



# the view from here

Manitobans call for a poverty reduction plan



CCPA

CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
MANITOBA OFFICE

## ABOUT THE COVER

CCPA thanks Rhian Brynjolson for kindly allowing us to use the image of her artwork titled *The View From Here*. The original artwork is acrylic latex on canvas, 26" x 30". Rhian Brynjolson is a visual artist, children's book illustrator and author of *Art & Illustration for the Classroom*. Rhian teaches *Art and English* in an alternative high school in Winnipeg.

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# **the view from here**

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# CONTENTS

- ENDORSEMENTS..... iii
- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....vii
  - Our Poverty Indicators..... viii
  - Our Recommendations..... ix
    - 1. HOUSING .....IX
    - 2. INCOME SECURITY.....X
  - Employment and Income Assistance (EIA)..... x
    - Jobs ..... x
    - Wages..... x
    - Employment Standards and Labour Legislation ..... xi
  - 3. EDUCATION .....XI
    - Early Learning and Child Care ..... xi
    - Kindergarten to Grade 12 ..... xi
    - Post Secondary Education ..... xii
    - Adult Learning and Training..... xii
  - 4. NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY APPROACHES .....XII
  - 5. TRANSPORTATION .....XIII
  - 6. DISABILITY SUPPORTS .....XIII
  - 7. HEALTH.....XIII
- INTRODUCTION..... 1
  - Poverty Reduction Plans: lessons from other jurisdictions ..... 2
  - Important Features of a Poverty Reduction Plan ..... 5
  - The Case for a Made in Manitoba Poverty Reduction Plan ..... 7
    - Fighting Poverty Is Just and Ethical ..... 8
    - Fighting Poverty Is Fair ..... 8
    - Fighting Poverty Is Affordable ..... 8
    - Fighting Poverty Is Economical..... 9
    - Fighting Poverty Reflects Fundamental Canadian Values ..... 9
  - A Call to Action ..... 10
- THE STATE OF POVERTY IN MANITOBA..... 12
  - Measuring Poverty ..... 13
  - Who Is Poor? ..... 14
    - Gender Age and Family Type ..... 14
    - Aboriginal Population ..... 16
    - Recent Immigrants ..... 18
    - Persons with disabilities ..... 18
    - Make Poverty History Principles ..... 20

OUR PLAN FOR MANITOBA.....	20
Consultations.....	20
A Comprehensive and Coordinated Approach .....	21
Targets and timelines to measure progress .....	22
Accountability Mechanisms.....	23
Recommended Priority Actions.....	24
1. HOUSING .....	24
2. INCOME SECURITY.....	27
Employment and Income Assistance .....	28
Jobs .....	29
Wages.....	31
Employment Standards and Labour Legislation .....	32
3. EDUCATION .....	34
Early Learning and Child Care .....	34
Kindergarten to Grade 12 .....	36
Post-Secondary Education.....	38
Adult Learning and Training.....	40
4. NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY APPROACHES .....	41
5. TRANSPORTATION .....	45
6. DISABILITY SUPPORTS .....	46
7. HEALTH.....	47
CONCLUSION.....	50
ENDNOTES.....	52
REFERENCES .....	57

## ENDORSEMENTS

CCPA Manitoba and Make Poverty History Manitoba will continue to reach out to Manitobans to endorse *The view from here: Manitobans call for a poverty reduction plan*. The following organizations have endorsed this plan. Individuals and organizations are encouraged to add their names to the list of supporters at [www.makepovertyhistory.ca](http://www.makepovertyhistory.ca)

Aboriginal Languages of Manitoba  
Aboriginal Literacy Foundation  
Aboriginal Visioning for the North End  
Better Fathers Inc.  
The Brandon Friendship Centre  
Brandon Labour Council  
Canadian Federation of Students  
Canadian Mental Health Association-Winnipeg Region  
Canadian Mental Health Association - Westman Region  
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Manitoba  
Community Education Development Association  
Canadian Community Economic Development Network  
Community Financial Counselling Services  
Community Unemployed Health Centre  
Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, The United Church of Canada  
Daniel McIntyre St. Matthews Community Association  
Disabled Women's Network of Manitoba  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Manitoba  
Faculty of Social Work - University of Manitoba  
The Family Centre of Winnipeg  
Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM)  
Jubilee Fund  
Just Income Coalition

Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.  
 Klinik Community Health Centre  
 Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre  
 Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres  
 Manitoba Association of School Trustees  
 Manitoba Association of Social Workers/Manitoba Institute of Registered Social  
 Workers  
 Manitoba Childcare Association  
 Manitoba Federation of Labour  
 Manitoba Government and General Employees Union (MGEU)  
 Manitoba Indian Education Association  
 Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council  
 Manitoba League for Persons with Disabilities  
 Manitoba Nurses Union  
 Manitoba Right to Housing Coalition  
 Misipawistik Cree Nation  
 Mount Carmel Clinic  
 Native Women's Transition Centre  
 Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad  
 North End Food Security  
 North End Women's Centre  
 Pembina Trails School Division  
 People First Winnipeg  
 Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence  
 Provincial Council of Women  
 Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY)  
 Rossbrook House  
 Salvation Army Prairie Division  
 Social Planning Council of Winnipeg  
 Success Skills Centre  
 St. Andrews River Heights United Church  
 St. Ignatius Housing Committee  
 Taking Charge Inc.  
 The Center for Aboriginal Human Resource Development  
 The Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg  
 The Aboriginal Business Development Center  
 The Canadian Muslim Women's Institute  
 The Islamic Social Services Association (ISSA)  
 The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents  
 Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation  
 Urban Youth Adventures  
 United Nations Platform for Action Committee (UNPAC)  
 University of Manitoba Student's Union  
 University of Winnipeg Students' Association  
 Wabung Abinoonjiiag  
 West Broadway Community Ministry



West Broadway Neighbourhood Housing Resource Centre  
West Central Women's Resource Centre  
Wolseley Family Place  
Women's Health Clinic



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GOVERNMENTS ACROSS CANADA are implementing comprehensive plans with targets and timelines aimed at reducing poverty and social exclusion. The Province of Manitoba has taken important steps to address poverty and social exclusion in recent years, however, much more remains to be done. It has to be acknowledged that progress has been made in each of the relevant policy areas. But, unlike a growing number of provinces, Manitoba has not implemented a comprehensive plan that shows Manitobans how far it has come and where it plans to go in its efforts to reduce poverty and social exclusion. This is an important part of a poverty reduction plan. In absence of a provincial government process, CCPA-Manitoba, in collaboration with Make Poverty History Manitoba and many other organizations, has gathered the ideas and policy recommendations resulting from consultations and interviews with hundreds of individuals across Manitoba. Through our research and dialogue we have put together what we believe to be a reasonable and realistic plan. Much of our plan builds on the progress that has been made by the Province. At time of publication, 70 organizations have endorsed our plan and many more continue to sign on. We hope that the Manitoba government will too.

This report looks at the emergence of poverty reduction plans in other jurisdictions; it outlines the essential components of a meaningful poverty reduction plan; it makes the case for a made in Manitoba poverty reduction plan; it includes the latest poverty statistics for Manitoba; it proposes indicators with targets and timelines to measure progress; and it outlines a large package of policies and programs that should be at the heart of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan, highlighting items for immediate action.

## OUR POVERTY INDICATORS

We recommend that the following poverty indicators be included in the plan to help monitor the impact that the plan is having on poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba. We recommend that a trajectory line be applied to many of the indicators below to make transparent the extent to which the Province is on track to meet the established benchmarks.

- Using Statistics Canada's after-tax low-income cut-off (LICO-AT), reduce Manitoba's poverty rate from 11.4% to 8.5% in five years, and to 5.5% in ten years (approximately a 25% reduction in five years and a 50% reduction within a decade).
- Ensure the poverty rate (using the LICO-AT) for children, female lone-parent households, single women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants likewise declines by 25% in five years, and by 50% in ten years, in recognition that these populations are particularly vulnerable to poverty.
- Within two years, ensure there are no Manitobans living 50 per cent or more below the LICO-AT.
- Reduce the share of Manitobans facing "core housing need" (and paying more than 30% of their income on housing) by half, by 2015.
- Reduce the waiting list for Manitoba Housing by half within four years. This must not be accomplished by reducing the number of people who are eligible or by elevating qualification barriers.
- Improve food security for low-income individuals and families:
- Reduce food bank use from 3.4% to 1.7%, a 50% reduction, within ten years, and set a date for the elimination of food banks in Manitoba.
- Reduce the share of low-wage workers. The median wage in Manitoba was \$17 per hour in 2008. Therefore, two thirds of the median, a common measure of low-wage work, was \$11.33. Manitoba should seek to reduce the share of workers earning less than two thirds of the median wage every year.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Make Poverty History Manitoba has consulted with organizations and individuals across the province for their input on what a Manitoba poverty reduction plan should include. While many very good ideas resulted from these discussions, we have selected the following initiatives for immediate action because we believe they will have the broadest impact on poverty reduction and lead to greater social inclusion in Manitoba. Implementation of these initiatives should allow Manitoba to reach its targets as measured by the indicators identified above. Each recommendation focuses on addressing one of seven key areas that require attention if poverty reduction efforts are to be successful in Manitoba.

### 1. HOUSING

***Ensure that accessible, safe, and affordable housing is available to all Manitobans.***

1-1. Increase the supply of non-profit, rent geared to income housing by a minimum of 300 units each year for five years. This, accompanied by a contribution of 700 units by the Federal Government, will help achieve the much needed total of 1,000 new units each year. Priority should be given to increasing social housing in Northern Manitoba and in high need urban centres such as Winnipeg and Brandon.

1-2. Increase housing related benefits, including Employment and Income Assistance Shelter Allowances and Manitoba Shelter Benefits by 20% and index them to annual increases in the Rent Increase Guidelines.

1-3. Invest sufficient financial resources to retrofit all existing public housing units to acceptable standards by 2014.

## 2. INCOME SECURITY

*Ensure that all Manitobans receive a sufficient income to meet their basic needs and participate fully in community life.*

### EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME ASSISTANCE (EIA)

2-1. Over the next two years, EIA benefits for all categories should be increased until they are equal to the inflation-adjusted 1992 levels. This would eliminate the significant erosion in the value of social assistance of the past fifteen years. The rates should then be indexed to increases in the cost of living.

2-2 As a second step, within four years, develop and implement a transparent mechanism to establish livable basic income support rates that reflects the actual cost of purchasing redefined basic needs, including: telephone service, recreation, transportation, and other basic amenities including food, clothing, shelter and utilities.

2-3. Allow EIA recipients to claim child maintenance payments as earned income in recognition of the unpaid work that goes into child-rearing.

### JOBS

2-4. Increase access to government jobs for equity seeking groups.

2-5. Include targeted training and hiring of equity seeking groups for all infrastructure projects that are supported by public funds.

### WAGES

2-6. Incrementally increase the minimum wage per hour to the before-tax Low- Income Cut-Off (LICO-BT), and index annually to the rate of inflation, by 2011.

2-7. Introduce Living Wage legislation to ensure that all businesses that are contracted to provide services to the government pay their workers a living wage.

## EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AND LABOUR LEGISLATION

2-8. Introduce a pro-rated formula to ensure that part-time, casual, temporary, and other workers not employed in traditional full-time jobs are awarded the same rights and benefits enjoyed by full-time workers.

## 3. EDUCATION

***Ensure that all Manitobans have access to quality educational programs through which they can develop the skills and knowledge that is required to gain meaningful employment and participate in society as informed citizens.***

### EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

3-1. Expedite Family Choices: Manitoba 's Five-Year Agenda for Childcare and Early Learning.

3-2. Fund market competitive compensation for all positions and all levels of experience in accordance with a research based uniform salary scale that can be applied across the province in order to attract and retain the childcare workforce.

3-3 Establish within five years, 30 head-start programs in high-needs schools across Manitoba

### KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12

3-4 Increase operating grants funding to school divisions by at least 5% annually to achieve an 80:20 ratio of provincial general revenues to locally generated education property taxation. (Excluding provincial contributions to capital construction, teachers' pension plan and education property tax rebates).

3-5. Increase the number and broaden the distribution of alternative learning opportunities and career pathways for non-university bound secondary students in all regions of the province.

3-6. Establish a mechanism that ensures interdepartmental coordination and funding sources to support in-school delivery of health-related, settlement, and social services and programs

for vulnerable student populations (that is, low socio-economic status, Aboriginal people, recent immigrants).

#### POST SECONDARY EDUCATION

3-7. Increase the minimum annual living allowance of the student aid program to the after-tax LICO.

3-8. Eliminate full-time status criteria as an eligibility requirement for Manitoba Student Aid loans and bursaries, and introduce a pro-rated living expense amount for part-time students.

3-9. Index funding for Manitoba's ACCESS programs to the growth of the Aboriginal student body in Manitoba, based on annual high school graduation rates.

#### ADULT LEARNING AND TRAINING

3-10. Equally recognize the value of education and training by extending income supports for social assistance recipients who wish to pursue education and training beyond the current two-year limits.

3-11. Increase financial support and access to education and training programs for high demand skills and jobs that offer low-income individuals a career path and long term security.

### 4. NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY APPROACHES

***Ensure low-income communities have sufficient resources to enable their residents to actively participate in the improvement of their lives and the communities they live in.***

4-1. Increase financial support to Neighbourhoods Alive! to allow neighbourhood renewal corporations to scale up their community revitalization activities.

4-2. Increase the number of Adult Learning Centres, including on-site childcare centres, in low-income neighbourhoods.

4-3. Establish within 5 years, 30 parent-child centres in high-needs schools across Manitoba



4-4. Increase financial support to school divisions to encourage after school and summer use of school recreational facilities, particularly in rural and northern areas and the inner city.

4-5. Expand programs that build linkages between recreational and justice structures, and that act as a preventative mechanism by providing at risk children and youth with recreational opportunities.

## **5. TRANSPORTATION**

***Ensure that accessible and affordable public transportation is available to all Manitobans.***

5-1. Make funding to municipalities conditional upon providing free public transportation for people on Employment and Income Assistance during off-peak hours.

5-2. Make funding to municipalities conditional upon ensuring that all forms of public transportation are easily accessible and adhere to the principles of Universal Design, while providing incentives for the private sector to do the same.

