials brought to Canada by newcomers. With hundreds of professional and government agencies involved in establishing and administering credentials for Canadians, each of which has a role to play in ensuring that credentials of immigrants and refugees are assessed, the task is not a simple one.

Despite the Committee's concerns about on-going barriers, the efforts by both the Foreign Credential Recognition Office (CIC) and by the Foreign Credentials Referral Office (HRSDC) that are currently underway are important and valuable. The Committee commends the federal government for its 2009 commitment to the development of a framework to speed up the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, and for its continuing efforts to accelerate the recognition of credentials of newcomers.

Recommendation 63

The Committee recommends that the federal government accelerate its work with provincial governments and other relevant agencies to complete and implement a framework leading to the recognition of qualifications from other countries, and report annually to Parliament on its progress.

Bridging programs

The Committee heard from witnesses of the role of “bridging programs” in assisting newcomers to find appropriate employment upon their arrival in Canada.⁴¹⁴ These programs include mentoring, specialized training to accelerate qualification for Canadian credentials in select trades and professions, and other supports. The award-winning programs⁴¹⁵ offered by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, which also engage employers in program design and delivery, have demonstrated how they can succeed.

Recommendation 64

The Committee recommends that the federal government support bridging programs, especially for immigrants with professional qualifications from their countries of origin, through immigrant settlement funds and agreements.

⁴¹⁴ Avy Go, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008.

⁴¹⁵ “TRIEC receives Ontario's Newcomer Champion Award,” 23 June 2009. <http://www.triec.ca/news/story/195>. Accessed 18 September 2009.

5.4 Lone Parents

Snapshot

Statistics Canada reports that 72% of total income in all lone-parent families came from earnings,⁴¹⁶ yet the table below shows the lower median income over time of lone-parent families than other family types of more than one person, despite rising incomes in recent years. While there have been strong arguments made that employment is the necessary condition to reduce or eliminate poverty among lone parents, Statistics Canada reports that workers who are heads of lone-parent households (along with unattached individuals) were two to three times more likely to be poor than workers in other kinds of households.⁴¹⁷

Lone parents have the lowest incomes of any other kind of family with two or more members, including elderly couples.

Table 2 - Median after-tax income, by economic family type⁴¹⁸

	1986	1996	2006
	2006 constant \$		
Economic families, two people or more	51,500	49,100	58,300
Elderly families	34,600	35,800	42,400
Married couples only	30,500	35,000	41,400
All other elderly families	45,900	38,100	46,800
Non-elderly families	54,000	52,000	62,000
Married couples only	49,700	48,500	57,900
Two-parent families with children	56,800	56,200	67,900
Married couples with other relatives	72,900	71,900	88,800
Lone-parent families	25,300	23,400	34,900
All other non-elderly families	43,300	47,700	55,300
Unattached individuals	19,900	18,500	22,800
Elderly males	17,800	19,400	22,100
Elderly females	16,200	17,800	20,500
Non-elderly males	24,500	20,600	26,300
Non-elderly females	21,300	16,600	21,500

Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 202-0605.

The Committee heard from local officials and stakeholders of this trend toward low-income single-parent households in their cities and of the particular challenges they face:

⁴¹⁶ Statistics Canada, *The Canadian Labour Market at a Glance, 2007*, 2009, p. 78. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/71-222-x/71-222-x2008001-eng.pdf>. Accessed 17 July 2009.

⁴¹⁷ Dominique Fleury and Myriam Fortin, "When Working is not enough to Escape Poverty: An Analysis of Canada's Working Poor," Working Paper, HRSDC, August 2006, p. 36. <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/cs/sp/sdc/pkrf/publications/research/SP-630-06-06/SP-630-06-06E.pdf>. Accessed 17 July 2009.

⁴¹⁸ Statistics Canada, *Canada at a Glance, 2009*, p. 10. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-581-x/12-581-x2008001-eng.pdf>. Accessed 17 July 2009.

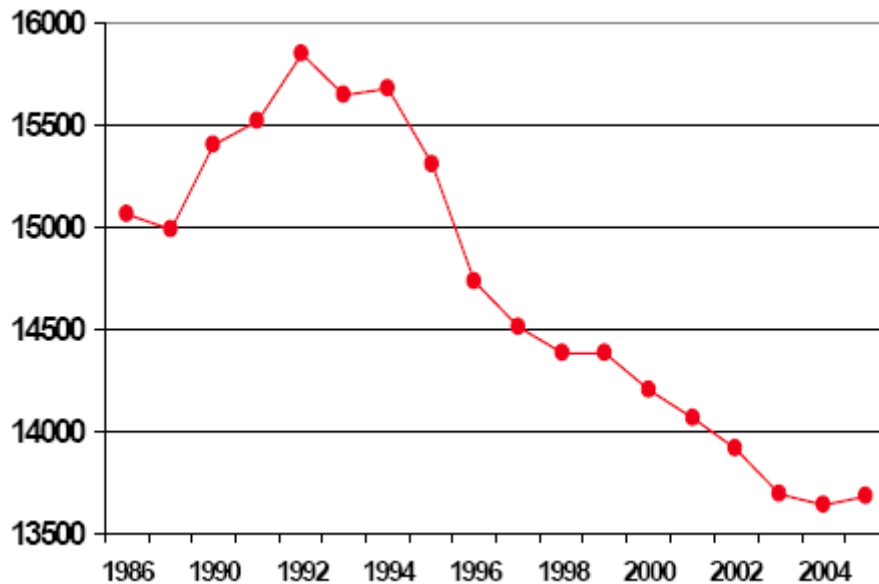
[A]s family patterns shift from those of the 1950s and 1960s, the single-mother led family is more common in Saint John with each new census year. As a result, because the majority of these single-mother led families cannot get out of poverty, the ratio of Saint John children living in poverty continues to climb.

(Tom Gribbons, Evidence, (SAST), 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 13 June 2007)

In 2004, more than one-third of lone-parents were living below the poverty line as measured by the Market Basket Measure.⁴¹⁹ The figure below, provided by one of the Committee’s witnesses, demonstrates the falling incomes from social assistance for lone parents, mostly single mothers, which may be contributing to this high poverty rate.

In 2004, more than one-third of lone parents were living with incomes before the low-income cut-off lines.

Figure 20 - National welfare incomes for lone parents over time⁴²⁰



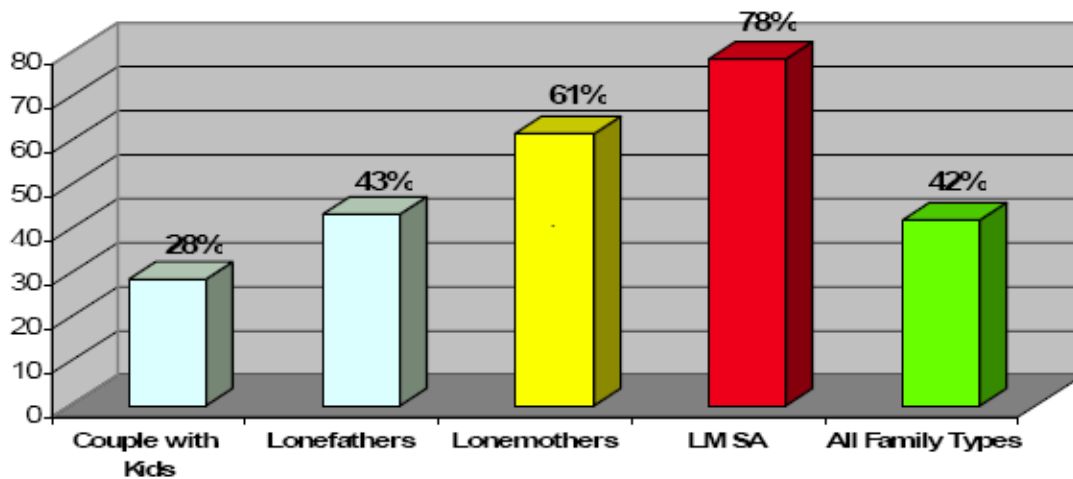
Source: Derived from SLID data, Dunn and Caragata, 2008

More lone parents, especially lone mothers, face housing affordability problems than other family types. The figure below demonstrates that the proportion of lone mothers on social assistance in core housing need is even higher than for other lone mothers.

⁴¹⁹ Laurie (2007), p. 28.

⁴²⁰ Leah Caragata, Submission to the Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 2 April 2009.

Figure 21 - Percentage of families with core housing need⁴²¹



While policy and programs of importance to this group are not targeted exclusively to lone parents, except for the establishment of social assistance rates by provincial and territorial government, the Committee is aware that some programs are of particular importance to this group, e.g., investment in early child development, increases to the National Child Benefit and the Working Income Tax Benefit, and increased opportunities for education and training. The Committee has made recommendations with respect to these programs in Section 2 of this report.

5.5 Aboriginal peoples

Jurisdiction

Unlike the other over-represented groups, legal and constitutional jurisdictional issues with respect to responsibility for Aboriginal peoples have been hotly debated in Canada over many years and on many occasions, leaving some Aboriginal peoples in limbo.

Aboriginal peoples are defined in the *Constitution Act, 1982* (section 35) as the “Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.” Despite this broad constitutional definition, the federal government’s current policy is that its responsibility – with a few exceptions – extends only to Indian people resident on reserve, while provincial governments have a general responsibility for Aboriginal peoples living off reserve. Neither the federal nor the provincial governments have accepted any special responsibility for the Métis and non-status Indian population. As a result, registered Indians are eligible for a range of federal programs and services delivered by a variety of federal government departments and agencies. Federal programs, albeit of lesser scope, targeted to off-reserve registered Indians are also available. The disparity in the range of available programs and services to this group, however, represents a long-standing grievance.

By virtue of subsection 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, there is a legal, clear constitutional basis for federal responsibility for First Nations on-reserve. The federal government accepts that it has primary responsibility for on-reserve First Nations, but not that it has exclusive jurisdiction. The status of the Métis and the non-registered Indian population under subsection 91(24) of the

⁴²¹ Ibid.

Constitution Act, 1867 remains undetermined. The federal government maintains that it does not have exclusive responsibility for these groups, and that its financial responsibilities for these groups are therefore limited.⁴²²

As with the debate over federal and provincial authority for many areas of social policy, witnesses expressed their exasperation with the lack of co-ordination:

[W]e have had almost half a century of debate between federal and provincial ministers and ministries about who is responsible for urban Aboriginal people. The royal commission suggested that that be resolved. It really needs to be resolved and [...] it needs to be resolved with the input of Aboriginal people. Fifty years of debate is getting to be too much.

(Evelyn Peters, Professor, University of Saskatchewan, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 3 April 2008)

The Committee also heard from witnesses who believe that their Indian status is not lost when they leave reserve, and that federal responsibility should travel with them from reserve to other communities:

It must also be recognized that just because we leave the reserves, we do not lose our status as Aboriginal First Nations people or whatever, and if we are living on-reserve, we do not usually run into discrimination until we leave the reserve. That is where the problems start, and significant problems arise from that particular aspect.

(Charlie Hill, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 5 June 2009)

Snapshot

Because this study focuses on major Canadian cities, and neither Aboriginal communities in the northern territories nor on reserves are located in these cities, our focus has been on off-reserve Aboriginal peoples. In 2006, Statistics Canada reported that, for the first time, more than half the Aboriginal population (54%) lived in urban areas. The urban Aboriginal population is predominantly young and concentrated in western cities, where they represent a considerable share of the population. In particular, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Edmonton and Prince Albert have relatively high concentrations of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people moving from reserves or traditional lands and communities face more than discrimination and poverty; they also face changes in services available to them, and benefits associated with Aboriginal status.

The Committee heard testimony that some Aboriginal peoples in cities are integrating into middle-class jobs and communities.⁴²³ However, while urban Aboriginal people tend to fare better on a range of socio-economic indicators than their on-reserve counterparts, the statistics are rarely encouraging. In 2000, the Canadian Council on Social Development found that Aboriginal people living in cities were more than twice as likely as their non-Aboriginal counterparts to be living in poverty. Another study found that more than half of urban Aboriginal households were living below the Low-Income Cut-Off line.⁴²⁴

⁴²² Calvin Hanselmann and Roger Gibbins, "Another Voice Is Needed: Intergovernmentalism in the Urban Aboriginal Context", in *Canada: The State of the Federation*, 2003, p. 79.

⁴²³ Douglas Durst, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009.

⁴²⁴ Andrew Siggner, "The Challenge of Measuring the Demographic and Socio-Economic Conditions of the Urban Aboriginal Population", *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, edited by David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, Policy Research Initiative, 2003, p. 128.

The incidence of poverty among the urban Aboriginal population is greatest in western urban centres. For example, Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Regina posted significantly high rates of urban Aboriginal poverty.

It is clear that urban Aboriginal people, like everyone else, are a heterogeneous group. They include people with widely varying incomes, education attainment levels, and employment situations. In recent years, in some cities, Aboriginal peoples are catching up to their non-Aboriginal urban neighbours, in terms of school attendance rates of 14 to 19 year olds,⁴²⁵ and graduation rates.⁴²⁶ Growing percentages of urban Aboriginal people are earning incomes of \$40,000 or higher.⁴²⁷ Nevertheless, overall, a significantly larger proportion of Aboriginal people in cities are poor, compared to non-Aboriginal urban dwellers.⁴²⁸

All across Canada, employment rates for Aboriginal peoples in 2001 were 10 percentage points below those of non-Aboriginal peoples.

Urban Aboriginal peoples are over-represented in many groups that experience high levels of poverty regardless of their Aboriginal status. For example, lone-parent families face a much higher risk of poverty than two-parent households in general, but for Aboriginal lone parents, the risk is even higher. Specific rates for specific cities are provided in the figure below.

Recent research has shown that Aboriginal students in the four western provinces are over-represented among those with less than a high school diploma, and vastly under-represented among those with a university education or higher.⁴²⁹ In the same provinces, Aboriginal peoples are under-represented among the employed, as shown in Figure 23 below. Canada-wide, Aboriginal people are three times more likely to be unemployed than the general population.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁵ Andrew J. Siggner and Rosalinda Costa, *Aboriginal Conditions in Census Metropolitan Areas, 1981-2001*, Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 27. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/89-613-MIE/89-613-MIE2005008.pdf> Accessed 9 September 2009.

⁴²⁶ John Lorinc, 'Making Space for Urban Aboriginals, in *The New City: How the Crisis in Canada's Urban Centres Is Reshaping the Nation*, Penguin Canada, 2006, p. 138.

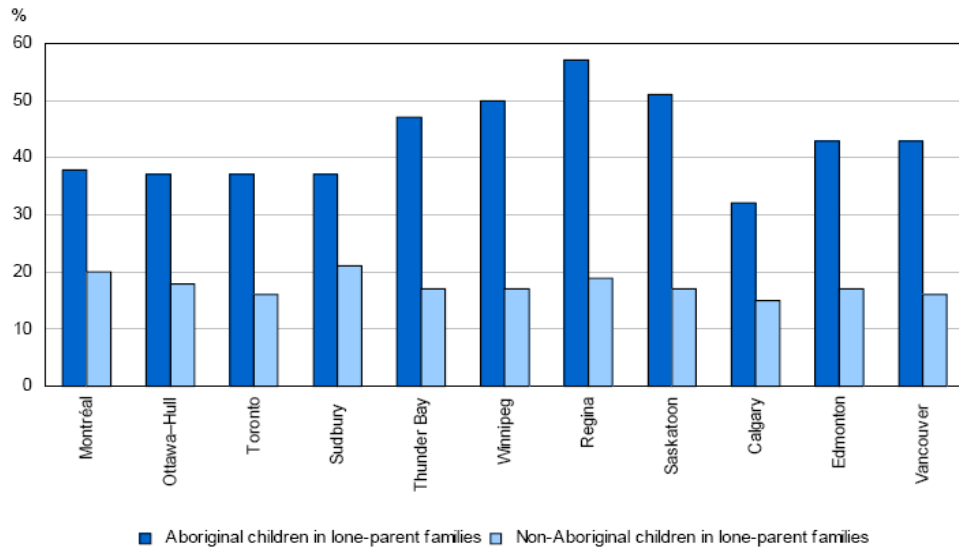
⁴²⁷ Katherine A.H. Graham and Evelyn Peters, *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*, Discussion Paper F|27, Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2002, p. 31.

⁴²⁸ Evelyn Peters, 'Geographies of Urban Aboriginal People in Canada: Implications for Urban Self-Government', in *Canada: The State of the Federation 2003 – Reconfiguring Aboriginal-State Relations*, edited by Michael Murphy, McGill-Queens University Press, 2003, p. 42.

⁴²⁹ Ben Brunnen, *Achieving Potential: Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People*, Building the New West Project Report #19, Canada West Foundation, 2003, p. 9.

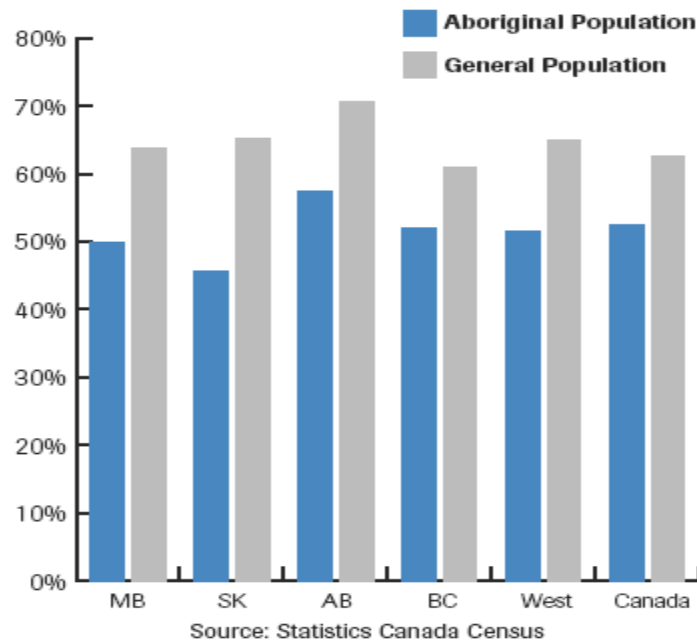
⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Figure 22 - Percentage of children under 15 years in lone-parent families, in selected cities, 2001⁴³¹



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2001.

Figure 23 - Employment rates, 2001 census⁴³²



Source: Statistics Canada Census

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People identified three ways in which urban Aboriginal people are underserved by health and human services. While they are theoretically eligible for services available to the general population, jurisdictional disputes (addressed in more detail below) and access to culturally appropriate programs and services (also addressed in greater detail below)

⁴³¹ Siggner and Costa (2005), p. 35.

⁴³² Brunnen (2003), p. 6.

have often resulted in an inadequate range and level of service for this segment of the population.⁴³³ Furthermore, Status Indians living off reserve are often unable to access the same level of services.

Finally, urban Aboriginal peoples are also among those facing the greatest housing affordability and security challenges, and are increasingly concentrated in large urban areas – particularly Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton. The barriers that exclude low-income Canadians from adequate housing are compounded for Aboriginal peoples by racism, high mobility rates, and inexperience in navigate the complexities of urban life. The combined effect of these factors makes housing for Aboriginal peoples a top priority for some witnesses:

Above all of the housing issues — both in terms of on- and off-reserve and in urban Canada—Aboriginal housing is the number-one issue we should be addressing. Their core housing need is so much more severe than for any other group in our society. Canada stands accused — and rightly so — all over the world for its negligence in dealing with that issue.

(John Anderson, Director, Government Affairs, Public Policy, Canadian Co-operative Association, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007)

Persistent problems

Jurisdictional arrangements

These jurisdictional disputes have direct impacts on First Nations peoples moving from reserve to city; for example, they lose their right to uninsured health benefits, including prescription drugs and dental care. Although, they become eligible for provincial social assistance and social services programs, one witness described the complexity that can result:

One of the most difficult areas, for those Aboriginal persons that have disabilities or mothers who have children with disabilities, is accessing services. Particularly, things like non-insured health benefits can be a serious problem for those that have status.

A simple task for mothers, such as getting eyeglasses for their children, can run into a logistical nightmare through the difficulty of ping-ponging between the band offices, federal Indian and health services and provincial authorities. Sometimes they are better off if they do not have status because they can access the provincial programs directly.

(Douglas Durst, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009)

The Committee heard from witnesses, one cited at the beginning of this section, who believe that their First Nation status is not lost when they leave reserve, and that federal responsibility should travel with them from reserve to other communities.

Inadequate funding for off-reserve housing

One of the most affected by housing problems are Aboriginal Canadians living off-reserve and increasingly concentrated in large urban areas – particularly Vancouver, Winnipeg, Regina, Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton. The focus of the federal government executive and legislative authority with respect to housing and other services for Aboriginal peoples has historically and primarily been on First Nations people living on reserves. With respect to on-reserve housing, however, the government states that it provides assistance based on policy and not treaty right. The federal government does provide some programs, albeit of a lesser scope, to off-reserve Aboriginal people, again on the basis of policy.

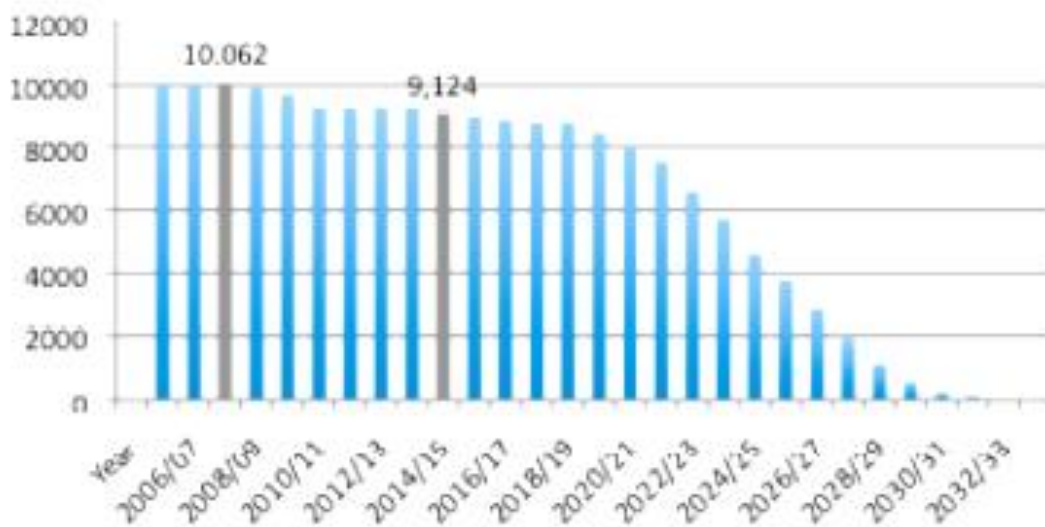
⁴³³ Summarized in Hanselmann and Gibbins, p. 80.

From 1953 to 1993, almost all non-market federal affordable housing projects⁴³⁴ were funded through four joint federal/provincial programs under the *National Housing Act*; these programs provided capital and/or operating subsidies to different types of projects. The Urban Native Housing Program was among them. The last funding for new projects under the program was provided in 1992. During the 30 years the program was in operation, fewer than 20,000 units were delivered, 11,000 of them in cities and towns. The federal government continues to provide operating subsidies for previously approved non-market projects, but since the end of 1993 it has provided no money for new projects under this program.

In 1996, the federal government took steps to transfer administrative responsibility for social housing, including off-reserve Aboriginal housing, to the provinces and territories. In Ontario, responsibility for the management of the still active portion of the Urban Native Housing Program was further devolved to municipalities. The subsidies are only available to the end of the mortgage period, after which Aboriginal groups are expected to manage without subsidy.

The action plan put forward by the National Aboriginal Housing Association, submitted to the Committee, indicates that close to 10,000 units funded under the Urban Native Housing program are “at risk” without renewed subsidies and renovation, starting last year as agreements began to expire.⁴³⁵ These agreements will all expire over the next 20 years, with one-tenth of the units losing their subsidy in the coming year.⁴³⁶ The figure below captures the anticipated losses.

Figure 24 - Expiry of subsidy – urban native units⁴³⁷



While many non-profit housing providers are also facing the expiry of operating subsidies under other federally funded programs,

⁴³⁴ Non-market housing is housing provided for those who cannot pay market rents and is owned by a government, a non-profit or co-operative society.

⁴³⁵ National Aboriginal Housing Association, “A Time for Action: A National Action Plan to Address Aboriginal Housing,” June 2009, p. 11.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

*The issue of expiring agreements and post expiry viability is more acute in the urban native portfolio because agreements were often shorter so expiry is earlier; and there tends to be deeper targeting – the residents are lower income and more concentrated...*⁴³⁸

Urban Aboriginal housing providers, in testimony⁴³⁹ and in less formal conversations⁴⁴⁰ with Committee members, have explained that they are unable to charge market rents for any of their units and still meet the needs of urban Aboriginal tenants. Consequently, they are unable to cross-subsidize rents from market-rent units, as many other non-profit housing providers do when faced with the end of operating subsidies.

The Committee heard testimony demonstrating some of the impacts on one particular organization:

Aboriginal housing in Winnipeg is faced with the immediate challenge of telling Aboriginal families that there is no longer a subsidy attached to that unit funded by the federal government. The family will be turfed out... [Selling units for a profit] might be their only alternative if there is no support given for those families who are facing those issues.

(Jino Distasio, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 17 May 2007)

The Committee also heard that this program was critical to recognizing and meeting the needs of urban Inuit in Canadian cities as well:

What is essential is a clear commitment by the federal government to address the fact that Inuit peoples do not have the same level of access to urban housing specific to their needs as other indigenous groups. This access can be achieved readily by reviving the Urban Native Housing Program in its entirety and by revising the downloading over the last several years of the administration segment to the provinces. Instead of walking away from their obligation, as has occurred, the federal government, through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, can and should revitalize what was an excellent vehicle for providing affordable housing for native peoples.

(Lynda Brown, President, Inuit Non-Profit Housing Ottawa, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 November 2007)

Following the end of the Urban Native Housing Program, the housing programs and services offered by the federal government for off-reserve urban Aboriginals were for the most part those that were available to all Canadians. These programs consisted of the Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI) and housing renovation programs delivered by CMHC. On its web site, CMHC identifies a number of services for off-reserve Aboriginal peoples but they are generally programs that are available for anyone who qualifies for them. Witnesses have told the Committee that they are not sufficient to provide the on-going support of affordable housing units for off-reserve Aboriginal peoples:

Regardless of the program model we use or how we deliver it, it does not involve one-time funding or 25 years of funding. It is permanent funding. It is something that will not go away.

(Lawrence Poirier, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 29 November 2007)

⁴³⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴³⁹ Lawrence Poirier and Lynda Browne, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 29 November 2007.

⁴⁴⁰ Site visit by Subcommittee on Cities, Gabriel Housing Corporation, Regina, 14 July 2009.

Recommendation 65

The Committee recommends that the federal government provide on-going subsidies to off-reserve, non-profit Aboriginal housing providers for new and existing units to ensure increased supply of affordable housing.

Access to culturally appropriate services

Aboriginal peoples are often unable to make use of existing mainstream services, either because they feel judged by providers, e.g., shelters, health services, or because the services provided do not meet their needs, e.g., lack of social housing units large enough to accommodate families with more children. Also, there may be a “culture shock” for Aboriginal people making this move:

For Aboriginal persons arriving from a life on reserve there is a major cultural adjustment and accordingly, customized culturally sensitive programming and service delivery may be required especially if the goal is to facilitate successful transition. This includes supports in life-skills and in improving educational readiness and labour market skills so that these persons and families can secure employment and increasing self-sufficiency, rather than reinforcing poverty and deprivation with the only change being geographical.⁴⁴¹

This is consistent with a 2007 research report on meeting the needs of urban Aboriginal peoples who are homeless, which observed that

“The approaches of shelters for Aboriginal people, run by Aboriginal people, differ fundamentally from mainstream shelters; these differences make Aboriginal shelters more effective than mainstream shelters in assisting Aboriginal clients.”⁴⁴²

The Committee also notes that the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples in its report on urban youth called for federal funding specifically for culturally appropriate services for youth in transition from reserve to urban contexts.⁴⁴³

One witness identified the importance of Aboriginal-run programming:

Aboriginal-controlled organizations in all of the cities of Canada — and some rural areas too — ... are more likely to be culturally responsive, to deliver services that are appropriate and that are actually closer to the communities that need the service.

(Frances Abele, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009)

Loss of benefits

As First Nations peoples move from reserve to City, they face specific challenges. In addition to losing entitlement to specific benefits, e.g., uninsured health benefits, including prescription drugs and dental care, they face a cultural change of enormous proportions.

⁴⁴¹ National Aboriginal Housing Association, “A Time for Action,” p. 15.

⁴⁴² Andrew Webster, “Sheltering Urban Aboriginal Homeless People: Assessment of Situation And Needs,” National Association of Friendship Centres In collaboration with The Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, November 2007, p. 9.

⁴⁴³ Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, *Urban Aboriginal Youth*, p. 59.

Promising practices

Urban Aboriginal Strategy

The Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) was introduced by the federal government in 1998 to “...address, in partnership with stakeholders, the serious socioeconomic needs of urban Aboriginal people. The UAS is designed to improve policy development and program coordination at the federal level and with other levels of government.”⁴⁴⁴ It originally was an attempt to co-ordinate existing programs, to avoid overlap and fill gaps. However, in 2003, \$25 million was allocated for pilot projects; in 2004, the project was extended to 2006-2007, and the budget for pilot projects doubled to \$50 million. While this program has received mixed reviews, with some of its flaws covered in the previous section, the consensus was that it offers promise, and is a model that could and should be extended to more communities.

The Urban Aboriginal Strategy has demonstrated some success in the communities in which it is available, providing the foundation for culturally appropriate supports of many kinds.

In 2007, the current federal government made a five-year \$68.5 million commitment to the UAS, and set three broad priorities: improving life skills; promoting job skills, training and entrepreneurship; and supporting Aboriginal women, children and families.⁴⁴⁵ Although the program was always intended to promote intergovernmental collaboration at the local level, this is now a requirement, in that a community plan developed by all stakeholders must be in place as part of the funding application process.

Among the outcomes being sought by 2012, are the development and implementation of community strategic action plans; increased community capacity; sustained partnerships; harmonized federal policies and programs with respect to urban Aboriginal peoples; and improvements in “client socio-economic conditions... , leading to increased self-sufficiency and less reliance on social programs.”⁴⁴⁶

One witness suggested that progress had been made on at least the first of these outcomes:

Where the UAS has been operating, you are more likely to find enduring networks of Aboriginal service organizations.

(Frances Abele, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009)

Other witnesses, however, have argued that UAS funding has failed both in targeting only 14 cities, and in funding social infrastructure that already existed.⁴⁴⁷ The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, in its report on urban youth, proposed that the UAS be used as a mechanism to build intersectoral and intergovernmental collaboration to address the many issues facing urban Aboriginal youth. The Committee commends the government for continuing commitment to the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, but seeks the expanded mandate proposed.

⁴⁴⁴ “Backgrounder: Urban Aboriginal Strategy” <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/mr/nr/j-a2005/02564abk-eng.asp>. Accessed 27 August 2009.

⁴⁴⁵ “Urban Aboriginal Strategy: Backgrounder” <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/of/ias/bkg-eng.asp>. Accessed 27 August 2009.

⁴⁴⁶ “Terms and Conditions - Urban Aboriginal Strategy Contribution Program” <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/of/ias/tnc-eng.asp>. Accessed 27 August 2009.

⁴⁴⁷ Calvin Hanselmann, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 3 April 2008.

Recommendation 66

The Committee recommends that the Urban Aboriginal Strategy be used as a platform for greater investment and collaboration in addressing the poverty and housing problems facing urban Aboriginal peoples.

Housing Trust

In 2006, the federal government resumed a more active role in housing for urban Aboriginal peoples, established the Off-Reserve Aboriginal Housing Trust totalling \$300 million for off-reserve Aboriginal housing. One-time funding from this trust is being allocated by provincial and territorial governments and is meant to address pressures with regard to the supply of affordable housing. Funding will be notionally allocated over three years (2006–2007 to 2008–2009) among provinces based on the provincial share of the Aboriginal population living off-reserve. The housing trust does not require matching funds from non-federal sources such as the provinces and territories,⁴⁴⁸ but witnesses advised that it also included no operating funds.⁴⁴⁹

The Committee has heard that access to these funds by groups seeking to develop off-reserve Aboriginal housing has been “sporadic” at best,⁴⁵⁰ and that accountability has been lacking.⁴⁵¹

Further, witnesses have advised the Committee that any funding, including under the Trust, needs to be made longer term:

Friendship Centres

The Committee has heard from witnesses and in submissions of the important role that Friendship Centres play in Canadian cities, providing locally determined programs to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal peoples across Canada.

*Friendship Centres, Urban Native housing associations and other Aboriginal service organizations play an important intermediary role in facilitating the transition to urban, non reserve life – housing is necessary but alone an insufficient response to broader social needs.*⁴⁵²

Like many organizations, these centres are facing increasing demand for services, without concurrent increases in funding under the federal program that supports their operations:

We received a 25% reduction in expenditure review. It remains stuck at those levels today. We are using 1996 dollars to address 2009 issues, and they have only grown and become more complicated.

(Peter Dinsdale, Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009)

Recommendations in the next section of this report, with respect to voluntary organizations, have particular applicability to this program.

⁴⁴⁸ At least two provinces – British Columbia and New Brunswick – have decided to match federal funding. A third province – Alberta – has rejected a proposal by the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force that it match federal funds.

⁴⁴⁹ Lawrence Poirier, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 November 2007.

⁴⁵⁰ Peter Dinsdale, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009

⁴⁵¹ David Seymour, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 29 November 2007.

⁴⁵² National Aboriginal Housing Association, “A Time for Action”, p. 16.

Labour market programs

The federal government has, for some time, focused on education and training as the main approaches to poverty alleviation for the general population, and for Aboriginal people in cities as well. Among efforts toward increasing Aboriginal people's employability are the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS) and the Aboriginal Human Resource Council.

