

# Executive Summary

MANITOBANS HAVE BEEN working hard in their communities to address complex challenges associated with poverty and social exclusion. The Province of Manitoba has played a critical role over the years in supporting community efforts while implementing key actions in a number of public policy areas that address poverty and social exclusion. While progress has been made, much more remains to be done.

In the 2000s, community advocates spent several years calling for a comprehensive provincial poverty reduction plan that shows Manitobans how far we have come and where the province plans to go in its efforts to reduce poverty and social exclusion. In the absence of a provincial government process, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba (CCPA-MB), in collaboration with Make Poverty History Manitoba and many other organizations, prepared *The View From Here: Manitobans Call For a Poverty Reduction Plan*, originally released in 2009. This report was based on the ideas and policy recommendations resulting from consultations and interviews with hundreds of individuals across Manitoba. It provided a reasonable and realistic plan that built on the progress made by the province, and was endorsed by over 70 organizations.

Also in 2009, the province introduced its *All Aboard* poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy. While the strategy did not address the need for targets and timelines, it was a significant response to the community's efforts and an important step towards demonstrating leadership in the fight against poverty in Manitoba. The introduction of the strategy led to the *The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* in 2011, which embeds in legislation a government commitment to reducing poverty.

Several important policy initiatives have been implemented since the introduction of the strategy, many of which are rooted in the recommendations put forth by the community in *The View from Here 2009*. Guided by their plan, community advocates have worked hard for action that would help make the province's strategy more comprehensive. As a result significant commitments and investments have been made in the areas of housing, shelter benefits, child care, accessibility rights, and training and jobs for people with barriers to employment.

Manitoba's poverty rate based on the Low-Income Cut Off-After Tax has been on a downward trend during the last decade. The annual rate declined steadily since 2005 under all three of the most common measures of poverty, before increasing slightly in 2009, after the start of the 2008 global recession. The most recent year for which data are available shows the rate dropped again in 2011 to 8.9 percent under the LICO-AT (0.4 percentage points higher than it was pre-recession).

Manitoba's poverty rate has been on a downward trend during the last decade.

Data related to the province's indicators of poverty and social exclusion show that since the strategy was announced in 2009, there has been an 8 percent increase in graduation rates, a 5.5 percent increase in the availability of licensed child care, and a 5.3 percent increase in the number of social and affordable housing units supported by the province.<sup>1</sup> A higher proportion of urban households live in quality, affordable and appropriate housing now than in years before the strategy.<sup>2</sup> But we have a lot more work to do. For example, there is an increasing proportion of children in care of the child welfare system, and we know that poverty creates conditions that can lead to involvement in the child welfare system.<sup>3</sup>

Given that the policy landscape has changed since 2009, and that the province will be required by legislation to update its strategy in 2017, community advocates believe that now is the time to renew *The View from Here 2009*. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Manitoba and the Canadian Community Economic Development Network–Manitoba (CCEDNet-Manitoba) have been working with community partners to present a renewed package of policy recommendations that should be included in Manitoba's updated strategy to ensure it takes a comprehensive and long-term approach to poverty reduction and social inclusion.

This renewed report looks at progress that has been made in other jurisdictions with poverty reduction plans; it reports on the progress made in Manitoba using the indicators that were proposed in our 2009 report; it includes the latest poverty statistics for Manitoba; it builds a case for continuing efforts through a made in Manitoba poverty reduction plan; it outlines the essential components of a meaningful poverty reduction plan as well as a comprehensive package of policies and programs that should be included in Manitoba's updated poverty reduction strategy.

## OUR POVERTY INDICATORS

Our plan identifies measurable indicators of poverty with targets and timelines that can be tracked to help monitor the impact that the plan is having on poverty and to measure progress. According to legislation, the province must update its strategy in 2017. As part of that update, the province should review its set of 21 indicators to ensure they capture those that are identified below.

- Using Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut Off–After Tax (LICO–AT), reduce Manitoba's poverty rate by 25 percent in five years, and by 50 percent in ten years.
- Ensure the poverty rate (using the LICO–AT) for children, female lone-parent households, single women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants declines by 25 percent in five years, and by 50 percent in ten years, in recognition that these populations are particularly vulnerable to poverty.
- Within two years, ensure there are no Manitobans living 50 percent or more below the LICO–AT.
- Reduce the share of Manitobans facing "core housing need" by half by 2020.
- Eliminate severe food insecurity within five years and reduce the prevalence of household food insecurity in Manitoba by half within ten years.
- Reduce the need for food bank use by half within ten years and set a date for the elimination of the need for food banks in Manitoba.
- Demonstrate annual progress in reducing the share of low-wage workers (earning less than two thirds of the median).

## OUR RECOMMENDED PRIORITY ACTIONS

The recommendations below are based on discussions with organizations and individuals across Manitoba who were asked to speak to what they believed needed to be included in a comprehensive plan to reduce poverty in this province. While many excellent ideas were presented during these discussions, the following recommendations represent those ideas that were believed to be the most critical and achievable. Implementation of these recommendations over the next five years will enable significant progress to be made toward reaching the targets we have established for the poverty indicators we identified in the previous section.

### 1. Housing

*Ensure that accessible, safe, and affordable housing is available to all Manitobans.*

1-1.A. Beginning in 2016, increase the supply of non-profit, rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing by a minimum of 300 newly built units each year for five years. Priority should be given to new builds in the North and in high-need urban centres. A portion of new units should be dedicated to larger families requiring three bedrooms or more.

1-1.B. Proactively work with housing providers and invest to ensuring that there is no net loss of rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing units due to expiring federal operating agreements.

1-2. Immediately increase Rent Assist's maximum benefit to 75 percent of Median Market Rent for people on and off Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) without cutting other income-related benefits, and index the benefit to annual increases in the Median Market Rent.

