

# Strategic Dialogue Background Document: The Nature of Poverty

## May 10 -11, 2010, MaRS Discovery District, Toronto, ON

---

“Every problem,” he says, “magnifies the impact of the others, and all are so tightly interlocked that one reversal can produce a chain reaction with results far distant from the original causes. A rundown apartment can exacerbate a child’s asthma, which leads to a call for an ambulance, which generates a medical bill that cannot be paid, which ruins a credit record, which hikes the interest rate on an auto loan, which forces the purchase of an unreliable used car, which jeopardizes a mother’s punctuality at work, which limits her promotions and earning capacity, which confines her to poor housing.”

“If problems are interlocking then so too solutions must be [...]: a job alone is not enough. Medical insurance alone is not enough. Good housing alone is not enough. Reliable transportation, careful family budgeting, effective parenting, effective schooling are not enough when each is achieved in isolation from the rest.”

David K. Shipler. *The Working Poor - Invisible in America*. 2004.

### **Poverty is Complex**

1. *It is Difficult to Frame* - Is poverty just a lack of income or does it also include poor education, jobs with meager benefits, insufficient education, hope and self-esteem?
2. *It has multiple joined up root causes* - Income is affected by decent housing and ability to get good housing is dependant on income.
3. *It Involves Multiple Stakeholders* - No one organization or sector has authority, resources or leverage to address the causes of poverty on their own.
4. *It Has Unique Manifestations* - There are different levels of poverty (e.g. homelessness to working poor), demographics (e.g. youth, senior, immigrants) and local contexts (e.g. Fort McMurray in Alberta, Regent Park in Toronto).
5. *It Evolves* - As demographics, economies, policies, etc. change, the manifestations of poverty and possible solutions also change.
6. *It’s Not Clear When Poverty is Reduced* - When is someone out of poverty?

### **Place-Based, Comprehensive and Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Poverty**

1. *Place-Based* - Mobilizing local resources and customizing solutions.
2. *Comprehensive* - Addressing multiple root causes in an orchestrated way.
3. *Multi-sector* - Working across artificial organizational and sector boundaries.

# Income Poverty in Canada

(Thanks to Ken Battle, Caledon Institute of Social Policy)

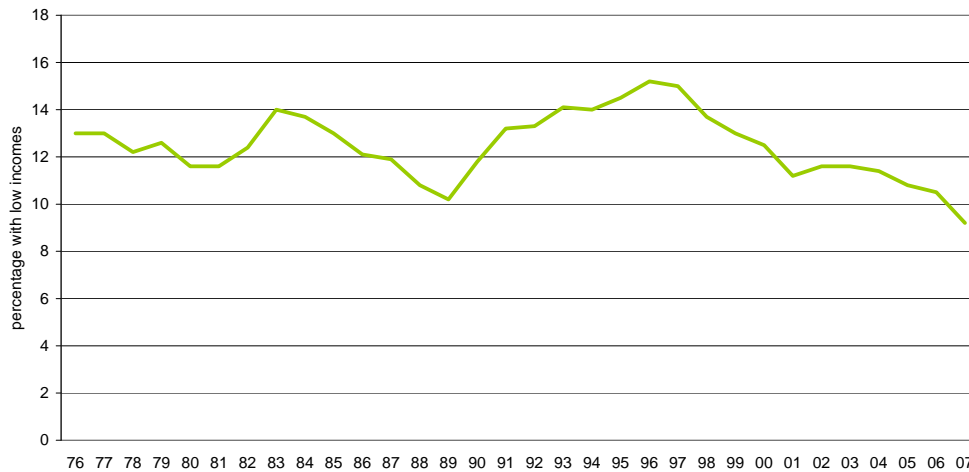
---

**Notes:**

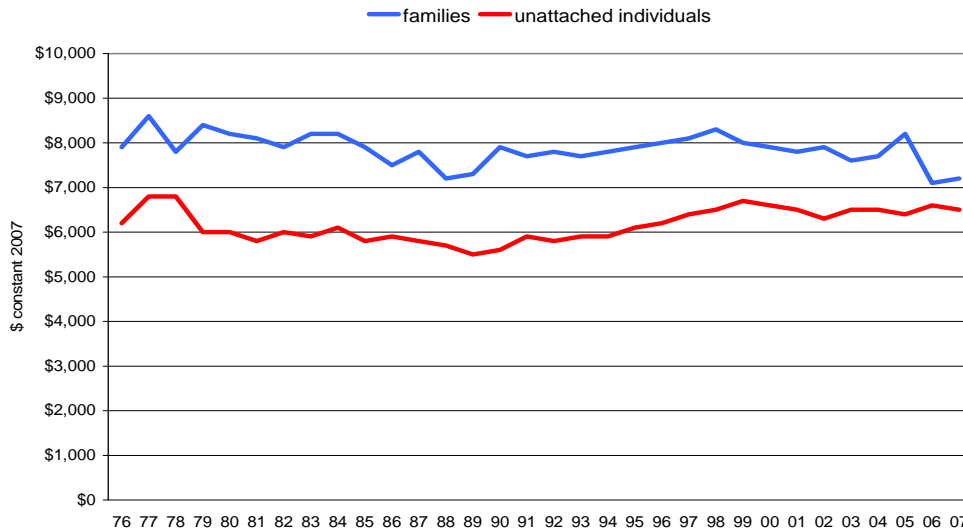
- “While certain populations experienced relative improvements in their socio-economic situation (e.g., seniors, aboriginals, people with disabilities) during the five-year period of relative economic growth from 2001 to 2006, others were left even further behind (e.g., single mothers and families with young children, the working poor, immigrants and social-assistance recipients).”

