

# Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction Recommendations Report

## *Executive Summary*

### **Introduction**

Saskatchewan has made considerable progress over the last few years in improving the quality of life for its citizens. Though progress continues to be made, the Government of Saskatchewan recognizes there is still work to do to help more people benefit from our province's economic prosperity. That is why, in the 2014 *Speech from the Throne*, Government announced its plan to develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Developing a strategy to improve the quality of life for people in poverty is no small task. It also is a task that Government cannot do alone – which is why Government reached out to the community and formed an Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction.

The Advisory Group was asked to review current efforts to reduce poverty in the province, identify gaps in the system, and identify what can be done better. The group was also directed to listen to the community and host a Poverty Roundtable, which the group did in April 2015. In addition, the Advisory Group felt it was important to sit down and meet with organizations that have experience working directly with families and individuals living in poverty, as well as with organizations that provide services to vulnerable populations.

Saskatchewan is a prosperous province. Over the last decade, the proportion of people living in poverty in our province has declined. According to Statistics Canada, as of 2012, the percentage of individuals with incomes below the Market Basket Measure (MBM) was 10.6 per cent, which is well below the national average of 12.0 per cent. Although this trend is positive, some Saskatchewan people are still faced with challenges related to poverty.

While there is no single defining feature of who experiences poverty in Saskatchewan, some groups are more likely to experience it than others. For example, we know that lone parent families, First Nation and Métis people, residents of the North, recent immigrants, and those who experience disability, tend to experience higher rates of poverty. What can add to this struggle is that many individuals living in poverty belong to more than one of these groups.

Research shows that individuals who face many barriers – like low levels of education, health issues, and lack of work experience – have difficulty getting and keeping a job, and the income that comes along with it. In addition to these barriers, Saskatchewan people who experience poverty repeatedly told the Advisory Group that discrimination also prevented them from getting a job.

It is important that a poverty reduction strategy provides all Saskatchewan citizens with the opportunity to be woven into our Province's economic and social fabric.

### **Vision and Target**

The Advisory Group's recommendations for a poverty reduction strategy are organized around a central vision with an aggressive target for reducing poverty in the province.

#### ***Vision:***

*"We envision all of Saskatchewan committing to actions that will reduce, and ultimately eliminate, poverty in our communities."*

#### ***Target:***

*Using the 2012 Market Basket Measure, the Province aims to reduce poverty in Saskatchewan by 50 per cent by the end of 2020.*

### **Guiding Principles**

The following principles guided the work of the Advisory Committee:

- **Protect and promote the rights and dignity of all people in Saskatchewan.** The rights and dignity of all people in Saskatchewan are very important and their views must be respected.
- **People come first.** Programs and services must be designed to meet the needs of people, not systems.
- **Build and support strength in individuals and families.** Emphasize the existing strengths of individuals and families and their ability to make decisions, while supporting them to improve their lives.
- **Partnerships are needed to achieve common goals.** Government agencies and community organizations should work together to provide Saskatchewan people with effective programs and services.
- **Accountability is vital to the Strategy's success.** Decisions made on policy and programs must be transparent and accompanied by supporting evidence. Clear targets will be chosen and outcomes will be evaluated for their effectiveness.
- **Balance the need for flexible, practical and concrete actions with a focus on innovation and excellence.** Recommendations must be achievable and sustainable over the long-term. They must also be adaptable to continue to meet people's needs.

## **Recommendations**

### **Overarching Recommendations**

1. We strongly recommend that the guiding principles and approach also guide the development and implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.
2. We strongly recommend the Government implement recommendations from other strategies, reports and task forces that have identified initiatives directly related to poverty.

### **Areas of Initial Focus**

#### **Income Security**

- 1) Ensure income supports meet basic needs and provide an acceptable standard of living for families and individuals, regardless of circumstance or geography.
- 2) Increase support for people transitioning from assistance to employment and education.
- 3) Use available mechanisms to ensure wages are adequate to meet the needs of workers and their families.

#### **Housing and Homelessness**

- 1) Work with partners to ensure housing is available for individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- 2) Increase the supply of safe, affordable, and adequate housing for individuals and families with low incomes.

#### **Early Childhood Development**

- 1) Implement a comprehensive early year's action plan.
- 2) Support young children and their families by creating developmentally-appropriate and culturally-inclusive programs and services.
- 3) Increase access to affordable quality childcare.

#### **Education and Training**

- 1) Prepare all Saskatchewan students with a Grade 12 education so that they can participate fully in the social and economic life of the province.
- 2) Develop supports for people with multiple barriers to get and keep a good job.
- 3) Help people get the education and training they need.

## **Employment**

- 1) Have the Province demonstrate leadership and use its influence to support greater inclusion of under-represented groups in the workforce.
- 2) Provide the necessary supports to help people get long-term employment.
- 3) Work with employers on addressing barriers to employment and advancement for under-represented groups.
- 4) Help communities sustain themselves and increase employment.

## **Health and Food Security**

- 1) Target health promotion and disease prevention to prevent or reduce illnesses associated with poverty.
- 2) Improve equity of access to services for people with illnesses related to poverty.
- 3) Work with individual communities and local governments to develop a plan to make sure residents in the North, isolated communities, and inner cities have access to affordable, culturally acceptable, and nutritious food.