



Towards an anti-poverty strategy for Ontario

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction believes that the Province of Ontario needs a broad anti-poverty strategy to address the unacceptable levels of poverty in the province. As the City of Hamilton currently has the highest incidence of urban poverty in the province, we believe local candidates running in the provincial election are in a unique and influential position to champion the proposal for a ‘made in Ontario’ comprehensive anti-poverty strategy.

Over the past few years, several other provincial governments have moved towards creating anti-poverty strategies by adopting specific policy goals, establishing financial commitments and setting out benchmarks for implementing change to reduce poverty in their jurisdictions. In Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Quebec, governments have focused on poverty reduction initiatives to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Several European jurisdictions have been extremely successful in reducing levels of poverty through comprehensive, coordinated strategies. In what came to be dubbed as “the Irish miracle”, poverty in Ireland was slashed to “6.8 per cent from the daunting 15 per cent that lived beneath the line of destitution 10 years ago”¹.

Importantly, each poverty reduction initiative recognizes the importance of breaking down the systemic (or bureaucratic) barriers that exist within or between governments by developing a synchronized approach to dealing with poverty. Like the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction’s process of ‘breaking down silos’, a successful anti-poverty strategy must engage both community and government and strive towards a widespread commitment or ‘buy-in’.

Many families are trapped in poverty because of policy and systemic failures. Reducing poverty means removing barriers that keep families from achieving self-sufficiency².

All successful anti-poverty agendas have indicated that focused government and community leadership is essential towards meeting success. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction would respectfully urge the Government of Ontario to:

- 1) **Establish an Inter-Ministerial Secretariat on Poverty Reduction.** The Secretariat should draw on the expertise of its different ministries, and be directly accountable to the Premier and Minister of Finance. Over the last few years there have been several successful initiatives of this kind; for example, the Democratic Renewal Secretariat and the Ontario Growth Secretariat. A Poverty Reduction Secretariat will establish political accountability for the issue of poverty, build bridges between different government departments that relate to poverty (e.g. Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ministry of

¹ Toronto Star “The Irish miracle, April 7, 2007

² “Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative” Saint John.

Education, or the Ministry of Health), and be able to implement the wide range of solutions needed to combat conditions of poverty across Ontario.

- 2) **Establish a multi-sector Provincial Panel on Poverty Reduction.** One of the major findings of the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction is that, while government has a major role to play in reducing poverty, all sectors – business, community, people living in low income, and government need to take responsibility and be involved in the long term solutions.
- 3) **Develop measurable targets and timelines to reduce poverty.** The ability to monitor progress or lack of progress is a crucial factor to evaluate success in reducing poverty. An example of targets and timelines include Campaign 2000's call for a 25% reduction in the child poverty rate (based on the Low Income Cut Off) by 2012. Other targets should include reductions in the rates of low income for different sub-populations – Aboriginal people, single mothers, recent immigrants, or visible minorities. Once established, the Poverty Reduction Strategy should include annual progress reports toward the targets.
- 4) **Invest the resources and create the necessary policies to reduce and prevent poverty.** The Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction has identified five key areas of investment in the lives of children, youth and their families living in poverty:
 - Quality early learning and child care
 - Skills through education, activity, and recreation
 - Targeted skills development (Post – secondary)
 - Employment
 - Asset Building and Wealth Creation

These critical points of investment are built on foundational community supports that require investment and policy direction by all levels of government, particularly the Provincial Government. Without these foundational supports, children are unable to move through the five critical points of investment. The foundational community supports require both investment by the Provincial Government and the development of policies to support their sustainability.

The foundational community supports are:

- Civic engagement and broad social inclusion
- Universal access to health care supports that focus on prevention, early intervention and mental health
- Strong education institutions
- A solid economy producing quality employment and a living wage
- Affordable housing opportunities in neighbourhoods across the city
- Accessible, reliable, and affordable transportation
- Accessible amenities at the neighbourhood level
- Adequate and responsive income security programs
- Institutional and community behavior that values that participation and contributions of youth.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction looks forward to working with the Province of Ontario to reduce poverty and social exclusion in our communities. We recognize that the issue of poverty will not be solved quickly or simply, but we would encourage the Province to take these important first steps immediately. We believe that ignoring the issues of poverty and social exclusion impacts the ability to achieve prosperity for all citizens in Ontario. It is time for leadership and action.



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