



the view from here 2015

Manitobans call for a renewed poverty reduction plan



CCPA

CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
MANITOBA OFFICE



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The View From Here 2015: Manitobans Call For a Renewed Poverty Reduction Plan

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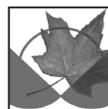
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ABOUT THE COVER

CCPA-MB and CCEDNet-Manitoba thank 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.

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Endorsements

CCPA-MB and CCEDNet-Manitoba will continue to reach out to Manitobans to endorse the recommended priority actions in *The View From Here 2015: Manitobans Call For a Renewed Poverty Reduction Plan*. The following 87 organizations have endorsed the priority actions in this plan. Organizations are encouraged to add their names to the list of supporters by emailing view@policyalternatives.ca.

Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg

Aki Energy

Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 1505

Andrews Street Family Centre

Assiniboine Credit Union

Brandon and District Labour Council

Brandon Friendship Centre

Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation

Building Urban Industries for Local Development (BUILD)

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – MB

Canadian Community Economic Development Network – Manitoba

Canadian Federation of Students – Manitoba

Canadian Mental Health Association – Western Region

Canadian Mental Health Association - Winnipeg

Canadian Union of Public Employees Manitoba

Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation

Child Care Coalition of Manitoba

Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba

Citizens' Bridge

City of Brandon Poverty Committee

College of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Manitoba

Community Education Development Association
Co-op Housing Development Group
Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada
Council of Canadians - Winnipeg Chapter
Council of School Leaders - Manitoba Teachers' Society
Council of Women of Winnipeg
Daniel McIntyre/St. Matthews Community Association
Dauphin Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation
Employment and Income Assistance Advocates Network
Family Dynamics
Food Matters Manitoba
Green Action Centre
Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM)
John Howard Society of Manitoba
Jubilee Fund
Klinic Community Health Centre
Local Investment Toward Employment
Make Poverty History Manitoba
Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance (MAFRA)
Manitoba Association of School Boards
Manitoba Cooperative Association
Manitoba Eco-Network
Manitoba Federation of Labour
Manitoba Government and Employees Union
Manitoba Green Retrofit
Manitoba Immigrant and Refugee Settlement Sector Association (MIRSA)
Manitoba Institute of Registered Social Workers
Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council
Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities
Manitoba Teachers' Society
Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Centre
Mount Carmel Clinic
Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad

New Journey Housing
North End Women's Centre
North Point Douglas Women's Centre
NorWest Co-op Community Health
Oak Table Community Ministry
Provincial Council of Women Manitoba
Pulford Community Living Services
Red Road Lodge
Resource Assistance for Youth
Rossbrook House
School of Social Work, Université de Saint-Boniface
SEED Winnipeg
Selkirk Community Renewal Corporation
Spence Neighbourhood Association
St. Andrew's River Heights United Church
Success Skills Centre
Swan Valley Settlement and Immigration Services
Taking Charge! Inc.
The Right to Housing Coalition
The University of Winnipeg Students' Association
The Winnipeg Boldness Project
United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local No. 832
University of Manitoba Students' Union
University of Winnipeg Department of Urban and Inner City Studies
Urban Circle Training Centre
Wahbung Abinoonjiiag
West Broadway Community Ministry
West Broadway Community Organization
West Central Women's Resource Centre
Winnipeg Harvest
Winnipeg Rental Network
Wolseley Family Place
Youth Agencies Alliance

Executive Summary

MANITOBANS HAVE BEEN working hard in their communities to address complex challenges associated with poverty and social exclusion. The Province of Manitoba has played a critical role over the years in supporting community efforts while implementing key actions in a number of public policy areas that address poverty and social exclusion. While progress has been made, much more remains to be done.

In the 2000s, community advocates spent several years calling for a comprehensive provincial poverty reduction plan that shows Manitobans how far we have come and where the province plans to go in its efforts to reduce poverty and social exclusion. In the absence of a provincial government process, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba (CCPA-MB), in collaboration with Make Poverty History Manitoba and many other organizations, prepared *The View From Here: Manitobans Call For a Poverty Reduction Plan*, originally released in 2009. This report was based on the ideas and policy recommendations resulting from consultations and interviews with hundreds of individuals across Manitoba. It provided a reasonable and realistic plan that built on the progress made by the province, and was endorsed by over 70 organizations.

Also in 2009, the province introduced its *All Aboard* poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy. While the strategy did not address the need for targets and timelines, it was a significant response to the community's efforts and an important step towards demonstrating leadership in the fight against poverty in Manitoba. The introduction of the strategy led to the *The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* in 2011, which embeds in legislation a government commitment to reducing poverty.

Several important policy initiatives have been implemented since the introduction of the strategy, many of which are rooted in the recommendations put forth by the community in *The View from Here 2009*. Guided by their plan, community advocates have worked hard for action that would help make the province's strategy more comprehensive. As a result significant commitments and investments have been made in the areas of housing, shelter benefits, child care, accessibility rights, and training and jobs for people with barriers to employment.

Manitoba's poverty rate based on the Low-Income Cut Off-After Tax has been on a downward trend during the last decade. The annual rate declined steadily since 2005 under all three of the most common measures of poverty, before increasing slightly in 2009, after the start of the 2008 global recession. The most recent year for which data are available shows the rate dropped again in 2011 to 8.9 percent under the LICO-AT (0.4 percentage points higher than it was pre-recession).

Manitoba's poverty rate has been on a downward trend during the last decade.

Data related to the province's indicators of poverty and social exclusion show that since the strategy was announced in 2009, there has been an 8 percent increase in graduation rates, a 5.5 percent increase in the availability of licensed child care, and a 5.3 percent increase in the number of social and affordable housing units supported by the province.¹ A higher proportion of urban households live in quality, affordable and appropriate housing now than in years before the strategy.² But we have a lot more work to do. For example, there is an increasing proportion of children in care of the child welfare system, and we know that poverty creates conditions that can lead to involvement in the child welfare system.³

Given that the policy landscape has changed since 2009, and that the province will be required by legislation to update its strategy in 2017, community advocates believe that now is the time to renew *The View from Here 2009*. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Manitoba and the Canadian Community Economic Development Network–Manitoba (CCEDNet-Manitoba) have been working with community partners to present a renewed package of policy recommendations that should be included in Manitoba's updated strategy to ensure it takes a comprehensive and long-term approach to poverty reduction and social inclusion.

This renewed report looks at progress that has been made in other jurisdictions with poverty reduction plans; it reports on the progress made in Manitoba using the indicators that were proposed in our 2009 report; it includes the latest poverty statistics for Manitoba; it builds a case for continuing efforts through a made in Manitoba poverty reduction plan; it outlines the essential components of a meaningful poverty reduction plan as well as a comprehensive package of policies and programs that should be included in Manitoba's updated poverty reduction strategy.

OUR POVERTY INDICATORS

Our plan identifies measurable indicators of poverty with targets and timelines that can be tracked to help monitor the impact that the plan is having on poverty and to measure progress. According to legislation, the province must update its strategy in 2017. As part of that update, the province should review its set of 21 indicators to ensure they capture those that are identified below.

- Using Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut Off–After Tax (LICO–AT), reduce Manitoba's poverty rate by 25 percent in five years, and by 50 percent in ten years.
- Ensure the poverty rate (using the LICO–AT) for children, female lone-parent households, single women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants declines by 25 percent in five years, and by 50 percent in ten years, in recognition that these populations are particularly vulnerable to poverty.
- Within two years, ensure there are no Manitobans living 50 percent or more below the LICO–AT.
- Reduce the share of Manitobans facing "core housing need" by half by 2020.
- Eliminate severe food insecurity within five years and reduce the prevalence of household food insecurity in Manitoba by half within ten years.
- Reduce the need for food bank use by half within ten years and set a date for the elimination of the need for food banks in Manitoba.
- Demonstrate annual progress in reducing the share of low-wage workers (earning less than two thirds of the median).

OUR RECOMMENDED PRIORITY ACTIONS

The recommendations below are based on discussions with organizations and individuals across Manitoba who were asked to speak to what they believed needed to be included in a comprehensive plan to reduce poverty in this province. While many excellent ideas were presented during these discussions, the following recommendations represent those ideas that were believed to be the most critical and achievable. Implementation of these recommendations over the next five years will enable significant progress to be made toward reaching the targets we have established for the poverty indicators we identified in the previous section.

1. Housing

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

1-1.A. Beginning in 2016, increase the supply of non-profit, rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing by a minimum of 300 newly built units each year for five years. Priority should be given to new builds in the North and in high-need urban centres. A portion of new units should be dedicated to larger families requiring three bedrooms or more.

1-1.B. Proactively work with housing providers and invest to ensuring that there is no net loss of rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing units due to expiring federal operating agreements.

1-2. Immediately increase Rent Assist's maximum benefit to 75 percent of Median Market Rent for people on and off Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) without cutting other income-related benefits, and index the benefit to annual increases in the Median Market Rent.

1-3. Ensure all Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation tenants have access to resource centres that receive sufficient and stable funding to cover basic costs (e.g. space and core staffing) by 2020.

1-4. Invest at least \$118 million annually between 2014/15 and 2019/20 to meet the need for capital repairs and maintenance in public housing units.

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

2-1. Immediately establish through legislation an EIA Rate Review Committee consisting of government and community representatives.

2-2.A. Immediately implement a transparent mechanism for redefining basic needs in EIA legislation and for setting, reviewing, and annually updating EIA rates that are based on the actual cost of purchasing those basic needs.

2-2.B. Increase EIA rates for all categories to the rates set in 2-2.A within two years and annually review and update rates to ensure they do not fall behind increases in the cost of living.

2-3. Establish a separate pension-like basic income support program for Manitobans with severe and prolonged disability.

Jobs

2-4. Provide immediate funding for the initial set up and operating costs of a Labour Market Intermediary in Winnipeg and in the North to be designed and delivered with Aboriginal community organizations to improve labour market outcomes for multi-barriered Aboriginal job seekers.

2-5. Commit resources to ensure the Manitoba Social Enterprise Strategy is fully implemented by 2020 in order to create more jobs for people with barriers to employment.

2-6. Include and achieve targeted training and hiring of groups identified in the Province of Manitoba's Employment Equity Policy for all infrastructure projects that are supported by public funds.

2-7. Address the barriers immigrants face when getting their qualifications recognized in Manitoba.

2-8. Adjust government-wide benchmarks for representation of employment equity groups in Manitoba's Employment Equity Policy to reflect changes in population and labour force data and set a goal to meet adjusted benchmarks within the civil service and publicly owned institutions by 2020. Priority should be given to achieving benchmarks within management positions.

Wages

2-9. Incrementally increase the minimum wage per hour to the Low-Income Cut Off— Before Tax (LICO-BT) for a one parent, one child household by 2020, and index annually to the LICO-BT.

2-10. Within two years, introduce living wage legislation to ensure that all Manitoba government employees are paid a living wage and that the evaluation criteria for all requests for proposals take into account whether or not employees are paid a living wage.

Employment Standards and Legislation

2-11. Immediately increase the protection of all workers from unfair labour practices.

2-12. Immediately improve the Employment Standards Code to better protect vulnerable workers and introduce stronger measures to proactively monitor and enforce the Code.

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.A. Add 12,000 new licensed and funded not for profit child care spaces while also investing resources to ensure existing spaces are sufficiently funded. Operating funding should be sufficient to fairly compensate and retain Early Childhood Educators and to enable the delivery of sustain-

able community-based and culturally-relevant early learning and child care programming for families in high socio-economic needs areas.

3-1.B. Invest in initiatives to recruit and train enough early childhood educators to meet the legislated requirements for proportion of trained staff in the 12,000 new spaces.

3-2. Immediately eliminate the \$2.00 daily child care fee and increase the income level at which families are eligible for a full fee subsidy, with annual indexing to ensure families do not unfairly lose out on subsidies in the future.

3-3. Establish 30 community-based Aboriginal head start programs in and around high-needs schools across Manitoba by 2020.

Kindergarten to Grade Twelve

3-4. Review operational funding to school divisions—and in particular the ratio of direct provincial funding to locally levied property taxes for schools—with an eye toward reducing inequities in education programs and services among school divisions.

3-5. Establish and provide multi-year funding for five community school cluster sites by 2020 to provide vulnerable student populations with a continuity of access to the in-school delivery of coordinated services and programs as they transition through kindergarten to grade 12.

3-6. Establish and provide funding by 2020 for 30 parent-child centres in community schools across Manitoba as part of efforts to coordinate services and programs through the community schools approach.

3-7. Support existing and new mentorship programs that include recreational elements for children and youth (e.g. arts, music, sports).

Post-Secondary Education

3-8. Immediately establish a timeline for transitioning provincial student loans into provincial student grants.

3-9. Increase the minimum annual living allowance of Manitoba Student Aid to the LICO–AT.

3-10. Eliminate full-time status criteria as an eligibility requirement for Manitoba Student Aid loans and bursaries.

3-11. Increase funding to ensure Manitoba’s ACCESS programs can meet the needs of the growing Aboriginal student body in Manitoba.

3-12. Provide financial incentives to post-secondary education institutions to encourage the delivery of courses off-campus and in low-income neighbourhoods and communities throughout the province.

Adult Learning and Training

3-13. Provide immediate support to community-based employment development organizations to deliver services to self-referred clients who wish to proceed through the province’s ‘sustainable employment pathway.’

3-14. Immediately extend Employment and Income Assistance supports to all participants who wish to pursue education and training programs, including university and other post-secondary programs that are up to four years in duration, depending on the participant's learning objectives.

3-15. Increase funding levels to existing adult literacy and learning centres and ensure all low-income neighbourhoods and public housing complexes have access to community-based and culturally-appropriate adult literacy and learning centres with onsite child care services.

Intergenerational Education

3-16. Support comprehensive models of education by investing in hubs consisting of educational programs, student housing, and child care facilities that are influenced by the cultural values of the population served.

4. Funding

Ensure that community-based organizations are sufficiently funded to effectively respond to the needs of the communities they serve.

4-1. Provide community-based organizations with adequate, flexible, and long-term funding (three to five years) that enables the delivery of programming that is high quality, holistic, and responsive to changing community needs.

4-2. Increase financial support to Neighbourhoods Alive! to allow neighbourhood renewal corporations to scale up their community revitalization activities.

4-3. Provide adequate and dedicated funding to Aboriginal-led organizations and organizations working with Aboriginal people for the delivery of programming that integrates decolonization methods.

5. Food Security

Ensure that all Manitobans have physical and economic access to healthy, safe, and affordable food.

5-1. Develop an adequately funded and nutritionally sound provincial school nourishment program that is available to all schools in need by 2020.

5-2. Immediately establish a Food Security Action Fund to provide grants that support food security initiatives across Manitoba.

5-3. Provide immediate funding to train and employ local community food coordinators who live in Northern Manitoba communities.

6. Transportation

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

6-1. Provide municipalities with adequate and targeted funding to ensure public transportation is affordable and accessible to all citizens.

7. Disability Supports

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

7-1. Develop and implement 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.

7-2. Ensure a seamless and lifelong continuum of support services for persons with disabilities.

8. Health

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

8-1. Continue to provide health services through a publicly-administered, single-payer, non-profit delivery system to ensure equal access for all Manitobans.

8-2. Ensure primary mental health services are a fundamental component of a comprehensive health system by increasing the proportion of the health budget that is allocated to expenditures on mental health and by expanding the types of mental health services covered by the public healthcare system.

8-3. Ensure youth have access to initiatives that promote mental health as well as services that prevent and address mental illness.

8-4. Extend dental and vision care benefits to all low-income people using an income-based graduated scale which augments benefits for those receiving EIA supports.

8-5. Immediately adopt an explicit goal to reduce health inequities, develop measures to track the progress of key indicators, and ensure that an equity-focused health impact assessment is implemented across government departments.

9. Child Welfare

Ensure child safety and the best possible outcomes for all Manitoba children.

9-1. Implement the recommendations in *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children* by Hon. Ted Hughes to improve the child welfare system and address the underlying issues of poverty that can lead to contact with the child welfare system.

Introduction

MANITOBANS HAVE BEEN working hard in their communities to address complex challenges associated with poverty and social exclusion. Many continue to develop community-driven solutions that respond to the need for training and employment, affordable housing, child care, food security, social supports, recreation, and community revitalization. The Province of Manitoba has played a critical role over the years in supporting community efforts while implementing key actions in a number of public policy areas that are relevant to poverty and social exclusion. While progress has been made, much more remains to be done.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act embeds in legislation a government commitment to reducing poverty.

Community advocates spent several years calling for a comprehensive provincial poverty reduction plan that shows Manitobans how far we have come and where the province plans to go in its efforts to reduce poverty and social exclusion. In the absence of a provincial government process, CCPA-MB, in collaboration with Make Poverty History Manitoba and many other organizations, prepared *The View From Here: Manitobans Call For a Poverty Reduction Plan*, originally released in 2009. This report was based on the ideas and policy recommendations resulting from consultations and interviews with hundreds of individuals across Manitoba. It provided a reasonable and realistic plan that built on the progress made by the province, and was endorsed by over 70 organizations.

Also in 2009, the province introduced its *All Aboard* poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy. While the strategy did not address the need for targets and timelines, it was a significant response to the community's efforts and an important step towards demonstrating leadership in the fight against poverty in Manitoba. The introduction of the strategy led to the *The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* in 2011, which embeds in legislation a government commitment to reducing poverty. This piece of legislation included several important elements including: the establishment of a joint ministerial/community committee to monitor the implementation of the strategy; a requirement to report annually on the progress of the strategy; the introduction of poverty and social exclusion indicators for measuring progress; and a requirement to take the strategy into account when preparing annual budgets.

Several important policy initiatives have been implemented since the introduction of the strategy, many of which are rooted in the recommendations put forth by the community in *The View from Here 2009*. Guided by their plan, community advocates have worked hard for action that would help make the province's strategy more comprehensive. As a result significant commitments and investments have been made in the areas of housing, shelter benefits, accessibility rights, and training and jobs for people with barriers to employment.

Manitoba's poverty rate based on the Low-Income Cut Off–After Tax has been on a downward trend during the last decade. The annual rate declined steadily since 2005 under all three of the most common measures of poverty, before increasing slightly in 2009, after the start of the 2008 global recession. The most recent year for which data are available shows the rate dropped again in 2011 to 8.9 percent under the LICO–AT (0.4 percentage points higher than it was pre-recession).

Data related to the province's indicators of poverty and social exclusion show that since the strategy was announced in 2009, there has been an 8 percent increase in graduation rates, a 5.5 percent increase in the availability of licensed child care, and a 5.3 percent increase in the number of social and affordable housing units supported by the province.⁴ A higher proportion of urban households live in quality, affordable and appropriate housing now than in years before the strategy.⁵ But we have a lot more work to do. For example, there is an increasing proportion of children in care of the child welfare system, and we know that poverty creates conditions that can lead to involvement in the child welfare system.⁶

Given that the policy landscape has changed since 2009, and that the province will be required by legislation to update its strategy in 2017, community advocates believe that now is the time to renew *The View from Here 2009*. The CCPA–MB and the Canadian Community Economic Development Network–Manitoba (CCEDNet–Manitoba) have been working with community partners to present a renewed package of policy recommendations that should be included in Manitoba's updated strategy to ensure it takes a comprehensive and long-term approach to poverty reduction and social inclusion.

This renewed report looks at progress that has been made in other jurisdictions with poverty reduction plans; it reports on the progress made in Manitoba using the indicators that were proposed in our 2009 report; it includes the latest poverty statistics for Manitoba; it builds a case for continuing efforts through a made in Manitoba poverty reduction plan; and it outlines the essential components of a meaningful poverty reduction plan as well as a comprehensive package of policies and programs that should be included in Manitoba's updated poverty reduction strategy.

