

If this information is required in an accessible format, please contact 1-800-372-1102 ext. 3111



The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner & Medical Officer of Health
Report: #2024-INFO-79
Date: November 22, 2024

Subject:

The 2024 Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty

Recommendation:

Receive for information

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 To provide an update on [A Time for Urgent Action: The 2024 Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty](#), released on October 29, 2024.

2. Background

- 2.1 In 2018, the Government of Canada committed to reduce poverty through [Opportunity for All – Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy](#). This foundation established Canada's Official Poverty Line, set targets to reduce poverty by 20 per cent by 2020 and 50 per cent by 2030, and introduced the [Poverty Reduction Act](#).
- 2.2 Although Canada met its 2020 poverty reduction target, data from the last couple of years show increasing poverty rates. The poverty rate rose from 6.4 per cent in 2020 to 7.4 per cent in 2021, and 9.9 per cent in 2022. This represents an extra 1.4 million people living in poverty in Canada in 2022 compared to 2020. If this trend continues, the federal government will not meet its 2030 target.
- 2.3 The National Advisory Council on Poverty (NACP) was created in 2019 to monitor and report on Canada's progress towards achieving its poverty reduction goals.
- 2.4 NACP's 2024 report was informed by conversations with organizations that work in poverty reduction, as well as individuals with lived experience.

3. NACP Report Findings

3.1 During NACP's engagement, they heard:

- a. As costs for goods and services rise, more people living in Canada are falling into poverty because they can no longer afford the things they need. Those living in poverty for a longer period time are finding it harder to access vital resources and have seen a deterioration in the supports they receive.
- b. People need access to resources to have and maintain a basic standard of living. These vital needs include housing, transportation, food, health, and mental health services. Other intangible but important needs were described, such as a sense of identity, inclusion, and dignity.
- c. Some people working full-time jobs, and others working multiple jobs are living in poverty. There is a need for higher minimum wages.
- d. Government supports at all levels often fall below Canada's Official Poverty Line. People relying on government benefits are living and staying in poverty. Higher social assistance rates are needed.
- e. More people are accessing shelters, living in encampments, or sleeping on the street. People feel unsafe in shelters, and there are insufficient alternate options, which is why tent encampments are widespread.
- f. People find it challenging and complex to access benefits and services through government and non-profit organizations. Systems are disconnected and difficult to navigate, and those who need supports are often unaware of what is available to them or how to access benefits. Further, some people are more likely to face challenges accessing benefits and services due to systemic inequity and racism.
- g. In 2023, racialized people were more likely to live in poverty (13 per cent), compared to non-racialized people (8.7 percent). Further, colonization has impacted Indigenous people, Black people, and people from other racialized groups, which has damaged trust between communities and government.
- h. Non-profit organizations are doing important and innovative work; however, they rarely get enough funding for basic operational costs. Additionally, funding is not stable or long-term. Funding issues limit impact. As poverty rises, non-profit organizations are struggling to keep up with the rising demands on their services.
- i. After the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic situation, many people describe themselves as living in survival mode. People are more likely to be thinking about their own families and communities, and the connection between people and the community overall is weakened. People spoke about how this leads to increased loneliness, isolation, and mental health problems.

Left unchallenged, these societal conditions can undermine people's interest in helping those made most marginal.

4. NACP's Six Recommendations

4.1 The NACP included the following six recommendations in its report which are based on ongoing dialogue, updated poverty statistics, observations of current measures and collective expertise:

a. That the federal government work towards **zero-poverty** by:

- Introducing a basic income floor, indexed to the cost of living, that would provide adequate resources for people to meet basic needs, thrive, and make choices with dignity.
- Increasing income security by incrementally reforming current benefits to increase benefit amounts.

b. That the federal government address **housing challenges** by:

- Working with all levels of government to develop a plan to decrease core housing need for people spending 30 to 50 per cent of their income on housing. This includes expanding non-market housing and the development of affordable not-for-profit housing.
- Introducing and managing federal rental subsidies, including a percent to account for energy and utility costs.

c. Increase **food security** by:

- Establishing regulations of nutritious food prices, in alignment with the United Nations [Sustainable Development Goal 2](#).
- Implementing the [National School Food Program](#) in a way that is low-barrier, stigma-free, equitable, inclusive, and nutritious.

d. Improve **access to benefits and services** by:

- Exploring ways to expand auto-filling and auto-enrollment for government benefits and supports.
- Funding system navigation improvements.

e. **Support the non-profit sector** by:

- Providing stable and long-term operational funding, while allowing for flexibility and autonomy in how organizations are managed.

- Providing funding for fair and equitable wages and working conditions for people employed in the non-profit sector.
 - Reducing the administrative burden associated with funding processes.
 - Supporting organizations that promote innovation in response to their clients' needs.
- f. **Build strong and equitable communities** by:
- Respecting treaty rights and supporting Indigenous leaders to reduce poverty in their own communities, in their own way. This includes urgently implementing the [Calls to Action](#) from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the [Calls for Justice](#) from Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
 - Developing a plan to address poverty inequity, with a goal of reducing poverty rates among priority populations to at least meet or be lower than the average national poverty rate by 2030.

5. Relationship to Strategic Plan

5.1 This report aligns with the following strategic goal and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

a. Goal 2: Community Vitality

- 2.3: Enhance community safety and well-being
- 2.4: Influence the social determinants of health to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations

6. Conclusion

6.1 Locally, the Regional Municipality of Durham is working on a Poverty Response Program (PRP). The PRP will outline actions to support poverty reduction. It is being developed by Durham Region Social Services Department and Durham Region Health Department (DRHD), in collaboration with Davis Pier Consulting. The PRP will be informed by and developed with the community, service providers, community partners and individuals with lived experience. The PRP aims to better understand poverty in Durham Region and create actionable solutions.

6.2 There will be engagement opportunities to help inform the PRP and these will be shared publicly when available.

- 6.3 DRHD is monitoring Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Staying updated on the national strategy will ensure DRHD is informed on national poverty trends and any changes to federal-level programming, policies and resources.
- 6.4 DRHD's Health Neighbourhoods initiative provides a picture of how health varies by where residents live. In 2015, seven Priority Neighbourhoods were identified that require focus to build on health and well-being. These Priority Neighbourhoods have the lowest income levels in the region.
- 6.5 DRHD works to improve health outcomes for those living with low income by modifying programs and services to address the needs of this population. DRHD also collaborates with Regional and community partners to help improve outcomes for those living with low income.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

R.J. Kyle, BSc, MD, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC, FACPM
Commissioner & Medical Officer of Health