

# Creating the future we all deserve

A social policy framework for Nova Scotia

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We acknowledge that our work is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. We are all Treaty people. Decolonization and reconciliation are our collective responsibility and are integral to our vision of transformative social policy for all.

5	<b>Foreword by Christine Saulnier</b>
8	<b>Foreword by Alec Stratford</b>
11	<b>Introduction</b>
13	<b>Why we need a social policy framework</b>
14	The growth of income inequality
21	The causes and consequences of income inequality
25	Why policy matters
26	State of Public Services
28	<b>How did we get here?</b>
32	<b>The road to transformation</b>
33	Intersectionality
34	Evidence-Based
37	Guiding Principles for Social Policy
56	<b>How to use this framework</b>
56	An example: Child Care
61	<b>Conclusion</b>
62	<b>Notes</b>



# Foreword

Christine Saulnier

Nova Scotia Director, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

WE ALL DESERVE a decent life and we should expect to have one. The latter part is something I reflect on when I think about how to bring positive change in Nova Scotia. It is striking to me that despite having a relatively bad health outcome profile, with higher rates of many chronic diseases, Nova Scotians are more satisfied with their access to health care than many other provinces.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the relationship between satisfaction and actual performance, and even the impact health care itself has on outcomes, is complicated. British Columbians are less satisfied with their health care system and yet have some of the best health outcomes/profile. Are Nova Scotians satisfied because the system(s) meets their low expectations? Indeed, research on satisfaction surveys cautions that a significant determinant of satisfaction are expectations. Expectations are based on experience and thus tend to reinforce the status quo. In the case of a health care system in crisis, for example, patients may still rate their care excellent because the care is provided by individuals who are not to be blamed for the system itself, which they expected not to perform well. Another significant determinant of level of satisfaction responses is a reluctance to be negative. The same logic and reasons could also explain why Nova Scotians are convinced that any increase in their wages will result in inflation and therefore they will

not gain anything anyway. Workers, it follows, should just be happy to have a job and moreover, employers are doing the best they can.

One could argue that this outlook about what to expect is rather pragmatic and is better than being continually frustrated and thus perhaps an unhappier lot. What we should ultimately consider is who really benefits from the status quo and from our complacency. The powerful, dominant elites have everyone convinced that we are a poor province, and therefore can't really afford to invest in better quality public services. Similarly, they claim over and over that they can't pay higher taxes, nor pay their workers higher wages, and if they are forced to raise wages then they must raise prices.

Let's set low expectations aside and consider how the few are disproportionately benefitting off the backs of the many. While many in our province live in poverty, try to make ends meet with low wages, and have difficulty getting access to what we need to feed or shelter our family, some people in our province do very well indeed. Given the state of things, shouldn't more Nova Scotians be agitating for radical change?

The social policy framework (SPF) is a tool that can help shift the policy paradigm to consider how we collectively benefit, over thinking about individual gains. If we are, for example, committed to reduce, and indeed eliminate poverty, then we must develop social policies that will address income and wealth inequality. Income inequality tears at the fabric of society because it undermines social cohesion. We need a vision that will repair that fabric. This framework provides an excellent basis for the development of policies to realize a vision that ensures everyone has a voice in shaping this future.

As the SPF makes clear, addressing the income side will be critical, but so too is addressing the costs of basic goods and services, including by ensuring some are publicly provided and thus outside of the for-profit market altogether. One of the hallmarks of universal public services, which are centred in the SPF framework, is their ability to bring people together while ensuring people have access to what they need. Think of our public education system, or public health care.

The social policy framework knits together a vision of the province that underpins the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' annual alternative budgets.<sup>2</sup> Alternative budgets make a persuasive case for how we can raise and allocate additional public funds to create a community that is socially and economically just, as well as environmentally sustainable. CCPA's alternative budgets demonstrate that if we are intentional about our outcomes, we can ensure that policies, whether budgetary spending and taxation or otherwise, can be developed to strengthen our communities, protect the most vulnerable

among us, and ensure that Nova Scotia has a just and sustainable future. This is the future we all should expect and deserve, and the framework provides a roadmap to assist us to demand no less.

# Foreword

Alec Stratford

Executive Director/Registrar Nova Scotia College of Social Workers

THE NOVA SCOTIA College of Social Workers (NSCSW) is incredibly proud to partner with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia (CCPA-NS) on this important framework. Our profession is founded on humanitarian and egalitarian ideals. We envision and work towards a society that promotes social, economic and political equity. We acknowledge that significant change needs to happen at the local, community, provincial, national and global level, in order for the injustices and harms that we see daily to be addressed or remedied. The profession works in solidarity with our clients, organizations and communities, and with Nova Scotians who are vulnerable, oppressed and dealing with the hurtful outcomes of society. This is why the NSCSW is so proud to partner with the CCPA-NS to create this important tool. It is our hope that the framework will be utilized by all Nova Scotians to transform our society into one that belongs to all of us: one that is grounded in shared responsibility for creating a strong, connected, and supportive society.

The Social Policy Framework is being introduced at a critical time in Nova Scotia as we have continued to see our governments, at all levels, implement policies and programs that have resulted in greater inequity. In the past three decades, we have seen increasing globalization along with the rise of neo-liberalism and unprecedented technological change. This



has had a profound impact on our climate, our workforce and the overall well-being of our society. These trends have combined to leave the most vulnerable Nova Scotians to carry the greatest burden of these decisions. Our political system has failed to develop an economy and public services that are inclusive of all Nova Scotians. Governments have continued to mark their success on the growth and expansion of the economy with hopes that a growing economy will benefit all. This approach has led our political leaders to ignore the indicators that the overall well-being of our population continues to deteriorate, which leads them to put their head in the sand when it comes to creating public policy that would positively impact our health, climate and economy.

The need for progressive organizations to add to the political dialogue with thoughtful progressive social policy solutions is now greater than ever if we are to capture the hope and aspirations for a society in which all Nova Scotians flourish. The goal of the social policy framework is for organizations to raise their voices and counter the trends that have led to:

- Rising inequality and the continued class divide between the rich and the poor, which have allowed the voices of oppressed particularly those of our racialized communities to go unnoticed, eroded trust, and increased anxiety and illness for all;
- Entrenchment of the patriarchy, which has pitted rational thought against emotional thought and devalues the work of professional care which is predominantly done by women;
- Governments enacting austerity policies (expanding corporate influence in the process) to cut the cost of care, institutionalize new management systems, and centralize government services, leading to highly top-down bureaucratic systems;
- Managerialism that devalues and deskills professional competence, and creates a management framework which aims to run government services like a business – searching for efficiencies rather than promoting human connection.

These trends have had a profound impact on the ability of Nova Scotians to receive the services and care that they rely on, and to make our economy one that works for all of us. What is needed is a fundamental paradigm shift in our political goals. As Nova Scotians, we need to ensure that the goal of increasing well-being is equal to the goal of a developing a strong economy.

The Social Policy Framework is designed to be at the root of this change. It creates a vision and a road map for Nova Scotians that:

- Addresses inequality through public policy aimed at redistributing wealth and building an economy that works for everyone, creating a society where political decisions are made in the interest of all, not for an elite few.
- Addresses the need to work for the public good through public policy that focuses on climate justice, investments in health and social services, the decolonization of public service and that values professional care.
- Addresses the need to build public policy through collaborative decision-making embedded in an intersectional lens. Through this process, we can support participatory communities in which all voices are heard.
- Addresses systemic oppression through public policy that leads to transformative change. Policy that supports all of us to acknowledge oppressive attitudes and assumptions by allowing us to share our stories and heal the hurts imposed by our conditioning, to act in the present in a humane and caring manner, to rebuild our human connection.

We hope that this framework provides you with inspiration and hope that a more fair, just and progressive Nova Scotia is possible.

# Introduction

“Nova Scotians have a great many strengths. They are committed to one another and to their communities. They help and trust one another. They have a sense of community belonging. They register, turn out to vote and volunteer for political organizations more than elsewhere.”<sup>3</sup>

NOVA SCOTIANS TAKE pride in caring for one another. But these values are not well reflected in government action or public policy. The current social policy landscape doesn’t match how Nova Scotians see themselves and what they want for their communities.

We can’t do it alone. Governments need to do their part. The purpose of social policy is to mobilize public resources and institutions to support collective responsibility for each other’s well-being. Yet governments in Canada and Nova Scotia are not living up to this task.

Have we become used to poverty and high levels of inequality? We don’t need to accept it. We have the resources to create virtually any kind of society we want. We simply need the political will, and good policy.

Over the past few decades, Nova Scotia’s provincial governments developed various social policy frameworks. Some made lofty promises: for example, that by 2020, “every Nova Scotian has the opportunity to live well and contribute in a meaningful way within a province that is caring, safe and creative — now and into the future.”<sup>4</sup>

This vision hasn’t been realized. In fact, many government policies made in recent years work against the stated goals in these frameworks. Compared

to other places, Canadian governments haven't been effective at reducing inequality and poverty,<sup>5</sup> and Nova Scotia has been particularly weak in this regard. For example, the data in the most recent child and family poverty report card reveal that the poverty rate for children in Nova Scotia pretty much stagnated, with less than a 1% decline since 1989. The province fared worse than all other provinces in reducing poverty during this time frame.<sup>6</sup>

Few government frameworks had a positive impact on the direction and creation of social policy. Even fewer aspired to revive and strengthen the public sector to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. Instead, they asked Nova Scotians to do more and to expect less from their governments. Without a well-rounded policy framework to hold politicians accountable, it isn't surprising that those citizens who are increasingly pushed to the margins of society, feel hopeless and skeptical when politicians promise change and prosperity.

To effectively tackle social issues such as poverty and inequality, municipalities, provinces, territories, and the federal government must work together and be held accountable. And they must work with communities.

Nova Scotians deserve a social policy framework that belongs to them: one that is grounded in shared responsibility for creating a strong, connected, and supported society.

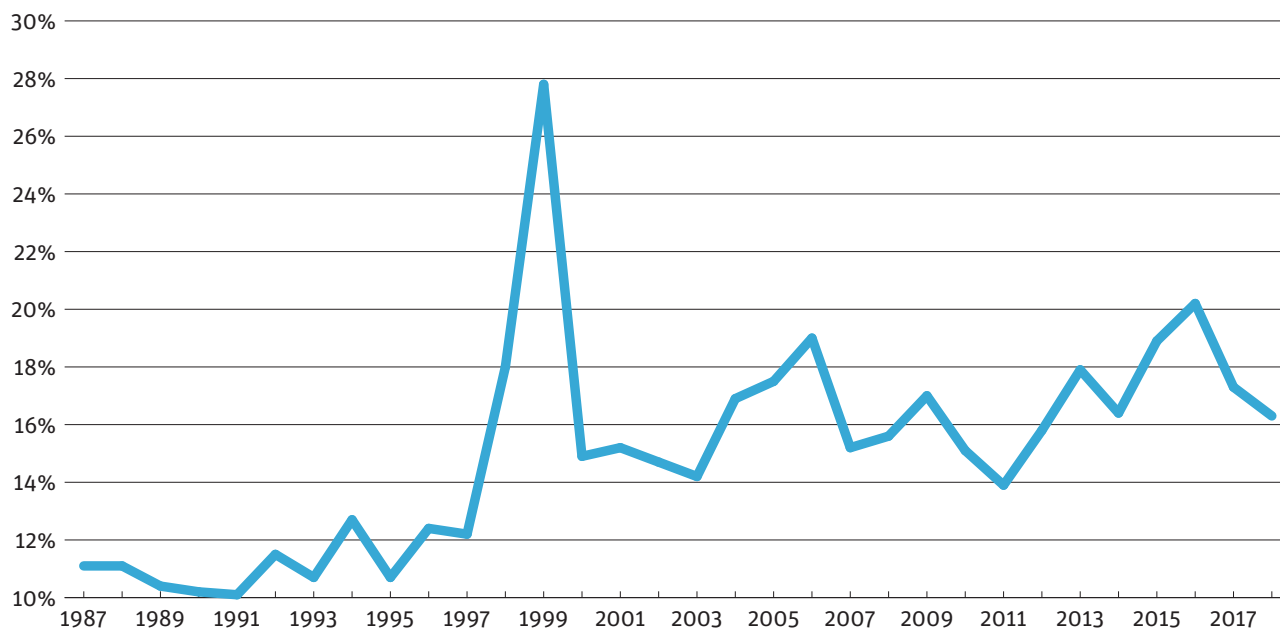
# Why we need a social policy framework

“Growing inequality is both an outcome—a reflection of underlying structural changes in the economy—and a causal force that can limit the prospects for economic growth, create uncertainty and insecurity, and erode fairness and equality of opportunity.”<sup>7</sup>

THERE ARE MANY reasons to be concerned about income inequality. Perhaps the principal reason is that income — especially income earned in the labour market — is the primary determinant of well-being. Income inequality is also a barrier to achieving a society where everyone has the means and the opportunity to fulfill their potential and participate as full and equal members. As we show, our own province has all the markings of one that is not thriving for the many, with low wages and household incomes, high poverty rates, a lack of access to the public services that we need, and a weakened democracy.