POVERTY REDUCTION PLANS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS: WHAT IS WORKING

Rising levels of poverty in many European countries, the United States and Canada are well documented. Many governments have responded to the call for comprehensive, multi-departmental approaches to address poverty and social exclusion in their countries by introducing national strategies and action plans. For example:

Sweden, like other social democratic Scandinavian countries, continues to lead the way in its commitment to greater social equality and alleviation of poverty. 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—create more jobs, reduce sick leave, improve long-term care, make society accessible for people with disabilities, tackle homelessness, increase integration, create the necessary conditions for a prolonged working life and achieve greater gender equality.⁷ The Swedish model emphasizes universal welfare policy in addition to active labour-market policy. Scandinavian countries have long used public policy, including tax policy, as a means to redistribute wealth and reduce poverty. After Luxembourg, Sweden has the European Union's (EU) lowest proportion of citizens that are considered to be severely materially deprived—at 1.3 percent.⁸

Overall, data suggest that Ireland's strategies have been highly successful. Targets initially set in Ireland's *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* for the 1997–2007 period were exceeded by 2001, when the poverty rate was as low as 4.1 percent. Unemployment rates declined from 14.7 percent in 1994 to 3.9 percent by 2001, and welfare rates and child benefits increased 40 percent and 240 percent respectively.⁹ The most recent *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016* has a strong emphasis on clearly defined and measurable targets. Unexpected challenges associated with the global recession in 2008 contributed to the failure to meet the initial interim target of 2012. This prompted the government to revise targets with a new objective to reduce consistent poverty to 4 percent by 2016 and to 2 percent or less by 2020. Ireland also introduced two new sub-targets for children and jobless households, and committed to strengthening the implementation of the targets through annual monitoring and social impact assessment.

Scotland released *The Policy Framework for Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland* in 2000, which outlined processes put in place to achieve its vision and targets for reducing poverty and social exclusion. The report focused on 10 long-term targets and 29 milestones towards tackling poverty and disadvantage experienced by children, young people, families and working age people, older people and communities.¹⁰ Government measures seem to have contributed to a reduction in poverty in Scotland from 23 percent in 2001 to 14 percent in 2011. Recent data suggest that poverty is now on the rise with 110,000 more people living in poverty in 2012 compared to 2011—a period with below-inflation increases in earnings and welfare reforms, such as the reduction in work tax credits that reduced incomes for some of the poorest households.

In 1999, the Blair government in the United Kingdom made a commitment to halve child poverty by 2010, and to eliminate child poverty by 2020. Its vision included partnerships with the non-government and private sector and targets for improving minimum wages, child benefits, and the quality of affordable housing, education and health services. While substantial progress was made during that period with 900,000 children lifted out of relative poverty, the target was ultimately missed. Child poverty was reduced from 33 percent to 27 percent.¹¹ Many credit this progress to a combination of measures to support parents (particularly single parents) in securing work, and increased financial support paid to families with children. There was a change in government in 2010, and there are concerns child poverty will increase in the coming years. By 2020 child poverty is expected to reach 4.2 million—close to 1999 levels.¹²

While the Canadian government continues to show no sign of moving forward with a comprehensive plan, most Canadian provinces and territories have begun to take the challenge of poverty and social exclusion seriously. Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island (PEI), and the Yukon now have plans in place. In the fall of 2014, Saskatchewan became the most recent province to commit to taking comprehensive action against poverty.

The government of Newfoundland and Labrador has made the most significant progress in reducing poverty since introducing a poverty reduction plan. *Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* was released in 2006. The plan, developed in consultation with non-governmental organizations, includes specific targets and timelines including “to be the province with the least poverty in Canada by 2014.” The poverty rate went from 8.6 percent in 2005 to 5.3 percent in 2011, the second lowest rate in Canada.¹³ This represents a reduction of 38 percent. It has been suggested that part of Newfoundland and Labrador's success can be attributed to the creation of a measure of poverty that enables the government to better identify and respond to gaps at the neighbourhood level and with specific demographics, which has led to highly targeted programs. Success has also been attributed to ongoing annual budgets that prioritize poverty reduction.¹⁴

While the Canadian government continues to show no sign of moving forward with a comprehensive plan, most Canadian provinces and territories have begun to take the challenge of poverty and social exclusion seriously.

New Brunswick has also made significant progress since introducing *Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan* in 2009. The plan included a bold target to reduce income poverty by 25 percent, reduce deep income poverty by 50 percent, and make significant progress in achieving sustained economic and social inclusion by 2015. The province achieved a 23 percent reduction in its poverty rate by 2011—going from a rate of 7.5 percent in 2008 to 5.8 percent in 2011, which is the third lowest in the country. New Brunswick’s approach included a re-evaluation of the social assistance program, as well as health benefits for children from low-income households and a proposed Drug Plan for the uninsured within the context of an ongoing commitment to community engagement. In 2014, New Brunswick launched *Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan, 2014–2019*. It does not include clear targets and timelines.

The Quebec government initiated the trend toward poverty and exclusion policy in Canada with the passing of the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* in 2002. The Act required a government action plan to raise low incomes and the implementation of an advisory committee to evaluate and report on progress. Quebec’s 2004 *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* included a goal “to progressively make Quebec, by 2013, one of the industrialized nations having the least number of persons living in poverty.” A second plan, *Government Action Plan for Inclusion and Solidarity: 2010–2015*, was introduced in 2010 to continue the commitment to fight poverty and social exclusion. Québec has reduced the overall poverty rate from 11.7 percent in 2005 to 9.5 percent in 2011, a reduction of 19 percent. Despite this progress, Quebec had the second highest poverty rate of all Canadian provinces in 2011.

Both Ontario and Nova Scotia have passed poverty reduction legislation and introduced poverty reduction plans since 2008. By 2011, Nova Scotia had reduced the overall poverty rate by 15 percent. Meanwhile, Ontario’s rate had increased slightly. Ontario did make progress toward achieving its goal of reducing child poverty by 25 percent by the end of 2013. As many as 47,000 children and their families were lifted out of poverty between 2008 and 2011—representing a 9 percent reduction in the rate of child poverty. However, in 2011 Ontario had the third highest poverty rate of all Canadian provinces. The government has recently released a renewed poverty reduction strategy which expires in 2019.

Nunavut, PEI, and the Yukon took important steps to combat poverty in 2012. Nunavut developed a poverty action plan that year and passed poverty reduction legislation in 2013. Prince Edward Island announced an action plan calling for investment in key areas with a commitment to observe progress on specific measures rather than establishing targets and timelines. The Yukon government also released a framework for poverty reduction, which outlines key objectives and guiding principles but does not yet represent a plan with actions and measurable goals to eradicate poverty.

THE STATE OF POVERTY IN MANITOBA

The View From Here 2009 included a set of indicators with targets and timelines that were recommended for inclusion in Manitoba’s poverty reduction plan. We have tracked the progress that has been made against those targets since 2008 and you can see them summarized in Table 1 below (*Progress on Poverty Indicators from View from Here 2009*). We chose 2008 because it is the year before our plan was proposed and the year before the province introduced its poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy.

We recognize other factors that may have influenced these indicators after 2008. For example, the province had introduced several important initiatives to address poverty and social exclusion

in the years prior to 2009. There was the elimination of the national child benefit claw back, investments in a strong child care plan, and the introduction of RentAid to assist low-income Manitobans in covering their housing costs. While actions such as increases to income benefits can have an immediate impact on poverty rates, other actions may take several years. Therefore poverty rates after 2009 will no doubt have been influenced by initiatives introduced prior to 2009. Similarly, it may take a few years before some actions taken as part of the strategy start to have an impact on poverty rates. An additional consideration is the global recession which began in 2008 and will likely have influenced poverty rates in the years after the introduction of the strategy.

It is too early to say whether the targets we established for low-income rates and “core housing need”¹⁵ have been met as comparable data are only available up to 2011. However, we can say that progress was made in reducing the prevalence of “core housing need” and the poverty rate based on the Low-Income Cut Off–After Tax (LICO–AT) for single women. See the text box below (*Measuring Poverty*) for more information on the LICO–AT. The overall poverty rate has increased slightly along with the rates for children, Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, and female lone-parent households. While the depth of poverty for single men under 65 was reduced to less than 50 percent of the LICO–AT within two years, this figure increased for single women under 65 over that time. By 2011 Aboriginal people and persons in youth-led families also lived in deep poverty with incomes that were 50.2 percent and 56.7 percent below the LICO–AT.

Poverty is connected to a broader concept commonly referred to as social exclusion—when people are excluded or marginalized from participating in the common economic, social, and cultural activities of society.

It is also too early to say whether our target for food bank use has been met as we are only six years into a ten-year timeline. However, we can say that the share of Manitobans using food banks has increased over that six-year period—representing an increase of 21,227 food bank users. We can also say that progress has been made in reducing the share of low wage workers between 2008 and 2013. One of our targets called for a 50 percent reduction in the waiting list for Manitoba Housing within four years. Since that time, we have learned that there are no reliable data available from the Province of Manitoba that could accurately reflect the number of Manitobans waiting to live in Manitoba Housing.

Poverty is often understood as not having enough financial resources to meet one’s basic needs. The reality is that poverty is connected to a broader concept commonly referred to as social exclusion—when people are excluded or marginalized from participating in the common economic, social, and cultural activities of society. That exclusion can be rooted in a lack of income, but it is also connected to poor labour market and educational outcomes, inadequate housing conditions, and poor health, all of which are also perpetuated by living with low income. Exclusion can also be rooted in discriminatory practices that create barriers to participation.

Unfortunately thousands of Manitobans continue to live in poverty and remain socially excluded. In 2011, 8.9 percent of Manitobans—105,000 people—were living in low income according to the LICO–AT. It’s important to note that it can be difficult to get a true picture of what is going on when measuring changes in indicator data between any two given years, as is done with our indicators above. A more complete story can be told by examining annual data over time in order to establish a trend, as is done in Figure 1 below (Low Income in Manitoba). Manitoba’s poverty rate averaged around 15 percent through the 1990s. It then began to trend downward in the following decade, hitting a low of 8.5 percent in 2008. Rates increased slightly in the two years that followed, which the Province of Manitoba attributes to the 2008 global economic recession, hitting a high of 9.2 percent in 2010.¹⁶

Other measures of low income tell a different story. While the Market Basket Measure (which dates back to 2002) also shows poverty rates trending downward beginning in 2002 until the

Table 1: Progress on Poverty Indicators from *View from Here 2009*

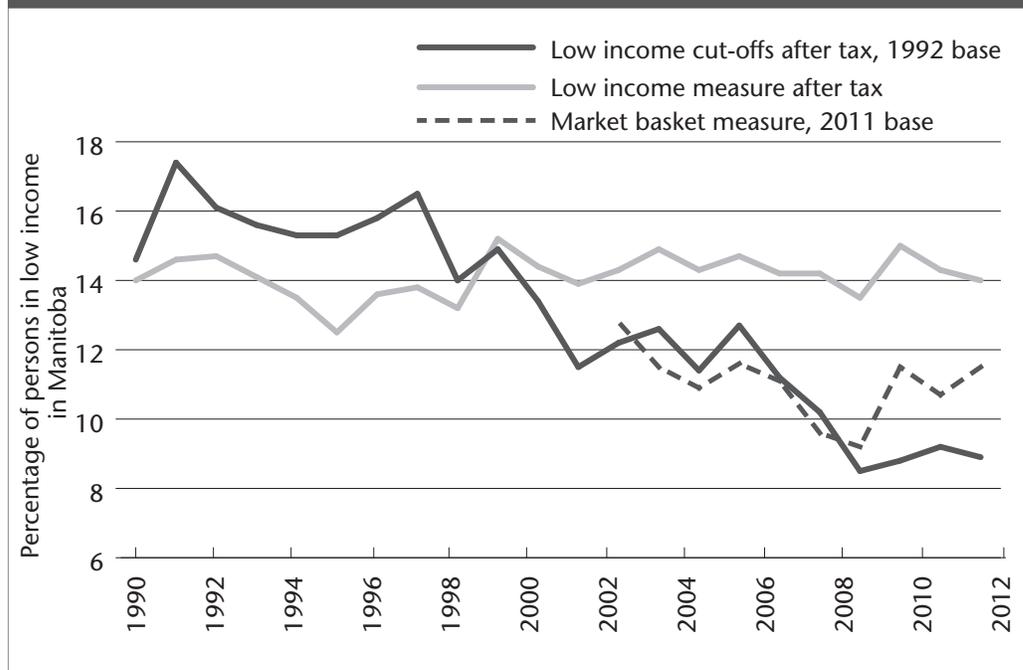
Using Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut Off – After Tax (LICO-AT), reduce Manitoba's poverty rate from 11.2% to 8.4% in five years, and to 5.6% in ten years (approximately a 25% reduction in five years and a 50% reduction within a decade).		2008	2011	% change 08-11
	All Manitobans	8.5%	8.9%	+4.7%
Ensure the poverty rate (using the LICO-AT) for children, female lone-parent households, single women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants declines by 25% in five years, and by 50% in ten years, in recognition that these populations are particularly vulnerable to poverty.		2008	2011	% change 08-11
	Children	8.7%	11.3%	+29.9%
	Female lone-parent households	19.9%	34.3%	+72.4%
	Single women	30.1%	27.7%	-8.0%
	Aboriginal people	9.9%	14.2%	+43.4%
	People with disabilities	10.1%	12.4%	+22.8%
	Recent immigrants	NA*	NA*	NA*
Within two years, ensure there are no Manitobans living 50 per cent or more below the LICO-AT.		2008	2010	% change 08-10
	Single males under 65	52.6%	39.3%	25.3%
	Single females under 65	50.0%	57.0%	+14.0%
Reduce the share of Manitobans facing "core housing need" by half, by 2015.		2006**	2011	% change 06-11
		11.3%	10.3%	-8.8%
Improve food security for low-income individuals and families by reducing the need for food bank use from 3.4% to 1.7%, a 50% reduction, within ten years, and set a date for the elimination of the need for food banks in Manitoba.		2008	2013	% change 08-11
		3.4%	4.7%	+38.2%
Demonstrate annual progress in reducing the share of low-wage workers (earning less than two-thirds of the median)		2008	2013	% change 08-13
		20.0%	18.0%	-10.0%
* We were unable to access data for recent immigrants that would be comparable over the period we are looking at. ** "Core housing need" data are released every five years. Data are available for 2006 and 2011, but not 2008.				

In 2011 there were 105,000 to 164,000 Manitobans living in poverty, depending on which measure is used.

global recession, it shows a more dramatic increase in the years following the start of the recession when compared to the LICO-AT. The Low Income Measure-After Tax shows poverty rates averaged around 14 percent from the early 1990s through to 2011.

These varying outcomes, which are influenced by the different ways in which each measure defines and calculates poverty, can make it difficult to evaluate progress. However, we know that there were between 105,000 and 164,000 Manitobans living in poverty in 2011. Regardless of the measure used, the number is unacceptable and we know there is much work to do.

Figure 1: Low Income in Manitoba



Poverty rates tell us how many people are living in poverty at a particular time, but it is also important to consider the depth of poverty. This indicator looks at how far below the poverty line people in low income are living. In 2011, people living in poverty had an income that was, on average, 33 percent below the poverty line. Depending on the poverty measure used, the depth of poverty in Manitoba has stayed between 25 and 35 percent below the poverty line throughout the last two decades. This tells us that Manitobans have not been living just below the poverty line, they have been living far below it.

Manitoba's poverty rate averaged around 15 percent through the 1990s, then began to trend downward the following decade, hitting a low of 8.5 percent in 2008. Rates increased slightly in the two years that followed due in part to the 2008 global recession.

WHO IS POOR

Gender, Family Type, and Age

Although poverty rates in Manitoba have experienced a downward trend over the last couple of decades, the gender gap in poverty persists. Women have higher poverty rates than men across all ages and family types (except for single seniors) according to the LICO-AT measure of poverty. The gender gap is most significant among single Manitobans under 65 years of age (poverty rates were 22.7 percent for males and 39.1 percent for females in 2011). Single women under 65 made up the largest share of the population living in poverty—19 percent—and had the highest prevalence of poverty. The gender gap in poverty can be attributed in part to the employment and income disparity between men and women. Men have higher employment rates than women across most age brackets.¹⁷ Average weekly earnings for women were 76.8 percent that of men in 2014, approximately ten percentage points higher than seventeen years earlier.¹⁸ For too many women, living in poverty means not being able to provide a safe and secure home and adequate nutritious food for their children. This in turn means living with the constant fear of having their children placed in the care of the child welfare system. Poverty also makes women more vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation. Addressing poverty among women must be a central component of Manitoba's poverty reduction plan.

Single individuals were almost four times as likely to be poor than people living in families—24.7 percent compared to 6.2 percent in 2011. Among all family types, female lone-parent families were the most likely to live in poverty with a poverty rate of 34.3 percent.¹⁹

The tax and transfer system has played an important role in lowering the poverty rate for Manitoba seniors. It virtually eliminated poverty among seniors living in families, and reduced the poverty rate among single seniors from as high as 28.7 percent in 1994 to 12.8 percent in 2011.²⁰

Manitoba has ranked within the top three provinces with the highest child poverty rates in Canada for the past two decades, based on the LICO–AT. Although Manitoba’s child poverty rate has persisted above the national average since 1990 (apart from 2008 and 2009), it has been on a downward trend over the last couple of decades according to the LICO–AT measure of poverty—peaking at 24.2 percent in 1991 and sitting at 11.3 percent in 2011.²¹ It is worth noting that other measures of low income suggest that Manitoba’s child poverty rate was as high as 22.4 percent in 2011.²² In either scenario, we must do a better job of ensuring Manitoba children get the best possible start in life. The prevalence of low income among persons in economic families was highest for children in female lone-parent families at 38.6 percent.

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 families who do not live in poverty. Some of the lasting outcomes and effects of child poverty can include: poor health, a lack of a nutritious diet, absenteeism from school and low scholastic achievement, behavioural and mental health problems, low housing standards, as well as few employment opportunities and persistently low economic status later in life.

The gender gap in poverty persists. Women have higher poverty rates than men across all ages and family types.

Aboriginal Population

Over the past decade, Manitoba has made progress in reducing the poverty rate among the Aboriginal population living off reserve. However the depth of poverty in 2011 was quite severe, with poor Aboriginal Manitobans living with incomes that are, on average, 50 percent below the LICO–AT poverty line. The poverty rate peaked at 27.1 percent in 2005, the highest of all provinces, according to the LICO–AT. It reached its lowest point at 9.9 percent in 2008, the second lowest of all provinces. In 2011, the most recent year for which data are available, the poverty rate was 14.2 percent, third lowest in the country.

While the poverty rate for Aboriginal people living off reserve has been consistently higher than the poverty rate for the overall population, the gap has narrowed in recent years, primarily due to reductions in poverty rates for Aboriginal people living off reserve. In 2011, Manitoba was among the top three provinces with the smallest gap in the poverty rate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.²³ This gap can be attributed in part to Canada’s history of damaging colonial policies and continued systemic oppression that has led to a high percentage of Aboriginal families who experience deep and intergenerational poverty. The poverty gap is also reflective of differences in earnings and employment rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In recent years, the earnings of First Nations and Métis people in Manitoba have increased at a faster rate than non-Aboriginal Manitobans. While there is still an earnings lag, the earnings gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Manitobans has been slowly closing.²⁴ First Nations Manitobans are less likely to be employed than other Manitobans aged 15 and older. In 2012, 66.2 percent of Non-Aboriginal Manitobans 15 years and older were employed compared to 64.2 percent of Métis and 47.8 percent of First Nations.²⁵

Some Aboriginal Manitobans face barriers to accessing and retaining adequate employment, including lower completion rates of formal education. In an economic climate where education is critical to securing well-paid employment, 46.6 percent of Aboriginal Manitobans aged 15 years and over have no educational certificate, degree or diploma, compared to 21.6 percent of non-Aboriginal Manitobans. 29.8 percent of Aboriginal Manitobans have a post-secondary education compared to 50 percent of non-Aboriginal Manitobans. Only 6.5 percent have a university education at bachelor level or above compared to 19.6 percent of non-Aboriginal Manitobans.²⁶

The lack of adequate, affordable and suitable housing is a critical issue related to Aboriginal poverty in Manitoba, and the situation is worse for Aboriginal Manitobans living on reserve, as is the case across the country. 28.2 percent of Aboriginal Manitobans live in housing that is in need of major repairs compared to 8.3 percent of non-Aboriginal Manitobans.²⁷ 52 percent of Aboriginal Manitobans living on reserve report that their housing is in need of major repairs.²⁸ 23.5 percent of Aboriginal households report spending 30 percent or more of total household income on shelter costs compared to 19.4 percent of all Manitoba households.²⁹ 28.7 percent of Aboriginal Manitobans live in housing that is not suitable compared to 10.3 percent of non-Aboriginal Manitobans.³⁰ 49 percent of Aboriginal Manitobans living on reserve live in housing that is not suitable.³¹ These statistics reflect the higher prevalence of “core housing need” among the Aboriginal population compared with the overall population.