AHRDS was initiated in 1999 with a five-year commitment, and was renewed for a further five-year period scheduled to end in 2009. It is, in the words provided by HRSDC,

*... a pan-Aboriginal human resources and skills development strategy that provides support to Aboriginal organizations (80 Human Resources Development Agreement holders to date), to design and deliver labour market development programs to assist Aboriginal people, including Aboriginal persons with disabilities, prepare for, obtain, and maintain meaningful and sustainable employment; special programs to assist Aboriginal youth make successful transitions from school to work or to support their return to school; and child care programs.*⁴⁵³

Of 50,000 clients predicted to have been served from 1999 to the end of 2006-2007, 7,500 were expected to have been urban Aboriginal people.⁴⁵⁴

A recent announcement by the Government indicates that these agreements will be replaced with the Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund, with a commitment of \$75 million over two years.⁴⁵⁵ According to the HRSDC website, the fund "will strengthen partnerships between Aboriginal employment service organizations and employers through training-to-employment programs related to concrete job opportunities, and will support deeper investments in training for individuals facing barriers to employment such as low literacy and essential skills."⁴⁵⁶

The Aboriginal Human Resource Council, created in 1999, is one of a network of human-resource-related councils created for particular industries or sectors, to support recruitment and retention of employees. The Council runs an Aboriginal job board, and supports employers in creating Aboriginal-inclusive workplaces, while also providing support to individual Aboriginal people seeking employment. It serves both rural and urban Aboriginal people.⁴⁵⁷

Urban Aboriginal youth need to be specifically targeted by programs to support them in completing high school and going on to college or university.

Despite these initiatives, the Committee is conscious of the barriers to training and employment experienced by urban Aboriginal peoples, particularly youth. The Committee commends the government for supporting programs that provide targeted funding and programming for training and employment supports for urban Aboriginal peoples, including support to Aboriginal-run organizations to support Aboriginal people seeking training and/or employment.

⁴⁵³ HRSDC, *Report on Plans and Priorities 2007-2008*, Section III, Supplementary Information. <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/2007-2008/hrsd-rhdsc/hrsd-rhdsc05-eng.asp>. Accessed 19 October 2009.

⁴⁵⁴ Hanselmann and Gibbins, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁵ HRSDC, "The Government of Canada announces the creation of the Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund," *News Release*, 17 April 2009. <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-eng.do?&nid=444309>. Accessed 23 April 2009.

⁴⁵⁶ HRSDC "Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund." <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/corporate/budget/2009/sap.shtml>. Accessed 23 April 2009.

⁴⁵⁷ For more information, see the Council's website, at <http://www.aboriginalhr.ca/>.

Recommendation 67

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue and expand targeted funding and programming for training and employment supports for urban Aboriginal peoples, and their organizations, where appropriate.

Homelessness

While some cities report over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in shelters, others believe that any numbers under-represent the true number of homeless, because many Aboriginal peoples moving to larger cities tend to stay with friends, or “couch-surf”,⁴⁵⁸ and are therefore among the hidden homeless.

The Committee is aware of a range of services offered by Aboriginal organizations in Canadian cities, many supported by federal homelessness funding programs. The Committee has also learned that SCPI and then the Homelessness Partnership Initiative, at the local planning level, have provided for planning by Aboriginal agencies to identify priorities for Aboriginal peoples in those communities; others have not.

Given the increasingly urban context for Aboriginal peoples, especially youth, and their over-representation among the low-income and the homeless, the Committee believes that this Aboriginal focus within community plans is of vital importance in meeting their needs.

Recommendation 68

The Committee recommends that the federal government require an Aboriginal working group to identify priorities for urban Aboriginal people and designated funding for this purpose within all federal funding to communities to address housing and homelessness.

⁴⁵⁸ Douglas Durst, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009.

Section 6 - Common Cause

Governments must become more responsive to the needs articulated by the people who live in these [economically and socially marginalized] neighbourhoods. Governments have to work together and adapt their programming so that it fits well and reinforces what others are doing, and we need to break down the silos between different government departments.

(Judith Maxwell, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 15 May 2008)

The Committee has heard over the months that no single level of government, no single sector (public, private or voluntary), no single industry can have the same impact on the issues that collaboration⁴⁵⁹ and partnership among governments and among sectors have demonstrated. We have also heard that Canadians – be they scholars, or elected officials, or voluntary sector leaders, or people grappling with poverty and related issues – want solutions, and not more finger-pointing from one government or sector at another. We could not agree more.

[T]he role of the non-profit organizations in alleviating poverty and homelessness cannot be denied. They are fiscally responsible, creative in approach and not afraid to make things happen while waiting for government.

Rebekah Peters

Voluntary sector

As noted above, the Committee learned over and over again that a small group of passionate people changed and continues to change the world, contributing to thriving communities,⁴⁶⁰ and to change the lives of people with inadequate incomes and unaffordable or no homes, across Canada:

[T]he role of the non-profit organizations in alleviating poverty and homelessness cannot be denied. They are fiscally responsible, creative in approach and not afraid to make things happen while waiting for government.

(Rebekah Peters, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 6 December 2007)

The Committee has heard that this is even more the case for emerging Aboriginal community-based organizations,⁴⁶¹ and those that emerged to respond to new groups of immigrants and refugees.

Testimony before the Committee has reinforced for the Committee the importance of the charitable sector to meeting the needs of all vulnerable groups, and the “double-whammy” they have faced in the current recession: demand for their services have been increasing, while support through charitable donations has been squeezed by the economic hardship facing some of their donors.⁴⁶² Further, witnesses reminded us, funding to these local organizations is a way to guarantee greater protection for the vulnerable in a recession:

[M]uch of the programmatic support for the vulnerable Canadian population is provided by the charitable sector, and this sector is being hit very hard and very quickly by the recession. The charitable sector almost makes the auto sector

⁴⁵⁹ Rachel Laforest, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 1 May 2008.

⁴⁶⁰ Derek Ballantyne, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007.

⁴⁶¹ Frances Abele, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009.

⁴⁶² Roger Gibbins, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 2 April 2009.

look like a bed of roses in terms of the immediate impact of the recession. Therefore, if the goal is to protect vulnerable Canadians, one way to do that is to try to protect and assist the charitable sector.

(Roger Gibbins, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 2 April 2009)

Persistent problems

At the same time, the Committee has heard that the sector has faced continual and persistent challenges, in terms of financial sustainability:

The wheels are coming off the bus in the non-profit sector. I know a number of organizations that did not receive money at year end and are planning how to reduce or disband. It is a particularly difficult time to be a non-profit organization committed to these issues, to be any type of organization engaged in public education or, as in Campaign 2000's case, a coalition dedicated to advocacy.

(Katherine Scott, Vice President Research, Canadian Council on Social Development, Evidence, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007)

Reporting requirements

Just as we and other levels of government do not make it easy for individuals and families to move from welfare dependence to economic independence, we also do not make it easy for volunteers and small, dedicated staffs to help in that transition, and in making their communities more welcoming, healthier places for all, including people who are poor and/or homeless.

The Committee heard, especially in its meetings with non-government organizations doing innovative work in communities across Canada, of inadequate, dispersed and insecure funding from a wide variety of sources, virtually all of which demand increasing reporting and evaluation to demonstrate results, even for very short-term project funding. We have learned that the resources they devote to seeking, sustaining and accounting for the public funding they do receive, take them away from the work that only they can do. At the same time, the Committee also heard from federal officials who shared the frustration with respect to reporting requirements in particular:

Even where programs are demonstrated to be successful and to meet identified community needs, too many resources are allocated to getting, keeping and reporting on funding from governments at all levels.

We are all trying to balance the over-burdensome administration against the attention we feel from Parliament and the public about doing due diligence and accountability and values and results. It is a balance.

(Andrew Treusch, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 26 April 2007)

The Committee heard from witnesses that the allocation of time and resources to seeking funds and accounting for them is detracting from their core work. One expert in this area summarized these impacts on this subject:

The impact of [the shift away from long-term, more stable sources of funding toward more short-term, project-based funding] has been devastating for voluntary sector organizations across Canada. Through a number of research projects, we know that the growing funding constraint, the growing short-term projects, the fact that project-based funding does not enable groups to put money aside for their core operations has led to growing volatility in the funding base of organizations... A loss of infrastructure, due to project funding models and restrictions on the administrative costs, can lead to mission drift.

(Rachel Laforest, Associate Professor, Queen's University, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 1 May 2008)

During site visits Committee members heard not only from people with lived experience of poverty and homelessness, but also from the staff of the organizations that serve vulnerable people. Agency staff have become adept at collecting and providing program statistics and evaluation data, but still they find the reporting requirements overly burdensome and inefficient. They proposed more simplified reporting to alleviate the administrative burden while maintaining accountability.

These organizations also identified the importance of long-term sustainable funding for ongoing programs, especially those with long successful track records. Some of their programs Committee members visited have been running for over 20 years, yet we heard that funding application processes often treated them as new and untested with every grant application.

Further, the short funding cycle works against responsiveness at the local level. Agency staff told Committee members of their own struggles to provide effective, efficient, innovative service. While their own capacities did not seem to be a limitation, sometimes funding, particularly government funding, did. This constraint on innovation was also identified by witnesses appearing before the Committee.⁴⁶³ Innovation and responsiveness, we were told, requires more flexible funding.

In its 2009 report on population health, the Committee flagged the importance of multi-year funding with co-ordinated reporting across departments. We echo that recommendation now.⁴⁶⁴

Recommendation 69

The Committee recommends that the federal government review and revise grants and contributions reporting requirements among federal departments and agencies to enhance horizontal and vertical coordination of reporting and encourage multi-year funding among federal granting agencies, where problems that programs are addressing are persistent and longer term.

Inadequate funding

There is a crisis in the NGO sector in this country, which is part of the legacy of the termination of CAP in 1996, the cutbacks in Canada's social transfer. We are still living the legacy today in 2009 of the cutbacks to balance the books in 1995, 1996 and 1997. We are now back in a world of deficits for perhaps four to six years. That is a terribly depressing story for those NGOs who were told they had to do their bit to balance the books the last time and have still not recovered from those deficit reductions.

(Michael Prince, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

The Committee has heard that reductions in funding for voluntary organizations and a virtual end to “core funding” to support their work has been framed in the context of diversifying sources of funding. Yet, the Committee has also heard that with greater competition for fixed or declining corporate and foundation funding, these non-government sources of funding are increasingly difficult to find and sustain over time.

Recommendation 70

The Committee recommends that the federal government recognize and stabilize the contribution of voluntary sector organizations with respect to poverty, housing and

⁴⁶³ Monica Patten and Rachel Laforest, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 1 May 2008; Sherri Torjman, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 2 April 2009.

⁴⁶⁴ SAST, *A Healthy, Productive Canada*, p. iv.

homelessness, by budgeting adequate support for these organizations to accomplish not only the delivery of government-funded services, but also the community-building activities that only this sector can provide.

Promising practices

In visits to agencies in cities across Canada, Committee members have been impressed with the innovative and often effective programs and services provided by voluntary organizations. (A more detailed description of these programs is included in Appendix 3.) While we recognize that their effectiveness stems at least in part because they respond to very specific local contexts, we have also seen and heard that some models and programs have been adapted to local circumstances and have proven to be effective in other locations as well.⁴⁶⁵

During site visits, Committee members were witness to a great variety of innovative solutions. Innovation, the capacity to respond quickly with local solutions, was evident at every site visit. In many cases, organizations had emerged and grown simply because they noticed something that needed to be done and they jumped in to fill the gap.

Committee members took the opportunity of these visits to ask organizations about how and under what circumstances their own innovation might be shared with others who are addressing similar problems. We heard that while there is the desire to share, there is little opportunity. We heard that in order to share, organizations require resources to gather, compile and disseminate information. While there is the potential to share information about innovation in written, web-based material or in a conference setting, the starting point is for innovation to be supported in the day-to-day work of the organization. Witnesses before the Committee echoed that voluntary organizations can often innovate by building on successful models in other communities⁴⁶⁶ and recommended that this be encouraged by government funding to successful local organizations, so that they can develop materials and practices that can lead to successful replication in other communities.

Recommendation 71

The Committee recommends that federal government use grants and contributions to fund community-based organizations to provide innovative solutions, to share innovation, and where appropriate to replicate successful community-based initiatives involved in poverty reduction, housing affordability, and supporting homeless people.

All-of-government(s) approach

Within the federal government, responsibility for programs related to income security, housing and homelessness all rest with the Minister for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. However, responsibility for programs that can prevent income and housing inadequacy and unaffordability, and that address the problems they can create, are often in other departments and agencies.

⁴⁶⁵ Examples include Vibrant Communities, operating in 15 cities across Canada with each group of stakeholders deciding on local priorities, and L'Abri en Ville, where the local organization has prepared a "how-to" manual and encourages visits from interested groups from other cities to learn more about the model.

⁴⁶⁶ Monica Patten, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 1 May 2008.

The Committee heard, for example, that cost savings realized by reducing social assistance benefits (which followed reductions in federal transfers for such programs) became additional costs to the health care system.⁴⁶⁷

The Committee recognized, in its study on population health, that a fragmented approach to that problem was not going to render the solution in terms of improved health for Canadians. In that study, the Committee concentrated its first recommendations on the requirements for a “whole-of-government” approach; it was described as a “horizontal approach that brings together different departments and agencies” with a view to achieving “concerted action, collaboration and coordination of efforts.”⁴⁶⁸

Governments need to work across silos, both across departments within governments, across sectors, and across levels of government, to address effectively the income and housing needs of many Canadians.

The Committee believes the same is true for poverty, housing and homelessness. While we have not recommended new machinery to achieve this goal, we learned with great interest of a new framework for the Nova Scotia government that focuses on both social and economic development. With a theme of “weaving threads,” the framework metaphor has been extended to the effort to rationalize programming to ensure access and adequacy and to reduce or eliminate duplication. The official told the Committee:

We talk about no dangle and no tangle of the threads. No dangle means no gaps. No tangle means no duplication.

(Lynn Hartwell, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 August 2008)

The Committee believes this is an appropriate goal for intra-governmental and intergovernmental collaboration with respect to income security for Canadians and newcomers, no matter where they live.

Recommendation 72

The Committee recommends that federal and provincial governments, acting internally, bilaterally and/or multilaterally, review current policies and programs and new initiatives in the context of eliminating and avoiding both gaps and duplication, through a whole-of-government approach to poverty, housing and homelessness issues.

Intergovernmental collaboration

While the Committee will address issues related to the “machinery” of how governments in Canada interact in a later segment of this study, as noted above, the lack of collaboration creates gaps, duplications and unintended interactions that trap people in economically and socially marginalized neighbourhoods and lives.

In addition to the welfare wall, for example, the Committee has learned of situations in which federal funds transferred to provincial governments are not always spent for the purpose intended.⁴⁶⁹ Many witnesses identified solutions that included more conditions and more accountability, while

⁴⁶⁷ Gina Browne, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 28 February 2008.

⁴⁶⁸ SAST, *A Healthy, Productive Canada*, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁶⁹ For example, the Committee heard that funds transferred to some provinces for immigrant settlement services are being diverted to general revenues, and never reach their intended target. Sarah Wayland, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 March 2008.

others were insistent on giving more local governments more flexibility and authority to identify priorities and allocate federal resources accordingly. The Committee fully understands both perspectives.

The Committee also recognizes the challenges created by federal-provincial initiatives for provincial governments. The most notable is the National Child Benefit, highlighted earlier in this report for its effectiveness. Under this program, funds transferred from the federal government to low-income parents were intended, in part, to free up provincial funds being spent on social assistance to provide supports to the same parents. Yet, to many advocates and even analysts, the provincial government reallocation of funds from social assistance to supports was characterized as a “claw-back.” Such a characterization makes it more difficult for provincial and territorial governments to enter into agreements with the federal government which call for direct cash transfers from the federal government to individuals, and provincial spending to be redirected to services, rather than cash.

The Committee has also learned about agreements among federal, provincial and local governments in several Canadian cities. While these will be addressed in more detail in a later segment of this study, the Committee noted and made recommendations with respect to Urban Development Agreements to support local initiative with co-ordinated multi-government support. While several witnesses pointed out the local, very targeted and time-limited nature of these agreements, the Committee wishes to highlight that these agreements demonstrate that collaboration on these issues is possible, at least in these specific contexts.

Finally, the Committee recognizes that poverty, the lack of appropriate and affordable housing, and homelessness cannot be addressed effectively without partnerships: between the federal and provincial governments, between federal and local governments, and among all three levels of government. Despite legitimate fears, administrative juggernauts, and disputed jurisdiction, all governments owe it to Canadians to eliminate barriers to participation and prosperity and to support people through transitions without trapping them in a mix of programs and policies that entangle rather than enable.

Inter-sectoral collaboration

The Committee is aware of remarkably successful programs and initiatives, made possible because governments, businesses, and voluntary organizations have worked together to achieve a common goal. Examples include some of the local poverty-reduction and homelessness strategies, described in more detail in Appendix 4. The Committee has also heard of situations where solutions are less effective or harder to find because these opportunities and efforts do not exist, for example, with the provision of affordable rental housing in general,⁴⁷⁰ or the development of policies and programs for urban Aboriginal peoples.⁴⁷¹

As with the “all-of-government” approach, described above, the Committee also believes that “all-sectors” approaches are valuable. The Committee’s support for this approach is reflected in recommendations related to the development of new policies, programs and/or strategies, throughout the report.

⁴⁷⁰ Sharon Chisholm, Evidence, SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 21 November 2007.

⁴⁷¹ Calvin Hanselmann, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 3 April 2008.

In particular, the Committee was impressed by a policy adopted by the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction⁴⁷² to contribute to the spirit of collaboration among diverse stakeholders:

[T]hey created what they call the "no-blame" table. It signals something very powerful: that is, the belief that the Hamilton Community Foundation and other community foundations have that we are all in this together. We have some responsibility for creating the situations in which we find ourselves, and we all have an opportunity to work together to move away from it. Therefore, the no-blame concept is a powerful principle.

(Monica Patten, President and Chief Executive Officer, Community Foundations of Canada, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 1 May 2008)

Research, data and knowledge exchange

Our Committee's work, like that of virtually every research exercise in Canada, relied heavily on Statistics Canada data. Research presented by witnesses went well beyond the Census data, a rich source of information all by itself, to more population- or sector-specific surveys, including youth in transition, the longitudinal study on children and youth, the survey on volunteer and charitable giving, the survey of labour and income dynamics, and the labour force survey. Officials from Statistics Canada provided analysis to the Committee that was invaluable.

The federal contribution to research, data collection and analysis, and knowledge dissemination is critical, and needs to be securely funded and affordable to local groups.

The Committee also heard from a variety of witnesses of the need for more population-specific data, especially in the context of gender,⁴⁷³ racialized groups and urban Aboriginal peoples.⁴⁷⁴ The Committee commends the work of Statistics Canada, on its own and in collaboration with other federal departments and agencies.

Recommendation 73

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue and expand support to Statistics Canada for the collection, analysis and more affordable dissemination of data important to the evaluation and improvement of social programs with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness.

The Committee also heard from witnesses of the important role that both government programs, like the Homelessness Partnership Initiative (and its predecessor programs) and CMHC, and voluntary sector activities have played in providing useful information to practitioners and researchers, including through the expansion of the Homelessness Individual and Families Information System; the Committee also learned of the role of these programs in bringing together government and non-government stakeholders to exchange promising practices and collaborate on finding solutions to common, apparently local, problems. Similar initiatives with respect to access to education supplied data for this report, for example; these have also been supported with federal funds.

⁴⁷² More information on the Roundtable and the local strategies developed is provided in Appendix 4 to this report.

⁴⁷³ Nancy Burrows, Coordinator, Fédération des femmes du Québec, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 4 June 2008.

⁴⁷⁴ Evelyn Peters and Calvin Hanselmann, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 3 April 2008.

Recommendation 74

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue to support knowledge exchange with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness.

Accountability

The Committee is aware that collaborations and partnerships can make accountability more challenging. As much as we wish to see reporting for voluntary-sector organizations simplified, we also understand and support the public's interest in knowing that public money has been spent for the purposes intended.

Recent trends have been toward fewer strings attached to federal dollars being transferred to provinces, and we have heard of the benefits of such an approach, in encouraging place-based solutions, and more flexibility and responsiveness to regional and local differences. Some have been cited in this report.

We have also heard concerns, also already cited, that federal funds may be diverted to purposes other than those intended, and the current accountability structures may mask some of these diversions. Under programs developed by both the previous and the current governments, provincial governments are expected, and often required, to report to their own people for the spending and the results from it.

Summary of recommendations

In its two-year study, the Committee identified many areas where current government policies and programs require revision, and others were promising policies and programs, many of which have already demonstrated some success, could be improved and/or need expansion to accomplish their goals. A summary of the recommendations to move Canadians out of poverty; to provide access to adequate, appropriate and affordable housing; and to end homelessness in Canada follows.

Poverty

Adequate incomes and the “welfare wall”

The Committee understands that most Canadians relying on income assistance programs do not have enough income to meet their individual and family needs. The Committee also understands that the current income programs too often entrap recipients through unintentional impacts of program design and interactions.

To ensure that all Canadians, regardless of their source of income, have an income adequate to meet their basic needs, and are able to become financially self-sustaining, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- adopt as a core poverty eradication goal, that all programmes dealing with poverty and homelessness are to lift Canadians out of poverty rather than make living within poverty more manageable and that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to adopt a similar goal;
- modify all federal income security programs, e.g., Employment Insurance, to better protect Canadians in low-income households who experience short-term gaps in income;
- establish with the provinces a goal that individuals and families, regardless of the reasons for their need, receive incomes totalling at least after-tax LICOs;
- publish a Green Paper by 31 December 2010, to include the costs and benefits of current practices with respect to income supports and of options to reduce and eliminate poverty, including a basic annual income based on a negative income tax, and to include a detailed assessment of completed pilot projects on a basic income in New Brunswick and Manitoba;
- reinstate a federal minimum wage at \$10/hour, indexed to the Consumer Price Index, and that suppliers of goods and services to the federal government be required to pay its employees at least that amount;
- develop and implement a basic income guarantee at or above LICO for people with severe disabilities; and work with provincial and territorial governments to redesign and enhance delivery of disability supports to all persons with disabilities, regardless of the source of their incomes in the context of this new federal income security program;

- explicitly cite international obligations ratified by Canada in any new federal legislation or legislative amendments relevant to poverty, housing and homelessness;
- establish a fund to allow groups over-represented among the persistently low-income to have legal representation in law reform cases with respect to their human rights; and
- develop a new program to insure against income losses due to long-term employment interruption, that covers those who are not included in under the *Employment Insurance Act*.

With respect for provincial jurisdiction over social assistance programs, the Committee has concluded that asset depletion requirements, intended to ensure that only those with genuinely low incomes are eligible, are especially detrimental to exiting poverty. The Committee also recognizes barriers to full social and economic participation created by some of these programs for people over-represented among those with low incomes. Therefore, the Committee recommends that provincial governments:

- increase current limits on assets for qualifying applicants for the first six to 12 months, to allow those relying on social assistance for short periods of time to retain the assets they need to re-engage in the labour force and regain their economic footing;
- amend their social assistance legislation to exempt savings under the Disability Savings Plan from any asset depletion requirements with respect to qualifications for or benefits from social assistance and social services programs; and
- extend supports to persons with disabilities leaving social assistance for up to 12 months following employment, and negotiate with employers to provide these supports indefinitely for those earning low incomes.

Employment insurance

The Committee has heard that Employment Insurance is a critical piece of the income security and re-employment puzzle in Canada, providing much-needed income for those who have recently lost their jobs and who are eligible for the benefits and training under this program. The Committee therefore recommends that the federal government:

- amend the *Employment Insurance Act* to provide benefits for a longer period to workers who become unemployed after a long attachment to the workforce, and that the longer benefit period not be based solely on regional unemployment rates;
- remove the two-week waiting period for employment insurance benefits for people who are taking compassionate or parental leave funded through the EI program;
- re-engineer the Employment Insurance program to allow adjustments to anticipated economic downturns, rather than be based solely on recent but past experience;
- amend the EI program to extend its parental insurance benefits to self-employed individuals, with premiums assessed similar to those being paid by employees who access this benefit;
- expand EI sickness benefits over time to 50 weeks, to provide appropriate support for eligible beneficiaries experiencing medium-term illnesses or disabilities;

- include reinstatement of experience rating for consideration in any redesign or substantial modification to the EI program; and
- make EI-funded training available to those who have contributed to the EI fund over time, but are not eligible for benefits.

Education and training

The Committee has learned of the critical role that high-school completion and advanced training and education play in helping Canadians become employed and earn incomes that are sufficient to meet their needs. As both provincial and federal governments are involved in designing, funding and implementing programs and policies with respect to education and training, the Committee has made recommendations to both.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- permit the inclusion of advanced language training and training that could equip those with credentials from other countries to qualify for Canadian recognition be permitted within training funded through the EI program;
- coordinate a nationwide federal/provincial initiative on early childhood learning;
- emphasize and support initiatives that keep disadvantaged youth enrolled and engaged in schools, including effective counselling, after-school programs, homework clubs, and youth centres through existing programs and initiatives;
- monitor and report on new post-secondary student aid programs, including comparisons with affordability and debt load results of the programs that have been replaced;
- in conjunction with the Council of Ministers of Education encourage and support actions to reduce the drop-out rate, including the establishment of targets and time-lines, with regular reporting on progress;
- in conjunction with the Council of Ministers of Education, encourage and support actions to reduce the drop-out rates among Aboriginal students, on-reserve or off-reserve, including the establishment of targets and time-lines, with regular reporting on progress;
- offer additional tax support for post-secondary education targeted to low-income students in groups under-represented in post-secondary education (e.g., Aboriginal students and students with disabilities) and to their families;
- set aside a fixed percentage of training positions (to match the percentage established for federal employment equity targets) for persons with disabilities in all renewing and new labour market agreements; and until then extend and expand funding for such training through the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities;
- sustain and increase the funding for the Opportunities Fund for persons with disabilities, with a clear mission to address barriers to the labour force;

- explicitly identify immigrants as a population to be targeted in training programs, including training to reduce language and other barriers to the labour market in all renewing and new labour market agreements;
- sustain strong financial support for adult and family literacy programs, with a special priority given to groups over-represented among high-school non-completers; and
- work with provincial governments to collectively amend existing income security programs to provide secure funding to training participants for long enough periods to ensure opportunities for secure employment at adequate incomes.

Health

In recognition of the contribution of poverty and homelessness to health challenges, and in keeping with this Committee's recent report on population health, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- instruct its central agencies to allocate resources to prevent and address negative health outcomes associated with poverty and unemployment;
- work with provincial and territorial governments and appropriate other stakeholders to develop a national pharmacare program, building on progress underway in some provinces; and
- with provincial and territorial governments and health researchers across Canada, provide funding for physical health investments for people who are homeless.

Taxation

The Committee recognizes the important role that tax policy and programs play in redistributing income and alleviating poverty for many Canadians. The Committee believes that tax measures could also help to address affordable housing challenges. With respect to taxation, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- analyze gender-based differences in benefits to men and women when designing and implementing new tax measures;
- increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors to ensure that economic households are not below the poverty line as defined by the low income cut-off levels, and that intergovernmental collaboration ensure that such increases do not result in the loss of eligibility for provincial/territorial subsidies or services for seniors;
- raise the National Child Benefit, incrementally and predictably, to reach \$5,000 (in 2009 dollars) by 2012;
- make the Disability Tax Credit refundable;
- develop a tax credit for employers who hire newcomers for their first job in their field or area of expertise; and

- issue a White paper on tax measures to support construction of rental housing in general and affordable rental housing in particular, including for the donation of funds, lands or buildings for low-income housing provision.

Housing and homelessness

Although housing and homelessness were address separately in this report, the Committee recognizes that some solutions must address them in an integrated way, while others are focused either on the creation and maintenance of affordable housing or on meeting the needs of people who are currently homeless.

Housing

With respect to housing, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- provide sustained and adequate funding through the Affordable Housing Initiative to increase the supply of affordable housing;
- clarify the mandate of Canada Lands Corporation to favour use of surplus federal lands for development of affordable housing, and to expedite planning processes to facilitate this use;
- support the work of local and provincial non-profit housing developers by making housing programs longer term to accommodate five-year development cycles and ten-year planning cycles, and to permit more effective planning at the local and provincial levels;
- support tenants in their challenges to discrimination in housing by explicitly identifying civil legal aid as an element to be supported by the Canada Social Transfer;
- extend the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program as a permanent program, increase the budget allocations for this program, and amend eligibility requirements to take into account differential costs for repairs in different communities across Canada, and projects converting housing units for affordable rental accommodation; and
- work with provincial governments and social housing providers take the necessary steps to provide larger housing units to larger families; and work with provincial housing authorities, private landlords' associations and non-profit housing providers to assess the impact of portable housing allowances on rents.

Homelessness

With respect to homelessness, the Committee has heard of the effectiveness of the Homelessness Partnering Strategies and its predecessor programs in supporting communities to reduce homelessness and to move people from the streets into housing. The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- expand the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to play a greater coordinating role within the federal government, engaging all departments and agencies with a mandate that includes housing and homelessness, especially for those groups over-represented among those in need;

- provide financial incentives to encourage communities already supported through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to use a 10-year time horizon in adjusting and renewing their community plans; and
- continue to provide direct funding for and continued support of related research and knowledge dissemination about a “housing first” approach to eliminating homelessness.

Integrated approach to housing and homelessness

With respect to an integrated approach to housing and homelessness, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- in collaboration with provincial governments, representatives of municipal governments, First Nation organizations, and other housing providers, develop a national housing and homelessness strategy to include:
 - priorities established by and for each provincial and territory with respect to meeting existing needs for affordable and secure housing;
 - a 10-year commitment of funds from the federal government, to include similar commitments from provincial and territorial governments that will receive these funds;
 - annual reporting on how the money is being spent, with particular attention to the number of people housed who could not afford to secure housing in the private market;
 - a specific focus, with targets and funding commitments, with respect to meeting the needs for affordable housing for urban Aboriginal peoples;
 - a simpler, more integrated application process for funds, cutting across programs related to housing funded at the federal level;
 - the integration of the Homelessness Partnership Initiative, with an expanded mandate and budget to support combined local housing and homelessness plans and the initiatives identified in them; and
 - a thorough evaluation at the end of the 10-year period to assess achievements and continuing gaps.
- integrate its housing and homelessness funding programs, and that such an integrated approach begin by supporting an expansion of existing homelessness plans to include housing, under a combined housing and homelessness strategy; and
- sustain federal funding focussed on homelessness until a combined strategy on housing and homelessness is developed to guide federal investment.

Aboriginal peoples

In addition to the recommendations made with respect to income security, training, and taxation that relate to Aboriginal peoples, the Committee recognizes the role that the federal government

plays with respect to on-reserve First Nations, and with urban Aboriginal peoples as well. The Committee also recognizes the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal peoples among the economically vulnerable in Canadian cities, and their under-representation in mainstream programs funded by all levels of government.

With respect to programs and policies intended to respond specifically to the needs of urban Aboriginal peoples, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- use the Urban Aboriginal Strategy as a platform for greater investment and collaboration in addressing the poverty and housing problems facing urban Aboriginal peoples;
- provide on-going subsidies to off-reserve, non-profit Aboriginal housing providers for new and existing units to ensure increased supply of affordable housing;
- continue and expand targeted funding and programming for training and employment supports for urban Aboriginal peoples, and their organizations, where appropriate; and
- require both an Aboriginal committee or working group to identify priorities for urban Aboriginal people, and designated funding for this purpose within all federal funding to communities to address housing and homelessness.

Newcomers to Canada

The Committee recognizes the primary responsibility of the federal government with respect to policies and programs for both refugees and immigrants to Canada. The Committee is also aware that these peoples face particular economic and social challenges in the first, and increasingly even in the second, generations in Canada. In addition to the tax measures proposed to ease integration to appropriate employment in Canada, the Committee believes that other initiatives are needed to redress these hardships.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- reduce the immigration sponsorship period from 10 years to three years similar to the regulations pertaining to conjugal sponsorship, and make a commensurate reduction in the residency requirement for entitlement to a monthly pension under the *Old Age Security Act*;
- extend eligibility for the resettlement assistance program for refugees to two years for regular cases and to four years for joint assistance sponsorships;
- establish a repayment schedule and loan forgiveness program for travel loan repayment by government-sponsored refugees, that takes into account the time needed to integrate and the household income upon employment;
- accelerate its work with provincial governments and other relevant agencies to complete and implement a framework leading to the recognition of qualifications from other countries, and report annually to Parliament on its progress; and
- support bridging programs, especially for immigrants with professional qualifications from their countries of origin, through immigrant settlement funds and agreements.

Common cause

The Committee believes that lifting Canadians out of poverty, ensuring they are adequately and affordably housed and eliminating homelessness is the work of all sectors, working in harmony wherever possible. In addition to the recommendations already provided above, the Committee wishes to support such collaboration wherever possible.

Voluntary sector

In particular, the Committee has noted the critical contribution of local agencies, both voluntary and municipal, to supporting people in their transitions out of poverty into appropriate and affordable housing and into social and economic participation in their communities.

The Committee recommends that the federal government:

- seek and support local voluntary sector and municipal agencies as active partners federal initiatives in design and delivery of federal initiatives at the community level;
- review and revise grants and contributions reporting requirements among federal departments and agencies to enhance horizontal and vertical coordination of reporting and encourage multi-year funding among federal granting agencies, where problems that programs are addressing are persistent and longer term;
- recognize and stabilize the contribution of voluntary sector organizations with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness, by budgeting adequate support for these organizations to accomplish not only the delivery of government-funded services, but also play the community-building activities that only this sector can provide; and
- use grants and contributions to fund community-based organizations to provide innovative solutions, to share innovation, and where appropriate to replicate successful community-based initiatives involved in poverty reduction, housing affordability, and supporting homeless people.