## **6. DISABILITY SUPPORTS**

***Ensure that all persons with disabilities in Manitoba achieve full inclusion in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of society.***

6-1. Develop and enact strong and effective legislation that requires the progressive removal of existing barriers for persons with disabilities, and prevents the creation of new ones.

6-2. Ensure a seamless and lifelong continuum of support services for persons with disabilities.

## **7. HEALTH**

***Ensure that publicly funded physical and mental health services are accessible to all Manitobans.***

7-1. Continue to provide health services through a publicly administered, publicly funded, non-profit delivery system to ensure equal access for all Manitobans.

7-2. Integrate into Manitoba's Healthy Living Strategy an explicit goal to reduce health inequities along with measures to track the progress of key indicators.

7-3. Extend dental and vision care benefits to all low-income people using an income-based sliding scale model similar to that used by Pharmacare.

7-4. Ensure primary mental health services are available as part of a fundamental component of a comprehensive health system.

## INTRODUCTION

GOVERNMENTS ACROSS CANADA are implementing comprehensive plans with targets and timelines aimed at reducing poverty and social exclusion. The Province of Manitoba has taken important steps to address poverty and social exclusion in recent years, however, much more remains to be done. It has to be acknowledged that progress has been made in each of the relevant policy areas. But, unlike a growing number of provinces, Manitoba has not implemented a comprehensive plan that shows Manitobans how far it has come and where it plans to go in its efforts to reduce poverty and social exclusion. This is an important part of a poverty reduction plan. In absence of a provincial government process, CCPA-Manitoba, in collaboration with Make Poverty History Manitoba and many other organizations, has gathered the ideas and policy recommendations resulting from consultations and interviews with hundreds of individuals across Manitoba. Through our research and dialogue we have put together what we believe to be a reasonable and realistic plan. Much of our plan builds on the progress that has been made by the Province. At time of publication, 70 organizations have endorsed our plan and many more continue to sign on. We hope that the Manitoba government will too.

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*Used in its broadest sense, social exclusion speaks to the lack of income as central to all exclusion, but it includes many other dimensions, such as health, education, access to services, housing, debt, quality of life, dignity and autonomy. Social exclusion can describe something more complex than is colloquially understood by poverty, in that it is dynamic, multi-dimensional, often deeply rooted and relational. It allows room for understanding that discriminatory and exclusionary practices may be causes of poverty.<sup>1</sup>*

## **POVERTY REDUCTION PLANS: LESSONS FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS**

Increasing poverty in many European countries, the U.S. and Canada has been well documented. Globalization has led to an increase in contingent, low-wage jobs and, in many cases, to growing numbers of people being detached from the formal labour market, unable to secure a place in the paid labour force. Many end up living in situations of poverty and social exclusion. Women, Aboriginal people, recent immigrants, and people with disabilities are over-represented among them.

Many governments around the world are starting to recognize that market solutions will not adequately address poverty and social exclusion. This is especially so given the urgent global economic crisis, and its roots in an over-reliance on unregulated markets. But even in the good times, some governments began to recognize the need to do more than build a strong economy and maintain low unemployment rates. They have responded to the call for comprehensive, multi-department approaches to address poverty and social exclusion in their countries by introducing national strategies and action plans. While strategies may now need to change in light of economic realities, what has not changed is the need for comprehensive policy approaches. Indeed, now they will be more important than ever.

While the Canadian government continues to show no sign of moving forward with a comprehensive plan for our country, many Canadian provinces have begun to take the challenge of poverty and social exclusion seriously. Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and most recently Ontario and Nova Scotia now have plans in place. New Brunswick has announced its intention to do the same. Provincial governments have looked to the European Union (EU) for models of practice that have evolved since the mid 90s.

In 2000, EU countries established the Social Inclusion Process with the aim of eradicating poverty by 2010. This was followed by the development of a framework for national strategy development and policy coordination between EU nations based on five key challenges.

1. To eradicate child poverty by breaking the vicious circle of intergenerational inheritance
2. To make labour markets truly inclusive
3. To ensure decent housing for everyone
4. To overcome discrimination and increase the integration of people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants
5. To tackle financial exclusion and over indebtedness

The 2000 process has contributed to the development of the poverty reduction plans that have been initiated in several EU countries. For example:

In 1999, the Blair government in the United Kingdom pledged to cut child poverty in half by 2010 and eliminate it by 2020. Its vision included partnerships with both the non-government and private sector and included targets for improving the quality of affordable housing, education and health services as well as the minimum wage and child benefits. By 2004-2005, there were approximately 800,000 fewer children and one million fewer pensioners living in low-income households than in 1996-1997.<sup>2</sup>

Ireland adopted the *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* in 1997. Since then the government of Ireland has released a couple of national action plans the most recent being the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*. The plan “has a strong emphasis on targets, clearly defined and measurable.” The Strategy recognizes the complexity of poverty and social exclusion and outlines a comprehensive, multi-department plan. Overall, information to date suggests that Ireland’s National Anti-poverty Strategies have been highly successful, even exceeding some of the targets set in 1997. Between 2003 and 2005 the percentage of people 65 and over living in consistent poverty decreased from 5.8% to 3.7%. The proportion of lone-parent households living in consistent poverty decreased from 33.6% to 27.2%. The proportion for people with disabilities living in consistent poverty declined from 22.4% to 17.4%. The percentage of children under 16 years of age living in consistent poverty also decreased from 12.4% to 10.6%. Overall, more than 250,000 people, including 100,000 children, have been lifted out of hardship and deprivation in less than ten years.<sup>3</sup>

In 1999, the Scottish House of Commons released *Social Justice: A Scotland where everyone matters*. This report laid out a policy vision and targets. *The Policy Framework for Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland* was later released in 2000, providing an overview of processes put in place in keeping with their vision. Government measures aimed at reducing poverty seemed to have contributed to a reduction in poverty in Scotland from 23% in 2001-2002 to 18% by the end of 2006.<sup>4</sup>

*Sweden’s Strategy Report for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008* outlines very specific objectives that were developed in consultation with non-government organizations (NGOs). The Swedish model emphasizes universal welfare policy in addition to active labour-market policy. Sweden, like other social democratic Scandinavian countries, continues to lead the way in its commitment to greater social equality and alleviation of poverty. Scandinavian countries have long used public policy, including tax policy, as a means to redistribute wealth and reduce poverty. Sweden’s poverty rate is among the lowest in the world and about half the Canadian rate<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the closest Canada has come to making a national commitment to poverty reduction was in 1989 when the House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000. But action to follow was less than enthusiastic. Some initiatives were put in place, such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit Supplement. But government departments continued to take an uncoordinated approach to program development, and overlooked the complexity of issues that would be more adequately addressed through a comprehensive strategy linking child poverty to the poverty and exclusion faced by their parents. The result of this narrow approach is that child poverty rates remain as high in 2008 as when the resolution was declared in 1989.

While the Canadian government has chosen not to develop a plan of action to address poverty and social exclusion, there have been some interesting developments at the provincial level.

The Quebec government initiated a growing trend toward poverty and exclusion policy with the passing of the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* in 2002. Central requirements laid out in the Act were the development of a government action plan to raise low incomes and the implementation of a publicly reporting advisory committee to evaluate progress. Quebec's *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* includes targets and timelines. Since 2004, Quebec reports investing \$3.3-billion over five years in its strategy in initiatives that include increases to the minimum wage, increased commitment to housing, a new work premium for low-income earners; enhanced financial support for low-income families; and an Employment Pact aimed at integrating youth into the labour market. According to the most recent progress report on Quebec's action plan, there were almost 25,000 fewer recipients of last-resort financial assistance in 2003 compared with 2007. The number of children living in families receiving last-resort financial assistance was reduced by 14.2% over the same period.

In June 2006, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador introduced *Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*. The plan, developed in consultation with NGOs, includes specific targets and timelines. The initiative engages participation across government, and is coordinated through the department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment. While it is still early to evaluate progress, the anti-poverty community is optimistic and generally pleased with the government's commitment to the initiative.

More recently the governments of Nova Scotia and Ontario have initiated processes leading to the development of comprehensive strategies in their provinces. In December 2007 Nova Scotia passed Bill 94, the *Poverty Reduction Working Group Act*, followed by the 2008 Report of the Poverty Reduction Working Group. The government has responded to the recommendations of

the working group in the April 2009 release of its poverty reduction strategy: *Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity*. The plan includes the creation of a new position in government: a coordinator of poverty reduction. It also establishes a committee of ministers from nine government departments that will be responsible for guiding, directing and sharing accountability for the strategy. Despite having been in the midst of experiencing a much worse recession than Manitoba, Ontario released *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* in December 2008. Its plan includes an intention to legislate the provincial commitment to poverty reduction, making future governments legally bound to the objective.

While it might be expected that a social democratic government would show leadership in this area, Manitoba's New Democratic Party (NDP) government has hesitated to formalize a comprehensive multi-department approach to addressing poverty. In spite of the advocacy efforts of NGOs, elected NDP government officials maintain that they have implemented many initiatives aimed at addressing poverty and they don't see a need to put forward a strategy with timelines and targets. In May of 2008, Manitoba's Liberal party introduced *Bill 226—The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act*, fashioned after the Quebec legislation. At time of publication, this bill was in second reading. We urge the Provincial government to take this opportunity to acknowledge that a comprehensive legislated plan is important for Manitoba. Although most countries identified have implemented their poverty reduction plans during better global economic times, Manitoba can still learn from their successes, and use them to develop a made in Manitoba plan for poverty reduction. If Ontario, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Quebec can do so, why can't we?.

## **IMPORTANT FEATURES OF A POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN**

While poverty reduction and social inclusion strategies are taking somewhat different shape across parts of the country, they appear to have some common features that can provide a lesson for Manitoba.

First, a comprehensive and coordinated approach is essential to a meaningful poverty reduction plan. The causes of poverty and social exclusion are complex and often deeply rooted. Solutions are equally complex and require multiple policy and program interventions. These realities need to be reflected in a poverty reduction plan if it is going to be effective. A comprehensive approach would include an increase in income benefits; an expansion of social housing; increased access to childcare; increased access to recreation; increases in the minimum wage toward a living wage; and establishing policies that provide education and training opportunities that lead to good jobs rather than the precarious cycle of low-wage jobs that is the reality for

many. These are just some examples of crucial supports that together address the multiple dimensions and causes of poverty.

Second, a process to consult meaningfully with citizens is an important element that should be used throughout the development and evolution of a poverty reduction plan. The social exclusion legislation adopted in Quebec, the poverty reduction strategies established in Newfoundland and Ontario, and others in earlier stages such as Nova Scotia have engaged NGOs and anti-poverty advocates in identifying key issues and targets. All Manitoba citizens interested in building a more inclusive community, including anti-poverty advocates, community workers, progressive business and labour leaders as well as individuals most affected by poverty, should be consulted.

Third, the most effective strategies have been those that integrate targets and timelines for each action that will be taken to address poverty. They also set targets and timelines for specific poverty indicators so that progress can be measured against them. While economic circumstances beyond the control of governments can quickly throw a wrench in the best of plans, setting targets and timelines shows that governments are serious about poverty reduction. Governments that have taken this step are to be commended for taking the risk. Targets and timelines make governments accountable and provide incentive to follow through with action. Without them, strategies can become little more than a public-relations exercise.

Fourth, communication and collaboration across government departments is another essential component. Departments must communicate in order to coordinate government activities and ensure all are working towards the achievement of common goals with respect to poverty reduction and inclusion. This can ensure that departments are not working at cross purposes and it can increase efficiency by preventing unnecessary duplication and exposing gaps in policy and programming.

Newfoundland has a unit responsible for coordinating poverty reduction activities across governments. When combined with strong political support, such as in the case of Newfoundland where the poverty reduction plan is prominently profiled on the government's main website, coordination across government can help ensure that a comprehensive approach is taken to reduce poverty. Such a mechanism can ensure that all departments are integrating poverty reduction and inclusion objectives in policy and program development by examining their policies through a social inclusion lens that determines the impact policies may have on poverty reduction and inclusion objectives.

Fifth, annually evaluating and reporting on progress is a critical feature of a poverty reduction plan. EU strategies are regularly evaluated by an independent evaluator to show where gains have been made and where more work is required, and to make recommendations when needed. Quebec



legislation requires that departments evaluate progress annually. This is an essential component of putting an accountability mechanism in place to help ensure that a poverty reduction plan will be effective and credible.

## **THE CASE FOR A MADE IN MANITOBA POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN**

Issues of poverty and social exclusion are challenging governments all over the world and Manitoba is no exception. Far too many people continue to have inadequate incomes and struggle to meet their basic needs and overcome barriers to full participation in society. Poverty exists in Manitoba and a comprehensive plan needs to be developed to effectively reduce it.

It is also notable that recent polling shows that Manitobans are deeply concerned about poverty and are in support of developing a comprehensive plan.

In 2008, the CCPA commissioned Environics Research to undertake a poll of Canadians to get a sense of what governments should be doing to reduce poverty. The results of the survey showed that the general public in all provinces is far out in front of our politicians on the poverty issue. According to the poll:

- 87% of Manitobans agree that if countries such as the U.K. and Sweden can reduce poverty, so can Canada.
- 86% believe that if governments take concrete action, poverty in Canada can be greatly reduced.
- 86% say both the Prime Minister and the provincial Premiers need to set real targets and timelines to reduce poverty.
- 87% said they would be proud if their Premier took the lead on poverty reduction.
- 86% say that Canada should try to distinguish itself in the world as a country where no one lives in poverty.
- 80% of Manitobans call on provincial government to bring in a concrete strategy to reduce poverty at least 25% over the next five years.

Participants were asked for their views on what we should do about this issue in a recession and to identify what sorts of actions would be helpful in reducing poverty. A significant majority (71%) say “in a recession, it is more important than ever to make helping poor Canadians a priority.” As for the sorts of actions that would be most effective in reducing poverty: 90% call

*Seventy-five percent of Canadians would be better off if their provincial governments had invested in public services instead of broad-based income tax cuts.*

Hugh Mackenzie and Richard Shillington, *Canada's Quiet Bargain—the benefits of public spending*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2009.

for an increase in the minimum wage to raise workers above the poverty line; 79% recommend better income support to help poor families with the costs of raising kids; 85% support the creation of more low-cost childcare spaces; 92% want more affordable housing; 96% endorse greater investment in job and skill training for individuals who are between jobs; and 77% want welfare rates tied to the cost of living.