1-3. Ensure all Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation tenants have access to resource centres that receive sufficient and stable funding to cover basic costs (e.g. space and core staffing) by 2020.

1-4. Invest at least \$118 million annually between 2014/15 and 2019/20 to meet the need for capital repairs and maintenance in public housing units.

### 2. Income Security

*Ensure that all Manitobans receive a sufficient income to meet their basic needs and participate fully in community life.*

#### Employment And Income Assistance

2-1. Immediately establish through legislation an EIA Rate Review Committee consisting of government and community representatives.

2-2.A. Immediately implement a transparent mechanism for redefining basic needs in EIA legislation and for setting, reviewing, and annually updating EIA rates that are based on the actual cost of purchasing those basic needs.

2-2.B. Increase EIA rates for all categories to the rates set in 2-2.A within two years and annually review and update rates to ensure they do not fall behind increases in the cost of living.

2-3. Establish a separate pension-like basic income support program for Manitobans with severe and prolonged disability.

### **Jobs**

2-4. Provide immediate funding for the initial set up and operating costs of a Labour Market Intermediary in Winnipeg and in the North to be designed and delivered with Aboriginal community organizations to improve labour market outcomes for multi-barriered Aboriginal job seekers.

2-5. Commit resources to ensure the Manitoba Social Enterprise Strategy is fully implemented by 2020 in order to create more jobs for people with barriers to employment.

2-6. Include and achieve targeted training and hiring of groups identified in the Province of Manitoba's Employment Equity Policy for all infrastructure projects that are supported by public funds.

2-7. Address the barriers immigrants face when getting their qualifications recognized in Manitoba.

2-8. Adjust government-wide benchmarks for representation of employment equity groups in Manitoba's Employment Equity Policy to reflect changes in population and labour force data and set a goal to meet adjusted benchmarks within the civil service and publicly owned institutions by 2020. Priority should be given to achieving benchmarks within management positions.

### **Wages**

2-9. Incrementally increase the minimum wage per hour to the Low-Income Cut Off— Before Tax (LICO-BT) for a one parent, one child household by 2020, and index annually to the LICO-BT.

2-10. Within two years, introduce living wage legislation to ensure that all Manitoba government employees are paid a living wage and that the evaluation criteria for all requests for proposals take into account whether or not employees are paid a living wage.

### **Employment Standards and Legislation**

2-11. Immediately increase the protection of all workers from unfair labour practices.

2-12. Immediately improve the Employment Standards Code to better protect vulnerable workers and introduce stronger measures to proactively monitor and enforce the Code.

## **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**

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 sustain-

able community-based and culturally-relevant early learning and child care programming for families in high socio-economic needs areas.

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.

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.

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

### **Kindergarten to Grade Twelve**

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.

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.

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.

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

### **Post-Secondary Education**

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

3-9. Increase the minimum annual living allowance of Manitoba Student Aid to the LICO–AT.

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

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

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.

### **Adult Learning and Training**

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.’

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.

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.

#### **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.

### **4. Funding**

*Ensure that community-based organizations are sufficiently funded to effectively respond to the needs of the communities they serve.*

4-1. Provide community-based organizations with adequate, flexible, and long-term funding (three to five years) that enables the delivery of programming that is high quality, holistic, and responsive to changing community needs.

4-2. Increase financial support to Neighbourhoods Alive! to allow neighbourhood renewal corporations to scale up their community revitalization activities.

4-3. Provide adequate and dedicated funding to Aboriginal-led organizations and organizations working with Aboriginal people for the delivery of programming that integrates decolonization methods.

### **5. Food Security**

*Ensure that all Manitobans have physical and economic access to healthy, safe, and affordable food.*

5-1. Develop an adequately funded and nutritionally sound provincial school nourishment program that is available to all schools in need by 2020.

5-2. Immediately establish a Food Security Action Fund to provide grants that support food security initiatives across Manitoba.

5-3. Provide immediate funding to train and employ local community food coordinators who live in Northern Manitoba communities.

### **6. Transportation**

*Ensure that accessible and affordable public transportation is available to all Manitobans.*

6-1. Provide municipalities with adequate and targeted funding to ensure public transportation is affordable and accessible to all citizens.

## 7. Disability Supports

***Ensure that all persons with disabilities in Manitoba achieve full inclusion in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of society.***

7-1. Develop and implement clear, progressive, mandatory and date-specific standards in all major areas related to accessibility that will apply to public and private sectors, accompanied by a timely and effective process for monitoring and enforcing the standards.

7-2. Ensure a seamless and lifelong continuum of support services for persons with disabilities.

## 8. Health

***Ensure that publicly funded physical and mental health services are accessible to all Manitobans.***

8-1. Continue to provide health services through a publicly-administered, single-payer, non-profit delivery system to ensure equal access for all Manitobans.

8-2. Ensure primary mental health services are a fundamental component of a comprehensive health system by increasing the proportion of the health budget that is allocated to expenditures on mental health and by expanding the types of mental health services covered by the public healthcare system.

8-3. Ensure youth have access to initiatives that promote mental health as well as services that prevent and address mental illness.

8-4. Extend dental and vision care benefits to all low-income people using an income-based graduated scale which augments benefits for those receiving EIA supports.

8-5. Immediately adopt an explicit goal to reduce health inequities, develop measures to track the progress of key indicators, and ensure that an equity-focused health impact assessment is implemented across government departments.

## 9. Child Welfare

***Ensure child safety and the best possible outcomes for all Manitoba children.***

9-1. Implement the recommendations in *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children* by Hon. Ted Hughes to improve the child welfare system and address the underlying issues of poverty that can lead to contact with the child welfare system.