In 2011, Manitoba was among the top three provinces with the smallest gap in the poverty rate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

A central concern for the Aboriginal community is the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care of the child welfare system. Aboriginal children now make up 87 percent of those living in the care of the child welfare system.³² Commissioner Ted Hughes led the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry—a comprehensive process investigating the circumstances of the tragic death of a young child who was in the care of the child welfare system. In his concluding report he writes: “The evidence I heard...highlights the vulnerabilities that lead so many members of our community to need help from the child welfare system and other government and community supports: poverty, substance abuse, and lack of education, to name a few. These systemic issues (are) so often rooted in the long-standing effects of racism and colonialism...”³³

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. First Nations Manitobans are more likely to experience premature mortality compared to non-First Nations Manitobans. Diabetes is a major health risk for Aboriginal people in Manitoba, with First Nations Manitobans at highest risk. The diabetes rate for First Nations people living on and off reserve was 13.5 percent and 10.9 percent respectively, compared to 7.6 percent of non-First Nations Manitobans.

Newcomers

While the Province of Manitoba continues to welcome newcomers, some continue to struggle to access meaningful employment and experience high rates of poverty and social exclusion. Recent immigrants (arriving in the last five years) are much more likely to live in poverty compared with the overall population. According to data from the 2006 Census, 32 percent of recent immigrants were living in poverty. The most recent data suggest that 31.4 percent of recent immigrants live in poverty. However, these data come from the 2011 National Household Survey and cannot be compared with the Census data.

Newcomers in Manitoba experience slightly higher unemployment rates than Canadian born residents. Rates were highest among immigrants arriving in the last five years at 9.7 percent in 2013, an increase of almost 30 percent since 2009. Unemployment rates decrease as more time is spent in the country and rates for established immigrants (10+ years) are even lower than rates for Canadian born residents.³⁴

Recent immigrants experience poorer labour market outcomes compared to non-immigrants, despite having relatively stronger educational outcomes compared to non-immigrants.³⁵ Many newcomers have a hard time integrating into the Manitoba labour force because of a lack of Canadian work experience, lack of English or French language skills, and challenges with the 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 newcomers have a hard time covering the costs of their basic needs and other monthly expenses, leaving little or no room to accumulate savings. As a result, they need to rely on social assistance and food banks to help make ends meet. Newcomers 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 above average numbers of children. Newcomers require access to effective settlement supports including help finding safe and affordable housing, adequate employment opportunities, and language, educational, and healthcare services.

Many newcomers have a hard time integrating into the Manitoba labour force because of a lack of Canadian work experience, lack of English or French language skills, and challenges with the transferability of their qualifications.

Persons With Disabilities

Persons with disabilities in Manitoba experience higher poverty rates compared to the overall population—12.4 percent of persons with disabilities lived in poverty in 2011. Unemployment data for persons with disabilities have not been available since 2006. However, that data show that Manitobans with disabilities have higher unemployment rates and lower employment and participation rates than Manitobans without disabilities.³⁶ Some Manitobans face severe and prolonged disabilities that prevent them from working 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. Most Manitobans with a disability are able to work but face barriers such as inaccessible education and training programs, systemic discrimination, and workplaces that fail to accommodate their needs, all of which contribute to lower educational attainment and labour force participation rates. 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.

Measuring Poverty

While there is considerable debate about the efficacy of different poverty measures, Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut Off (LICO) has been commonly used to measure 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 percent of its after-tax income on shelter, food, and clothing. A family spending a share of its income that is equal to, or greater than the amount that is 20 percentage points higher than the average family on these three necessities (i.e. 63 percent 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).

The View from Here 2015 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.

It is important to acknowledge that the LICO cannot be applied to First Nations communities. Status Indians on reserve and in Winnipeg have median incomes that are extremely low by Canadian standards and a majority of families and individuals subsist on incomes below an equivalent of the Statistics Canada LICO.³⁷ 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. Since the LIM is income—rather than expenditure—based, it can be applied to every Canadian family including those living in First Nations communities.

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.

THE CASE FOR A MADE IN MANITOBA POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN

Community advocates worked hard over many years to build a case for the Province of Manitoba to develop a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with accompanying legislation. The province responded in 2009 with the introduction of its *All Aboard* poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy and then again in 2011 with the introduction of the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act*. While some progress has been made in key areas since 2009, much more remains to be done, as is evidenced by the data in the previous section. Manitoba must build upon its strategy to address this challenge effectively. Political pressures and competing priorities within the context of tight provincial budgets create a need to continue to raise public awareness around the issue of poverty and social exclusion, and build a case for strengthening our future efforts and investments.

A nation-wide survey conducted in the fall of 2014 suggests that Canadians, regardless of demographics or past political alignments, desire a more equitable distribution of wealth, and large majorities believe that government can and should do something to reduce inequality.³⁸ The survey revealed support for a range of progressive policies to reduce inequality: 80 percent of Canadians—including Canadians in the highest tax bracket—support increasing the federal income tax rate on the highest income bracket; 75 percent support increasing corporate tax rates; 69 percent support a publicly funded national child care program; and 68 percent support increased funding for social assistance. Many Manitobans share similar sentiments and are looking for inspired leadership to address inequality, poverty, and social exclusion.

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 is required by our international obligations. The United Nations 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.”

Fighting Poverty Reflects Fundamental Canadian Values

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 a social safety net that catches those in need and treats them with compassion. 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. Fighting poverty is absolutely essential to any hope of realizing a fair and compassionate society, and now is the time to ramp up that fight.

Fighting Poverty is Affordable

Calculations derived from Statistics Canada data 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) for a total cost of just under \$529 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 is easily affordable in a province like Manitoba where the poverty gap represents less than 1 per cent of the overall provincial economy (Manitoba’s GDP in 2013 was \$61.3 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 the 2014 Manitoba Budget Address, tax cuts announced since 1999 amount to annual savings of more than \$1 billion dollars in taxes for Manitobans and businesses. This is almost twice the amount needed to bring all low-income Manitobans up 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 do not pay any

80 percent of Canadians—including Canadians in the highest tax bracket—support increasing the federal income tax rate on the highest income bracket; 75 percent support increasing corporate tax rates; 69 percent support a publicly funded national child care program; and 68 percent support increased funding for social assistance.

taxes. These tax savings represent more than \$1 billion of annual revenue that could have been available to spend on affordable housing, child care, 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, greater involvement in the child welfare system, 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.

We must take a different and preventative approach to tackle the root causes of crime, poor health and involvement in the child welfare system. This can be achieved through the implementation of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan.

The Province of Manitoba spends approximately \$500 million per year on its justice budget, this is up from close to \$300 million in 2006. The City of Winnipeg spends approximately \$257 million per year on policing, up from \$114 million in 2000. Approximately 38 percent of the Provincial budget is allocated to health care.³⁹ We must take a different and preventative approach to addressing these ever-increasing costs—one that tackles the root causes of crime, poor health, and involvement in the child welfare system. This can be achieved through the implementation of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan.

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. The strategy has created opportunities for the province to engage citizens, to make its poverty reduction efforts more transparent through annual reporting, and to be held accountable for making progress. The strategy has also led to the release of action plans that the province can use to expose gaps and provide direction for the development of future actions to reduce poverty and social exclusion. The introduction of Manitoba's strategy set the stage for other critical developments in Manitoba's poverty reduction efforts, but there is more to be done to improve upon these efforts and the effectiveness of the province's strategy.

Our Plan for Manitoba

OUR PLAN INCORPORATES all the important features of an effective poverty reduction plan. We call upon the Province of Manitoba to ensure that all these features are captured in Manitoba's poverty reduction and social exclusion strategy.

CONSULTATIONS

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.

We engaged in a consultation process aimed at renewing the recommendations that Manitobans identified in 2009 as essential to a comprehensive plan to reduce poverty and social exclusion. We examined the existing policy context in Manitoba to identify recommendations that had been implemented since 2009 as well as those that were no longer considered a priority. We then encouraged Manitobans to think about new policy areas and recommendations that they believed were essential to our renewed poverty reduction plan. We engaged stakeholders through consultation workshops and countless informal discussions. We also synthesized existing research on a variety of poverty and social exclusion issues in Manitoba to bolster the ideas that were brought forward. This collaborative approach enabled more than 80 organizations to endorse the package of recommendations in this plan.

Manitobans believe that although the province has taken significant action in some policy areas that were identified in 2009, these areas continue to be relevant and further action is needed. They also identified new policy areas that were not included in the 2009 plan but were important enough to be included in the renewed plan with specific recommendations: Intergenerational Education, Funding, Food Security, and Child Welfare. A main message was that minor adjustments to existing policies and programs are insufficient. Comprehensive, systematic, and bold action and investment is needed to reduce poverty, improve social and economic inclusion, and reduce economic, health and social disparities in Manitoba. We also heard that it is important to integrate gender and diversity analysis in all policy and program development processes. Another key message was that it is important for actions to be strategic—developed within the context of achieving transparent objectives and based on a careful analysis of what is required to effectively achieve those objectives.

Comprehensive, systematic, and bold action and investment is needed to reduce poverty, improve social and economic inclusion, and reduce economic, health and social disparities in Manitoba.

The province has been criticized for consultation processes that limit meaningful participation. Future consultation efforts should ensure the community is given sufficient notice and information to participate and should reflect a genuine process of co-construction of policy. The development of Manitoba's Social Enterprise Strategy and Cooperative Community Vision and Strategy are good examples of public policy co-constructed by the community and government. 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.

A COMPREHENSIVE AND COORDINATED APPROACH

A comprehensive approach is essential to a meaningful poverty reduction plan. 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.⁴⁰ We believe that analyzing solutions to poverty through a social determinants of health lens is important because this framework recognizes, and enables us to address, not only the complex and interrelated causes of poverty and social exclusion, but also the broad implications for the health of individuals and the communities in which we live.

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

Understanding how poverty affects us all encourages the development of a comprehensive and coordinated approach that brings together multiple policy and program interventions. While often the primary focus of government policy, poverty reduction is not as simple as increasing people's attachment to the labour market. The social determinants of health framework tells us that this is only one part of the solution. While we include recommendations that focus on training, education, and jobs, they are only part of a larger set of recommendations that are much broader in scope. Our recommendations recognize that exclusionary and discriminatory practices are causes of poverty, as are insufficient and inaccessible public supports and services like healthcare, child care, recreation, and social housing.

We recognize that certain groups continue to face many barriers, putting them at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. Women, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal people, and newcomers are particularly at risk and must be made a priority. Aboriginal people have a special place in Manitoban society, and the content of our plan needs to be interpreted and applied specifically to reflect their circumstances. We also recognize that poverty is often spatialized. Poverty in First Nation communities, which is a federal responsibility, continues to be unconscionable. In urban centers, there is a clear concentration of poverty in specific neighborhoods. Our recommendations acknowledge the need to focus action on vulnerable regions and communities in Manitoba.

A comprehensive and coordinated approach to poverty reduction and social inclusion must also fit with the principles of a green economy. We acknowledge and endorse the provincial commitment for Manitoba "to be one of the most sustainable places to live on earth" with the promise that "a strong, resilient green economy will be built to reduce environmental risks and ecological scarcities, while improving well-being and social equity for Manitobans."⁴¹ Green jobs, low energy and water bills through greener housing, affordable and eco-efficient public transportation, and prevention and mitigation of environmental impacts on vulnerable persons are parts of a socially

inclusive and environmentally sustainable economy. These measures should ensure that poverty reduction and social inclusion are integral to the building of a green economy.

Communication and collaboration across government departments is essential to ensuring a coordinated plan where all are working towards the achievement of common goals. It can expose gaps and prevent unnecessary duplication in policy and programming. The province's *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* requires the government to ensure that programs, policies and initiatives to reduce poverty and social exclusion are coordinated across government and consistent with its strategy.⁴² The province's *All Aboard* Committee, consisting of Ministers and community members, is responsible for overseeing cross-departmental work to reduce poverty and increase social inclusion and ensure that this work is coordinated. A Deputy Ministers Committee and an interdepartmental working group should help coordinate efforts across government departments and create new opportunities for departments to work together on initiatives where they may not otherwise. The Premier's Advisory Council on Education, Poverty and Citizenship consisting of ministers and community leaders should help coordinate efforts between the community sector and government by bringing the community voice to the table.

TARGETS AND TIMELINES TO MEASURE PROGRESS

The most effective strategies have been those that establish targets and timelines around actions that will be taken to address poverty and around specific poverty indicators.

Many of our recommendations include targets and timelines. Where we do not include targets and timelines, we urge the province to establish its own to provide a basis from which progress toward implementation can be measured and to provide incentive to follow through with commitments.

Our plan also identifies measurable indicators of poverty with targets and timelines that can be tracked to help monitor the impact that the plan is having on poverty and to measure progress. An effective plan must include indicators that track the breadth and depth of poverty, focus on populations most vulnerable to poverty, and capture the different forms of hardship and financial stress that low-income people face.

- Using Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut Off–After Tax (LICO–AT), reduce Manitoba's poverty rate by 25 percent in five years, and by 50 percent in ten years.
- Ensure the poverty rate (using the LICO–AT) for children, female lone-parent households, single women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants declines by 25 percent in 5 years, and by 50 percent in 10 years, in recognition that these populations are particularly vulnerable to poverty.
- Within two years, ensure there are no Manitobans living 50 percent or more below the LICO–AT.
- Reduce the share of Manitobans facing "core housing need" by half by 2020.
- Eliminate severe food insecurity within five years and reduce the prevalence of household food insecurity in Manitoba by half within ten years.
- Reduce the need for food bank use by half within ten years and set a date for the elimination of the need for food banks in Manitoba.

Analyzing solutions to poverty through a social determinants of health lens enables us to address the complex and interrelated causes of social exclusion along with the broad implications for the health of individuals and communities.

- Demonstrate annual progress in reducing the share of low-wage workers (earning less than two thirds of the median).

The Province of Manitoba should be commended for establishing targets and timelines around some of the actions that it has taken to address poverty. However, it has not been willing to establish targets and timelines around any of the 21 indicators of poverty and social exclusion. The absence of targets and timelines has resulted in action plans that are not strongly forward-focused and appear to largely represent a patchwork of existing initiatives that are already underway.

According to legislation, the province must update its strategy in 2017. As part of that update, the province should review its set of 21 indicators to ensure they capture those that are identified above. The review should also identify existing indicators that could be better reported on by using disaggregated data that more clearly show the impact on Manitobans with low incomes.

Finally, the review should include establishing targets and timelines against which progress can be measured, so that we can move beyond simply observing trends in indicators and start to make annual reporting more meaningful and useful. Targets and timelines will provide a framework within which strategic thinking and action can emerge as the strategy is updated. They provide an opportunity for the province to outline a vision and strategic roadmap of actions that will be taken over a specific timeframe to achieve that vision. If the province doesn't know where it is going, how will it determine the best way to get there?

Targets and timelines create an opportunity to outline a strategic roadmap of actions. If we don't know where we're going, how will we determine the best way to get there?

ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Targets and timelines alone will not ensure accountability. 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 reporting process. 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 province should continue to take its poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy into account when preparing the annual budget, and table an annual progress report as is currently required by legislation.⁴³ Taking the strategy into account when preparing the budget encourages the government to consider how spending decisions could impact its ability to implement its strategy and make progress on the indicators of poverty and social exclusion. Annually evaluating and reporting on progress is an essential component of putting an accountability mechanism in place to help ensure that a poverty reduction plan will be effective and credible.

It is also important to have structures in place to monitor the implementation of poverty reduction plans, such as the All Aboard Committee, the Deputy Ministers Committee, the interdepartmental working group, and the Premier's Advisory Council on Education, Poverty, and Citizenship.

A ROLE FOR EVERYONE

An effective poverty reduction plan requires 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.). More should be done to meaningfully engage these stakeholders. Furthermore, combating poverty in Manitoba will require the coordinated efforts of all levels of government.

While the recommendations we lay out in the following section focus on actions to be taken by the province, this no way absolves other levels of governments from responsibility. 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 21st century. But while we recognize that all levels of government have a role to play, we believe that the province must take a lead role and build upon its existing strategy using existing tools, including provincial taxes and federal transfers, and should be held primarily accountable for the strategy's success. Meanwhile it should continue to work with provinces across the country to call for an increased federal role.

While the recommendations we lay out in the following section focus on actions to be taken by the province, this no way absolves other levels of governments from responsibility.

Our Recommended Priority Actions

The recommendations below are based on discussions with organizations and individuals across Manitoba who were asked to speak to what they believed needed to be included in a comprehensive plan to reduce poverty in this province. While many excellent ideas were presented during these discussions, the following recommendations represent those ideas that were believed to be the most critical and achievable. Implementation of these recommendations over the next five years will enable significant progress to be made toward reaching the targets we have established for the poverty indicators we identified in the previous section. Each of the recommendations address one of the following nine key areas that require attention if poverty reduction efforts are to be successful in Manitoba.

1. Housing
2. Income Security: Employment and Income Assistance, Jobs, Wages, Employment Standards and Legislation
3. Education: Early Learning and Child care, Kindergarten to Grade 12, Post-Secondary Education, Adult Learning and Training, Intergenerational Education
4. Funding
5. Food Security
6. Transportation
7. Disability Supports
8. Health
9. Child Welfare

1. HOUSING

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

Manitobans continue to identify housing as the highest priority area for investment when it comes to reducing poverty.⁴⁴ Stable access to safe and affordable housing improves mental and physical health, and allows individuals and families to participate in the community and access education, training, employment and social services.⁴⁵ Ensuring adequate housing is an important part of an overall strategy to achieve population health. It is difficult to imagine how poverty reduction and social inclusion can be achieved without first addressing housing.

Access to safe and affordable housing is also key to preventing people from falling into poverty and becoming homeless. High housing costs force too many Manitobans to choose between paying for rent and putting food on the table. A job loss or unexpected expense can trigger a financial crisis causing low-income individuals and families to lose their housing. On any given night, it is estimated that there are 2,450 people who are considered homeless in Winnipeg alone.⁴⁶

Manitoba's poverty reduction plan must aim to ensure that all Manitobans can access housing that is safe and affordable. In 2011, 10.3 percent of all households in Manitoba were in "core housing need" —a slight decrease from 11.3 percent in 2006.⁴⁷ The incidence of "core housing need" is even higher for renter households.⁴⁸ After paying rent, many of these households are left with few resources to meet their basic needs, let alone to move forward economically.

The challenge can be addressed by adding to the housing supply, by providing new subsidies that make the existing supply more affordable, and by ensuring existing supply is not diminished. The Province of Manitoba has taken significant steps in all three areas, supporting its own public housing stock as well as housing owned by non-profits and co-operatives.

The federal government must also play a central role by implementing and funding a comprehensive national housing strategy. The Province of Manitoba should work with other provincial jurisdictions to call on the federal government to do so. Municipalities can contribute using the tools and resources at their disposal. In the absence of a federal strategy, the Province of Manitoba must continue to provide leadership and make it a priority to ensure that permanent, safe, and affordable housing is accessible to low-income households. We recommend the following actions:

1-1.A. Beginning in 2016, increase the supply of non-profit, rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing by a minimum of 300 newly built units each year for five years. Priority should be given to new builds in the North and in high-need urban centres. A portion of new units should be dedicated to larger families requiring three bedrooms or more.

The high demand for affordable housing is combined with low apartment vacancy rates in places such as Thompson (1.7 percent), Winnipeg (2.5 percent), and Brandon (0.9 percent).⁴⁹

Vacancy rates are even lower for affordable units because supply is more limited. The Province of Manitoba's immigration policies have led to an influx of international migrants who are settling in Winnipeg and other urban centres. Inadequate housing and flooding on Manitoba reserves forces many Aboriginal people into urban centres where they need to find an affordable place to live. The growth in demand for housing has contributed to rising housing costs as new builds have not kept pace and as existing units have been lost to condominium conversions among other things. As a result, rental rates across Manitoba have increased by 60 to 65 percent since 2000.⁵⁰ With the cost of housing becoming more unaffordable in the private market, the demand for subsidized, RGI housing has gone up. Some Aboriginal people, immigrants, and refugees live

with extended family and friends. They require housing with at least three bedrooms, but many low-income families cannot access larger units. The cost is simply too high in the private market and those who turn to subsidized housing find that there are not enough units with three or more bedrooms.⁵¹

The need for housing for people with addictions and mental health issues far exceeds what is available through the existing stock. For example, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in Brandon provided emergency housing for 113 homeless people last year, including families with young children, and turned away 367 people, including 55 families with children.⁵² Regional CMHAs report having several hundred people on their wait lists for low-income or transitional housing as well as emergency shelter.⁵³ Individuals with mental health issues and other disabilities benefit from housing that provides access to a range of support options, including community mental health services, that allow them to maintain their housing, participate in recovery processes, and maximize their independence. Support options should be comprehensive—providing access to mental health and addictions recovery resources, primary health care, financial assistance, life skills development, and training and job opportunities either in the community or onsite. Housing may also need to contain visitable design features in order to be accessible to some persons with disabilities.