Provincial governments

The Committee is sensitive to the jurisdictional primacy of provincial governments in many of the policy areas that address poverty, housing and homelessness. The Committee is also aware of innovation and commitment at the provincial level with respect to these issues that, if successful, will make an enormous contribution to the economic and social well-being of many more of its residents.

Therefore, the Committee recommends that the federal government:

- target "shovel-ready" social infrastructure for investment, to combat recession with their provincial counterparts, specifically housing, income security, and social agencies, whose ability to serve can be quickly enhanced through increased and accelerated investment in the Canada Social Transfer, to parallel its investment in "shovel-ready" physical infrastructure, to combat recession; and

- at the next meeting of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Labour, take a leadership role in encouraging a harmonization of provincial and territorial workers' compensation programs.

Multisectoral collaboration

As noted above, it takes business, communities, and provincial and federal governments to allow and encourage everyone to have economic and social security in Canadian cities.

The Committee recommends that

- federal and provincial governments, acting internally, bilaterally and/or multilaterally, review current policies and programs and new initiatives in the context of eliminating and avoiding both gaps and duplication, through a whole-of-government approach to poverty, housing and homelessness issues;
- the federal government continue and expand support to Statistics Canada for the collection, analysis and more affordable dissemination of data important to the evaluation and improvement of social programs with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness;
- the federal government continue to support knowledge exchange with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness; and
- the federal government explore and implement additional Urban Development Agreements among federal, provincial and municipal governments, in concert with community-identified leaders and priorities.

Appendix 1 - Glossary

AHRDS	Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy
AHI	Affordable Housing Initiative
BC	British Columbia
BCAPI	Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative, Saint John
CAP	Canada Assistance Plan
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CESCR	Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CFS	Canadian Federation of Students
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CKP	Community Kitchen Program, Calgary
CMEC	Council of Ministers of Education
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
CNH	Collingwood Neighbourhood House, Vancouver
CPP	Canada Pension Plan
CPP-D	Canada Pension Plan - Disability
DLAS	Dalhousie Legal Aid Services
DTC	Disability Tax Credit
EI	Employment Insurance
FCM	Federation of Canadian Municipalities
GAI	Guaranteed annual income
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GED	Grade 12 Equivalency Diploma
GIS	Guaranteed Income Supplement
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HPS	Homelessness Partnering Strategy
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
HRM	Halifax Regional Municipality
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

HUMA	House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities
INAC	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
IRPP	Institute for Research on Public Policy
IWK	Health Centre in Halifax
JAS	Joint Assistance Sponsorship
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
LICO	Low-Income Cut-Off lines
LIM	Low-Income Measure
LSIC	Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada
MBM	Market Basket Measure
MDD	Montreal Diet Dispensary
METR	Marginal Effective Tax Rates
MISWAA	Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults
MS	Multiple Sclerosis
NAHA	National Aboriginal Housing Association
NCB	National Child Benefit
NECHC	North End Community Health Centre, Halifax
NGO	Non-government organization
OAS	Old Age Security
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PALS	Participation and Activity Limitation Survey
PTA	Provincial training allowance
RADAR	Re-engaging Academically Disconnected Adolescents Respectfully, Calgary
RAP	Resettlement Assistance Program
RDSP	Registered Disability Savings Plan
RRAP	Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program
SAST	Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology
SBCS	Stella Burry Community Services, St. John's
SCPI	Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative
SES	Socioeconomic status
SFRPHI	Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative

SHQ	Société d'habitation du Québec
SHYM	Supportive Housing for Young Mothers, Halifax
SLID	Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics
TCHC	Toronto Community Housing Corporation
UAS	Urban Aboriginal Strategy
UCTC	Urban Circle Training Centre, Winnipeg
UI	Unemployment Insurance
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
VCSJ	Vibrant Communities Saint John
WCB	Workers' Compensation Board
WITB	Working Income Tax Benefit
YESS	Youth Emergency Shelter Society, Edmonton

Appendix 2 - List of Witnesses

Organization	Name, Title	Date Of Appearance
39 th Parliament - 1 st Session		
Statistics Canada	<p>Jane Badets, Director, Social and Aboriginal Statistics;</p> <p>Mark Brown, Senior Research Economist, Micro-Economic Analysis;</p> <p>Andrew Heisz, Senior Research Economist, Business and Labour Market Analysis;</p> <p>Garnett Picot, Director General, Socio-Economic and Business Analysis;</p> <p>Grant Schellenberg, Senior Analyst, Social and Aboriginal Statistics;</p> <p>John Turner, Chief, Policing Services Program, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.</p>	March 29, 2007
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada	<p>Andrew Treusch, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy and Research Branch;</p> <p>Bayla Kolk, Associate Deputy Minister, Homelessness Partnering Strategy.</p>	April 26, 2007
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	Sharon Matthews, Vice-President Assisted Housing.	April 26, 2007
National Council of Welfare	<p>Greg deGroot-Maggetti, Acting Chairperson;</p> <p>Sheila Regehr, Director.</p>	May 3, 2007
Caledon Institute of Social	Ken Battle, President.	May 3, 2007

Policy		
National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO)	Rob Rainer, Executive Director; Nancy Shular, First Vice-President, Board of Directors.	May 3, 2007
Canadian Association of Food Banks	Shawn Pegg, Acting Director of Public Policy and Research.	May 3, 2007
Feed Nova Scotia	Dianne Swinemar, Executive Director, Member of the Board of Directors.	May 3, 2007
Campaign 2000	Sid Frankel, Member, Steering Committee; Katherine Scott, Vice-President Research at the Canadian Council on Social Development.	May 10, 2007
Canadian Association of Social Workers	Glenn Drover, Social Worker.	May 10, 2007
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)	Loly Rico, President; Roberto Jovel, Policy and Research Coordinator.	May 10, 2007
National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC)	Vera Pawis Tabobondung, President; Jocelyn Formsma, Program Officer.	May 10, 2007
University of Winnipeg	Jino Distasio, Director and Professor, Institute for Urban Studies.	May 17, 2007
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives	Molly McCracken, Manitoba Board Member.	May 17, 2007
McMaster University	Barbara Wake Carroll, Professor, Department of Political Science.	May 17, 2007
Department of Human Resources, Labour and	Aisling Gogan, Director, Poverty	May 17, 2007

Employment of Newfoundland and Labrador	Reduction Strategy.	
Downtown Eastside Residents Association	Kim Kerr, Director; Anna Hunter, Advocate.	June 13, 2007
Vibrant Communities Saint John (VCSJ)	Tom Gribbons, Chairperson; Kurt Peacock, Researcher.	June 13, 2007
United Way of Greater Toronto	Jan Donio, Vice-President Information Services and Operational Change Management.	June 14, 2007
Centraide of Greater Montreal	Michèle Thibodeau-DeGuire, President and Executive Director.	June 14, 2007
39 th Parliament - 2 nd Session		
Toronto Community Housing	Derek Ballantyne, Chief Executive Officer.	November 21, 2007
Canadian Housing and Renewal Association	Sharon Chisholm, Executive Director.	November 21, 2007
Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada	Nicholas Gazzard, Executive Director.	November 21, 2007
Canadian Co-operative Association	John Anderson, Director, Government Affairs and Public Policy.	November 21, 2007
Nanegkam Housing Corporation	Patrick Augustine, Native Council of Prince Edward Island.	November 29, 2007
National Aboriginal Housing Association	David Seymour, President.	November 29, 2007
Inuit Non-Profit Housing Corporation	Lynda Brown, President.	November 29, 2007
Kinew Housing	Lawrence Poirier, Manager.	November 29, 2007
Phoenix Youth Programs	Tim Crooks, Executive Director.	December 6, 2007
Canadian Population Health	Elizabeth Votta, Program Lead	December 6, 2007

Initiative	Reports and Analysis.	
As an individual	Deborah Kraus, Housing Policy and Research Consultant.	December 6, 2007
Saul Sair Health Centre	Rebekah Peters, Health Clinic Director.	December 6, 2007
St. Christopher House, Toronto	John Stapleton, Fellow.	December 13, 2007
Simon Fraser University	John Richards, Professor, Public Policy Program.	December 13, 2007
Canadian Teachers' Federation	Emily Noble, President.	February 7, 2008
Canadian Nurses Association	Nicki Sims-Jones, Policy Consultant.	February 7, 2008
First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition	Michael Goldberg, Chair.	February 7, 2008
Montreal Diet Dispensary	Marie-Paule Duquette, Executive Director.	February 7, 2008
As an individual	Armine Yalnizyan, Senior Economist.	February 28, 2008
United Way of Greater Toronto	Frances Lankin, President and Chief Executive Officer.	February 28, 2008
McMaster University	Gina Browne, Professor of Nursing and Clinical Epidemiology.	February 28, 2008
Caledon Institute of Social Policy	Ken Battle, President.	February 28, 2008
Federation of Canadian Municipalities	Mayor Anne Marie DeCicco-Best, Working Group on Housing.	March 6, 2008
City of Toronto	Sean Gadon, Director, Affordable Housing Office.	March 6, 2008

City of Vancouver	Don Fairbairn, Consultant.	March 6, 2008
Ontario Metropolis Centre	Sarah V. Wayland, Research Associate.	March 13, 2008
University of British Columbia	David Ley, Department of Geography.	March 13, 2008
Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic	Avvy Go, Clinic Director.	March 13, 2008
Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes	Jean-Claude Icart, Representative.	March 13, 2008
University of Saskatchewan	Evelyn Peters, Professor, Department of Geography.	April 3, 2008
National Association of Friendship Centres	Kama Steliga, Executive Director, Lillooet Friendship Centre; Calvin Hanselmann, Director of Research.	April 3, 2008
Council of Canadians with Disabilities	Marie White, National Chairperson.	April 17, 2008
Caledon Institute of Social Policy	Michael Mendelson, Senior Scholar.	April 17, 2008
University of Victoria	Michael J. Prince, Professor of Social Policy.	April 17, 2008
Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec	Walter Zelaya, Representative.	April 17, 2008
Winnipeg Harvest	David Northcott, Executive Director.	May 1, 2008
Community Foundations of Canada	Monica Patten, President and Chief Executive Officer.	May 1, 2008

Carrefour de pastoral en monde ouvrier	Jonathan Lacasse, Coordinator.	May 1, 2008
Queen's University	Rachel Laforest, Assistant Professor.	May 1, 2008
United Nations Human Rights Council (via videoconference)	Miloon Kothari, Former Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing.	May 8, 2008
Social Rights Advocacy Centre	Bruce Porter, Director.	May 8, 2008
National Anti-Poverty Organization	Rob Rainer, Executive Director; Michael Creek, Director.	May 8, 2008
Income Security Advocacy Centre	Mary Marrone, Director of Advocacy and Legal Services.	May 8, 2008
Tamarack	Paul Born, President.	May 15, 2008
Caledon Institute of Social Policy	Sherri Torjman, Vice-President.	May 15, 2008
Canadian Policy Research Networks	Judith Maxwell, Past President and Senior Fellow.	May 15, 2008
University of Ottawa	David Gray, Associate Professor, Department of Economics.	May 29, 2008
McGill University	Axel van den Berg, Professor, Department of Sociology.	May 29, 2008
Social Research Development Corporation	Carole Vincent, Principal Research Associate.	May 29, 2008
Informetrica Limited	Richard Shillington, Senior Associate.	May 29, 2008
Fédération des femmes du Québec	Nancy Burrows, Coordinator.	June 4, 2008
Carleton University	Fran Klodawsky, Professor, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies;	June 4, 2008

	Marika Morris, School of Canadian Studies.	
University of British Columbia	Claire Young, Senior Associate Dean, Academic Affairs and Professor, Faculty of Law.	June 4, 2008
Affordable New Home Foundation Saskatchewan	Keith Hanson, Executive Director.	June 5, 2008
Centretown Affordable Housing Development Corporation	Dennis Carr, Development Coordinator.	June 5, 2008
Vancity Enterprises Ltd.	Dan Paris, Director of Development.	June 5, 2008
Focus Consulting Ltd.	Steve Pomeroy, President.	June 5, 2008
Université Laval	François Blais, Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences.	June 13, 2008
Canadian Education Association	Christa Freiler, Director of Research.	June 13, 2008
The Toronto Star	Carol Goar, Editorial Columnist.	June 13, 2008
University of Ottawa	David Gray, Associate Professor, Department of Economics.	June 13, 2008
University of Manitoba	Derek Hum, Professor, Department of Economics.	June 13, 2008
Caledon Institute of Social Policy	Michael Mendelson, Senior Scholar.	June 13, 2008
University of Regina	Jim Mulvale, Associate Professor, Department of Justice Studies.	June 13, 2008
Winnipeg Harvest	David Northcott, Executive Director.	June 13, 2008
Dalhousie University	Lars Osberg, Professor, Department of Economics.	June 13, 2008
Citizens for Public Justice	Chandra Pasma, Policy Analyst.	June 13, 2008

National Anti-Poverty Organization	Rob Rainer, Executive Director.	June 13, 2008
National Council of Welfare	Sheila Regehr, Director.	June 13, 2008
University of Miami	Philip Robins, Professor, Department of Economics.	June 13, 2008
Council of Canadians with Disabilities	Marie White, National Chairperson.	June 13, 2008
Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador	Lynn Vivian-Book, Assistant Deputy Minister, Income, Employment and Youth Services; Aisling Gogan, Director, Poverty Reduction Strategy.	August 11, 2008
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation	Cynthia King, Manager of Affordable Housing.	August 11, 2008
City of St. John's	Shannie Duff, Councillor; David Blackmore, Director of Building and Property Management.	August 11, 2008
Make Work Pay Coalition	Lana Payne, Representative.	August 11, 2008
St. John's Status of Women Council and Women's Centre	Charmaine Davidge, Executive Director.	August 11, 2008
Canadian Mental Health Association – Newfoundland and Labrador	Heather Pollett, Policy Analyst, Canadian Mental Health Division.	August 11, 2008
St. John's Board of Trade	Nancy Healey, Chief Executive Director.	August 11, 2008
Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers	Annette Johns, Social Work Consultant.	August 11, 2008
Community Food Sharing Association of Newfoundland and Labrador	Egbert Walters, General Manager.	August 11, 2008
St. John's Native Friendship	Eileen Joe, Shanawdithit Shelter	August 11, 2008

Centre	Coordinator.	
Community Services Council of Newfoundland and Labrador	Penny Rowe, Chief Executive Officer.	August 11, 2008
Choices for Youth	Kerri Collins, Coordinator.	August 11, 2008
Association for New Canadians	Bridget Foster, Executive Director.	August 11, 2008
Coalition of Persons with Disabilities	Barry Galloway, Board Member and Director General, Independent Living Resource Centre.	August 11, 2008
Bridges to Hope	Derek Winsor, Program Director.	August 11, 2008
As individuals	Lorraine Best; John Eddy.	August 11, 2008
Department of Community Services, Government of Nova Scotia	Lynn Hartwell, Executive Director, Policy and Information Management; David Ryan, Executive Director, Employment Supports; Kristen Tynes, Advisor, Communications.	August 13, 2008
Halifax Regional Municipality	Geri Kaiser, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer; Fred Wendt, Planner, Regional Planning.	August 13, 2008
City of Charlottetown	Clifford J. Lee, Mayor.	August 13, 2008
Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities	Robert Wrye, Deputy Mayor of Wolfville, President.	August 13, 2008
Nova Scotia Legal Aid	Vince Calderhead, Senior Staff	August 13, 2008

	Counsel.	
Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia	William Buckland, Vice-President.	August 13, 2008
Community Action on Homelessness	Claudia Jahn, Program Director.	August 13, 2008
Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities	Claredon Robicheau, Past Chair.	August 13, 2008
Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health	Barbara Clow, Executive Director.	August 13, 2008
Investment Property Owners Association of Nova Scotia	Joe Metlege, President.	August 13, 2008
Urban Core Support Network Saint John Inc.	Lisa Wetmore, Project Coordinator.	August 13, 2008
Human Development Council	Belinda Allen, Research Project Coordinator.	August 13, 2008
United Way of Prince Edward Island	Clair Smith, Executive Director.	August 13, 2008
Phoenix Youth Programs	Miia Suokonautio, Director, Programming.	August 13, 2008
Exit Realty Professionals	Bill Grace.	August 13, 2008
First Voice Community	Ann Duffy.	August 13, 2008
Nova Scotia Community base Transportation Association	David Mooney.	August 13, 2008
Spring Garden Area Business Association	Bernard Smith.	August 13, 2008
As individuals	Carole Hanrahan; Anne Marie Elderkin.	August 13, 2008
University of New Brunswick	Luc Thériault, Professor of Sociology.	August 14, 2008

City of Saint John	Peter McGuire, Councillor.	August 14, 2008
New Brunswick Non-Profit Housing Association	Gary Glauser, Consultant.	August 14, 2008
40 th Parliament - 2 nd Session		
Canada West Foundation	Roger Gibbins, President and CEO.	April 2, 2009
Caledon Institute of Social Policy	Sherri Torjman, Vice-President.	April 2, 2009
Wilfrid Laurier University	Lea Caragata, Associate Professor.	April 2, 2009
Centre for the Study of Living Standards	Andrew Sharpe, Executive Director.	April 22, 2009
University of Alberta	Alison Taylor, Professor, Faculty of Education; Harvey Krahn, Professor of Sociology.	April 22, 2009
Simon Fraser University	Olena Hankivsky, Associate Professor, Public Policy Program Co-Director.	April 22, 2009
Pathways to Education Canada	David Hughes, President and Chief Executive Officer.	April 22, 2009
As an individual	Derek Cook.	April 23, 2009
Carleton University	Frances Abele, Professor, School of Policy and Administration.	April 29, 2009
University of Regina	Doug Durst, Professor, Faculty of Social Work.	April 29, 2009
As an individual	Andy Siggner.	April 29, 2009
National Association of Friendship Centres	Peter Dinsdale, Executive Director.	April 29, 2009
University of British	Daniel Hiebert, Professor of	May 6, 2009

Columbia	Geography.	
Institut national de la recherche scientifique, Centre Urbanisation Culture Société	Damarise Rose, Professor, Urban and Social Geography.	May 6, 2009
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants	Debbie Douglas, Executive Director.	May 6, 2009
City of Vancouver	Jill Davidson, Assistant Director, Housing Policy.	May 28, 2009
City of Toronto	Sean Gadon, Director, Affordable Housing Office.	May 28, 2009
University of Victoria	Michael J. Prince, Lansdowne Professor of Social Policy.	May 29, 2009
Caledon Institute of Social Policy	Michael Mendelson, Senior Scholar.	May 29, 2009
University of Ottawa	Miles Corak, Professor, Graduate of School of Public and International Affairs.	May 29, 2009
University of Montreal	Dr. Marie-France Raynault, Associate Scientific Director, Population Health.	May 29, 2009
University of Manitoba	Sid Frankel, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work; Evelyn Forget, Professor, Community Health Services.	May 29, 2009
The Toronto Star	Laurie Monsebraaten, Columnist.	May 29, 2009
University of Montreal	Alain Noël, Professor, Department of Political Science.	June 3, 2009
Vibrant Communities Saint John Leadership Roundtable	Tom Gribbons, Chair.	June 3, 2009
Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction	Liz Weaver, Director.	June 3, 2009

Government of Ontario	The Honourable Deb Matthews, M.P.P., Minister of Children and Youth Services.	June 3, 2009
National Aboriginal Housing Association	Charles W. Hill, Executive Director; David Seymour, Member, Board of Directors.	June 5, 2009
Calgary Homeless Foundation	Alina Tanasescu, Manager, Research and Public Policy.	June 5, 2009
Canada Without Poverty	Rob Rainer, Executive Director.	June 5, 2009
National Council of Welfare	Sheila Regehr, Director.	June 5, 2009
As an individual	David Snow.	June 5, 2009
Wellesley Institute	Michael Shapcott, Director, Affordable Housing and Social Innovation.	June 5, 2009
Canadian Housing and Renewal Association	Phil Brown, Member, Board of Directors.	June 5, 2009
Focus Consulting Inc.	Steve Pomeroy, President.	June 5, 2009
As an individual	Margaret Eberle, Housing Policy Consultant, Eberle Planning and Research.	June 5, 2009
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	John Black, Director, Housing Needs Policy; Debra Darke, Director, Community Development.	June 11, 2009
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada	Frank Vermaeten, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister; Frank Fedyk, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister; Dominique La Salle, Director General, Seniors and Pension Policy Secretariat;	June 11, 2009

	Jane Weldon, Director General, Homelessness Partnering Secretariat.	
As an individual	Claire Heslop.	June 18, 2009
Statistics Canada	Russell Wilkins, Senior Analyst, Health Analysis Division. Jillian Oderkirk, Director, Health Analysis Division.	June 18, 2009
Saskatoon Health Region	Dr. Cory Neudorf, Chief Medical Health Officer.	June 18, 2009
As an individual	Darrell Powell, National Advocate – Mental Health and Disability for Disabled Workers Canada.	June 18, 2009
As an individual	Dr. Lisa Doupe, Consultant.	June 18, 2009

Appendix 3 -Approaches to analysis

In the first section of this report, a summary of approaches to the analyses that underpin this report was provided. A more detailed description is provided below.

Public sector, private sector, voluntary sector

The Committee also understands that responsibility for “solving” poverty, housing and homelessness problems does not and cannot rest solely with government, just as it does not and cannot rest solely on the shoulders of those with inadequate incomes and housing affordability problems. While our focus is on public policy instruments, primarily but not exclusively at the federal level, we have been most impressed with the enormous contributions made by the private sector (the “market) and the community-based or civil-society sector to improving the economic and social context in which people are living their lives in communities across the country. Both sectors have contributed enormously to employment creation, and to helping people prepare for these jobs. Similarly, both sectors have been instrumental in identifying and meeting the needs of people who are not able to purchase the goods and services they need in the competitive marketplace.

Through research, witnesses in hearings in Ottawa, Halifax and St. John’s, and agency staff and clients in those cities and in Vancouver, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal, the Committee has learned that local business and community leaders have often taken the leadership role in filling gaps in social programs, in tackling more systemic economic and social issues, and in building stronger communities, at a local level. We have sought their policy advice, which is cited in this report and has informed our recommendations. We have also identified the promising practices from these sectors and described them briefly in Appendix 3, to catalogue what has been making the difference across Canada to people who are poor and/or homeless, and to encourage others to tailor solutions from other communities to meet the needs in their own.

Finally, we have addressed ways in which all sectors, in their search for ways to reduce poverty, increase access to affordable and secure housing, and eliminate homelessness, can “make common cause.” A discussion and recommendations are included in Section 6.

Life-course

The Committee has also tried to apply a life-course approach to its deliberations. It has been recognized for some time that in almost every life, there are transition points that are challenging: school completion, first job, buying a home, birth of a child, marital breakdown, death of a spouse, retirement are just some examples. We are also aware that the vast majority of Canadians navigate all of these transitions or “bumps” successfully, with the help of family and friends, and perhaps employers. For many others, one or more of these transitions can result in significant loss of income and/or housing security.

It has been suggested that appropriate intervention in anticipation of these disruptions, or in a short-term and more immediate response to them, would be a more useful approach to policy and program design, than designing programs without regard for what has come before and what might come after, if the transition is navigated smoothly.

This approach, for example, would suggest that requiring people in need of income assistance to liquidate virtually all their savings, homes, and other assets is short-sighted and mean-spirited. More will be said about this problem later in the report.

Further, the Committee has heard that different solutions are appropriate at different transition points:

You can imagine thinking about poverty writ large and the appropriate programs according to different points in an individual's life cycle. If we think of the elderly widow of the 1950s and 1960s, if that woman was poor in one year, she was poor forever. It was also appropriate to suggest that money was not only a symptom of her problem, but a cause of it. The lack of funds prevented her from participating normally in society. In that case and at that stage of life, perhaps income transfers are the appropriate mechanism. One of the great success stories of the Canadian welfare system has been the decline of poverty amongst seniors. However, if you flip this to the other end of the age spectrum — the child — we might think of the more appropriate intervention under the term investment, not income support.... In the middle stage of life, we think more in terms of insurance. People are engaged in the labour market, which is how you will make your way in life. However, things happen and there is a need for social insurance.

(Miles Corak, Professor, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 May 2009)

Diversity analysis

The Committee has paid special attention to how public policies and programs have different impacts on different identifiable groups of people. The first way this is reflected in this report is a focus on groups that are over-represented among the poor and the homeless in Canada. While we have undertaken to report on the differential impacts of various “mainstream” policies and programs on these groups, we have also added a section to the report focussing on these groups: we describe the particular situations facing unattached adults, lone parents, Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities and newcomers to Canada (both immigrants and refugee claimants). This specificity includes a focus on the programs and policies that are intended to address the needs of these groups, with recommendations related to them.

The Committee is aware, however, that these groups are not the only ones who experience differential impacts.

Gender

In particular, the Committee held hearings on women’s poverty. Despite significant increases in labour force participation and rising incomes, women (and their children) are particularly vulnerable, including economically, when domestic violence forces them to leave their homes, and when marriages and households dissolve.

[T]he average earnings of women relative to men remain in the range of 62% to 64%; for women who are fully employed, it is higher at 72%. It is remaining relatively constant. It is not moving; it is not improving. It did improve previously, but it is stuck now at a certain level.

The poverty level of female lone parents is 33%. For unattached females aged 65 and over, it is 20%, and for unattached females under age 65, it is 37%. Those are very high levels of poverty.

(Glenn Drover, Social worker, Canadian Association of Social Workers, Evidence, Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007)

The Committee has addressed the particular impact of programs on women throughout the report.

Race

In the course of our hearings, we also heard about how race (visible minority status) is a factor in the experience of poverty and housing and income insecurity and inadequacy.⁴⁷⁵

According to Boris Palameta, visible minority immigrants are “significantly more likely than other immigrants to be in low income, regardless of time in Canada.”⁴⁷⁶ He suggests language facility, credential recognition, and discrimination are possible factors to explain these results. Other analysts have noted that the intersection of being a newcomer, and being of colour seems to increase the risk, experience and duration of poverty.⁴⁷⁷

Although more and more newcomers to Canada are non-Caucasian, not all visible minority people in Canada are newcomers. And not only newcomers experience racism. The Committee heard testimony that fully one-third of members of racialized groups are Canadian-born, and that their experience is similar to that of the two-thirds of racialized groups who are newcomers to Canada.⁴⁷⁸ During site visits in Winnipeg, Committee members heard that the racism young Aboriginal people face is rampant; the Committee also heard from witnesses that racism and its links to poverty are problems that have not been adequately addressed in federal policy. A witness before the Committee emphasized the same point:

[Aboriginal individuals] encounter racism from landlords, from employers when they are seeking employment, from clerks and waiters in restaurants when they use their status cards, and from police and authorities with so-called zero tolerance. The racism is both personal and systemic. It is built into the system and it is difficult to address.

(Douglas Durst, Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 29 April 2009)

Intersectionality

Finally, the Committee understands that disadvantage is exacerbated at the intersections of these groups. For example, an Aboriginal person with a disability is more likely to be poor than a non-Aboriginal person with a disability; an Aboriginal woman is more likely to be poor than an Aboriginal man.

An expert in this approach gave the Committee guidance in this matter:

[I]t is important ahead of time, in terms of proposing a policy, to think about the differential effects it will have on the diversity within the Canadian population... Gender-based analysis ... looks at the potential differential effects of proposed policy legislation on men and women... [W]e need to move beyond gender-based analysis into a more refined and sophisticated analysis which, in the European and American contexts, is now referred to as an intersectionality framework where we take into account the complexity of interactions of gender and race, ethnicity, class, geography, age

⁴⁷⁵ For examples, see testimony by Mr. Roberto Jovel before the Committee, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 10 May 2007, and by Michele Thibodeau-DeGuire also before the Committee, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 14 June 2007.

⁴⁷⁶ Boris Palameta, “Low Income Among Immigrants and Visible Minorities,” *Perspectives*, Catalogue no. 75-001-XIE, Statistics Canada, April 2004.

⁴⁷⁷ Michael Ornstein, *Ethno-Racial Groups in Toronto, 1971–2001: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile*, Institute for Social Research, York University, 2006, p. 91; Cheryl Teelucksingh and Grace-Edward Galabuzi, “Impact of Race and Immigrants Status on Employment Opportunities and Outcomes in the Canadian Labour Market,” *Policy Matters*, No. 22, Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement, November 2005, p. 1; Jeffrey G. Reitz, “Social Risks for Newcomers to Canada: Issues Respecting the Role of Government in Ontario,” 2003, p. 16.

⁴⁷⁸ Avy Go, Submission to SAST, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, March 2008, p.2.

and ability in order to understand people's experiences and to better tailor policies that are inclusive. This is not looking at things through a single category of analysis like gender, race or class, but bringing them all together and considering how those combine to affect experiences and educational and health needs. For areas such as poverty and homelessness, this kind of an approach would be extraordinarily effective.

(Olena Hankivsky, Associate Professor and Public Policy Program Co-Director, Simon Fraser University, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009)

Another witness, presenting detailed data on paths into homelessness in Ottawa, reminded the Committee of the importance of this analysis to the development of appropriate policy responses:

It is not enough to recognize that, broadly, some groups are more affected by poverty than are others. In order to understand what causes people to become homeless and what help they require, it is important to fully incorporate an intersectional lens. By intersectional, I mean an approach that recognizes that a person's life experience is shaped by multiple characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, ability, class, sexual orientation and so on. These factors intersect with one another in complex ways, with poverty too often being the outcome.

(Fran Klodawsky, Professor, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Carleton University, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 4 June 2008)

In some cases, data are not available, and/or testimony did not comment on these impacts. However, wherever possible, the Committee has captured these differential impacts within this report.

Regional differences

As the Committee has heard witnesses from across Canada, and has visited agencies in many major cities, we have been struck by the pervasiveness of poverty, housing challenges and homelessness in every province and major city. At the same time, we have noted that some regions, provinces and cities have challenges unique to their particular areas.

For example, we heard from many witnesses that in the Atlantic provinces, the disproportionate increases in home fuel costs, or “fuel poverty,” was an emerging and growing exacerbation of income inadequacy in that region.⁴⁷⁹ At the other end of the country, we heard that Vancouver has had to postpone its “housing first” approach to homelessness because of a complete dearth of available housing in that city.⁴⁸⁰ In between, we learned of the concentration of off-reserve Aboriginal poverty and homelessness in Prairie cities, and the concentration of poverty and housing affordability and adequacy problems among newcomers in Montreal and Toronto, as well as Vancouver.

These differences have been reflected in the particular initiatives in different provinces and cities, from both governments and non-government organizations. They highlight both the importance of flexibility in federal policies and programs, and the great responses at more local levels to particularly local problems.

⁴⁷⁹ Rob Rainer, Evidence, SAST, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, 3 May 2007; Claredon Robicheau, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 August 2008; Derek Winsor, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 11 August 2008; and Clifford Lee, Submission to the Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 39th Parliament, 13 August 2008.

⁴⁸⁰ Jill Davidson, Evidence, Subcommittee on Cities, 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 28 May 2009.

Jurisdiction

The Committee is conscious of the primacy of provincial and territorial authority in many areas related to poverty, housing and homelessness.

In each province, we were impressed by particular programs and/or policies that are contributing to the reduction of poverty, the creation of affordable housing, and the reduction in homelessness. Many were under the rubric of a poverty reduction strategy or a housing or homelessness strategy. We have highlighted some of these provincial government initiatives in the section of the report that focuses on demonstrated successes and promising practices, and have provided more detail in Appendix 4.

Also, for each province, the Committee learned of particular gaps or inadequacies in programs or glitches in their implementation, sometimes caused by interaction with other programs, including federal programs. In this study, we focus in part on “persistent problems” in public policies and programs, and focus on either federal programs or interactions among programs and policies.

However, the Committee also heard that Canadians do not want any level of government to avoid addressing these issues by deflecting responsibility elsewhere. This sentiment was summarized by an interfaith coalition working to eliminate poverty in a letter to the Committee:

Canadians are tired of jurisdictional disputes among various levels of governments, and expect that all three levels of government will work together to provide the requisites for worthwhile living for all Canadians.⁴⁸¹

We share that sentiment.

We have also been reminded by many witnesses that many Canadians are looking to the federal government for leadership, including in a renewed intergovernmental collaboration on these issues.

Our recommendations focus on federal policies and programs, but also address the need for federal and provincial governments to share goals, to remove the counterproductive interactions among programs and policies, and to contribute to a Canada that is rid of poverty and homelessness, and that provides adequate and affordable housing for all in our country. We offer these recommendations with respect for the initiative and innovative approaches being implemented across Canada, and with hope that collectively we can maximize the benefits for all Canadians.

⁴⁸¹ Elizabeth Brown and Carolyn Earle, Letter to the Committee as co-chairs of Face of Poverty Consultation, 31 August 2008.

Appendix 4 - Community responses

The Committee visited nine cities and 25 agencies across Canada, meeting with staff and clients of programs that hold great promise in meeting the needs of people living with challenges with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness. While these have been referred to briefly throughout the report, this appendix provides more detail about the programs, the challenges they face, the actions they have taken, the lessons they have learned, and the government action they are recommending.

Poverty

Pathways to Education Canada⁴⁸²

The Committee heard from Pathways to Education staff as a witness on 22 April 2009.

Challenge

*[S]tudies show that high school dropouts tend to be unemployed or earn lower wages, thus paying lower taxes and incurring higher social assistance costs. They commit more crime, threatening the safety of our neighbourhoods and putting greater strains on the justice system. They have higher incidences of drug use and teenage pregnancy, putting greater strains on the health care system.*⁴⁸³

- The vast majority of homeless youth across the country have not completed high school, in Ottawa and Toronto that number ranges between 63% and 90%.
- The unemployment rate among those aged 25 to 44 who did not have a high school diploma was 12.2% - almost double that of those who had completed high school, without further education.⁴⁸⁴

The Pathway to Education approach views the high dropout rate not as a school problem, a community problem or a family problem alone, but rather as a problem that involves all of those elements.

