

ADVISORY GROUP ON POVERTY REDUCTION



RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR A PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY





Recommended Vision

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

Recommended Target

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

Table of Contents

- Letter of Transmittal 3
- Introduction 4
- Poverty in Saskatchewan 6
- Consultation Summary 7
- Recommendations 8
 - Areas of Initial Focus 10
 - Income Security 10
 - Housing and Homelessness 12
 - Early Childhood Development 13
 - Education and Training 15
 - Employment 16
 - Health and Food Security 17
- Conclusion 19
- Appendix A. 20
- Appendix B. 24



Letter of Transmittal

Her Honour, the Honourable Donna Harpauer, Minister of Social Services

Dear Minister Harpauer:

On behalf of the Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction, we are pleased to present our report detailing recommendations for the development of a poverty reduction strategy for Saskatchewan.

Our group was tasked in December 2014 to review the work Government has done to address poverty in Saskatchewan, and identify any gaps where more work is needed. We knew the task would be challenging and would require us to seek out advice from people and organization that have expertise in poverty issues in our province.

We learned about initiatives that are already working well, some of which are detailed throughout this report. We also heard there is still more work to do to help all Saskatchewan people to be fully included and contribute to our province.

We have seen and heard that people who experience poverty face multiple, sometimes overlapping, barriers to social, economic and geographic inclusion. That's why we have developed a broad set of recommendations that take a holistic approach to reducing poverty.

Our group is honoured to have had the opportunity to ensure the community's voice was included in the development of recommendations for a Poverty Reduction Strategy. With this said, we urge Government to act quickly in responding to our recommendations by developing a provincial Strategy that will guide a co-ordinated, collaborative approach to further reducing poverty in our province.

Sincerely,



Alison Robertson
Citizen Co-chair
Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction



Constance Hourie
Government Co-chair
Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction

Introduction

Saskatchewan has made considerable progress over the last few years to help improve the quality of life for its citizens. Though progress continues to be made, the Government of Saskatchewan recognizes there is still more 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 is they reached out to the community and formed an Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction.

The Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction, also known as the AGPR, is made up of six community members, and five representatives from across Government. The members who form the AGPR are:

- **Alison Robertson (co-chair)** – Director of Community Development, Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre
- **Constance Hourie (co-chair)** – Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Assistance and Corporate Planning, Ministry of Social Services
- **Ron Anderson** – Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Safety Outcomes and Corporate Services, Ministry of Justice/Corrections and Policing
- **Steve Compton** – Chief Executive Officer, Regina Food Bank
- **Dr. Jo-Ann Episkenew** – Director, Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre
- **Karen Lautsch** – Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health
- **Alastair MacFadden** – Assistant Deputy Minister, Labour Market Development, Ministry of Economy
- **Dr. Ryan Meili** – Physician, WestSide Community Clinic
- **Greg Miller** – Associate Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education
- **Russ Mirasty** – Retired RCMP Commanding Officer in Saskatchewan
- **Dr. Cory Neudorf** – Chief Medical Health Officer, Saskatoon Health Region

Social Services Minister Donna Harpauer tasked this diverse group of people to review current efforts to reduce poverty in the province, and identify what can be done better.

The group believed a critical part of their task involved hosting a conversation with a number of community groups together to come up with creative options for reducing poverty in Saskatchewan.

On April 28, 2015, the group did exactly that by hosting a Poverty Roundtable event in Saskatoon. The Roundtable was facilitated by Tamarack, an Institute for Community Engagement, an organization that brings with them considerable experience promoting dialogue on poverty.

The Roundtable brought together roughly 100 people from more than 60 organizations, including those with lived experience who know the challenges of poverty first-hand. Some of the organizations included Government, health regions, First Nation and Métis organizations, the education sector, early childhood development agencies, and community groups. All of these individuals brought and shared their unique experience, challenges, stories, ideas and energy to what was a very productive session.

In addition to the Roundtable, members of 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. The group met with representatives ranging from anti-poverty organizations, Directors of Education, Regional Inter-Sectoral Committees¹, First Nation organizations, the Advocate for Children and Youth, the Provincial Ombudsman, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, and the Federal Government.

