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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner & Medical Officer of Health
Report: #2025-INFO-84
Date: November 14, 2025

Subject:

The 2025 Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty

Recommendation:

Receive for information

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 To provide an update on the 2025 report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty (NACP) titled [We Can Do Better: It is not a safety net if the holes are this big](#), released on October 28, 2025.

2. Background

- 2.1 In 2018, the Government of Canada (GoC) committed to reduce poverty through [Opportunity for All – Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy](#). The strategy established:
- a. Canada's Official Poverty Line, which is based on the Market Basket Measure (MBM).
 - b. Targets to reduce the poverty rate by 20 per cent by 2020 and 50 per cent by 2030 (compared to the 2015 baseline rate).
 - c. The [Poverty Reduction Act](#).
- 2.2 The NACP was created in 2019 to monitor and report on Canada's progress towards achieving its poverty reduction goals.
- 2.3 Poverty data in the NACP report are based on the MBM, which establishes poverty thresholds based on the cost of a specific basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, transportation).

- 2.4 In 2020, Canada met and exceeded its first poverty reduction target with a drop in the poverty rate from 14.5 per cent in 2015 to 6.4 per cent in 2020.
- 2.5 This year's report explores how Canada has been performing more recently, focusing on 2023 statistical data, combined with data from engagements with hundreds of people experiencing poverty and thousands of representatives from relevant groups and organizations across Canada.

3. NACP Report Findings

- 3.1 The most recent data from 2023 show that nearly four million people are living in poverty in Canada (i.e., 10.2 per cent of people living in Canada).
 - a. The highest poverty rates among the provinces are in Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia (both at 12.9 per cent).
 - b. Ontario's poverty rate is 11.1 per cent, which is a small increase compared to 10.9 per cent the year prior.
 - c. The poverty rate in the territories is 22.8 per cent, which is significantly higher than the provinces.
 - d. Poverty rates among groups of people made most marginal remain higher than average, reflecting inequalities.
 - The poverty rate for racialized people was 14 per cent.
 - The rate of Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve who live below the poverty line is 17.5 per cent, which is significantly higher than the non-Indigenous population (9.9 per cent).
- 3.2 Canada is falling off track with regards to meeting its 2030 poverty reduction targets.
 - a. Although the most recent poverty data from 2023 show a decrease compared to the 2015 baseline, data from the three most recent years show increasing rates since 2020. The poverty rate rose from 6.4 per cent in 2020 to 7.4 per cent, 9.9 per cent, then 10.2 per cent in 2021, 2022, then 2023.
 - b. If Canada's poverty rate continues with its current trend, the GoC will fail to meet its 2030 target.
- 3.3 The NACP engaged organizations and people with lived and living experience of poverty to answer the key question "why does poverty matter?". The main themes that came out of their engagements centred around the following ideas:
 - a. Poverty is persistent. People spoke of difficulties in affording food, transportation, housing, clothing, and other essential needs. They expressed concerns about rising costs, which cause more people to fall into poverty

while making it harder for people already living in poverty to get out of it, leading to intergenerational poverty.

- b. Poverty is an ongoing struggle. People expressed that when they struggle to meet their basic needs, they have little time and energy for doing anything besides surviving.
- c. Poverty is dehumanizing. People expressed feeling infantilized, dehumanized, and stigmatized by systems that are meant to be supportive.
- d. Poverty is systemic. Poverty is the consequence of structures, policies, and programs that create and perpetuate economic and social disadvantages for some, while benefitting others. People expressed concerns that the way systems are designed often creates dependence, making people living in poverty feel stuck.
- e. Poverty needs to be prevented, rather than treated (i.e., address root causes, not just the conditions of poverty).
- f. Poverty does not discriminate, but it can be the result of discrimination. Black people, racialized people, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers to Canada, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and people with a disability shared their personal experiences with racism and discrimination in housing, employment, schooling, or when accessing supports.
- g. Poverty is divisive and erodes social cohesion amid a rising sense of resource scarcity.

3.4 The NACP highlighted three central issues when it comes to poverty: affordability, income, and income supports.

- a. Affordability is a major contributor to poverty, as the cost of living is high (e.g., housing, food, utilities, transportation, and everyday goods).
 - The report dedicates an entire chapter to the issue of housing affordability because it is often the largest cost for individuals and families. The NACP believes that if affordable and quality housing can be achieved in Canada, this would have the greatest impact on decreasing poverty and the experience of poverty.
- b. Income is another major issue. For people experiencing poverty, wages are often too low to lift them out of poverty. This was especially true for people earning minimum wage. Engagements highlighted how demoralizing it is for people to work full-time and still be unable to make ends meet.
- c. Inadequate income supports are also a major contributor to poverty.