Action

Pathways to Education provides a full range of complimentary supports to help youth focus on education and manage the day-to-day challenges that sometimes get in the way of achieving success. It is the Pathways approach to focus those supports at home and in the community where youth spend the greater part of the day, and where they are tempted by the greatest number of distractions that could pull them off course. The Pathways to Education approach is community based; the program staff work with the community, school and household to develop the right supports for youth in that community.

After building the capacity among volunteers in the community who will provide support to students, Pathways asks students, their parents and their school to ‘contract’ to meet expectations and the accountabilities of the program. Volunteers provide after-school tutoring and mentoring. The youth describe this as like having a “coach and a referee”⁴⁸⁵. Their ‘coaches’ help with the

⁴⁸² David Hughes, CEO Pathways to Education Canada, Submission to the Subcommittee on Cities 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

distracting challenges and also help students to seize opportunities. Pathways also provided financial support such as lunch vouchers or bus tickets and larger financial support such as scholarships.

Lessons learned

The Subcommittee heard that in 2001 the first Pathways program was implemented in Toronto's Regent Park, where average family income was below \$18,000 and the high school dropout rate was double the Toronto average. An assessment found that in an eight-year period, 90% of the high school-aged youth had enrolled in the Pathways to Education program, and that the dropout rate for those in the program declined from 56% to less than 10%. There was also a quadrupling of the number of students going on to post-secondary education, up to 80%, from only 20%. Ninety percent of these students were the first in their families to go on to post-secondary education.⁴⁸⁶

The Boston Consulting Group undertook a study of the Pathways to Education program and concluded that its Social Return on Investment (SROI) was valued at \$25 dollars back to society for every dollar invested in the program. They calculated that the program would have a \$400,000 cumulative life-time value to each graduate based only on the incremental tax receipts and lower transfer payments typical of high school graduates compared with the program costs. The Subcommittee was impressed by this analysis.

The Subcommittee is very interested in encouraging the replication of effective community-based program models that have the potential to work in other communities. We learned that an essential element of the program is the reliance on volunteer effort and community engagement. While the program has been replicated in five Canadian communities in the past couple of years, replication began only after careful selection of the community, identification of community leaders and emergence of a coalition of community partners. Implementation has been unique to each community.

Government action

In testimony the Subcommittee heard specific recommendations for action that would help to reduce dropout rates and help to reduce poverty in urban areas.

- Fund programs such as Pathways to Education and similar programs that are reducing dropout rates, as an investment. Funding for replication of the program would be helpful but it must remain largely a volunteer and community-based effort and relies on involvement of the family and the community. The process cannot be hurried.
- Establish bold and ambitious goals for cities and provinces around educational attainment. Develop a national consortium or task force that is multilevel, multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary in nature, and that works with government, corporate and non-profit sectors to establish and attain the goal of complete elimination of dropouts.
- Require that educational statistics relating to credit accumulation, school attendance, grades, and standardized test results in core subject areas be tracked and reported by postal codes to help in the identification of – and analysis of - high-risk/low-risk communities. The greatest challenges are around Grades 9 and 10.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

Circle Project Association⁴⁸⁷

Site Visit 14 July 2009 Regina, Saskatchewan

Challenge

High school completion rates among Aboriginal people are significantly lower than rates for the general population.⁴⁸⁸ Recent research indicates that Winnipeg and Regina had non-completion rates of 48% and 44% respectively among the Aboriginal population.⁴⁸⁹ Increasing the high school completion rate has been demonstrated have a positive impact on the employment rate among Aboriginal people.⁴⁹⁰ When the Circle Project program was first implemented in the early 1980s, the dropout rate for Aboriginal students was 85%, while unemployment and welfare dependency rates were around 90%.⁴⁹¹

Aboriginal peoples make up 9.3% of the population of Regina; this rate is among the highest of all large urban centres in the country, ranking third after Winnipeg (10.2%) and Saskatoon (9.9%).⁴⁹² Although Aboriginal peoples have made significant economic gains in the last 20 years, the 2006 Census indicated that 37% of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population was living at or below the LICO.⁴⁹³

Action

The Circle Project offers education programs, counselling and support, based on the Aboriginal vision of wholeness, balance and healing, for adults over the age of 18 years. The adult basic education program helps students achieve their Grade 12 Equivalency Diploma (GED). Also offered are traditional parenting sessions and the KidsFirst program that provides services and support to parents as they raise young children.⁴⁹⁴ Programs are delivered to the Regina community at the main centre and in satellite locations; about 90 to 95% of the clients are Aboriginal. Counselling services support clients dealing with various experiences such as drug addiction, family violence and anger management. In a separate, purpose-built location The Circle Project operates a licensed childcare facility for children 18 months to 12 years old.

Lessons learned

Adult basic education toward achievement of the GED is offered in a series of courses, allowing students to progress in manageable stages. Subcommittee members learned that many students start more than once, as they stabilize other elements of their lives and that this flexibility was a key factor for success of the program. Circle Project offers support and referrals to students for access housing, food bank and financial assistance, but focuses on what staff refer to as second-level

⁴⁸⁷ The Circle Project Association Inc. <http://www.circleproject.ca/index.html>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

⁴⁸⁸ Michael Mendelson, "Improving Primary and Secondary Education on Reserves in Canada", *Caledon Commentary*, Caledon Institute of Social Policy October 2006

<http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/608ENG.pdf>. Accessed 30 July 2009.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Andrew Sharpe, Jean-François Arsenault, Simon Lapointe and Fraser Cowan, *The effect of increasing Aboriginal education attainment on the labour force, output and the fiscal balance*, The Centre for the Study of Living Standards May 2009 <http://www.csls.ca/reports/csls2009-3.pdf>. Accessed 30 July 2009.

⁴⁹¹ The Circle Project Association Inc. *Annual Report* 2009.

⁴⁹² Douglas Durst, "Both Lost and Found: Urban Aboriginal Peoples in Prairie Cities," *Our Diverse Cities*, No. 6, Spring 2009, p. 93.

⁴⁹³ Bill Holden, Nicola Chapin, Carmen Dyck and Nich Frasier, *Poverty Reduction Policies and Programs: Saskatchewan*, Canadian Council on Social Development, 2009 p. 5.

⁴⁹⁴ The Circle Project website <http://www.circleproject.ca/>. Accessed 2 July 2009.

service delivery, meeting the needs of people who are “helping themselves through education, cultural awareness, family and community”⁴⁹⁵ A number of former students now serve as staff members having completed both high school and subsequent college level education.

Subcommittee members saw how Aboriginal culture and teachings were integrated into every aspect of the services offered and were reinforced by the large number of Aboriginal staff.⁴⁹⁶ The majority of the governing council members are Aboriginal by mandate. Elders are involved in a meaningful way in all aspects of the agency.⁴⁹⁷ Subcommittee members learned from staff, student, volunteers and Elders about the importance of the Aboriginal foundation of the program.

Government action

Focus groups participants, including students from the GED preparation program, staff and an Elder, made the following points about what would help them to achieve their academic goals:

- Services that are currently available only to those on social assistance, such as shelter allowance, medical and dental care and childcare subsidies, should be made available to all living in low income. This would encourage people to move away from social assistance into school or work without losing the supports they need.
- Focus group participants were unanimous in noting the need for more support for those who move off social assistance to become full-time students. In their assessment, the current provincial training allowance (PTA)⁴⁹⁸ program provides no financial motivation for leaving social assistance and taking up full-time studies, particularly for those who are lone parents. The allowance has not been able to react quickly enough to recent increases in rent and utilities, and it excludes coverage for childcare, in the experience of the students.
- National housing and childcare strategies were noted as having the potential to alleviate some of the most significant barriers for students moving from social assistance to school to work.

Urban Circle Training Centre⁴⁹⁹

Site Visit 15 July 2009 Winnipeg, Manitoba

Challenge

Winnipeg, like Regina, has a high concentration of Aboriginal people. While high school completion rates and even poverty rates are showing improvement, there is still high demand for programs that assist young Aboriginal women with high school completion and further education.⁵⁰⁰ A study of urban Aboriginal people living in Western cities reports that Urban Aboriginal youth are facing three

⁴⁹⁵ The Circle Project *Mission Statement* October 1997.

⁴⁹⁶ Devlin and Associates Canada *An Evaluation of The Circle Project* March 2007.

⁴⁹⁷ The Circle Project Association Inc., *Annual Report 2009*, June 2009.

⁴⁹⁸ The Provincial Training Allowance (PTA) provides income support to low-income students enrolled in approved basic education. For more information, see Government of Saskatchewan, “Workforce Development initiatives or in Quick Skills Training,” <http://www.aeel.gov.sk.ca/pta/>. Accessed 20 July 2009.

⁴⁹⁹ Urban Circle Training Centre Inc. <http://www.urbancircletraining.com/home.htm>. Accessed 7 August 2009

⁵⁰⁰ Jim Silver, “The Inner Cities of Saskatoon and Winnipeg: A New and Distinctive Form of Development,” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, January 2008, p. 11.

main challenges: difficulties in developing positive Aboriginal identity, problems finding suitable employment opportunities and success in completing secondary education.⁵⁰¹

Action

The first program responded directly to a need expressed by Aboriginal women in Winnipeg's inner city for training that would lead to meaningful employment.⁵⁰² Urban Circle Training Centre (UCTC) began almost 20 years ago with one program only for women on social assistance. That program, like the ones offered now, provided access to a 'ladder' of education – beginning with life skills, then adult basic education and Grade 12 equivalency diploma (GED) preparation and on to college-certified courses. Individuals can enter at any level. Participants are given 'wrap-around' support as they achieve goals of education attainment necessary for employment. Urban Circle now serves 130 students per year in a purpose-built, four-classroom training centre in Winnipeg's inner core.

Lessons learned

Subcommittee members experienced firsthand how the UCTC building itself is an integral part of the centre's program and displays the Urban Circle approach. The building design in the shape of a turtle, with the four classrooms representing the legs, allows the space to embrace and foster the Aboriginal roots of the program. Staff described the construction of the Centre as a community-building experience with an Aboriginal focus.

Normally, a life skills program is part of the first few weeks of training. Subcommittee members heard from the students that life skills and teachings in how to approach learning are as important as the course content to their success. The diploma completion and employment rate for students is 85 to 90%. Follow-up with students is done when they leave and then again six and 18 months later. Student tuition fees for most programs are covered by the Urban Circle's funders; students are responsible for their own living expenses. To be eligible for the program, they must receive social assistance or employment insurance benefits and/or be the recipient of Band Council or Manitoba Metis Foundation support.

Staff explained to Subcommittee members that a new trades apprenticeship program has attracted men to the centre's programming. However, staff noted that the 130 students now being trained each year fills the classroom space, the building, and the program to their maximum capacity. UCTC is considering new programs. For example a childcare centre, in a building close-by, is in the planning stages and there is a desire to be able to provide housing for students. Beyond these changes, staff reported that the program could be replicated, but not expanded.

Government action

The focus group discussions with program participants and staff included the following recommendations for government action:

- Consistent, stable funding with a more regularized reporting requirement should acknowledge their status as an organization that has been providing service for almost 20 years.
- All the students who participated in the focus group discussion were finding it difficult to keep up financially while going to school. They proposed that social assistance build in "lots

⁵⁰¹ Durst, p. 95.

⁵⁰² Urban Circle Training Centre <http://www.urbancircletraining.com/aboutus.htm>. Accessed 7 August 2009.

of incentives” for participation in an education program. They described their experiences with less than adequate or affordable housing, unstable childcare, low food security and unstable education for their children when frequent moves were required to find more affordable and suitable housing.

- Staff have explored alternative program formats, combining school and work placements, but have found that restrictions in EI training allowances or social assistance programs could prevent students from getting coverage for living expenses while attending full-time studies.

Collingwood Neighbourhood House⁵⁰³

Site Visit 13 July 2009 Vancouver, British Columbia

Challenge

Located in a neighbourhood where just over 80% of the residents are visible minorities and approximately 18% of the residents arrived in Canada within the last five years.⁵⁰⁴ The area is one of Vancouver’s most diverse communities, and is characterized by its high density. As well, 32% of the population lives in low income, almost three times the national average.⁵⁰⁵

Action

Collingwood Neighbourhood House (CNH) is located in the centre of the community between other partnering facilities including community centres and churches, the community policing office and the local health centre. Building partnerships among all local facilities is a core mission of CNH. It serves all residents and offers several programs specifically for those living in low income, recent immigrants and the homeless, who are all likely to be socially isolated.

Programs have been built, adapted and expanded in response to needs, as and when they are identified by the community. The CNH space has been adapted over time to create several multipurpose rooms, a community kitchen, designated childcare space, several lounge areas for groups to use, and a roof top community garden. Programs are delivered both within the building and out in the community. Community groups are encouraged to develop their own programs.

Collingwood Neighbourhood House, like most neighbourhood houses and community centres, depends on fees for services as well as municipal, provincial and federal funding.⁵⁰⁶

Lessons learned

In discussion with Subcommittee members, staff described over 20 programs directly operated by CNH. CNH also partners with other organizations or facilitates many more programs in the community. Thus creating a wide variety of programs for a wide diversity of community needs. Subcommittee members were privileged to learn about some of the programs serving over-represented groups:

- Staff described their practice of active community outreach to bring new comers, single mothers and parenting grandparents to the centre in an attempt to reduce their sense of

⁵⁰³ Collingwood Neighbourhood House website. <http://www.cnh.bc.ca/>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

⁵⁰⁴ Statistics Canada *Census Tract Profile* <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-597/P3.cfm?Lang=E&CTCODE=5273&CACODE=933&PRCODE=59&PC=V5R6C9>. Accessed 5 August 2009.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Collingwood Neighbourhood House website, <http://www.cnh.bc.ca/settlement.htm>. Accessed 9 June 2009.

isolation. An example of the outreach efforts is the group of single mothers who started their own community kitchen project, cooking multiple meals together.

- Services to recent immigrants include language training, and settlement services, with a 24-hour information and referral service in multiple languages. Individuals and families are connected to other service providers for help with housing, employment and school registration for children.
- Every Saturday morning, about 80 homeless people are served breakfast and offered a shower and fresh clothes. While some of the homeless people are from the local area, this program serves a much broader geographical area: staff estimate that about 70% come from Vancouver's downtown eastside.
- The Families Branching Out program gathers area residents for a family-centred evening of shared cooking, dining and activities. The program serves the many cultures represented within the community residents.
- Aboriginal programming includes a canoe club featuring weekly voyages to area rivers.
- The licensed childcare service at CNH is estimated by staff to be providing subsidized space to about 50% of the families using the service. Families are also offered assistance in their application for the subsidy.

Government action

CNH made these observations about needs among the people they serve:

- There is a need for sustainable, affordable housing with appropriate support to assist individuals to be fully 'involved', if not fully employed, in volunteer or other community participation.
- Newcomers need affordable temporary housing. Frequently among the hidden homeless, some newcomers have few options other than to stay with family or friends. Staff are aware of multiple families living together in overcrowded spaces for extended periods.
- Quick access to language training for all newcomers, regardless of immigration status, is important for the earliest possible integration.

Finally staff noted that Collingwood Neighbourhood House programs are funded from a variety of sources, often for specific programs for specific purposes. While that has allowed an extensive array of services, the most effective funding would be flexible enough to allow the organization to adapt quickly to the emerging needs of the community.

Montreal Diet Dispensary

Witness Testimony 7 February 2008 Montreal, Quebec

Challenge

Sixteen percent of all persons in Montreal lived in low income in 2006⁵⁰⁷ and the proportion of working poor among low-income households rose to 46.6% in 2005. Of this number, 38.3% had one employment income and 8.2% had more than one.⁵⁰⁸

A representative of the organization described the situation as follows:

*“At the moment, disadvantaged families spend approximately 21% of their income on food, when they should be spending about 32% in order to get proper nutrition. And children are the greatest victims of this poverty. Unborn children are particularly affected by this, because pregnant women will have much smaller babies born much earlier, and everyone knows about the problems caused by low-birth weight.”*⁵⁰⁹

Mothers living in urban areas were 1.3 times or 30% more likely to have low birth-weight babies, while mothers living in low-income neighbourhoods were also at increased risk (1.5 times or 50% more likely compared to mothers living in high-income neighbourhoods); while nutrition is not the only contributing factor, it is considered a significant one.⁵¹⁰

According to the Dispensary’s executive director, social assistance rates are too low to adequately meet the needs for a minimum standard of food security.⁵¹¹ A study conducted by the Montreal Diet Dispensary, funded by the City of Montreal, found that a nutritious food basket cost was \$6.91 per person per day in January 2009, an increase of 11% over the cost in January 2008.⁵¹²

Action

While the recent statistics demonstrate the current need, the Montreal Diet Dispensary (MDD) was, in fact, founded in a much earlier era. In 1879 MDD began by preparing and distributing “nutritious meals to many destitute and ill Montrealers.”⁵¹³ The MDD mission is to promote health in the community, especially among pregnant mothers whose babies are at risk because of low socio-economic status. MDD fights poverty by trying to prevent the problem of low birth-weight babies.

Lessons learned

Each year, the MDD assists approximately 2,000 poor women including pregnant teenagers; this represents over one-third of the disadvantaged families on the Island of Montreal.⁵¹⁴ The Committee learned that MDD offers a very specific service to the women they serve: each one receives a home visit, nutrition counseling and a daily food supplement. Mothers are also encouraged to take part in

⁵⁰⁷ Statistics Canada 2006 Census Community Profiles, CANSIM table.

⁵⁰⁸ Pierre-Joseph Ulysse, *La lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion par le développement social au Québec : un portrait des vingt dernières années*, Canadian Council on Social Development, 2007, p. 4.

⁵⁰⁹ Marie-Paul Duquette, Evidence, SAST,, 2nd Session 39th Parliament, 7 February 2008.

⁵¹⁰ Canadian Institute for Health Information, *Too Early, Too Small: A profile of small babies across Canada*, 2009 http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/too_early_too_small_en.pdf. Accessed 12 August 2009.

⁵¹¹ Marie-Paul Duquette, Evidence.

⁵¹² Montreal Diet Dispensary, *129th Annual Report 2008-2009*, p. 6 <http://www.ddm-mdd.org/en/pdf/Report%2008-09.pdf>. Accessed 12 August 2009.

⁵¹³ Montreal Diet Dispensary http://www.ddm-mdd.org/en/prop/prop_hist.html. Accessed 12 August 2009.

⁵¹⁴ Marie-Paul Duquette, Evidence.

group activities including breastfeeding promotion and support, preparation for delivery, care of the newborn, and healthy cooking.

Over-represented groups such as immigrants in Montreal are especially in need of MDD services. “Forty-four per cent of the babies born in Montreal have mothers who were born in another country; they are often living in extreme poverty.”⁵¹⁵

The Committee heard that the cost of the MDD package of services is \$650 for each woman served; this compares very favourably to the more significant costs, in both financial and human terms, of the extra care required for a low birth-weight baby.⁵¹⁶ It has been estimated that every dollar invested in the MDD program saves \$8 in health care.⁵¹⁷ Last year, just 4.6% of MDD clients had a low birth-weight baby; the rate is 6% in Montreal, for all socio-economic levels.⁵¹⁸ More than 95% of mothers helped by MDD breastfeed their babies.⁵¹⁹

Government action

While the focus of the work of the MDD is on nutrition, MDD Executive Director told the Committee about the issues facing the women that MDD sees every day and suggested action in the following areas:

- Provision of a income to families in need, at an adequate level to pay for nutritious food, housing and childcare;
- Access to affordable housing, a major issue for the families that MDD helps, MDD has found that families struggling to afford their housing will have to sacrifice healthy eating. Access to food bank provisions does not always solve the problem. The government is urged to provide more access to affordable housing so that low income families would be able to afford healthy food.
- Government funding and programs for pre-natal and post-natal nutrition. The MDD program needs to act quickly to have an impact on their clients, many of whom do not connect with the services until they are well into their pregnancy. MDD makes the case that gaining access to nutritious food early in life, and gaining access to related supports during the baby’s first year can break the poverty cycle.

Community Kitchen Program of Calgary⁵²⁰

Site Visit 20 May 2009 Calgary, Alberta

Challenge

The Community Kitchen Program (CKP) of Calgary cites the following data for those living in poverty in Calgary: 14.8% of children, 20.6% of seniors, 30.4% of single parent families and 12.5%

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Montreal Diet Dispensary, *129th Annual Report 2008-2009*, p. 6 <http://www.ddm-mdd.org/en/pdf/Report%2008-09.pdf>. Accessed 12 August 2009.

⁵¹⁷ MDD, “Evaluation of the ‘Higgins Method’”, http://www.ddm-mdd.org/en/acti/acti_rech.html Accessed 12 August 2009.

⁵¹⁸ MDD, *129th Annual Report 2008-2009*, p. 6.

⁵¹⁹ MDD, “Evaluation of the ‘Higgins Method’”.

⁵²⁰ Community Kitchen Program of Calgary <http://www.communitykitchenprogram.com>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

of Calgarians in general lived in poverty in 2006.⁵²¹ The Community Kitchen Programs identified these over-represented groups as needing both more time and money to be able to better feed themselves and their families; these are the groups their many programstar get and serve.

Action

Beginning in the 1993 recession, the CKP started with one volunteer coordinator, in one community kitchen. Six mothers cooked together, in an afternoon, a total of 357 nutritious meals for 17 people at cost of 52 cents per person, per meal. For that group, the process was repeated on a bi-monthly basis for the next five years. The agency reported that the results included not only saving valuable time and money, but also important long-term friendships.⁵²² That is the basis of the program. Since that time, the program, known as the Calgary's Cooking, has been expanded to multiple groups operating in over 35 locations, such as church and community centre kitchens. CKP has also created additional food distribution services.

Lessons learned

The Calgary's Cooking program continues to function much as it did in the initial program, by supporting the self-sustaining small cooking groups in the start-up phase and offering access to Calgary's Cooking program staff for ongoing advice. Subcommittee members learned that group participants benefit from the time saving and cost saving through bulk purchasing and menu planning that takes advantage of grocery store sales.

The Spinz-A-Round food distribution program helps other agencies meet the food needs to their clients. The program receives food donations from Safeway, Co-op, Sobeys and other agencies, food that would otherwise go to waste. Fresh produce, bread and other donations also come from suppliers and farmers' markets. Subcommittee members were given a tour of the large warehouse; its capacity, including extensive refrigeration and easy access for drop-off and pick-up, is a critical element of the success of the program. About 120 agencies such as Meals-on-Wheels, churches, and Calgary food banks pick up food from the Spinz-A-Round warehouse. CKP staff told Subcommittee members that food from the Spinz-A-Round warehouse fed approximately 125,000 people at a cost saving of over \$2.3 million. Seniors make up about 14,000 of that number and children over 46,300.

Committee members also heard about other programs run by Community Kitchen Program including a 'good food box' distribution to neighbourhood depots, emergency food hampers and emergency food distribution for City of Calgary disaster relief. CKP also delivers food to low-income children in summer day camp programs. CKP Souperstars program is an educational tool about food, food preparation and shopping delivered in schools in low-income communities.

Committee members were given a data sheet summarizing the impact of the Community Kitchen Program in 2008: 65,827 and 88,227 adults and seniors were fed, for a total of over 154,000 clients served. Community Kitchen estimates that a total of 40,663 meals were prepared using 11,000 volunteer hours in 2008.⁵²³

⁵²¹ Community Kitchen Program of Calgary "Poverty Facts and Impact of the Community Kitchens Program in 2008," brochure provided to Subcommittee during site visit.

⁵²² Community Kitchen Program of Calgary http://www.communitykitchenprogram.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48:history-of-ckp&catid=34:history&Itemid=55. Accessed 4 August 2009.

⁵²³ Ibid.

Government action

Community Kitchen Program staff identified the following areas for potential government action:

- Funding to support requests for replication of the program. Calgary's Cooking has been approached by others wishing to replicate the program from Vancouver, Seattle and Melbourne, Australia. While Community Kitchen Program has been able to share its experience with Food Banks Canada, and the Alberta Food Banks, funding that activity is not easy. Government support for the costs of sharing the programs with other interested agencies would be helpful.
- Funding for capital acquisitions needed for program delivery. Key to their success, according to the program staff, is their "dream" location and warehouse facility. It is the 9,000 square foot leased space that makes possible the range of programs and the quality of programs. Having the storage space, refrigeration, teaching kitchen and offices, all located in the same space, and co-located with other service organizations has been a 'major bonus' for the organization. The space was made possible through a joint lease arrangement with other non-profit organizations which is described as "socially innovative collaboration that introduces a radical response to poverty related issues."⁵²⁴ Access to funding capital costs for such a space adaptation may make all the difference to the success of similar programs.

Sun Youth Organization⁵²⁵

Site Visit 8 June 2009 Montreal, Quebec

Challenge

Montreal's Le Plateau area has long been an area of both community and disadvantage. A poor enclave popular with newly arrived immigrants, it was first populated in the post-war period by Portuguese newcomers, creating the foundation for a still-vibrant community.⁵²⁶ It is one of the most densely populated areas in Montreal, with over 100,000 residents. The area remains home to many people who are living in low income circumstances and in need of assistance.

Action

Sun Youth was founded in 1954 to provide a safe and constructive outlet for young people to focus their time and energies in the Le Plateau area where sports and recreation activities for area youth were minimal.⁵²⁷ While the name remains, the organization has since expanded to serve people of all ages with a wide variety of programs. Just some of the programs are emergency response service for people in distress, community crime prevention, a food bank which is open 365 days a year and comprehensive seniors' programs. Sun Youth moved into a large, old school building in the 1980's, which allowed the organization to greatly expand services. Today Sun Youth describes itself as "a comprehensive and vibrant non profit community center looking toward serving the disadvantaged in the next millennium."⁵²⁸

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Sun Youth Organization <http://sunyouthorg.com/index.asp>. Accessed 22 July 2009.

⁵²⁶ "Le Plateau," on Montreal Bits website http://www.montrealbits.com/plateau_mont_royal/plateau/. Accessed 21 July 2009.

⁵²⁷ Sun Youth Organization <http://sunyouthorg.com/index.asp>. Accessed 22 July 2009.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

Lessons learned

Sun Youth, since its inception over 50 years ago, identifies the needs of the community and responds with a program. Subcommittee members were impressed to learn of the transformation from its original service to young people needing sports and recreation opportunities to the addition of a food bank, a clothing exchange, a medication aid program for low-income seniors plus many other services, while still offering recreation to youth: Sun Youth has demonstrated its capacity to adapt to emerging needs and gaps in services.

Committee members learned about the youth-focussed recreation and summer camp programs, and the after-school programs that aim to reduce the school drop-out rate in the area. Sun Youth also assists single parent families with special programming. Approximately 2,500 families come to the food bank per month. There are also specific supports for pregnant mothers, disaster plan and emergency care services. Some support is offered to homeless people but the programs focus on people who have an address.

Government action

Sun Youth staff urged the government to take a longer term view of the alleviation of poverty. In their estimation there is too much focus on poverty as a 'crisis'. Staff cited studies that assess the costs of poverty, the health costs related to poverty, and the costs of school drop-outs. These studies, staff told us, make a clear case for taking a long-term approach to helping people out of welfare and out of poverty. Action, staff say, is required of government, unions and business. Government needs to commit money and engage intensely now. Some more general observations about government support of programs such as theirs follow:

- Long-term funding from government is essential, for a minimum of three years, with more co-ordination of reporting requirements.
- During the economic downturn funding for hiring summer students should double
- When there is job loss, money should flow immediately; it is those people who are waiting to receive EI benefits that are now coming to the food bank
- Federal government could play a role in leveraging business action, with tax credits for corporate food donations offered as an example.

The Hospitality Project⁵²⁹

Site Visit 13 July 2009 New Westminster, British Columbia

Challenge

In response to community need, the Shiloh-Sixth Avenue United Church has operated a food bank for two days a week for decades. By the analysis of project staff the community they serve is characterized by its high density—over 12,000 people live within six blocks— two-thirds of whom live below the poverty line. Many are new immigrants, about 14% are Aboriginal and there are many single parents. Staff noted that approximately 80% of the neighbourhood residents have moved within the last three years, indicating a high level of transience.

⁵²⁹ The Hospitality Project <http://www.newwesthospitalityproject.org/links.html#>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

Demand for the food bank increased over the years, and the line-up began to stretch down and around the block. Staff described how people waited anxiously, protective of their position in line, sometimes with children in tow, for hours at a time, in all kinds of weather.

Action

In response to the increasingly long food bank line-up, Shiloh-Sixth Avenue United Church devised a new system: they brought the line-up inside, into the comfort of the large church gymnasium. This simple action was the beginning of the Hospitality Project. The Hospitality Project currently distributes about 500 bags of food weekly, which feed about 800 people. Clients come from among the homeless in the area and those who are living in poverty, and those with addictions or mental health issues. Staff estimate that about one-third are new immigrant families.

Lessons learned

Committee members heard how the Hospitality Project has changed a visit to the food bank into a visit to a safe, friendly environment where participants come together, chat, have coffee and build community connections. Additional services, beyond the food bank offerings, have become a part of the environment. Clothing, books and household items are exchanged. Dental clinics make regular visits for assessments and fluoride treatments. A teacher tutors adults toward high school completion. Cooking classes are combined with budget and nutrition information. Subcommittee members learned how all these services can be made available all in one space.

Hospitality Project staff assess new clients, performing a triage assessment of their needs. New clients used to number two or three per day; now that figure is 20 to 30. On-site translation is available in 20 languages and there are links available to over 100 languages. Resource staff provide basic information on topics such as housing or health, and more help in accessing services is also available. Subcommittee members heard that staff help people negotiate more critical and complex issues for specialized needs in health care, immigration, housing or welfare.⁵³⁰

The Hospitality Project, as described by program participants, changed the food bank line-up from a place of shame to a place of dignity. One participant explained that when the line-up was outside, it was chaotic, visible to passers-by and isolating. It is now instead a community of sharing experience, networking and building self-esteem. Subcommittee members heard firsthand that for some, this has been enough stability to help them address other issues in their lives such as addictions or lack of education; some who first came when homeless have since secured housing. The sharing sense of community made the difference; one participant proposed the idea that the greatest ailment is loneliness.

The Hospitality Project is funded in large part with Homelessness Partnering Strategy funds from HRSDC.

Government action

In discussion with Subcommittee members, clients and staff made the following proposals for the alleviation of the poverty they experience or observe:

- Higher rates of social assistance. One client said that the difference between just existing and feeling good is a \$200 more a month.

⁵³⁰ Family Services of Greater Vancouver, http://www.fsgv.ca/programs/program_details.php?program_id=239. Accessed 30 June 2009.

- Use a ‘Is this kindness?’ lens for every government policy, program or directive.
- Hospitality and compassion have proven to be low key but effective approaches.

Stella Burry Community Services⁵³¹, Stella’s Café

Site Visit 11 August 2008 St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador

Challenge

For people with social and emotional health issues, limited or no work history, and/or low levels of literacy, finding affordable housing is an important step towards integration within the community.⁵³² After leaving a correctional institution, for example, people without family or friends can have difficulty finding housing, employment and support in the community, making it more likely that they will become homeless, re-offend and eventually be re-incarcerated. For individuals living with mental illness, the challenges are similar in that they can find it hard to keep their housing when no consistent support is available. If they ultimately become homeless, they often become victims of crime.⁵³³

Action

Stella Burry Community Services (SBCS) has been building what it calls a “circle of hope” that begins with residential counselling or emergency shelter, followed by critically important long- or short-term affordable housing. SBCS also offers work-experience programs that provide skills training, literacy programs and career counselling that meets the specific needs of vulnerable individuals and gives them the self-confidence needed to attain independence.⁵³⁴ The organization’s website describes it as follows:

Members of the Stella Burry community know that when safe, affordable housing, effective employment programs and appropriate supports are available, they can transform their lives in extraordinary ways.⁵³⁵

As an incorporated body of the United Church of Canada, SBCS’s programs offer opportunities for self-renewal that affirm individual strengths and abilities. The SBCS HOPEworks program, for example, supports and encourages people who face significant personal barriers and find it difficult to sustain successful traditional education and employment. HOPEworks takes a ‘no-fail’ approach to workforce preparation, enabling participants “to achieve meaningful gains in their ability to fully participate in the community.”⁵³⁶

Stella Bury also operates a social enterprise called Stella’s Café, to fulfil their mission of providing effective employment opportunities. They define social enterprise as

⁵³¹ Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is from the website of Stella Burry Community Services <http://www.stellaburry.ca/>. Accessed 18 August 2009.

⁵³² CMHC, *Project Profile* 2006 http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/prpr/upload/Rawlin-Cross_E.pdf. Accessed 14 August 2009.

⁵³³ CMHC, Corporation *Project Profile* 2008 http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/prpr/upload/Carew-Lodge_E.pdf. Accessed 14 August 2009.

⁵³⁴ CMHC (2006).

⁵³⁵ Stella Burry Community Services <http://www.stellaburry.ca/>. Accessed 10 August 2009.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

*a term for a non-profit enterprise, social-purpose business or revenue-generating venture founded to assist or create economic opportunities for people who need assistance to access employment. Generally, social enterprises have a double bottom line – a social one as well as a financial one.*⁵³⁷

The café provides training and additional work experience in food preparation as well as sales, customer service and café operations, and was the setting for the discussion that Subcommittee members held with SBCS staff and clients.

Lessons learned

Committee members heard from Stella Burry staff, clients and residents that there is a need for combinations of services. The experiences of clients—in and out of prison, during periodic stays in hospital for mental illness, getting on and off social assistance, and into and out of affordable housing—were made more complicated by the silo-style, single-focus solutions usually available to them. Subcommittee members heard that people have more success when more complete combinations of solutions are available: finding the home, the job and the friends all at once, was how one participant put it.

The clients shared stories of their lives with Subcommittee members, lives that had many bumps along the way and commonly took turns into high-risk living situations – addiction, violence, homelessness and crime. The thread tying all the stories together was a history of mental illness. Clients explained that mental illness made stable living difficult. A typical example included a shift from social assistance to a low-wage job that was not sustainable because required medication prescribed for a mental illness was not affordable without the social assistance benefit. We learned that in this case, the individual eventually stopped taking the medication to save money, lost their job and then lost their housing. Homelessness came next. Incarceration in a prison or a stay in a mental health facility often followed. Members learned from the stories people shared that only by gaining stability from a combination of supports offered by Stella Burry, had they been able to make change in their lives.

