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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Roundtable Calls for Ontario-Wide Poverty Strategy

HAMILTON - The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) is calling for a provincial strategy to address unacceptable levels of poverty in Ontario.

"Many families are trapped in poverty because of weaknesses in policies and systems, and that's where a broad, provincial approach can create sustainable change," says Mark Chamberlain, Chair of HRPR.

"From our Hamilton experience, we know that a collaborative, cross-sector approach is needed if we want to truly reduce and prevent poverty, and not just alleviate it."

Mr. Chamberlain said the call for a province-wide strategy is a non-partisan one. "We are not endorsing any particular party in the lead up to next week's election. Regardless of next week's outcome, it's time for leadership and action on poverty in Ontario."

Ontario's poverty rate is estimated at 14.5 per cent (2001 census). Hamilton has the highest urban poverty rate in Ontario at 20 per cent.

The Roundtable has prepared a Policy Brief with four recommendations for the Government of Ontario, including:

- Establish an inter-ministerial secretariat on poverty reduction
- Establish a multi-sector provincial panel on poverty reduction
- Develop measurable targets and a timeline to reduce poverty
- Invest the resources and create the necessary policies to reduce and prevent poverty

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The Policy Brief is being shared with all local electoral candidates and with party leadership. “Our city has the highest incidence of urban poverty in Ontario, so local candidates are in a unique and influential position to champion this proposal,” Mr. Chamberlain said.

“We recognize that the issue of poverty will not be solved quickly or simply, but we encourage the new provincial government to take these important first steps immediately,” says Brian McHattie, City Councillor and Roundtable member. “I will seek council’s endorsement of the Policy Brief.”

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was convened in mid-2005 by the City of Hamilton and Hamilton Community Foundation. With broad community support, the goal of making Hamilton “the best place to raise a child” has been identified, along with five critical points of investment in the lives of children, youth and their families living in poverty:

- Quality early learning and childcare
- Skills through education, activity and recreation
- Targeted skills development
- Employment
- Asset building and wealth creation

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BACKGROUNDER

- In Newfoundland, Quebec and New Brunswick, provincial governments have focused on poverty reduction strategies to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.
- Several European jurisdictions have been extremely successful in reducing levels of poverty through coordinated strategies. Poverty in Ireland was reduced to 6.8 per cent from 15 per cent in the last 10 years.
- Hamilton is part of the “Vibrant Communities” movement focusing on poverty reduction (www.tamarackcommunity.ca).
- Hamilton City Council will be asked to endorse HRPR’s Policy Brief.

ABOUT HRPR

- The HRPR is a 32-member group co-convened the City of Hamilton and Hamilton Community Foundation. It is chaired by local businessman Mark Chamberlain.
- In March 2007, the HRPR released its “Starting Point Strategies” poverty reduction plan for Hamilton.
- The plan identifies a number of “Starting Point Partners” working with HRPR to address the five critical areas of investment: Quality early learning and childcare; skills through education, activity and recreation; targeted skills development; employment; and asset building and wealth creation.

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