In sum, Manitobans want change and inspired leadership in addressing these issues both nationally and provincially. It is simply the right thing to do.

#### FIGHTING POVERTY IS JUST AND ETHICAL

Combating poverty is not an act of charity, but rather is required by our commitment to justice and individual dignity. It is fully in line with the domestic human rights commitments of our federal and provincial governments, and it is required by our international obligations. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, for example, asserts the right of all individuals to “social security” and the right of every individual to an adequate standard of living “including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”<sup>6</sup>

#### FIGHTING POVERTY IS FAIR

Our nation has been built on principles of collective responsibility for one another. A surprising number of Canadians are just a step away from the poverty that can arise from the loss of a job, the loss of a spouse or the loss of good health. The people who helped plan Canada's social programs many years ago realized the often fragile and contingent nature of economic wellbeing and the importance of programs to help people in need. This has once again been made clear by the current global economic crisis, and the hardship it is creating for so many Canadians.

#### FIGHTING POVERTY IS AFFORDABLE

Calculations derived from Statistics Canada show that the after-tax incomes of all poor people in Manitoba could be brought up to Statistics Canada's low income cut-off (LICO)—the most commonly used poverty line—for a total cost of just under \$516-million a year. Some of that money would have to come from government, but much of it could be provided by employers paying a living wage. Closing this “poverty gap”—the total depth of poverty of all low-income residents—is easily affordable in a province like Manitoba where the “poverty gap” represents a mere 1.1 per cent of the overall provincial economy (Manitoba's GDP in 2007 was \$48.5-billion).

The Province would have more financial resources to put toward the fight against poverty if less emphasis was placed on tax cuts. According to a recent government news release, tax cuts announced since 1999 have amounted to annual savings of more than \$1-billion dollars in taxes for Manitobans and businesses. This is twice the amount needed to bring all low-income Manitobans up at least to the poverty line. However, tax cuts have hardly benefited Manitobans that fall into the lowest tax bracket and do nothing for those that earn incomes so low they don't pay any taxes. In fact, tax cuts come at a cost to Manitobans living in low income. The cost takes the form of lost government revenue. These tax savings represent \$1 billion dollars of annual revenue that could have been available to spend on affordable housing, childcare, job training, transportation, and health. The loss of government investment in these areas costs low-income Manitobans much more than the amount, if any, they save from tax cuts.

#### FIGHTING POVERTY IS ECONOMICAL

We all pay for persistent poverty and homelessness. Study after study links poverty with poorer health, more young people in trouble with the law, higher rates of incarceration and higher justice system costs, more demands on numerous social and community services, more stress on family members, and diminished chances of success at school. We know that poverty among children in particular has tremendous costs over the long run because it affects children's cognitive development and future life chances. Children who live in poor families are at a higher risk of becoming involved in crime, dropping out of school, and relying on more income supports and social services over their lifetime. Homelessness is particularly costly, both to society at large and to the public treasury.

#### FIGHTING POVERTY REFLECTS FUNDAMENTAL CANADIAN VALUES

Canadians pride themselves on their understanding of the importance of looking after one another, and of providing a social safety net that catches those in need and treats them with compassion. It is the responsibility of the Province to provide a social safety net that allows people to navigate a path out of poverty. Instead, current provincial policies fail to provide many low-income Manitobans with the assistance and resources they need to escape a life of hardship. It is often said that the true test of a society is how it cares for its most vulnerable and how well it provides for the common good. Currently, our society fails this test. Fighting poverty is absolutely essential to any hope of realizing a just and compassionate society.

The reasons for fighting poverty are abundant and evident. A poverty reduction plan can be an extremely helpful tool with which to approach poverty reduction and social exclusion for several reasons. It can:

- Demonstrate that governments take seriously the issue of poverty and social exclusion and aim to make it a priority.
- Highlight existing initiatives, expose gaps, and provide direction for future action.
- Provide a mechanism for governments to engage citizens in discussion about what might be incorporated in a comprehensive strategy.
- Increase transparency and help hold governments accountable to their commitment to poverty reduction.
- Act as an education tool to raise awareness of the complex nature of poverty and social exclusion and why prioritizing its elimination is important for the entire community.

Many governments continue to hang their hats on economic growth as the sole solution to poverty. Manitoba has benefitted from strong economic growth for several years, yet poverty remains deep and persistent. The Province has implemented some important initiatives to address poverty and social exclusion. For example, Manitoba's childcare plan is arguably the best in the country outside of Quebec and the elimination of the national child benefit supplement claw back has helped many families struggling to survive on social assistance. Still, the fact that Manitoba has the second highest child poverty rate before tax, third after tax, and 11.4% of the total population in low income (after tax, 2006) suggests that we have a lot more to do. Without a comprehensive plan we won't really know exactly how far we have come and we certainly won't know where we are going. The Province needs to work in collaboration with the community to begin this process so that we are working together to make poverty reduction and social exclusion a priority.

## **A CALL TO ACTION**

A comprehensive poverty reduction plan will require the participation and cooperation of citizens, the private sector, the non-governmental sector, and government agencies and authorities across many sectors (health, education, economic development, labour, etc.). Furthermore, while the recommendations we lay out focus on actions to be taken by the Province, it in no way absolves other levels of governments from responsibility. Combating poverty in Manitoba will require the coordinated efforts of all levels of government. However, in many of the areas outlined, the Province has been left with major challenges because the Federal Government has either shirked its responsibility or refused to step up to the plate to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But while we recognize that all levels of government have a role to play, we believe that the Province must take the lead role in developing and implementing a plan using

existing tools, including provincial taxes and federal transfers to meet timelines and targets, and should be held primarily accountable for the plan's success. Meanwhile it should continue to work with provinces across the country to call for an increased federal role.

There is no excuse for poverty and homelessness in Canada. As the policy recommendations outlined in this paper make clear, there is nothing inevitable about poverty and homelessness in a society as rich as ours. If we commit to a bold plan now, we should begin to see a reduction in poverty and social exclusion within a few short years. There is no quick fix to the kind of poverty we are facing in Manitoba, and the Province must recognize that a long-term commitment will be required.

## THE STATE OF POVERTY IN MANITOBA

MANITOBA HAS EXPERIENCED stable economic growth over the last number of years, accompanied by relatively low unemployment rates and improved average weekly earnings. Unfortunately, this has passed unnoticed by many Manitobans who continue to live in poverty and remain socially excluded.

In broad relative terms, poverty can be defined as “people’s inability to participate in the customary life of society...their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.”<sup>7</sup>

Between 1986 and 2006, Manitoba’s poverty rate has remained above the national rate. Both rates have been declining since the late 1990s, although less steadily in Manitoba. In 2006, (the most recent year from which data are available) 11.4% of Manitobans—125,000 people—were living on low incomes. This figure is almost a full percentage point above the national rate and the third highest of all provinces after British Columbia and Quebec.<sup>9</sup> In addition, in 2005 Winnipeg and Vancouver had the highest poverty rate of all large urban areas in Canada at 15%<sup>10</sup>.

Poverty rates tell us how many people are living in poverty at a particular moment in time, but it is also important to consider the depth and duration of poverty. These indicators look at how far below the poverty line the poor are and how long they remain below it. In 2006, the average poor person in Manitoba had a yearly income that was \$7,700 below the after-tax LICO.<sup>11</sup> This tells us that they are not living just below the poverty line, they are living far below it. The total cost of bringing the incomes of every poor person in Manitoba to the poverty line is just \$516-million per year—a mere 1.1% of the overall provincial economy.<sup>12</sup> Human Resources and Social Development Canada reports that 5.5% of Canadians and 4.6% of Manitobans were in

*Poverty, poverty,  
poverty, poverty,  
and poverty are the  
major problems.  
Racism, violence  
against women,  
violence against girls.  
Gangs. Drug dealers.  
Addiction. And  
poverty.*

The Promise of Investment  
in *Community-Led  
Renewal: State of the  
Inner City Report: 2005.  
Part II: A View from  
the Neighbourhoods*,  
November 2005, pages 22  
and 24.

## MEASURING POVERTY

*While there is considerable debate about the efficacy of different poverty measures, Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-off (LICO) is commonly used to indicate poverty.*

*The LICO is a hybrid of both an absolute and a relative measure. As an income threshold below which a family spends a larger proportion of its income than the average family on the basic necessities of shelter, food, and clothing, it references both expenditures on basic items and the distribution of income. According to the most recent base, the 1992 Family Expenditures Survey (FES), the average family spent 43% of its after-tax income on shelter, food, and clothing. A family spending greater than 20% of its income than the average family on these three necessities (i.e. 63% or more of their income in 1992) is considered to be in "straightened circumstances" and below the LICO. LICOs for subsequent years are calculated by applying the Consumer Price Index to the base year cut-offs. LICOs are derived for seven family sizes and five community sizes, and produced in relation to both before-tax and after-tax incomes (after government transfers).*

*This document defines poverty rates in relation to the after-tax LICO, unless otherwise specified. That is, we consider those with incomes below the after-tax LICO in their community to be living in poverty. Statistics Canada prefers the after-tax LICO to the before-tax LICO, as it better reflects the redistributive impact of Canada's tax/transfer*

*system. While the LICO is not a federally authorized poverty line, it is commonly used as such by organizations such as the National Council on Welfare. Similarly, the Manitoba government has traditionally referenced LICO when discussing poverty rates.*

*It is important to acknowledge that the LICO cannot be applied to First Nations communities. The Census provides no evidence that the incomes on reserve are either more or less adequate than among Status Indians in Winnipeg. In both settings, median incomes are extremely low by Canadian standards and a majority of families and individuals subsist on incomes below an equivalent of the Statistics Canada LICO.<sup>8</sup> That being said, the poverty statistics in this report would likely be worse if they were to include the percentage of people in First Nations communities living below the LICO. The fact that they are not included cannot be an excuse for inaction. The Province must work with First Nations leaders to develop additional poverty measures for use in First Nations communities. Statistics Canada also produces the Low Income Measure (LIM), which is a purely relative measure set at one half of the median income. The LIM is similar to the measure used in the European Union and since it is income- rather than expenditure-based, can be applied to every Canadian family including those living in First Nations communities.*

poverty for four years or more between 1999 and 2004<sup>13</sup>. Between 1999 and 2005 38% of all Manitoba children lived in poverty for at least one year, 27% lived in poverty for one to three years, and 11.3% for four or more years.<sup>14</sup> Poverty reduction strategies must consider the possibility that solutions for tackling persistent poverty may differ from solutions for tackling poverty more generally. These differences must be reflected in the actions that governments commit themselves to take to reduce poverty.

## WHO IS POOR?

### GENDER AGE AND FAMILY TYPE

Although overall poverty rates have decreased over the last number of years, the gender gap in poverty persists. Women continue to be at a greater risk for poverty compared with men. Consequently, there are more women than men living in poverty in Manitoba. This fact holds true for all family types and age groups (except for males under eighteen). Elderly and Aboriginal women, women with disabilities and mental illness, and female newcomers are among the poorest of the poor in our province.<sup>15</sup> The gender gap in poverty within the overall poor population is relatively narrow with 68,000 women living in poverty compared with 58,000 men. On the other hand, the gender gap in poverty among seniors is much wider; in this group women are three times more likely to be poor than men. Furthermore, women make up 78% of all poor seniors and 86% of all poor and single seniors. The largest share of the population living in poverty (21%) is made up of women aged 18-64 in families. Single women under the age of 65 have the highest prevalence of poverty at 41% and, among all unattached individuals, are the most likely to be poor.<sup>16</sup>

The gender gap in poverty can be attributed in part to the income disparity between men and women. The median income for women is only 67% that of men.<sup>17</sup> In 2006 women's yearly earnings were \$27,700 compared with \$42,900 for men. Aboriginal women, immigrant women and women living with disabilities earned even less.<sup>18</sup>

For too many women, living in poverty means not being able to provide a safe, secure home and adequate nutritious food for their children. This in turn means living with the constant fear of having their children placed in government care. Poverty also makes women more vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation. Addressing the poverty of women must be a central component of any poverty reduction strategy.

Single individuals are almost three times more likely to be in poverty than those living with their families; 26.3% compared with 8.8%. Among all economic family-types, two-parent families with children with a single-



earner were the most likely to be in poverty with 30.5% living below the after-tax LICO. Female lone-parent families were next with 21% living in poverty. In most of the other Canadian provinces, female lone-parent families had higher rates of poverty than two-parent families with children. This is also the case in Manitoba, but only when looking at before-tax poverty rates. However, the Province has shown progress, particularly over the last decade, in reducing the before-tax poverty rate for female lone-parent families. It fell from 64.2% in 1986 to 37.5% in 2006. Furthermore, Manitoba's tax and transfer system has played an important role in lowering the poverty rate for female lone-parent families. In 2006 the tax and transfer system helped reduce the poverty rate for female lone-parent families from 37.5% to 21%, where it remains below the national average, which stood at 28%.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1990 and 2006 Manitoba had the highest child poverty rate of all provinces five times out of seventeen. It was among the three worst provinces every year except 1992 and 2004. In 1991 the child poverty rate peaked at 24%, the worst in Canada, and hovered around 20% for much of the rest of the decade. By 2006, when the national average was 11.3% Manitoba's rate of child poverty had dropped to 12.4% the third worst in Canada. The City of Winnipeg's child poverty rate rose to more than one in five in 2005, the highest rate among mid-size cities across Canada.<sup>20</sup> Children of families with at least one member who is Aboriginal, a recent immigrant, or has a disability are at an even greater risk of poverty. In 2006 the prevalence of low income among persons in economic families was highest for persons under the age of eighteen at 12.4%, and particularly high for those children living in female lone-parent families at 21.8%.<sup>21</sup>

High rates of child poverty matter because children who grow up in poor families are, on average, less likely to do well in life than are children who grow up in non-poor families.<sup>22</sup> The Canadian Council on Social Development has described the lasting effects of child poverty as follows: child poverty is associated with poor health and hygiene, a lack of a nutritious diet, absenteeism from school and low scholastic achievement, behavioural and mental problems, low housing standards, and in later years few employment opportunities and a persistently low economic status.<sup>23</sup>

Overall, poverty rates for most of the above categories have improved over the last ten to fifteen years, but they have only recently returned to 1980 levels. Still, in 2006, poverty rates for most categories in Manitoba were higher than they were nationally, and far too many Manitobans continue to live in deep and persistent poverty.<sup>24</sup>

An effective poverty reduction strategy must acknowledge that poverty rates are higher among certain groups. As such, measures targeted toward these groups will have a significant impact on reducing overall poverty rates. The following sections address those demographic groups with some of the highest poverty rates in Manitoba: the Aboriginal population, recent immigrants and

*Canada's 1982 Constitution Act defines Aboriginal people as including the Indian, Metis and Inuit people of Canada.<sup>25</sup> While Indian remains the word used in the legal definition, First Nation people has come to be the commonly used term to describe persons that the Constitution Act defines as Indian. Canada's Indian Act (first enacted in 1876, last amended in 2000) has a narrower definition of Indian than the term First Nation. The Indian Act establishes a register of all Indians and the rules governing who can be registered. People who are entitled to be registered as Indians under the terms of the Act are termed status, while those First Nation people who are not entitled to be registered are referred*

persons with disabilities. The different needs of these groups necessitate different policy responses in order to address the underlying causes of their poverty.