Federation of Canadian Municipalities  
[www.fcm.ca/english/View.asp?mp=1&x=1297](http://www.fcm.ca/english/View.asp?mp=1&x=1297)

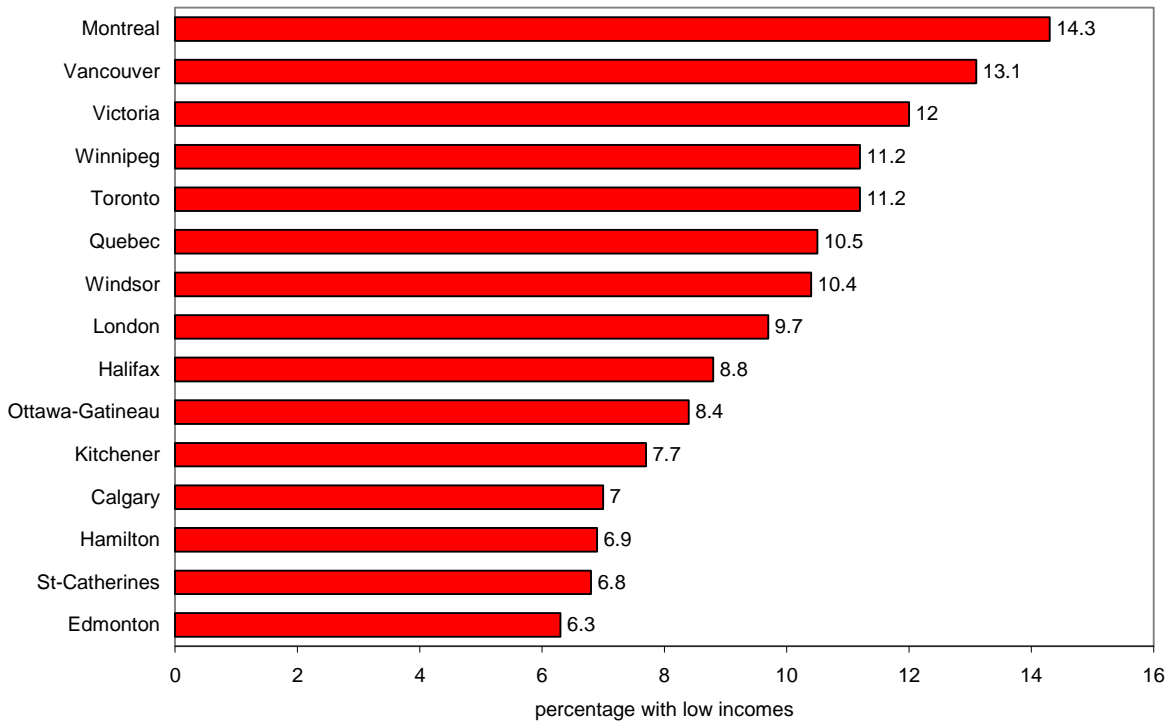
**Low income rate, Canadians, 1976-2007**