The View from Here 2009 called for the creation of 300 units of social housing annually for five years. The Province of Manitoba has responded to this recommendation and other calls from housing advocates to increase the supply of RGI housing.

While some important investments have been made to meet the housing needs of larger families and people with mental health issues and other disabilities, the Province of Manitoba should undertake a needs assessment to determine the appropriate number of units to set aside each year for these demographics. The province should also consider the unique factors that impact the demand for affordable housing in different Manitoba communities when determining where to deliver new housing commitments.

The View from Here 2009 called for the creation of 300 units of social housing annually for five years. The Province of Manitoba has responded to this recommendation and other calls from housing advocates to increase the supply of RGI housing. In 2014 it completed a five-year commitment that delivered 790 new units of RGI housing, 710 new units of affordable housing, and new RGI assistance for an additional 710 households. This was followed by another three-year commitment to build 500 new social housing units and 500 new affordable housing units in partnership with the non-profit and private sectors by 2016. Despite these significant investments, Manitoba's current stock of RGI housing does not meet the demand which, based on the numbers in "core housing need," is estimated to be around 43,000.⁵⁴

The Province of Manitoba can help address the need for more RGI housing by committing to 300 new units annually for five years while leading advocacy efforts calling for a national housing strategy. Manitoba has a strong social enterprise sector ready to take on a piece of this work—providing training and job opportunities for people with barriers to employment. There is also an opportunity to build the capacity of non-profit and co-op housing providers to support the development of social housing.

1-1.B. Proactively work with housing providers and invest to ensuring that there is no net loss of rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing units due to expiring federal operating agreements.

Between now and 2040 the federal government will phase out funding to all non-profit, co-operative, and all provincial and territorial housing providers as program operating agreements expire. As a result, housing providers in Manitoba will lose a total of 63.4 million dollars in annual subsidies that enable them to provide RGI and affordable housing.⁵⁵ Operating agreements were typically designed to provide subsidy only until the mortgage was totally repaid. The assumption

was that housing projects would be able to generate enough rental income to cover operating costs once the major expense of the mortgage was paid off.⁵⁶ The reality is that there are housing providers that are finding that without subsidies, they are not able to remain viable while providing the same levels of RGI housing. This presents a serious challenge for low-income Manitobans who can only afford RGI housing. The loss of even one unit of RGI housing is unacceptable at time when more units are desperately needed. The federal government has shown no indication of an intention to continue to increase funding to the provinces to meet the high demand for low income housing. As a result, the Province of Manitoba has been forced to take action.

The province is committed to continuing to fund the RGI units owned and operated by Manitoba Housing even if the program operating agreement has expired. It has also committed to extending financial supports to urban native housing providers for another five years so they can continue to offer all of their housing units at rents that are geared to income. According to the province, there are 26 non-profit or co-operative housing providers with agreements expiring before March 31, 2017, five of which may require ongoing assistance. The province has committed to providing temporary assistance with business planning to help providers become sustainable without ongoing financial support. It has committed to helping those on the margins of sustainability allowing them time to become viable by providing temporary funding assistance for a few years. In addition the province will ensure a safety net for housing providers by offering financial assistance for capital repairs. Housing providers are expected to maintain their RGI units on a voluntary basis. However, the Province of Manitoba should demonstrate its commitment to affordable housing by proactively engaging with housing providers to indicate its willingness to assist in ensuring RGI units remain viable.

The important commitments outlined above can help to maintain the RGI units offered by housing providers with agreements expiring before March 31, 2017. However, the real crisis will begin after 2020 when the majority of RGI units will become threatened by expiring operating agreements. Housing providers should educate themselves about what the expiry of operating agreements will mean for them and not wait for the Province of Manitoba to begin a discussion around extending subsidies and other supports. There is a need to build capacity among non-profit and co-op housing providers to help plan for maintaining existing RGI units beyond the expiry of their operating agreements. Further, there is a need to monitor and update a database of current social housing providers as agreements expire in order to keep track of what is happening to their stock of social housing units.

1-2. Immediately increase Rent Assist's maximum benefit to 75 percent of Median Market Rent for people on and off Employment and Income Assistance without cutting other income-related benefits, and index the benefit to annual increases in the Median Market Rent.

The affordable housing challenge can be addressed through a multi-pronged approach. Increasing supply is an important piece of the puzzle. Another is to provide rental subsidies to households in existing non-profit, co-operative, or private units. Households on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) face the greatest housing affordability gap. EIA rates have only modestly increased over the last couple of decades and have not kept pace with inflation and rent increases in the private market.

The View from Here 2009 called for housing-related benefits such as EIA Shelter Benefits and Manitoba Shelter Benefits to be increased by 20 percent and indexed to annual increases in the Rent Increase Guideline. Since then, the Province of Manitoba has improved housing-related income benefits for low-income Manitobans both on and off of EIA. Maximum benefit amounts were increased and more vulnerable Manitobans became eligible to receive benefits with the

The Province of Manitoba has improved housing-related income benefits for low-income Manitobans both on and off of EIA.

introduction of Rent Aid and the Portable Housing Benefit. While these were important steps, the benefit programs were not available to all EIA recipients and did not sufficiently address the affordability gap. Community advocates were concerned about the ongoing affordability gap faced by Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens on EIA and pushed hard for an increase in EIA Shelter Benefits to 75 percent of Median Market Rent.

The Province of Manitoba responded in Budget 2014 with the introduction of Rent Assist. This program replaces the EIA Shelter Benefit and Rent Aid programs and is available to eligible low-income Manitobans on and off of EIA. With this initiative, individuals on general assistance and persons with disabilities now use up just over 60 percent of their total EIA income (including Rent Assist) to pay for rent in a low end private market bachelor or one bedroom suite.⁵⁷ After paying for housing, these individuals are left with between approximately \$260 and \$330 per month to pay for food and other expenses such as clothing, personal needs, and household supplies. These figures are based on the assumption that the individual is paying rent that is equal to 75 percent of Median Market Rent—individuals renting in the private market will be paying higher rents, which will leave them with even less to make ends meet. For example, individuals on general assistance use up 82 percent of their total EIA income to pay for the average rent for a private market bachelor suite. It's not just people on EIA who are struggling. Working Manitobans are also finding it hard to keep up with rent increases, even with annual increases to the minimum wage. For example, an individual needed to work 54 hours per week at minimum wage to afford the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Winnipeg in 2013.⁵⁸

The Province of Manitoba is committed to increasing Rent Assist's maximum benefit amount over a four-year period, with the target set at 75 percent of Median Market Rent.⁵⁹ While many low-income Manitobans will continue to struggle to afford Median Market Rent, a fully implemented Rent Assist will have a significant impact. This benefit will be available to low-income Manitobans both on and off EIA, an approach that is similar to that employed in a guaranteed annual income model. The community sector is committed to working with the province to ensure the 75 percent target is met and that Manitobans can easily access the benefit. It is important that increases to Rent Assist not be made at the expense of other benefits received by EIA participants. This will help prevent a reversal of the progress that has been made to close the housing affordability gap for low-income Manitobans.

1-3. Ensure all Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation tenants have access to resource centres that receive sufficient and stable funding to cover basic costs (e.g. space and core staffing) by 2020.

Public housing can do more than just address the housing needs of low-income Manitobans who cannot afford to be housed in the private market. Public housing can also connect tenants to resources and opportunities that address the inter-related factors that contribute to their poverty and social exclusion.⁶⁰ Much of Manitoba's public housing is situated in the inner city where there tends to be a concentration of resource centres providing services and supports to low-income Manitobans. However, public housing units situated outside of the inner city and in rural areas where programs and services are scarce and where the high cost of transportation creates a barrier that prevents low-income Manitobans from accessing services elsewhere.⁶¹

The Province of Manitoba has partnered with communities to respond to this challenge with mechanisms that connect Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation tenants to important resources and opportunities—counseling and mental health services, child care, food skills, healthcare, literacy training, education, job training, recreation, etc. Family Resource Centres located in Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation complexes outside of the inner city

have been viewed as a model of best practice for improving tenants' access to information and services.⁶² These resource centres bring services and information on site based on needs that have been identified by tenants. They also connect tenants to service providers off site and create opportunities for tenants to come together and build a sense of community.

The Province of Manitoba should ensure that all Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation tenants have access to tenant-driven resource centres that offer comprehensive supports either on site or nearby. The province should also explore the potential for mobile resources and services in smaller urban communities where Manitoba housing tenants are not geographically concentrated. Recent research suggests that there should be focused effort to ensure resource centres address the need for child care services, adult education programming, and supports for tenants with mental health issues and other disabilities.⁶³

1-4. Invest at least \$118 million annually between 2014/15 and 2019/20 to meet the need for capital repairs and maintenance in public housing units.

The quality of Manitoba's public housing stock needs to be improved to preserve existing units and ensure Manitobans have access to quality affordable housing options. Investments in upgrades can help prevent Manitoba housing tenants from being exposed to toxic substances in their homes that have a direct impact on their health. Problems with mould and inadequate heating and insulation can create and exacerbate poor health conditions like asthma and other respiratory disease. Serious insect infestations can cause illness requiring medical treatment and hospitalization.⁶⁴

In 2008, after more than a decade of neglect, the province began to significantly increase investments in capital upgrades to roofs, windows, heating and ventilation systems, water and waste efficiency upgrades, major renovations and overall site improvements. Investments increased from around \$9 million annually in the years prior to 2008 to around \$80 million annually since 2012. Investments in recent years approach the \$100 million annual investments over ten years that the province estimated to be needed in 2009 to address the current and deferred capital repair requirements in public housing. Community groups commend the province for recent investments despite limited federal commitments. They call upon the province to invest \$118 million annually to meet the estimated need for capital repairs in public housing by 2020 so that this public asset will continue to benefit Manitobans.

The building of new and the upgrading of old social housing units should continue to integrate targeted procurement to create training and employment opportunities for people with multiple barriers. These community economic development initiatives help provide new and lasting opportunities for local people and enterprises, and the community encourages this kind of approach to be integrated whenever possible.

Investments in improving Manitoba's public housing stock increased from around \$9 million annually in the years prior to 2008 to around \$80 million annually since 2012.

2. INCOME SECURITY

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

Income security is critical to poverty reduction and social inclusion. Manitobans should have access to enough income to live in a safe and stable home, eat healthy food, get from one place to another, use all the health services they need, and ensure someone can look after their children when they are unable to. By ensuring access to an income that can cover the cost of these needs, many more opportunities become available to help Manitobans participate more fully in the community and the economy—leading to even more opportunities to improve their wellbeing. Manitobans are able to pursue training, education, and employment opportunities when they do not have to worry about how they are going to pay for rent or food in a given month, or how their children will be cared for while they are working.

A multi-pronged approach is needed to provide Manitobans with income security. Those who are able to work should be supported to access the training and education they need to enter the labour market. Particular attention should be given to providing comprehensive supports to Manitobans with multiple barriers to employment as they transition through training into employment. Employers who hire them also need to be supported to ensure employment is sustained. Social enterprise development should be supported to create more supportive first job opportunities for Manitobans with multiple barriers. Efforts to increase employment rates for people with multiple barriers need to also ensure that people are moving into good jobs that pay living wages and offer good benefits. This can be achieved in part through minimum wage and living wage legislation and policies, as well as through strong employment standards and labour legislation. Some Manitobans are not able to access enough work hours to earn a sufficient income through employment. Others are not able to work at all. Manitoba's EIA program should provide all Manitobans who are eligible to participate in the program with enough income to meet their basic needs and participate in community life. It is clear that income security for Manitobans requires a comprehensive approach. We recommend the following actions:

Employment and Income Assistance

Manitoba's EIA program provides financial assistance to Manitobans who have no other way to support themselves or their families. The EIA program also helps those who are able to transition off of EIA and into work so they can become financially independent. Manitoba's EIA caseload has increased since 2009 from over 31,000 cases representing over 56,000 participants to over 35,000 cases representing nearly 62,000 participants.⁶⁵

In 2010, the Manitoba Ombudsman released a report based on a systemic review of the EIA program, which was triggered by ongoing community concerns related to the program.⁶⁶ The *Report on Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance Program* included 68 recommendations to the province to help ensure the program better meets the needs of Manitobans. As part of acting on the recommendations, the Province of Manitoba released the EIA Rate Review in 2013, which compares the total incomes of EIA participants to common benchmarks of low income.⁶⁷ It found that the incomes of EIA participants are well below low-income thresholds. The review was intended to inform policy and program development and funding decisions related to the EIA program. It concludes with four recommendations for how and where future resources could be utilized to improve the incomes of EIA participants.

The EIA program should provide Manitobans with enough income to meet their basic needs and participate in community life. This is a critical piece of an effective plan to reduce poverty and social exclusion.

The EIA program should provide Manitobans with enough income to meet their basic needs and participate in community life. This is a critical piece of an effective plan to reduce poverty and social exclusion. It is critical not just for the many Manitobans who are unable to work and must rely on the EIA program for their main source of income, but also for those Manitobans on EIA who are able to transition to work and become financially independent. It is difficult to imagine how Manitobans could participate in training, education, and employment that could lead to financial independence without first having an income that is sufficient to provide access to housing, food, clothing, telephone services and other basic needs.

While the recommendations below speak to changes that should be made within the EIA system, it is important to note that there is a growing call for the EIA system to be replaced with a guaranteed annual income (GAI). A GAI could ensure a basic minimum income for all Manitobans, including the working poor, so that nobody has to live in poverty. A widely-recognized research experiment on GAI took place in Dauphin, Manitoba in the 1970s. The results revealed better health, higher graduation rates, and no significant impact on employment.⁶⁸ Its proponents argue that a GAI would generate more than enough savings through reduced administrative costs and reduced costs in other areas such as health and policing to justify the cost of implementing a GAI. Such an approach to income security would likely need strong financial support from the federal government. Keeping in mind the long-term goal of achieving a GAI for all Manitobans, we recommend the following actions to improve Manitoba's current system for income security:

2-1. Immediately establish through legislation an EIA Rate Review Committee consisting of government and community representatives.

A joint committee of community and government representatives would help ensure the effectiveness of reforms to the EIA system. This committee would be tasked with implementing the 2010 Ombudsman's report and redefining basic needs, as well as setting, reviewing, and annually updating EIA rates, among other things.

2-2.A. Immediately implement a transparent mechanism for redefining basic needs in EIA legislation and for setting, reviewing, and annually updating EIA rates that are based on the actual cost of purchasing those basic needs.

The province's EIA Rate Review says that many EIA participants receive a sufficient income to meet their core daily basic needs as defined by EIA legislation. However this definition does not account for things such as telephone and internet services, recreation, and transportation. The EIA Rate Review acknowledges the connection between these services and social inclusion. The 2010 Ombudsman's *Report on Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance Program* recommended expanding the definition of basic needs to include some of these services.⁶⁹ The Province of Manitoba should work with the community through the EIA Rate Review Committee to redefine the legislated definition of daily basic needs to include: telephone service, recreation, transportation, and other basic amenities including food, clothing, shelter, essential health services, and utilities. By adopting a more inclusive definition of basic needs, the province can help ensure that EIA participants have adequate financial resources to access the services they need to move out of poverty, find employment if they are able to work, and become financially independent.

The 2010 Ombudsman's report recommended that the province be more transparent and accountable in the way that EIA rates are set. It called for a "formal, documented process for reviewing and making recommendations for periodically updating basic and shelter rates...and other income assistance allowances in a logical and equitable manner."⁷⁰ The province should work with the community through the EIA Rate Review Committee to develop a transparent

By adopting a more inclusive definition of basic needs, the province can help ensure that EIA participants have adequate financial resources to access the services they need to move out of poverty, find employment if they are able to work, and become financially independent.

mechanism in legislation for setting, reviewing, and annually updating EIA rates that are based on the actual cost of purchasing redefined basic needs. For example, EIA rates could be based on cost estimates of goods and services that are used to calculate measures of low income such as the Market Basket Measure, the Modified Market Basket Measure, or the Acceptable Living Level.⁷¹

It is important to note that there are several other benefits that are available to low-income Manitobans who are not receiving EIA, such as the Manitoba Child Benefit and the 55 Plus Program. The province should work with the EIA Rate Review Committee to be transparent and accountable in the way these benefit levels are set.

2-2.B. Increase EIA rates for all categories to the rates set in 2-2.A within two years and annually review and update rates to ensure they do not fall behind increases in the cost of living.

Manitoba's EIA rates have remained virtually unchanged in the last twenty years. The province has instead introduced new benefits available to low-income Manitobans both on and off EIA, enhanced earnings exemptions, implemented asset exemptions and has reinstated other sources of financial support that had once been clawed back from EIA participants.⁷² The monthly federal and provincial benefit income for single adults on EIA in Manitoba was \$677 as of July 2014.⁷³ Average private market rent for a bachelor suite in Manitoba was \$556.⁷⁴ That leaves the individual with \$4.23 per day each month for all other expenditures. These benefits provide single adults with an annual income of \$8,124. This is 41 percent of the poverty line based on the Low-Income Cut Off–After Tax, which was \$19,774 in 2013.⁷⁵ A single adult with a disability on EIA receives an annual income that is 54 percent of the poverty line.⁷⁶ Single parent families with two children and two-parent, two-child families on EIA live with incomes that are 60 percent and 70 percent of the poverty line.⁷⁷ These incomes are inadequate if the EIA program is to contribute to poverty reduction and social inclusion.

A pension-like program for Manitobans with severe, prolonged disabilities would help ensure Manitobans do not have to experience a lifetime of poverty because they are unlikely to participate in the labour market due to a disability.

The province's Strategy for Sustainable Employment and a Stronger Labour Market recognizes the important role EIA plays in helping Manitobans meet basic needs and participate fully in community life to the greatest extent possible.⁷⁸ However, it is clear that current EIA rates are not fulfilling this role. The Province of Manitoba's EIA Rate Review acknowledges that EIA participants receive incomes that are below established low-income thresholds which take into account the cost of purchasing goods that could be considered important for social inclusion. The province should begin to increase EIA rates now and annually review and update rates to ensure they do not fall behind increases in the cost of living.

It is important that EIA rates be increased in a way that ensures participants do not lose income when they transition into employment. The province's EIA Rate Review recommends increasing financial transfers to EIA participants through higher benefits outside of EIA, which would also be available to support low-income Manitobans who are not eligible for EIA, such as many of the working poor. The Rent Assist benefit provides an example of this approach because it is available to Manitobans on and off EIA. This portable approach would also need to be taken to implement a guaranteed annual income that would be available to all low-income Manitobans. These income-tested portable benefits can help ensure that EIA participants are better off when they transition into work. Furthermore, they help provide income security to low-wage workers who live below the poverty line despite having found employment.

2-3. Establish a separate pension-like basic income support program for Manitobans with severe and prolonged disability.

In 2009, Greg Selinger spoke at a poverty reduction forum about his intention to provide Manitobans on long-term disability with a pension option that would be annually increased to re-

flect changes in the cost of living. He wanted to provide Manitobans on long-term disability with a long-term approach to income security that would not preclude them from participating in the paid labour market. In 2013, the Province of Manitoba released its EIA Rate Review report which recommended that the government prioritize a separate pension-like program for Manitobans with severe, prolonged disability.⁷⁹ Such a program could help ensure that Manitobans do not have to experience a lifetime of poverty because they are unlikely to participate in the labour market due to a disability. It would also help reduce administrative costs as EIA caseworkers would no longer need to undertake regular reviews to determine ongoing eligibility for EIA benefits. While the federal government should provide funding to support this program and ensure it is available across Canada, some provinces already have similar programs without federal participation. The Province of Manitoba can begin by developing eligibility criteria and screening for participation in a new pension-like basic income support program. The new program should be designed in a way that ensures nobody loses access to related benefits they received before the program was introduced. It should also provide recipients with an amount that is at least equal to what is received under the current Canada Pension Plan disability benefit.