How did we get here? What is income inequality and why should we all be concerned about it? The following section answers these questions and provides evidence and insight that help us forge a new path that sees a better future for all of us. The second half of the report lays out the details of a social policy framework to get us on the right path to the future that we all deserve.

**FIGURE 1** Total income share ratio, top 10% to bottom 10%, Nova Scotia, 1988–2018



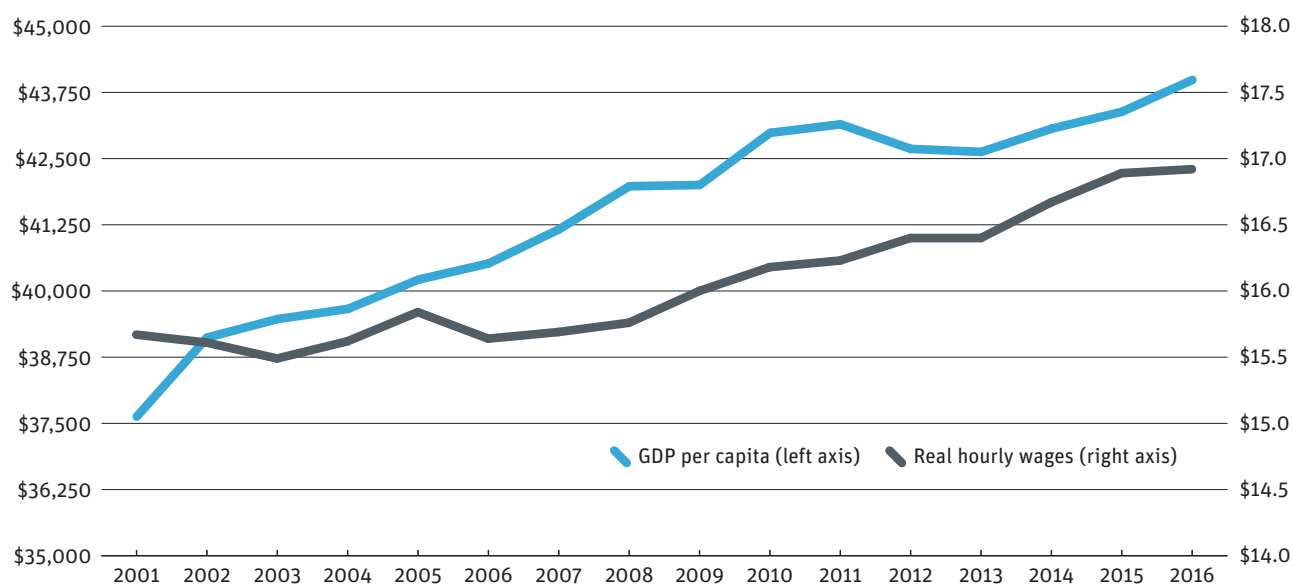
Source: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0192-01 Upper income limit, income share and average income by economic family type and income decile.

## The growth of income inequality

Over the last 30 plus years in Canada, the income gap between the top and everyone else grew largely because of the exponential growth of top incomes compared to the growth (indeed lack of growth) for the middle or the bottom.<sup>8</sup> In Nova Scotia, data from 1988 to the 2018 shows there has been a fairly consistent trend upwards for the share of income of the top 10% (top decile) of income earners from 23.3% in 1988 to 26.1% in 2018 (a 12% increase), whereas the bottom 10% saw a decline from 2.1% to 1.6% in 2018, a 23.8% decrease. As illustrated in *Figure 1*, top incomes are now 16.3 times the income share of the bottom.<sup>9</sup> To be in the top decile requires an average income of \$163,900, and the average income of those in the bottom is \$9,800. The exceptions, the decreases for the top, were generally around economic recessions. What accounts for the steep increase in the top? “Combine record-breaking growth in incomes with historically low top tax rates, and the richest 1% is taking a bigger piece of the economic pie today than at any time in the past century.”<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, even during the good times, the trend has seen a drop in the total share of income going to the bottom decile of earners in Nova Scotia.

**FIGURE 2** GDP per capita and average real hourly wages, Nova Scotia, 2001–16

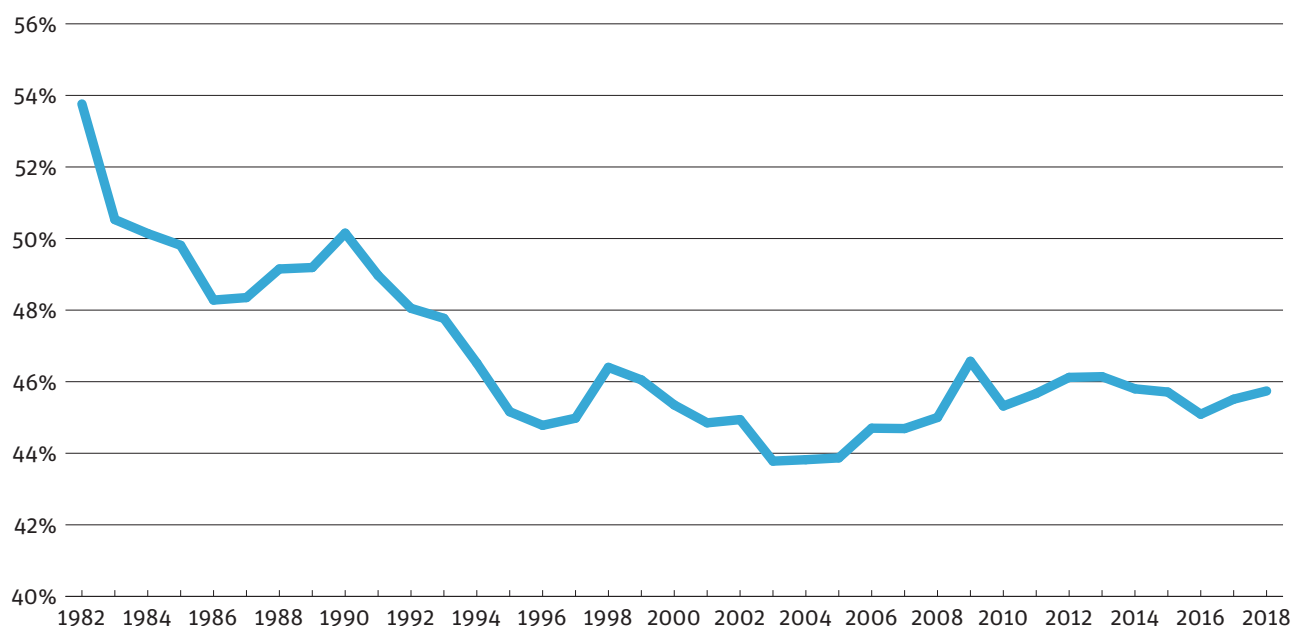


**Source** Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0206-01 Average hourly earnings for employees paid by the hour, by industry, annual. Statistics Canada. Table 36-10-0229-01 Long-run provincial and territorial data.

CCPA's annual report on the average incomes of the top 100 CEOs in Canada demonstrates the concerning trend of the very top pulling away from everyone.<sup>11</sup> In 2018, Canada's 100 highest paid CEOs made 227 times more than the average worker – at \$11.8 million compared to \$52,061 – surpassing all previous records.. The distance between the 1% and the rest of us is an indicator of general income inequality, and is gendered – 83% of those in the 1% are men.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, women make up only 4% of Canadian CEOs and 10% of top executives.<sup>13</sup> The solution to inequality, however, is not more women billionaires, but fewer billionaires over all. Our pathway to address income inequality must also address gender and race inequality. Corporate power is pervasive no matter who the CEO is and it is critical that we understand its influence. The more the top amasses in income share, the more they will look to isolate themselves, the more we should be concerned about a minority influencing policy that affects everyone.

The story of income inequality is one of unfairness: the middle and bottom saw very little increase even when the economy was growing. Despite the changes that have seen us work smarter and harder the average worker was not rewarded their fair share. Real GDP per capita grew by 17% in Nova

**FIGURE 3** Wages and salaries as percentage of GDP, Nova Scotia, 1982–2018



**Source** Statistics Canada. Table 36-10-0221-01 Gross domestic product, income-based, provincial and territorial, annual (x 1,000,000).

Scotia between 2001 and 2016, while average real wages grew by only 7% (see *Figure 2*).<sup>14</sup>

The bottom 50% saw a decrease in their share of market income from 15.5% in 1987 to 14.5%, while there was an increase in the market income share for the top from 28.5% to 33.2%.<sup>15</sup> Not only has the bottom 50% seen their share of income from labour go down, there has been a decline in the total amount of income going to wages and salaries. As is shown in *Figure 3*, 54% of GDP went to wages and salaries in 1982. In 2018 that share was down to 46% where it has remained since 2011.<sup>16</sup>

The growth at the top has not been due to an increase in total family hours of paid work. In contrast, incomes stagnated for families in the middle of the income distribution, even though they saw an increase in dual earners working more hours.<sup>17</sup> It was during this time period that women entered the workforce in droves, providing an additional earner, and families became smaller. Therefore, households were able to subsist as they were smaller and more educated, but may have also sacrificed well-being by working longer hours.

Part of the story of rising income inequality is how labour markets and jobs have changed. As a result, “a job does not guarantee prosperity and



security in the way that it did three or four decades ago, when there was less wage rate polarization and when significant annual pay increases were the norm.”<sup>18</sup> The number of Nova Scotians who belong to unions is declining, and employment is increasingly precarious or insecure.<sup>19</sup> Casey reports that “Canada’s workforce has shifted to more part-time and temporary positions as ‘temporary work accounts for 13.5% of Canada’s workforce in 2016 compared to 8.6% in 1997 and part-time workers account for 19.6% of Canada’s workforce in 2016 compared to 12.5% in 1976’”. Comparably, in 2016, temporary workers represented 16.1% of Nova Scotia’s workforce and part-time workers represented 18.5% Nova Scotia’s workforce.”<sup>20</sup> In this changing labour market, “women, racial and ethnic minorities, and immigrants are more vulnerable to precarious employment than others.”<sup>21</sup>

The rise in precarious, insecure work also leaves many workers without access to workplace benefits.<sup>22</sup> For instance, we can measure inequality not only based on income, but also on the growing gap between those who have an employee pension plan, and those who do not.<sup>23</sup> 39% of Canadian workers have access to a workplace pension plan other than CPP, while 46.6% have access to medical/dental insurance and 42.4% have access to paid sick leave. In Nova Scotia, 44.6% have access to a workplace pension plan, 47% have access to medical/dental insurance, and 47% have access to paid sick leave.<sup>24</sup> It is also increasingly an issue of “intergenerational equity,”<sup>25</sup> as few young workers have the workplace benefits that previous generations enjoyed. Nor can they rely on the same level of public services that were once available.