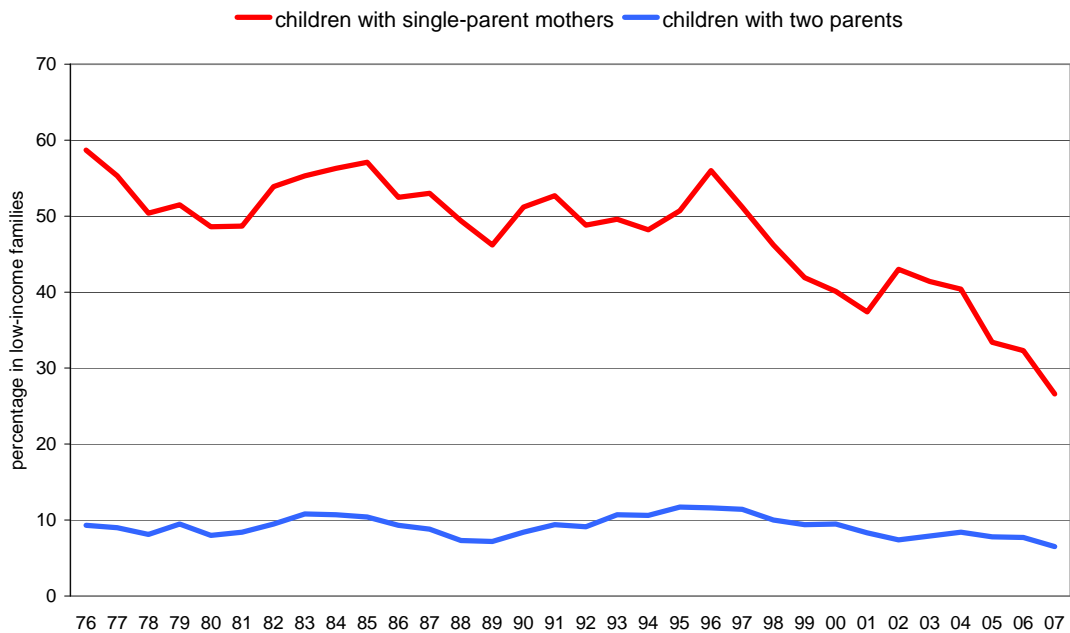
**Average depth of poverty, families and unattached individuals, 1976-2007**



### Low income rate, major cities, 2007



### Low income rate, children with single-parent mothers and children with two parents, 1976-2007



## The Case to Reduce Poverty

---

### The Social Justice or Ethical Case

Louise Arbour, former Supreme Court of Canada justice and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has said that “today, poverty prevails as the gravest human rights challenge in the world. Combating poverty, deprivation and exclusion is not a matter of charity, and it does not depend on how rich a country is. By tackling poverty as a matter of human rights obligation, the world will have a better chance of abolishing this scourge in our lifetime. Poverty eradication is an achievable goal.”

Canada Without Poverty  
[www.cwp-csp.ca/Blog/](http://www.cwp-csp.ca/Blog/)

“Poverty in the midst of plenty is a fundamental injustice.”

KAIROS  
[www.kairoscanada.org/en/solidarity/poverty-in-canada/](http://www.kairoscanada.org/en/solidarity/poverty-in-canada/)

### The Economic Case

“Poverty costs the residents of Ontario a staggering \$32 billion to \$38 billion a year – the equivalent of 5.5 per cent to 6.6 per cent of provincial GDP. As one would expect, most of this cost is borne by the 1.9 million households with the lowest incomes.”

Ontario Association of Foodbanks  
*Cost of Poverty*. 2009.  
[www.oafb.ca/assets/pdfs/CostofPoverty.pdf](http://www.oafb.ca/assets/pdfs/CostofPoverty.pdf)

#### Interested in more information?

The National Council of Welfare has a “top ten” research studies on the cost of poverty. See <http://www.ncwcnbes.net/documents/researchpublications/ResearchProjects/CostofPoverty/Top%20Ten%20Picks.pdf>

## Interest in Reducing Poverty

---

### **The Public**

The majority of Canadians believe Canada should try to distinguish itself as a country where no one lives in poverty, according to an Environics Research poll conducted for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) in October 2008. In this poll, 90% of respondents reported that they would be proud if their Premier took the lead in reducing poverty in their province; 88% want Canada to be a leader in poverty reduction; and 77% say a recession is all the more reason to act now.

Among the poll findings:

- 90% say it's time for strong leadership to reduce the number of poor people;
- 92% say if countries like Great Britain and Sweden can do it, so can Canada;
- 86% believe if government took concrete action, poverty could be greatly reduced;
- 89% say the Prime Minister and Premiers need to set concrete targets and timelines to reduce poverty and measure their progress;
- 81% support reducing poverty by at least 25% over the next five years: 55% say that sounds about right but another quarter (26%) say that's not ambitious enough; and
- there is resounding majority support to raise the minimum wage, improve income support programs to help poor families raising children, create low-cost child care spaces, create more affordable housing, make sure welfare rates rise with the cost of living, and invest in jobs and skills training for those in between jobs.

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives  
[www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)

### **Municipal Government**

“We have a new class of working poor in our country; waiting lists for affordable housing that keep getting longer; and people struggling to get to work and find childcare ...New growth, the recession, and the legacy of the 1990s have changed Canada and are taking a huge toll at street-level. We can't go on pretending the system isn't broken. All governments-and all political parties-need to acknowledge the problem and they need to respond.”