¹ Regional Inter-Sectoral Committees (RICs) bring together a variety of local service agencies to provide leadership and problem solving at the community/regional level.

Both Government and the Advisory Group firmly believe that addressing poverty is everyone's responsibility. That's why the group also provided an opportunity for public input. In total, the group received more than 350 responses through its online survey.

The approach and recommendations contained in this document are based on the advice and information collected from these consultations. The Group also took into account the many public consultations that have taken place across the province over the past few years. These consultations have gathered important information to help address poverty, and were used to develop other provincial strategies related to disability, housing, education and mental health and addictions.

The Advisory Group also considered community-led discussions and consultations that are currently underway to develop local strategies to reduce poverty. They also took steps to understand Saskatchewan's unique needs by looking at some research that has been done in terms of the causes and impacts of poverty, and some examples of promising practices that can help reduce it. Some of these promising practices are highlighted throughout this report.





Poverty in Saskatchewan

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 with some form of 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 with 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.

In short, Saskatchewan people made it clear in written submissions, one-on-one meetings and online surveys that discrimination is still preventing a number of people from reaching their full potential and contributing fully to our province.

That's why 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.

Consultation Summary

The Advisory Group noticed several overlapping themes when it was looking over the feedback it received. Here are some of the highlights:

- **We all need to work together to successfully reduce poverty in Saskatchewan.** Reducing poverty needs a commitment not just from the Provincial Government, but also from community-based organizations, First Nation and Métis leaders, municipalities, health care providers, educators, business, and the Federal Government. We also need to make sure we include those who have lived experience when it comes to making decisions and coming up with ideas to reduce poverty.
- **We need to build on individual, family and community strengths.** There are many examples of successful local initiatives that are making a difference in the lives of those living in poverty. The stories of success are many, which is why the Strategy must build on existing strengths and focus on what is working – so that more people can benefit from the good work that is already being done.
- **Government may have different Ministries, but it needs to work as one.** Its programs and services need to meet the unique needs of people, rather than people meeting the needs of a complicated and disconnected system.
- **A poverty reduction strategy must be for all Saskatchewan people.** It needs to remove barriers and service limits for all people. This includes developing seamless programming that ensures supports are in place wherever people live. This is particularly important when it comes to First Nations people, who should have the supports they need whether they live on- or off-reserve.
- **Poverty doesn't discriminate based on location.** A poverty reduction strategy must recognize that people living in rural and remote locations do not have access to the same services as those living in urban settings.
- **We need to overcome structural causes of poverty.** Discrimination, prejudice, racism, and social isolation are barriers to employment, housing, and other services, and need to be identified and overcome.
- **We need to build on existing strategies and actions.** Good work has already been done. A poverty reduction strategy must build on other major initiatives like the Disability Strategy, the Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan and the Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People.
- **Lack of access to safe, affordable housing contributes to continued poverty.** Safe and affordable housing needs to be provided so families can have stability in their lives – stability that allows them to access training or employment.
- **Children need to get the best start in life if they are to grow up to be successful adults.** Access to early learning for children and supports for their parents are essential for children to be successful as they enter the education system.
- **Economic inclusion is vital.** A poverty reduction strategy needs to focus on education and training to help create employment opportunities. Income supports also need to be improved to ensure that people have the financial means to meet their needs.
- **Poverty impacts health.** Reducing poverty will lead to a healthier Saskatchewan population.

Recommendations

Poverty is a complex issue. There is no one solution that will address the many factors that cause poverty. That is why it is the responsibility of both Government and the community to work together to develop effective ways to help reduce poverty in our province. 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. The recommendations speak to a combination of short, medium and long-term actions. In addition, the Advisory Group recommends that the approach be comprehensive, guided by a set of foundational principles, and provide direction for continued focus and action over several areas.

Vision

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

Acting on our provincial motto, "From Many Peoples Strength," the Advisory Group recommends a bold vision that sets the stage to eliminate poverty so that all Saskatchewan people can fully realize their potential. In order to achieve this vision, we need everyone and every sector to work together.

Target

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

The Advisory Group recommends the Province adopt the Market Basket Measure (MBM)¹ as the main measure of poverty. The most recent year of data shows the MBM was 10.6 per cent in Saskatchewan. The Advisory Group recommends the Province set a target to reach an MBM of 5 per cent by the year 2020.