Jobs

An effective poverty reduction plan provides employment opportunities that increase the incomes of people who live in poverty. Labour is one of the most important assets that low-income people can use to improve their wellbeing. However, many people who live with low incomes face multiple barriers to employment.

First Nations people in Manitoba (off-reserve) continue to have lower employment and labour market participation rates compared to non-Aboriginal Manitobans. The unemployment rate for First Nations people is more than three and a half times the rate for non-Aboriginal Manitobans.⁸⁰ The legacy of colonization and ongoing systemic racism contributes to a variety of barriers (lower completion rates to formal education, discriminatory hiring practices, substance abuse issues and more) that prevent some Aboriginal Manitobans from accessing and succeeding in employment.⁸¹

Newcomers in Manitoba experience slightly higher unemployment rates than Canadian born residents. Rates were highest among immigrants arriving in the last five years at 9.7 percent in 2013, a percentage change increase of almost 30 percent since 2009. Unemployment rates decrease as more time is spent in the country and rates for established immigrants (10+ years) are even lower than rates for Canadian born residents.⁸² The immigrant population in Manitoba faces numerous challenges accessing employment including, a lack of Canadian work experience, poor English language skills, and difficulties with qualifications recognition.

Unemployment data for persons with disabilities have not been available since 2006. Data from this time shows that Manitobans with disabilities have higher unemployment rates and lower employment and participation rates than Manitobans without disabilities.⁸³ Some Manitobans face severe and prolonged disabilities that prevent them from working. However, most Manitobans with a disability are able to work but face barriers such as inaccessible education and training programs, systemic discrimination, and workplaces that fail to accommodate their needs.

The Province of Manitoba states that employment is the best way out of poverty. It must follow-up on this statement by ensuring that low-income Manitobans can access good jobs regardless of the barriers they face. We recommend the following actions:

2-4. Provide immediate funding for the initial set up and operating costs of a Labour Market Intermediary in Winnipeg and in the North to be designed and delivered with Aboriginal community organizations to improve labour market outcomes for multi-barriered Aboriginal job seekers.

There are many initiatives in Manitoba providing education, training, and supports to multi-barriered job seekers. The transition from training to employment can be very difficult with some clients requiring ongoing access to supports once employed. Furthermore, practitioners in community-based training programs explain the transition is not always linear. Some job seekers may need to access services from multiple organizations before they are prepared for employment. Others might find employment right away, but then fail to sustain that employment and need to access additional supports or training before becoming employed again. In many instances, often due to being inadequately resourced, community-based organizations do not have the capacity to continue to serve clients after they transition out of their programming. As a result, many clients lose access to the supports they need and fall off their path to sustained employment.

Recent research suggests that this gap in services can be addressed by a community-designed and delivered Labour Market Intermediary (LMI) with a mandate to support multi-barriered job seekers and employers to ensure a successful transition into employment.⁸⁴ An LMI would leverage the existing training services offered by educational institutions and employment development organizations in the neighbourhood and have the capacity to direct clients to the full range of services available to them. The LMI would also develop enduring relationships with employers and unions when relevant, in order to connect clients to jobs when they are ready, and to act as a liaison between employers and organizations in the neighbourhood. Finally, the LMI would employ and assign caseworkers to clients to ensure that multi-barriered job seekers have access to consistent and ongoing supports no matter where they are on their employment path (e.g. further training at a community-based organization, or working in the private sector).

Budget 2014 introduced Manitoba Works! a three-year initiative that enables four community-based organizations providing training and job placement services to offer comprehensive supports to job seekers and employers for up to six months once a link to employment is made. This initiative is similar to an LMI approach but it can be scaled up more efficiently through the development of an actual LMI. Rather than funding multiple employment development organizations to provide ongoing supports during the transition from training to employment, a community-based LMI would be centralized (by building capacity in a single Aboriginal community-based organization) to administer these supports and provide jobseekers and employers with access to comprehensive resources for as long as required.

The Province of Manitoba can provide more low-income Manitobans with access to good jobs regardless of their circumstances by funding the initial set up and operating costs of an LMI in Winnipeg and in the North. The province should partner with employment development organizations serving Aboriginal people, and other stakeholders to design and deliver the LMIs. These LMIs would focus on, but not be limited to, serving multi-barriered Aboriginal job seekers given the over-representation of Aboriginal people among those who are unemployed and living with low incomes. An Aboriginal-focused LMI would provide cultural reclamation programming to Aboriginal clients and cultural competence training for employers in recognition of the impact this has on improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal people. Once established, other funding partners, such as the federal government and crown corporations, can be called upon to financially support the LMI—a mechanism for achieving their equity hiring objectives.

It is important to acknowledge that there are other population groups in Manitoba, such as immigrants and refugees, who face unique challenges in accessing relevant and meaningful employment opportunities. Challenges may include language and skills recognition issues, low levels of education and literacy, acculturation issues, and the need to cope with trauma.⁸⁵ While some work has already been done to explore the potential for a newcomer-serving LMI in Winnipeg, further research is needed to determine whether or not this would be an appropriate mechanism to improve labour market outcomes for newcomers.

2-5. Commit resources to ensure the Manitoba Social Enterprise Strategy is fully implemented by 2020 in order to create more jobs for people with barriers to employment.

Social enterprises are non-profit businesses that aim to achieve social outcomes, such as jobs for people with barriers to employment. Social enterprises that provide training and job opportunities for multi-barriered job seekers contribute also to poverty reduction, crime reduction, a more inclusive economy, an increased tax base, and reduced costs associated with health, justice, and other social services.⁸⁶

Manitoba has a strong and growing social enterprise sector, particularly in Winnipeg, that is providing supports, training, and jobs for people who tend to be shut out of the labour market (e.g. people with disabilities, people who have a criminal record, or people with low educational attainment). The sector provides an important first job experience that can be used as a stepping stone toward other employment opportunities in the private labour market.

The Province of Manitoba has provided a variety of supports for social enterprise development over the years. Most recently, Budget 2014 committed to working with social enterprises to create a comprehensive strategy to grow the sector.⁸⁷ The Social Enterprise Strategy is expected to be complete by 2015 and stakeholders will be looking for a resourced commitment in Budget 2015 to begin implementation of the Strategy.

One outcome of the Strategy that can be implemented immediately without a budgetary implication would be for the Province of Manitoba to integrate Community Benefit Clauses (CBC) in all of its procurement policies and practices. This can help ensure that government spending maximizes training and job opportunities for people with barriers to employment.

The Province of Manitoba purchases many goods and services that can be provided by social enterprises that generate community benefit by providing jobs for people with barriers to employment and reducing dependency on the social welfare system. The Province of Manitoba has taken steps to provide social enterprises with more opportunities to provide goods and services for government projects, particularly around housing. These opportunities have been provided on a case by case basis by negotiating direct contracts with non-profit social enterprises and should continue to be provided where it makes sense.

But this practice is not based in procurement policy. Current government procurement policies do not require the added value generated by social enterprise to be taken into account when deciding who to purchase from or contract with. If procurement policies and practices valued community benefit on top of price and quality, more purchases and contracts could shift toward social enterprises and other business models that generate community benefit. The resulting growth in these businesses would scale up their positive impacts and create more training and job opportunities for people with barriers to employment.

Manitoba has a strong and growing social enterprise sector, particularly in Winnipeg, that is providing supports, training, and jobs for people who tend to be shut out of the labour market (e.g. people with disabilities, people who have a criminal record, or people with low educational attainment).

2-6. Include and achieve targeted training and hiring of groups identified in the Province of Manitoba's Employment Equity Policy 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 and Manitoba Hydro development projects in the North. These models should be improved upon and utilized more frequently in future infrastructure projects. One way to achieve this would be through the use of Community Benefit Clauses (CBCs). CBCs enable the province to award bids on publicly-funded projects based on the consideration of community benefit in addition to price and quality. Given their significant social value, social enterprises are well positioned to capitalize on the use of CBCs in projects they have a capacity to work on. Private sector employers who are better positioned to take on large infrastructure projects can also capitalize by demonstrating community benefit. For example, private sector employers would be awarded points for demonstrating in their tender, plans to integrate targeted training and hiring of local equity-seeking groups, which could include working with social enterprises and providing apprenticeship opportunities to their employees.

It is worth noting that a Labour Market Intermediary (LMI) would provide a cost-effective and efficient mechanism through which equity employment and training objectives of large-scale infrastructure projects can be met. An LMI would be able to develop long-term relationships and the institutional knowledge that is needed to ensure relevant partners can successfully implement targeted training and employment in various projects.⁸⁸

2-7. Address the barriers immigrants face when getting their qualifications recognized in Manitoba.

Manitoba's immigration policies are bringing skilled immigrants into Manitoba with the intention that they will make a long-term contribution to the labour market. However, agencies report that many immigrants to Manitoba have to go through a long, difficult, and expensive process to have their qualifications recognized so that they can work in the field they have been trained in. The Province of Manitoba has supported comprehensive gap training and bridge programs that provide immigrants with an opportunity to upgrade their skills and acquire job search skills, English as an additional language training, and job placement supports. Agencies report that wait lists are high for some of these programs and some immigrants end up having to start from scratch as a result of being out of professional practice for too long. Gap training and bridge programs need to be better supported so that immigrants can access the training they need to accelerate their entry into Manitoba's labour market.

The Province of Manitoba has partnered with the federal government to fund Recognition Counts, an initiative that provides micro-loans to low-income skilled immigrants to help relieve the financial burden that can come with skills upgrading. As of August 31, 2014 close to \$1,020,000 in loans have been disbursed among 115 clients. The program, delivered by SEED Winnipeg in partnership with Assiniboine Credit Union and the Province of Manitoba, also offers financial and career counseling to assist immigrants with obtaining employment in their field of expertise. The Province of Manitoba should follow up on its policies that bring more skilled immigrants to Manitoba by scaling up support and providing multi-year funding for initiatives like Recognition Counts that help eliminate the barriers skilled immigrants face to accessing employment.

2-8. Adjust government-wide benchmarks for representation of employment equity groups in Manitoba's Employment Equity Policy to reflect changes in population and labour force data and set a goal to meet adjusted benchmarks within the civil service and publicly owned institutions by 2020. Priority should be given to achieving benchmarks within management positions.

Gap training and bridge programs need to be better supported so that immigrants can access the training they need to accelerate their entry into Manitoba's labour market.

Public sector employment is an important source of jobs—providing good incomes, benefits, and opportunities for career advancement. All levels of government must make a more concerted effort to employ individuals from under-represented groups including Aboriginal people, visible minorities, women, and persons with disabilities.

We commend the province for setting equity targets and measuring progress. As of March 2014, women comprised 54.5 percent of the civil service, which surpassed the goal of 50 percent. The Province of Manitoba has also surpassed its goal to have visible minorities make up 8 percent of the civil service. In March 2014, visible minorities comprised 9 percent of the civil service, up from 4.9 percent in 2008. Progress has also been made toward meeting targets for Aboriginal people and persons with disabilities. Aboriginal people comprised 13.8 percent of the civil service, which almost reaches the goal of 14 percent and is up from 11.9 percent in 2008. Persons with disabilities comprised 4.9 percent of the civil service, which brings representation closer to the target of 7 percent and is up from 2.9 percent in 2008. While good progress has been made, the province has not met any of its equity targets for senior management positions within the civil service, meaning women, Aboriginal people, persons with a disability, and visible minorities continue to be under-represented in higher paying positions. It is important to note that equity benchmarks have not been revised since 2003/04. Benchmarks should be revised to reflect the most recent population and workforce data in Manitoba.

Wages

Employment will not provide a pathway out of poverty if jobs do not pay an income that brings individuals and families above the poverty line. All Manitobans working full time, full year should earn enough income through employment to live above the poverty line. However, 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, despite regular increases to the minimum wage. More than 46,000 Manitobans earn minimum wage, the majority of whom are over the age of 20 and female.⁸⁹ The 2014 minimum wage of \$10.70 per hour provides a full-time minimum wage earner with only approximately \$20,865 annually, leaving them \$2,996 below the before-tax poverty line (based on the 2013 LICO—before tax). A single parent with one child earning minimum wage is worse off, living \$8,841 below the poverty line.⁹⁰ More than 40 percent of minimum wage earners are working full time.⁹¹ The Province of Manitoba must ensure that all Manitobans receive a wage that keeps them above the poverty line. We recommend the following actions:

2-9. Incrementally increase the minimum wage per hour to the Low-Income Cut Off—Before Tax (LICO-BT) for a one parent, one child household by 2020, and index annually to the LICO-BT.

The Province of Manitoba has increased the minimum wage from \$6.25 per hour in 2001 to \$10.70 in 2014. Annual increases have ranged between .25 cents and .50 cents, with the majority of increases on the lower end of the range. Incremental increases over the last decade and a half have been welcomed, they have not been enough to bring full-time minimum wage earners to the poverty line.

As of October 2014, the minimum wage was 67 cents per hour short of what is required to bring a two-parent, two-child household to the LICO-BT (the 2013 poverty line), assuming that both parents work full time all year. A single parent with one child, working full time all year is \$4.53 per hour short of what is needed to live at the poverty line

Manitoba's minimum wage has increased from \$6.25 in 2001 to \$10.70 in 2014. While this increase is welcome, it is not enough to bring full-time minimum wage earners to the poverty line.

Single parent households are much more likely to live in poverty compared to households with two-parents and two children. Incremental increases to the minimum wage to a level that will ensure single parent households can live above the poverty line will also close the gap for households with two parents and two children and one-person households. The Province of Manitoba should increase the minimum wage to the poverty line for one-person households by 2017, and to the poverty line for single parent households by 2020. It is worth noting that this 2020 target would provide a living wage (defined below) to households with two-parents and two children, but it is \$1.81 short of a living wage for single-parent households.

It is argued by some that rather than concentrating on minimum wage increases, the province should increase the basic personal tax exemption. While tax measures are needed to assist lower income earners, the cumulative effect of increasing the exemption for everyone results in a loss of much needed tax revenue to pay for government programs that help low-income Manitobans. Net income is only one part of the family income equation. The province provides other tax credits and transfers such as Rent Assist that effectively boost a family's income. These credits and transfers could be put in jeopardy from the loss of revenue that would occur if every Manitoban benefitted from a personal tax exemption. The importance of income tax credits and transfers and government-funded services for low-income families is further demonstrated in the calculation of the living wage.

2-10. Within two years, introduce living wage legislation to ensure that all Manitoba government employees are paid a living wage⁹² and that the evaluation criteria for all requests for proposals take into account whether or not employees are paid a living wage.

A living wage is the hourly wage rate at which a household can meet its basic needs, based on the actual costs of living in a specific community. It is calculated after government transfers have been added to the household income and after deductions have been subtracted. Stronger government programs can shift certain costs off the shoulders of individual families, effectively lowering the living wage.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has developed a methodology for calculating the living wage that has become a model used across the country.⁹³ At least 25 communities in Canada have calculated their local living wage using its approach. Based on this methodology, the 2013 living wage for a two-parent, two-child family in Manitoba is \$14.07 per hour.⁹⁴

Living wage policies have been implemented in over 140 American cities, counties and universities.⁹⁵ Many British public sector employers have signed living wage agreements affecting direct and contract employees.⁹⁶ In 2010, the City of New Westminster and the Township of Esquimalt in British Columbia passed living wage policies affecting direct and contracted employees.

The Province of Manitoba is connected to a large number of workers in Manitoba—those it employs directly and those employed by businesses that the province purchases goods and services from. The province can prevent and alleviate severe financial stress for these workers and their families by lifting them out of poverty and providing a basic level of economic security through living wage legislation. Such legislation would ensure that all government employees are paid a living wage, and that the evaluation criteria for all requests for proposals take into account whether or not employees are paid a living wage, with the goal of all Manitobans having a living income. It would allow the government to demonstrate leadership and set an example for other employers in the private sector to emulate on a voluntary basis. There are many examples of employers around the world who have already taken the initiative to pay their workers a living wage, including Winnipeg-based Assiniboine Credit Union.

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Employment Standards and Legislation

Manitoba unions play a strong role in providing employment and income security to workers. The ability of unions to protect workers is directly related to the strength of the legislation that governs their rights and obligations. The province, therefore, has an important role to play in allowing unions to effectively do their job. However, there is a constant friction between employers and unions as they try to influence the province to either weaken or strengthen labour legislation. To protect workers, legislation constantly needs to be monitored, enforced, and strengthened.

Most workers in Manitoba are not union members and do not enjoy the added protection unionized workers do. Non-unionized workers are covered by provincial employment standards and occupational health and safety legislation. This legislation sets out the minimum requirements that employers must meet and protects workers from unfair labour practices. The legislation promotes 'decent work,' which the International Labour Organization defines as work that provides "income and employment security, equity and human dignity."⁹⁷

Some workers in Manitoba do not benefit from employment standards and occupational health and safety legislation leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation, job insecurity and fewer benefits. This includes self-employed persons, independent contractors, volunteers working for a charitable or political organization, individuals who are working as part of a rehabilitation or therapeutic program, and individuals, many of whom are students who are involved in a time-limited training or work experience program of the provincial or federal government, a school board, or a private sector employer. A variety of other workers are entitled to only some employment standards including many agricultural workers, fishers, and even some professionals and managers.

The Province of Manitoba has made some important changes to legislation regarding employment standards, occupational health and safety, and labour law in recent years. In addition, the province granted seasonal agricultural workers access to healthcare coverage in 2013. Despite this progress, more remains to be done. We recommend the following actions:

2-11. Immediately increase the protection of all workers from unfair labour practices.

Increasing protection from unjust treatment in the workplace is critical to preventing individuals from falling into poverty. Most vulnerable are non-unionized workers because they do not have anyone to advocate on their behalf and because they only benefit from minimum employment standards related to minimum wage, hours worked, paid vacation, and termination among other things. A comprehensive package of protection for workers would require the Province of Manitoba 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.

Improved protection would also come from allowing for automatic union certification when 50 percent plus one of potential union members sign membership cards. Automatic union certification currently requires 65 percent of potential union members to sign membership cards, up from 55 percent prior to the 1990s. Unionized workers would benefit from increased protection if legislation were to be introduced to prohibit the employment of replacement workers during labour disputes, whether it be during a strike or a lockout. This protection is particularly important for locked out workers whose employers prevent them from coming to work.

2.12. Immediately improve the Employment Standards Code to better protect vulnerable workers and introduce stronger measures to proactively monitor and enforce the Code.

Manitoba workers could be better protected by improvements to the Employment Standards Code that increased vacation entitlement from two weeks to three. This would provide a better work life balance, especially for parents who require additional time off to care for children. Furthermore, it would bring Manitoba in line with some other provincial jurisdictions. Other improvements to the Code would address the need to protect jobs (mostly women's) from disappearing while they are on parental leave and extend the period within which jobs are protected from 12 months to 18.

Attaining recognition of workers' rights in the Employment Standards Code is one thing, having them respected is another. Better enforcement of the existing Employment Standards Code is required. The Province of Manitoba has increased proactive workplace inspections of employment records throughout Manitoba and has broadened the spectrum of workplaces it visits. Further increases to the number of proactive inspections along with the investigations triggered by anonymous and third-party complaints will require an increase in officers and inspectors.

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

Children who can access high quality early learning and child care programs benefit from improved health, life-long learning, improved school readiness and performance.⁹⁸ They also benefit because child care enables parents to access training and employment so they can increase their family income. Child care is particularly important for women because they are most likely to limit their participation in the labour market when child care is unavailable. Accessible child care provides an opportunity for women to increase their life-time earnings, which can contribute to reduced poverty among senior women.

Early learning and child care programs that foster early childhood development are the most cost-effective ways to reduce poverty and promote economic growth.⁹⁹ Every dollar spent on child care in Manitoba generates \$1.58 of economic activity in rural and northern regions and returns \$1.38 to the Winnipeg economy through increased participation in the workforce and higher tax revenues, among other factors. Child care affects over 12,700 households in Winnipeg alone, allowing mothers and fathers to work or study, and to earn an estimated \$715 million per year. Every job created in the child care sector creates or sustains another 2.15 jobs.¹⁰⁰

Despite the importance of early learning and child care, persistent challenges remain in Manitoba's system, leaving many families without access to this critical resource. The federal government must play a role in meeting child care needs by establishing and funding a national early learning and child care system. The Province of Manitoba should advocate for such a system while continuing to demonstrate leadership. We recommend the following actions:

3-1.A. Add 12,000 new licensed and funded not for profit child care spaces while also investing resources to ensure existing spaces are sufficiently funded. Operating funding should be sufficient to fairly compensate and retain Early Childhood Educators and to enable the delivery of sustainable community-based and culturally-relevant early learning and child care programming for families in high socio-economic needs areas.