Government action

Subcommittee members heard about the need for services to be better linked: when changes happen to individuals, timely support to ease the transition is often lacking. These examples were cited by the staff and clients:

- moving off social assistance and into employment while still needing coverage for the cost of medication;
- coming out of prison and in need of support to re-integrate into community ; and
- gaining access to social assistance but without access to affordable housing means that life is still not stable.

One person noted that there are lots of services, but they are all isolated, with gaps between them, making access difficult to navigate. Staff also noted that organizations find that funding also has ‘gaps’: on-going programs require annual funding proposals as if being newly established, for example. Although good relationships with funders are being created, with too much staff time goes into writing proposals rather than delivering the program

⁵³⁷ Stella Burry Community Services <http://www.stellaburry.ca/>. Accessed 10 August 2009.

There was a call for a national housing strategy that set federal standards for non-profit housing, but provincial-level implementation decisions. Focus group participants emphasized a need for ongoing government commitment and funding to the prevention, reduction and elimination of homelessness.

North End Community Health Centre⁵³⁸

Site Visit 14 August 2008 Halifax, Nova Scotia

Challenge

Although the North End of Halifax has a long history, analysts suggest that the area it still defined by the vast destruction experienced during the Halifax Explosion of 1917.⁵³⁹ Rebuilt with modest housing, the area was populated largely by shipyard workers during the boom years of the Second World War. The modest homes, having been converted to accommodate more workers, fell into disrepair, and finally were largely abandoned as relocation to the suburbs became popular in the post-war era. The North End continued to decline according to most measures – household income level, incidence of low income, proportion of tenants, population and commercial services.⁵⁴⁰

Today the area is home to a high proportion of renters (over 85% in the census tract around the North End Community Health Centre); almost all of the buildings were built before 1986 and almost 70% of the population lives in an apartment building.⁵⁴¹ Census tract data of 2006 showed an unemployment rate of 12%, with 38% of residents living with incomes below the after-tax Low Income Cut-Off lines. Despite a 70% labour-force participation rate, the median income in 2006 was just over \$15,000. By comparison the median income of all Haligonians over the age of 15 years was \$27,212.⁵⁴²

Action

The North End Community Health Centre (NECHC) is supporting North End Halifax “to be a healthy community by offering leadership in primary health through health services, education, community development, outreach and advocacy.”⁵⁴³ NECHC was founded in 1971 by a group of local residents in response to a need for local health care services in the neighbourhood. The Centre, located in the heart of the North End community, continues to serve this purpose and more. The centre has three nurse practitioners, five doctors, and a nutritionist, a social worker and mental health workers. Health practitioners at the Centre also do outreach work with clients of other organizations, agencies and many of the shelters in the area.

⁵³⁸ Information about the North End Community Health Centre is taken from its website, unless otherwise noted. <http://www.nehc.com/>. Accessed 10 August 2009.

⁵³⁹ Jim Silver, *Public housing Risks and Alternatives: Uniacke Square in North End Halifax*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, February 2008 p. 10, http://www.policyalternatives.ca/documents/Nova_Scotia_Pubs/2008/Public_Housing_Risks_and_Alternatives.pdf. Accessed 10 August 2009.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Statistics Canada Census Tract Profile Halifax 0010.00 CT, <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-597/P3.cfm?Lang=E&CTCODE=0039&CACODE=205&PRCODE=12&PC=B3K3B5> accessed 10 August 2009.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ North End Community Health Centre website.

Lessons learned

Committee members learned that when the centre first opened, it relied on the traditional physician-based system, but staff noticed that the “treat-and-street approach wasn’t dealing with the underlying health problems in the community.”⁵⁴⁴ Social workers were added to the centre for in-house and community outreach programs. This was the beginning of building the holistic approach to health care that is now offered at NECHC.

We were interested to learn that the governing body of the NECHC encourages members and program participants to be involved in setting the direction for their health centre. Program participants, residents and friends of NECHC are encouraged to become members, with the Board of Directors being drawn from the membership. The Centre partners with many local community organizations and service providers to support and encourage health, broadly defined, in the community. Programs for parents and youth, mental health and chronic disease, cooking and gardening are just some examples of NECHC programs. NECHC also serves as an educational learning environment for students in the health profession.

Government action

In focus group discussions, Subcommittee members heard personal stories from those with “first voice” experience living in poverty, brought together by the NECHC. Individuals who also spoke for others through their connections with local organizations raised several points were about how government might better serve vulnerable people. They spoke of their experiences with mental illness, homelessness, disability and chronic disease such as HIV. In all cases, they had experience with trying to navigate the system of supports – social assistance, CPP-D, social housing and income benefits for seniors. They expressed their concerns with system inflexibility, with gaps in coverage and with disincentives in the system of supports. They recommended that government action could better support people as they move from disability to part-time work, or as they transition from social assistance to full-time work. In their experiences, supports were complicated to access, often subject to claw-back and reduced or eliminated before a transition was completed.

Committee members were reminded that transitions can take time, as was the case for one participant who has struggled with mental illness for 17 years. He has required, but not always received, support at various stages over that period; for example although a university graduate, there was little support for his transition to full-time work which for him was made more complicated by his mental illness and an intermittent work history. Stories such as his describe a life of disruptions to achieving stability, sometimes as a direct result of a limitation or restriction of a needed support.

Rainbow Youth Centre⁵⁴⁵

Site Visit 14 July 2009 Regina, Saskatchewan

Challenge

Youth in the Regina were the subject of a 1982 study that called for a comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach to youth services. Easy access to a wide range of services, the study said,

⁵⁴⁴ John McPhee, “Shot in the arm for holistic health care,” *The Chronicle-Herald* [Halifax] 21 May 2009 p. A8.

⁵⁴⁵ Information about the Rainbow Youth Centre is taken from its website unless otherwise noted. <http://www.rainbowyouth.com/>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

would make it possible to prevent many high-risk youth from experiencing problems later when the consequences would be more major.⁵⁴⁶

Action

In operation since 1982, Rainbow Youth Centre works with young people aged 11 to 18, and up to 25 years old in some programs, in a variety of individual and group counselling, skills development, educational, recreational, and direct service programs for those building life skills and employment readiness capacity. Programs also include classes in young parenting, sports, games, computer skills, anger management, and peer mentoring.

Lessons learned

Rainbow Youth Centre is open to all youth throughout Regina; about half of its participants are Aboriginal. Subcommittee members met some of the youth engaged in programs at the Centre, and learned about the other programs. Participants in the after-school drop-in program for youth aged 11 to 18 years become 'members' during an intake process in their initial few visits. While invited to drop in, all youth are involved in programming when at the centre. About 90% of the drop-in program members are Aboriginal, but this proportion has changed year to year. Programs can be adapted quickly to suit the needs of the current members. Older youth may be engaged in the Young Parent Program or the Road to Employment programs. Youth Express helps youth of all ages to locate stable housing.

Rainbow Youth Centre partners with another Regina agency that Subcommittee members visited, The Circle Project, to deliver the KidsFirst program to young adults who are also parents.

Committee members learned about the Road to Employment program in a discussion group with program participants. The program started its eleventh year with 20 youth who will, over the course of the next year, be given structured support as they work to obtain their Grade 12 Equivalency Diploma (GED), a driver's licence, various certificates, and experience in a job placement.

Government action

In discussion with these participants, comments addressed how government might help them achieve more stable lives. The following captures the key themes that were noted during the discussion:

- Easier access to housing for young families. Youth, most of them parents of young children, struggled to find stable, suitable affordable housing; several spoke of their impression that they were discriminated against for being young and also for being Aboriginal. Easier access to housing, for young families, was an area noted for government action.
- More funding for programs like Road to Employment. Their positive experience with the program, and the long waiting list to get into the program, prompted participants to propose more funding be available to create more spaces in such programs.
- More financial supports for people in full-time training programs. Participants described, in some detail, the negative financial consequences for leaving social assistance to take up the education program. While they are eligible for the provincial training allowance (PTA), they

⁵⁴⁶ Rainbow Youth Centre "Regina Multi-service Centre for youth," p.2, submitted to the Subcommittee during its visit.

have found that even if they work during the school term, their income will be clawed back, yet the allowance is not enough for their families to live on. During the job placement part of the Road to Employment program, participants will be making minimum wage; although minimum wage has been increased recently to \$9.25⁵⁴⁷ per hour, youth at the focus group felt that they could not sustain themselves without further supplements for childcare, rent, utilities, and public transportation.

Focus group participants described their involvement with gangs and criminal behaviour and their choice to move into education, job readiness and employment. They felt that support for their change in lifestyle, which comes at a short-term financial cost could be better supported with housing, childcare, and rent supplements.

Dalhousie Legal Aid Service⁵⁴⁸

Site Visit 14 August 2008 Halifax, Nova Scotia

Challenge

Legal aid is the means by which the governments ensure that people who otherwise would not be able to afford legal services are the equal beneficiaries of the rule of law and enjoy the equal benefit and protection of the law. In Nova Scotia, according to the provincial Legal Aid Commission, it must also be determined that the case in question has some merit, and that the applicant will receive some benefit if service is provided. Legal services are provided mainly in the areas of family and criminal law.⁵⁴⁹

Only those receiving social assistance benefits or in an “equivalent financial situation,” determined by a needs test based on family income, expenses, debt load and assets, are eligible for legal aid services a.⁵⁵⁰

Action

In operation since 1970, Dalhousie Legal Aid Service (DLAS) began as a summer project out of the former Halifax Neighbourhood Centre. It was the first legal clinic service for poor people in Nova Scotia and is the oldest program of its kind in Canada. DLAS functions as a partnership between community groups, law students, community legal workers and lawyers. The office is located in the Halifax North End neighbourhood and is operated and largely funded by Dalhousie Law School.

Dalhousie Legal Aid has a three-part mandate:

- to provide legal aid services for persons who would not otherwise be able to afford to obtain legal advice for assistance,
- to conduct research and engage in programs relating to legal aid and law reform, and

⁵⁴⁷ Government of Saskatchewan <http://www.labour.gov.sk.ca/mw-mco-pay-increase/>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

⁵⁴⁸ Information about Dalhousie Legal Aid Services is taken from its website, unless otherwise noted. <http://law.dal.ca/Institutes/Dalhousie%20Legal%20Aid%20Service/>. Accessed 10 August 2009.

⁵⁴⁹ Nova Scotia Legal Aid Commission http://www.gov.ns.ca/Just/legal_aid.asp. Accessed 11 August 2009.

⁵⁵⁰ Department of Justice Canada, “Legal Aid Eligibility and Coverage in Canada”, *Legal Aid Research Series*, October 2002, p. 34 a http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2003/rr03_la5-rr03_aj5/rr03_la5.pdf. Accessed 21 October 2009.

- to provide an clinical educational experience for the students of the Faculty of Law of Dalhousie University.

In addition to traditional legal clinical law services, Dalhousie Legal Aid Service provides community outreach, education, organizing, lobbying and test case litigation in issues affecting persons with low incomes in Nova Scotia. Community groups and community-based agencies with mandates to fight poverty and injustice may apply for legal advice, assistance, and community development and education services.

Lessons learned

Committee members learned that while staff and volunteers of DLAS attended to over 400 new client files in 2008, they also pursued a number of related activities on the boards and committees of organizations at the municipal and provincial levels.⁵⁵¹ Participation of third-year law students in the work of the clinic continues to be a high priority. According to its annual report,

“Community development projects and law reform initiatives play a key role in their education. The exposure of students to systemic and discriminatory problems faced by the low-income community broadens their perspective regarding the impact of the law on the lives of the disadvantaged and powerless.”⁵⁵²

Government action

In discussion with community representatives, staff and clients (held at the North End Community Health Centre), Subcommittee members heard about concerns with the inflexibility of the system of supports. Focus groups participants, many who have dealt with mental health issues, expressed their desire to be engaged in the labour market or voluntary sector without losing their necessary supports. While barriers are expected for gaining access to a support program, such as CPP-D or social assistance, participants said that they needed more flexibility to be able to work when they were capable or find other ways to participate in the community.

Additional details of the discussion are noted in the North End Community Health Centre promising practice notes.

Housing

Regent Park Revitalization⁵⁵³

Site Visit 15 May 2009 Toronto, Ontario

Challenge

The Regent Park housing community, Canada’s largest and oldest publicly funded community, was constructed in 1948 of primarily four-storey walk-up buildings.⁵⁵⁴ Originally conceived of as a ‘garden city,’ it was created with walkways and parks instead of public access streets; much of the area is inaccessible to traffic vehicles. While a model for the period, most of the Regent Park structures have not received significant capital upgrades for 50 years. The design has led to “the

⁵⁵¹ Dalhousie Legal Aid Service. *Annual Report 2008*, p. 12, http://law.dal.ca/Files/Dal_Legal_Aid/2008_Annual_Report.pdf. Accessed 10 August 2009.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁵³ Information about Regent Park is taken primary from its website, unless otherwise noted. Toronto Community Housing <http://www.torontohousing.ca/regentpark>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

isolation of the neighbourhood's more than 7,500 residents.⁵⁵⁵ Both the buildings and the area design were contributing to the general decline in the neighbourhood.

Regent Park is a property of Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), the largest social housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America.

Action

In 2006, TCHC initiated a major revitalization of Regent Park that will take place in six phases over 12 years. This project will replace all existing 2083 units of social housing and add at least 700 units of affordable housing. The first phase — including the demolition of older buildings and the completion of two new buildings with more than 900 units — will be completed by the end of 2009. Once revitalized, the area will provide affordable and market-rate rental and ownership units, creating a mix that was not part of the original Regent Park. Regent Park will have, for the first time in 50 years, commercial space for such amenities as groceries, banking and services, as well as a community space for local programs, a learning centre and an aquatic centre. The multi-unit family-oriented building will be home to a daycare centre.

The new buildings will be LEED⁵⁵⁶ certified, with lower emissions and energy-efficient building design: lower long-term operating costs are expected as a result. The new Regent Park will create pedestrian-friendly streets, large park spaces for recreation and landscaped walkways, even after the re-introduction of vehicle traffic through the area.

Lessons learned

The entire revitalization is expected to cost \$1 billion and will be financed half from private and commercial interests, and slightly less than half by TCHC and the City of Toronto. Creating a mixed-income neighbourhood allows TCHC to use the proceeds from the sale of market units to help finance the construction of the replacement rent-geared-to-income units.⁵⁵⁷

Toronto Community Housing staff presented highlights of the specific approaches to revitalization:

- The mix of rent-geared-to-income and market-rate units is an important feature of the revitalization designed to improve social inclusion and increase diversity in the area.
- The mix of high-rise, low-rise and townhouse units, plus the addition of 'regular' streets, will help to create a neighbourhood feel.
- The construction project itself has created employment for area residents.

⁵⁵⁵ Regent Park Revitalization *Backgrounder* June 2008.

⁵⁵⁶ The LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Green Building Rating System[®] is a voluntary, consensus-based national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings. It addresses many environmentally preferable building construction options, in areas as diverse as selection of construction materials, lighting, energy efficiency, and water use. In some cases, there may be an incremental cost associated with selecting environmental features, however, payback in operational and energy savings is expected. <http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/ecologisation-greening/achats-procurement/trousse-toolkit/page-6-eng.html#a64a>. Accessed 22 October 2009. For further information see Canada Green Building Council <http://www.cagbc.org/leed/what/index.php>. Accessed 22 October 2009.

⁵⁵⁷ Regent Park Revitalization *Backgrounder* June 2008.

- TCHC is also developing an affordable home ownership program by making units available for purchase without requiring a down payment, using a second mortgage mechanism instead, payable when the owner sells the unit.
- The revitalization has been assisted through collaboration with the developer and builder, and commercial and retail partners.
- Community engagement is intended to be a feature of the new Regent Park neighbourhood; engagement began with the consultation of over 2,000 residents and stakeholders during the revitalization planning stages.

Government action

In discussion with Subcommittee members, staff and Regent Park residents emphasized the positive changes that have resulted from the revitalization. They indicated that any government support or contribution to the process of change would be beneficial, and the following were more concrete recommendations.

- Increased safety. Residents reported that they see an increase in community safety and look forward to the design change that will eliminate the large ‘no man’s land areas that have become sites for drug-use related activities.
- Employment opportunities. The increased employment arising from the construction has contributed to a change in attitude, residents say.
- Local solutions. The Regent Park area has also benefitted greatly from the addition of locally delivered programs targeted at the resolution of local problems. For example, the Pathways to Education program was implemented in the community, reducing the dropout rate from 56% to 10%.⁵⁵⁸

Gabriel Housing Corporation

Site Visit 14 July 2009 Regina, Saskatchewan

Challenge

In 2006, 41% of all Regina tenant households were spending 30% or more of their gross income on shelter.⁵⁵⁹ Although this is a lower rate than in 2001, it still compares poorly to the comparable rate for owner households in Regina at just 12%.⁵⁶⁰ Not only are tenant households more likely to be spending a greater proportion of their income on housing,⁵⁶¹ Subcommittee members also heard during site visits in Regina that affordable rental spaces are frequently in need of major repair. In 2008, the vacancy rate in Regina was 0.5%, down from 3.3% in 2006. Aboriginal people in particular are among those most affected by the housing situation in Regina.

⁵⁵⁸ Pathways to Education “Executive Summary,” Written submission to SAST. 2nd Session, 40th Parliament, 22 April 2009.

⁵⁵⁹ For the definition of affordability and core housing need see: CMHC, “Affordable Housing.” http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/corp/faq/faq_002.cfm. Accessed 1 September 2009.

⁵⁶⁰ Gabriel Potter and Marc Spooner, “Taking Stock, Taking Action 2009,” Unpublished report Draft v.4, June 2009, p. 8.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

[I]n 2001 a quarter of Regina households in core housing need were Aboriginal, although at that time only about 9% of the Regina population was Aboriginal according to 2001 census figures. According to documents, a large number of Aboriginal peoples are among the hidden homeless.⁵⁶²

Action

Since 1981, Gabriel Housing Corporation, a collaboration of six Métis groups in Saskatchewan, has provided affordable housing for Métis people in Regina. The non-profit corporation currently owns and operates 303 housing units and Riel House, transition house for women.

Riel House is a 12-unit building for women and their children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness because of domestic violence. Through a partnership with Aboriginal Family Services, women and children living at the facility have access to counselling, family support, parent aid, employment and training referrals, group support, transportation, and case management services.

Originally funded in the 1980's through CMHC's public housing funding, Gabriel Housing Corporation now aims to be self-sustaining in financing new units with only some assistance from government programs.

Lessons learned

Gabriel Housing staff and Board told Subcommittee members that rents are set to maximize the affordability of units rather than revenues. Given the current funding agreements, that means that the corporation can break even while renting at least some units for as low as \$555 per month; market value for most of their units would be closer to \$700, according to staff. Other units occupied by those on social assistance are rented for no more than the shelter allowance component of their benefits, or the rent is set at 26% of gross income. Currently, approximately 30% of the units are subsidized through the original public housing agreements of the early 1980s. That proportion declines as the units come to the end of the original CMHC operating agreements. Gabriel Housing Corporation seeks funding from a variety of sources (federal, provincial municipal) and through other programs specifically targeted to meet urban Aboriginal housing needs.⁵⁶³

Government action

Gabriel Housing Corporation staff made the following recommendations for funding mechanisms for non-profit, affordable housing corporations:

- Ensure early policy design consultation occurs during the planning process and is inclusive of Aboriginal groups.
- Control the rate of rental unit conversion to condominiums; and/or make use of rent control mechanisms to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing units
- Provide subsidies to the individual rather than the housing provider.
- CMHC is still the best agency to be the central hub for housing, including for Aboriginal groups and those who are homeless; CMHC should get back in the housing market.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁶³ Service Canada

<http://disclosure.servicecanada.gc.ca/dtlcdn-eng.jsp?site=3&id=6036&employeeid=null&startdate=2008-10-01&preview=null&enddate=2008-12-31&quarterid=11§ion=3>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

Supportive Housing for Young Mothers⁵⁶⁴

Site Visit 13 July 2008 Halifax, Nova Scotia

Challenge

Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM) identified a clear community need among teenage mothers in 2000. In the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), about 200 children are born to teenage mothers every year. Many of these mothers do not have adequate family or partner support. High rents, rental agreement restrictions for minors and age-based disqualification from income assistance, leave some young mothers with a stark choice between abusive relationships and substandard living arrangements.⁵⁶⁵

The origins of the program came from the thinking of a small group of women who saw things in their community that concerned them:

*We knew a lot of young mothers and their children who had lived in unsafe places, who had gone without food or electricity or heat, and who had been abused, beaten up, or taken advantage of. We knew girls and women who had been homeless - couch surfing, living in a shelter, or staying in a place where they weren't safe or weren't wanted. We knew a lot of people who were afraid to be in an apartment by themselves, or afraid to be alone with a brand new baby - but they had no choice. We knew there had to be a way to make this easier, safer, and less stressful!*⁵⁶⁶

Action

SHYM provides transitional housing, including a program designed to improve the quality of life of young mothers. It offers a supportive environment while participants gain confidence as parents and get help returning to school or work. SHYM opened the doors of its renovated building, originally a school, in October, 2007.

Lessons learned

SHYM is for mothers who are 16 to 21 years of age, currently pregnant or parenting, and in need of safe, secure housing. The building houses 12 families, each in their own two-bedroom apartment where they can stay for up to two years. Mothers are required to take part in SHYM activities, selecting from on-site programs such as regular house suppers and community events. Support services include parenting education, life skills and child development, referrals to community resources and a supportive peer group of other young mothers in the same building. The women also meet with their Family Support Worker. All units are self-contained but there is a communal kitchen and childcare room. There is an on-site office area and facilities for overnight staff.

SHYM offers secure housing, the opportunity to learn and practice life skills in a safe environment, a sense of community, and independence.

Government action

Funding for the program and money for the extensive renovation came from a variety of sources: United Way (Halifax Region), Halifax Regional Municipality, IWK Foundation; Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI); Nova Scotia Department of Community Services; Nova

⁵⁶⁴ Information about Supportive Housing for Young Mothers is taken from its website, unless otherwise noted. <http://www.shym.ca/>. Accessed 7 August 2009.

⁵⁶⁵ CMHC, "Project Profile – Supportive Housing for Young Mothers" <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/prpr/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=164457>. Accessed 7 August 2009.

⁵⁶⁶ SHYM, "History." <http://www.shym.ca/history.html>. Accessed 7 August 2009.

Scotia Department of Education Youth Secretariat; CMHC, and IWK Health Centre.⁵⁶⁷ Such funding arrangements, from a variety of sources and each with its own limitations or restrictions, are not uncommon for similar projects.

In discussion with the mothers, the following points were made about how government might act to improve the circumstances of women in similar situations:

- Addiction treatment services. Most of the women come directly from environments that were unstable or unsupportive of their need to parent their child or children; they reported growing up in homes where addictions and the presence of drugs and guns was normal.
- No requirement to identify of father as a condition of receipt of benefits. None of the fathers of the children are involved and only about half of the women say that their families are involved. Some of the women felt that involvement with the father would be a negative experience and that tracking down the father would be unproductive in terms of getting more financial support; in one case at least, involving the child's father could be damaging to the child's wellbeing.
- Literacy and other bridging programs. Effectively navigating the school system is a problem for some; large class size, courses that were not focused enough on basic life skills and a lack of success in basic literacy were all cited as issues that led to disengagement from school.
- Access to childcare. The mothers pointed out that lack of access to childcare is a barrier to their school completion or getting a job, and would likely be unaffordable even if it were available.

Options for Homes⁵⁶⁸

Site visit 15 May 2009 Toronto, Ontario

Challenge

In 2008, the Ontario Human Rights Commission heard during its province-wide consultation on rental housing and human rights “widespread views that it is Ontario’s most vulnerable families and individuals who bear the human toll of inadequacies in the province’s rental housing sector.”⁵⁶⁹ In general, the rental market in Ontario has been marked by loss of units to condominium conversion or demolition, lower than needed construction of rental and co-op housing, and dropping vacancy rates.⁵⁷⁰ The vacancy rate in Toronto has declined from 3.2% in October 2007 to 2.0% in October 2008.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁷ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Project Profile – Supportive Housing for Young Mothers, <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/prpr/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=164457>. Accessed 7 August 2009.

⁵⁶⁸ Options for Homes, <http://www.optionsforhomes.ca/>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

⁵⁶⁹ Options for Homes, <http://www.optionsforhomes.ca/>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

⁵⁶⁹ Ontario Human Rights Commission, *Right at Home: Report on the consultation on human rights and rental housing in Ontario*, May 2008, pp. 84–85.

⁵⁷⁰ Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) and Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada Ontario Region, *Where's Home? 2008*, 2 March 2009, p. 7,

http://www.chfcanada.coop/eng/pdf/ontdocs/Where's%20Home%202008_FINAL.pdf. Accessed 29 April 2009.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Action

Options for Homes is a private, Toronto-based, not-for-profit organization that, since 1992, has created a unique approach to developing more affordable housing. Home ownership, through this model, is available to those with an income threshold below the level than would normally required to access the ownership market. Options for Homes does not rely on government funding for its operations, although some of the low-income buyers are recipients of government assistance toward home purchase.

Options for Homes builds and sells condominiums using a “no frills” approach to building location and design to keep unit costs affordable for initial buyers. With each new unit, Options offers a second mortgage to initial buyers for the difference between the appraised market value and the lower at-cost sales price. The second mortgage is a no-interest profit-sharing mechanism; it can be increased to reduce the amount of first mortgage required, further reducing the monthly carrying costs for lower income buyers. The second mortgage is due only when the unit is sold; no payments are required on this mortgage until the buyer sells the condominium unit. In lieu of payments, the second mortgage grows at the same rate as the market value of the unit. This financing mechanism, offered through an Options for Homes affiliate, allows the homeowner to pay off the second mortgage from the market-based appreciation equity gain. Affordability stems from the building design and the special financing mechanism. When the unit is sold and the second mortgage is paid, Options has no further stake in the unit; the cost savings and the financing mechanisms are not passed onto the second owner.

Lessons learned

Staff estimate that for one of their more recent projects, initial buyers fell into the following income groupings: 12% of buyers had income of less than \$30,000, and 57% had incomes between \$30,000 and \$60,000. In the lowest income range, 90% were only able to afford their unit with the second mortgage and additional purchase assistance; 25% in the \$30,000 to \$60,000 range needed assistance beyond the second mortgage.

Options buildings are built without unnecessary extras such as on-site recreation facilities and large or high-end common spaces. Units are as small as 700 square feet and are built without costly additions or finishings. Initial owners units have carrying costs of less than the average rent levels in Toronto.⁵⁷²

Subcommittee members visited the St. Lawrence and Mill Street projects located in the Distillery District of Toronto. These apartment-style condominium units in high-rise buildings were built in 1999 and 2001, at a time when the area had “very low desirability” for more typical condominium development. Low land cost helped to keep the initial unit price down; the area has become more desirable since, raising re-sale price of units to as much as double the initial price. About 95% of the units are owner-occupied and tend to have a very low turnover rate, according to data gathered by Options for Homes staff.

The purchasers form a non-profit co-operative corporation to manage the development in the initial building stage and for on-going building maintenance. Options does not build until there are enough buyers to cover the building costs.

⁵⁷² Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, http://www.cmhc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/tore/afhoid/fite/eqfi/eqfi_005.cfm. Accessed 3 September 2009.

By the estimation of Options staff, approximately 60% of buyers would not have been able to afford their unit without taking the second mortgage option; about 40% do not require it.

Government action

Apart from the direct assistance that individuals may get for the purchase of the unit, Options for Homes does not itself rely on any government funding. However, during discussions with Subcommittee members, Options for Homes staff proposed some government actions that would help to facilitate future Options for Homes projects:

- Favour non-profit over for-profit bidders for surplus government lands. Non-profit organizations such as Options for Homes bid on the purchase of surplus government land, and offer equitable but reasonable terms, in the payment schedule for example. Staff advocate giving non-profit organizations some favour over for-profit organizations where municipalities are selling land, such as the Build Toronto initiative.
- Increase government funded targeting affordable home ownership. . Funding mechanisms such as the Affordable Housing Initiative should include subsidies that would increase home ownership among people with low income in the opinion of the Options staff.
- Continued support through means tested programs that offer financial assistance to buyers.

Lookout Emergency Aid Society⁵⁷³

Site Visit 13 July 2009 Vancouver, British Columbia

Challenge

Vancouver's downtown eastside has been home to a disproportionate amount of run-down public housing and cheap hotels, and an influx of drugs and prostitution pushed out of other Vancouver area neighbourhoods; as key businesses closed, the area quickly became downtrodden.⁵⁷⁴ The area has "the dubious feature of having the single highest rate of HIV infection in the Western world. It is also Canada's poorest area by postal code."⁵⁷⁵ Recent efforts by the community are making improvements in the area; however, the need for services remains great.

Action

Lookout Emergency Aid Society has offered emergency shelter to the most marginalized people in double occupancy rooms since 1980. When Lookout first opened, staff expected to serve a short-term need. Since then, shelter use has increased and the need for support has expanded. Lookout now operates four shelters and seven buildings offering transitional and permanent housing to more than 350 people, including some with disabilities. Lookout is providing "support, supervision, direction and aid to anyone whose needs are not addressed by others."⁵⁷⁶ Subcommittee members visited three downtown eastside facilities operated by Lookout, each offering differing levels of support for individuals with differing needs.

⁵⁷³ Information about Lookout Emergency Aid Society is taken from its website, unless otherwise indicated. <http://www.lookoutsociety.bc.ca/>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

⁵⁷⁴ Downtown Eastside <http://www.downtowneastside.ca/>. Accessed 17 July 2009.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Lookout Emergency Aid Society website.

Lessons learned

Emergency shelter

The Lookout Emergency shelter is open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. Shelter users are homeless adult men and women who cope with a wide variety of challenges including mental illness, mental handicaps, medical problems, physical disabilities, social dysfunction, substance abuse or – more frequently – a combination of issues. Lookout is the ‘safety net’ of last resort for those who have few other options. People stay on average 11 days in the single or double occupancy private rooms. Staff estimate that 77% of those people never return, an indication, according to staff, that they are “doing okay”. The remainder are those who need more support. Lookout provides the additional services of assessment, linkages, referrals and placement to other agencies. Approximately 2,000 people are sheltered per year. Staff have observed that in the last 30 years, the average age of their clients has dropped from about 65 to closer to 35 years old. The emergency shelter provides basic services such as protection of valuables, accommodation for pets and shopping carts, as well as meals, laundry, showers, phone, internet access and the support of staff and a visiting nurse. Subcommittee members witnessed the importance and benefit of welcoming people to the shelter regardless of their status, including their pets and shopping carts.

Staff say of their “24/7” model of support that it saves lives. They note that the simple “three hot meals and a cot”, referring to three hot meals and a bed without additional support, results in a death rate of 4% of shelter users per year. By staff assessment, shelter plus some level of support brings the rate down to 0.4%. While the comment goes uncorroborated in evidence, we learned of the importance of making connections through service and that being able to spend a bit of time with an individual is important.

Transitional housing

The Hazleton residence above the downtown eastside emergency shelter, provides 39 private rented rooms for adults and seniors who have few if any housing options and a chronic history of homelessness. The average stay is two to three years, although there are tenants who have been there as long as 13 years. Residents are independent but given extensive support. Almost all the residents are in treatment for psychiatric, physical or both forms of illness. Subcommittee members learned that community health nurses visit daily, medication is controlled, and support is provided from local mental health and HIV-treating agencies. Residents come from referrals and from Lookout’s shelters; priority is based on an assessment of individual need by a committee of community service providers. It was evident to us that the residents were vulnerable and benefited from the security of the support provided.

Supportive, 2nd stage Housing

The Jim Green Residence is a permanent home for 66 low-income men and women who have a history of homelessness. The building design features a courtyard space that helps to create a neighbourhood atmosphere, encouraging social connection among tenants and contributing to greater safety and security of tenants. Subcommittee members were impressed with these particular design features. The tenants pointed out that the building design also protects them from external street life.

Units are accessible for those with mobility barriers. On-site support is available to residents 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The residence also includes a two-room emergency shelter; it is a matter of Lookout policy to include emergency shelter in every housing site. Lookout has made a commitment to building a long term bed for every shelter bed they build.

In discussion with Subcommittee members, tenants and shelter users made the following observations about the services offered by Lookout:

- Some help to ‘navigate’ life makes a big difference.
- Structure with supports, such as management of money and medications, is key.
- Harm reduction is more helpful than a requirement for complete and immediate abstinence; addiction is a medical - not a moral - disease.

Government action

To meet the needs of homeless people, residents and staff offered these suggestions:

- Support services like detox and treatment. They would be more successful if available immediately when requested by a client.
- More supportive housing. Support services like those offered by Lookout is necessary.
- More privacy in shelter design and construction. Dorm-style homeless shelters are considered unsafe by the shelter users.
- Housing First. This approach works, along with support and a community that gives people some stability, and even some friendships.
- Wrap-around supports. Residents often made reference to the benefits of ‘wrap-around support,’ describing both the 24/7 availability and the extensive supports provided.

Boyle Street Community Services Co-op⁵⁷⁷

Site Visit 19 May 2009 Edmonton, Alberta

Challenge

In 2008, more than 3,000 people were counted as homeless in the city of Edmonton.⁵⁷⁸ This is an increase of 18% from 2006, when the count reflected a 20% increase over the 2004 count. The Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness projects that by 2018, there could be 6,500 homeless people in the city.⁵⁷⁹ Among those included in the 2008 count, 36% were identified as Caucasian by observation and 38% were Aboriginal. The Committee reports that the vast majority of the homeless population are single Aboriginal men between the ages of 31 to 54.⁵⁸⁰

In the Edmonton inner city area, where the Boyle Street Community Services Co-op is located, over 90% of residents are tenants (the Canadian average for households that rent is 35.8%)⁵⁸¹ and close to

⁵⁷⁷ Inner City Agencies Foundation, “Boyle Street Community Services.” <http://icaf.ca/boylestcoop.html>. Accessed 6 July 2009.