#### ABORIGINAL POPULATION

Compared with other provinces, Manitoba is home to the largest Aboriginal population as a percentage of the total population. Aboriginal people make up 15% of the total population of Manitoba.<sup>26</sup> They are dramatically over-represented among those living in poverty. In Manitoba, according to 2006 Census data, the rate of Aboriginal poverty was 29%, almost three times the overall poverty rate of 11.4%. While off-reserve Aboriginal poverty is present throughout Manitoba, it is concentrated in Winnipeg. 37% of all Aboriginal people in Winnipeg are living in poverty. They make up approximately 10% of Winnipeg's population, yet Aboriginal people constitute 25% of those living in poverty.<sup>27</sup>

According to numerous surveys, Aboriginal women are consistently poorer than Aboriginal men. According to 2001 Census data, (the most recent year from which data are available), Aboriginal women had an overall poverty rate of 44.4% compared with 40% for men. Single Aboriginal women were also more likely to live in poverty, with a poverty rate of 67.5%, compared with 54.5% for single Aboriginal men.<sup>28</sup> In 2006, Aboriginal children were almost three times more likely to be poor than non-Aboriginal children. Aboriginal children under six had a poverty rate (based on before tax LICO) of 56% compared with 19% for non-Aboriginal children under six.<sup>29</sup>

The poverty gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Manitobans can be attributed in part to differences in earnings and employment rates. There is a significant wage gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population. According to Census data from the 2006 Aboriginal Population Profile, the median annual income for Aboriginal workers aged 15 and over in Manitoba was \$15,246, a mere 63% of the median income of \$24,194 for the overall population. The Aboriginal unemployment rate was 15.4% in Manitoba; almost three times the rate for the overall population. The situation was worse on reserves, where the unemployment rate was 26%. Although they make up less than 13% of the working-age population, Aboriginal people represent over 30% of the total unemployed in Manitoba.

Aboriginal people face many barriers in gaining access to and retaining adequate employment, including lower completion rates of formal education. In an economic climate in which education is critical to securing well-paid employment, 50% of Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over have no educational certificate, degree or diploma, compared with 29% of the overall population. Fewer have post-secondary qualifications. Just over 5%

of Aboriginal people over 15 years old have a university certificate or degree, compared with 15% of the total population.

The lack of adequate, affordable and suitable housing is a crucial issue for Aboriginal poverty in Manitoba. Close to 25% of private Aboriginal dwellings are in need of major repairs compared with 10% of all private dwellings.<sup>30</sup> Fifty-three percent of households living in band housing report that their dwelling was in need of major repairs.<sup>31</sup> Aboriginal homes are two to three times more likely to be overcrowded than non-Aboriginal homes. These statistics reflect the higher prevalence of core housing need among the Aboriginal population compared with the overall population. (A household is in “core housing need” if it fails to meet the standards of “acceptable housing,” which refers to housing that is of suitable size, in adequate physical condition, and affordable (costs less than 30% of before-tax household income).<sup>32</sup> The lack of affordable housing for the Aboriginal population in Manitoba creates lengthy waiting lists for Aboriginal social housing and helps to explain why 75% of the emergency shelter population in Winnipeg is made up of Aboriginal people.<sup>33</sup>

A central concern for Aboriginal women is the increasing rate of child apprehensions in Manitoba. Aboriginal children make upwards of 70% of those living in foster care.<sup>34</sup> A key conclusion emerging from five external reviews of the child and family services system suggests that “factors such as poverty, poor housing and addictions, as well as the lack of effective responses to these by other systems, are root causes of family breakdown and the growing demands on the child and family services system.”<sup>35</sup> In some cases, small children must be removed from their communities in order to be put into care. This is a common problem in ‘no road’ access communities in northern Manitoba, which are mostly Aboriginal. Very few foster families will take children under the age of two because they don’t get enough funding to cover the relatively high costs of necessities in these communities.

A focus on transitional services for Aboriginal people leaving reserves must be part of a poverty reduction strategy. A study on Aboriginal people who recently moved to Winnipeg cites family reasons, employment opportunities, and education and training as the three main reasons for moving. On arriving in the city, Aboriginal people are either unaware of or lack access to transition support services that could help provide affordable and suitable housing options, as well as education, training and employment opportunities. Many end up relying on provincial social assistance as their main source of income.<sup>36</sup>

High poverty rates and social exclusion mean that Aboriginal people face longstanding poverty-related inequalities in health when compared with the non-Aboriginal population in Manitoba. Status Indians in Manitoba experience higher mortality rates, higher suicide rates, a shorter life expectancy, and higher risks for heart disease. Diabetes is another major health risk for

*to as non-status. In the past it was possible for First Nation women to lose their status by marrying a non-status male. In other cases people had to renounce their status in order to be allowed to vote.*

*The issue of status is significant since the Federal Government has responsibility for the provision of certain health and dental care, housing, education and other services to Inuit people and First Nations people with status. These services are not provided to non-status people and to status people not living on a First Nation reserve. Furthermore, these services are not provided to Metis people.*

Aboriginal people in Manitoba. The diabetes rate for Status Indians is 4.2 times higher than the general population<sup>37</sup>. The rate of HIV/AIDS infection within the Aboriginal population in Manitoba is also significantly above the non-Aboriginal population. Aboriginal people are ten times more likely to be diagnosed with HIV/AIDS than non-Aboriginal people.<sup>38</sup>

#### RECENT IMMIGRANTS

The Province has set a new target for an annual inflow of 20,000 new immigrants to Manitoba over the next ten years. In 2007, Manitoba was the destination of almost 11,000 international immigrants and refugees. However recent immigrants (arriving in the last five years) are much more likely to live in poverty compared with the overall population and also compared with established immigrants (have been living in Manitoba fifteen years or longer). In Manitoba, 32% of recent immigrants were living in poverty in 2006.<sup>39</sup>

Many new immigrants have a hard time integrating into the Manitoba labour force. This can be attributed to a lack of Canadian work experience, lack of English or French language skills, and transferability of their qualifications. Some end up in low-skill, entry-level positions with inadequate earnings and for which they are overqualified. Although their incomes improve as time goes on, many new immigrants have a hard time covering the costs of their basic needs and other monthly expenses, leaving little to no room to accumulate savings. As a result, they need to rely on social assistance and food banks to help make ends meet. New immigrants to Manitoba often end up living in inner-city neighbourhoods where the cost of housing, while still high relative to their budgets, is somewhat less expensive. These difficulties are particularly problematic for newcomers with large numbers of children.

The provincial commitment to achieve its new target must be accompanied by a commitment to ensure that new immigrants are aware of, and have access to effective settlement supports. This includes help finding safe and affordable housing, adequate employment opportunities, and accessing language, educational, and healthcare services.

#### PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

As of 2006, 170,000 people in Manitoba have a disability. That's almost one in six people.<sup>40</sup> Sixteen percent of all persons with disabilities are living in poverty.<sup>41</sup> Some people with a disability simply cannot work and therefore rely on government income assistance. Unfortunately, current provincial disability benefits do not provide a way out of poverty. They are too low to meet even the minimum costs of living in Manitoba, let alone cope with the extra costs of living with a disability. A single person with a disability receives \$721 per month (\$105 as an automatic allowance, \$331 for basic

living expenses, and \$285 for shelter). This adds up to an average annual welfare income of \$8,652, which is 48% of the poverty line.<sup>42</sup>

Persons with disabilities continue to have unnecessarily high unemployment rates compared with the general population. Many people with a disability are employable to varying degrees and may need to combine government assistance with employment income. Often, they cite systemic discrimination, and a lack of appropriate disability supports and accommodations in education and training facilities, and workplaces as explanations for their lower educational attainment and participation rates. In some cases, persons with disabilities are unaware that it is possible to continue receiving disability supports, when needed, after finding work and becoming ineligible for employment and income assistance. The failure to communicate this information to persons with disabilities leaves them to believe there is a disincentive to employment.

Persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, not only as a result of the lack of adequate and appropriate disability supports in education facilities and workplaces, but also because these supports are lacking in other areas. This can prevent persons with disabilities from taking advantage of recreation opportunities, doing their own grocery shopping, using public transportation, and living safely and comfortably in their own homes and communities.

## OUR PLAN FOR MANITOBA

### MAKE POVERTY HISTORY PRINCIPLES

- *An integrated and coordinated approach to programs and services to reduce both the incidence and depth of poverty and social exclusion and associated effects.*
- *Gender and diversity analyses as part of all policy and program development processes.*
- *Long term and annual action plans designed and implemented with participation from multiple stakeholders.*

OUR PLAN INCORPORATES all the important features of a poverty reduction plan. We call upon the Province to ensure that all these features are captured in Manitoba's poverty reduction plan.

### CONSULTATIONS

Make Poverty History Manitoba is a multi-sectoral collaborative coalition made up of over 30 Winnipeg organizations from the business, education, student, Aboriginal, newcomer, labour, women's health, and disability communities and agencies. Make Poverty History Manitoba engaged in a process of consultation aimed at the development of a plan to reduce poverty and social exclusion. The approach towards the development of these ideas involved the synthesis of existing research on a variety of poverty and social exclusion issues in Manitoba, the preparation of a series of accessible discussion papers, and engaging stakeholders in consultation workshops

The coalition consulted with a broad cross-section of Manitobans. The main message, which was heard loud and clear, is that minor adjustments to existing policies and programs are insufficient and the Province must undertake comprehensive and systematic action to reduce poverty and improve social and economic inclusion, to reduce economic, health and social disparities in our population. Manitobans believe that their NDP government should show leadership by implementing a poverty reduction plan that includes all of the important features highlighted above, as well as integrating gender and diversity analysis in all policy and program development processes, and increasing sustained social investment. Further consultation should take place using our plan as a basis for finalizing Manitoba's poverty reduction plan. However, we call on the Province to move the plan to the implementation stage in the current fiscal year. Doing so would provide the Province with

an opportunity to outline the details surrounding the new poverty reduction initiatives announced in this year's budget.

## **A COMPREHENSIVE AND COORDINATED APPROACH**

The actions we are recommending for inclusion in Manitoba's poverty reduction plan recognize poverty in the context of the social determinants of health. Social determinants of health are the economic and social conditions that shape the health of individuals and communities. The social determinants of health include: Aboriginal status, early life, education, employment and working conditions, food security, gender, health-care services, housing, income and its distribution, social exclusion, social safety net, unemployment and employment security. In essence, social determinants of health are concerned with the quantity and quality of resources society makes available to its members.<sup>43</sup>

We believe that analyzing solutions to poverty through a social determinants of health lens is important because this framework recognizes not only the complex causes of poverty, but also the broad implications for the health of individuals and the communities in which we live. Understanding how poverty affects us all encourages the development of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to poverty reduction. While often the primary focus of government policy, poverty reduction is not as simple as increasing people's attachment to the labour market. That is only one part of the solution. We firmly believe that intervention at this level alone will have limited impact. While some of our recommendations touch on this issue, they are only part of a larger set of recommendations that are much broader in scope. Our poverty reduction plan recognizes that exclusionary and discriminatory practices are causes of poverty, as are insufficient and inaccessible public supports and services like healthcare, education, and housing.

While we recognize that poverty is not exclusive to those of any particular background, certain groups continue to face many barriers, putting them at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. Our recommendations recognize that women, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal people, and recent immigrants are particularly at risk and must be made a priority.

Aboriginal people have a special place in Manitoban society, and the content of Manitoba's poverty reduction plan needs to be interpreted and applied specifically to reflect their circumstances.

We also recognize that poverty is often spatialized. In urban centers, there is a clear concentration of poverty in specific neighborhoods, particularly in Winnipeg. Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods hold high concentrations of low-income Aboriginal people and newcomers because of its stock of affordable housing and proximity to services.<sup>44</sup> Poverty in First Nation communities, which

- *Increased social investment reflected in provincial budget expenses and revenues.*

- *Targets, timelines, and benchmarks with ongoing monitoring and reporting to ensure that objectives are being met.*

- *A multi-sectoral and cross-departmental authority to oversee progress and make further recommendations.*

is a federal responsibility, continues to be unconscionable. Manitoba has a long history of intervening to address poverty through neighborhood renewal approaches however provincial support has been sporadic, depending on the government in power. Our recommendations acknowledge the need to focus action on vulnerable regions and communities in Manitoba, including through the use of neighbourhood approaches.

## **TARGETS AND TIMELINES TO MEASURE PROGRESS**

Some of the recommended actions in our plan include targets and timelines. Where they do not, we urge the Province to establish targets and timelines of its own to provide a basis from which progress can be measured and to provide incentive to follow through with commitments.

In addition, our plan identifies measurable indicators, here again with targets and timelines that can be tracked to help monitor the impact that the plan is having on poverty in Manitoba. An effective plan must include indicators that track the breadth, depth and duration of poverty, that focus on populations most vulnerable to poverty, and that capture the different forms of hardship and financial stress that poor people face. With many of the indicators below, we recommend that a trajectory line be established, so that at any particular time, the public can see to what extent the Province is on-track to meet key benchmarks. In this way, if progress in any given year falls short of the needed trajectory, the Province can be expected to announce additional policy measures to get back on target.