As of 2014, there were 89,400 children aged 0–5 years in Manitoba for which there were only 21,778 early learning and child care spaces.¹⁰¹ Not all of these children will require a child care space, but Manitoba's Online Child care Registry suggests that there are at least 12,000 children across the province waiting for child care.

New and existing spaces should be sufficiently funded to provide for a provincial salary scale that is at current market competitive rates and that applies to all child care professionals. Without adequate compensation, it is difficult to attract and retain a diverse and qualified child care workforce, which creates an imbalance between the number of new spaces and the availability of child care professionals. In 2014 the province committed to supporting higher wages through regular operating grant increases to centres, including a two percent increase starting in January 2015 specifically to support wages. It also committed to developing a new wage-enhancement grant to support long-term early childhood educators.¹⁰² However, child care advocates report that the

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majority of employees in child care centres are three to five years behind in competitive wages. As a result, approximately 30 percent of licensed child care centres are unable to recruit employees with the qualifications required by the Community Child Care Standards Act.

New and existing spaces should also include sufficient core operating funding to enable child care centres to deliver sustainable community-based and culturally-relevant early childhood programs that meet the needs of the families they serve. Aboriginal people working in the child care sector have identified a need for funding to support community-based and culturally-relevant programming designed specifically to support Aboriginal children under two and their parents.

The Province of Manitoba has taken significant steps to increase the number of funded child care spaces across the province. This includes meeting a commitment to fund 6,500 child care spaces and invest \$37 million towards the renovation, expansion or creation of new child care centres by 2013.¹⁰³ New commitments in 2014 suggest another 5,000 newly funded spaces and another \$25 million towards building and expanding child care centres by 2019.¹⁰⁴ Despite these investments, much more remains to be done to meet the need for additional spaces as determined by the Online Child Care Registry.

While we should endeavor to ensure that all children can access early learning and child care, targeted supports are needed for those most at risk of marginalization.

While we should endeavor to ensure that all children can access early learning and child care, targeted supports are needed for those most at risk of marginalization. A portion of newly funded spaces should be prioritized in communities with high socio-economic needs to build upon other poverty reduction efforts targeting those communities. For example, efforts to improve labour market outcomes for low-income Manitobans are more likely to be successful when child care is available as a resource. The Province of Manitoba will also need to invest in capital funding to ensure there are enough purpose-built and accessible facilities to accommodate the 12,000 new spaces.

3-1.B. Invest in initiatives to recruit and train enough early childhood educators to meet the legislated requirements for proportion of trained staff in the 12,000 new spaces.

Early childhood educators should be representative of the people they serve. Data measuring the percentage of kindergarten children who are “not ready” to learn in school reveals that 27 percent of Aboriginal children were not ready to learn in school compared to 11 percent of other Manitoba children. There is also a growing newcomer population facing unique challenges and similar data show that recent immigrant children are not as ready to learn in school than other children.¹⁰⁵ The need to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and newcomer children suggests that there should be a particular emphasis on encouraging more Aboriginal people and newcomers to become early childhood educators. This would help meet the pressing need for culturally and linguistically appropriate services and role models for children from Aboriginal and other minority communities. The Province of Manitoba should invest in resources and training supports such as tuition and living allowances that support more low-income Aboriginal people and newcomers to get into the child care profession. The Province of Manitoba should also invest in supporting and expanding successful community-based early childhood education training programs for Aboriginal people and newcomers.

3-2. Immediately eliminate the \$2.00 daily child care fee and increase the income level at which families are eligible for a full fee subsidy, with annual indexing to ensure families do not unfairly lose out on subsidies in the future.

Despite Manitoba’s child care subsidy program, many families are unable to afford child care. To be eligible for the maximum subsidy, families must live well below the poverty line. These families must also pay a \$2.00 per day user fee, which adds to their financial burden. As incomes

increase, the subsidy phases out and the user fee increases, meaning that when parents work and improve their income, they must pay more out of pocket for child care. However, even when working, many parents are unable to earn enough to afford non-subsidized child care and the cost of high user fees.

The daily user fee was reduced to \$2.00 from \$2.40 back in 2007, but this still leaves Manitoba's most vulnerable families to pay up to \$40.00 per month on child care. The income levels at which families are eligible for a full subsidy have not been increased since 2007 and have not kept pace with inflation. As a result, families working for minimum wage receive a lower subsidy every time minimum wage is increased despite working for incomes that leave them below the poverty line. The Province of Manitoba should immediately eliminate the \$2.00 daily child care fee to ensure the most vulnerable families do not face a financial barrier to accessing child care, while ensuring that child care centres do not lose this important source of revenue. The province should also immediately increase the income level at which families are eligible for a full fee subsidy in order to make up for having not kept pace with the rate of inflation since levels were first set. Levels should then be indexed annually to ensure families do not unfairly lose out on subsidies in the future.

3-3. Establish 30 community-based Aboriginal head start programs in and around high-needs schools across Manitoba by 2020.

Aboriginal head start programs focus on the early childhood development of Aboriginal children off-reserve and in urban centres and large Northern communities. These half-day programs support the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical development of children up to six years of age while supporting parents as primary teachers. Program components typically include: Aboriginal culture and language; education and school readiness; health promotion; nutrition; social support; and parental involvement.¹⁰⁶

A 2012 evaluation of head start programs across Canada revealed that they have had a positive effect on school readiness, cultural literacy, and health. There is evidence that some program sites have created a sense of community for Aboriginal children and their families. The evaluation also determined a continued and growing need for head start programs to serve the growing number of Aboriginal children who are living in urban centres.¹⁰⁷

The Little Red Spirit Aboriginal Head Start program at Dufferin School was the first head start program in Canada to be located in an urban elementary school. It has had a very positive impact on improving education outcomes for children in the school and was initiated by the federal government. Depending on their age, children spend half the day at the head start program and the other half at either the nursery program or kindergarten program. Kindergarten teachers have reported that children are much better prepared as a result of having participated in the head start program. The federal government provides funding to support 20 Aboriginal Head Start programs in urban and Northern communities and 43 Aboriginal Head Start projects in First Nations communities. The Province of Manitoba should work with the federal government to ensure these programs are adequately funded. Despite stagnant federal funding for existing Aboriginal Head Start programs and a lack of federal initiative to open new programs, the province should also demonstrate leadership to improve educational outcomes for children by establishing 30 additional head start programs in and around high-needs schools. In addition to having an Aboriginal focus, new head start programs should be targeted to also meet the needs of children in high-needs schools with large newcomer and refugee populations.

A 2012 evaluation of head start programs across Canada revealed that they have had a positive effect on school readiness, cultural literacy, and health.

Kindergarten to Grade Twelve

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. A high school diploma can help generate further education opportunities, training, and employment. High school completion rates have significantly improved over the last decade and a half in all Manitoba regions, with the exception of the North. Some neighborhoods fare better than others. As many as 90 percent of students in high socio-economic Winnipeg neighbourhoods graduated high school within five years of entering grade 9, while rates were lower in Winnipeg's low-income inner city, and in some North End neighbourhoods rates were closer to 20 percent.¹⁰⁸ A national assessment of science, reading, and math was released in 2014 and revealed that Manitoba has the lowest percentage of students that are meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in these areas out of all provinces.¹⁰⁹ Improving educational outcomes and increasing high school graduation rates of vulnerable students is critical to the prevention of poverty. It requires initiatives to strengthen parental involvement in schools and to provide students and their families with access to comprehensive and coordinated services that enable them to fully benefit from educational opportunities. We recommend the following actions:

High school completion rates have significantly improved over the last decade and a half in all Manitoba regions, with the exception of the North.

3-4. Review operational funding to school divisions—and in particular the ratio of direct provincial funding to locally levied property taxes for schools—with an eye toward reducing inequities in education programs and services among school divisions.

Inequities across neighbourhoods and in rural and Northern communities result in an inconsistency in programs available—certain programs and services available in one school 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. Establish and provide multi-year funding for five community school cluster sites by 2020 to provide vulnerable student populations with a continuity of access to the in-school delivery of coordinated services and programs as they transition through kindergarten to grade 12.

Community schools provide students and families with access to comprehensive supports, services, and opportunities that strengthen educational outcomes. They are hubs of educational, social, cultural, and recreational activities and can provide access to the in-school delivery of services related to health, mental health, settlement, and justice.

Community schools can offer use of school facilities before and after school, as well as during weekends and summer. It makes sense to provide these resources in school sites because the infrastructure already exists, and children already spend much of their time in schools.

Parental involvement in schools is a key piece of the community schools model because children do better at school when their parents are involved in their education. Community schools can provide resources and opportunities to bring parents into schools, including, adult education programming, access to training and jobs, food and nutrition skills programming, and addictions services.

The services and programs delivered in community schools are locally determined and will look differently depending on the unique challenges and opportunities that exist within the community it serves.

The Province of Manitoba introduced the Community Schools Partnership Initiative in 2005, which provides funding to 29 community schools in 14 school divisions. A recent external evaluation of the initiative found improvements in attendance, mitigation of vandalism, improved test scores, and improvements of home support for the school's program. The *Community Schools Act* was passed in 2013 to embed the community school philosophy and model in legislation. The Province of Manitoba's 2013 Speech from the Throne said that it would "broaden opportunities available to Aboriginal students...(by) building on new legislation to establish regional clusters of community schools involved in strengthening community participation in student success."¹⁰

Clusters of community schools consisting of early, middle, and high schools located within close proximity of one another provide an opportunity to offer students and families a continuity of supports and services as they transition from kindergarten through to graduation. The Province of Manitoba should establish and provide funding for five community school cluster sites across urban, rural, and Northern settings.

The province should collaborate with schools, communities, and service providers to identify gaps and duplications in service delivery, and to coordinate the full range of services and programs that need to be delivered in the cluster sites to improve education outcomes. While this will require adequate and coordinated financial resources, it should be noted that some services and programs can be provided by simply shifting delivery sites to schools, and do not require additional funding.

3-6. Establish and provide funding by 2020 for 30 parent-child centres in community schools across Manitoba as part of efforts to coordinate services and programs through the community schools approach.

Parental involvement in high-need schools is a significant challenge. There is a great deal of social distance between these schools as an institution and the communities they serve in terms of class, race, culture and language. A negative association with schools due to family experiences with the residential schools system, for example, can create further 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 low-income families. These factors prevent can parents from becoming actively involved in their child's education.

Building on the community schools model, parent-child centres in community schools attempt to bridge this social distance between parents and the school by bringing parents, educators, and social service agencies and organizations together to develop community-driven supports for families in the local neighbourhood. Parent-child centres are based on a capacity-building, strength-based approach that promotes community self-help and self-reliance. Parent-child centres can provide parents with access to social supports, food security, employment development opportunities, parenting programs, advocacy services, and leadership development opportunities.

Providing assistance for families to address their basic needs serves to build trust between the school and parents. Parents feel less intimidated by the school and begin to develop relationships with the educators and the various school programs. In this way, parent-child centres can be a stepping-stone to connect local parents to the school more broadly. Parent-child centres in community schools can also act as a platform for the coordinated and community-based delivery of existing parent education and child-welfare prevention programs.

The Province of Manitoba provides funding to 26 parent child coalitions across Manitoba. The province can build on its support for the model by providing funding for 30 additional parent-child centres in community schools as part of efforts to coordinate a broad range of services and programs through the community schools approach.

Attending to basic survival issues such as food, clothing and shelter pre-occupy a great deal of the time and energy of many low-income families. These factors can prevent parents from becoming actively involved in their child's education.

3-7. Support existing and new mentorship programs that include recreational elements for children and youth (e.g. arts, music, sports).

Accessible recreation options for children and youth can contribute to good health and personal development. It can help prevent disease and the likelihood of participating in negative behaviours such as smoking or substance abuse. It can also encourage the development of motor skills, social skills, and self-esteem while improving educational outcomes.¹¹¹ Recreation provides opportunities to expose children and youth to positive role models through mentors. Mentors can support youth and encourage them to stay in school, avoid addictions and criminal activity, develop positive relationships with family and peers, and develop the confidence they need to succeed in school and beyond.

Children and youth living in families with low incomes face many barriers to accessing recreation opportunities including a lack of adequate facilities, awareness of available opportunities, transportation, ability to afford equipment, family support and safe places to play. Some of these barriers can be addressed by building on the community schools approach and providing school divisions with financial support to encourage after school and summer use of school recreational facilities. Improving access to school facilities can provide children and youth in the community with convenient and safe places to recreate and benefit from mentorship opportunities. Schools can spread awareness of available opportunities to students and provide the support and encouragement they may not otherwise receive to take advantage of the benefits offered through recreation and mentorship. Outside of school facilities, many community-based and non-profit organizations are providing youth with improved access to mentorship programs that include recreational elements. Many of these opportunities are provided through a volunteer model and need to be better supported with funding by the provincial government. This is particularly important in low-income neighbourhoods where a volunteer model may not operate as effectively.

Expanding opportunities for accessing post-secondary education is an important component of a poverty reduction plan. Post-secondary education is associated with increased access to better jobs, higher earnings, improved health outcomes, and reduced crime.

Post-Secondary Education

Some students will look for work directly out of high school and the Province of Manitoba has helped make that transition as smooth as possible by increasing the number of alternative learning opportunities and career pathways for non-university bound high school students as called for in *The View from Here 2009*. For example, the province's Skill Build Shops fund and career development fund enables more students to access trades training and get their first year of apprenticeship or accredited training while in high school.

Many high school graduates will transition into post-secondary education institutions. Success in today's knowledge-based economy can depend on having higher levels of education and specialized skills. Expanding opportunities for accessing post-secondary education is an important component of a poverty reduction plan. Post-secondary education is associated with increased access to better jobs, higher earnings, improved health outcomes, and reduced crime.

Making post-secondary education accessible to all with targeted investments in vulnerable students requires a commitment to universal access policies. These policies include lowering user fees with the goal of eliminating these upfront barriers, providing good grants and bursaries for students, and ensuring adequate funding for post-secondary institutions. Broad measures like these can ensure a strong, sustainable post-secondary education system.

The province 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:

3-8. Immediately establish a timeline for transitioning provincial student loans into provincial student grants.

The province has taken some steps to reduce the financial burden student loans place on low-income post-secondary students. The province offers a competitive program through the Manitoba Tuition Fee Income Tax Rebate that provides students with up to 60 percent of their tuition paid back through an income tax rebate. Also, in 2012, the province reduced the interest rate on student loans from prime plus 1.5 percent to strictly prime. The 2014 Throne Speech indicated that the province plans to eliminate provincial interest on all Manitoba student loans. The province should be commended for this important action as charging interest on provincial student loans places an additional burden on those who need assistance the most.

However, if the impetus of grants and aid programs is to improve access to post-secondary education for those in need, than accessibility must be increased on the front end of the post-secondary education system, not the back end. This can be achieved by transitioning to provincial student grants rather than loans. This would open up post-secondary education to those historically unable to enter it due to the financial burden associated with loans.

3-9. Increase the minimum annual living allowance of Manitoba Student Aid to the Low-Income Cut Off—After Tax.

Until Manitoba transitions from provincial student loans to grants, action is needed to ensure Manitoba Student Aid adequately meets the financial needs of students. A single student living independently can borrow approximately \$360 per week in provincial and federal government student loans. After paying tuition, the student is left with an income that is almost 35 percent below the poverty line based on the Low-Income Cut Off—After Tax (LICO—AT). Some low-income students will be eligible for a Canada Student Grant which can help, but still leaves students below poverty levels.

Manitoba's Student Aid program assumes that parents will contribute to financing their child's education. However, not all parents are able or willing to do this. Some students will work during their studies to cover the costs not accounted for by Student Aid's living allowance rates. However, by increasing their incomes, they are then eligible for even less assistance, which prevents them from improving their overall financial situation. Some students will borrow from other financial institutions to make up the difference. This results in higher debt levels for students who cannot benefit from personal or family financial resources. The Province of Manitoba should increase the minimum annual living allowance of the Student Aid program to the LICO—AT to improve access and outcomes related to post-secondary education.

3-10. Eliminate full-time status criteria as an eligibility requirement for Manitoba Student Aid loans and bursaries.

Many students are unable to participate in post-secondary education on a full-time basis because of parental responsibilities or other personal factors. Part-time students are particularly vulnerable to high debt loads because they are not eligible for financial support from Student Aid. Furthermore, they are charged a number of other fees that do not vary according to full or part-time status. These factors create a barrier for potential students including many adult learners who want to return to school to receive a post-secondary education. Part-time students are expected to work during their studies, but many may not be in a position to do so. These students should

The province must continue to encourage and support students from low-income families and socially excluded groups that wish to access post-secondary education.

not have to face increased financial barriers when personal circumstances prevent them from studying on a full-time basis.

Part-time students who are in a position to work do not make a sufficient income working for minimum wage to live above the poverty line. It would be very difficult to cover the full costs of a part-time education on top of other regular living costs. These students should not be penalized for working part time to contribute to the costs of their education. Part-time students may be eligible for a patchwork of federal loans and grants. However, these are inadequate because they do not typically consider costs of living. The Province of Manitoba should eliminate full-time status criteria as an eligibility requirement for Manitoba Student Aid loans and bursaries to ensure that part-time students are not over-burdened by high student debt levels.

3-11. Increase funding to ensure Manitoba’s ACCESS programs can meet the needs of the growing Aboriginal student body in Manitoba.

Manitoba’s ACCESS programs have been very effective at supporting Aboriginal students who wish to pursue an education at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, Red River College, and University College of the North. These programs provide academic, personal, and financial supports to help students overcome the cultural, social, and economic barriers that prevent them from pursuing and succeeding in post-secondary education. ACCESS programs support several academic programs of study and a high percentage of graduates find full-time employment in their field of study—law, medicine, education, and engineering.

We commend the Province of Manitoba for annual funding increases to the ACCESS programs. This has helped increase the number of Aboriginal students in post-secondary education. The Province of Manitoba should index funding for ACCESS programs to the growth of the Aboriginal peoples in Manitoba to accommodate a growing number of Aboriginal students. This is important given that, by 2026 the Aboriginal population is projected to increase by 51.8 percent and form 18.9 percent of the total population in Manitoba.¹¹² Expanded ACCESS programs will benefit all who apply (e.g. northerners, women, newcomers, people with disabilities, single parents, and people from visible minority groups), as more spaces become available generally.

3-12. Provide financial incentives to post-secondary education institutions to encourage the delivery of courses off-campus and in low-income neighbourhoods and communities throughout the province.

Many students in low-income families can benefit significantly from having post-secondary education courses offered in the communities where they live. This can be particularly important for individuals with more complex lives than typical students, especially in the early stages of post-secondary education when the experience can be overwhelming. The supports provided in small and safe learning environments can help these students successfully transition into university and college life.

Aboriginal Focus Programs at the University of Manitoba provide education programs in Northern and First Nations communities that respond to the post-secondary and professional development needs of Aboriginal people. These programs respect the history, cultures, and development goals of the Aboriginal participants and communities they serve. The certificate and diploma programs can be ladderred into degrees and are offered as cooperative partnerships that involve community stakeholders, instructors, and students in the planning process to ensure that programs are relevant and meaningful to their specific needs.

The Urban Circle Training Program, the University of Manitoba’s Inner City Social Work Program, and the University of Winnipeg’s Urban and Inner City Studies Program are all located on Selkirk

Avenue and have demonstrated successful approaches to providing training and post-secondary education opportunities to inner city students.

The programs intend to attract people from the surrounding community who are unlikely to access post-secondary education in traditional education institution settings. They have resulted in higher enrolments of Aboriginal and inner city students. This success can be attributed to a model that enables students to go to school in their own neighbourhood, and in a small, friendly, and non-intimidating setting where they can easily interact with faculty and staff and access both academic and emotional supports. Of particular importance to Aboriginal students, has been the use of a decolonizing method of teaching that supports Aboriginal students and places the Aboriginal experience at the centre of the learning process.¹¹³

The Province of Manitoba should encourage post-secondary education institutions to offer courses off-campus and in low-income neighbourhoods and communities to build upon the successful model described above and to provide more inner city and Aboriginal people with access to post-secondary education.