⁵⁷⁸ Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness, *A Place to Call Home. Edmonton’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness*, January 2009, http://www.endedmontonhomelessness.com/docs/report_NoSpreads_ForWebDownload_jan26-2009.pdf. Accessed 31 July 2009.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁸¹ CMHC, *Canadian Housing Observer 2008* December 2008 p. 11.

44% are living in a household with an income of less than \$20,000.⁵⁸² Tenants are more likely to living in core housing need⁵⁸³ which means that they are spending more than 30% of their household income on rent, or living in inadequate or less than suitable dwellings.⁵⁸⁴

Action

Since 1971, Boyle Street Community Services Co-op has provided programs to support inner city residents in need of assistance with housing and mental health issues, and programs for family and youth for those who are “without financial and social resources”⁵⁸⁵. Boyle Street staff estimate that the Centre serves approximately 7,500 to 8,000 people per year, of whom about 90% are homeless, 75% are men, and 70% are of Aboriginal descent of whom many are residential school survivors. By observation staff estimate that approximately 40% of the street homeless they serve were born with mental health issues.

Boyle Street describes itself as a multi-service community resource centre serving clients using “assertive outreach, client-centred case management and hands-on problem solving”.⁵⁸⁶ A wide mix of services, programs and drop-in spaces are available on-site to a mix of clients; old and young, male and female, families and singles. In addition to the drop-in services offered at the Boyle Street centre, clients can access many more supportive services through community partnering collaborations. Boyle Street uses a harm reduction approach in its outreach services and a “housing first” model in its housing program.

Lessons learned

Boyle Street delivers a continuum of targeted community-based preventive social, health and education programs that build skills and ensure that people have somewhere to live, someone to talk to and something to do.

Subcommittee members learned more details about just some of the many services offered during a group discussion with staff, clients and volunteers:

- Boyle Street currently houses 55 people per month through community partnerships with landlords, some more formal than others. Clients get into housing and Boyle Street provides the support required to sustain them tenant in that housing. A client described this process as “learning the skill of being a good tenant.” Staff noted that landlords welcome the reduction in tenant turnover rates that result from this program.
- A youth drop-in space takes a harm reduction approach; nobody is refused service and everyone is welcome at the youth drop-in regardless of their situation. Youth workers noted that homeless youth face unique barriers in securing housing and need different types of support to get and keep them housed.

⁵⁸²City of Edmonton, “A Community Profile: Boyle Street,” p. 73.

<http://censusdocs.edmonton.ca/DD34/MultiSource/Neighbourhood/BOYLE%20STREET.pdf>. Accessed 23 October 2009

⁵⁸³ CMHC, *Canadian Housing Observer 2008* December 2008 p. 11.

⁵⁸⁴ CMHC, “Housing in Canada Online.”

http://data.beyond2020.com/cmhc/HiCODefinitions_EN.html#_Core_Housing_Need_Status. Accessed 23 October 2009

⁵⁸⁵ Information about Boyle Street Community Services Co-op is taken from its website, unless otherwise indicated.

http://www.boylestreet.org/about_our-history.html. Accessed 23 October 2009.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

- Support is provided to those with the multiple barriers of addiction, physical illness and mental health issues. Staff emphasised that no one is refused service at the centre as a matter of policy.
- Many clients have left a reserve and moved into Edmonton, and have experienced racism toward Aboriginal peoples that has been a barrier to employment.

Government action

During discussions, several suggestions were made for government action:

- Increased social housing spaces. Staff proposed that the federal government play a bigger role in creating permanent social housing spaces. The housing first approach is premised on moving homeless people directly into housing, but this requires affordable units that are available and landlords willing to offer them.
- Increased shelter allowances within social assistance benefits. Clients reported that low-end rents in Edmonton are close to \$900 per month while the government rent supplement offered to a person living on social assistance is about \$350. An increase to the shelter allowance of social assistance that matches real local rent rates was also suggested by clients.
- Attracting private-sector investment in housing development. Boyle Street staff indicated that the federal investment in social housing should be based on a mechanism that attracts private sector investment in non-profit housing.
- Better supports to keep youth in school. Staff pointed out the need for better support for youth having difficulty in the education system, especially those with mental health issues. Better school attachment would reduce other issues faced by youth in the opinion of the staff.

Housing Support Centre, Metro Non-Profit Housing Association⁵⁸⁷

Site Visit 14 August 2008 Halifax, Nova Scotia

Challenge

Located in the North End of Halifax, the Housing Support Centre is available weekday mornings to all in the area. The area is characterized by its high levels of poverty⁵⁸⁸ and homelessness. The initial vision was for a centre with a primary service to help people find affordable housing in the community. Finding and securing housing can be a complex process made more difficult by lack of experience or stability. Although that is still a large part of the work done at the centre, the program changed direction in response to the need expressed by its clients for a space to go to during the day that is safe, supportive, welcoming and non-judgemental, no matter what their circumstances.

⁵⁸⁷ Information about Metro Non-Profit Housing Association's Housing Support Centre is taken from its website unless otherwise indicated. http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/mnpha/support_centre.html. Accessed 10 August 2009.

⁵⁸⁸ Statistics Canada, "Census Tract Profile Halifax 0010.00 CT." <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-597/P3.cfm?Lang=E&CTCODE=0039&CACODE=205&PRCODE=12&PC=B3K3B5>. Accessed 23 October 2009.

Action

A program of the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association,⁵⁸⁹ the Housing Support Centre has been operating since 1996. Known locally as the "Coffee Shop," the Centre provides a safe environment for people to deal with housing, finance and health issues, or simply to meet with friends. Over 100 people visit daily. They come in, have a coffee, feel at home, interact with staff and with each other, and get help. Most live in local substandard housing, in shelters or on the street. A shower is available at the centre and visitors are offered emergency clothing, and food for lunch or snacks is available from the nearby food bank.

During a visit, people can obtain information and assistance for problems associated with housing and income benefits, receive supportive counselling from two support centre workers, and access care from physical and psychiatric health care staff provided by the North End Community Health Centre and the Shared Mental Health Care Team.⁵⁹⁰

Lessons learned

"I may not have a place to live, but I have a place to call home." This is how many participants feel about the Support Centre. It has become a home away from home, a place of stability and support that was previously unknown to them. A community of support and wellness has developed with often spontaneous self help. Subcommittee members were heartened to witness the difference that this centre had made in the lives of people who were or had been homeless.

The Centre keeps its door open to those who have been barred elsewhere. "We've never barred anyone for any significant period of time. We've chosen to try to work with the behaviour problems and this has worked well for us. We make it clear that the behaviour, not the person, is judged, and make people feel at home when their behaviour is changed."⁵⁹¹

Centre staff made a conscious decision to limit the drop-in services to the mornings (8:30 am to noon Monday to Friday), and hold more structured activities in the afternoons. In the afternoons community groups can use the space for meetings and special events, and other groups use the space for meetings such as the weekly recovery group. The centre has branched out in response to the community: now giving space to guitar and piano lessons, a regular theatre group gathering, a monthly community kitchen and perhaps the most well known of these expansion projects – the Shining Lights Choir.

Shortly after the drop-in started, some of those in attendance formed the Shining Lights Choir. The choir began in 1997 with seven members, and has grown to over thirty. Ten years later, the choir has three recordings and has given over 150 performances. It has also been featured in both the local and national media. The choir is still made up of those who are homeless, were homeless and are still living in poverty. "The choir members have bonded; there is a feeling of belonging. The choir gives a voice to people who previously had none."⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁹ Metro Non-Profit Housing Association <http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/mnpha/projects.html>. Accessed 11 August 2009.

⁵⁹⁰ Centre website.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Metro Non-Profit Housing Association Shining Lights Choir, http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/mnpha/shining_lights.html. Accessed 11 August 2009.

Government action

In a discussion with community representatives, staff and clients (held at the North End Community Health Centre). Subcommittee members heard about concerns over the lack of affordable housing. The dearth of affordable housing has added to the struggles faced by people on social assistance or people moving from incarceration or a stay in a mental health facility, according to focus group participants. Making the transition to work from social assistance is also hindered by lack of affordable housing.

Additional details of the focus group discussion are noted in the North End Community Health Centre notes in this appendix.

Building Futures⁵⁹³

Site Visit 15 July 2009 Winnipeg, Manitoba

Challenge

The Subcommittee has learned that unattached individuals, particularly those aged 45 to 65 years old, are over-represented among the homeless and those experiencing poverty. The Siloam Mission in Winnipeg estimates that there are approximately 2,000 people living on the street in the city. This shelter alone receives over 500 people daily who are experiencing poverty and homelessness.⁵⁹⁴ The Mission's program is designed to connect older unattached homeless people with a unique opportunity.

Action

About a year ago, Siloam Mission began to support a new program, Building Futures. While the program is still in its infancy, it got its start just like so many other programs observed by Subcommittee members – with some passion and a funding source willing to support an innovative approach.

Building Futures is a training program that employs people who have 'fallen through the cracks'. They have few skills, a reliving high-risk lives, and are dealing with addiction, homelessness or poverty – or sometimes all three at once. In its inaugural session six men are being employed fulltime, at minimum wage, for one year in woodworking projects. The product of the work is sold, making the program potentially self sustaining, although for now funding from the Siloam Mission covers about 85% of program expenses. The program is designed to prepare participants for entrance to an apprenticeship program or directly into stable employment. Average age among the participants, is about 45 years and just over half of the group is Aboriginal.

Lessons learned

Subcommittee members learned that finding sustained employment is challenging for those looking to escape life on the streets. Building Futures might be described as using an "employment first" model, in which participants engage in paid employment as a first step to stability. Similar to "housing first", where stable housing is provided along with support, Building Futures provides stable work along with support to keep individuals on the job. That 'holistic' support comes from the program director, the Siloam mission, links with other agencies and from workplace colleagues who can share experiences in a safe environment. Participants likened the support to having a

⁵⁹³ Information about Siloam Mission's Building Futures program is taken from its website unless otherwise indicated. http://www.siloam.ca/building_futures.html. Accessed 7 August 2009.

⁵⁹⁴ Siloam Mission, <http://www.siloam.ca/general.htm>. Accessed 7 August 2009.

‘mentor’ to help in the transition to stability. They also spoke of how the structure of the job, the support and the flexibility were helping them progress toward a more sustainable lifestyle.

Subcommittee members learned about the participants’ plans for future endeavours, such as going to college and opening a carpentry business. Whatever their choice, the program will have provided a year’s worth of stable employment, an improved resume and better employability skills.

Government action

Program staff told Subcommittee members that the program could be expanded or replicated by providing training in other trades such as metal work or auto body repairs. Further funds would be required to get appropriate space, equipment and tools for those programs. In the current location the number of participants accommodated on the shop-floor and in the classroom is at a maximum.

Funding support would be for the start-up phase rather ongoing operating funds, as the program is designed to become self sustaining through the sale of its products. While the focus of the program is on providing the necessary support to the participants during their move to stable employment, the enterprise approach to become self-sustaining through revenue generation is an important program element.

Sage House⁵⁹⁵

Site Visit 15 July 2009 Winnipeg, Manitoba

Challenge

Sex-trade workers often suffer from addiction and health issues, and are some of the most marginalized and vulnerable people. Although not all are of these (mostly) women are homeless, many are ‘couch surfing’, staying in shelters and periodically living on the street, or ‘rough sleeping’.⁵⁹⁶

Action

Since 1992 Sage House has been providing, in conjunction with the Mount Carmel Clinic, a safe street women’s health outreach and resource service. Sage House offers a variety of services to street-involved women and transgendered individuals living as women including assistance with education, addictions treatment, social security, housing, child and family support and harm reduction information.

The drop-in house is available to street-involved sex-trade workers, women and transgendered persons living as women. It is a welcoming, safe environment where meals are served two evenings a week, and laundry and baths are freely available. Many women reported that they have survived their street experiences because of the support and resources offered at the drop-in.⁵⁹⁷ Settled in their current location for three years, staff noted that Sage House would be open for more evenings with increased funding. At this point, the twice-weekly evening meals are routinely served to 35 people. Many are frequent visitors. A full-time nurse is available on site. Staff estimates that 80 to

⁵⁹⁵ Sage House is a program of Mount Carmel Clinic, <http://www.mountcarmel.ca/>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

⁵⁹⁶ Jason Brown et. al., “Shared Responsibility: Building Healthy Communities in Winnipeg’s North End,” Institute for Urban Studies, p. 33. November 2004, http://ius.uwinnipeg.ca/pdf/wira_healthy_communities.pdf. Accessed 23 October 2009.

⁵⁹⁷ Information about Sage House is taken from its website, unless otherwise indicated. <http://www.mountcarmel.ca/assets/Sage%20House.pdf>. Accessed 6 August 2009.

90% of their clients are Aboriginal. Sage House honours the Aboriginal tradition of sage as a healing herb especially for women.

Lessons learned

In a discussion with staff and clients of Sage House, participants described their life experience and their experience with Sage House. Subcommittee members learned that while they remain street-involved, women and transgendered individuals living as women rely on the variety of services that Sage House offers. During the discussion, the women spoke of addiction as self-medicating to survive street life; they noted that drugs were used “as a way to stay warm, stay awake and stay alive.” In their experience, homelessness preceded addiction, not the other way around. Clients of Sage House described the program as place that serves basic needs to get warm and clean and fed without judgement or demands. Although some said they would like to move to a space in transitional housing, but there are very few spaces available for women in their situation.

Subcommittee members were also introduced to a new program offered by the organization that will help to move homeless women into housing, following what staff referred to as a ‘pathways to housing’ model. The program will move 100 women into private single-occupancy housing in Winnipeg over the next four years. The tenant will spend no more than 30% of her income or no more than her social assistance shelter allowance on rent. Clients told Subcommittee members that they were unable to find stable housing at the rate provided by social assistance and chose to ‘work the street’ to make ends meet. They also noted that in the transition to work, there is always a period during which one would receive neither social assistance nor employment income, possibly for as long as two weeks. That is a gap that for them presents a significant barrier for moving from social assistance to employment.

Government action

Staff and clients of Sage House provided the following commentary and recommendations for government action:

- Affordable housing. Provide more affordable housing, and make it available through the ‘pathways to homes’ or the ‘Housing First’ approach.
- Rent controls. Work with private landlords to minimize rental rates. Social assistance rates for shelters were established 15 years ago, and have not kept pace with rising rents.
- Harm reduction. Addiction treatment without harm reduction is like a table with only three legs: likely to topple over. Women need treatment in a women-only facility.
- Funding for community-based services. Stabilize adequate funding including core funding for service delivery organizations. Sage house would be able to open longer hours and for more days per week with additional funds.
- Access to less expensive food. Food security is an issue in some low-rent areas, resulting in higher than average food costs for tenants who already spend a high proportion of their income on housing.
- Access to community kitchens and affordable food would help in creating a supportive community in the transition to more stable living.

L'Abri en Ville⁵⁹⁸

Site Visit 8 June 2009 Montreal, Quebec

Challenge

People who live with mental illness can feel isolated. Their isolation stems from both their health and financial situation, according to a L'Abri en Ville resident. Although many people living with mental illness are quite capable of living independently, living alone is costly and it is also lonely.

Action

L'Abri en Ville provides stable, supported shared housing for adults with serious mental illness. Although residents live in geographically dispersed units, the program creates a sense of community among the residents. "The experience of L'Abri en Ville over 18 years has shown that permanent housing and social support are significant factors in preventing relapse, including readmissions to hospital. This reduces both human and healthcare costs."⁵⁹⁹

Lessons learned

L'Abri en Ville opened its first apartment in 1991. Now the organization coordinates ten apartments housing 30 residents in its program. Once staff have secured an affordable three-bedroom apartment, ideally fairly close to the program office, they carefully select, with a committee, three individuals who are offered a room in the unit. Residents are selected with a view compatibility, with a view to their becoming supportive roommates. They are expected to share their space and the rent and utilities costs. L'Abri signs the lease and pays the monthly rent; residents pay L'Abri for their share. L'Abri generally has been able to find three-bedroom apartments for about \$1000 per month; when shared, that figure is sustainable for most receiving social assistance or disability benefits. None of the residents have dependants.

The program is designed to provide stability and allow residents to benefit from the sharing arrangement both financially and emotionally. Subcommittee members learned about the vital role that the volunteers play at L'Abri. A small team of volunteers is assigned to each apartment; each team visits and provides general support and assistance to the residents. They may also help with chores, grocery shopping, budgeting, bill payment, and meal planning. The program is built on stability among both the residents and the volunteer team. Staff co-ordinators also pay weekly visits to the residents.

In a discussion with clients, staff and board members, Subcommittee members heard about the experiences of these residents. Some came after hospitalization for a mental illness, transition housing or agencies that serve those with mental illness. Once settled in their L'Abri-supported home, residents described their new life, including sharing with roommates, engaging in community events, volunteering and working instead of social isolation.

Subcommittee members learned that L'Abri offers many opportunities for the residents to gather for group activities, such as pot luck suppers, art classes and an annual camping event. One resident noted that the key thing he gained from being a L'Abri resident is social inclusion and social capital.

⁵⁹⁸ Information about L'Abri en Ville is taken from its website, unless otherwise noted.

<http://www.labrienville.org/homepage.html>. Accessed 24 August 2009.

⁵⁹⁹ L'Abri an Ville *Response to the Mental Health Commission of Canada* April 2009. Written submission to Cities Subcommittee, 1st Session, 40th Parliament.

Residents may choose to move into other living arrangements but there is no requirement for them to do so.

Government action

L'Abri en Ville has been successfully replicated in other locations. With government support, L'Abri produced a guidebook assist that process. While replication has been successful in some instances; to date one of the four replication efforts has failed. The current size, L'Abri maintains is ideal; they do not intend to grow beyond the 10 apartments. Staff, volunteers and residents alike feel that stability has been achieved with the program's formula of placing three residents per apartment and having no more than 30 residents in the program.

One of the main program benefits, staff say, is that it has kept people with mental illness out of hospital. The program has put in place a network with multiple layers of supports, including roommates, volunteers and staff co-ordinators. The costs savings of this benefit had not been formally assessed, but they are likely to be significant according to L'Abri staff.

Staff also suggested that the model might work well for seniors who enjoy independent living but would benefit from the company and cost sharing offered by the program.

Youth Emergency Shelter Society⁶⁰⁰

Site visit 19 May 2009 Edmonton, Alberta

Challenge

Youth Emergency Shelter Society (YESS) provides services to men and women ages 15 to 19 who are in crisis, either living on the street, homeless although not on the streets or at risk of homelessness. Youth who use the emergency shelter may be dealing with addictions, mental illness or need a place away from their home. The majority have been street-involved.

The initial impetus for the program was an awareness, in 1978, of a gap in services for youth in crisis between the ages of 16 and 18; they were no longer considered children by Child and Family Services, yet were not old enough to be eligible for adult support.

Action

YESS provides shelter to youth in differing stages.

- Community Outreach for non-residential clients is available 24 hours for intakes, referrals, and family mediation; it also provides resources for school and community presentations
- Emergency shelter with 16 beds offers youth aged 15 to 18 an overnight stay plus immediate necessities such as a shower, clean clothes, a meal and access to other community service supports.
- SkY (Skills for Youth) offers a longer-term (six to eight months) residential facility, with 12 beds, for 15 to 18 year-olds without a viable living alternative, who are ready to participate in a program that provides more support within a more structured living arrangement. Youth are offered counselling and are supported in their efforts to complete school or maintain employment.

⁶⁰⁰ Information about Youth Emergency Shelter Society is taken from its website, unless otherwise noted. <http://www.yess.org/#>. Accessed 28 August 2009.

- START residential program (up to one-year stay) offers with 10 beds for youth aged 16 to 19, and is designed for youth who are motivated to achieve stability and independence, while completing school or working. The Armoury Youth Centre was under development at the time of the Subcommittee's visit, and was expected to be open during the day to youth for drop-in and access to services provided under five pillars: safety, health and wellness, self-reliance, education and recreation

Lessons learned

YESS staff estimated that 80% of their clients report that the street is a safer option than living at home. Youth originate largely from the Edmonton area, but staff have observed a growing number of refugees and immigrants among the youth they serve. Subcommittee members also learned that there had been an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal youth using the program, growing to about 50% in 2007-2008.

Staff explained to Subcommittee members that once youth become 'street-entrenched', providing basic shelter is not enough; building a relationship becomes essential. We learned that this is a long process and may require multiple intake sessions, and is the reason for differing stages of shelter..

Staff said that youth became aware of YESS largely through word-of-mouth. More than 5,000 files opened in the shelter program in 2007-2008, a 23% increase from the previous year. At the emergency shelter, between 500 and 600 youth stayed an average of almost three nights. The annual occupancy rate in 2007-2008 was 87% and higher in the winter months. The average age for youth in the shelter program was 16.4 that year.

Fewer clients are served by the SkY and START programs, but their average length of stay is much longer at 40 days and five months respectively, reflecting the more intense programming offered in these programs. These programs provided staff the opportunity to work with youth at various stages in their move from homelessness to stability.

Government action

In discussion with Subcommittee members, proposed the following government actions:

- Stable, longer term funding. Ability to access stable, long term funding is critical to program success and allows staff to focus on their job of providing services to youth. Staff reported that the current reporting requirements of their grants and contributions agreement have made it necessary for YESS to hire a second accountant.
- Better match between programs and needs. Staff proposed a better integration between the actions of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness and the needs of youth in crisis in urban areas. Also lacking, staff noted, was a consultation between the youth shelters and the Alberta government Child Mental Health Initiative.
- Information exchange. Staff recommended that governments help create forums for sharing 'best practices' and provide funding for participation in such forums. The "Partners Solving Youth Homelessness" conference hosted and organized by Raising the Roof, Toronto, in November 2008⁶⁰¹ was cited as an example of such a forum.

⁶⁰¹ Partners Solving Youth Homelessness Conference website http://www.raisingtheroof.org/popup/psuh_en.html. Accessed 8 July 2009.

Avenue 15 and RADAR⁶⁰²

Site Visit 20 May 2009, Calgary, Alberta

Challenge

In Calgary's 2008 homeless count, children accounted for 11% of the homeless population,⁶⁰³ meaning that almost 450 young people were homeless on the day the count was conducted; of these, 384 were under the age of 17. There are 36 shelter beds designated for youth in the city. Avenue 15 staff estimated that on any given night, over 100 young people are staying at a shelter designed for adults. Staff also estimated that the average age of youth shelter users has dropped from 16 to closer to 14 years old. Both the count and the observation of Avenue 15 staff suggest that homeless youth are underserved by shelters in Calgary.

Recent research found that among street-involved youth, there are high levels of violence, significant mental and physical health concerns, high levels of substance abuse and other high risk activities.⁶⁰⁴ For youth who become homeless, the risks and issues quickly accumulate as they become immersed in the 'street kid' life.⁶⁰⁵

Action

Avenue 15 program staff explained that there is no single reason why youth find themselves without a stable home environment. In their 'street kid' lifestyle, youth are already functioning in a very adult way, making hard decisions with few resources in an environment that is 'chaos' rather than 'comfort'. Service providers, therefore, have needed to offer a menu of services meeting a broad spectrum of needs.

Avenue 15 provides homeless and runaway youth, aged 12 to 17, with access to temporary shelter, basic needs and a comprehensive support system for family reunification or access to alternative stable living arrangements. Three shelters provide a network of services with varying degrees of support, living flexibility and access requirements. Avenue 15 is a program of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary.

Lessons learned

Avenue 15

The Avenue 15 approach is to provide shelter for youth in a 'family' setting, developing relationships, support and obligations among members. Subcommittee members learned that Avenue 15 offers shelter services in three streams:

- Low-barrier emergency shelter for youth aged 12 to 17 years provides basic needs in a safe overnight place for youth to clean-up, eat, rest and get access to supports.

⁶⁰²Boys and Girls Club of Calgary <http://www.boysandgirlsclubsofcalgary.ca/programs/shelter-and-outreach/avenue-15.html>. Accessed 28 August 2009.

⁶⁰³ City of Calgary *Fast Facts #3 2008*.

⁶⁰⁴ Calgary Homeless Foundation, *Setting the Course: A Blueprint to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary* Draft for Discussion, May 2009. [http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/files/pdf/Youth%20Discussion%20Paper%20Draft%20\(May%206%2009\).pdf](http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/files/pdf/Youth%20Discussion%20Paper%20Draft%20(May%206%2009).pdf). Accessed 9 July 2009.

⁶⁰⁵ Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary *New Directions for Youth Shelter Services in Calgary: The New Avenue 15 Youth Shelter*, no date.

- Short- to medium-term shelter and support for youth under 18 is designed to help them develop the capacity for community living instead of their ‘street kid’ lifestyle. Youth share accommodation in a home-like setting and generally stay for weeks or months.
- Transitional housing is provided for youth who are building the skills and confidence necessary for independent living. Youth contribute to their room and board costs (a portion of which is returned through a personal saving plan). Youth also commit to behaviours and activities that offer them greater stability in the future such as school completion, employment and life skills training.

Staff noted that in their experience with youth in shelters, their homelessness stems not primarily from poverty, but rather from all the other things that lead to homelessness, such as abuse, violence, and/or addiction in their family homes.

Re-engaging Academically Disconnected Adolescents Respectfully (RADAR)

The RADAR program, implemented by Avenue 15 in September 2008, provides a response to the increasing number of youth ages 13 to 15 in youth shelters and to research that indicates that increasing number of youth in this age group were completely disengaged from school. Subcommittee members learned from RADAR staff that disengagement from school, which can begin even in the middle school years, has been demonstrated to be a predictor of later community disengagement and potentially homelessness.⁶⁰⁶

RADAR is designed to address the needs of homeless disengaged youth in this age group who are not attending school by providing a learning-focused space for academic, arts and recreation programs and a computer lab. The program’s strategy is to provide things that a family would provide: food, shelter, safety, medical care, guidance, and support for recreational pro-social activities. The objective is to return youth to a positive learning approach.

Government action

In discussion with Subcommittee members, program staff and clients described the following opportunities for government action:

- Parental supports. Staff suggested that more support for parents during years when they are parenting teens may be helpful in reducing homelessness among youth. While parents with children under the age of 6 years have access to parenting support, the challenge of parenting those between the ages of 6 and 16 goes largely unsupported.
- School attendance as an early warning system. Staff observed that regular school attendance is a significant indicator of attachment to the school community and a normal lifestyle. Using school attendance as an early indicator has helped to identify youth at risk for dropping-out and future homelessness, particularly where there are no other obvious risk factors or indicators. Staff noted that although there are often complex issues facing youth and their parents, early identification is more effective for prevention of homelessness

⁶⁰⁶ Calgary Homeless Foundation, *Setting the Course: A Blueprint to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary* Draft for Discussion, May 2009.

[http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/files/pdf/Youth%20Discussion%20Paper%20Draft%20\(May%206%2009\).pdf](http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/files/pdf/Youth%20Discussion%20Paper%20Draft%20(May%206%2009).pdf).

Accessed 4 August 2009.

- Gaps in services for children in care. Staff and clients noted that there are gaps in access to child and youth services depending on Child Welfare status. They suggested that any youth under the age of 18 should have equal access to services and supports regardless of their Child Welfare status.
- Flexible funding. HRSDC's grants for youth programs (no specific ones were mentioned) were reported to be useful in supporting quick, innovative responses as needs were identified. Flexible funding is particularly helpful for solving immediate problems as they arise from within the population being served.
- Youth-specific approaches to homelessness. Staff identified the need for the creation of more youth specific shelter and support services within the broader provincial effort to end homelessness. Staff suggested implementation of the plans detailed in the Calgary Homeless Foundation's draft discussion paper titled: 'Setting the Course: A Blueprint to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary'.⁶⁰⁷
- Tracking outcomes. While staff estimated that about 85% of homeless youth ultimately gain employment and stability in their lives, they also encouraged governments to support better tracking of long-term outcomes. Such longitudinal data could help service agencies to deliver evidence-based best practices. Staff said that data currently collected six months past shelter exit is not enough adequate for this purpose.

WoodGreen Community Services, Homeward Bound Program⁶⁰⁸

Site Visit 15 May 2009, Toronto, Ontario

Challenge

Helping single homeless mothers to achieve long-term security is the program goal of Homeward Bound. Applicants to the program are often identified by staff at a homeless shelter; many of the mothers are in shelters fleeing violence.

Action

WoodGreen Community Services started off as an East-end neighbourhood centre in 1937. Its mission is to deliver services that promote wellness and self-sufficiency, reduce poverty and inequality, and build sustainable communities. WoodGreen believes that the only way to achieve this mission is to work closely with its clients to understand the many barriers they face, and to help them to gain access to all the supports they need – whether housing, child care, employment training, help with a child who has developmental challenges or care for seniors right in their home.⁶⁰⁹

The Homeward Bound program provides support to single homeless mothers through a simultaneous offering of employment training, transitional housing, on-site child care, and one-on-one counselling. The program's primary goal is to move participants into independent housing with

⁶⁰⁷ The discussion paper can be viewed by accessing Calgary Homeless Foundation website at http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/main/page.php?page_id=1. The report is available at [http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/files/pdf/Youth%20Discussion%20Paper%20Draft%20\(May%206%2009\).pdf](http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/files/pdf/Youth%20Discussion%20Paper%20Draft%20(May%206%2009).pdf). Accessed 4 August 2009.

⁶⁰⁸ WoodGreen Community Services <http://www.woodgreen.org/about/whoarewe.html>. Accessed 29 July 2009.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

employment and family sustaining incomes within three years.⁶¹⁰ Space in the program is limited by the 32 two- and three-bedroom housing units (all rent-geared-to-income) that Homeward Bound created to offer women and their children. There were 30 women on the waiting list at the time of the Subcommittee's site visit Program participants are offered a variety of life skills courses and college based training programs.

The Homeward Bound program is funded from a variety of sources: private, provincial, individual, and also from those program participants who pay their social assistance rent allocation for the housing that is provided.

Lessons learned

Subcommittee members learned that Homeward Bound Program brings together a variety of supports that would otherwise be available only from different sources and potentially at different times. WoodGreen staff explained to us that the program eliminates the separate waiting lists for each of the three key supports – affordable housing, childcare and training.

During discussions with program participants, Subcommittee members learned about some of the program highlights:

- Homeward Bound's education-centred program requires participants to be focused on that element to be successful Program participants described significant pressures created by the changes in their life that the program demands; most of the program participants had entered the program from a shelter.
- These young women described their difficulty in 'navigating the system', facing multiple barriers in their attempts to further their education; these included access to affordable housing, childcare and social assistance and getting assistance while going to school.
- The co-location of the apartment building and childcare centre helped to facilitate support among participants. Women also spoke about how moving into the building allowed them to move away from what had been negative influences.
- An independent study found that those who had the most difficulty with the program had a long history of poverty, violence and dependence;⁶¹¹ the addition of the on-site counsellor has helped.

Government action

In discussions with Subcommittee members, program staff suggested the following government actions:

- Simplified funding. For a program like Homeward Bound that delivers a variety of services, government program funding is complicated by multiple restrictions and multiple reporting

⁶¹⁰ WoodGreen Community Services <http://www.woodgreen.org/HomewardBound/index.html>. Accessed 29 July 2009.

⁶¹¹ WoodGreen Community Services, "Creating the path from homelessness to self sufficiency: Early findings from WoodGreen's Homeward Bound Program," July 2007 p. 16.

requirements. To alleviate the complexities, staff encouraged implementation of 'The Report of the Independent Blue Ribbon Panel on Grants and Contributions'⁶¹² recommendations.

- Income support for students. Program participants and staff have struggled with restrictions imposed by social assistance that does not allow full time studies or part-time work while receiving benefits. While WoodGreen covers the cost of tuition. The women are responsible for contributing to the cost of housing provided by Woodgreen. The social assistance restrictions make the program more complex to deliver.
- More affordable housing and child care. Staff suggested that access to more affordable housing would give the women a better chance at completing their transition to sustainable stable housing or home ownership – a goal of the program. Access to lo- cost child care is one of the biggest barriers for mothers wanting to go back to school, according to the WoodGreen staff. Staff saw a role for federal government support in both these areas.

⁶¹² The Report of the Independent Panel on Grants and Contributions *From Red Tape to Clear Results* http://www.cwlc.ca/files/file/policy/Report_on_Grant_and_Contribution_Programs.pdf December 2006. Accessed 3 September 2009.

Appendix 5 - Provincial and local strategies on poverty, housing and homelessness

As noted in the text of the report, several provincial and local governments have developed and begun to implement inter-sectoral and/or interdepartmental strategies to address poverty, housing and homelessness. This appendix provides a brief description of these.

Poverty reduction strategies

Provincial strategies

*Quebec*⁶¹³

The province of Quebec was the first jurisdiction in Canada to enact a law to combat poverty and social exclusion. The idea of a framework law for the elimination of poverty was initiated by a broad-based citizens' movement called The Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec (Le Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté).⁶¹⁴ On 13 December 2002, the National Assembly of Quebec adopted Bill 112, An Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.⁶¹⁵ Quebec's legislation establishes a "national strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion" that "is intended to progressively make Quebec, by 2013, one of the industrialized nations having the least number of persons living in poverty."⁶¹⁶ The Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale is the lead department responsible for the implementation of Quebec's strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion.

In April 2004, the government of Quebec released its action plan, *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*.⁶¹⁷ The approach adopted in this plan evokes policies similar to those pursued in some English-speaking European countries such as the United Kingdom and Ireland.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹³ For more information on this topic, see: Chantal Collin, *Poverty Reduction Strategies in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador*, PRB 07-23E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, 26 October 2007, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0723-e.htm>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶¹⁴ For more detailed information on the Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec and its actions to support the passage of a law to eliminate poverty in Quebec, see William Ninacs with the collaboration of Anne-Marie Béliveau and Francine Gareau, *The Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec: A Case Study*, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Ottawa, September 2003.