Figure 1: Projection for poverty rates (using the MBM) by the year 2020 for select provinces based on 2002 through 2012 data as reported by Statistics Canada.



Since poverty is about more than just a lack of money, we can't just use the MBM alone as a provincial target. We also need to focus on other measures that can be used to monitor how we're doing, and how effective we are in reducing poverty across various groups. This can include measures related to program areas like education, housing, health and social services.

Approach and Guiding Principles

Effective poverty reduction needs a blueprint to guide the development of policies and programs. The following principles frame the way programs are designed, delivered, and evaluated.

The Advisory Group used the principles below to guide their work. They recommend these principles also guide development and implementation of the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy:

- **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.
 - Ensure access to justice and basic human rights is not limited by an individual's socio-economic status or place of residence (whether urban, rural, on- or off-reserve, or North).
 - Respecting the dignity of First Nations and Métis people includes addressing the consequences of colonialism, residential schools and ongoing racism³.

¹ A description of the MBM and comparison to other poverty measures is available in Appendix B

³ Truth and Reconciliation

Reconciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc in their lives. But it must do even more. Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share. (TRC Executive Summary, p. 7)

- **People come first.** Programs and services must be designed to meet the needs of people, not systems.
 - Ensure the voices of those affected are meaningfully included in all decisions that impact their lives.
 - Respectful interpersonal relationships should be valued as the centre for all interactions. Systems should acknowledge the power dynamic between people who offer services and those who rely on them.
 - People living on-reserve should have access to the same programs and services as other Saskatchewan people. Jurisdiction and funding issues should not be a barrier for people to access programs and services.
 - Implement a “no wrong door” policy and simplify processes to provide easier access to government programs and services.
 - Support community and Government human service providers to not only promote programs and services, but also to seek out people in need of these programs and services⁴.

⁴ No Wrong Door

Staff of community organizations are able to connect individuals and/or families with the appropriate service(s) in a manner that is streamlined, effective and seamless from the individual’s and/or family’s perspective, even if that service(s) is not offered by their organization or within their sector. <http://www.hpechildrenandyouth.ca/2014/11/no-wrong-door-supports-cysn-vision-and-mandate/>

- **Build and support strength in individuals and families.** Emphasize the existing strengths of individuals and families and their ability to make decisions, while also helping them improve their lives.
 - Acknowledge people’s individual circumstances and build on their strengths and abilities.
 - Recognize the impact of historical cumulative emotional and psychological injury that spans across generations.
 - Recognize the effects of individual trauma-damage to individuals and families from a severely distressing event.
- **Partnerships are needed to achieve common goals.** Government agencies and community organizations should work together to provide Saskatchewan people with effective programs and services.
 - Demonstrate leadership with the Province acting as convener for an open dialogue, including the Federal Government, First Nations and Métis, business, municipalities and CBOs.
 - Implement recommendations from other strategies, reports and task forces that have already identified initiatives directly related to poverty (a list of these recommendations is provided in Appendix A).
 - Take a Government-wide approach to invest in actions that reduce poverty and encourage all ministries to work together to address the social determinants of health⁵.

⁵ Health in All Policies

One way of addressing this is a “Health in All Policies” approach. This is when public policies across sectors systematically take into account the health implications of decisions, seek synergies, and avoid harmful health impacts, in order to improve population health and health equity. <http://www.healthpromotion2013.org/health-promotion/health-in-all-policies>

- **Accountability is vital to the Strategy's success.**

Decisions made on policy and programs must be transparent and accompanied by supporting evidence. Clear targets should be chosen, and outcomes will need to be evaluated for their effectiveness.

- Enhance and establish rigorous data collection, analysis and sharing practices.
- Develop a process to monitor and evaluate poverty reduction initiatives. Ideally, this would include a transparent, independent central body to oversee and report on this work.

- **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.

- A Poverty Reduction Strategy should be a living document that can be reviewed at regular intervals to determine if it is on track, and what adjustments need to be made to ensure it continues to be effective.
- Implement an evidence-based approach to decision-making, invest in social innovation and explore new ways of working.