Adult Learning and Training

Many adults living with low incomes, including those receiving Employment and Income Assistance, cannot access meaningful, long-term employment because they do not have the required education or skills. Adults with multiple barriers to employment will require comprehensive and integrated educational and employment development programming where they can access training in reading, writing and numeracy, high school credits and diplomas, and technical training, while also addressing needs around child care, stable housing, income, counselling, and healing. Community-based and culturally-relevant education and training opportunities are particularly important for inner city and Aboriginal adult learners.

Simple steps can be taken to improve and scale up existing programs so that more Manitobans can access the education and training they need to move into good jobs. We recommend the following actions:

3-13. Provide immediate support to community-based employment development organizations to deliver services to self-referred clients who wish to proceed through the province's 'sustainable employment pathway.'

Currently, provincial government staff offer services to prepare EIA participants for work through a 'sustainable employment pathway' model. EIA case coordinators do an assessment to determine what EIA participants need to achieve their training and employment goals. They refer participants to appropriate partners that are able to provide services (e.g. literacy training, life skills training). Those who are ready will move on to complete an essential skills assessment, which evaluates areas including numeracy, writing, reading, and working with others. After this assessment, participants meet with career development consultants who help develop an action plan to reach training and employment goals. This can include referrals to a community-based employment service or to a skills development training program.

EIA participants are instructed to go to an EIA office to initiate this process. However, offices are not always accessible to EIA participants, particularly multi-barriered jobseekers. Furthermore, many EIA participants are more comfortable accessing services in their own neighbourhoods from staff at community-based organizations with whom they have already established trusting relationships.

Simple steps can be taken to improve and scale up existing programs so that more Manitobans can access the education and training they need to move into good jobs.

The Province of Manitoba has begun to partner with two community-based employment development organizations—Opportunities for Employment and the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development—to support them in preparing EIA participants for work through the ‘sustainable employment pathway’ model. EIA participants can self-refer to these organizations and work with their staff to undertake employment and training assessments, essential skills assessments, and participate in their training and employment programs. This community-based approach is important when working with multi-barriered jobseekers and should be expanded and better supported.

3-14. Immediately extend Employment and Income Assistance supports to all participants who wish to pursue education and training programs, including university and other post-secondary programs that are up to four years in duration, depending on the participant’s learning objectives.

Manitoba’s EIA program supports participants to prepare for employment. Supports are based on what a participant expresses their employment goal to be as well as their assets and barriers as they relate to attaining sustainable employment. Supports may range from seeking immediate employment to longer term and extensive skills development training. Without adequate education and training, EIA participants may have a hard time gaining quality employment. The province has made efforts in recent years to bring more attention and focus to providing education and training supports that lead to sustainable employment rather than just any employment opportunity.

EIA participants can access EIA benefits while participating in pre-employment, job readiness, and skills training or education programs including literacy, mature student diploma programs through adult learning centres, and other upgrading programs. Many participants will move off of EIA and become eligible to receive a living allowance while in some of these programs. Those who are eligible for a living allowance may also be eligible to have tuition and other education fees, transportation costs, child care costs, and health services covered by the province. However, participants are only eligible for a living allowance if they are in an education or training program that is less than two years in duration. Similarly, EIA participants on general assistance (approximately 22 percent of the caseload) are only eligible for EIA benefits if they are in an education or training program that is less than two years in duration. It is worth noting that EIA participants are eligible for benefits while upgrading and receiving related supports for a significant period of time prior to entering into a two-year program. While the length of education or training programs cannot be longer than two years, participants may take longer than two years to complete their program. The two year limit enables participation in most college certificate and diploma programs as well as a wide range of certificate programs offered by private vocational institutions. However, those who wish to participate in educational or skills training programs that are more than two years in duration are required to find alternative means of financial support to cover costs. This can create a barrier for some who need to participate in these programs in order to develop the skills and credentials required for meeting their employment goals.

The Province of Manitoba’s Get Ready! policy allows EIA participants who have a disability or who are single parents (approximately 78 percent of the caseload) to receive EIA supports while in a post-secondary education or training program of up to four years in duration. All other participants are limited to two years. Extending EIA supports to all participants provides jobseekers with greater freedom to choose training and employment pathways that align with their interests. This approach may prove to be cost-effective in the long run as participants may be more likely to succeed and sustain employment in jobs that align with their expressed interests and career goals.

In addition to extending the eligible training period to up to four years, the Province of Manitoba can take further steps to recognize the value of education and training. Volunteer work provides

an opportunity for individuals to develop the type of skills 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.

3-15. Increase funding levels to existing adult literacy and learning centres and ensure all low-income neighbourhoods and public housing complexes have access to community-based and culturally-appropriate adult literacy and learning centres with onsite child care services.

Literacy skills and high school credentials are absolutely critical for adults who wish to pursue and succeed in further education and training with the long-term goal to gain meaningful employment. Adult literacy and learning centres provide adults with tuition-free programming to increase their reading, writing, and numeracy levels and to complete high school credits and diplomas.

Approximately 285,000 Manitobans between the ages of 16 and 65 have literacy levels below what is considered necessary to fully participate in society.¹¹⁴ Investments in improving literacy levels produce economic and social benefits. Low literacy levels are associated with lower earnings, and employment levels, and reduced participation in the political process. Parents who take steps to improve their literacy levels are more likely to be involved in their children's education, which is associated with improved educational outcomes.

The Province of Manitoba introduced the Adult Literacy Act in 2009 which requires there to be a province-wide adult literacy strategy that 'ensures all Manitobans have the literacy skills to fully participate in and benefit from the province's social and economic systems.'¹¹⁵ The Province of Manitoba provides funding to community-based agencies and organizations to deliver adult literacy and learning programs.

As of 2013, there were 36 agencies offering adult literacy programming in 58 locations across Manitoba. Of these, 12 agencies provided the literacy programming as part of a continuum of learning within adult learning centre programming, which focuses on offering high school credits and diplomas. There were 42 adult learning centres delivering programming in 82 locations across Manitoba.¹¹⁶ During the 2012–13 program year, 1,425 adult learners graduated with a high school diploma, 562 of which were Aboriginal learners. While the Province of Manitoba should be commended for supporting existing centres, there are many adult learners who do not have access to an adult literacy and learning centre in their community. Less than one percent of Manitoba adults in need of literacy training are enrolled in programs supported by Manitoba's Adult Literacy Program.¹¹⁷

Many adult learners will require literacy level upgrading before being ready to benefit from programming in adult learning centres. The Province of Manitoba should increase the number of adult learning centres and ensure that new centres also provide access to literacy programming so that adult learners can access the full range of services they need in one location. These centres should be located in low-income neighbourhoods and in public housing complexes, where possible. The Province of Manitoba has already invested in centres located onsite in some public housing complexes, which have helped improve tenants' likelihood of pursuing educational objectives while building a stronger sense of community. This has been particularly important in suburban complexes where services like these are lacking and transportation costs create a barrier to participating in programs outside the community.¹¹⁸

The majority of participants participating in existing literacy programs are either recent immigrant or Aboriginal learners. Almost half of adult learning centre enrollments are by Aboriginal learners. The Province of Manitoba should take stronger action to ensure that culturally-appropriate programming is provided in adult learning centres with high numbers of Aboriginal and newcomer participants. We also recommend that the Province of Manitoba ensure that child care services are provided in adult

literacy and learning centres in order to improve access to programming, particularly for women. In addition, the province should take action to ensure adult learners can access transportation in cases where a lack of transportation options acts as a barrier to program participation.

Intergenerational Education

3-16. Support comprehensive models of education by investing in hubs consisting of educational programs, student housing, and child care facilities that are influenced by the cultural values of the population served.

Educational hubs create new opportunities for social and economic advancement not only for individuals, but also for friends, neighbours, and family members who witness success and are inspired to develop and achieve their own educational goals. The outcome can break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

There are advantages to supporting the development of hubs that bring people of all ages together, from pre-school to adult learners, to access neighbourhood-based education opportunities along with the supports they need to succeed in education. Providing opportunities for parents and their children to learn together helps improve parental involvement in children's education, which positively impacts educational outcomes. Bringing high school students together with university students can provide high school students with role models and normalize the idea of a university education. Providing onsite access to housing, child care, and counseling can eliminate some of the barriers that would otherwise prevent people from participating and succeeding in education. The strategic location and design of these hubs can also attract people who would otherwise be unlikely to participate in educational programs. Ensuring a friendly and culturally-relevant environment can have a similar effect. This innovative approach to education creates new opportunities for social and economic advancement not only for individuals, but also for friends, neighbours, and family members who witness their success and are inspired to develop and achieve their own educational goals. The outcome can help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

The North End's Selkirk Avenue has developed over many years and continues to develop into a space where Aboriginal people in the surrounding community can come to learn and reclaim their culture through innovative educational approaches that are grounded in Aboriginal values. Education initiatives in and around Selkirk include the University of Manitoba's Inner City Social Work Program, the Urban Circle Training Centre, the University of Winnipeg's Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies, and the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) Pathways to Education program for high school students. These initiatives work together to facilitate a laddering approach to education where participation in one initiative provides a basis for participation in another. The community's efforts have been supported by the Province of Manitoba, which has invested in the many education initiatives on and around Selkirk Avenue.

The most recent development on Selkirk Avenue, which has been supported by the Province of Manitoba, is the new Merchants Corner—an education and housing complex that will connect and expand upon existing education initiatives in the area. The complex will offer literacy programs to pre-schoolers and their parents. It will also offer shared space for the University of Winnipeg's Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies and the CEDA Pathway to Education program for high school students, creating new opportunities for CEDA students to be tutored by the university students, and for the university students to become paid staff in the CEDA program. In addition to these intergenerational education initiatives, the complex will feature subsidized student housing and student-centred child care, all of which will be strongly influenced by Aboriginal values.

The Province of Manitoba should continue to support this comprehensive, interconnected, intergenerational, and neighbourhood based model of education on Selkirk Ave, while exploring opportunities in other key neighbourhoods.

4. FUNDING

Ensure that community-based organizations are sufficiently funded to effectively respond to the needs of the communities they serve.

Manitobans have a long history of taking innovative and strategic action in their communities to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion. Community-based organizations (CBOs) across the province are successfully providing access to child care services, settlement services, housing, local food, nutrition and food skills, financial literacy and capital, education and training, cultural reclamation and healing, and many other much needed services that enable marginalized people to overcome their barriers and develop capacity. CBOs are providing important prevention services to individuals and families before and after involvement in the child welfare system and justice system.

These community-based solutions are needed in addition to strong government programs and public services. Many CBOs lack the consistent and sustained core funding they need to take innovative, strategic, and sustained action through a comprehensive approach. For example, some women's and family resource centres are among those CBOs that are the lowest funded, despite the unique and critical services they offer. There is no short-term or one-size-fits-all solution for transforming social and economic conditions. CBOs correspondingly require long-term and flexible funding. There is a growing interest in some jurisdictions in exploring the use of social impact bonds, which involve the private sector in the funding and delivery of social services. However, others raise concerns and caution governments against embracing the model as a solution to scarce public funding, and reinforce the need for ongoing funding and service delivery by the public sector.¹¹⁹ We recommend the following actions:

4-1. Provide community-based organizations with adequate, flexible, and long-term funding (three to five years) that enables the delivery of programming that is high quality, holistic, and responsive to changing community needs.

Short-term funding from multiple sources creates an administrative burden that leaves CBOs with less time to ensure deliverables are met through programming. Furthermore, short-term funding tends to provide insecure and low-paying jobs with inadequate benefits that make it difficult to attract and retain enough qualified staff. Understaffing leads to stress and burnout, and high turnover diminishes organizational capacity and stability. Short-term funding also leads to interruptions and/or terminations to successful programs that are still needed in the community to address ongoing needs. When programs terminate prematurely, it can become difficult to effectively evaluate their impact.

The Province of Manitoba has responded to some of these challenges with the introduction of the Non-Profit Organization (NPO) Strategy. Participating community-based organizations entered into three-year funding agreements through the strategy to provide stable and predictable funding. The Strategy also intended to provide an integrated reporting mechanism to reduce the administrative burden associated with reporting to multiple funders. While many CBOs have responded favourably to the Strategy, more can be done to ensure its objectives are met.

The Province of Manitoba should further acknowledge the expertise and good value of CBOs by building on the NPO Strategy to provide sufficient funding to CBOs that are reducing poverty in their communities. Through the Strategy, the Province of Manitoba should enter into three to five year core funding agreements with more CBOs that deliver comprehensive and long-term programming that responds to changing community needs. Agreements should reflect the an-

Short-term funding from multiple sources creates an administrative burden that leaves CBOs with less time to ensure deliverables are met through programming.

nual increased cost of program delivery and enable CBOs to hire and sustain adequately trained staff in order to ensure the provision of high quality service.

4-2. Increase financial support to Neighbourhoods Alive! to allow neighbourhood renewal corporations to scale up their community revitalization activities.

Neighbourhoods Alive! supports designated urban communities in taking a long-term, comprehensive, community-led approach to neighbourhood revitalization by providing multi-year core and project-based funding. Neighbourhoods Alive! recognizes that each neighbourhood has its own unique needs, priorities, and opportunities, and that some of the most effective ideas for revitalization come directly from the community in need. Neighbourhoods Alive! offers planning assistance and flexible funding components that enable communities to identify the special needs of their neighbourhood, and then to develop and implement strategies to address them. The initiative supports revitalization initiatives in the following key areas: housing and physical improvements; employment and training; education and recreation; and safety and crime prevention.

Independent evaluations provide clear evidence that the Neighbourhoods Alive! model has made a significant difference in the revitalization of inner-city neighbourhoods through enhanced housing quality, perceptions of safety, neighbourhood stability, resident empowerment, resident engagement in the community, and overall neighbourhood well-being.¹²⁰

The Province of Manitoba should build on these successes by increasing core funding levels provided to Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations so that they can effectively plan and coordinate sustainable neighbourhood revitalization initiatives with their surrounding communities.

4-3. Provide adequate and dedicated funding to Aboriginal-led organizations and organizations working with Aboriginal people for the delivery of programming that integrates decolonization methods.

Many Aboriginal people are disconnected from their cultural heritage as a result of colonial policies purposely designed to assimilate them into a culture based in Western European values. Others have also experienced significant trauma as a result of policies and programs such as residential schools and 'the sixties scoop'. The deep and damaging intergenerational effects of colonization have been well documented.¹²¹ They include depression, poverty, violence, addictions, poor health outcomes, low educational attainment, and a lack of parenting skills.

It is increasingly being recognized that reversing some of the damage that has been done will require a process of decolonization including healing and cultural reclamation that is fully integrated into programming Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal-led organizations and organizations working with Aboriginal people indicate that this must first be addressed before Aboriginal people can proudly reclaim their Aboriginal identity and move forward.¹²² However, organizations are not provided with specific funding for cultural reclamation and healing from the effects of colonization. The journey of healing from the damage of colonization and the reclaiming of Aboriginal identity can be long and painful—this slow and often non-linear process is difficult for funders to understand and fit into their mainstream measurement tools, which are designed for quick and tangible results.¹²³

The Province of Manitoba should provide adequate and dedicated funding to Aboriginal-led organizations and organizations working with Aboriginal people, for the delivery of programming that integrates decolonization methods such as cultural reclamation and healing. The province should work with these organizations to develop appropriate eligibility criteria that ensures funding is provided to organizations that integrate decolonization methods that are based on established best practices.

It is increasingly being recognized that reversing some of the damage from colonization includes healing and cultural reclamation that is fully integrated into programming with Aboriginal people.

5. FOOD SECURITY

Ensure that all Manitobans have physical and economic access to healthy, safe, and affordable food.

Manitobans ranked food security as the second most important area to direct efforts in order to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion.¹²⁴ Food security is when all people have physical and economic access to enough safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs for an active and healthy life.¹²⁵ However, 17.5 percent of Manitoba children and 12.1 percent of Manitoba households experienced food insecurity in 2012.¹²⁶ In March 2014, 61,691 Manitobans used a food bank.¹²⁷ Almost half of all households that used food banks included children.¹²⁸ More than half were Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) participants and more than 16 percent were working.¹²⁹ This provides further evidence to suggest that EIA benefits and minimum wage are not sufficient to meet basic needs.

Access to adequate and healthy food is a key social determinant of health. Hunger can lead to serious and permanent physical and mental health issues. It is also associated with poor educational outcomes, which can create barriers to moving into other education opportunities that lead to employment and economic security.

Key barriers to food security include low income, geographic isolation, a lack of access to transportation, and low food literacy levels.¹³⁰ These underlying risk factors must be addressed if we are to achieve long-term solutions. The recommendations in this report do just that, by collectively working to improve incomes and therefore economic access to transportation and food. However, the Province of Manitoba should also take direct action to meet immediate food needs, improve food literacy levels, and support community-based initiatives that improve access to healthy and affordable food. We recommend the following actions:

5-1. Develop an adequately funded and nutritionally sound provincial school nourishment program that is available to all schools in need by 2020.

Many children living in families with low incomes go to school without having eaten a proper breakfast or packed a healthy lunch. Some children will not have eaten at all. Families with low incomes are often forced to choose between paying for housing or for food. Many families will turn to food banks when housing costs eat up their food budgets. Others will go through temporary periods with little or no food. In Canada, 31 percent of elementary students and 62 percent of secondary school students don't eat breakfast daily.¹³¹ Well over half of Manitoba youth in grades 9 through 12 report eating two or less servings of fruits and vegetables per day—far less than the recommended daily intake.¹³²

Studies show that well-nourished children are better positioned to succeed in school. Access to healthy food is linked to improved attentiveness, attitude, behavior, memory, problem-solving skills, and creative abilities.¹³³ Poorly nourished children score much lower on tests of vocabulary, reading comprehension, arithmetic, and general knowledge.¹³⁴ When students are not hungry, they can focus more clearly on their academic studies.

A long-term solution requires investments to ensure families have access to enough income to become food secure. In the short-term, school nourishment programs can provide students with regular access to healthy foods. The Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba supports nearly 200 schools across the province that are running programs to feed around 17,000 students healthy snacks, breakfasts, and light lunches. These school nourishment programs are open to all students and are delivered alongside nutrition education components that allow students to learn more

Key barriers to food security include low income, geographic isolation, a lack of access to transportation, and low food literacy levels.

about healthy eating and develop food skills. Studies of specific Manitoba programs show improved literacy scores, better behavior, school attendance, and ability to learn.¹³⁵

Budget 2014 provided new funding to the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba to support more nourishment programs in high-need schools. The Council is now able to support close to 250 programs compared to 15 in 2001. The Council is able to assist schools with approximately 25 percent of their costs. But costs are high in schools that require programming every day of the week, especially if they want to deliver nutritious food. Schools work hard to develop partnerships that leverage support from the community, but available resources vary across communities and some require more help than others.

The Province of Manitoba should build on this support by developing an adequately funded and nutritionally sound comprehensive provincial school nourishment program. An adequately funded program would be available to all schools in need and would better support the purchasing and storage of nutritious food. There is a need to include a fund that supports the purchase of equipment deemed necessary by Provincial inspectors to deliver school-based programs. An adequately funded program would also better support the delivery of school-based programs. These are often delivered by school staff or volunteers from the community. School nourishment programs can provide training and employment opportunities for parents and other community members. Some school divisions have partnered with schools to address the needs of school-based programs, including human resources. More partnerships like these are needed. Partnerships with social enterprise to supply food for school-based programs provides another opportunity to support jobs for local people.

A comprehensive provincial school nourishment program would be flexible, allowing for programs to be designed based on community strengths and students' needs, which may include accommodation for culturally appropriate food and special dietary needs. A flexible program would also recognize and address the unique challenges and opportunities in First Nations schools.

Finally, a comprehensive program would incorporate opportunities for students to learn about nutrition and develop food skills. It would also support food program coordinators to upgrade skills and knowledge around nutrition, which could be facilitated by stronger connections between schools and public health dieticians attached to regional health authorities.

5-2. Immediately establish a Food Security Action Fund to provide grants that support food security initiatives across Manitoba.

People are taking action in communities across Manitoba to improve food security. They are building community gardens and kitchens that provide opportunities for people to learn how to grow and prepare healthy food in their community. They are establishing 'good food clubs' which provide community members with workshops on nutrition education and food skills, and improve access to affordable, healthy, and local food. Different food-related programs and projects have been developed and implemented to meet the unique needs of a variety of communities—First Nations, newcomer, Northern etc.

These successful community-based initiatives and other new initiatives should be better supported so that more Manitobans can become food secure. The Province of Manitoba administers the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, which provides funding for local and regional food system projects in Northern Manitoba. This type of support can be expanded to other parts of the province through the establishment of a Food Security Action Fund that provides grants to deliver long-term and stable support to successful community-based food security initiatives across the province. Short-term grants should also be available to support new and innovative initiatives.