We recommend that the following indicators be included in the plan, and propose targets and timelines for each of them:

- Using Statistics Canada's after-tax low-income cut-off (LICO-AT), reduce Manitoba's poverty rate from 11.4% to 8.5% in five years, and to 5.5% in ten years (approximately a 25% reduction in five years and a 50% reduction within a decade).
- Ensure the poverty rate (using the LICO-AT) for children, female lone-parent households, single women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants likewise declines by 25% in 5 years, and by 50% in 10 years, in recognition that these populations are particularly vulnerable to poverty.
- Within two years, ensure there are no Manitobans living 50% or more below the LICO-AT.



- Reduce the share of Manitobans facing “core housing need” (and paying more than 30% of their income on housing) by half by 2015.
- Reduce the waiting list for Manitoba Housing by half within four years. This must not be accomplished by reducing the number of people who are eligible or by elevating qualification barriers.
- Improve food security for low-income individuals and families. Reduce food bank use from 3.4% to 1.7%, a 50% reduction, within ten years, and set a date for the elimination of food banks in Manitoba.
- Reduce the share of low-wage workers. The median wage in Manitoba was \$17 per hour in 2008. Therefore, two thirds of the median—a common measure of low-wage work—was \$11.33. Manitoba should demonstrate progress in reducing the share of workers earning less than two thirds of the median wage every year.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS**

It is not enough to simply establish targets and timelines. Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure the Province is accountable for compliance with its commitments.

All government departments should implement and report annually on the use of a poverty and social exclusion lens through the annual budget and reporting process. We recommend that a cabinet committee chaired by the Minister of Finance and including key ministers be tasked with the implementation and monitoring of the Poverty Reduction Plan. This will ensure that government actions are analyzed and evaluated in the context of the impact they have on poverty reduction and social inclusion objectives. It will provide policymakers with the information that is needed to identify current government actions that need to be revised and ensure that new actions are designed so that they will have the intended impact on poverty reduction and social inclusion.

The lead minister should be required by legislation to table an annual progress report in the legislative assembly, so that progress on the plan is transparent to the public, and members of the legislative assembly can monitor and evaluate progress, and seek elaboration on government performance as required.

A cross-sectional public advisory board should be appointed to monitor progress and ensure that timelines and targets are met.

## RECOMMENDED PRIORITY ACTIONS

Make Poverty History Manitoba has consulted with organizations and individuals across the province for their input on what a Manitoba poverty reduction plan should include. While many very good ideas resulted from these discussions, we have selected the following initiatives that we believe to be the most critical and achievable. Implementation of these initiatives will allow Manitoba to reach our targets as measured by the indicators identified in the previous section. Each initiative focuses on addressing one of the following seven key areas that require attention if poverty reduction efforts are to be successful in Manitoba.

Housing

Income Security: *Employment and Income Assistance; Jobs; Wages; Employment Standards and Labour Legislation.*

Education: *Early Learning and Child Care; Kindergarten to Grade 12; Post Secondary Education; Adult Learning and Training .*

Neighbourhood and Community Approaches

Transportation

Disability Supports

Health

The full list of actions recommended by Manitobans, ranging from simple short-term actions to more structural policy changes, is available at [www.spcw.mb.ca](http://www.spcw.mb.ca). The following actions are those that we have prioritized for immediate action because we believe they will have the broadest impact on poverty reduction and lead to greater social inclusion.

### 1. HOUSING

***Ensure that accessible, safe, and affordable housing is available to all Manitobans.***

Housing continues to be raised as the single most important issue facing low-income people in Manitoba, particularly in Northern Manitoba. Safe, affordable, permanent and quality housing improves socio-emotional and physical health and safety, and promotes social inclusion by providing both stability and a base from which to access services and social networks, including employment.<sup>45</sup> Ensuring that housing is safe and affordable for everyone must be a central component of Manitoba's poverty reduction plan.

To increase their opportunities to integrate fully into the community, housing targets should include a percentage of safe and affordable units that meet the needs of all persons with physical and mental disabilities. This must include a range of options operating within a harm reduction philosophy to ensure housing is available for individuals with different levels of substance use.

Public housing in Manitoba is targeted at households in core need. In 2006, 11.3% of all provincial households (46,900 households) were in core need.<sup>46</sup> Although Manitoba had the best record of housing affordability among Canadian provinces, almost one in five households still spent more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs.<sup>47</sup> Renter households were more likely to be in core need than owner households. The lack of affordable housing means that after covering the costs of their rent many Manitobans are left with few resources to meet their basic needs let alone to move forward economically. For others, it means homelessness. There are an estimated 2,000 homeless people in Winnipeg alone.<sup>48</sup>

Make Poverty History Manitoba recognizes that the Federal Government must play a central role by implementing a comprehensive national housing strategy that includes ongoing investment. However, in the absence of such a strategy, the Province must take leadership and make housing a priority to ensure that permanent, accessible, safe, affordable housing is available for low-income households. We recommend the following actions.

- 1-1. Increase the supply of non-profit, rent-geared-to-income housing by a minimum of 300 units each year for five years. This, accompanied by a contribution of 700 units by the Federal Government, will help achieve the much needed total of 1,000 new units each year. Priority should be given to increasing social housing in the North and in high-need urban centres such as Winnipeg and Brandon.

The high demand for affordable rental housing is combined with low vacancy rates in places such as Thompson (0%), Brandon (0.2%), and Winnipeg (1%). This contributes to rising rental prices, which in turn increases the demand for subsidized, rent-geared-to-income housing. The average apartment vacancy rate across urban centres in Manitoba has declined over the last decade from 4% to 0.9%.<sup>49</sup> The University College of the North in Thompson, Brandon University and the Maple Leaf Plant in Brandon have increased education and employment opportunities and attracted many new workers and students to these areas. The Province's immigration policies have resulted in an influx of international migrants settling in Winnipeg over the last number of years. Unfortunately these cities do not have an adequate supply of low-income rental housing to meet the housing needs of all new arrivals. Exacerbating the problem is the lack of housing on Manitoba reserves that forces many Aboriginal people into urban centres where they need to find an affordable

*Certainly housing is a huge issue for the clients that we service. I know it's a big issue for everybody... one of the big challenges that we face, is when someone is coming to our crisis units who has no fixed address or has trouble holding on to housing for long periods of time, or simply can't access housing, the options that we have to present to them in the short term are often very limited...I would argue that it means that people are returning to the street.*

*"We got evicted... did I leave that out?" Stories of Housing and Mental Health  
By Ian Skelton and Richard Mahé, page 24.*

place to live. All of this has created an upward pressure on rental prices, which have been increasing more than median incomes.<sup>50</sup> As a result, there is a high demand for subsidized housing, both in these cities and across Manitoba, particularly from those earning less than median incomes. Unfortunately, the current stock of subsidized housing does not meet the demand. According to Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation, as of February 2009, there were 1,111 applicants (733 in Winnipeg alone) on a waitlist for Manitoba Housing's 13,064 units. Furthermore, for every unit of housing provided by the Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association that is already occupied, there is an additional two persons on a wait list (not including their families) for a total of over 2,300 people.<sup>51</sup> High rents, combined with the lack of subsidized housing, have resulted in the displacement of some families from the communities they have lived in all of their lives.

Increasing investments in social housing by committing to Manitoba Right to Housing Coalition targets, while also leading advocacy efforts calling for a national housing strategy, would allow us to meet the real need of 1,000 new units annually. The Province has indicated that it will make room for new low-income housing units in the 2009 budget. However, details behind this commitment have yet to be revealed. A commitment to build 300 new units per year would be an excellent investment at a time of economic decline. This investment (at a cost of approximately \$150,000-200,000 per unit) would cost 45-60 million annually but it would result in 1,800 jobs and an additional \$90-million in GDP each year.

1-2. Increase housing related benefits, including Employment and Income Assistance Shelter Allowances and Manitoba Shelter Benefits, by 20% and index them to annual increases in the Rent Increase Guidelines.

Current shelter allowances provided through the Employment and Income Assistance program fail to cover the costs of renting a home in the private rental market in Manitoba. A single parent with one child, for example, receives a maximum monthly shelter allowance of \$387 per month. However, the average rent in Manitoba was \$596 for a one bedroom apartment and \$748 for a two bedroom apartment in 2008. This leaves families \$209-\$361 short of their monthly rent. Larger families are worse off. A two-parent family with two children receives a maximum monthly shelter allowance of \$471 to cover the \$893 it costs, on average, to rent a three-bedroom apartment.<sup>52</sup> These families have to find \$422 to make up the shortfall. As of March 2008, 77% of persons receiving EIA and renting privately in Manitoba had a rent deficit.<sup>53</sup> The Manitoba Shelter Benefit provides eligible EIA recipients up to \$35 a month, depending on household income and the monthly cost of renting in the private market. This maximum amount fails to cover the shortfall left by inadequate shelter allowances. As a result, many are forced to live in homes of inadequate condition and inappropriate size relative to

their needs. Furthermore, they leave EIA recipients with no choice but to use money that is meant to be spent on other basic needs to pay for their rent. This provides some insight into why 80% of families on social assistance end up relying on food banks.<sup>54</sup> Contributing to the affordability problem is the fact that rents have been increasing at a faster rate than increases in shelter allowances. The Rent Increase Guideline has gone up 25% since 1993, the year shelter allowances were no longer indexed to increases in the Rent Increase Guidelines.<sup>55</sup>

### 1-3. Invest sufficient financial resources to retrofit all existing public housing units to acceptable standards by 2014.

The quality of Manitoba's public housing stock needs to be improved to meet acceptable standards (that is, be of suitable size, in adequate physical condition, and cost less than 30% of before-tax household income). The tenants of these homes are not the owners and are often unable to afford much-needed repairs, including the removal of toxic substances that have a direct impact on their health. Problems with mold and inadequate heating and insulation create and exacerbate poor health conditions like asthma and other respiratory disease. Serious insect infestations have caused illness, sometimes requiring medical treatment and hospitalization.<sup>56</sup> In 2008, after more than a decade of neglect, the Province committed \$48-million to the retrofitting of existing public housing stock. This was not enough to match the \$83.9-million five-year maintenance and improvement plan suggested a number of years ago by the Manitoba Housing Authority to address the quality of Manitoba's public housing.<sup>57</sup> In the 2009 budget, the Province announced a commitment of \$160-million as part of social housing renewal. This will contribute significantly towards our goal of retrofitting all public housing units by 2014. We commend the Province for taking these important steps and we call upon it to make investments in maintenance and improvement an ongoing commitment so that this public asset will continue to benefit Manitobans. The building of new and the retrofitting of old social housing units should integrate targeted training, employment, and procurement as has been done in other large-scale projects. These community economic development initiatives help provide new and lasting opportunities for local people and businesses, and we encourage this kind of approach to be integrated whenever possible. The recent Federal Government budget announcement of \$1-billion nation wide for public housing will assist the Province to scale up efforts to address the decay of the existing supply. However we maintain that an ongoing federal commitment will be required.

## 2. INCOME SECURITY

***Ensure that all Manitobans receive a sufficient income to meet their basic needs and participate fully in community life.***

## EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME ASSISTANCE

Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program is intended to help Manitobans meet basic personal or family needs, and when possible, find paid employment. In 2007 Manitoba had the lowest annual average of people on social assistance in twenty years and almost 10,000 fewer people needed income assistance than in 1999.<sup>58</sup> Still, almost 60,000 Manitobans use Employment and Income Assistance as their major source of income.<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately social assistance rates in Manitoba are not high enough to enable recipients to meet their basic needs, participate fully in community life, and bring people's income levels to the poverty line. Furthermore, Social assistance benefits (in constant 2005 dollars) have been steadily declining since 1992.<sup>60</sup> Between 1992 and 2006 social assistance recipients saw the value of their benefits decrease by 10.5% and 36.8% depending on the category.<sup>61</sup>

We recommend the following actions.

2-1. Over the next two years, EIA benefits for all categories should be increased until they are equal to the inflation-adjusted 1992 levels. This would eliminate the significant erosion in the value of social assistance of the past fifteen years. The rates should then be indexed to increases in the cost of living.

The current EIA rate of \$480 per month for a single person just barely covers the \$460 it costs on average to rent a bachelor suite in Manitoba.<sup>62</sup> A single person is expected to rent a home in the private market with a mere \$285 per month, while receiving \$6.29 per day for all other expenditures.<sup>63</sup> This rate provides an income that is 68% below the after-tax poverty line (based on the LICO-AT for 2007). For all categories, EIA incomes, as a percentage of the poverty line, have been on the decline since the early 1990s. They vary from 28% of the poverty line for single employable persons to 53% for a couple with two children. Welfare incomes range from 21% to 34% of the average income of all households depending on category.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, social assistance rates are not indexed to inflation and have not kept up with the rising cost of living. Low-income households spend a larger proportion of their incomes on basic necessities and these costs have increased faster than the general inflation rate over the last number of years. From August 2002 to August 2008, the costs of food, shelter, transportation and energy have increased by 18%, 22%, 24% and 60% respectively. The problem is particularly acute in 'no road' access communities in northern Manitoba where the cost of necessities are significantly higher.

2-2. As a second step, within four years, develop and implement a transparent mechanism to establish livable basic income support

rates that reflects the actual cost of purchasing redefined basic needs, including: telephone service, recreation, transportation, and other basic amenities including food, clothing, shelter and utilities.

As mentioned above, current basic assistance rates in Manitoba provide a single person on EIA with only \$6.29 per day to spend on basic living expenses. This amount is not sufficient to allow EIA recipients to meet their basic needs even as currently defined, let alone a broader understanding of basic needs. Basic needs should be redefined to go beyond simply food, shelter, clothing and utilities to include things such as telephone service, recreation and transportation. By adopting a more inclusive definition of basic needs, the Province can help ensure that EIA recipients will have adequate financial resources to access the types of services they need to help find and maintain employment and move out of poverty.

2-3. Allow EIA recipients to claim child maintenance payments as earned income in recognition of the unpaid work that goes into child-rearing.

Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance program treats earned and unearned income differently when determining an individual's eligibility for assistance. Child maintenance payments are considered unearned income in Manitoba and this has the effect of lowering the amount of social assistance that recipients are eligible for. However, it is widely acknowledged that the unpaid work that goes into child-rearing in the home is comparable in value to the paid work that is performed in the market. The work that goes into child-rearing provides a productive contribution to the economy by securing the health, well-being and ultimately the existence of the paid workforce. The Province can take action to acknowledge this unpaid work by treating child maintenance payments as earned income and therefore have it be subjected to the Work Incentive Program whereby the EIA participant is allowed to keep \$200 and 30% of every dollar earned monthly.

## JOBS

Creating employment opportunities to bring low-income people out of poverty is a central feature of a poverty reduction plan. Labour is one of the most important assets that low-income people can use to improve their well-being. Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities and recent immigrants are over-represented among Manitobans living in poverty. This can be attributed in part to the fact that each group faces unique challenges that hinder their ability to access employment opportunities.

According to the 2006 Census, the unemployment rate in Manitoba for Aboriginal people was 15.4%, almost three times the rate for the

total population. Although they made up less than 13% of the working-age population, Aboriginal people represented over 30% of the total unemployed in Manitoba.<sup>65</sup> The Northern Manitoba region has relatively high unemployment levels compared with the rest of the province and it is the Aboriginal population alone that accounts for the exceptionally high rates in the region. Employed Aboriginal people are more likely to hold intermittent and insecure jobs with average yearly wages that are considerably below average.<sup>66</sup> Aboriginal people face many barriers in gaining access to and retaining adequate employment. These include discriminatory hiring practices and lower completion rates to formal education.

Persons with disabilities in Manitoba have higher rates of unemployment and lower participation rates compared with persons without disabilities.<sup>67</sup> Most people with disabilities are not permanently unemployable, but face barriers to employment due to a lack of accessible education and training programs, systemic discrimination, and workplaces that fail to provide disability supports that adequately accommodate persons with disabilities.

After arriving, immigrants are disproportionately likely to face unemployment. Recent immigrants to Manitoba (five years or less) had an unemployment rate of 8.8% in 2007 compared with a rate of 3% for those born in Canada.<sup>68</sup> The immigrant population faces numerous challenges when attempting to integrate into the Manitoba labour force. These include a lack of Canadian work experience, lack of English or French language skills, and transferability of their qualifications.

The Province needs to put in place policies that will address the unique challenges each of the above groups face when attempting to access employment opportunities. In addition, better links can be made between employment development agencies and employers through community-based labour market intermediaries (LMI). LMIs bring together employers, unions, educational institutions, governments and community-based organizations around a common table on an ongoing basis for the purpose of developing ways to move low-income people into good quality jobs. They are, potentially, an important addition to the Province's poverty reduction plan. The Province should begin a process to develop, in collaboration with key stakeholders, appropriate LMI models in Winnipeg and in the North. In the immediate term, priority actions must be taken to create employment opportunities for equity seeking groups. We recommend the following actions.

#### 2-4. Increase access to government jobs for equity seeking groups.

Government employment has proved to be an important source of jobs providing good incomes, benefits and opportunities. All levels of government must make a more concerted effort to employ individuals from under represented groups including Aboriginal people, recent immigrants, women, and persons with disabilities. We commend the Province for setting equity



targets and measuring progress. As of March 2008, the Province surpassed its goal of 50% women by 4.2%. However, progress has been less impressive for other equity groups. There is significant room for improvement in the hiring of Aboriginal people, members of visible minorities and persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities represented 2.9% of all civil service employees, well short of the 7% target.<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, the virtual lack of experience with persons with disabilities as fellow workers leaves the civil service ill prepared to recruit and see applicants with disabilities as the productive employees they wish to become.

2-5. Include targeted training and hiring of equity seeking groups for all infrastructure projects that are supported by public funds.

The Province has demonstrated leadership by integrating equity hiring and training for large-scale infrastructure projects like the Red River Floodway expansion project and Manitoba Hydro construction projects in the North. These models can be improved upon in future infrastructure projects. The Province has also shown leadership in creating training and employment opportunities for unemployed inner-city residents through community-based initiatives such as BUILD (Warm Up Winnipeg), Ogijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin (OPK) and Inner City Renovations. These are important inner-city programs that are retrofitting housing in the inner city. They should be scaled up and more closely linked with relevant training and apprenticeship programs.

Increasing employment opportunities does not necessarily provide a path out of poverty. Many employed Manitobans are unable to support themselves and their families because the wages they receive are not high enough to bring them above the poverty line, and their jobs do not provide financial security and stability.

## WAGES

All Manitobans working full-time over a full year should have the right to earn enough money through employment to stay above the poverty line. But far too many Manitobans are working for wages that are not high enough to lift them and their children out of poverty, even when in full-time positions. In 2006, 62% of poor children lived in families where family members worked the equivalent of one full-time full-year job.<sup>71</sup> One in five Manitobans (28,000), the majority of whom are women, earn minimum wages<sup>72</sup>. The current minimum wage of \$8.50/hour provides a full-time minimum wage earner with only \$16,575 annually, leaving them \$5,091 below the before-tax poverty line (based on LICO-BT for 2007).<sup>73</sup> A single parent with one child earning the minimum wage has to work 49 hours a week to reach the poverty line.

*I am paid on a piecework system, and when I don't make the piecework quota I am paid the minimum wage. To make ends meet I have taken a second job at a personal care home where I work three-and-a-half hours every day and eight hours every second weekend....I need two jobs just to provide a basic standard of living for my family.*

*Paid to be Poor: Low-Wage Community Inquiry, Manitoba 2005. Just Income Coalition, page 9-10.<sup>70</sup>*

Exacerbating the fact that the minimum wage is set too low is the loss of its value over time as a result of its not being indexed to the rate of inflation. When adjusted for inflation, Manitoba's minimum wage has fallen relatively steadily since the 1970s. Between 2002 and 2006 average expenditures of Manitoba households grew 14.5 percent while their incomes only grew by slightly more than two percent.<sup>74</sup> We call on the Province to ensure that all Manitobans receive a wage that keeps them above the poverty line. We recommend the following actions.

2-6. Incrementally increase the minimum wage per hour to the before-tax Low- Income Cut-Off (LICO-BT), and index annually to the rate of inflation, by 2011.

The Province has increased the minimum wage from \$6.25 in April 2001 to the current rate of \$8.50 per hour with plans for an increase to \$9.00 in the fall of 2009. We commend the Province for making these increases, but further increases are required to bring workers to the poverty line. Even with a \$9.00 minimum wage, a full-time worker still only earns \$17,550 annually, leaving them \$4,116 below the before-tax poverty line. Furthermore, a recent report that looks at improving accessibility to post-secondary education in Manitoba recommends that student earnings be improved through a higher minimum wage.<sup>75</sup> Many students fund their post-secondary education with their earnings. If they earned higher wages, they would not only have lower debt levels but would also need to rely less on other funds like Manitoba Student Aid.

2-7. Introduce Living Wage legislation to ensure that all businesses that are contracted to provide services to the government pay their workers a living wage.

A Living Wage is the amount of income an individual or family needs to: meet basic needs; maintain a safe, decent standard of living in their community; and save for future needs and goals. Living Wage policies ensure that all workers working for an employer contracted by a government will be paid a Living Wage. Living Wage policies can be formalized by legislation and have been implemented in over 130 American cities. The cities of Calgary and Hamilton are examples of municipal government that are leading other Canadian cities in living wage policy.

#### EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AND LABOUR LEGISLATION

There is an immediate need for revised employment standards that reflect the considerable changes that have taken place in Manitoba's labour market. The Province has made some important changes in recent years resulting in expanded coverage for farm workers and young workers. However, part-time casual, temporary and self-employed workers continue to receive few benefits

and have minimal rights under existing laws compared with full-time workers, even as their numbers are growing. Thirty years ago, the workforce was made up almost entirely of full-time employees, many of them in unionized, well-paid and secure jobs. At the start of 2009, nearly one in five workers in Manitoba was part-time. Ten percent of all workers were in temporary positions, and 14% were self-employed.<sup>76</sup> Inadequate benefits, low wages, and the lack of enforcement of employment standard laws and regulations make it difficult for these workers to use their employment opportunity as a means to improve their lives. Even when wages are high enough to keep these workers above the poverty line, the lack of job security means there is no guarantee of how long they will remain there.

Increasing protection from unfair/unjust treatment in the workplace is critical to preventing individuals from falling into poverty. A comprehensive package of protection would require the Province to put in place a process of appeal for non-unionized workers who believe that they have been wrongfully dismissed from employment. This would allow non-unionized workers to have their case heard by an appeal board with procedures similar to grievance-arbitration procedures in collective agreements and the power to order reinstatement and compensation. Increasing protection would also include introducing legislation to prohibit employment of replacement workers during an industrial dispute and allowing for automatic union certification when 50% plus one of potential union members sign membership cards. It is also important to note the important role that unions play in ensuring workers have a decent level of income, benefits and security. Countries with the highest rates of unionization are also those with the least poverty.

In addition to the above improvements, it will also require better enforcement of the existing Employment Standards Code. Attaining recognition of workers' rights in the Employment Standards Code is one thing, having them respected is quite another. Enforcement of the Code's provisions is absolutely essential and the Province must increase proactive workplace inspections of employment records throughout the province, along with investigations triggered by anonymous and third-party complaints. This will require an increase in officers and inspectors. Related to this is the need for improved access to Department of Labour and Immigration staff assistance for individuals seeking guidance on matters related to the enforcement of Employment Standards Code.

All of the above are important initiatives that the Province must introduce to prevent poverty in the future. The Province can make a significant difference in the immediate term. We recommend the following action.

2-8. Introduce a pro-rated formula to ensure that part-time, casual, temporary, and workers not employed in traditional full-

time jobs are awarded the same rights and benefits enjoyed by full-time workers.

### 3. EDUCATION

***Ensure that all Manitobans have access to quality educational programs through which they can develop the skills and knowledge that is required to gain meaningful employment and participate in society as informed citizens.***

*As a single mother it is really hard to find day cares and that's a big thing...I had a very hard time finding day cares in my area so I had to look elsewhere...that was difficult...I know a lot of other mothers have mentioned that they would like to pursue an education and go to school or get a job but now there is a shortage of day cares so that plays a really, really important role.*

Unearthing Resistance: Aboriginal Women in the Lord Selkirk Park Housing Developments by Jim Silver, page 21.<sup>77</sup>

#### EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

Research suggests that early learning and childcare programs that foster early childhood growth and development are the most cost-effective way to reduce poverty and promote economic growth.<sup>78</sup> Every \$1.00 spent on childcare in Manitoba generates \$1.58 of economic activity in rural and northern regions and returns \$1.38 to the Winnipeg economy, in part as a result of increased workforce participation and higher tax revenues.<sup>79</sup> Children who can access high quality early learning and childcare programs can expect to benefit from improved health, life-long learning, school readiness and performance.<sup>80</sup> Their parents can expect an opportunity to seek employment and increase their family income. This is particularly important for women because they are most likely to limit their work-force participation when childcare is unavailable. Increasing the availability and accessibility of childcare can go a long way in addressing the issue of poverty among senior women as it provides an opportunity to increase their life-time earnings and earn adequate pensions. Childcare spaces must be broadly available to promote early childhood development and facilitate parental participation in employment and training. Unfortunately, persistent problems in the childcare system remain with 27,000 spaces in a province with approximately 180,000 children aged 0-12 years of whom about 115,000 have mothers in the paid labour force. The Federal Government has a critical role to play in establishing and funding a national early learning and childcare system and the Province should continue to advocate for such a plan. The Province must also show leadership. We recommend the following actions.

#### 3-1. Expedite Family Choices: Manitoba's Five-Year Agenda for Childcare and Early Learning.

Manitoba's Five-Year Agenda for Childcare and Early Learning was announced in April of 2008, and has been well received by the childcare community. However, since being announced, implementation has moved very slowly. While the Province announced an increase of \$14-million in the 07/08

budget, they actually under spent by \$10.6 million in that year. Expediting the existing plan would go a long way to address the issues discussed above.

3-2. Fund market competitive compensation for all positions and all levels of experience in accordance with a research-based uniform salary scale that can be applied across the province in order to attract and retain the childcare workforce.

With an increase in the number of childcare spaces comes an opportunity for job creation, particularly for women, as it demands more trained early childcare educators. Unfortunately, low wages are a major issue contributing to the difficulties in attracting and retaining committed qualified childcare professionals. This has become a big problem for some childcare centres, particularly in rural areas where many have had to reduce their enrollment or shorten their hours of service. For too long, wages and benefits in the childcare sector have not been competitive with comparable jobs in the external job market. The Province has taken steps toward funding competitive compensation based on a uniform salary scale. However, this has only benefited a limited number of workers in entry-level positions, and the result still falls short of market competitive wages. The childcare sector requires an immediate 20-25% increase in funding just to pay market competitive wages. The Province's most recent announcement to increase wages by 3% is not a large enough investment to enable the majority of employers to fund competitive wages to all employees. While these improvements are welcome, the Province must take further action to ensure that all childcare workers, particularly long-term and experienced workers, receive competitive wages. The Manitoba Child Care Association believes that the Province's recent commitment to increase wages and benefits for the childcare workforce will not be enough to address the shortage of trained workers in the sector. Without an expanded childcare workforce, it believes that the Province's plan to fund 6,500 new spaces over five years will not be achievable.<sup>81</sup>

3-3. Establish within five years, 30 head-start programs in high-needs schools across Manitoba.

The Little Red Spirit Aboriginal Head Start pre-school program at Dufferin School has made a very positive impact on improving education outcomes for the children in the school. It is the first time in urban Canada that a Head Start program has been located in an elementary school. An entire wing of Dufferin School houses an integrated early childhood program including Head Start, a Nursery program for four-year-olds and a kindergarten program for five year olds. Head Start provides a half-day early childhood program for children three- to five-years of age with an Aboriginal culture and language focus. Parent involvement is also a key component of the Head Start program. The four year olds attend half the day at the Head Start program and half the

day at the Nursery program. The five-year-olds attend half the day at the Head Start program and half the day at the kindergarten program.

The kindergarten teacher at the school reports that children are much better prepared for his kindergarten program due to the Head Start program. Dufferin School had the greatest increase of student stability than any other school in the Winnipeg School Division. This was due to the large number of students that remained in the school in the nursery, kindergarten and Grade 1 classes. The largest grade group at Dufferin School for 2006/2007 was the Grade 1 classes. The principal of the school directly attributes this to the strong influence of the Little Red Spirit Head Start program at the school. In addition to the Aboriginal focus of the Head Start program, the new sites should also target inner-city schools with large refugee populations.

#### KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12

All children have the right to attend an appropriately funded school that has the capacity to impart the knowledge and skills that they will need to continue their education, work at a job, and participate fully in the community as an informed citizen. While high school completion no longer guarantees a ticket out of poverty, the lack of a high school diploma remains a significant predictor of future income and inclusion. According to research conducted by Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, several regions in Manitoba have shown a significant increase in high school completion rates in recent years (74.3% to 77.7%).\* However, some regions fare better than others.\*\* For example, the northern Manitoba region of Burntwood saw a decline in completion rates (55.9% to 54%) compared with a significant increase in Central region (75%-80%), and Assiniboine (82.1-86.6%). In Winnipeg, high school completion rates have increased significantly over time, however, the Downtown and Point Douglas rates remain comparatively low (59.5% and 52.8%).<sup>82</sup> Improving quality educational outcomes and increasing high school graduation rates are critical to the prevention of poverty. This requires a commitment to adequate funding for schools all across Manitoba. We recommend the following actions.

3-4. Increase operating grants funding to school divisions by at least 5% annually to achieve an 80:20 ratio of provincial general revenues to locally generated education property taxation. (Excluding provincial contributions to capital construction, teachers' pension plan and education property tax rebates).

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\* Students enrolled in Grade 9 in 1997/98 were followed until the 2002/03 school year ; 2000/01 were followed until the 2005/06 school year

\*\* MCHP uses the regional health authority regions for their analysis. Students in band-operated schools are excluded because enrolment data is incomplete.

Inequities across neighbourhoods and in rural and northern communities result in an inconsistency in programs available—certain programs and services available in one division may not be affordable in another. A greater provincial contribution would reduce pressure on local levies to provide basic education programs. This would bring more fairness to rural, northern and other school divisions currently at a disadvantage.

3-5. Increase the number of and broaden the distribution of alternative learning opportunities and career pathways for non-university bound secondary students in all regions of the province.

Some students seek work directly out of high school and there is a role for the Province to play in ensuring that schools have the capacity to make that transition as smooth as possible. Programs need to be put in place to give students an opportunity to link their high schools studies with their career aspirations particularly when students do not plan to follow-up their high school studies with a university education. Programs should provide an opportunity for students to gain some kind of work experience while still in high school either through co-op and apprenticeship programs, or other technical/vocational education opportunities.

3-6. Establish a mechanism that ensures interdepartmental coordination and funding sources to support in-school delivery of health-related, settlement, and social services and programs for vulnerable student populations (that is, low socioeconomic status, Aboriginal people, recent immigrants).

Schools are increasingly tasked with addressing the growing special needs of student's settlement, cognitive, mental health and behavioural challenges. Community agencies are providing an important service to the community but many low-income families rely almost solely on schools for help. Their services and programs can help improve the likelihood that students will go on to gain a post-secondary education. As part of the 2009 budget, the Province plans to develop new school-based family resource centres and we await further details on these plans. The Province can play a more active role in coordinating the services and programs provided by schools, community agencies and government departments in an effort to avoid unnecessary duplications and eliminate gaps in program delivery, while ensuring that all levels are working towards common objectives. It is also essential to ensure that adequate financial resources are made available to support these efforts at all levels, but particularly in schools, so that no child falls through the cracks.

*I was a 21-year-old Aboriginal single mother of two with a Grade-8 education and little hope for life beyond welfare. Education became my ticket out of poverty. Through the Inner City Access program, I was able to complete a university degree and get a decent job working in my community.*

*The Government had the foresight to invest in me. But governments are increasingly reluctant to support people beyond two years of education. It is possible to lift people out of poverty, but governments need to be in it for the long haul.*

Josie Hill, Executive Director, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre

## POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

It is widely acknowledged that in today's knowledge-based global economy, everyone requires higher levels of education and specialized skills if they are to be successful in the labour force. Expanding opportunities through post-secondary education is an important component of a poverty reduction plan as it is associated not only with increased access to better jobs and higher earnings, but also with improved health outcomes, greater longevity and less criminality. Ensuring that post-secondary education is accessible to all and investing in vulnerable students in particular is more important than ever in the current economic crisis. It requires a commitment to universal access policies, including lower user fees, with the goal of eliminating these up-front barriers, good grants and bursaries for students, and adequate funding for post-secondary institutions. These broad measures will ensure a strong, sustainable post-secondary education system. We commend the Province for the work it has done in collaboration with the Millennium Foundation to increase post-secondary enrollment by Aboriginal and low-income students. It must continue to encourage and support students from low-income families and socially excluded groups that wish to access post-secondary education. We recommend the following actions.

3-7. Increase the minimum annual living allowance of the student aid program to the after-tax LICO.

Currently, a single student living away from home can borrow \$903 a month in government student loans. This amount is 30% below the after-tax low-income cut-off. The student aid program assumes that parental contributions based on family income will be available to help the student finance her or his education. This is not always the case. Students may borrow on top of what they receive from Student Aid from other financial institutions, increasing their debt. This can lead to high debt levels for students who are unable to rely on personal or family financial resources. While getting a post-secondary education is a way out of poverty, there is no guarantee it will be enough to pay off high student debt. Keeping student debt low will help improve access and success. Those who turn to employment to cover the costs that Student Aid fails to account for in its living allowance rates are eligible for even less assistance, and, as a result, their overall financial situation does not improve. Furthermore, a student loan recipient's maximum monthly student loan amount in Manitoba shrinks as tuition fees eat up a larger and larger portion of these stagnant funds.

3-8. Eliminate full-time status criteria as an eligibility requirement for Manitoba Student Aid loans and bursaries, and introduce a pro-rated living expense amount for part-time students.



Many students are unable to attend a post-secondary educational program on a full-time basis due to parental responsibilities and other family obligations. When this is the case, they are not eligible to receive financial support from Manitoba Student Aid, because part-time students are expected to be working during their studies. However, not all part-time students are in a position where they can also work part-time. These students should not have to face increased financial barriers to accessing post-secondary educational opportunities as a result of personal circumstances that require them to study on a part-time basis. Furthermore, a full-time, full-year minimum wage earner does not earn enough income to meet the poverty line and may already be in a difficult financial situation. So those part-time students who are able to work part-time would be living even further below the poverty line and could not be expected to take on the full costs of their part-time education on top of their regular living costs. A part-time student that is able to work part-time to contribute to the costs of their education should not be penalized for doing so.

Part-time students are eligible for a Canada student loan up to \$4,000. High-need part-time students are also eligible for non-repayable Canada Study Grants for as much as \$1,200 per loan year. On top of these, students with dependents may be eligible for grants of up to \$60 per week of study. Part-time students with disabilities are also eligible for Canada student loans and grants. However, this patchwork of aid is inadequate for part-time students. Canada student loans and grants only cover tuition, books and supplies and do not consider costs of living. The Province's recent announcement of a 12% increase in funding to Manitoba's bursary program is intended to help post-secondary students manage their debt loads. While these new initiatives are welcome, the Province must continue to invest in grants and bursaries for part-time students, especially as university and college endowment funds are hammered by the economic downturn.

### 3-9. Index funding for Manitoba's ACCESS programs to the growth of the Aboriginal student body in Manitoba, based on annual high school graduation rates.

Manitoba's ACCESS program has been very effective at providing support for Aboriginal students pursuing a high quality college or university education in Manitoba. These programs provide appropriate supports that help students overcome the cultural, social and economic barriers that may otherwise prevent them from pursuing and succeeding in higher education. Counseling, tutoring, training in study skills and other supports are provided to help students successfully complete the programs. A high percentage of graduates go on to find full-time employment in their field of study, which have included law, medicine, education and engineering. We commend the Province for its recent announcement to provide a 4.5% increase in funding to these much-needed programs. They have contributed to an increase in

the number of Aboriginal students in post-secondary education. This has resulted in post-secondary participation rates for Aboriginal people that are now comparable to their share of the Manitoba population.<sup>83</sup> We recommend that the Province index its funding for ACCESS programs to the growth of the Aboriginal student body in Manitoba to help ensure that these programs have the capacity to remain effective and accommodate a growing number of Aboriginal students. This is important given the relatively high growth rate of the Aboriginal population compared with other populations in Manitoba. The expansion will have the result of benefiting all who apply to ACCESS programs as more spaces will be available.

#### ADULT LEARNING AND TRAINING

Many adults living in poverty experience barriers to employment resulting from lack of education and the skills required to access meaningful, long-term employment. The process from increasing basic literacy through training to employment can take much longer than programs are currently designed to support. While a combination of prevention and intervention is required, simple steps can be taken to improve outcomes and better align existing programs. For example, increasing the number of Adult Learning Centres and strengthening their links to community-based education and training programs, ACCESS programs, and apprenticeship opportunities. The Province must support adults in accessing the education and training they require to gain the type of employment that can help prevent a fall into poverty. We recommend the following actions.

3-10. Equally recognize the value of education and training by extending income supports for social assistance recipients who wish to pursue education and training beyond the current two-year limits.

Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance program focuses first and foremost on getting social assistance recipients back to work, but without adequate education and training, recipients have a hard time gaining quality employment. There needs to be an acknowledgement that the current two-year limit to education and training may not be long enough to help some social assistance recipients develop the skills they need to access good, high paying jobs that provide an opportunity to move out of poverty. Many individuals end up in low-skill, low-paying jobs even after having qualified and participated in an education or training program. Social assistance recipients that are considered 'employable', such as singles without dependents, are less likely to be eligible for these programs compared with persons with disabilities and single parents. In cases where they are eligible, they are unlikely to receive approval for the full two years. 'Employable' individuals are expected to have access to alternative sources of funding if they wish to pursue education and training to improve their employment prospects. However, very-low-

income families and individuals do not always have access to the same financial supports that middle class families and individuals have and are in need of more support than is currently provided by the Province. Those who are eligible for two years of education and training but need to study beyond that to gain meaningful employment will also require more support. Providing this support is cost-effective in the longterm as these individuals are less likely to need assistance in the future. The Province might be starting to move in this direction with the recent announcement of its intention to create a new program called Rebound. The program would provide training and employment opportunities for social assistance recipients, but its details have yet to be announced. In addition to the above recommendation, the Province can take further steps to recognize the value of education and training. It must be recognized that volunteer work provides an opportunity for individuals to develop the type of skills training that can lead to paid employment. Therefore, we recommend that the Province extend, to all EIA categories, the benefits that are currently offered to EIA recipients with disabilities who do volunteer work.

3-11. Increase financial support and access to education and training programs for high-demand skills and jobs that offer low-income individuals a career path and long term security.

Job training programs are more likely to have the intended impact on poverty reduction when they target the type of training that meets the demands of the local labour market. Education and training programs should be targeted at jobs and industries that offer the best opportunities for advancement. Programs should also be designed with employers to ensure that they deliver the skills and knowledge that is required by the labour market. Over the next decade many skilled tradespeople will be retiring, and unless they can be replaced, Manitoba will face large shortages in the skilled trades. Construction activity is expected to grow in the future with an estimated 4,500 construction workers needed to replace retirees and another 6,000 needed to fill expected new demand over the next seven years.<sup>84</sup> It is essential that recruitment and training be made a priority to address this critical problem. We recommend that the Province establish an 'into the trades' strategy to assist low-income individuals learning about and gaining access to careers in skilled trades. A community-based program that focuses on low-income individuals would create a great opportunity to fill the need while enhancing the education and career prospects of these individuals.

#### **4. NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY APPROACHES**

***Ensure low-income communities have sufficient resources to enable their residents to actively participate in the improvement of their lives and the communities they live in.***

*We work with the people nobody else wants...societies most unwanted. We sit on second-hand broken furniture in our offices, we receive low wages, we tend to work statutory holidays so there is access for the marginalized when the bigger system sleeps. We have to do "the song and dance" for each funder to show them we are accountable for their donated dollar; and looking forward to retirement isn't an option because we have no pension plan...it's a good thing we know where the food banks are.*

Kelly Holmes, executive director, Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY)

Place-based poverty reduction is an important component of a poverty reduction plan because it empowers individuals through participation and capacity building. Community based approaches recognize that individuals have unique skills, knowledge and resources that can be built upon and applied through active participation towards the improvement of their lives and the communities they live in. These approaches to poverty reduction can help prevent members at-risk groups from falling through the cracks, particularly when the approaches are focused on engaging disadvantaged populations and neighbourhoods. Manitoba has a long history of supporting community-based approaches, however much more must be done. For example, community organizations require increased funding to provide adequate compensation and benefits to their staff, and continue to provide their much needed services and supports to community members. This needs to be addressed in the longer term as governments rely increasingly on NGOs to deliver programming. In the immediate term, we recommend the following actions.

4-1. Increase financial support to Neighbourhoods Alive! to allow neighbourhood renewal corporations to scale up their community revitalization activities.

Neighbourhoods Alive! provides support to community organizations with their neighbourhood revitalization efforts. In doing so, the initiative recognizes the importance of building upon ideas and working towards goals that are generated by community members. The program is concerned with housing and physical improvements, employment and training, education and recreation, and safety and crime prevention, and many projects in these areas have been proven successful. We commend the Province for its recent announcement to expand Neighbourhoods Alive! to new communities across Manitoba. Further financial investments are required to support the sustainability of the projects that are taking place in existing Neighbourhoods Alive! communities. There is very clear evidence that the neighbourhood renewal corporations funded by Neighbourhoods Alive! have made a significant difference in the revitalization of inner-city neighbourhoods.

4-2. Increase the number of Adult Learning Centres, including on-site childcare centres, in low-income neighbourhoods.

Adult Learning Centres provide Manitobans with the essential skills and credentials that are required to pursue further education and training. At the end of the 2006/07 school year, 8,300 learners completed 11,170 courses for credit and 1,260 graduated with high school diplomas.<sup>85</sup> We recommend that childcare centres be integrated into facilities that provide adult learning and training. The Urban Circle Training Centre does just this and in doing so, provides resources for families that facilitate community-based capacity building. The SISTARS organization was designed by and for women

residing in North Point Douglas. It integrates an early childhood education program and trades training program into a community-based facility that also provides childcare. The childcare component enables women to take advantage of education and training opportunities right in their community and also provides an employment opportunity for early childhood education graduates. The Province has recently announced its intention to increase funding for Adult Learning Centres. We hope to see details around this investment that reflect the recommendations we have made.