Areas of Initial Focus

Based on all of the information collected, the Advisory Group has recommended six areas of initial focus for the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Each Area of Initial Focus includes a high level recommendation, as well as several sub-recommendations that represent practical starting points for action. A number of potential measures to monitor their effectiveness have also been included. Since the Strategy is being recommended as a living document, these Areas of Initial Focus should be viewed as the basis for a Strategy that would guide actions until 2020. A process to evaluate and renew the Strategy will be needed to maintain the effectiveness of poverty reduction activities over the longer-term.

Income Security

A lack of income prevents individuals from participating in the economic and social life of their communities. In some cases, today's income assistance programs do not provide enough resources to meet the basic needs of families and individuals. In fact, they might actually act as a barrier for those wanting to transition to employment or education. And for some individuals who have found full-time employment, they still do not make enough to live above the poverty line.



PROMISING PRACTICE #1

SIGN (The Society for the Involvement of Good Neighbors) is a not-for-profit family and community service agency, which develops and delivers services to enhance the quality of life for individuals and groups in the Yorkton area. SIGN is an umbrella agency that consists of many programs and is home for other independent programs. This community service agency has operated since 1969. Throughout the years, SIGN has developed

and delivered various programs to provide services and facilities to improve the welfare of individuals and families in the Yorkton area. Some of the programs such as Triple P and Family Preservation Program help to support families and improve parenting skills. Other programs support education and capacity building opportunities for individuals such as the: Before and After School Programs, Learning to Live: Youth Life Skills Program and Independent Living Program. SIGN provides a variety of other programs to meet the needs of individuals in the community.

- 1) Ensure income supports meet basic needs and provide an acceptable standard of living for families and individuals, regardless of circumstance or geography.
 - Pilot and evaluate a basic income⁶ program, and if the results are successful, scale the program province-wide. Eventually, this would reduce the need for a number of current assistance programs.

⁶ Basic Income

A basic income is a clear and sufficient distribution of adequate funds to improve the quality of life and increase opportunities for those in need. A similar model already exists in Canada for seniors through the Guaranteed Income Supplement and in the Child Tax Benefit for families with children. A true basic income would take these successful programs further, providing everyone with an income that is above the poverty line.

Basic income is different from social assistance. Social assistance tends to provide a level of support that is well below the poverty line, whereas basic income is defined as an adequate amount to meet the needs of an individual or family. It also differs in its simple administration, eliminating complex eligibility and exemption criteria.

The two most common models proposed for basic income are a) a cash transfer or demo grant model in which every eligible person receives the same amount with it being returned through taxation from those making enough to not need the support and b) a negative income tax model in which everyone who makes above a certain amount continues to pay income tax as is currently done, but those who earn below that level receive enough to bring them up that amount. Both of these models represent proportionate universality, where the support is available to all, but given in greater quantity to those in greater need.

While basic income can't replace all social programs – we still need quality public education, health care, unemployment insurance, etc. – it can reduce pressure on those services by improving the lives of those who need them, and their families.

- While awaiting the results of this pilot, other immediate measures are required to better meet the needs of those on assistance:
 - Set up a process to regularly review income supports to ensure they are adequate and responsive to community needs.
 - Streamline the process to reduce the number of applications required.
 - Increase and index the food and shelter allowances beginning with the North, isolated areas and areas with higher costs of living.
 - Allow individuals receiving income assistance to receive spousal maintenance payments without financial penalty.
- 2) Increase support for people transitioning from assistance to employment and education.
 - Redesign income supplements (e.g., Saskatchewan Employment Supplement, Child Care Subsidy, Family Health Benefits, Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement) to address gaps in funding (e.g., transportation) and provide more stability for families and individuals.
 - Explore options for extending health benefits to individuals not currently covered.
 - Encourage people who are working or are making the transition to employment by increasing earned income exemptions.
 - 3) Use available mechanisms to ensure wages are adequate to meet the needs of workers and their families.
 - Ensure a minimum wage for people fully employed is sufficient to meet or exceed the Market Basket Measure (MBM).
 - Promote understanding around the concept of a “Living Wage” and encourage Saskatchewan businesses to become “Living Wage” employers⁷.

7 Living Wage

The idea of a living wage has been gaining attention throughout Canada in recent years. It is calculated as the amount needed for an employee to remain healthy, productive, and support themselves and their families with confidence.