The fund should be created with new dollars rather than by dollars redirected from existing food-related initiatives. It should enable communities to develop, staff, and implement a wide range of projects that increase access to healthy foods and improve knowledge and skills around nutrition and food preparation. Communities should have the freedom to design projects that meet their unique needs and build on their unique strengths. A Manitoba Food Security Action Fund could be modeled after British Columbia's Community Food Action Initiative, which provides funding to food security projects in over 100 communities across the province.

5-3. Provide immediate funding to train and employ local community food coordinators who live in Northern Manitoba communities.

Food security can be a significant challenge in Northern Manitoba communities. The high price of healthy, perishable food items in the North poses a major barrier to food security. The lack of healthy food options has contributed to high rates of diabetes and obesity in Northern communities. Low levels of nutritional education mean that even when healthy food is accessible, it is not always purchased. While Northern communities are finding ways to become more food self-sufficient—growing and harvesting healthy foods locally—more can be done to develop community capacity.

A community food coordinator would help to coordinate the development and implementation of a community food security strategy in partnership with local stakeholders. The objective of the community food strategy would be to improve food security within the community. The community local food coordinator would work to ensure that local food security projects align with the community strategy.

Northern communities have been implementing food security projects and there is high demand for more to be developed. Individuals working with these communities report that many food security projects are supported largely by volunteers who are not always able to devote the time needed to ensure the project is successful, which can lead to high burn out rates that threaten the success of food security projects. They also report that projects are often supported by people who live outside of the community and do not necessarily have a strong connection to community partners or understanding of the communities needs and opportunities. Ideally, local players would develop the capacity and be leveraged to support local projects. The Province of Manitoba can improve food security and create employment opportunities in Northern communities by providing funding to train and employ local community food coordinators who live in Northern Manitoba communities. Coordinators should be part of a structure with reporting channels and resources, such as the health authority.

A Manitoba Food Security Action Fund could be modeled after British Columbia's Community Food Action Initiative, which provides funding to food security projects in over 100 communities across the province.

6. TRANSPORTATION

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

Poverty reduction and social inclusion requires all people to have access to affordable transportation options. Without transportation, Manitobans may not be able to access education, training, employment, child care, and services such as health care and recreation. Public transportation can be one of the few means through which individuals are able to maintain the social relationships that contribute to their wellbeing. People living with low incomes and people with disabilities face barriers to using public transportation, which prevents them from participating fully in the economy and the community.

6-1. Provide municipalities with adequate and targeted funding to ensure public transportation is affordable and accessible to all citizens.

The province provides funding to municipalities to improve their public transportation systems. It should work closely with municipalities that operate public transit systems to increase affordability and accessibility for people with low incomes and persons with disabilities. Transportation could be made more easily accessible to all Manitobans if it adhered to the principles of Universal Design. The Province of Manitoba must develop strong accessibility standards with respect to transportation to prevent and remove barriers to participation for persons with disabilities.

While some EIA participants are eligible for bus tickets or passes for health, training, or job search purposes, the cost of public transportation is usually paid out of pocket. The Province of Manitoba worked with the City of Brandon to provide EIA participants with free transit passes for use during off-peak hours. However, the restrictions on usage made the program difficult to manage and created conflict between transit riders and bus operators. Furthermore, the municipality wanted to see the province contribute more towards the subsidy that was needed to provide the free passes. The inability to resolve these challenges led to the elimination of the program. The Province of Manitoba should work with and support municipalities that wish to provide subsidized transportation for EIA participants and other low-income Manitobans in order to reduce economic barriers to transportation.

It is important to acknowledge that some municipalities do not have a public transportation system. Manitobans in those communities often rely on shuttle companies or cab services to get around. However, these modes of transportation are not affordable for everyone. This creates challenges, in particular for families with young children who live further away from services and employment. The Province of Manitoba has developed a transportation fund that supports rural Manitoba communities to invest in transit infrastructure projects by providing 50 percent cost-shared funding for transportation projects, including new public transit systems where none currently exist.¹³⁶ Municipalities must do their part by making transportation a priority and taking advantage of the supports the province has made available. This might include undertaking a study to determine transportation related needs and opportunities in the community and to develop a strategy to ensure transportation is affordable and accessible to all citizens.

People living with low incomes and people with disabilities face barriers to using public transportation, which prevents them from participating fully in the economy and the community.

7. 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 Métis communities are at least twice as likely as non-Aboriginal people to have a disability.¹³⁷ Without appropriate supports, persons with disabilities face many barriers to reaching their full social and economic potential. These barriers can prevent them from benefitting fully and equitably from education, job training, employment, housing, transportation, health care, recreation, and social services. As a result, persons with disabilities can end up with relatively lower incomes and become among those most socially and economically excluded in Manitoba. The province has responded with the implementation of its Full Citizenship Strategy, the introduction of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, the establishment of a disability issues office, the introduction 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, more needs to be done to ensure the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres of society. We recommend the following actions:

7-1. Develop and implement 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.

Accessibility-rights legislation and mandatory standards are critical to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities. In 2013, The Province of Manitoba responded to calls from the community to enact strong and effective legislation that requires the progressive removal of existing barriers for persons with disabilities, and prevents the creation of new ones. Since then the province has begun consultations on the development of accessibility standards that are to be enacted by regulation. Standards will be developed with respect to customer service, information and communication, transportation, employment and the built environment.

The key to effective legislation will be strong and effective compliance measures and the ongoing monitoring and enforcement of standards by the community. Community agencies that serve the disability community should be brought into the fold as partners of the provincial government. The Province of Manitoba should empower these agencies by granting them more responsibility and accountability for the ongoing monitoring and enforcement of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act. This will foster a sense of ownership that will lead to ongoing improvements in the accessibility standards of local stakeholders. Community groups that contend daily with disability issues are uniquely situated to realize, assess, and report on the outcomes of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act. The Act was due in large part to the drive and ambition of independent community groups, such as Barrier Free Manitoba. The province must continue to tap into the expertise of the community by utilizing community groups as fundamental partners in the maintenance and monitoring of the legislation.

7-2. Ensure a seamless and lifelong continuum of support services for persons with disabilities.

The Province of Manitoba should increase supports for persons with disabilities and their families as they transition into adult life and towards greater independence and self-direction. This includes services and supports that address residential or transportation needs to help persons with disabilities live as independently as possible. It also includes supports to facilitate transitions

More needs to be done to ensure the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres of society.

into education and employment. The community needs to be engaged in a candid and honest discussion of the realities facing a person with a disability in Manitoba.

Quality home care services enable persons with disabilities to live safely and with dignity in their homes and as integrated members of their communities. Manitoba has been a leader nationally in home care and is the only province to recognize caregivers in legislation and provide a caregiver tax credit. However, as indicated by the Canadian Home Care Association, Manitoba is challenged to meet the home care support requirements of an aging population and the increasing demographic of persons identifying as having a disability.¹³⁸ The province should invest in improved home care services including staff continuity, technical support training, and 24-hour emergency service. There should be greater participation from the community and experts in the delivery of home care services. The Province of Manitoba should increase investments to community organizations that train independent living attendants for little to no cost in programs that are directed by persons with disabilities.

The Province of Manitoba should also partner with community groups to leverage their expertise and experience toward making the labour market more accessible to the disability community. Education and training 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 systemic discrimination, often due to a lack of awareness, which can prevent them from accessing meaningful education and employment opportunities. Specific programs should be put in place to bridge the population of unemployed persons with disabilities to gainful job opportunities. This requires ensuring that training programs and facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities and geared toward employment that persons with disabilities are interested in and able to take advantage of. The Province of Manitoba's marketAbilities program could be better promoted to support more persons with disabilities in accessing and maintaining meaningful employment.

Families of persons with disabilities and the broader community need to be educated on the role they can play in facilitating transitions to professional employment and greater personal and financial independence. Frontline service groups must be supported to deliver ongoing workshops and educational sessions in the area of securing gainful employment for persons with disabilities. Barriers to education and volunteer opportunities are different for youth with disabilities than those without. Young people with disabilities need to be educated on the culture of employment. Training and orientation for navigating the landscape of the labour market should be introduced early in the high school curriculum rather than at the end or after. This will better prepare youth with disabilities for a transition into independence.

8. HEALTH

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

High income does not guarantee good health, but low income almost inevitably ensures relatively poor health and significant health inequity. Health inequities are explained by factors that have much less to do with lifestyle choices and health care and much more to do with the economic and social conditions we live in (poverty, income inequality, unemployment, inadequate housing). It is widely recognized that these social determinants of health contribute to good or poor health, and that our collective health would improve dramatically if investments were made toward improving these economic and social conditions. 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.¹³⁹

A 2010 publication on the social determinants of health in Manitoba provides further evidence in support of a social determinants of health approach to improving health outcomes.¹⁴⁰ Manitobans living in the lowest income neighbourhoods experience shorter life expectancies, higher premature mortality rates, higher infant and child mortality rates, and higher rates of chronic disease than Manitobans from the highest income neighbourhoods. While data show that the general health of Manitobans has improved at times over the last couple of decades, these improvements have not been experienced by Manitobans living in low socio-economic areas, meaning health disparities are widening over time, and more Manitobans are being left behind. Data also show that First Nations in Manitoba experience shorter life expectancies, premature mortality rates that are twice as high, and diabetes prevalence rates that are four times as high compared to all other Manitobans.

The Province of Manitoba must continue to build upon preventative actions that reduce economic and social disparities within Manitoba and therefore also improve overall population health outcomes. Urban inner-city neighbourhoods and First Nations in Manitoba have some of the highest poverty rates in the province. Women, Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities are over represented among those who are poor and therefore are also at greater risk of poor health. Targeted actions will be needed to improve health outcomes for these communities.

The recommendations in this poverty reduction plan address the social determinants of health. Together, they will help reduce poverty and improve health outcome disparities within Manitoba. This preventative approach to improving health outcomes can generate much needed savings in a province where 38.3 percent of the budget is allocated to health care.¹⁴¹ More specific to physical and mental health services, 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:

8-1. Continue to provide health services through a publicly-administered, single-payer, non-profit delivery system to ensure equal access for all Manitobans.

Manitoba's healthcare system plays a critical role in providing access to the healthcare services that people need often as a result of our failure to adequately address the social and economic conditions that contribute to their poor health. Healthcare systems based on ability to pay disadvantage those who are more likely to require healthcare services because they are often also least able to afford to pay for care. Manitobans with low incomes should not have to face financial

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.

barriers to accessing healthcare services. Many out of pocket expenses such as dental and eye exams and prescription drugs are inaccessible to low-income Manitobans, including the working poor who often have little to no benefits. The Province of Manitoba must maintain and improve upon a healthcare system that is based on need to ensure that all Manitobans have access to healthcare services and are treated equally regardless of their ability to pay.

Manitoba could maximize the impact its health care system has on positive health outcomes with actions that ensure it better adheres to the five principles of the Canada Health Act: public administration, universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility, and portability. Canada's 2004 Health Accord, was an agreement between the provinces, territories and federal government that provided stable funding to provinces while recommitting the nation to the principles of the Canada Health Act. The federal government's refusal to renegotiate the Health Accord after its expiry in March 2014 poses a threat to Manitoba's ability to adhere to the five principles. Cuts to federal health transfers mean a lack of stable and adequate funding that puts our public healthcare system in danger.

8-2. Ensure primary mental health services are a fundamental component of a comprehensive health system by increasing the proportion of the health budget that is allocated to expenditures on mental health and by expanding the types of mental health services covered by the public healthcare 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. We commend the province for taking steps to better support Manitobans with mental illness such as increasing community living supports and expanding mental health crisis stabilization services. However, much more must be done to increase the resources and capacity for a range of community mental health services.

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. Psychiatric and mental health services are among those listed by health professionals as "chronically underprovided" to people living in Canada's inner cities.¹⁴² Current spending on mental health services in Manitoba is below par. The World Health Organization notes that the disease burden of mental illness is 13 percent but the proportion of health spending dedicated to mental health care falls short of need world-wide.¹⁴³ High-income countries with comparable health care systems spend an estimated 12 percent (UK), 10 percent (Germany), and 8 percent (the Netherlands). Approximately 7 percent of Canada's health budget is spent on mental health.¹⁴⁴ In Manitoba the figure is estimated to be around 5 percent

Low-income people may face barriers to accessing mental health services that are not always covered by the public system including non-medical treatment options like psychotherapies and clinical counselling.¹⁴⁵ These services should be included in the range of mental health services that are covered by the public healthcare system. The qualified delivery of these approaches can be cost effective while improving mental health outcomes.^{146 147}

It is important to acknowledge that not all barriers to accessing mental health services are financial, some are systemic. For example, a national study on frontline service to vulnerable populations notes that "medical education generally doesn't prepare doctors to deal with addiction, disease, infection, and mental illness all in the same client."¹⁴⁸

8-3. Ensure youth have access to initiatives that promote mental health as well as services that prevent and address mental illness.

Low-income people may face barriers to accessing mental health services that are not always covered by the public system including non-medical treatment options like psychotherapies and clinical counselling. These services should be included in the range of mental health services that are covered by the public healthcare system.

A majority of young adults living with mental health issues report that their symptoms started in childhood. Early promotion and prevention is critical to healthy emotional and social development. It can also reduce demands on the mental health system and the criminal justice system in the long run. The overrepresentation of people with mental health problems and illnesses in the criminal justice system can be attributed in part to a lack of access to services, treatments and supports in the community.¹⁴⁹ The punitive approach to crime that has been amplified in recent years through federal legislation leads to increased incarceration of people with low income who may be unable to access services to address addictions issues and mild to moderate mental health issues before negative behaviors stemming from these issues escalate and lead to contact with the criminal justice system.¹⁵⁰ Related to this is the need for police, and other service providers related to the justice system, to have basic training in mental health and wellbeing and to be aware of available mental health services. This training is essential for all service providers who work with people who have mental health problems and illnesses.

The province should take a preventative approach to crime and better support youth with mental health issues by ensuring access to initiatives and services that promote mental health, and prevent and address mental illness from an early age through to adulthood. Strategies to promote mental health should actively recognize the role that socio-economic circumstances play in mental health and wellness.¹⁵¹ This requires curriculum that attends to the existence of social and economic inequities and their known effects on mental health. For example, youth who are racialized or poor require tools to counteract the negative psychological effects of racism and anti-immigration as well as the stigma of poverty.

8-4. Extend dental and vision care benefits to all low-income people using an income-based graduated scale which augments benefits for those receiving EIA supports.

Many people do not realize the important role dental and vision care play in overall health, particularly 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 have to make difficult spending decisions. However, without dental care, people are at elevated risk of oral diseases and infections that can have a significant impact on quality of life and cost more money to address in the long run. 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 to prevent suffering and generate long-term cost efficiencies.

The Province of Manitoba can better adhere to the Canada Health Act's principle of comprehensiveness by expanding the basket of covered health services to include dental care and vision care. Such an approach would eliminate the stigma that can accompany means-tested programs and would help make early intervention services more accessible to low-income Manitobans, which can reduce costs down the road. Currently no public provision is made for dental care and eye care and it is limited to "medically necessary" treatment provided in a hospital or doctor's office. An income-based dental and vision care program based on a sliding scale model would improve accessibility for Manitobans with low incomes and help improve their overall health and wellbeing. More research is needed to determine whether or not Manitoba's Pharmacare program would provide an effective model to follow. The income-based program provides assistance for the cost of prescription drugs. Patients pay a deductible (minimum \$100) that is calculated based on family size and taxable income and the Pharmacare program covers eligible prescription drug

costs above and beyond the amount of the deductible. While the deductible acts as a user fee that can limit some families from accessing prescription drugs, Pharmacare is critical to preventing families from going bankrupt as a result of chronic illness and associated high prescription drug costs.

8-5. Immediately adopt an explicit goal to reduce health inequities, develop measures to track the progress of key indicators, and ensure that an equity-focused health impact assessment is implemented across government departments.

The province can show that it is serious about addressing the social determinants of health 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. Implementing the recommendations in this report would help reduce health inequities and disparities. However, more can be achieved if all government departments took into consideration the impact its policies, programs, and initiatives are likely to have on health inequities and disparities. To that end, the Province of Manitoba should require that a health equity impact assessment be undertaken for all major provincial public policies, programs and services. Such an assessment would look at potential impacts that could widen health disparities among population groups with a goal to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts.

9. CHILD WELFARE

Ensure child safety and the best possible outcomes for all Manitoba children.

9-1. Implement the recommendations in *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children* by Hon. Ted Hughes to improve the child welfare system and address the underlying issues of poverty that can lead to contact with the child welfare system.

Poverty creates conditions that can lead to involvement in the child welfare system.¹⁵² Colonial policies have contributed directly to higher rates of poverty amongst Aboriginal people, and as a result Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child welfare system.¹⁵³ In Manitoba, 87 percent of children in care are Aboriginal.¹⁵⁴ The province devolved responsibility for child welfare to Aboriginal authorities in 2002, an important step toward self-determination, however Aboriginal community-based organizations wish to be more involved in providing preventative services to Indigenous children.¹⁵⁵ Addressing the conditions of poverty and providing supports to families is key to preventing the apprehension of children into the care of the child welfare system and to the reunifications of families.¹⁵⁶

The number of children in care is costly socially and financially. Manitoba has seen an increase in the number of children in care, from 6,118 children in 2005 to 10,293 children in 2014.¹⁵⁷ At the current rate there could be more than 22,000 children in care in Manitoba by 2030, doubling the current government expenditures of \$0.5 to \$1 billion, with further cost implications for social assistance, health care and other public expenditures.¹⁵⁸ These costs will become a long-term cost driver for the Manitoba budget. Beyond the cost implications, our province has a moral obligation to support the best possible outcomes for all children, especially the most vulnerable.

Children who grow up in foster care fall behind other children: they are less likely to graduate from high school and have a greater likelihood of suffering from mental health problems, chronic unemployment, homelessness and incarceration.¹⁵⁹ A child “aging out” of foster care today will earn \$326,000 less income over his or her lifespan and cost all levels of government more than \$126,000 in the form of higher social assistance payments and lower tax revenues.¹⁶⁰ Children aging out of care require adequate supports in order to transition to independence.

The Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry was a comprehensive process investigating the circumstances of the tragic death of this young girl failed by the child welfare system. Phase three of the Inquiry looked at the systemic reasons why families have contact with the child welfare system and the program, policy and legislative changes needed to improve supports to families and children. Commissioner Ted Hughes concluded the Inquiry in December 2013 with the release of his report, *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children*. The Inquiry made a total of 62 recommendations to improve the welfare of children in Manitoba. One recommendation cites *The View from Here 2009*: “That the province closely examine the 2009 report, *The View from Here: Manitobans Call for a Poverty Reduction Plan*, with a view to implementing the outstanding recommendations, paying particular attention to the area of adult education.”¹⁶¹

Poverty creates conditions that can lead to involvement in the child welfare system. Colonial policies have contributed directly to higher rates of poverty amongst Aboriginal people, and as a result Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child welfare system.

Conclusion

THERE IS NO EXCUSE for poverty and social exclusion in a society as rich as ours. We must make a renewed commitment to build upon the progress we have made and generate significant reductions in poverty and social exclusion over the next several years. There is no quick fix for the kind of poverty we are facing in Manitoba, and the province must recognize that a long-term commitment will be required.

The province has implemented some important initiatives to address poverty and social exclusion since the introduction of its strategy in 2009. Still, the fact that Manitoba's poverty rate is 8.9 percent, the fourth highest in the country, suggests that we have a lot more to do. The recommendations outlined above represent a renewed package of policy initiatives that a broad cross-section of Manitobans believe should be included in a comprehensive and long-term poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy. They have been endorsed by more than 80 organizations.

The Province of Manitoba's strategy, *All Aboard*, and its accompanying action plans end in 2017. Legislation requires the strategy to be reviewed and updated at least once every five years.¹⁶² The province should begin now to engage in consultations and an open dialogue with the community and use our plan as a basis for updating *All Aboard* through a co-constructed process. Such a process should ensure that future actions are taken within the context of achieving transparent objectives and based on a careful analysis of what is required to effectively achieve those objectives. We also call on the province to move areas of this plan, that build upon existing initiatives, to the implementation stage in the next fiscal year with details announced in Budget 2015.

Endnotes

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