### **Low wages and high poverty**

Nova Scotia has long been characterized as a low-wage economy. Income inequality has led to even less investment in productivity and innovation as employers attempt to squeeze profits out of a declining amount of new economic growth that goes to pay for workers. Nova Scotia has the second lowest average weekly earnings (see *Table 1*). Recent local campaigns signal the pressing need to increase wages. The Fight for \$15 & Fairness is aimed at increasing Nova Scotia’s minimum wage to \$15 an hour.<sup>26</sup> The Living Wage, which opened our eyes to “what it actually costs to live and raise a family in a specific community,” sets the bar at \$19.17 per hour in Halifax, and \$17.30 per hour in Antigonish.<sup>27</sup>

**TABLE 1** Average weekly wages, provinces, 2018

Prince Edward Island	\$840.65
Nova Scotia	\$871.34
New Brunswick	\$911.34
Quebec	\$932.02
Manitoba	\$936.85
British Columbia	\$968.59
Saskatchewan	\$1,014.16
Ontario	\$1,021.40
Newfoundland and Labrador	\$1,037.82
Yukon	\$1,117.72
Alberta	\$1,148.23
Nunavut	\$1,376.00
Northwest Territories	\$1,420.19

Source Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0204-01 Average weekly earnings by industry, annual

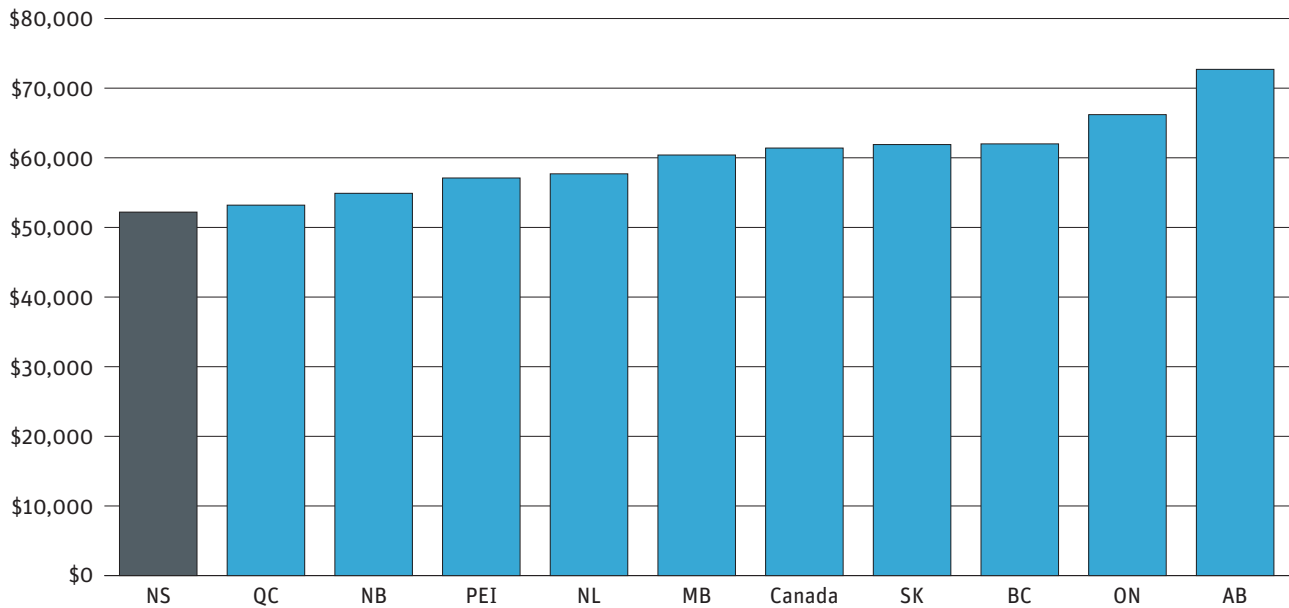
Nova Scotia also has the lowest median after-tax family income in Canada in 2018, at \$52,200 just over \$9000 a year less than the Canadian average family. (see *Figure 4*)

As shown in *Figure 5*, Nova Scotia has the second highest poverty rates of all the provinces at 15.9% when measured using the Low Income After Tax (LIM-AT, 2018).

There are many ways to measure poverty. The LIM-AT is a relative measure of poverty using the Canadian median income, and thus it tells us about income inequality in our province, as well as how residents' incomes compare to others in Canada. It is the low-income measure most often used internationally. At 10.3%, Nova Scotia also has the highest poverty rate (in 2018) measured by the Market Basket Measure (MBM), which is an absolute measure of poverty. The next highest rate is 9.7% in Newfoundland and Labrador, with the Canadian average at 8.7%.<sup>28</sup> The MBM is based on 2008 spending habits and is being significantly revised as a low-income measure that has been deemed the official poverty measure in Canada.

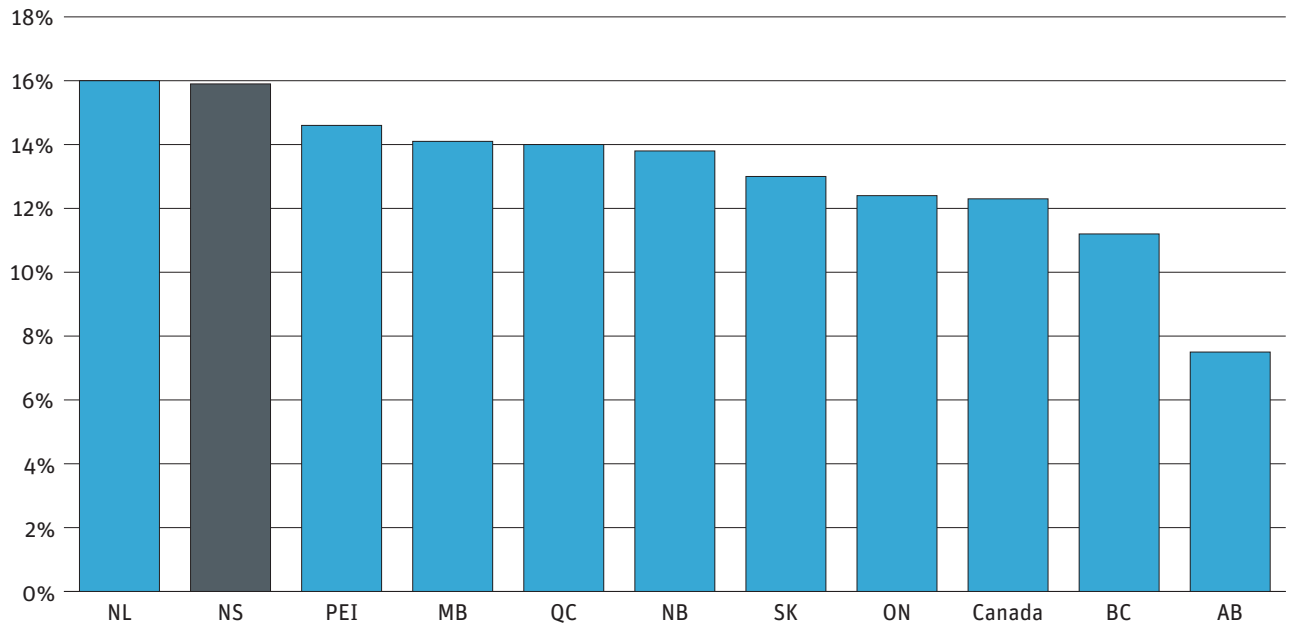
The measures are also impacted by the data used. The most recent numbers released (for 2018) are based on a survey called the Canadian Income Survey (CIS), which is less reliable — especially for provinces like ours with a relatively small population. The most recent CIS data shows Nova Scotia

**FIGURE 4** Median after-tax family income, provinces, 2018



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0017-01 Census families by family type and family composition including before and after-tax median income of the family.

**FIGURE 5** Percentage of the population in low income (LIM-AT), provinces, 2018



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type.

has the highest child poverty in the country by the MBM, at 12.1% (2018). In contrast, the annual child poverty report card's main findings rely on data from the tax filers, which is a more reliable measure that includes all tax filers; the CIS is a more limited survey and does not include First Nations people living on reserve. According to the most recent data available (2017), Nova Scotia has the third-highest provincial child poverty rate in Canada, and the highest rate in Atlantic Canada. 24.2% of children live in poverty in Nova Scotia, or close to 1 in 4 children.<sup>29</sup>

What is more important than these quantitative numbers is that the story these numbers tell:

...poverty is not just a measure of inadequate income. Poverty is felt. It is a social condition manifested in families' struggles to afford the cost of housing, food, childcare, clothing and transportation in the face of low wages, precarious work, racial and gender discrimination, a weak social safety net, inadequate public services and lack of affordable and available child and family services.<sup>30</sup>

Poverty in childhood has long-term impacts on health and learning, community participation, and economic prospects in adulthood. Data collected in Nova Scotia schools between 2015 and 2018 show a meaningful increase in the rates of vulnerability from 25.5% to 28.8%. Vulnerability means that without additional support in areas like social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, communications skills, and general knowledge, these children will face future health, educational, and social challenges.<sup>31</sup>

Poverty in Nova Scotia is also highly racialized and gendered. As in the rest of Canada, some groups face higher risk of low income, including recent immigrants, Indigenous peoples, single mothers, unattached people aged 45 to 64, and people with disabilities.<sup>32</sup> Child and family poverty is one example: child poverty is two to three times higher for those who face additional barriers and discrimination. For example, 67.8% of Arab children, 50.6% of Korean children, and 39.6% of Black children were low-income compared to 20.3% of non-visible minority children. Census data also show higher rates of low income among new immigrant children (56.8%) compared to non-immigrant children (21.2%). We also know that 53.1% of the children living in lone parent families in Nova Scotia lived below the poverty line, and that the majority of single parents are women.<sup>33</sup>

Census data also show disparities in employment rates, with the lowest rate for people with disabilities (45%), followed by Aboriginals on reserves

(64.7%). The provincial employment rate in Nova Scotia was 71.7% compared to 67.7% for visible minorities, 65.9% for Black people, and 66.5% for recent immigrants.<sup>34</sup> Comparing 2020 data for women to men in Nova Scotia, we find that while men have a higher unemployment rate of 8.5% compared to 6.2% for women. They also have a higher participation rate (79.3% compared to 76.3% for women), and a 72.6% employment rate compared to 71.6% for women.<sup>35</sup> The highest unemployment rate by age is for those aged 15 to 24, at 12.3% (January 2020), compared to 6.5% for those between the ages of 25 and 54, which was the same rate for those aged 55 plus.<sup>36</sup>

Poverty and inequality also have deep geographic and generational roots. The highest child poverty rate when examining postal code areas is 75% in the rural postal code of Micmac, which includes the Sipekne'katik First Nations. Fifty postal areas in Nova Scotia have child poverty rates at 30% and higher. The lowest rate is 4.5% in Fall River, part of the Halifax Regional Municipality.<sup>37</sup> There are also higher rates of unemployment in those areas of the province with higher rates of poverty, including Cape Breton: the child poverty rate is 34.9% in the Cape Breton census division (compared to the NS rate of 24.2%), and while the unemployment rate for the province is 7.4%, it is 12.2% in Cape Breton (for those aged 15 plus).<sup>38</sup>

It is no coincidence that in 2017 Canada saw historically high personal debt, at \$1.78 in credit debt for every dollar of household disposable income.<sup>39</sup> Many families are struggling to cover their costs. Income inequality has affected us all, but has meant that some are more disadvantaged than others.

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## The causes and consequences of income inequality

For a long time, the dominant economic thinking was that income inequality provided incentives for hard work and entrepreneurialism, and was necessary for innovation and economic growth. However, “[t]hese claims have been increasingly discredited because of the lack of systematic supporting evidence.”<sup>40</sup> There is now a significant amount of evidence pointing to the negative effects of income inequality.