A living wage is often confused with a minimum wage. While a minimum wage is enforced by law (what economists call a “price floor”), a living wage reflects what an employee actually needs to live. As a result, a community’s living wage is generally higher than their minimum wage.

In Saskatoon, for example, the living wage has been calculated at \$16.77 per hour for an individual working a minimum of 35 hours a week (Plante & Roddau, Forthcoming*). The business case for living wages maintains they increase productivity, decrease staff turnover, and increase purchasing from local businesses.

Governments can support the living wage movement by raising awareness about the advantages of living wages, and by talking about, and rewarding, businesses that choose to pay their employees a living wage. They can also set an example by ensuring that they, and any companies from which they procure services, pay a living wage to their employees.

*Plante, Charles and Stefan Roddau. Forthcoming. “The Business Case for a Living Wage in Saskatoon.” Saskatoon: Upstream, the United Way and the SPRP.

Measures:

- Percentage of households with incomes above MBM, with specific focus on First Nation and Métis households, people with disabilities, lone parent households, new immigrants (less than five years in Canada).

Housing and Homelessness

The lack of access to safe, affordable housing is not only a result of poverty; it is also a factor that contributes to continued poverty. When it comes to ensuring the lives of individuals and families have stability, housing is the foundation from which people can build. Having a safe and affordable place to call home makes it far easier for individuals experiencing poverty to succeed in education, training, and employment.

- 1) Work with partners to ensure housing is available for individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
 - The Province should work with stakeholders (including municipalities, businesses, the Federal Government, CBOs, people with lived experience) to implement a Saskatchewan-specific, province-wide Housing First model for those individuals and communities in immediate housing need.
 - Increase the supply of supportive housing for people who have multiple challenges in finding and maintaining housing.



PROMISING PRACTICE #2

Housing First is a successful and transformational housing model used in a number of Canadian communities to move people from homelessness to housing, enabling them to access services they require.

The **Saskatoon Housing First model** is an initiative led by the United Way of Saskatoon and Area together with Saskatoon’s Plan to End Homelessness partners since 2012. This model has already provided homes to 24 homeless people in Saskatoon as of April 2014. Housing First puts the priority not only to move people into housing, but also to address the issues that led to homelessness.

Data collected in the first six months of Saskatoon’s Housing First program shows a cost savings and significantly decreased demand for emergency and related services.

2) Increase the supply of safe, affordable, and adequate housing for individuals and families with low incomes.

- Continue to partner with communities to build appropriate housing in partnership with stakeholders, such as Government, CBOs, the private sector, municipalities, and individuals who are affected by housing insecurity.
- Explore innovative housing models that take advantage of unique opportunities in communities, ensuring that these initiatives provide for large families and people with special accommodation needs.
- Engage the Federal Government and First Nation governments in a process to increase the supply of safe, stable and affordable housing on-reserve.

Measures:

- Percentage of households in Core Housing Need⁸ with a focus on First Nation and Métis households, people with disabilities, lone parent households, new immigrants (less than five years in Canada).
- Percentage of households paying greater than 30 per cent of their income on shelter with a focus on First Nation and Métis households, people with disabilities, lone parent households, new immigrants (less than five years in Canada).
- Number of homeless individuals (as per municipal homelessness counts).

⁸ A household is said to be in core housing need if its housing falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability, standards and it would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three housing standards).

- Adequate housing is reported by its residents as not requiring any major repairs.
- Affordable dwellings cost less than 30 per cent of total before-tax household income.
- Suitable housing has enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of resident households, according to National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements.

Early Childhood Development

Investing in child care and early childhood development builds brighter futures for our province's children. Investing early builds capacity so that all Saskatchewan children can have greater opportunities to contribute to, and benefit from, our province's prosperity. Giving children access to high quality early childhood education provides their caregiver(s), who are also living in poverty, with the opportunity to pursue higher education and employment.

1) Implement a comprehensive early years action plan.

- Develop a dedicated mechanism to ensure Government ministries work closely together to implement and monitor early childhood development initiatives.
- Determine which families need help the most by measuring critical points in childhood development (in-hospital screening questionnaire, 18-month screening and the Early Development Instrument⁹).
- Work with the Federal Government and First Nation to ensure equitable early years supports for children living on-reserve, using a targeted approach to achieve the best possible outcomes.