4-3. Establish within five years, 30 parent-child centres in high-need schools across Manitoba.

The research is clear: the more parents are involved in their child's education, the better children do at school. Parental involvement in inner-city schools is a significant challenge. There is a great deal of social distance between inner-city schools as an institution and the communities for which they serve in terms of class, race, culture and language. As well, many inner-city parents have had a bad experience with the education system when they were students and this serves to further create distance and alienation between families and the schools. Attending to basic survival issues such as food, clothing and shelter pre-occupy a great deal of the time and energy of many inner-city families. These types of factors create barriers to parents becoming actively involved in their child's education.

Parent-Child Centres in Schools attempt to bridge this social distance between parents and the school by providing supports to families in the local neighbourhood including social, parenting, employment, food security, cultural, advocacy and leadership development. Parent-Child Centres are based on a capacity-building, strength-based approach that promotes community self-help and self-reliance.

Providing assistance for families to address their basic needs serves to build trust between the school and local parents. Parents feel less intimidated by the school and begin to develop relationships with the educators and the various school programs. Parent-Child Centres can be a stepping-stone to connect local parents to the school.

Parent-Child Centres also have the potential to act as a platform for the delivery of existing education and child-welfare prevention programs. Existing education programs such as Building Success for Aboriginal Parents and the Positive Parenting Program would benefit from having a community-based resource centre for program delivery. School attendance can be an early warning signal of family stress. Parent-Child Centres have the potential to develop community-based strategies to support families in the local neighbourhood including support groups, parenting programs, advocacy services and to facilitate the recruitment of foster parents. Resource centres

can also act as a referral resource for families to child and family support services.

The school is one of the institutions in our community that have daily contact with children and families. It is an ideally situated neighbourhood resource to deliver a broad range of integrated services.

4-4. Increase financial support to school divisions to encourage after school and summer use of school recreational facilities, particularly in rural and northern areas and the inner city.

Access to quality recreation activities is a key factor contributing to the health and personal development of children and youth. Participation in recreation activities helps prevent disease and other negative behaviours such as smoking and substance abuse while encouraging the development of motor skills, social skills and self-esteem and improving educational outcomes. Low-income children and youth face many barriers to accessing recreation opportunities including a lack of adequate facilities, awareness, transportation, family support and safe places to play. One study of low-income women in Winnipeg revealed that mothers make budget changes including, taking money out of their food budgets to find ways to afford the costs associated with providing their children with recreation opportunities.<sup>86</sup> Increasing recreation opportunities through school facilities can help address some of the barriers that low-income children and youth face when trying to access recreation opportunities. Improving access to school facilities can provide children and youth in the community with convenient, adequate and safe places to recreate. Furthermore, schools can spread awareness to their students and provide the support and encouragement that students may not otherwise have to take advantage of the benefits offered by recreation. The 2009 budget indicates a commitment by the Province to work with Manitobans to ensure that schools serve their communities in a variety of ways including as venues for recreation and sporting events outside of school hours. The details around this commitment have not yet been made public.

4-5. Expand programs that build linkages between recreational and justice structures, and that act as a preventative mechanism by providing at risk children and youth with recreational opportunities.

Manitoba's Lighthouses support community-based recreational, educational and social programs organized by and for local youth throughout Manitoba. In addition to providing recreation opportunities from which youth can gain health and developmental benefits, these programs teach life skills such as conflict resolution and peer mediation while promoting anti-vandalism, safety and crime prevention and community relationship-building. By building awareness of these issues and by providing an opportunity to participate in

all stages of the programs, youth can not only discover an alternative to crime but also begin to develop a stake in facilitating crime prevention activities in their communities. Residents who live in neighbourhoods where these programs are offered can begin to benefit from living in safer communities within which they can grow and prosper. The Province has recently indicated a commitment to expand the Lighthouses program. We recommend that the Province continue to invest more resources into this program and others like it.

## 5. TRANSPORTATION

### ***Ensure that accessible and affordable public transportation is available to all Manitobans.***

A public transportation system that is designed to enable every Manitoban to participate fully in community life is essential for poverty reduction. Public transportation is required to provide access to education, training, regular and stable income earning employment, recreational activities and social services. Furthermore, public transportation can be one of few means through which individuals are able to maintain the social relationships that contribute to their well being. Persons living on low incomes and persons with disabilities face barriers to using public transportation and often fail to reap the benefits that access provides. Some of these individuals may make sacrifices in other areas such as quality housing in order to pay for public transportation, while others are forced to look for alternative sources of mobility. The Province has recently increased funding to municipalities with public transportation to improve their transportation systems, restoring a 50-50 funding partnership that was eliminated in 1993. However, municipalities ultimately decide on how this money gets spent. By attaching conditions to its financing, the Province can work with municipalities that operate public transit systems to increase accessibility for low-income persons and persons with disabilities. We recommend the following.

- 5-1. Make funding to municipalities conditional upon providing free public transportation for people on Employment and Income Assistance during off-peak hours.

While some EIA participants may be provided with tickets or passes based on their particular circumstances (for health reasons, to look for employment or take advantage training) the cost of public transportation is usually paid out of the pockets of those with a fixed and inadequate income. Manitoba Family Services and Housing purchases off-peak transit passes from the City of Brandon at the cost of wear and tear for all EIA participants. The Province could mandate this arrangement to all municipalities with transportation

systems. The cost of providing transportation during non-peak hours is negligible and is heavily outweighed by the benefits.

5-2. Make funding to municipalities conditional upon ensuring that all forms of public transportation are easily accessible and adhere to the principles of Universal Design, while providing incentives for the private sector to do the same.

Universal Design is a broader concept than accessibility. It means enhancing the usability of products, communications and environments for as many people as possible, not just persons with disabilities, at little or no extra cost. According to the Centre for Universal Design, the seven principles of Universal Design are: equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive, perceptible information, minimal tolerance for error, low physical effort, appropriate size and space for approach and use. Public transportation will become more accessible to everyone in Manitoba, including persons with disabilities, if it adheres to these principles. This requires making public transportation

## **6. DISABILITY SUPPORTS**

***Ensure that all persons with disabilities in Manitoba achieve full inclusion in the social cultural, political and economic spheres of society.***

Nearly one in six people in Manitoba have a disability. Members of First Nations and Metis communities are at least twice as likely as non-Aboriginal people to have a disability.<sup>87</sup> Persons with disabilities can face many barriers to reaching their full social and economic potential without appropriate disability supports. These barriers can prevent them from participating fully and equitably in education, job training, employment, housing, public and private transportation, health care, recreation, and social services. Education facilities and workplaces do not always provide the supports and flexibility that persons with disabilities need to pursue education, training and employment opportunities. Furthermore, persons with disabilities face attitudinal barriers and systemic discrimination, often due to a lack of awareness, which can prevent them from accessing meaningful education and employment opportunities. Lower educational attainment, employment and participation rates mean they end up with relatively lower incomes and become among those most socially and economically excluded in Manitoba. The Province has taken important steps through the implementation of its Full Citizenship Strategy, a disability issues office, Cabinet's recent approval of a disability lens to be used across government, and the implementation of an advertising campaign to promote the advantages of hiring persons with disabilities. However, consultations with persons with disabilities resulted in important areas requiring immediate actions to ensure their full inclusion in the social,



cultural, political, and economic spheres of society. We recommend the following actions.

6-1. Develop and enact strong and effective legislation that requires the progressive removal of existing barriers for persons with disabilities, and prevents the creation of new ones.

Accessibility-right legislation and mandatory standards are critical to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities over a reasonable period of time. As indicated by Barrier Free Manitoba, this requires the development of clear, progressive, mandatory and date-specific standards in all major areas related to accessibility that will apply to public and private sectors, accompanied by a timely and effective process for monitoring and enforcing the standards. For example, standards must be put in place that address barriers to accessing educational, employment, and recreational facilities. The Province should also legislate the use of the disability lens to ensure that future governments will continue to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities and make their full citizenship a priority. The disability lens is a tool that can be used by the Province to identify, prevent and remove barriers to full citizenship for persons with disabilities. The Province should use its disability lens to assess how provincial initiatives impact persons with disabilities, identify barriers, put actions in place to address barriers, and reassess progress annually.

6-2. Ensure a seamless and lifelong continuum of support services for persons with disabilities.

The Province should increase supports for persons with disabilities and their families as they transition into adult life. Persons with disabilities along with their families may need assistance in moving towards greater independence and self-direction. This includes services and supports for vocational, residential or transportation needs to help persons with disabilities live as independently as possible. It also includes programs that educate families on the role that they can play in facilitating the transition to professional employment, and greater personal and financial independence.

Quality home-care services are integral to enabling persons with disabilities to live safely and with dignity in their homes and as integrated members of their communities. The Province should invest in improved home-care services including staff continuity, technical support training, and 24-hour emergency service.

## 7. HEALTH

***Ensure that publicly funded physical and mental health services are accessible to all Manitobans.***

*Disparities in income have long been associated with health inequities at the population level, not just for individuals. As health is inextricably linked to income, it is essential to continue to examine women and men's health in relation to their income.*

M. J. Haworth-Brockman  
in Donner et al, 2008. *A Profile of Women's Health in Manitoba*, Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence

High income does not guarantee good health, but low income almost inevitably ensures poor health and significant health inequity in Canada.<sup>88</sup>

It is widely recognized that socio-economic factors contribute to individual health outcomes, and that social determinants of health contribute to good or poor health. More significantly, it has been proven that *disparities* in income in a population affect the overall health of the *entire* population. That is, the greater the difference between rich and poor and the greater the population that is prevented from having the same resources as the rest of the population, in a society, the worse is the health of the entire population. In Manitoba, the incomes of the richest fifth of the population have been increasing much faster than the incomes of the poorest fifth. As of 2006, the richest 20% of Manitobans garnered 42.8% of total after-tax income, while the poorest 20% received 5.3% of total after-tax income. In other words, the richest fifth of the population of Manitoba had incomes more than eight times higher than those of the poorest fifth of Manitoba residents.<sup>89</sup>

It should also be noted that women, Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities and visible minorities are over represented among those who are poor and therefore are at greater risk of poor health. A strong public system built on a model of prevention is particularly significant for these equity seeking groups.

Our poverty reduction plan includes policy and program recommendations that touch on each of these determinants. More specific to physical and mental health, we call on the Province to build on the basis of Manitoba's public system, which is generally fairly funded, efficient and comprehensive. We recommend the following actions.

7-1. Continue to provide health services through a publicly administered, publicly funded, non-profit delivery system to ensure equal access for all Manitobans.

Health-care systems based on ability to pay create a situation where those who are at greater risk of poor health and more likely to require health-care services are also those who are least able to afford to pay for it. Poor Manitobans should not have to face financial barriers to accessing the health-care services that they are forced to depend on as a result of our failure to address the social determinants that are contributing to their poor health. The Province needs to maintain and improve upon a system based on need that ensures all Manitobans have access to health-care services and are treated equally regardless of their ability to pay.

7-2. Integrate into Manitoba's Healthy Living Strategy an explicit goal to reduce health inequities along with measures to track the progress of key indicators.

The Province can show that it is serious about addressing the social determinants of health in an effort to reduce health inequities by openly announcing it as a policy objective, setting targets and timelines for reaching that objective, and by identifying indicators that can be used to track progress. Developing and implementing a poverty reduction plan with targets and timelines for actions that address the social determinants of health would be an important step towards achieving the objective of reduced health inequities.

7-3. Extend dental- and vision-care benefits to all low-income people using an income-based sliding scale model similar to that used by Pharmacare.

Many people fail to realize the importance of dental and vision care compared with basic health care. Consequently, dental and vision care may be delayed or neglected all together, perhaps more so by people of low income who face tight budget constraints and are forced to make difficult expenditure decisions. However, without access to dental care, people are at risk for oral diseases and infections that can have a significant impact on quality of life. Furthermore, oral health has been linked to overall body health and its maintenance and improvement need to be treated as an important contributor to overall good health. Vision care is required not only to maintain healthy vision but also to detect medical eye conditions and major medical problems that may be in the early stages of development like diabetes and high blood pressure. Dental and vision care are as essential to ensuring good health outcomes as prescription drugs and should be as accessible to people of low income.

7-4. Ensure primary mental health services are available as part of a fundamental component of a comprehensive health system.

Mental health is just as important as physical health in enabling individuals to realize their full potential, work productively, and participate fully in society. Mental illness is the number one health disability in Manitoba. The Province has recently indicated a commitment to increase community living supports for Manitobans with mental disabilities, and expand mental health crisis stabilization services. We commend the Province for taking these steps. However, much more must be done. The Province must make it a priority to address mental illness by ensuring that adequate and appropriate investments are made to improve the accessibility and quality of mental health services for all Manitobans who require them.

## CONCLUSION

ISSUES OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION are challenging governments all over the world and Manitoba is no exception. Far too many people continue to have inadequate incomes and struggle to meet their basic needs and overcome barriers to full participation in society. Poverty exists in Manitoba and a comprehensive plan is required if we are to effectively reduce it.

Significant poverty reduction will not happen without a strong federal role. But with a provincial plan, Manitoba can join the voices of other provincial governments in showing that poverty is a priority. Collectively we must all demand that the federal government take action too. A strong social safety net will be increasingly important during these difficult economic times.

*The view from here: Manitobans call for a poverty plan* outlines a comprehensive package of policy interventions that if implemented, would greatly reduce poverty in Manitoba.

We have also provided timelines, targets and indicators to measure progress. While we believe that progress has been made in recent years, it is difficult to demonstrate how far we have come because we have not established a method to measure progress. Our plan shows how we can change that.

Polling clearly shows that Manitobans want poverty reduction made a priority.

- 86% of Manitobans believe that our governments can take concrete action to reduce poverty and they want the Prime Minister and provincial Premiers to set real targets and timelines to make that happen.

- 80% of Manitobans call on provincial government to bring in a concrete strategy to reduce poverty at least 25% over the next five years.

We have laid out a plan.

What we need now is the leadership of our provincial government.

## ENDNOTES

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