

### 3. EDUCATION

*Ensure that all Manitobans have access to quality educational programs through which they can develop the skills and knowledge that is required to gain meaningful employment and participate in society as informed citizens.*

#### Early Learning and Child care

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Province of Manitoba has taken significant steps to increase the number of funded child care spaces across the province. This includes meeting a commitment to fund 6,500 child care spaces and invest \$37 million towards the renovation, expansion or creation of new child care centres by 2013.<sup>103</sup> New commitments in 2014 suggest another 5,000 newly funded spaces and another \$25 million towards building and expanding child care centres by 2019.<sup>104</sup> Despite these investments, much more remains to be done to meet the need for additional spaces as determined by the Online Child Care Registry.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Kindergarten to Grade Twelve

While high school completion no longer guarantees a ticket out of poverty, the lack of a high school diploma remains a significant predictor of future income and inclusion. A high school diploma can help generate further education opportunities, training, and employment. High school completion rates have significantly improved over the last decade and a half in all Manitoba regions, with the exception of the North. Some neighborhoods fare better than others. As many as 90 percent of students in high socio-economic Winnipeg neighbourhoods graduated high school within five years of entering grade 9, while rates were lower in Winnipeg's low-income inner city, and in some North End neighbourhoods rates were closer to 20 percent.<sup>108</sup> A national assessment of science, reading, and math was released in 2014 and revealed that Manitoba has the lowest percentage of students that are meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in these areas out of all provinces.<sup>109</sup> Improving educational outcomes and increasing high school graduation rates of vulnerable students is critical to the prevention of poverty. It requires initiatives to strengthen parental involvement in schools and to provide students and their families with access to comprehensive and coordinated services that enable them to fully benefit from educational opportunities. We recommend the following actions:

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

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

Inequities across neighbourhoods and in rural and Northern communities result in an inconsistency in programs available—certain programs and services available in one school division may not be affordable in another. A greater provincial contribution would reduce pressure on local levies to provide basic education programs. This would bring more fairness to rural, Northern and other school divisions currently at a disadvantage.

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

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

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

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

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

The Province of Manitoba introduced the Community Schools Partnership Initiative in 2005, which provides funding to 29 community schools in 14 school divisions. A recent external evaluation of the initiative found improvements in attendance, mitigation of vandalism, improved test scores, and improvements of home support for the school's program. The *Community Schools Act* was passed in 2013 to embed the community school philosophy and model in legislation. The Province of Manitoba's 2013 Speech from the Throne said that it would "broaden opportunities available to Aboriginal students...(by) building on new legislation to establish regional clusters of community schools involved in strengthening community participation in student success."<sup>110</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Post-Secondary Education**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

## Adult Learning and Training

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

an opportunity for individuals to develop the type of skills that can lead to paid employment. Therefore, we recommend that the province extend to all EIA categories the benefits that are currently offered to EIA recipients with disabilities who do volunteer work.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Intergenerational Education

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

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

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

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

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

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