A wide range of literature has highlighted the sinister relationship between socioeconomic status and health for quite some time. The most widely cited is the social gradient in health, which refers to the fact that health outcomes improve as socioeconomic position improves. This gradient exists whether education, income, or financial wealth is used as the marker of one’s socioeconomic status. These conclusions are maintained even after controlling

for a standard set of behavioral risk factors such as smoking and drinking. There is evidence that the way work is organised, the work climate, social influences outside work, influences from early life, and individual health behaviours result in health inequalities. In other words, health inequalities result from social inequalities. Policy solutions must pay attention to social environments, job design/work environment, and the consequences of income inequality.<sup>41</sup>

Health disparities and inequities are caused by the unequal distribution of power, income, goods, and services. These result in unfair differences in the immediate, visible circumstances of peoples' lives — including access to health care, education, employment, the conditions of work, and the state of homes and communities. Health disparities exist depending if one lives in a rural versus urban area, or if they are on-reserve versus off-reserve or are Indigenous or not.<sup>42</sup> There is a significant gap in life expectancy for Canada's Indigenous population: in 2017, the life expectancy for the total Canadian population was projected to be 79 years for men and 83 years for women. Among Indigenous populations, the Inuit have the lowest projected life expectancy — 64 years for men and 73 years for women.<sup>43</sup> Metis and First Nations populations have similar life expectancies with 73–74 years for men and 78–80 years for women.<sup>44</sup>

People living in Canadian metropolitan areas with greater levels of income inequality were more likely to self-report their oral health as poor.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, even though mental health issues impact one in five Canadians, those in lower income brackets are less likely to seek psychological services.<sup>46</sup> In Nova Scotia, 70.1% with household incomes over \$80,000 report very good or excellent health, while only 41.4% of Nova Scotians in households with annual incomes below \$40,000 feel as healthy.<sup>47</sup>

Recent evidence shows that how big the difference is — the gap itself — has a negative impact on various social issues, including physical and mental health, life expectancy, infant mortality, food insecurity, addiction, education levels, social mobility, social cohesion and trust, community life, crime, violence, incarceration, child and senior well-being, climate change, and political participation and democracy.<sup>48</sup> As the authors of *The Spirit Level* found, the health and social problems they looked at were between two to ten times as common in more unequal societies.<sup>49</sup> The differences are so large because inequality affects not just those at the very bottom but a large proportion of the population. Wilkinson and Pickett found that the average Japanese man is healthier than the richest American man—Japan having one of the smallest income gaps compared to the country with one of the

largest.<sup>50</sup> Overall, societies with smaller income differences between the highest income earners and the lowest tend to have better health.

Research on the impact of income inequality also confirms the psychosocial processes through which inequality gets under the skin. “Social relationships, insecurities about social status and how others see us have powerful effects on stress, cognitive performance and the emotions. We now have evidence explicitly linking income inequality to these psychological states in whole societies.”<sup>51</sup> We also have evidence that this imprinting is especially harmful when it happens early in life.<sup>52</sup> This is particularly concerning given that 31% of Nova Scotia children aged 0–2 years (7,910 infants) live in poverty, which is the highest rate for any developmental age group.<sup>53</sup>

The global economic crisis that hit in 2008 should have been a wakeup call to the effects of income inequality on political and economic stability. “Drawing on harmonised data covering the OECD countries over the past 30 years, the econometric analysis suggests that income inequality has a negative and statistically significant impact on subsequent growth.”<sup>54</sup> Societies marked by high levels of income inequality also neglect investing in human capital and instead encourage high end consumption. Income inequality results in political, economic and social instability, along with the lost potential of large swaths of people.

Income inequality also has an impact on the effectiveness of democratic institutions. There is evidence that socioeconomic inequality leads to inferior democratic outcomes due to concentrated forms of power among smaller groups of affluent people, and because it also increases politicians’ responsiveness to an ever-smaller group of advantaged citizens.<sup>55</sup> Comparative research across OECD advanced democracies finds that income significantly affects rates of people taking part in election processes: people living below the median income in society are less likely to participate in elections.<sup>56</sup> Time pressures also make it increasingly difficult to be involved in our local communities, seen by a steady decline in volunteering.<sup>57</sup>

We all want the best for the next generation. However, that is much harder to achieve than previously. Data from the Organization of Economic Co-Operation show that it could take four generations for Canada’s poorest 10% just to earn a median income in Canada. Moreover, in most OECD countries, earnings mobility across generations is higher when income inequality is lower.<sup>58</sup> Inequality of opportunity is another cost of income inequality especially when its growth erodes universal public services, which used to be the great leveller. As Lars Osberg points out, while intergenerational mobility is a marker of equality of opportunity, when you are at the top the

only movement for your kids is down. Therefore, it becomes more important for the kids of the rich to have an advantage, and thus just paying their fair share for an adequately funded public education is a threat to their status.<sup>59</sup>

An insidious result of income inequality is undermining societal cohesion and the creation of scapegoats of refugees and immigrants and those living in poverty. Those with power try to convince others that they are to blame for their current circumstances that scarcity of resources means there is less to go around. In this context of deep inequality, powerful discourses have emerged that place fault on those who have less rather than on a system that advantages those who have more.

Finally, we should all be concerned about income inequality because it is a cause of the climate crisis which we have a short window to address. While we should focus on corporate responsibility and on emissions they produce, the influence of income inequality is made even clearer when considering consumption. When we consider the quantity of emissions “consumed” (through the products we buy and the services we use): “A clear gap emerges between the North and South, but also between the world’s wealthiest 10% and everybody else.”<sup>60</sup> Not only is income inequality a cause of the climate crisis, “high inequality hampers the development and adoption of new green technologies,” and thus our ability to transition.<sup>61</sup> In addition, income inequality, alongside other inequalities, “increases the exposure of the most vulnerable to the ensuing climatic hazards, but it also heightens their sensitivity to its adverse effects and diminishes their capacity to adapt and recover following an extreme climate event.”<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, tackling inequality and strengthening the social bond are essential to the very survival of our planet.

All of society is affected by the social, economic, and environmental costs of poverty and inequality. In a 2010 study, MacEwen and Saulnier estimated that

the total cost of poverty in Nova Scotia is at least \$1.5 to \$2.2 billion dollars per year, between 5%–7% of Nova Scotia’s GDP in 2008. The portion of the total cost borne by society (the social cost) is at least \$500 to \$650 million dollars. This corresponds to 6%–8% of Nova Scotia’s 2007/2008 budget, or around \$1,400 to \$1,700 for each Nova Scotian household.<sup>63</sup>

Inequality hurts us all. As Gibson concludes in the Alberta Social Policy Framework, “[d]isparity jeopardizes the fabric of social relationships that make our communities good places to live, work, raise children and grow



old.”<sup>64</sup> The good news is that we all gain from reducing it, since “money spent on reducing poverty and inequality is an investment in all of our futures.”<sup>65</sup>

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## Why policy matters

There are disagreements about the causes of income inequality, and even over distinguishing between the causes and the consequences. Is the weakening of the role of the government to redistribute income a cause or a consequence of growing income inequality? The growth of income inequality over the last three or four decades is the result of the state’s unwillingness and weakened ability to counter trends including of technological advancements and globalization, and moreover the ideological turn toward neoliberalism and its prescription for remaining “competitive” (i.e. smaller state, lessening regulations, reducing taxes for corporations and those at the top). The evidence also points to the markers of those states whose citizens fared better than others; states that had proportionally representative electoral systems, more centralized political institutions and universalist welfare states.<sup>66</sup>

The rhetoric of social policy does not always match the reality. Many Canadians assume that our social policy record is better than it actually is and that, in particular, that we invariably score better than the Americans on all things social. Sometimes we do, sometimes we do not. There are clear weak points and areas for improvement.<sup>67</sup>

Canada (and Nova Scotia) has what is called a ‘liberal’ welfare state, which puts us in the same family as the United States, Britain, and Australia. Liberal welfare states spend comparatively little on social programs overall. They also rely on targeting social programs to groups of people most in need rather than making them universally available to all.<sup>68</sup>

Canadian public social spending peaked in 1990 at just under 18% of gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>69</sup> The most recent data show that Canada spent 17.3% of GDP in 2017, which is about same as 1990. Canada spent less than 23 other countries including the United States. It is striking that only 1.6% of GDP in Canada is spent on social expenditures for families, and even less on the unemployed at 0.6%.<sup>70</sup>

Until the 1990s, redistributive policies, such as social expenditures, helped offset growing inequality: “Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, after-tax income inequality did not increase, despite a significant rise in market income inequality and two major recessions.”<sup>71</sup> This tells us two important pieces of information. First, it shows that public policy is essential

and effective in reducing inequality. It did so from the 1970s to 1990s. Policy matters. We saw this confirmed recently in a 2019 report by Macdonald and Friendly that pointed to the importance of public policies for increasing child care affordability in some provinces.<sup>72</sup> In the 2019 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Nova Scotia, Frank and Fisher also show that government benefits are critical for reducing child poverty; Government income transfers reduced child poverty in Nova Scotia by 39.5 per cent.<sup>73</sup>

Second, it reveals that while policy (what governments do or choose not to do) can lessen inequality, it can also make it worse. Governments “shrank programs that provided support to vulnerable Canadians, such as unemployment benefits and social assistance, and reduced the progressivity of the tax system.”<sup>74</sup> Banting and Myles emphasize that “[a]ction and inaction, sins of omission and sins of commission, have weakened the redistributive state”, emphasizing that policy often entails “[d]eliberate inaction and neglect,” and referring to government’s “quiet indifference to new social risks and rising inequality.”<sup>75</sup> It is important to note that research shows “redistribution has declined more at the provincial level than at the federal level.”<sup>76</sup>

Since the 1990s, major changes have been made to social programs in Canada and Nova Scotia. Governments at all levels have continued to implement austerity policies that have explicitly contributed to the erosion of public services including program cuts, privatization, contracting-out, tax breaks for the wealthy, and offloading services onto the community.<sup>77</sup> Governments have continuously failed to adequately invest in comprehensive and holistic social policy to better the lives of all Canadian citizens.

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## State of Public Services

It is clear that Nova Scotians are struggling to access what they need for themselves, their families, and their communities.<sup>78</sup> Eligibility for Employment Insurance (previously called Unemployment Insurance) has been severely restricted.<sup>79</sup> Social assistance is punitive, and robs people of their dignity with strict surveillance, while providing paltry income supports. Single people deemed employable receive 39% of the income needed to buy a basic basket of goods. A family with two children is over \$10,000 a year short of affording a basic basket of goods because they are still 27% below the Market Basket Measure of poverty.<sup>80</sup> It is not surprising then that Nova Scotia has highest rate of food insecurity (15.4%) for any province and the highest rate of severe food insecurity (4.6% of households).<sup>81</sup> Nova Scotians

also have high rates of housing insecurity, with 5700 people on waitlists for social housing.<sup>82</sup> The cost of housing is unaffordable for many: “...by 2014, Nova Scotians were putting 47.1% of their net incomes towards their shelter needs, which is now the highest rate in the country, exceeding even British Columbia (44.7%).”<sup>83</sup> To afford an average two-bedroom apartment in Halifax, one would have to work 78 hours a week at minimum wage, or earn almost double the minimum wage of \$11.55 an hour.<sup>84</sup>

In our province, parents lack access to quality, affordable child care.<sup>85</sup> Nursing homes are under-staffed and underfunded, and serious gaps remain in complex care for seniors despite the fact that Nova Scotia has one of the oldest populations in Canada.<sup>86</sup> Nova Scotia also has the highest rate of disability in Canada,<sup>87</sup> but citizens with physical, mental, or intellectual disabilities continue to be forgotten by policy makers as services dwindle and demands increase.<sup>88</sup> Tuition fees and student debt continue to rise. Nova Scotia’s tuition fees are the second highest in Canada, at an average of \$8,153 for the 2018-19 academic year, compared to a national average of \$6,838.<sup>89</sup> Nova Scotia also has a shortage of family doctors.<sup>90</sup> The 2017 Auditor General’s report on the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) concluded that the NSHA lacks a plan for the services it provides and where it provides them, and that services during a crisis vary, depending on location, hours of operation and coverage.<sup>91</sup> Publicly reported wait times for mental health services have reached as long as a year in Cape Breton.<sup>92</sup> This inaction particularly affects Nova Scotia’s most vulnerable populations.