⁹ The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a population measure, used to determine the health and wellness of young children and their ability to take advantage of learning opportunities in the school environment.

2) Support young children and their families by creating developmentally-appropriate and culturally-inclusive programs and services.

- Increase the number of family resource centres, parenting programs for vulnerable families, and family support programs, such as KidsFirst and Early Childhood Intervention Program.
- Increase the number and accessibility of Prekindergarten programs.
- Expand the use of community libraries as learning hubs where families can access tools and supports appropriate for all levels of reading.
- Prioritize supporting vulnerable children, such as the children of incarcerated persons and children in care or at risk of coming into contact with Child Protection Services.

PROMISING PRACTICE #3

Maternity Package

The Maternity Package is a kit granted by the Finnish social security institution Kela, to all expectant or adoptive parents who live in Finland or are covered by the Finnish social security system. The package contains children's clothes and other necessary items, such as diapers, bedding, cloth, gauze towels and child-care products. The box by itself with the mattress in the bottom can be baby's first bed. The first package was issued in 1938 to parents with a low income. Since that time, packages improved and became bigger. Mothers have a choice between taking the box, or a cash grant, currently set at 140 euros, but 95 per cent of Finnish mothers choose the box because it's worth much more. Maternity Package seems to be a very helpful way to encourage healthy childhood with the combination of keeping one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world.



3) Increase access to affordable quality child care.

- Redesign the Child Care Subsidy to ensure it covers costs and offers parents more opportunities to choose the best caregiver for their child.
- Invest in quality and culturally-inclusive child care options:
 - Establish an “accredited” child care category that provides non-licensed providers with training focused on early child development and safety.
 - Ensure child care options are available for parents who work non-traditional hours (for example, 24/7 child care).
- Strengthen professional development opportunities and supports available to all caregivers of children, including parents who choose to stay at home, and ensure they are culturally appropriate.

Measures:

- Number of children linked to appropriate supports based on data from the in-hospital birth questionnaire.
- Number of children linked to appropriate supports based on data from 18-month screening.
- Number of children linked to appropriate supports based on data from the Ministry of Education Early Development Instrument results.
- Demand for child care spaces, including the percentage of families desiring child care that are able to access/afford that care.

PROMISING PRACTICE #4

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission is collaborating with educators, supporting organizations, and Government agencies to create a **“Three Rs: Rights, Responsibilities, Respect”** citizenship education program. Students are challenged to understand their rights, act on their responsibilities as citizens, and demonstrate respect for others. Grade 12 graduates will be engaged, empathetic, enlightened, empowered, and ethical citizens.

Citizenship education:

- gives every K-12 Saskatchewan classroom curriculum resource materials, designed by teachers, for teachers,
- adds depth and context to existing preventative SHRC education programs, and
- builds a culture of respect across communities.



SASKATCHEWAN
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION

PROMISING PRACTICE #5

Pathways to Education was founded in 2001, and it operates nationally across Canada with programs in Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and British Columbia. It is an innovative approach to help young people in low-income

communities graduate from high school and make a successful transition into post-secondary education. This stay-in-school program helps to break the poverty cycle and address systemic barriers to education. The Pathways program offers a broad set of academic, financial and social supports to youth.

This program has been very successful. Results show that high school dropout rates decrease by as much as 70 per cent and post graduate participation rates increase by up to 300 per cent.

By 2016, Pathways will serve over 10,000 students and alumni each year.

Education and Training

Education and training are prerequisites for jobs, but they are not the only obstacles to employment. A successful strategy for poverty reduction will help people tackle their obstacles so that they graduate from education and training opportunities that will provide them with stable jobs and a bright future. Achieving a Grade 12 Diploma is a vital step in helping young people become prepared to compete in the labour market, and to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. However, for some First Nation and Métis people, this achievement seems out of reach, which is why the strategy will require improvements in education outcomes that are also culturally appropriate for those living both on- and off-reserve.

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.

- Support schools as community hubs to deliver health and social supports for vulnerable youth to help them complete their education.