Federation of Canadian Municipalities  
[www.fcm.ca/english/View.asp?mp=1&x=1297](http://www.fcm.ca/english/View.asp?mp=1&x=1297)

## **Education Sector**

“Teachers see the effects of poverty get played out in schools and classrooms in many ways. Low-income children experience reduced motivation to learn, delayed cognitive development, lower achievements, less participation in extra-curricular activities, lower career aspirations, interrupted school attendance, lower university attendance, an increased risk of illiteracy and higher drop-out rates. "The evidence is clear and the data is out. Let's move from words to action," urges Donnelly. "Although governments have taken positive steps in the right direction to address poverty, more needs to be accomplished. All levels of government need to meet to develop a coordinated poverty reduction strategy," concludes the Canadian Teachers Federation President.”

Canadian Business Magazine

[www.canadianbusiness.com/markets/cnw/article.jsp?content=20100420\\_130502\\_0\\_cnw\\_cnw](http://www.canadianbusiness.com/markets/cnw/article.jsp?content=20100420_130502_0_cnw_cnw)

## **Federal Politicians**

“As our research evolved, so too did our frustration and concern as we repeatedly heard accounts of policies and programs only making living in poverty more manageable – which essentially entraps people.”

Senate Report on Poverty

[www.parl.gc.ca/40/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/citi-e/subsite-dec09-e/Report\\_Home-e.htm](http://www.parl.gc.ca/40/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/citi-e/subsite-dec09-e/Report_Home-e.htm)

## An Illustrative Snapshot of “Comprehensive” Poverty Reduction Efforts in Canada

There are countless initiatives that focus on some element of poverty (e.g. homelessness, welfare reform, early childhood development, workforce planning). The following table provides an illustrative list of ongoing activities focused explicitly and directly on comprehensive poverty reduction across Canada.

National & Provincial Activities	Examples of City Wide Place-Based Initiatives
<p><b>Pan-Canadian Networks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Canadian Community Economic Development Network</li> <li>- United Way of Canada (informal network of UW’s working on poverty using ‘community impact lens).</li> <li>- Vibrant Communities Canada</li> </ul> <p><b>Provincial Networks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BC Poverty Reduction Coalition</li> <li>- 25 in 5 Network</li> <li>- Povnet – online community</li> <li>- Poverty Watch Ontario</li> </ul> <p><b>Provincial Governments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government of Quebec</li> <li>- Government of Newfoundland &amp; Labrador</li> <li>- Government of Ontario</li> <li>- Government of Nova Scotia</li> <li>- Government of New Brunswick</li> <li>- Government of Manitoba</li> </ul> <p><b>Interested in more information?</b> The Canadian Social Research group has a comprehensive list of poverty reduction activities at the pan-Canadian and provincial level: <a href="http://www.canadiansocialresearch.net/antipoverty.htm">http://www.canadiansocialresearch.net/antipoverty.htm</a></p>	<p><b>British Columbia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality of Life Challenge: <a href="http://www.qolchallenge.ca/">http://www.qolchallenge.ca/</a></li> <li>- Vibrant Abbotsford: <a href="http://vibrant.domain7.com/">http://vibrant.domain7.com/</a></li> <li>- Vibrant Surrey <a href="http://www.vibrantsurrey.ca/">http://www.vibrantsurrey.ca/</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Prairies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Calgary (UW) Poverty Reduction Coalition: <a href="http://www.reducepoverty.ca/">http://www.reducepoverty.ca/</a></li> <li>- Vibrant Calgary <a href="http://www.vibrantcalgary.com/">http://www.vibrantcalgary.com/</a></li> <li>- Vibrant Communities Edmonton <a href="http://www.vibrantedmonton.ca/contact.asp">http://www.vibrantedmonton.ca/contact.asp</a></li> <li>- Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council <a href="http://www.wprc.ca/">http://www.wprc.ca/</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Ontario</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kingston Community Roundtable on Poverty Reduction: <a href="http://www.kingstonpovertyreduction.ca/">http://www.kingstonpovertyreduction.ca/</a></li> <li>- Regional Municipality of Niagara</li> <li>- Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction: <a href="http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca/">http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca/</a></li> <li>- Opportunities Waterloo Region: <a href="http://www.owr.ca/">http://www.owr.ca/</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Quebec</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vivre Saint Michel <a href="http://www.vsmsante.qc.ca/">http://www.vsmsante.qc.ca/</a></li> <li>- Trois Rivieres: <a href="http://www.ecof.qc.ca/index.jsp">http://www.ecof.qc.ca/index.jsp</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Atlantic Canada</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business Community Anti-poverty Initiative/Vibrant Saint John</li> <li>- St. John’s, Newfoundland <a href="http://envision.ca/templates/vc2009.asp?ID=8548">http://envision.ca/templates/vc2009.asp?ID=8548</a></li> </ul>