# How did we get here?

A historical reflection

FOR THE FIRST half of the twentieth century, social welfare in Canada was largely a patchwork of provincial, municipal, and private charitable funding. By the 1960s, driven by a post-war interest in social welfare reform, provinces and territories worked with the federal government to create a safety net to meet the needs of Canada's citizens. These arrangements are called Cooperative Federalism, because social programs were funded jointly by the federal and provincial/territorial governments. The federal government used its spending power, outlined in the constitution, allowing it to spend money in areas of provincial jurisdiction. Health care and social welfare were created as shared cost programs, where each level of government covered 50% of the costs and conditions were attached to the funding from the federal government.<sup>93</sup>

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the principles of social security that had formed the basis of provincial-federal relations and social policies were replaced with a business model focused on containing spending and reducing the federal responsibility. The withdrawal of federal leadership in social policy intensified in the early 1990s under the Liberal government, and the Harper Conservative government embraced the model of Open Federalism (sometimes called Classic Federalism), which seeks to revert back to a strict division of powers between the levels of government, with minimal federal financial contribution to social programs.<sup>94</sup>

Even during the brief period of social expansion, Canada's welfare state was relatively limited, leaving a large role for the market, families, and charity. In this context, our community organizations and non-profit agencies do excellent work, but they have historically struggled to fill gaps and meet ever growing need. Limited budgets, beliefs of funders, and program limitations mean that strict rules often dictate who can receive services and support – rules which can be paternalistic, and result in a band-aid to suffering rather than an attack on the root cause of social inequality.

In the early twentieth century, Nova Scotia could be a challenging place to live. There were no safety nets, and only a patchwork of charities intended for the 'worthy' poor – people with disabilities, widows, seniors, and children. The little help given by private charities was meant to be short-term. Needing longer-term help was seen as moral failure and inability to 'pull oneself up by the bootstraps'. It could result in being sent to a workhouse, the poorhouse, prison, or an asylum.

At this time, Halifax was known as the unhealthiest city in North America due to lack of sanitation, crowded living conditions, and frequent outbreaks of tuberculosis and cholera. It took the biggest disaster on Canadian soil – the Halifax Explosion in 1917 – to finally address some of the social and public health challenges facing the province. Because the disaster impacted all economic and social classes in Halifax, not just the poor and marginalized, and because money flowed both from federal funds and donations from private foundations and citizens, the province went from having an uncoordinated patchwork of private charities to a coordinated, publicly-funded, and comprehensive system of social welfare in mere months. Nova Scotia was considered a world leader in social welfare, and our systems and supports were studied and envied around the world.<sup>95</sup>

In the decades following the Halifax Explosion, Nova Scotia (like all of Canada) slipped back into a patchwork of charities. A few publicly-funded services remained, with the bulk of social support coming from private charities. Public services were focused on large institutions (e.g. orphanages, homes for unwed mothers, schools, and residences for people with disabilities).

Today, government departments have responsibility for providing social services (financial supports, in particular), with community organizations filling in the gaps. The charity model has shaped the way government services evolved, and the way in which society views both the services and the people who receive and deliver them. It keeps up the age-old notion of the 'worthy poor': clients have to meet strict eligibility requirements to prove their need, and can face penalties if rules are broken. Needing to apply for

services and supports comes with stigma and the degradation of having to prove you are ‘worthy’. Support levels are kept harshly low, and don’t reflect the cost of housing, healthy food, and necessities of daily living.<sup>96</sup> Support relies on the goodwill of the charity, funder, or government program, and can be taken away if the client behaves in a way that suggests they’re no longer ‘worthy’ of help. Workers in the charitable sector and for government agencies delivering social services, who are primarily women, feel the sting of a ‘care penalty’, with wages well below those in other sectors, high rates of work-related stress, and vicarious trauma and stigma.<sup>97</sup>

Many people—both within government and in the community—want to do much more than offer band aids. They question the level and lack of supports and the structural inequalities built into the system. They want to do advocacy work on behalf of what their clients truly need, or for changes they’d really like to see in society. But advocacy work comes with a price. Community organizations may fear losing government funding or grants from private foundations if they advocate for change. Workers in government settings may feel they can’t criticize policy without putting their jobs in jeopardy. In both community and government, staff are overwhelmed with high caseloads, and feel powerless to do more. The charity model reinforces inequality, making sure that both the client and the worker toe the line.

It is critically important that Canadians recognize that the same systems that worked to destroy Indigenous peoples in Canada also provided settlers with tremendous advantages that have accumulated through generations. The legacy of colonialism and inequality is a global phenomenon. A recent Commonwealth Fund report found that four of five countries with the lowest health equity scores had histories of colonization that spawned policies and systems that systematically disadvantaged certain racial/ethnic groups while privileging others.<sup>98</sup> There is more child poverty on Canada’s reserves than anywhere else in the country,<sup>99</sup> and close to half of status First Nations children live in poverty.<sup>100</sup> Alongside high income disparity for Indigenous peoples, are higher rates of unemployment, disproportionate numbers of Indigenous children in child welfare, over-representation in the justice system, lower education levels, poorer health, lower housing quality, and greater food insecurity.<sup>101</sup> We continue to see Indigenous people faring the worst in Canada, either because of outright denial of Indigenous communities’ right to self-determination, or by the state continuously failing to act on issues affecting Indigenous education, language rights, and even clean water.

Effective social policy begins with big ideas. Big ideas can lead to transformational change. In Halifax in 1917, disaster led to transformation

of the social welfare system from private charity to publicly funded and administered. In the 1960s, the notion of a social safety net for all led to Medicare and a publicly-funded and accountable funding framework for social programs. Now, the time is right for Nova Scotia to have a social policy framework that transforms our thinking from the idea of social safety net for the most vulnerable, to an equitable base for everyone.

# The road to transformation

A social policy framework for Nova Scotia

“We need a new vision of society, one that promotes quality of life, well-being and community over individualism.”<sup>102</sup>

PART OF THE answer to dealing with income inequality is to foster a labour market that provides good jobs and economic security. In particular, “[i]ncreasing minimum wage rates will help narrow the gap between certain groups of workers, especially women, racialized workers, and young people who disproportionately work for minimum wage.”<sup>103</sup> In addition to wages, worker protections should be strengthened. As Casey shows, Nova Scotia’s labour standards provisions are weak compared to many other provinces.<sup>104</sup> The companion to renewing the labour market is transforming social policy. To truly tackle inequality, we need to design policies, programs, and systems that work for everyone. Redistributive measures, such as public investment, higher wages and pay equity, and higher taxes on the rich, undoubtedly help constrain income and wealth concentration. We need social policies that reduce poverty and vulnerability by ensuring people have access to decent paid work as well as adequate support, when caring for children, facing unemployment, sickness, disability, and old age. These policies, such as housing, education, health care, child care, employment insurance,



and retirement pensions, are broadly known as social policies. There are many ways of defining social policy. Lightman and Lightman refer to “a set of values, programs, and practices that bring us together (or, *should* bring us together) as a community, that relate to our shared experiences, and that recognize our mutual interdependence: one’s well-being is related to another’s well-being.”<sup>105</sup>

Rather than provide what could only be an incomplete inventory of policy solutions, we suggest some guiding principles that can be applied to the development of *all* social policies in order to help to build the kind of society that Nova Scotians aspire to be.

Before turning to these principles, we briefly describe the two policy lenses we are applying to construct this framework: intersectionality and evidence-based policy.

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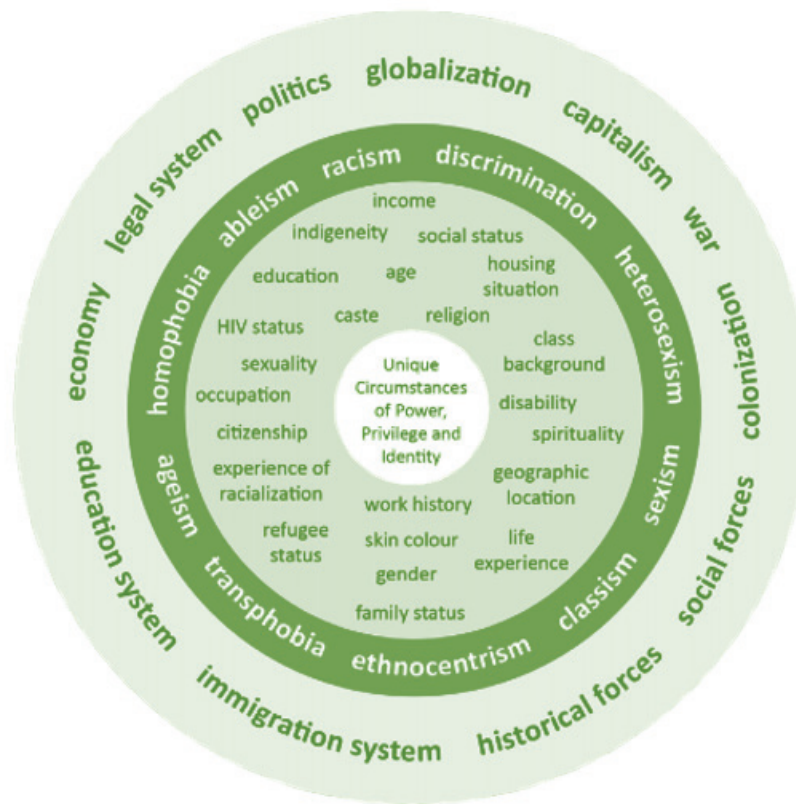
## Intersectionality

A social policy framework that works for everyone must be designed to account for the multiple ways that power and privilege are unevenly shared; it captures the interaction and interconnection between social locations, policies, and institutions and offers a path toward systemic change.

An intersectional approach considers:

the many circumstances that combine with discriminatory social practices to produce and sustain inequality and exclusion ... [and] how systems of discrimination, such as colonialism and globalization, can impact the combination of a person’s:

- Social or economic status;
- Race;
- Class;
- Gender;
- Sexuality;
- Ability;
- Geographic location;
- Citizenship and nationalities; and/or
- Refugee and immigrant status<sup>106</sup>



Source Joanna Simpson, CRIAW/ICREF, June 2009.

## Evidence-Based

Evidence-based policy-making rests on the foundation that government decisions that are influenced by research and data are more likely to solve problems effectively, and that we should learn from best practices.<sup>107</sup> Our framework takes this as given.

It is important to stress that while our framework requires evidence-based policy-making, pointing to evidence alone is not enough to achieve policy change. Power and politics matter. For example, it was well known by policy-makers in the mid-1990s that “by expanding quality childcare systems, there would be the double payoff of gains in learning among the young children with future social payoffs, and of supporting a jobs and

employment agenda in the present by allowing mothers to return to the labour market more quickly after having children.”<sup>108</sup> Yet governments have not acted on that evidence. Policy does not change without political will and social demand. Banting and Myles remind us that “[n]ew politics generate new policies.”<sup>109</sup>

Westhues also explains that “policy analysis is necessarily value-based and ought also to be evidence based and participatory. I understand evidence to include both qualitative and quantitative data, and the experiences and opinions of citizens to be as relevant as demographic data or cost-effectiveness analysis in shaping policy.”<sup>110</sup>

Evidence-based policy making is not something that only the wealthy or powerful can or should be doing. It isn’t something that should be off-limits to people who’ve been systematically oppressed or marginalized in society. We all can, and should, engage in policy analysis.

We acknowledge that a structural barrier to the implementation of the social policy framework is the lack of data, especially noneconomic data and disaggregated quantitative, as well as qualitative data. The framework would benefit from the data collected as part of the quality of life index.<sup>111</sup> More data is needed, as well, that differentiates between Nova Scotians and considers not just where people live, but who they are – whether they are women, racialized, recent immigrants, members of the LGBTQ2S community, have disabilities, or otherwise face discriminatory barriers to enjoying the prosperity that exists. These data gaps need to be addressed to ensure the framework results in responsive public policy that meets the diverse needs of the population.

The ten principles of our social policy framework start from the idea that the development and evaluation of public policy must be based on intersectional and evidence-based lenses. These principles also draw inspiration from a variety of existing proposals from the Alberta College of Social Workers, the Caledon Institute, the Canadian Association of Social Workers, and Engage Nova Scotia.<sup>112</sup>



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## Guiding Principles for Social Policy

1. Interconnectedness
2. Decolonization
3. Social Inclusion
4. Universality
5. Climate Justice
6. Decent Work and Well-Being
7. Public Provision
8. Fiscal Fairness
9. Shared Governance
10. Democratization



### 1. Interconnectedness

Policy researchers often use concepts such as comprehensive social policy, social determinants of health, health equity, multisectoral, whole of government, whole of society and/or holistic policy to describe this principle. The chosen label is less important than the idea that policies and issues are interrelated, and that we cannot separate the economic from the social.