⁶¹⁵ *An Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, R.S.Q. L-7, updated to 1 August 2008, http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/L_7/L7_A.html. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶¹⁶ *An Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, R.S.Q. L-7, c. II, s. 4.

⁶¹⁷ Government of Quebec, *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future – Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille, April 2004.

⁶¹⁸ For a brief overview of anti-poverty strategies in the United Kingdom and Ireland, see: Chantal Collin, *Poverty Reduction Strategies in the United Kingdom and Ireland*, PRB 07-28E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, 2 November 2007, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0728-e.htm>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

The plan promotes “economic security and social inclusion through employment” and increases “protection for people with significant employment limitations.”⁶¹⁹

In the first year after the launch of the action plan, a research centre – Centre d’étude sur la pauvreté et l’exclusion – was established under the aegis of the Ministère de l’Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale with the mandate to provide reliable and rigorous information on poverty and social exclusion issues.⁶²⁰ An advisory committee, the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l’exclusion sociale, was created several months later to advise the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the national strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion.⁶²¹

Available data show that the proportion of people living on low incomes in Quebec decreased steadily from 1997 to 2006. Based on Statistics Canada’s after-tax low income cut-off (LICO), the overall proportion of people living on low incomes in Quebec declined from 19.3% in 1997 to 11.6% in 2006. Significant progress has also been made during this period with respect to a decline in the incidence of poor children, as the proportion of children living in low-income families decreased from 22.4% in 1997 to 11.3% in 2002, to 9.7% in 2006.⁶²² The proportion of female lone-parent families living on low incomes declined from 40.9% in 2002 to an estimated 28.5% in 2006. However, 33.1% of unattached individuals were living on low incomes in 2006, up from 31.3% in 2002, the year before the strategy was implemented.

Newfoundland and Labrador⁶²³

In 2006, Newfoundland and Labrador became the second province in Canada to adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. The government pledged to transform Newfoundland and Labrador from a province with the most poverty to a province with the least poverty over the following decade. The Minister of Human Resources, Labour and Employment has the responsibility to lead the government’s effort to reduce poverty. The Minister must provide the House of Assembly with an annual statement of progress and a report on the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) every two years.

To prevent, reduce and alleviate poverty for individuals, families, women, seniors, youth, and persons with disabilities, the government decided on a comprehensive, integrated and multi-faceted approach that addresses key areas such as education, health, housing, child care and labour market development. In June 2006, the government released its action plan which identified five medium-term goals for the first four years of the PRS. These goals were to: improve access and coordination of services for those with low incomes; establish a stronger social safety net; improve earned incomes; increase emphasis on early childhood development; and create a better educated population.

⁶¹⁹ Government of Quebec, *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice*, 2004, p. 8.

⁶²⁰ For more information on the Centre d’étude sur la pauvreté et l’exclusion and its work, see its website at: http://www.cepe.gouv.qc.ca/index_en.asp. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶²¹ For more information on the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l’exclusion sociale, see its website at: http://www.cclp.gouv.qc.ca/mission_en.asp. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶²² Statistics Canada, “Income in Canada 2006,” Table 11-6, Catalogue no. 75-202-X, May 2008, <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/75-202-XIE/75-202-XIE2006000.htm>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶²³ For more information on this topic, see: Chantal Collin, *Poverty Reduction Strategies in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador*, PRB 07-23E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, 26 October 2007, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0723-e.htm>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

The action plan also identified a number of areas in which the federal and provincial governments could work collaboratively. These areas include income tax-related issues, Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, affordable housing, a new Labour Market Development Agreement, child benefit programs, student loan programs, and literacy programs.⁶²⁴

On the first anniversary of the implementation of the PRS, the Minister of Human Resources, Labour and Employment issued a statement indicating that significant progress was being made to prevent, reduce and alleviate poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador and that the government would continue to invest in a mix of policy and program areas to achieve its goal of eliminating poverty.⁶²⁵

In 2006, using after-tax LICO, 7.6% of people were living on low incomes in Newfoundland and Labrador, down from 12.2% in 2003. The prevalence of low income among unattached individuals under 65 years of age was much higher, at 42%, down from 53% in 2003; and differed considerably between males and females (36.3% and 49.5% respectively). Children were also affected by poverty, as an estimated 9.3% lived in low-income families in 2006, a substantial decline from a rate of almost 16% in 2003. The prevalence of low income among female lone-parent families was 30.6% in 2006, down significantly from 50.8% in 2003.⁶²⁶

Ontario

In December 2008, the Government of Ontario released *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* and became the third Canadian province, after Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, to develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Ontario's poverty reduction plan is guided by "the vision of a province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential, and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario."⁶²⁷ The strategy aimed to "break the intergenerational cycle that makes poverty such an insidious problem"⁶²⁸ and set a target of reducing the number of children in poverty by 25% in five years. This goal would lift 90,000 children out of poverty while improving the quality of life of all children facing this hardship.⁶²⁹ To monitor its progress, the Government of Ontario intended to use Statistics Canada's Low-Income Measure.

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy included a comprehensive set of initiatives to improve the wellbeing of children and families. For example, the strategy proposed to enhance the Ontario Child Benefit to \$1,310 per child per year at maturity (2011–2012).⁶³⁰ This would represent an annual investment of \$1.3 billion and provide support to 1.3 million children when fully implemented.⁶³¹ Among other initiatives, the strategy also called for the creation of 200 new Parenting and Family Literacy Centres; the implementation of full-day learning programs for four- and five-year-olds; a

⁶²⁴ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador," June 2006, <http://www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/poverty/poverty-reduction-strategy.pdf>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶²⁵ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Significant Progress Being Made to Prevent, Reduce and Alleviate Poverty in our Province, Human Resources, Labour and Employment," *News release*, 4 June 2007.

⁶²⁶ Statistics Canada, *Income in Canada 2006*, Table 11-2,

⁶²⁷ Government of Ontario, *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*, December 2008, p. 5, http://www.growingstronger.ca/english/poverty_report_access.asp Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶³⁰ In 2008, the maximum benefit is \$50/month (\$600 annually) for each child under the age of 18.

⁶³¹ Ontario (2008), *Breaking the Cycle*, p. 16.

\$32 million investment over three years in the Student Nutrition Program; and \$80 million in funding over three years for a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, part of which would target low-income youth with mental illness and/or substance addictions.⁶³²

The poverty reduction plan also contained measures to improve the well-being of all Ontarians. It provided for additional funding for training and apprenticeship programs; stronger employment standards to better protect vulnerable workers; an increase in the minimum wage to \$10.25 by 2010; and investments in a Community Opportunities Fund to support community revitalization projects.⁶³³ The Poverty Reduction Strategy also recognized that certain groups are more vulnerable to poverty than others and provided tailored support to new Ontarians, people with disabilities, women, Aboriginal people, seniors, and the homeless.⁶³⁴

In order to achieve the goals outlined in its Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Government of Ontario has requested support from other levels of government. In its strategy document, it asked the federal government to take the following actions:

- double the amount of the Working Income Tax Benefit to \$2,000 per year per family and increase the National Child Benefit Supplement by \$1,200 per child;
- reform the Employment Insurance (EI) program to meet the needs of workers transitioning to expanding sectors of the economy and provide benefits to Ontarians at a level similar to those provided in other provinces;
- convene a summit with governments, private sector, non-profit sector and union leaders to discuss EI modernization;
- enter into a renewed Early Learning and Child Care Agreement with the provinces;
- continue to support the Affordable Housing Program that otherwise will sunset in 2010; and
- follow-up on commitments originally made in the Kelowna Accord that would eventually provide Aboriginal people with the same quality of life as other Canadians.⁶³⁵
- In May 2009, Ontario passed An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario, “to establish mechanisms to support a sustained long-term reduction of poverty in Ontario.”⁶³⁶

Nova Scotia

In April 2009, the Nova Scotia Government released its poverty reduction strategy, in a document entitled *Preventing Poverty: Promoting Prosperity*. Emphasizing its prior commitment to poverty

⁶³² *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 13 and pp. 19–22.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–28.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

⁶³⁶ Ontario, *An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario*, 6 May 2009. http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/source/statutes/english/2009/elaws_src_s09010_e.htm. Accessed 26 October 2009.

reduction, the document highlights a reduction in child poverty rates from 19.3% in 1997 to 8.7% in 2006,⁶³⁷ and government spending of almost \$200 million in the past three years.⁶³⁸

The vision of the provincial strategy “for 2020 is to break the cycle of poverty by creating opportunities for all Nova Scotians to participate in the prosperity of the province and enjoy a better standard of living.”⁶³⁹ The four main goals of the strategy were to: enable and reward work; improve supports for those in need; focus on our children; and collaborate and coordinate.⁶⁴⁰ The first three of these have been identified as first-year priorities. Another first-year priority was to increase the capacity within the Government to measure and report on progress, with a commitment to begin reporting in 2010–2011.⁶⁴¹

With respect to the federal government, the Nova Scotia strategy acknowledged three existing federal-provincial partnerships with respect to housing: Affordable Housing Program Agreement, Affordable Housing Trust, and Aboriginal Off-Reserve Trust.⁶⁴² Beyond housing, the Strategy identified other existing partnerships: the Federal/Provincial Social Services Support Committee, the Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market Agreement, and the Mi’kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada Tripartite Forum.⁶⁴³ The report highlighted the importance of federal involvement: “Our relationship with the federal government is key to making long-term, sustainable progress on poverty in Nova Scotia,”⁶⁴⁴ but was not specific as to what additional supports were expected or desired.

Manitoba

Manitoba’s poverty reduction strategy, announced in May 2009, identified four pillars “to reduce poverty and promote prosperity: safe, affordable housing in supportive communities; education, jobs and income support; strong, healthy families; and accessible, co-ordinated services.”⁶⁴⁵ The Government committed to \$212 million in new spending in the 2009-2010 fiscal year.⁶⁴⁶

The Manitoba plan identified the importance of economic growth to the success of its plan, and said the following about the federal role:

*We need the federal government to do its part by building on recent investments, such as the Canada-Manitoba Labour Market Agreement. Non-insured, Aboriginal, and low-skilled workers need improvements in access to education and training. We also need to partner with the federal government to increase child care funding, work with homeless individuals and increase investments for affordable housing both on and off reserves.*⁶⁴⁷

⁶³⁷ Nova Scotia, *Preventing Poverty: Promoting Prosperity: Nova Scotia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy*, 2009, p. 6, http://gov.ns.ca/coms/specials/poverty/documents/poverty_report_2009.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ Manitoba, *ALLAboard: Manitoba’s Poverty Reduction Strategy*, 2009, p. 2, [http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/misc/pubs/CSM All%20Aboard Report 16.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/misc/pubs/CSM_All%20Aboard_Report_16.pdf). Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

The Strategy also created an interdepartmental working group to report to a new Ministers' Poverty Reduction Committee, to monitor and report on progress.⁶⁴⁸

Local Poverty Reduction Strategies

While many communities have multi-sectoral groups focused on pressing social issues, including poverty reduction, Saint John and Hamilton were among five such groups funded under the Vibrant Communities Initiative to undertake community-wide poverty reduction strategies. These are detailed below.

Saint John, New Brunswick

In Saint John, the initial impetus in local poverty reduction came from the business community, and the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) in 1997. Described as “unique coalition of senior business and professional community leaders working together with people living in poverty, government and community, to address root causes,”⁶⁴⁹ BCAPI has operated as a catalyst. In 2000, it commissioned a study on poverty in the city, and recommended that BCAPI “seek to break the poverty cycle.”

As a first step, BCAPI convened a broader group of community leaders, and received funding from the Vibrant Communities network to support its anti-poverty work. In 2005, Vibrant Communities Saint John (VCSJ) set a three-year goal to “assist 2000 individuals (800 households) in continuing their journey out of poverty,”⁶⁵⁰ which was surpassed by reaching over 3,000 individuals.⁶⁵¹ VCSJ also set a 10-year goal: to reduce the City’s poverty rate from 24% to the national average of 16% by 2015.⁶⁵²

The four “key areas” of the strategy were: investing in children and youth; ensuring access to education through to employment; promoting safe and affordable housing; and positioning the strategy in neighbourhoods.

Hamilton, Ontario

In February 2005, with the leadership of the City of Hamilton and the Hamilton Community Foundation, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was formed. Faced with a 20% poverty rate, the Roundtable’s role was to play “a critical role in generating the energy for and evolving the idea of a local poverty reduction initiative.”⁶⁵³ By August, the Roundtable had

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁴⁹ “Vibrant Communities Saint John: Convenor,” from the website of the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2s28.html#povsj>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁵⁰ Saint John Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable and BCAPI, “People, Practice and Policy: Pathways Out of Poverty: Poverty Reduction Strategy for Saint John,” submitted as a proposal to Vibrant Communities Canada, July 2004, p. 9, http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/vc/stjohn_plan.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁵¹ “Vibrant Communities Saint John: Dismantling the Poverty Traps,” October 2008, p. 2, http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/vc/SJ_Dismantling_Pov_Traps.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁵² Saint John Vibrant Communities Leadership Table and BCAPI, p. 8.

⁶⁵³ City of Hamilton and Hamilton Community Foundation, “Roundtable for poverty reduction takes community approach,” *Media release*, 13 May 2005, http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca/docs/Roundtable%20on%20Poverty_FINAL%20MEDIA%20RELEASE.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.

commissioned a study by the Hamilton Social Planning and Research Council to identify the demographics of poverty in Hamilton.⁶⁵⁴

With an articulated vision of making Hamilton the best place to raise a child, the Roundtable identified “critical points of investment in children and youth: quality early learning and parenting; skills through education, activity and recreation; employment; and targeted skills development”⁶⁵⁵ through post-secondary education.

In 2007, the Hamilton Roundtable was one of the informed voices calling for a provincial poverty reduction strategy, and in 2009, it submitted a brief to the federal government in the context of the pre-Budget consultation calling, in part, for a national poverty reduction strategy. A pre-budget brief to the federal government from the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty said, in part:

*Many of the investments identified require an integrated policy and program delivery approach between all levels of government which can be moved forward through the leadership of the Government of Canada. Examples of integrated approaches required by communities including a National Poverty Reduction Strategy, National Housing Strategy, National Early Learning and Child Care Strategy and a National Strategy for Investing in Cities.*⁶⁵⁶

The brief included quite specific recommendations for elements of a National Housing Strategy, including rent banks and rent supplements, and “the development of a long-term, comprehensive strategy to deal with affordability and accessibility to housing for hundreds of thousands of low income Canadians.”⁶⁵⁷

Housing strategies and plans

Provincial strategies

As noted in the report, several provincial governments have developed provincial plans and strategies to guide the allocation of funds from both federal and provincial coffers. These plans and programs are briefly summarized below, arranged from west to east.

British Columbia

In 2004, funded by the second phase of the federal-provincial-territorial Affordable Housing Initiative, the BC Government announced its provincial homelessness initiative. Since that time, according to a recent publication from the BC Government, more than 4,000 units have been allocated across the province under this initiative.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁴ Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, “Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: Starting Point Strategies,” February 2007, p. 3, <http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca/docs/Starting%20Point%20Strategies.pdf>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁵⁵ Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, “Strategy Map,” p. 3, <http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca/docs/news/reports/Strategic%20Framework.pdf>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁵⁶ Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, “Priority Recommendations: Social Investments and Expanding the Canadian Economy, Federal Budget 2009 Policy Brief,” p. 1, http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca/docs/news_and_reports/news-releases/Federal-budget-2009-policy-brief.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁵⁸ BC Housing, “An overview of BC Housing programs,” January 2009, p. 1, http://www.bchousing.org/resources/BreakingtheCycle/Overview_fact_sheet.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.

In October 2006, the Government of British Columbia launched its provincial housing strategy, entitled Housing Matters BC, which committed to existing programs, but also committed to new approaches to meet needs in a “changing housing environment.”⁶⁵⁹

While this plan addressed homelessness, a year later the BC Government announced its Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness initiative, built upon the previous two initiatives to include an annual commitment of \$41 million to sustain emergency shelters, expand outreach to the homeless, with a special allocation for Aboriginal persons, rent supplements, and fast-track approvals of housing applications.⁶⁶⁰ One-time capital funding was also part of the announcement at the time.⁶⁶¹

Since 2001, a government website says, the BC Government has committed to the construction of 16,000 new subsidized housing units.⁶⁶² Also since that date, it has funded more than 3,000 supportive housing units, in addition to the 1,300 that existed then.

Alberta

In February 2007, the Alberta Government appointed the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, with a mandate to focus on solutions for homelessness and affordable housing, to include rent subsidies and home ownership.⁶⁶³ It offered immediate-term and longer term solutions, mostly with respect to housing affordability, rather than homelessness. Its immediate-term recommendations included increasing funding to emergency shelters, establishing an Alberta Transitional Housing Initiative, increasing capital funding for affordable housing construction, an eviction prevention fund, and an increase in the shelter allowance for people on income assistance.⁶⁶⁴

This report included specific recommendations to the federal government with respect to the pursuit of “further opportunities to support affordable housing:”⁶⁶⁵ modifications to GST treatment of new homes and non-profits’ capital and operating costs, extension and acceleration of capital cost depreciation, a “substantial increase” in funding, and the creation of a national housing strategy.⁶⁶⁶

The government’s response, just a few weeks later, cited Budget 2007 commitments that responded to these recommendations, including a \$285 million funding commitment that it said covered all of the recommendations cited above.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁵⁹ Housing Matters BC, “An Update on the Provincial Housing Strategy,” 2007, p. 1, http://www.bchousing.org/resources/About%20BC%20Housing/Housing_Matters_BC/Homelessness_brochure_FI_NAL.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁶⁰ BC Government, “Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness,” *Backgrounder*, 12 October 2007, http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2005-2009/2007OTP0154-001292-Attachment1.htm. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶² BC Housing, Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness website, <http://www.bchousing.org/breakingthecycle>. Accessed 22 May 2009.

⁶⁶³ Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, *Housing First: An Investment with a Return in Prosperity*, 19 March 2007, p. 2, http://housing.alberta.ca/documents/Housing_Task_Force_report.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁷ Government of Alberta, “Government responds to task force report with \$285 million in new funding,” News release, 24 April 2007, <http://alberta.ca/home/NewsFrame.cfm?ReleaseID=/acn/200704/213412425F73C-ADCF-7367-39197E9BB9992B61.html>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

Although the recommended 10-year plan on affordable housing did not emerge as such, the Government responded to the intent with the announcement of its plan to address homelessness in a 10-year initiative later that year.⁶⁶⁸ By early 2008, the government had appointed the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness as a government agency with a mandate to develop and implement a provincial plan.

In October 2008, the Secretariat released its plan, calling for investments focused on “rapid re-housing of homeless Albertans, moving them from streets and shelters into permanent housing; providing client-centred supports to re-housed clients, helping them obtain the assistance they need to restore their stability and maintain their housing; and preventing homelessness through emergency assistance and by providing adequate and accessible government programs and services to Albertans.”⁶⁶⁹

The report called for \$3.316 billion over 10 years to move 11,000 individuals and families out of homelessness, and compared that to a figure of \$6.65 billion, the price tag for “managing” these individuals and families, resulting in a significant saving to taxpayers.⁶⁷⁰

The Alberta Government’s commitment to its implementation has been backed up by budget allocations and departmental business plans.

Saskatchewan

In 2008, the Minister of Social Services appointed a Task Force on Housing Affordability, with a view to finding new ideas to “housing affordability keeps pace with the province’s current economic momentum,”⁶⁷¹ with a mandate to study and make recommendations on three issues:

- improving housing affordability and security for those least able to afford rising housing costs;
- increasing capacity in the housing system to encourage the creation of affordable housing; and
- examining how best to facilitate the long term monitoring, policy development and provisions of affordable housing in Saskatchewan.⁶⁷²

Three months later, the Task Force reported, including 36 recommendations, ranging from increasing income for low-income people in the province to eliminating provincial sales tax on building supplies for affordable housing construction. It called on the federal government to change tax treatment of income from rental property, and to renew the five-year affordable housing agreement scheduled to expire in 2009.

⁶⁶⁸ Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, “A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years,” October 2008, p. 3, http://www.housing.alberta.ca/documents/PlanForAB_Secretariat_final.pdf Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁷¹ Social Services Minister Donna Harpauer, quoted in Government of Saskatchewan, “Province announces task force on housing affordability,” 18 March 2008, <http://www.gov.sk.ca/news?newsId=dad16d57-1c11-4119-8734-5d1b0d47ee06>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁷² Saskatchewan Task Force on Housing Affordability, *Affordable Housing: An Investment: Report of the Task Force on Housing Affordability*, June 2008, p. 1, <http://www.gov.sk.ca/adx.aspx/adxGetMedia.aspx?mediaId=496&PN=Shared>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

The Government responded within weeks to the recommendations framed as “immediate-term,” with increased shelter allowances in all of its income support programs, and technical changes to boundaries, income thresholds for rental increases, increases in per-diem rates paid to emergency shelters, and an expansion of the Saskatchewan Housing Authority Board.⁶⁷³ These and other medium-term changes were reflected in the Estimates tabled with the provincial budget for 2009-2010, which increased funding for the housing envelope to more than \$30 million for 2009-2010 (from \$22 million in 2008-2009).⁶⁷⁴ In addition, the Ministry Plan for Social Services for the same year includes a commitment to the development of an increased investment in and supply of affordable housing in Saskatchewan.⁶⁷⁵

Manitoba

In 2007, the Manitoba government announced its HOUSINGFirst strategy with respect to housing for people on low incomes, built on four pillars: “the development of affordable housing for low-income Manitobans; the revitalization of existing public housing; the provision of emergency and transitional shelter for homeless individuals, and the extension of existing renovation programs including the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP).”⁶⁷⁶ Specific programs were developed for each of these pillars, ranging from an overhaul of Manitoba Housing’s governance and operations, to support for moderate-income people to become home owners, to increasing the supply of emergency and longer-term affordable rental housing for low-income people.

In the provincial poverty reduction strategy released in May 2009, “safe affordable housing in supportive communities” is one of four pillars; in the strategy document, the government of Manitoba included the “largest-ever investment in social housing,” and promised a “long-term housing vision.”⁶⁷⁷

Ontario

In 2005, the Ontario government announced its Affordable Housing Plan, to provide “low- and moderate-income households with opportunities along the housing continuum – from housing allowances/rent supplements to affordable homeownership.”⁶⁷⁸

This plan had four components: a housing allowance or rent supplement, which could support households for up to five years; financial support for rental and supportive housing, “to reduce the capital costs for rental and supportive housing units developed through new construction,

⁶⁷³ Government of Saskatchewan, “Government responds to Task Force on Housing Affordability,” News release, 23 June 2008, <http://www.gov.sk.ca/news?newsId=df89aa58-2090-487a-8d36-f8454295af35>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁷⁴ Province of Saskatchewan, *Estimates for the Fiscal Year Ending March 31 2010*, p. 134, <http://www.finance.gov.sk.ca/budget2009-10/Budget200910Estimates.pdf>. Accessed 26 October 2009.

⁶⁷⁵ Province of Saskatchewan, *Plan for 2009-10: Ministry of Social Services*, p. 2, <http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=710,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=647&Filename=MSSplan2009-10.pdf>. Accessed 22 May 2009.

⁶⁷⁶ Government of Manitoba, “Province commits \$500,000 to phase two of integrated housing project in Swan River: Doer,” News Release, 25 August 2008, <http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.print.html?item=4346>. Accessed 22 May 2009.

⁶⁷⁷ Government of Manitoba, *ALLAboard: Manitoba’s Poverty Reduction Strategy*, May 2009, pp. 2, 4, http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/misc/pubs/CSM_All%20Aboard_Report_16.pdf. Accessed 22 May 2009.

⁶⁷⁸ Government of Ontario, *Ontario’s Affordable Housing Strategy: New Approach, New Opportunities – Information Booklet for Municipal Councillors and Officials*, August 2006, p. 7, <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Asset723.aspx>. Accessed 22 May 2009.

acquisition and conversion, or through additions and renovations to existing stock,⁶⁷⁹ where providers are required to maintain below market rents for at least 20 years; funding to support affordable rental or ownership housing in Northern Ontario; and support for low- or moderate-level renters to become home-owners, with municipal revolving funds to ensure on-going affordability moving forward.⁶⁸⁰

As noted, the government planned to develop a long-term affordable housing strategy and was expected to roll-out a new 10-year \$60 billion infrastructure plan in 2009 that would likely cover many initiatives including social housing.⁶⁸¹ Consultations on such a strategy took place over the summer of 2009.

While the Ontario and federal governments signed a memorandum of understanding with respect to information-sharing with respect to homelessness in 2008,⁶⁸² there was no evidence of a provincial homelessness strategy in place or under consideration.

Quebec

The Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) released its third strategic plan in 2008, which flagged the pressing need to renovate existing stock,⁶⁸³ along with three major axes of intervention: access to social and community housing, support to stay in the home, improvement of housing conditions, and supportive housing.⁶⁸⁴

At the time, provincial programs included rent-geared-to-income (or low-cost) housing, rent supplement program, a housing allowance administered through the tax system, financial support for non-profit and housing co-operative to renovate or construct new units under the AccèsLogis Québec program, and the Quebec Affordable Housing Program, which could support the construction of new supply by a wider range of organizations.⁶⁸⁵

The AccèsLogis Québec program was a five-year program, with a financial commitment of \$26 million annually, and the Quebec Government's Infrastructure Program allocated \$96 million annually until 2013 to renovate and repair existing units, under the Habitations à loyer modique.⁶⁸⁶

These measures were consistent with commitments made by the Government in its anti-poverty legislation with respect to housing.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁸¹ Government of Ontario, *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*, December 2008, p. 23, http://www.growingstronger.ca/english/pdf/Ontario's_Poverty_Report_EN.pdf. Accessed 22 August 2009.

⁶⁸² Government of Ontario, "Federal and provincial ministers to jointly address homelessness in Ontario," *Newsroom*, 2 April 2008, Accessed 22 May 2009.

⁶⁸³ Société d'habitation du Québec, *Plan Stratégique: 2008-2011*, 2008, p. 10, <http://www.habitation.gouv.qc.ca/publications/M20047.pdf>. Accessed 22 May 2009.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁸⁵ Quebec Ministry for Families and Children, "Guide to Government Programs and Services: Housing Assistance," <http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/services-en-ligne/guide-programmes-services/fiches/9.asp?lang=en&chapitre=9&fiche=0>. Accessed 22 May 2009.

⁶⁸⁶ "New Housing Program Unveiled," *The Gazette*, 10 October 2008, <http://www.mtlurb.com/forums/showthread.php?p=38056>. Accessed 22 May 2009.

⁶⁸⁷ Collin, *Poverty Reduction Strategies in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador*, 2007, p. 5,

Newfoundland and Labrador

In a social housing plan launched in September 2009, the Newfoundland and Labrador Government identified a series of strategic action priorities:

- “preserving privately owned homes by assisting with the cost of essential repairs;
- providing quality, affordable rental accommodation through direct delivery programs and partnerships with the non-profit and private sectors;
- promoting the development of more new affordable housing;
- supporting home modifications to address the accessibility needs of seniors and persons with disabilities;
- promoting renovations for lower-income homeowners to improve energy efficiency and conservation;
- preserving [Newfoundland Labrador] Housing homes to ensure they meet current and future housing needs and improving overall energy efficiency during renovations; and
- working with government and community partners in the development of a range of housing options which prevent homelessness by integrating housing and other services to promote housing stability.”⁶⁸⁸

While the plan focused on the social housing portfolio and plans, its development included extensive stakeholder consultation, and comments focused on four themes: the renewal of “social housing policy and programs” and existing stock; the role of the private rental market; the housing needs of specific subgroups of the population; and the need for supportive housing,⁶⁸⁹ all common themes in cities and provinces across Canada. Similarly, the identified challenges – changing demographics, aging housing stock, pressures in the private rental market, and the increasing need for integrated support services within housing⁶⁹⁰ – were again common to most social housing providers within provinces across Canada.

Within its plan, the decline in federal operating funds over time was flagged as a particular problem, which all provincial governments have identified: “...all provinces and territories are continuing to seek a long-term funding commitment from the federal government.”⁶⁹¹ Throughout the report, the need for federal collaboration and funding, including with respect to meeting the housing needs of Aboriginal peoples, was identified.

Local housing strategies

While housing is a provincial responsibility, a federal *Housing Act* and funding over decades has entrenched federal involvement in the provision of affordable housing across Canada. Federally owned and operated social housing was devolved to provincial governments, with a continuing

⁶⁸⁸ Newfoundland Labrador Housing, *A Social Housing Plan for Newfoundland Labrador: Secure Foundations*, 2009, p. 18. <http://www.nlhc.nf.ca/SocialHsingPlan/report.pdf>. Accessed 18 September 2009.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

commitment to subsidize operating costs for the life of mortgages. At the same time federal direct investment in social housing stopped for a 10-year period, re-emerging in 2005–2006, when housing trusts and bilateral affordable housing agreements with provincial and territorial governments were signed. Further federal involvement was confirmed in Budget 2009, with commitments for renovation of existing social housing stock, and new construction of housing for seniors and persons with disabilities.

Provincial governments have the constitutional jurisdiction over housing, and have either devolved responsibility to local governments or have allowed cities to become directly involved, or both. Across Canada, cities provide housing directly, subsidize construction and/or ownership through one or more of several local strategies, e.g., direct spending, below-market prices for land, zoning changes, and rent supplements.

In the past 10 years, a number of cities have undertaken research and engaged citizens, voluntary organizations and business in the development of local strategies with respect to meeting needs for affordable housing or reducing or eliminating homelessness, and sometimes both. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), in its proposals for a National Strategy on Housing, indicated that funding to municipalities would be contingent on the development of a local housing strategy.⁶⁹²

It should be noted that in more than one city, there have been multiple strategies, focussed on housing or homelessness or both. For this report, the City's activity has been identified in either the housing or homelessness section depending on which seemed to dominate their plan(s).

Montreal

One of the first goals established in the City of Montreal's Master Plan is to encourage the construction of "60,000 to 75,000 housing units between 2004 and 2014," and to provide high-quality living environments.⁶⁹³ The City's housing strategy, contained within the Master Plan, identified three goals: "a balanced residential supply, improved housing conditions and living environments and residential development."⁶⁹⁴

The focus of the residential supply goal was on affordability and the actions necessary to achieve it. The plan described it as follows:

Access to the rental housing market posed challenges for certain types of households, including those with low incomes, newcomers and large families. Current price levels and the evolving housing supply have also made it increasingly difficult for low-income households to buy their first home. In response to these problems, the City deployed a strategy for affordable housing, which included

⁶⁹² Federation of Canadian Municipalities, "Toward a National Housing Strategy for Canada: Working Paper," 2000, http://action.web.ca/home/housing/resources.shtml?x=67139&AA_EX_Session=292486894e02c760ab7c35b307566c18. Accessed 24 April 2009.

⁶⁹³ City of Montreal, "Summary of the Master Plan's goals, objectives and actions," *Montreal Master Plan*, November 2004, http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/plan_urbanisme_en/media/documents/041123_orientations_en.pdf. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁶⁹⁴ City of Montreal, *Master Plan*, January 2005, p. 12, http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/plan_urbanisme_en/media/documents/061030_2_1_en.pdf. Accessed 5 May 2009.

subsidies and programs designed to ease access to property ownership as well as incentives and regulatory measures to ensure social diversity within major real estate projects.⁶⁹⁵

While the document refers to the need for partnerships, no federal agency was listed among the partners needed to achieve these goals.

The particular measures referred to took the form of an Inclusionary Housing Strategy, financial support for building community-based affordable social housing, and a program offering financial aid to first-time home-buyers.⁶⁹⁶

The Inclusionary Housing Strategy established the goals that 15% of all new housing units be affordable and that 15% be built by the community and social sectors.⁶⁹⁷ The seven major components of the strategy are:

- optimization of current housing subsidy programs;
- use of municipally owned land;
- securing the partnership of “major public property owners”;
- full use of regulatory and planning tools;
- adaptation of the city’s service delivery model;
- research, development and communication activities;
- and monitoring implementation.⁶⁹⁸

While the report acknowledged the contribution of the federal government to programs essential to implementation of this report, there were no specific actions or funding requirements of the federal government.

In a report updating progress on this strategy, City staff told the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association conference that significant progress had been made in the first two years of the strategy, including more than 2,000 social and community-based housing units, and almost 40% of new housing construction were “affordable.”⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ Ville de Montreal, “Stratégie municipale en habitation,” http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=4977,15933590&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁶⁹⁷ City of Montreal, “Inclusion of Affordable Housing in New Residential Projects,” http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=5097,16433629&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁶⁹⁸ City of Montreal, “Strategy for the inclusion of affordable housing in new residential projects,” 2006, p. 14, https://servicesenligne2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/sel/publications/PorteAccesTelechargement?lng=Fr&systemName=7757558&client=Serv_corp. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁶⁹⁹ City of Montreal, “Montréal’s inclusionary housing strategy: A progress report,” a presentation to Canadian Housing and Renewal Association conference, April 2008, Slide 5, http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/habiter_v2_fr/media/documents/presentation_achru_vancouver_2008.pdf. Accessed 5 May 2009.

The City of Montreal also adopted a four-year strategy to subsidize the construction of 5,000 affordable units and to “intervene” with respect to an addition 10,000 units in private ownership.⁷⁰⁰ Funding was anticipated from all levels of government,⁷⁰¹ yet the federal government was not identified as a “partner” in the program.⁷⁰²

Finally, an Urban Housing for Families program has been initiated, as a “major commitments towards the ‘Grandir à Montréal’ family policy and the 2008-2012 family action plan.” Under this program, a call for proposals was issued to developers to develop more family-friendly designs and layouts, located near family-friendly services. The City’s website had not provided information about successful proposals at the time of writing.

Edmonton

Edmonton’s involvement in housing and homelessness issues at the local level dates back to 1999, when its first Task Force on Homelessness reported; its first task force on housing came four years later.⁷⁰³ With progress on both fronts reported to Council over the years, continued interest resulted in three more recent plans of interest to the Committee.