- People who receive income supports from the government (e.g., Employment Insurance, disabilities benefits, and pension payments) find that the amount received is insufficient to cover their basic living expenses. Research in the poverty field found that in 2023, a significant majority (80 per cent) of households relying solely on social assistance and related government transfers were living in deep poverty.
- People who live in poverty but do not receive income supports noted a variety of gaps in accessing income supports. For example, eligibility criteria for disability benefits excludes many people with work-limiting disabilities. Also, some individuals in the labour market that do not earn enough money to cover the cost of living do not qualify for Employment Insurance.
- People living in poverty commonly expressed that they find it complicated and difficult to access benefits and supports.
- Engagements also identified a lack of awareness of formal and informal supports for people living in poverty. Consequently, many people are not receiving all the financial assistance they are entitled to.

4. NACP's Seven Recommendations

- 4.1 The report recognizes that the GoC has made significant investments in social protection programs, but there are still gaps that leave people in the cycle of poverty and others at risk of falling into poverty. The NACP offers the GoC several recommendations to help meet its poverty reduction goals. In particular, the NACP recommends that the GoC needs to:
- a. Increase income through wages and/or benefits and decrease costs of essentials for individuals.
 - b. Take targeted steps to raise awareness about benefits people are entitled to and make it easier to access federal benefits.
 - c. Work with provincial and territorial governments to protect and support renters in market housing.
 - d. Invest in non-market housing to increase its availability, affordability, and adequacy.
 - e. Stabilize the overextended non-profit sector which provides vital and essential support to people experiencing poverty.
 - f. Invest in mental health and harm reduction services. This includes increasing funding through provincial and territorial health transfers for the delivery of low barrier integrated mental health services.
 - g. Support labour force participation to make employment a real pathway out of poverty. This requires actions to remove barriers that prevent people from accessing and maintaining decent work. Addressing this recommendation will

require efforts from all levels of government, in partnership with the non-profit sector. This may include:

- Wraparound supports for people transitioning between benefits and employment.
- Incentives for employers.
- Increasing access to employment benefits.
- Investing in skills training programs.
- Building pathways for skilled migrants to enter the labour market in their field.

5. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 5.1 Report [#2024-INFO-79](#) provided an update on [A Time for Urgent Action: The 2024 Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty](#), released by the GoC on October 29, 2024.
- 5.2 [Report #2025-INFO-33](#) provided an update on the report titled [Food Insecurity and Food Affordability in Ontario](#), released by Public Health Ontario on April 9, 2025.
- 5.3 Report [#2025-INFO-64](#) provided an update on the report titled [2024 Annual Report: Poverty Reduction Strategy](#), released by the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) on June 20, 2025.

6. Local Initiatives

- 6.1 Durham Region Social Services Department (DRSSD) and Durham Region Health Department (DRHD) have partnered with [Feed the Need in Durham](#) to establish a Steering Committee and identify next steps in the work related to developing a Poverty Response Program (PRP). The PRP will outline actions to address poverty across Durham Region and will be grounded in a collaborative, community-based approach that includes local leaders, service providers, and individuals with lived experience of poverty. The PRP aims to better understand poverty in the local context and create actionable solutions.
 - a. On May 21, DRHD and DRSSD co-hosted a Poverty Response Community Workshop at the Ajax Community Centre. Community partners were invited to attend the workshop to discuss poverty, learn from each other and work towards actionable solutions. Approximately 90 people attended, including community partners from diverse sectors and individuals with lived experience of poverty. Discussions focused on identifying and addressing key areas that impact those living with poverty the most.
 - b. The information, advice, guidance, and recommendations that were gathered during the workshop were compiled into the [Durham Region Poverty Response Program – What We Heard Report](#), available on durham.ca. This report is informing next steps in the development of the PRP.

7. Relationship to Strategic Plan

7.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following Strategic Directions and Pathways in Durham Region's 2025 to 2035 Strategic Plan:

a. Healthy People, Caring Communities

- H1. Implement preventive strategies to support community health, including food security.
- H2. Collaborate with partners to respond to complex social issues that improve community safety and well-being, including mental health and addictions.
- H3. Integrate and co-ordinate service delivery for positive life outcomes, including investments in poverty prevention, housing solutions, and homelessness supports.
- H4. Support the development of healthy children and youth, including access to affordable and quality child care.
- H5. Provide services for seniors and work with community partners to support aging in place.

b. Strong Relationships

- S3. Collaborate across local area municipalities, with agencies, non-profits, and community partners to deliver co-ordinated and efficient services.

8. Conclusion

8.1 While last year's NACP engagements captured a sense of urgency and despair, this year's engagements captured a communal sense of frustration. People expressed a desire for governments to continue to listen while taking accountability and actions to solve the poverty crisis.

8.2 Given that poverty rates have risen over the last three years, we know that existing supports and benefits are not keeping pace with evolving and increasing needs.

8.3 MCCSS is currently conducting a [survey](#) of individuals, non-profit, government, Indigenous or public sector entities and employers or industry associations to assess the current provincial poverty reduction strategy and inform a new strategy for Ontario for the next five years. The survey is open until November 30, 2025.

8.4 Reducing poverty requires a whole-of-society approach. The implementation of the NACP's seven recommendations will require leadership and investment from the federal government and collaboration with other levels of government, the non-profit sector, funders, the private sector, and individuals.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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