An excellent example of this principle is the social determinants of health approach. Health is determined by the interconnected social, political, and economic conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. Although we often talk about the social determinants in terms of their influence on health, they also have a great impact on equality and ability to participate fully in society. The social determinants are concerned with addressing ill health and social inequities – the unfair and avoidable differences in health [and social] status.<sup>113</sup> The determinants that impact social equality and well-being include:

- gender / gender identity
- race / racialization
- ethnicity

- indigeneity
- colonization
- migrant and refugee experiences
- religion
- culture
- discrimination / social exclusion / social inclusion
- education / literacy
- health literacy
- occupation / working conditions
- income / income security
- employment / job security
- early life experiences
- disability
- nutrition / food security
- housing / housing security
- natural and built environments
- social safety net / social protection
- access to health services<sup>114</sup>

Spending on health care services is the biggest share of Nova Scotia's budget: \$4.64 billion in the 2019 budget, or 41.6% of overall government spending.<sup>115</sup> Health care services, though, are only one part of what makes a society well. In fact, health care services are focused on treating sickness, rather than creating or preserving well-being. We need policy frameworks that provide minimum standards, accountability, and understanding between government and citizens for the other areas that create conditions for a population to be healthy, socially supported, and economically well.

Poverty, and solutions to poverty, impact people differently depending on where they live and their social locations (i.e. gender, 'race', ethnicity, class, sexuality and age), and how people experience intersecting systems of inequality (i.e. racism, colonialism, classism, heterosexism). Experiences of discrimination, racism, and historical trauma are important social determinants of health for certain groups such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ people, and Black Canadians.

The World Health Organization has stated that health inequities are the result of “a toxic combination of poor social policies and programs, unfair economic arrangements, and bad politics.”<sup>116</sup> We know that these contribute to poor health and a less vital society. In Canada, we have access to insured health care services because the government and citizens made it a priority. However, access to affordable food and housing is not available to many Nova Scotians. Poverty rates are amongst the highest in Canada.

To address the social determinants of health and inequality broadly, we need to invest beyond the illness-treatment system. We need to improve income supports, invest in safe and affordable housing, as well as accessible and affordable early childhood and post-secondary education, and make core investments into child, youth, and family services that are client-centred and reflect the diverse and cultural needs of Nova Scotian communities.

Engage Nova Scotia draws linkages between all of the following: community vitality, democratic engagement, education, environment, healthy populations, leisure and culture, living standards, and time use.<sup>117</sup> Each must be attended to if we are to improve social well-being. The Canadian Association of Social Workers and the Alberta College of Social Workers also remind us that that the comprehensiveness of services we seek in our health care system, should apply to social policy as a whole.<sup>118</sup> In the same way, each of our ten principles relies on, and reinforces, the others.

Interconnectedness is embodied in taking a Whole-of-Society approach. Governments can work across traditional silos and consider how their policy decisions are impacting the longer-term social well-being and inclusion of its citizens. They can also identify ways to work collectively, with clients and communities, to find ways to improve life for Nova Scotians.

A Whole-of-Society approach can help governments consolidate social, economic and environmental goals. It can also increase partnerships among and between governments, civil society, and the private sector to enhance accountability, transparency and engagement.<sup>119</sup>

The approach would include:

- governments adopting a cabinet-wide, cross-departmental approach to analyze policy interventions and their outcomes;
- integrated budgets and accounting;
- cross-cutting information and evaluation systems that consider social impact (such as gender-based and intersectional analyses)
- community consultations and involvement in shaping public policy<sup>120</sup>



## 2. Decolonization

We can learn a lot about holistic social policy from Indigenous models. Saulis teaches us that

[w]ithin the indigenous world view and traditions, social policy is created in order to nurture all people in their mind, spirit, and emotions, and in their physical needs. In the expression and manifestation of society's social welfare, this is not an option, but a given. Social policy, then, is an expression of the commitment to sustaining the health of the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical environment, because society can only be sustained by the health of each of these areas of society and its people.<sup>121</sup>

Imagine how our lives would change if social policy was driven by these values rather than the individualism and competition that dominate today.

Indigenous knowledge and ways of being have not been included in Canadian policy-making. Instead, paternalistic governments thought they knew what was best, imposing their views and their will, through destructive policies such as Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop.<sup>122</sup> The legacy of colonialism has resulted in high rates of Indigenous children in protective services,<sup>123</sup> and an epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Services for Indigenous children are chronically under-funded.<sup>124</sup> Many Indigenous communities lack access to basics such as safe housing and drinking water.<sup>125</sup> Indigenous peoples have poorer health outcomes and lower levels of education, and experience chronic underemployment.<sup>126</sup> Systemic racism persists in the labour market, health care, and criminal justice system.<sup>127</sup> Government promises to prioritize decolonization and reconciliation have been criticized for being merely symbolic and lacking sufficient financial commitment,<sup>128</sup> and are contradicted by the pursuit of resource extraction projects that encroach on Indigenous lands.<sup>129</sup>

We agree with Frank and Saulnier that,

Canada's colonial legacy of displacement and removal of Aboriginal peoples from their traditional lands, deliberate attempts to destroy their language, culture and heritage and the systemic under-funding and denial of services



and supports for Indigenous peoples must be immediately addressed in the context of truth and reconciliation.<sup>130</sup>

There were 94 *Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)* to redress the situation of Indigenous communities in Canada. All of them are relevant to social policy. The TRC mapped out in detail what governments need to do to improve child welfare, education, health, justice, and language and culture for Indigenous peoples and how to begin the process of reconciliation.<sup>131</sup> The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls also offers 231 Calls for Justice, one of them being that we

[r]ecognize that Indigenous Peoples are the experts in caring for and healing themselves, and that health and wellness services are most effective when they are designed and delivered by the Indigenous Peoples they are supposed to serve.<sup>132</sup>

These Calls to Action and Calls for Justice are an excellent foundation for decolonizing social policy for Indigenous peoples. They can be transformative for settler society, too.

As a case in point, one of the Calls to Action was that all levels of government implement Jordan's Principle ensuring that disputes between governments not get in the way of providing services to First Nations children seems entirely sensible:

“Jordan's Principle is a child-first principle named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, a First Nations child from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba. Born with complex medical needs, Jordan spent more than two years unnecessarily in hospital while the Province of Manitoba and the federal government argued over who should pay for his at home care. Jordan died in the hospital at the age of five years old, never having spent a day in his family home. Jordan's Principle aims to make sure First Nations children can access all public services in a way that is reflective of their distinct cultural needs, takes full account of the historical disadvantage linked to colonization, and without experiencing any service denials, delays or disruptions because they are First Nations ... Jordan's Principle calls on the government of first contact to pay for the services and seek reimbursement later so the child does not get tragically caught in the middle of government red tape.”<sup>133</sup>

Why not go even further and apply this standard to all services for all Canadians?<sup>134</sup>



### 3. Social Inclusion

“social inclusion refers to all efforts and policies to promote equality of opportunity to people from all circumstances and from all socially-excluded categories.”<sup>135</sup>

Social inclusion is closely tied to the intersectionality lens we described earlier, and to the concept of social cohesion. Bittle says that “[s]ocial cohesion requires economic and social equity, peace, security, inclusion and access. Diversity and differences are conducive to social cohesion because they contribute to a vibrant political and social life” and that its absence hurts all of society.<sup>136</sup>

Social policy solutions should address the deeply-rooted systemic barriers in our policy, programs, and services. They should redress the legacies of colonialism, racism, and slavery. They should remove socially-created barriers to access and inclusion for people with disabilities.<sup>137</sup> They should challenge gender-based and heteronormative inequality. They should support newcomers and people living in the deepest poverty. They should work for those in urban and rural locations. Solutions must ensure that those with physical, mental, sometimes invisible, disabilities, are provided barrier-free access to our physical environment, as well as our social, economic and political institutions.

Social inclusion must be guaranteed for the users of public services, as well as those who provide those services to us. Whether service providers are paid or unpaid, “the giving and receiving of care is socially stratified, unevenly distributed, gendered, classed, and racialized.”<sup>138</sup> Improving the working conditions of our service providers is a crucial element of social inclusion.

Social inclusion requires both equality and equity.<sup>139</sup> In some situations, equal treatment is in order –all individuals should be free from discrimination based on their sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, social class, ability, religion, language, age, and/or beliefs.<sup>140</sup> However, treating all people the same when the socio-economic issues they face are different can continue and deepen inequality. When groups have experienced systemic inequality, social policy must ensure equity – by actively counteracting social exclusion with measures tailored to the distinctive needs of those communities.<sup>141</sup>



#### 4. Universality

Universal programs are accessible to all, regardless of income.<sup>142</sup> They are paid for through general revenue from income taxes, rather than through user fees or payroll taxes,<sup>143</sup> “delivering social provision as a public entitlement or right of citizenship rather than as a consumer good or private commodity purchased in the market.”<sup>144</sup>

Canadians are most familiar with universality as a grounding principle of our health care system. The Medical Care Act of 1968 removed financial barriers for Canadians seeking medically necessary health services. To qualify for federal-provincial cost sharing, the provincial health programs had to meet five terms of reference:<sup>145</sup>

- Universality (95% of the population had to be covered within two years of adoption of the plan)
- Portability from province to province
- Comprehensive insurance for all medically necessary services
- Accessibility, meaning reasonable access to insured services without charge or paying user fees
- Publicly administered, not-for-profit program.

Canadians pride themselves on these principles of the Canada Health Act – they’ve come to frame our expectations for what health care services should be. They provide a minimum standard, accountability, and a framework for understanding between government and citizens. Most Canadians consider them non-negotiable. Finding similar principles for social services – particularly universality – has proven to be more difficult. As noted above, Canada has few universal programs, which is one of the major reasons we fall far behind other countries in reducing inequality. Research points to many of the benefits of universality in social policy. Béland, Marchildon, and Prince show that “generous universal programs are more effective at fighting poverty and reducing inequality than targeted or flat-rate benefits.”<sup>146</sup> Universal programs such as Medicare and Old Age security are well-loved in Canada.<sup>147</sup> As a result, universal programs are more durable, as

their popularity and impact on every citizen makes them less vulnerable to cuts.<sup>148</sup> Programs that are targeted to improving conditions for marginalized communities are much less likely to be supported by powerful communities.<sup>149</sup> Also, when programs are accessed by everyone, service quality tends to be higher and we avoid the stigma that is often attached to targeted programs and to the communities who rely on them.<sup>150</sup> There is evidence that universal programs are better at promoting gender equality and social inclusion for diverse communities.<sup>151</sup> In addition, Kapoor sees universal pharmacare as providing both greater economic security for workers in the changing labour market, and addressing the growing cost pressures for employers.<sup>152</sup> Finally, we know that universal programs cost less.<sup>153</sup> Targeting often requires more administration yet is rarely done effectively or efficiently. Universality, on the other hand, “results in a more effective use of public resources and reduces administrative costs and complexity.”<sup>154</sup>

Social policy holds a unique place in Canada. Whereas in other countries, social policy is driven primarily by class politics, in Canada, it has also played an essential role in nation-building. It has brought together very different geographic communities and forged a shared cultural identity and set of symbols.<sup>155</sup> In this way, we can also speak of “universalism”: a set of ideas about universality that resonates with Canadians.<sup>156</sup> As Béland, Marchildon, and Prince argue,

universalism goes to the very meaning of Canada as a political community and social structure often described as a sharing and caring country comprising diverse provinces; different linguistics, ethnic, and racial communities; multiple generations; a variety of family forms; and people with a range of abilities and disabilities.<sup>157</sup>

Universality is not the same as uniformity.<sup>158</sup> It doesn’t mean everyone receives the same thing, and nothing more. Universality can, and must, accommodate diversity and respect the right to Indigenous self-determination.<sup>159</sup> In some cases, to achieve equity, universal programs may need to be supplemented with programs designed for specific communities<sup>160</sup> (sometimes called “progressive universalism”). Measures need to be taken to correct the “false universalism” that has historically acted to exclude people with disabilities, immigrants, and Indigenous peoples.<sup>161</sup>



## 5. Climate Justice

The relationship between environmental and social policy may not seem immediately evident. However, there are many ways in which they are related. The climate change crisis is real, and pressure is growing for governments to take policy action to address it. Climate policies (or “green policies”) do offer political and economic challenges, but they also provide opportunities for holistic policy making.