By 2000, to qualify for funding under the National Homelessness Initiative, the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing had formed, and reported with a 2000-2003 community plan,⁷⁰⁴ supported by City staff. This report called for extensive investment, totalling nearly \$50 million,⁷⁰⁵ to address the needs for emergency, transitional and supportive housing (all part of the “continuum of housing” being proposed in connection with the federal initiative). Of that amount, almost \$12 million was expected to come from federal sources.⁷⁰⁶

While there were no specific recommendations directed to the federal government, the assignment of non-financial responsibility for various elements of the plan included federal departments and agencies: Human Resources Development Canada, CMHC, INAC, and Corrections Canada.

A year later, the City of Edmonton articulated its own “Low-Income and Special Needs Housing Strategy, 2001–2011,” based on five principles with respect to access to housing, municipal co-ordination, stakeholder consultation, program delivery, and shared funding responsibility. In particular, the report called on federal and provincial funds “to provide a sufficient supply of housing units that is both physically adequate and affordable to low-income households [and] adequate household incomes and necessary support services.”⁷⁰⁷ In articulating its strategies,

⁷⁰⁰ City of Montreal, “Opération 15 000 logements,” http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_dad=portal&_pageid=5097,16335565&_schema=PORTAL. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² City of Montreal, “Opération 15 000 logements: Partners,” http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=5097,16347655&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁷⁰³ City of Edmonton Community Services Department, “Affordable Housing Update,” 14 December 2004, p. 2, <http://webdocs.edmonton.ca/OcctopusDocs/Public/Complete/REPORTS/CC/Elected-1995/2005-07-05/2005CLR002att2.doc>. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁷⁰⁴ Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing, “Edmonton Community Plan on Homelessness, 2002–2003,” November 2000.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

⁷⁰⁷ City of Edmonton, “Building Together: The City of Edmonton Low-Income and Special Needs Housing Strategy 2001–2011 – Principles and Strategy Statements,” 2002, p. 3, <http://www.edmonton.ca/CommPeople/BuildingTogether.pdf>. Accessed 5 May 2009.

particularly with respect to increased access to appropriate, affordable housing, the report again highlighted the importance of provincial and federal involvement in “legislation, policy and funding to meet priority identified housing and homeless needs.”⁷⁰⁸

The following year, a Task Force on Affordable Housing, chaired by the Mayor, released its background report, which focussed on options to encourage the construction of new rental housing at any rent level, and measures to encourage an increase in the supply of affordable rental units.⁷⁰⁹ Written in the context of bilateral federal-provincial housing agreements that were part of the Affordable Housing Partnership Initiative, the report indicated that the implementation of its shorter term recommendations would rely on this funding. The report also identified fees and charges on rental construction as a significant barrier to an adequate rental housing supply, of which almost half were attributed to the federal Goods and Services Tax and mortgage insurance fees imposed by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.⁷¹⁰

In particular, the report endorsed and repeated recommendations to the federal government made earlier by an Ontario working group, calling on the federal government to amend tax policy and programs with respect to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and treatment of capital gains.⁷¹¹

In 2005, the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing, authors of the first homelessness strategy, released a report intended to address homelessness, housing and support service needs in Edmonton to 2009. The report presented detailed research on current and projected needs with respect to these three areas, and prioritized the gaps identified: meeting short-term, then long-term housing needs, and to put prevention programs in place.⁷¹²

In addition to the federal-provincial initiatives with respect to housing at the time, the report called for funding from the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, Urban Aboriginal Homelessness program, and other elements of the National Housing Initiative.⁷¹³

In 2005, the City Council of Edmonton passed “Cornerstones: Edmonton’s Plan for Affordable Housing, 2006–2011,” calling for collaboration among all levels of government and other community partners to increase income and supports for those in need of emergency and transitional shelter, and to develop 2,500 new units of long-term housing.⁷¹⁴ The City was committed to playing an advocacy role with federal and provincial governments for income and supports, and was to play a more active role in meeting the housing targets.⁷¹⁵

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁰⁹ Edmonton Task Force on Affordable Housing, “Improving Opportunities for Affordable Housing in Edmonton,” City of Edmonton, February 2003, p. ii, http://www.edmonton.ca/for_residents/CommPeople/ETFAHBackground.pdf. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷¹² Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing, “Community Plan: Edmonton Community Plan on Housing and Support Services: 2005–2009,” January 2005, p. 19, [http://intraspec.ca/Edmonton_CommunityPlan\(web\).pdf](http://intraspec.ca/Edmonton_CommunityPlan(web).pdf). Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷¹⁴ City of Edmonton, “Cornerstones: Edmonton’s Plan for Affordable Housing, 2006–2011,” approved by Council 19 July 2005, p. 1. Provide by Edmonton City Clerk’s Office, 5 May 2009.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

To implement this plan, the City established a number of grant programs, each with a specific focus: building long-term affordable housing, purchase of existing stock for affordable housing, a municipal fee rebate to offset some of the costs of developing affordable housing, the development of secondary suites, or the piloting of rent supplement programs.⁷¹⁶

In January 2009, the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness released its 10-year plan to end homelessness in Edmonton. The Committee included members of City staff, along with community and business leaders, local agencies, City councillors, provincial officials and faith communities.⁷¹⁷ Its committees included federal officials as well.⁷¹⁸

Its five goals were to provide permanent housing options for people living on the streets, ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing, ensure supply of emergency accommodation, prevent homelessness, and establish a governance and implementation process for the plan.⁷¹⁹ As with the plans that preceded it, this plan called for provincial and federal policy and funding commitments to allow both short- and longer term goals to be achieved.⁷²⁰ No other specific requirements or recommendations to the federal government were included.

Homelessness Strategies

While federal funding for homelessness required the development of local homelessness plans, this section provides more detail on some that have gone far beyond the minimum program requirements.

Calgary

In Calgary, for example, a community-based, multi-sectoral Committee to End Homelessness unveiled its 10-year plan to end homelessness, and created the Foundation that would be responsible for its implementation.⁷²¹

The plan draws on ideas and programs that were field-tested, evidence-based, and incorporated into similar 10-year plans in such US cities as New York, Portland and Denver. With early and strong support from the City of Calgary,⁷²² the plan followed the “Housing First” model by creating “affordable housing opportunities” and ensuring that the necessary supports are in place.⁷²³

The vision behind the plan was described by the Committee to End Homelessness was defined in the plan:

⁷¹⁶ City of Edmonton, “Cornerstones,”

http://www.edmonton.ca/for_residents/emergency_services/cornerstones.aspx. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁷¹⁷ Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness, “A Place to Call Home: Edmonton’s 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness,” January 2009, pp. 4–5, http://www.edmontonhomelessness.com/docs/report_NoSpreads_ForWebDownload_jan26-2009.pdf. Accessed 5 May 2009.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷²¹ Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, Calgary’s 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, January 2008, <http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/files/pdf/Calgary's%2010%20Year%20Plan.pdf>. Accessed 27 April 2009.

⁷²² “Homelessness: From Prevention to Cure – A 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Calgary,” City of Calgary website, http://www.calgary.ca/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_2_428245_0_0_18/Homelessness+From+Prevention+to+Cure+.htm. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷²³ Calgary Committee to End Homelessness Calgary’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, p. 7.

*[B]y the year 2018 all people facing homelessness in Calgary will have access to safe, decent and affordable housing as well as the resources and supports necessary to sustain that housing. Our aim is to deliver a plan that will not only end homelessness, but do so by the most economically efficient means possible.*⁷²⁴

The plan set a target to create 11,000 affordable units within 10 years:

- Specific targets were to: eliminate family homelessness in two years;
- retire 50% of Calgary's emergency shelter beds within five years;
- achieve an 85% reduction in the chronic homeless population within five years;
- complete elimination of chronic homelessness in seven years; and
- reduce the maximum average stay in emergency shelters to less than seven days by the end of 2018.⁷²⁵

Its mechanisms included the creation of affordable housing units, which allowed for the creation of secondary suites and student housing.⁷²⁶

The Committee estimated that at the current growth rate in the homeless population, the cost of “managing” homelessness would be a total of \$9 million over the next decade. With early investment and direct and indirect savings, the plan was predicted to achieve cumulative cost savings of \$3.6 million by the end of 10 years.⁷²⁷

The report included specific public policy recommendations to the federal government, including the need for longer term funding commitments and the development of tax incentives for rental construction. The Calgary Homeless Foundation expected to work with local experts, the City of Calgary and the Government of Alberta to develop specific recommendations on these tax policy ideas.

The Calgary Homelessness Foundation reported in January 2009 on progress to date, noting that “Approximately 1,100 potential affordable housing units in various stages of development have been identified as of the end of the third quarter.”⁷²⁸

The City of Calgary itself, in a homelessness strategy approved by Council four years earlier, held all three governments responsible for homelessness, and chose to focus its efforts on prevention.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ City of Calgary, 2008 Annual Report, 31 December 2008, http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/finance/reports/2008/annual_report_2008.pdf. Accessed 1 May 2009.

⁷²⁷ Calgary Committee to End Homelessness.

⁷²⁸ Calgary Homelessness Foundation, “Third quarter 2008 ends with more achievements on ending homelessness,” *News Release*, 29 January 2009, p. 7, http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/files/pdf/NR_QR3_Jan%2029%2009%20FINAL.pdf. Accessed 27 April 2009.

⁷²⁹ City of Calgary, “Homelessness Strategy (Policy),” 1 September 2004, http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/cns/homelessness/cc_homelessness_strategy-04.pdf. Accessed 4 May 2009.

Vancouver

Vancouver is governed by both the City of Vancouver and Metro Vancouver, each of which has been involved in developing local strategies, the former with respect to homelessness in 2005, and the latter with respect to homelessness in 2001 (updated in 2003) and affordable housing, in 2007.

To take them in chronological order, the Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver emerged from a multi-sectoral committee that included government, community organizations and service agencies was developed in the context of the federal government's National Homelessness Initiative, and in particular, the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI).⁷³⁰ In keeping with SCPI frameworks at that time, the plan focussed on the continuum of supports for people who were homeless and on the streets, from emergency to transitional to supportive to independent housing.⁷³¹ It was based on three key elements: affordable housing, adequate income, and support services.⁷³²

The 2003 update to the regional plan reported considerable progress:

*During the past three years, a total of 76 projects received funding through the various SCPI processes. Most projects developed partnerships with other funders so that the total amount of SCPI funding was almost doubled by the end of the first three years. In total, over \$30 million in SCPI funding was distributed through the Regional, Aboriginal and Youth homelessness planning processes. An additional \$22 million was contributed by other funders, including provincial and municipal governments, health authorities, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, private foundations, and others.*⁷³³

Its specific goals remained unchanged: enhanced continuum of housing and support; creation and maintenance of a continuum of housing; promotion of income adequacy for households; promotion of support services delivery; and support for sub-regions in the greater Vancouver area to meet local needs.⁷³⁴ The analysis in the report identified gaps in particular sub-populations, and in sub-regions, including the City of Vancouver.

Following a street homelessness count in 2005, Vancouver City Council asked staff to develop a homelessness action plan, "to identify actions which the City, other levels of government, the community, and business can take to address homelessness."⁷³⁵ In April of that year, Council passed a plan that the changes needed to house the "street homeless," and to reduce the number of people at risk of becoming homeless.

The plan identified the same three components flagged in the regional plan: income, housing, and support services. In particular, a key priority was identified for each of these components:

⁷³⁰ Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC) of British Columbia, "3 Ways Home: Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver – Update: 2003," p. 4, <http://ir.lib.sfu.ca/retrieve/3616/Chodarr0263.pdf>. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷³⁵ Michelle Patterson and Julian Somers, *Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia*, Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health & Addiction, October 2007, p. 27, http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2007/Housing_Support_for_MHA_Adults.pdf. Accessed 4 May 2009.

- Its income-related priority was to reduce barriers to reducing barriers to accessing welfare by homeless people;
- Its housing-related priority was to develop 3,200 units of supported housing; and
- Its support services priority was to increase addiction and mental health services.⁷³⁶

Its 86 recommendations stemming from these priorities, if implemented, were expected “to eliminate homelessness in 10 years.”⁷³⁷

In November 2007, Metro Vancouver approved its Affordable Housing Strategy, which identified “critical housing challenges”: demand for affordable rental and ownership housing, low vacancy rates, low levels of new rental housing supply, loss of existing rental housing units, an increasing socioeconomic gap between tenants and owners, and “an increasing incidence and duration in homelessness across the region.”⁷³⁸

Its goals were to: “Increase the supply and diversity of modest cost housing; ... eliminate homelessness across the region; ... [and] meet the needs of low income renters.”⁷³⁹ Each was matched with specific objectives and strategies, to include specific applications of fiscal actions, regulatory actions, education and advocacy, and direct service provision. Finally, under each objective were listed actions to be taken by Metro Vancouver, municipalities within the region, the provincial government and the federal government. These are listed below, under related objectives.

With respect to increasing the supply and range of “modest-cost housing,” recommendations for the federal government were to respond to FCM’s call for a National Affordable Housing Strategy, and, where possible and appropriate to the local planning context, to make federally-owned land available for affordable housing development.⁷⁴⁰

With respect to eliminating homelessness across the region, the report called on the federal government to continue to provide financial support, at increased levels, to address homelessness.⁷⁴¹

Finally, in December 2008, the City of Vancouver put in place a Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT), chaired by the Mayor, with a 90-day timeline, “to identify immediate action steps that the City and its partners can take to get street homeless off the street and into safe and secure shelter over the winter.”⁷⁴² This team focussed on finding facilities that could be opened temporarily on an emergency basis to shelter people who were homeless. This initiative was jointly funded by the municipal and provincial governments, churches and private foundations.

⁷³⁶ City of Vancouver Housing Centre, *Homelessness Action Plan*, City of Vancouver, 2005, pp. 6–7, <http://intraspec.ca/hap05jun.pdf>. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷³⁷ Pateron and Somers (2007), p. 28.

⁷³⁸ Metro Vancouver, *Affordable Housing Strategy*, 2007, p. 1, <http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/development/housingdiversity/AffordableHousingStrategyDocs/AdoptedMetroVancAffordHousStrategyNov302007.pdf>. Accessed 23 April 2009.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁴² City of Vancouver, “Update on Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT),” January 2009, http://vancouver.ca/heat/mayors_update_jan22_2009.htm. Accessed 4 May 2009. Information about this program is from this source, unless otherwise noted.

These shelter beds were tentatively scheduled to close at the end of March 2009, though funding was available for an additional month if needed; since then, funding was extended to June 2009.⁷⁴³ In April, 2009, the City of Vancouver considered and approved an “Interim Housing Plan to Reduce Homelessness: Strategic Partnership Proposal City-Province-Private Sector.” This plan set a target of 550 additional interim housing units for next winter, calling on the provincial government to fund just over half of the costs, with the City and private funding accounting for the remainder of the more than \$50 million budget.⁷⁴⁴

To meet the needs of low-income renters, Metro’s Affordable Housing Strategy called on the federal government to encourage development of rental housing through tax treatment, to increase funding, and to enhance RRAP to improve access to funds.⁷⁴⁵

Toronto

The City of Toronto established its Street to Home plan at a February 2005 Council meeting, with a goal to “help ... homeless people living outdoors to get a safer place to sleep and find long-term housing.”⁷⁴⁶ By 2007, the plan was being described as “Toronto’s plan to end street homelessness.”⁷⁴⁷ As the Committee heard in spring 2008, this plan is also based on a “housing first” approach, and its 2007 post-occupancy survey of former beneficiaries of this plan showed remarkably positive results:

The findings provided detailed evidence that homeless individuals housed directly from the street could maintain their housing with the appropriate supports in place, and also provided client perspectives on the housing process, the supports they receive, and changes in a variety of quality of life indicators. The findings demonstrated that the vast majority were satisfied with their housing and had seen improvements in nearly all quality of life indicators. The study also showed that while individuals faced challenges in making the transition from the streets to housing, the follow-up supports offered by Streets to Homes were helping people to keep their housing.⁷⁴⁸

While a second analysis of the survey results suggests that the results were overstated in this report, it did not discount the overall positive results.⁷⁴⁹

Later in 2008, Streets to Homes was recognized by CMHC as one of the “promising practices” with respect to affordable housing.⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁴³ City of Vancouver, “Interim Housing Plan to Reduce Homelessness: Strategic Partnership Proposal City-Province-Private Sector,” a presentation to City Council, 7 April 2009, Slide 4, <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/housing/pdf/09apr7interimhousingplan.pdf>. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., Slide 11.

⁷⁴⁵ Metro Vancouver, p. 9.

⁷⁴⁶ City of Toronto City Clerk, “From the Street into Homes: A Strategy to Assist Homeless Persons Find Permanent Housing,” passed by City Council February 2005, http://www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/2005_02-001_pfc_screen.pdf. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷⁴⁷ Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, “Home is where it starts,” Brochure on Streets to Homes program, 2007, <http://intraspec.ca/s2h-brochure.pdf>. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷⁴⁸ Laurel Raine and Tricia Marcellin, *What Housing First Means for People: Results of Streets to Homes 2007 Post-Occupancy Survey*, Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, p. 1, <http://www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/results07postocc.pdf>. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷⁴⁹ Nick Falvo, “Homelessness, Program Responses and an Assessment of Toronto’s Streets to Homes Program,” Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2009.

Ottawa

The City of Ottawa's first action plan on homelessness was developed in 1999, with a goal to end homelessness.⁷⁵¹ It was succeeded by a plan for 2002-2005,⁷⁵² with progress reported on that plan in the subsequent plan, to cover 2005-2008.⁷⁵³ For example, the 2005 report identified achievements in the previous three years that included the construction of more than 300 new low-income units (including with SCPI funding), the development of a Housing Loss Prevention Network, and improved collaboration among city agencies with respect to homelessness.⁷⁵⁴ In addition to acknowledging the City's commitment to developing a housing strategy,⁷⁵⁵ the 2005-2008 plan called on the City to "advocate with federal and provincial governments for better social housing, immigration, health and income support policies to prevent and resolve homelessness."⁷⁵⁶

The promised housing strategy, launched in September 2007, established three broad directions consistent with broader policy goals of the City: "building healthy, inclusive, sustainable communities; promoting and preserving affordable housing; [and] meeting the need for supports to housing."⁷⁵⁷ In addition,

*Each of the three Directions is supported by strategic statements. These Strategies indicate which actions will be prioritized in implementing the City Housing Strategy.*⁷⁵⁸

While the recommendations were directed mostly to municipal governments and other local stakeholders, the report highlighted the importance of funding from provincial and federal governments.⁷⁵⁹

The report recommended to federal and provincial governments "a more comprehensive, integrated framework of public policies, programs and tools that promotes local control over policy development and implementation,"⁷⁶⁰ and outlined specifics for the federal government, including improved tax treatment of expenditures on rental construction, extended time-lines on funding, and making RRAP a permanent program.⁷⁶¹

⁷⁵⁰ City of Toronto, "Streets to Homes innovation honoured by national housing agency," *News release*, 4 November 2008, <http://wx.toronto.ca/inter/it/newsrel.nsf/7017df2f20edbe2885256619004e428e/ef1bba120bc75055852574f7005b9f91?OpenDocument>. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷⁵¹ Joyce Potter, et. al., "Priority on People: Ottawa's 2006-2008 Community Action Plan on Homelessness to create 'A City Without Homelessness'," prepared for the Community Capacity Building Team, November 2005, p. 3, http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/housing/homelessness/action_plan/homelessness_en.pdf. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷⁵² City of Ottawa, "Affordable Housing Strategy," Report to Health, Recreation and Social Services Committee, January 2002, <http://ottawa.ca/calendar/ottawa/citycouncil/hrssc/2002/02-21/ACS2002-PE0-HOU-0001.htm>. Accessed 4 May 2009.

⁷⁵³ Potter, et. al., p. 17.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷⁵⁷ City of Ottawa, *City Housing Strategy: 2007 to 2012*, September 2007, p. iv, http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/housing/housing_strategy/strategy_overview_en.html. Accessed 23 April 2009.

⁷⁵⁸ City of Ottawa, "Overview of the City Housing Strategy," *City Housing Strategy 2007 to 2012*.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

Additional more general recommendations called on the federal government to provide “sustained and sufficient funding” for both housing and housing supports, and allowance for increased local flexibility.

Appendix 6 – List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the federal government adopt as a core social policy poverty eradication goal that all programmes dealing with poverty and homelessness are to lift Canadians out of poverty rather than make living within poverty more manageable and that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to adopt a similar goal.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that provincial governments increase current limits on assets for qualifying applicants for the first six to 12 months, to allow those relying on social assistance for short periods of time to retain the assets they need to re-engage in the labour force and regain their economic footing.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that federal government modify all federal income security programs, e.g., Employment Insurance, to better protect Canadians in low-income households who experience short-term gaps in income.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the federal government establish with the provinces a goal that individuals and families, regardless of the reasons for their need, receive incomes totaling at least after-tax LICOs.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the federal government publish a Green Paper by 31 December 2010, to include the costs and benefits of current practices with respect to income supports and of options to reduce and eliminate poverty, including a basic annual income based on a negative income tax, and to include a detailed assessment of completed pilot projects on a basic income in New Brunswick and Manitoba.

Recommendation 6

To demonstrate a federal commitment to adequate minimum wages, the Committee recommends that the federal government reinstate a federal minimum wage at \$10/hour, indexed to the Consumer Price Index, and that suppliers of goods and services to the federal government be required to pay its employees at least that amount.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the federal government develop a new program to insure against income losses due to long-term employment interruption that covers those who are not included under the Employment Insurance Act.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the federal government amend the *Employment Insurance Act* to provide benefits for a longer period to workers who become unemployed after a long attachment to the workforce, and that the longer benefit period not be based solely on regional unemployment rates.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the two-week waiting period for Employment Insurance benefits be removed for people who are taking compassionate or parental leave funded through the EI program.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the federal government re-engineer the Employment Insurance program to allow adjustments to anticipated economic downturns, rather than be based solely on recent but past experience.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the federal government amend the EI program to extend its parental insurance benefits to self-employed individuals, with premiums assessed similar to those being paid by employees who access this benefit.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the federal government expand EI sickness benefits over time to 50 weeks, to provide appropriate support for eligible beneficiaries experiencing medium-term illnesses or disabilities.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the federal government include reinstatement of experience rating for consideration in any redesign or substantial modification to the EI program.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the federal government make EI-funded training available to those who have contributed to the EI fund over time, but are not eligible for benefits.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the federal government permit the inclusion of advanced language training and training that could equip those with credentials from other countries to qualify for Canadian recognition be permitted within training funded through the EI program.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the federal government coordinate a nationwide federal/provincial initiative on early childhood learning.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that federal funding programs and allocations emphasize and support initiatives that keep disadvantaged youth enrolled and engaged in schools, including effective counselling, after-school programs, homework clubs, and youth centres.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the federal government, in conjunction with the Council of Ministers of Education, encourage and support actions to reduce the drop-out rate, including the establishment of targets and time-lines, with regular reporting on progress.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that federal government, in conjunction with the Council of Ministers of Education, encourage and support actions to reduce the drop-out rates among Aboriginal

students, on-reserve or off-reserve, including the establishment of targets and time-lines, with regular reporting on progress.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the federal government monitor and report on new post-secondary student aid programs, including comparisons with affordability and debt load results of the programs that have been replaced.

Recommendation 21

To redress the under-representation of low-income people from some groups, e.g., Aboriginal people and people with disabilities, among students in post-secondary education, the Committee recommends that the federal government offer additional tax support for post-secondary education targeted to these students and their families.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the federal government sustain strong financial support for adult and family literacy programs, with a special priority given to groups over-represented among high-school non-completers.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that federal and provincial governments collectively amend existing income security programs to provide secure funding to training participants for long enough periods to ensure opportunities for secure employment at adequate incomes.

Recommendation 24

The Committee recommends that the federal government set aside a fixed percentage of training positions (to match the percentage established for federal employment equity targets) for persons with disabilities in all renewing and new labour market agreements.

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that the federal government explicitly identify immigrants as a population to be targeted in training programs, including training to reduce language and other barriers to the labour market in all renewing and new labour market agreements.

Recommendation 26

In recognition of poverty's effect on health, the Committee recommends that the federal government instruct its central agencies to allocate resources to prevent and address negative health outcomes associated with poverty and unemployment.

Recommendation 27

The Committee recommends that the federal government work with provincial and territorial governments and appropriate other stakeholders to develop a national pharmacare program, building on progress underway in some provinces.

Recommendation 28

Recognizing the importance of local contexts with respect to identifying and implementing programs to reduce poverty, the Committee recommends that federal policy initiatives seek and support local voluntary sector and municipal agencies as active partners in design and delivery of federal government initiatives at the community level.

Recommendation 29

To facilitate support for local approaches and solutions to complex social and economic problems, the Committee recommends that the federal government explore and implement additional Urban Development Agreements among federal, provincial and municipal governments, in concert with community-identified leaders and priorities.

Recommendation 30

The Committee recommends that the federal government establish a fund to allow groups over-represented among the persistently low-income to have legal representation in law reform cases with respect to their human rights.

Recommendation 31

In recognition of both Canadian obligations under international human rights law, and their importance in claiming access to appropriate programs and services, the Committee recommends that the federal government explicitly cite international obligations ratified by Canada in any new federal legislation or legislative amendments relevant to poverty, housing and homelessness.

Recommendation 32

The Committee recommends that the federal government analyze gender-based differences in benefits to men and women when designing and implementing new tax measures.

Recommendation 33

The Committee recommends that the federal government increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors to ensure that economic households are not below the poverty line as defined by the low income cut-off levels, and that intergovernmental collaboration ensure that such increases do not result in the loss of eligibility for provincial/territorial subsidies or services for seniors.

Recommendation 34

Recognizing the important contribution the National Child Benefit (NCB) can make to reducing child poverty, the Committee recommends that the NCB be raised, incrementally and predictably, to reach \$5,000 (in 2009 dollars) by 2012.

Recommendation 35

The Committee recommends that the federal government commit to a schedule of longer term planned increases to the Working Income Tax Benefit to bring recipients at least to the LICO line.

Recommendation 36

The Committee recommends that just as the federal government invests in "shovel-ready" physical infrastructure to combat recession with their provincial counterparts, so too should "shovel-ready" social infrastructure be targeted for investment, specifically housing, income security, and social agencies, whose ability to serve can be quickly enhanced through increased and accelerated investment in the Canada Social Transfer.

Recommendation 37

The Committee recommends that the federal government provide sustained and adequate funding through the Affordable Housing Initiative to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Recommendation 38

The Committee recommends that the federal government issue a White Paper on tax measures to support construction of rental housing in general and affordable rental housing in particular, including the donation of funds, lands or buildings for low-income housing provision.

Recommendation 39

The Committee recommends that the federal government clarify the mandate of Canada Lands Corporation to favour use of surplus federal lands for development of affordable housing and to expedite planning processes to facilitate this use.

Recommendation 40

The Committee recommends that the federal government support the work of local and provincial non-profit housing developers by making housing programs longer term to accommodate five-year development cycles and ten-year planning cycles, and to permit more effective planning at the local and provincial levels.

Recommendation 41

To assist tenants facing discrimination in housing, the Committee recommends the explicit identification of civil legal aid as an element to be supported by the Canada Social Transfer.

Recommendation 42

The Committee recommends that the federal government extend the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program as a permanent program, increase the budget allocations for this program, and amend eligibility requirements to take into account differential costs for repairs in different communities across Canada, and projects converting housing units for affordable rental accommodation.

Recommendation 43

The Committee supports the use of rent supplements to provide faster access to affordable housing and recommends that the federal government, with provincial housing authorities, private landlords' associations and non-profit housing providers, assess the impact of portable housing allowances on rents.

Recommendation 44

The Committee recommends that the federal government, in collaboration with provincial governments, representatives of municipal governments, First Nation organizations, and other housing providers, develop a national housing and homelessness strategy to include:

- priorities established by and for each provincial and territory with respect to meeting existing needs for affordable and secure housing;
- a 10-year commitment of funds from the federal government, to include similar commitments from provincial and territorial governments that will receive these funds;
- annual reporting on how the money is being spent, with particular attention to the number of people housed who could not afford to secure housing in the private market;
- a specific focus, with targets and funding commitments, with respect to meeting the needs for affordable housing for urban Aboriginal peoples;
- a simpler, more integrated application process for funds, cutting across programs related to housing funded at the federal level;

- the integration of the Homelessness Partnering Initiative, with an expanded mandate and budget to support combined local housing and homelessness plans and the initiatives identified in them; and
- a thorough evaluation at the end of the 10-year period to assess achievements and continuing gaps.

Recommendation 45

The Committee recommends that federal funding focussed on homelessness be sustained until a combined strategy on housing and homelessness is developed to guide federal investment.

Recommendation 46

The Committee recommends that the federal government, with provincial and territorial governments and health researchers across Canada, provide funding for physical health services for people who are homeless.

Recommendation 47

The Committee recommends that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy be expanded to play a greater coordinating role within the federal government, engaging all departments and agencies with a mandate that includes housing and homelessness, especially for those groups over-represented among those in need.

Recommendation 48

The Committee recommends that the federal government provide financial incentives to encourage communities already supported through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to use a 10-year time horizon in adjusting and renewing their community plans.

Recommendation 49

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue to provide direct funding for and continued support of related research and knowledge dissemination about a “housing first” approach to eliminating homelessness.

Recommendation 50

The Committee recommends that the federal government, at the next meeting of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Labour, take a leadership role in encouraging a harmonization of provincial and territorial workers’ compensation programs.

Recommendation 51

The Committee recognizes the importance of support services for persons with disabilities entering jobs, and that these supports are often lost when employment earnings begin. Therefore, the Committee recommends that provincial and territorial governments extend these supports for up to 12 months following employment to persons with disabilities leaving social assistance, and that these governments negotiate with employers to provide these supports indefinitely for those earning low incomes.

Recommendation 52

The Committee recommends that the Government make the Disability Tax Credit refundable.

Recommendation 53

The Committee recommends that the federal government develop and implement a basic income guarantee at or above LICO for people with severe disabilities.

Recommendation 54

The Committee recommends that provincial and territorial governments use the savings realized in social assistance spending with the introduction of the basic income guarantee for people with severe disabilities to redesign and enhance delivery of disability supports to all persons with disabilities, regardless of the source of their incomes.

Recommendation 55

The Committee recommends that the federal government sustain and increase the funding for the Opportunities Fund for persons with disabilities, with a clear mission to address barriers to the labour force.

Recommendation 56

The Committee recommends that all provincial and territorial governments amend their social assistance legislation to exempt savings under the Disability Savings Plan from any asset depletion requirements with respect to qualifications for or benefits from social assistance and social services programs.

Recommendation 57

Until mainstream training programs provide training opportunities for persons with disabilities proportionate to their representation in the population, the Committee recommends that the federal government extend and expand funding for such training through the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities.

Recommendation 58

The Committee recommends that federal government work with provincial governments and social housing providers to take the necessary steps to provide larger housing units to larger families.

Recommendation 59

The Committee recommends that the federal government develop a tax credit for employers who hire newcomers for their first job in their field or area of expertise.

Recommendation 60

The Committee recommends that the federal government reduce the immigration sponsorship period from 10 years to three years similar to the regulations pertaining to conjugal sponsorship, and make a commensurate reduction in the residency requirement for entitlement to a monthly pension under the *Old Age Security Act*.

Recommendation 61

The Committee recommends that the federal government extend eligibility for the resettlement assistance program for refugees to two years for regular cases and to four years for joint assistance sponsorships.

Recommendation 62

The Committee recommends that the federal government establish a repayment schedule and loan forgiveness program for travel loan repayment by government-sponsored refugees, that takes into account the time needed to integrate and the household income upon employment.

Recommendation 63

The Committee recommends that the federal government accelerate its work with provincial governments and other relevant agencies to complete and implement a framework leading to the recognition of qualifications from other countries, and report annually to Parliament on its progress.

Recommendation 64

The Committee recommends that the federal government support bridging programs, especially for immigrants with professional qualifications from their countries of origin, through immigrant settlement funds and agreements.

Recommendation 65

The Committee recommends that the federal government provide on-going subsidies to off-reserve, non-profit Aboriginal housing providers for new and existing units to ensure increased supply of affordable housing.

Recommendation 66

The Committee recommends that the Urban Aboriginal Strategy be used as a platform for greater investment and collaboration in addressing the poverty and housing problems facing urban Aboriginal peoples.

Recommendation 67

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue and expand targeted funding and programming for training and employment supports for urban Aboriginal peoples, and their organizations, where appropriate.

Recommendation 68

The Committee recommends that the federal government require an Aboriginal working group to identify priorities for urban Aboriginal people and designate funding for this purpose within all federal funding to communities to address housing and homelessness.

Recommendation 69

The Committee recommends that the federal government review and revise grants and contributions reporting requirements among federal departments and agencies to enhance horizontal and vertical coordination of reporting and encourage multi-year funding among federal granting agencies, where problems that programs are addressing are persistent and longer term.

Recommendation 70

The Committee recommends that the federal government recognize and stabilize the contribution of voluntary sector organizations with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness, by budgeting adequate support for these organizations to accomplish not only the delivery of government-funded services, but also the community-building activities that only this sector can provide.

Recommendation 71

The Committee recommends that federal government use grants and contributions to fund community-based organizations to provide innovative solutions, to share innovation, and where appropriate to replicate successful community-based initiatives involved in poverty reduction, housing affordability, and supporting homeless people.

Recommendation 72

The Committee recommends that federal and provincial governments, acting internally, bilaterally and/or multilaterally, review current policies and programs and new initiatives in the context of eliminating and avoiding both gaps and duplication, through a whole-of-government approach to poverty, housing and homelessness issues.

Recommendation 73

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue and expand support to Statistics Canada for the collection, analysis and more affordable dissemination of data important to the evaluation and improvement of social programs with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness.

Recommendation 74

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue to support knowledge exchange with respect to poverty, housing and homelessness.