Climate justice means that as we move towards sustainable consumption and production, “we consider the social and economic effects of climate change, and we acknowledge that climate change affects people differently, depending on their position in society.”<sup>162</sup> We know for example that emissions are related to consumption patterns and that high income families are responsible for a disproportionate share of the emissions that lead to climate change. We also know that Nova Scotians on a low-income cannot afford many of the measures proposed such as electric cars, or retro-fitting homes and that some groups are more vulnerable to the most serious impacts of climate change — for example, women, children, seniors and people living in resource-dependent communities. Many people around the world are at risk of being displaced and becoming refugees, thus our policies must also address that interconnectedness both in terms of our role in mitigating our own emissions and supporting other countries to do so and deal with the consequences of the crisis.

Transitioning to a “green” economy that is less polluting will require adjustment. It is critical that the brunt of this adjustment not fall onto marginalized communities. Thirgood et al. identify several sectors of the economy where green measures could negatively affect disadvantaged workers and intensify existing inequalities. Likewise, the sectors that are likely to thrive (such as utilities), are those where women, racialized communities, and immigrants are underrepresented.<sup>163</sup> This is why a green jobs strategy must also be a “Just Transition Strategy,” in which racialized groups, Indigenous peoples, women, newcomers, rural communities, and people with disabilities are full participants.<sup>164</sup> A just transition provides affected workers with income support and skills retraining, and makes

infrastructure investments in communities as they undergo the transition to a cleaner economy. Any green jobs strategy must also employ an equity lens to ensure that the benefits of the expected growth in permanent, full-time, high-wage green jobs are widely shared.<sup>165</sup>

A climate justice approach means redressing environmental racism which “refers to the disproportionate location of industrial polluters such as landfills, trash incinerators, coal plants, toxic waste facilities and other environmentally hazardous activities near to communities of colour and the working poor. It is also characterized by the lack of organization and political power that these communities hold for advocating against the siting of industrial polluters, the uneven negative impacts of environmental procedures, the uneven negative impacts of environmental policies, and the disproportionate access to environmental services such as garbage removal.”<sup>166</sup>

Thirgood et al. make a connection between public services, precarious work, and efforts to move to a green economy. For them, good social policy is the solution to an assortment of related issues:

[i]ncreasing the universality of programs such as pharmacare coverage, affordable childcare and affordable housing can help alleviate the financial pressures and stresses associated with precarious work and job churn, and help ease the transition to the green economy. For example, increasing the number of affordable childcare options could encourage female participation in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, where a lack of access has been identified as a barrier to female participation in the sector.<sup>167</sup>

They add that governments can build both social and green housing, and that in order to ease the transition to a green economy, governments will need to improve Employment Insurance, education, and skills training.<sup>168</sup> In fact, if governments focus on creating quality jobs in the public sector, they can at once invest in green jobs *and* meet the desperate demand for caregiving supports.<sup>169</sup>



## 6. Decent Work and Well-Being

Policies for achieving collective well-being must attend to both paid work and unpaid caregiving. This starts with ensuring fair income for work. Thirgood et al. outline the urgency for policy makers to adopt a “decent work agenda”:

Decent work can also be understood as the flipside of precarious work. Precarious work generally entails shifting risks and responsibilities away from the employer and onto the worker, resulting in more insecure and uncertain employment scenarios for individuals. Precarity tends to manifest itself in the form of temporary positions, unpredictable hours, lack of access to social protection and benefits, obstacles to collective bargaining and low pay. A decent work agenda aims to eliminate these challenges and improve the lives of workers... The International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies four strategic pillars of a decent work agenda: full and productive employment, rights at work, social protection and promotion of social dialogue.<sup>170</sup>

A precarious or insecure labour market, alongside a growing crisis of care, is a toxic combination for social well-being.

As our province’s demographics continue to shift, many Nova Scotians are providing unpaid care for family members. Increasingly, they are providing care across generations, for aging parents or partners, while also providing care for children. Families play a critical role in supporting people living with mental health problems and physical disabilities. They are a primary source of emotional support and physical care, contributing services that save the health and social service systems millions of dollars annually. However, this saving to government can come at a high personal cost to the citizen. Caregiving is associated with high rates of depression, financial burden, and social isolation.<sup>171</sup>

Unpaid, informal caregiving is highly gendered, with women performing the majority of caregiving activities.<sup>172</sup> Some women remain out of the labour force in order to provide care at home, while others take part-time jobs so that there are fewer scheduling conflicts with caregiving responsibilities. In fact, “[w]hen caregiving services are absent or inadequate, it is most often women (through their roles as wives, daughters, and family members) who

adjust their labour force participation, dropping hours, changing jobs, and leaving the workforce entirely.<sup>173</sup> As a result, women who provide caregiving have weaker economic security.<sup>174</sup> Women earn less than men to begin with. They are more likely to be at risk of poverty, especially when they are single parents, when their children are young, or when they are elderly. Women who provide unpaid caregiving have smaller pensions (if any), and do not get the kinds of supports available to other workers, such as Employment Insurance and other benefits. Women's caregiving is undervalued socially and monetarily because it is seen as natural and unskilled.<sup>175</sup>

Policy efforts to address caregiving issues remain largely patchy, targeting particular aspects of care associated with distinct groups (e.g. policies that reward unpaid work, increasing funding for child care, or improving working conditions in nursing homes). These efforts are typically fragmented and easily become conflicted, pitting elder-care groups, childcare groups, and family caregiver advocates against each other in a battle for scarce public resources.<sup>176</sup>

In most cases, providing care involves a complex network of unpaid family members and paid care workers whose labour supports and enhances each other. A good social policy framework must understand the complementary relationships that connect paid and unpaid care, rather than placing them in competition.

We can recognize the value of caregiving with money, services, and time. All three are important. We need measures to account for unpaid work contributions, such as improved paid maternity and parental leaves and pension supports. Governments have to invest in social infrastructure and work together to develop and fund public services that support caregivers, especially child care, home care, and long-term care programs. Canadians have a lack of leisure time, with much less time off from work than workers have in Europe.<sup>177</sup> Having time out of the labour market to spend with family and to engage in our communities is essential to leading healthy lives. Engage Nova Scotia lists Time Use, or “how people experience and spend their time”, as one of its eight quality of life domains.<sup>178</sup>

Overall, governments should be conducting genuine gender-based and intersectional analyses to show how government policies help or harm those who provide unpaid domestic labour and caregiving, and to identify the best solutions.





## 7. Public Provision

Canada’s approach to social policy frames social provision as primarily belonging to the private sphere of either the market or the family.<sup>179</sup> For example, caregiving is largely viewed as a private, family responsibility,<sup>180</sup> and a wide range of “services” are heavily market-based, from post-secondary education, to child care, to employment training.<sup>181</sup> Therefore, “[s]upports needed by children, elders, people with disabilities, and others are absent or underdeveloped in the public sector and expensive in the private market.”<sup>182</sup> When we rely on families to provide services, it is still women who are disproportionately doing this work.<sup>183</sup>

This private reliance is one of the main reasons that Canada lags behind other countries in social policy. But what we consider to be ‘public’ and what we consider to be ‘private’ is not fixed. Ideas about public and private are politically organized and produced, and are influenced by biases about gender relations and the proper role of government.<sup>184</sup> They can be changed.

There are at least three evidence-based reasons why we should advocate for *public* services. The first is about service quality:

The quality of our services varies depending on who provides them. Much evidence points to the quality gap between public and private services. Research consistently shows the superior quality (and lower cost) of services such as health care, child care, elder care, pharmacare, criminal justice, snow removal, garbage collection, water treatment, and postal services, when they are public services and not treated as profitmaking ventures.<sup>185</sup>

The second is about equity. Public services are generally more accessible and affordable, thereby advancing equity for service users. They also offer better working conditions for service providers.<sup>186</sup> The third is about accountability:

Public services are unique because they are democratically accountable to citizens. The cost, quality, location, accessibility and comprehensiveness of services are determined through political processes, not by the whims of the market.<sup>187</sup>

Like our other principles, public provision cannot be separated from its counterparts. Not all Nova Scotians have the same relationship with the public sector. We know that “children and parents in working-class, Aboriginal, immigrant, and other minority families are too often scrutinized, over-policed, and made the object of unwanted public intervention.”<sup>188</sup> For that reason, public services must also be decolonizing and socially inclusive.



## 8. Fiscal Fairness

We cannot have high quality, affordable and accessible public services without also transforming our taxing and spending. As we saw earlier, Canada has seen a decline in how progressive our tax system is, which has allowed income inequality to grow.<sup>189</sup> Conservative tax schemes (such as income splitting) benefit wealthy families, encourage traditional family and gender relations, and discourage women’s labour market participation.<sup>190</sup> When governments cut taxes, especially for high income earners and corporations, this is forgone revenue, or money they would otherwise be able to invest in public services.<sup>191</sup> These tax cuts are also gendered.<sup>192</sup>

Tax measures have increasingly taken the place of directly providing services to citizens. Prentice et al. describe the effects of this shift:

As more and more households deal with precarious labour, struggle with austerity, and experience stalled or falling real wages, public policies predicated on giving tax breaks and credits rather than services consign increasing numbers of Canadians to poverty and stress, forcing more unpaid work onto women.<sup>193</sup>

The Alberta College of Social Workers include progressive revenue reform as one of the planks in its social policy framework.<sup>194</sup> Tax policy — specifically, substantial increases in top-end marginal income tax rates — is central to any realistic attempt to stop inequality from increasing further.<sup>195</sup> Tax changes must be equitable and progressive.<sup>196</sup>

Nova Scotia is often portrayed as a poor province. While it is true that Nova Scotians’ incomes are lower than the Canadian average, from a global

prospective, we are among the most prosperous. With GDP per capita of over \$47,000,<sup>197</sup> there is much more that Nova Scotia can do to support its citizens. Consider that countries such as the Slovak Republic, Poland, and Turkey all have incomes considerably lower than those in Nova Scotia;<sup>198</sup> however, their citizens all enjoy free tuition at public universities. Meanwhile Nova Scotian students face close to the highest tuition in the country leaving many laden with high debt burdens upon graduation. Likewise, whereas Nova Scotia's child poverty rate, at 19.5%,<sup>199</sup> is the second highest in Canada, countries such as the Czech Republic (8.5%), Hungary (7.7%), Poland (9.3%) and Slovenia (7.1%), with per capita incomes similar or lower than Nova Scotia, all have child poverty rates considerably lower than Nova Scotia's.<sup>200</sup> These examples demonstrate that Nova Scotia is not too poor to better support our citizens.

Smart public investments that address inequality and insecurity not only achieve greater fairness; they also provide more opportunities for economic growth, but not just any kind of growth. Investment to strengthen and extend public services help level the proverbial playing field. All of our community members have the right to fully use their skills and capabilities. For decades now, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has published alternative budgets, which show how to achieve fiscal fairness: to make strategic investments to advance social and economic justice, create jobs, reallocate resources, expand the economy, and broaden our progressive revenue base. It is possible to help those in need now, and ensure a solid foundation for our future, our people, our communities, and our environment.

We need fiscal fairness – where those who have more do their part, and our governments collect sufficient revenue to move us from austerity to social investment.<sup>201</sup>



## 9. Shared Governance

Canada is a federal system. For social policy, this has meant that federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments needed to cooperate in order to deliver programs and services such as health care and social welfare to Canadians (thus the term Cooperative Federalism). For instance, in 1966, the Canada Assistance Program consolidated the federal funding and delivery of income assistance programs, substantially increasing federal cost-shared funding to support provincial spending on income assistance programs. The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) provided basic principles that validated Canadian social values about social welfare.

At the same time, the stated goal of CAP was to provide funding for programs to prevent and alleviate poverty, with as much flexibility for provinces and with as few conditions as necessary.<sup>202</sup> This meant that income assistance, like many other social programs in Canada, developed in a patchwork fashion.<sup>203</sup>

The CAP was cancelled in 1996 — a critical policy shift that was short-sighted as a cost cutting measure, and failed to reduce costs or need for social services. It was replaced with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), a cash grant which focuses on transferring funds to provinces for health, social assistance, and post-secondary education. Unlike the CAP, the CHST doesn't describe principles or values. In fact, the CHST doesn't even state that its purpose is to provide funding for social care. It comes with no accountability mechanisms, and no requirement for provinces to explain how the funding transfer is used to improve the social services and social conditions in the province. Without the national standards and basic principles that had framed social service funding through CAP, provinces have slipped backwards. Cancellation of the CAP once again returned the burden of social care onto charities, without providing funding or infrastructure to help them support people. Services have also been downloaded onto municipalities, without the necessary resources.

This funding arrangement, with few restrictions on how federal funding to the provinces and territories is spent,<sup>204</sup> has exacerbated the patchwork. Marchildon, Béland, and Prince describe social policy in Canada as

“fragmented,”<sup>205</sup> and it is all too common to hear advocates raise concern about the “patchwork” of programs and services rather than a coherent and coordinated system.<sup>206</sup> The federal government plays a fairly minimal role in social policy.<sup>207</sup> This was particularly the case under the Conservatives from 2006–15,<sup>208</sup> but remains under the Liberals, who have continued to prioritize financial transfers to families over direct investment in services, and have been reluctant to establish common standards for social programs. Canadians have also expressed a decline in confidence in the federal government over time.<sup>209</sup>

The Canadian Association of Social Workers identifies constitutional integrity (respecting each level of government’s jurisdiction) and subsidiarity (providing services at the lowest level whenever possible) as guiding principles.<sup>210</sup> Even so, the federal government must work with the provinces, territories, municipalities, and First Nations in the funding of services and the setting of standards. Federal transfers to the provinces and territories and equalization payments are integral to supporting universal programs in Canada,<sup>211</sup> as “it is the federal government that holds the most powerful tools for poverty reduction”<sup>212</sup> and it “has a strong leadership role to play in social cohesion.”<sup>213</sup> Prentice et al. explain that

In a federation such as Canada, relations between all levels of government and the First Nations immediately come into play. Since Confederation, most aspects of social policy have been provincial responsibilities. In domains that matter to the national interest, the federal government can step in – with health care being historically the prime example. Divisions of responsibility and unequal fiscal powers mean that provinces and territories may have official responsibility but inadequate resources.<sup>214</sup>

The federal government is best able to ensure that all Canadians have access to the supports they need regardless of where they live and that there is accountability for public funds.<sup>215</sup>



## 10. Democratization

Our democracy is struggling. We've witnessed the rising influence of corporations and business organizations in politics, alongside the declining power of labour unions and the weakening of equality-seeking civil society organizations and progressive think tanks and research institutes.<sup>216</sup> We've seen "cuts in social programs and community spaces that provide much of the glue for social cohesion,"<sup>217</sup> and the growing time crunch that leaves little time for community engagement.<sup>218</sup> Citizens are increasingly disillusioned with their governments: "By 2014, the percentage of Nova Scotians who were satisfied with the way democracy was working in Canada had fallen to 67.9%, just above the national average of 65.8%."<sup>219</sup>

The form our political system takes makes a difference for social policy. We know from looking at other countries that social policy in Canada is held back by the weak representation of labour in the policy process, our decentralized federation with limited federal leadership, and our first-past-the-post electoral system.<sup>220</sup> We should not accept broken federal promises and provincial lack of action. Electoral reform can bring us closer to our social vision.

We also know that the internal processes of policy making have to change. Governments need to consider the potential social impact of each policy they introduce – particularly, the impact on the most vulnerable members of society. Policy decisions might make sound fiscal sense and help the government achieve its economic policy goals, but may also have disastrous effects on social well-being in the longer-term. Individual departments make policy without considering whether they are maintaining or deepening systemic oppression (for example, a transportation policy may adversely impact rural communities; an environmental policy may impact a marginalized community's water supply; changes to early childhood education programs may impact a parent's ability to enter the workforce full-time). As noted above, achieving interconnectedness in social policy requires a Whole-of-Society approach that breaks down policy silos, and applies substantive gender-based and intersectional analyses.

In order to ensure meaningful, inclusive, and effective participation, communities need the capacity to engage and to shape public policy. Mendelson examines the absence of a pan-Canadian advocacy voice in social policy since the closing of pivotal institutions such as the National Council of Welfare and the Caledon Institute and the diminished Canadian Council on Social Development. He recommends the creation of a new, publicly funded, representative, non-partisan body to conduct research, generate fresh ideas, coordinate and engage with civil society, foster public dialogue, advise government, monitor progress and evaluate results.<sup>221</sup> Bittle also suggests greater public resources for non-governmental organizations and think-tanks to promote democratic participation.<sup>222</sup>

Democratization must also extend to our economy. Unions are identified as one of the essential tools for addressing income inequality, and thus should be encouraged. Our solutions must support our collective strength and enable more worker control and ownership to meet human needs. For example, as we address the climate crisis, we must ensure that our shift to renewable energy enhances public control over energy.

While there were variations across the other policy plans we reviewed, all touched on themes of participation, democratic engagement, social dialogue, and community consultation in decision-making.<sup>223</sup> Social policy that works for everyone must ensure that everyone has a say in its creation.

# How to use this framework

THIS FRAMEWORK IS intended as an advocacy and accountability document. It can be used in conversations with our neighbours, friends, co-workers, and elected officials about the kind of society we want and the social policies we need to support it. In fact, we've already used it with a group of social workers, who applied these principles to their experiences with child welfare services, and have additional workshops planned. Perhaps you can organize such a conversation in your own community?

It can also be used as a tool for assessing government policy (both its action and its inaction). To what extent are current government policies living up to these principles? What are the gaps? What should be done to address them? Graham further asks: "Where would we go if our enduring public policy questions were ones like, 'What makes for a good life for Nova Scotians?' or 'How do we improve our well-being?'"<sup>224</sup> We believe that this framework provides a guide for answering these questions.

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## An example: Child Care

Let's take a moment to think about what one social policy – child care – would look like if it were designed using our 10 principles, which are intersectional and evidence-based.



## 1. Interconnectedness

- Child care is a social determinant of health. Catching vulnerabilities before children enter school avoids high social and financial costs later on. Investing in the early years also has many future benefits including healthier, better educated, and more prosperous adults.<sup>226</sup>
- Child care can address multiple social challenges at once: child development; demographic decline; rural revitalization; immigrant retention; gender equality; work/family balance, social inclusion; and precarity for early childhood educators.<sup>227</sup>
- Child care is a proven economic development strategy.<sup>228</sup>
- Comprehensive child care gives options to parents, such as flexible scheduling and a variety of locations. It includes wrap around care that covers the full working day in a seamless system.<sup>229</sup>
- Quality child care provides both learning and care.<sup>230</sup>
- Child care is one component of a broader package of necessary family policies that include improved income supports, maternity and parental leave.

## 2. Decolonization

- Child care services must be developed with respect for the right to self-governance and self-determination for Indigenous communities.<sup>231</sup>
- Child care in Indigenous communities must be informed by traditional practices of education and care.<sup>232</sup>
- Child care policy must be aligned with the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

### 3. Social Inclusion

- Quality, affordable and accessible child care can advance social inclusion in several ways.
- Quality, play-based child care with evidence-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum, provides equal opportunities for all children to thrive.
- Inclusive child care can be especially important for supporting children with special needs and from culturally diverse backgrounds.<sup>233</sup>
- Quality child care brings better wages and working conditions for the female-dominated early childhood education work force.<sup>234</sup>
- Public child care boosts the social value of caring work.<sup>235</sup>
- Child care ensures more equitable access to the labour market for women.
- Flexible child care helps parents achieve work/life balance.<sup>236</sup>
- Public child care can offer more secure employment options for migrant caregivers and diversify the child care sector.<sup>237</sup>
- Child care aids in immigrant settlement and retention.<sup>238</sup>
- Child care investments can stem rural depopulation.<sup>239</sup>

### 4. Universality

- We need universal child care that is available to all who want it, regardless of their income or labour force participation.<sup>240</sup> Services should not be targeted only to ‘vulnerable communities.’
- All children should have access to child care as a human right.
- Universally accessible child care is more likely to be of high quality and to provide better wages and training for early childhood educators.<sup>241</sup>
- Only universal, high quality child care brings the economic benefits that have been achieved in other jurisdictions.<sup>242</sup>

### 5. Climate Justice

- Investing in public child care creates green jobs.
- Child care supports workers, particularly women, in the just transition to the green economy.
- Programs, such as Eco-Healthy Child Care, can be implemented to ensure best practices for healthy, safe and sustainable child care environments.<sup>243</sup>
- Child care curriculum can encourage children to think about their relationship with the environment and the changing climate.<sup>244</sup>

## 6. Decent Work and Well-being

- Flexible child care assists parents, especially women, in combining work, caregiving, leisure, and community engagement.<sup>245</sup>
- Child care allows women to have more equitable access to paid work.<sup>246</sup>
- Quality child care will improve the working conditions for early childhood educators and allow them to afford the same services they now provide for others.<sup>247</sup>

## 7. Public Provision

- Child care in Canada is largely private (either non-profit or commercial) and market-based.<sup>248</sup>
- We need to treat child care as a service, not a business.<sup>249</sup>
- Child care should be a “public good,” the same as public education or health care.<sup>250</sup>
- Public funding should be phased out for-profit providers.<sup>251</sup>
- Subsidies should be replaced with a public system of regulated child care.<sup>252</sup>
- Public child care follows international evidence pointing to higher quality, better access, and stronger accountability.<sup>253</sup>

## 8. Fiscal Fairness

- Child care, like all social investment, requires a progressive tax system.<sup>254</sup>
- Public child care is entirely affordable, we just need to make it a priority.<sup>255</sup>
- The international benchmark is that governments should spend 1% of their GDP for children aged 0–5. Canada and Nova Scotia do not meet this target.<sup>256</sup>
- Child care is an investment, which means it brings economic returns. Research shows that child care more than pays for itself through job creation and increased tax revenue for governments.<sup>257</sup>
- Governments must provide capital and operational funding to improve the wages of the child care workforce, ensure that parent fees are affordable, and fund data collection and research.<sup>258</sup>
- Gender-based analysis of budgets should assess the impact of government inaction in child care policy.<sup>259</sup>

## 9. Shared Governance

- Child care is a provincial responsibility, but the federal government has an important role to play in providing and funding a coherent framework of principles and standards throughout the country.<sup>260</sup>
- Stable and sufficient federal funding must be provided to provinces, territories and Indigenous governments for child care, tied to conditions for accountability.<sup>261</sup>
- Federal transfers for social programs (the Canada Social Transfer) are overshadowed by health care (the Canada Health Transfer) and have been given low priority. The federal government must grow its social transfers to the provinces and territories and strengthen mechanisms for accountability.

## 10. Democratization

- Governments must be held accountable for persistent inaction on child care and other social policies. This requires significant democratic reform to our policy-processes and our electoral system.
- Governments should work with local and school authorities, Indigenous communities, service providers, early childhood educators, parent and community groups, and researchers to design, deliver, and evaluate child care services and to transition from the patchwork to a full system.<sup>262</sup>
- Public consultation is important, but cannot be used by governments as a stalling strategy. The need for a system is clear and well-established in research. Community expertise should be tapped to put this knowledge into action.

# Conclusion

“Good public policy requires balancing social, economic, fiscal and political considerations. We can get clarity on the best path to pursue if we decide that future public policies prioritize and articulate the dignities and rights that we think all Canadians should be afforded by virtue of being a human being, and not because of where we work.”<sup>225</sup>

FOR TOO LONG, Nova Scotians have been told that real solutions to poverty and inequality are unaffordable and impractical. But we don’t have to accept that. We’ve been misled by governments that lack the ambition and imagination to take action. This framework lays out what is required for a transformative social policy agenda based on intersectional and evidence-based policy-making. Now it’s time for our governments to step up.

# Notes

- 1** Statistics Canada, Patient satisfaction with any health care services received in past 12 months. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1310049301> Table: 13-10-0493-01. Last data year is 2007.
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