- Help young adults and teen parents to go back to school by providing child care and health-related services in school communities.
- Enable smooth transitions for youth both entering and exiting foster care and custody to complete high school, enter post-secondary education or secure job training and employment opportunities.
- Partner with First Nations and invest in education on-reserve to help achieve the same graduation rates as young people off-reserve.
- Ensure that Saskatchewan's K-12 curriculum includes learning about Treaties, Indigenous Peoples' languages and customs, and the legacy of Residential Schools from teachers who are culturally competent.
- Promote plans that increase attendance rates for all students including parent/caregiver awareness.
- Improve school libraries so that students have access to better resources, employment programs, and connections to the provincial public library network.

PROMISING PRACTICE #6

Saskatchewan Reads was developed to improve student reading and is focused on grades 1-3. This province-wide reading strategy will improve students' academic success in all subject areas and increase graduation rates over the long-term.

Teachers will use high impact reading assessment, instruction, and intervention strategies in order to support all students in developing improved reading skills.

Provincial school divisions, French Immersion educators, the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, and several First Nation education authorities have adopted *Saskatchewan Reads* and are set to begin implementation in the 2015-2016 school year. The goal of this initiative is for 80 per cent of students to read at or above grade level by 2020.



- Assess Grade Three reading levels and take steps to address disparities for all children in the primary grades.
 - Increase supports for school nutrition so that children have the chance to eat and prepare healthy foods.
- 2) Develop supports for people with multiple barriers to get and keep a good job.
- Support high school transitions to post-secondary education and training.
 - Enhance literacy programs, adult basic education, lifelong learning and skills training.
 - Promote workplace literacy training, including technical (digital literacy), social (communications, relationships, conflict), financial, safety and workplace rights.
- 3) Help people get the education and training they need.
- Increase supports and services to help people get into post-secondary and skills training programs.
 - Increase investment in training/education in the North.
 - Increase financial support offered through Saskatchewan Assistance Program/Transitional Employment Allowance programs to adults who are attending full-time training programs.
 - Enhance employment training for inmates while they are incarcerated and after their release.
 - Provide training and start up support for entrepreneurs.
 - Increase support for college, university and skills training tuition fees.
 - Implement cultural competency training for all schools and workplaces.

Measures:

- Attendance rates for all students.
- Adult literacy rates.
- 3rd Grade reading levels.
- Grade 12 graduation rates of all students with a particular emphasis on First Nation students on- and off-reserve, youth on Social Assistance and youth in foster care.

Employment

One of the best ways for helping families or individuals get out of poverty is to provide access to well-paying, long-term employment. Numerous barriers have prevented certain groups from connecting to the many employment opportunities in our province. Hiring workers from under-represented groups builds human capital, and creates a broader tax base and a bigger labour pool. It also helps businesses to become more innovative and competitive.

- 1) Have the Province demonstrate leadership and use its influence to support greater inclusion of under-represented groups in the workforce.
 - Improve Provincial Government efforts in employing workers from under-represented groups in the workforce and accommodate flexible work arrangements.
 - Become a leader in retaining employees from under-represented groups and share best practices on retention with other employers.
 - Award extra points to bidders that can demonstrate a representative workforce and inclusive practices when Government is purchasing services or awarding construction contracts.

PROMISING PRACTICE #7

Iron Buffalo Centre is an example of an innovative employment and education hub that helps people to break the poverty cycle. This centre is located in Treaty Six Territory at Mistawasis First Nation. Iron Buffalo Centre provides education, training and employment programs and services for community members. Iron Buffalo Centre offers alternatives to Income Assistance in a holistic manner, with the aim of assisting clients in securing meaningful and substantive employment. Centre objectives are being met by pooling internal resources, and by developing and sustaining partnerships with Government departments, external agencies and institutions. Presently this centre serves 273 clients that are case managed and referred within Iron Buffalo Centre Service areas. Iron Buffalo Centre continues to work toward establishing a regional centre.



- 2) Provide the necessary supports to help people get long-term employment.
 - Structure employment programs to take into account barriers to employment, such as lack of access to stable and quality housing, child care and transportation.
 - Use a holistic approach when assessing people for their ability to work and identifying their best options and next steps in their career plan.
- 3) Work with employers on addressing barriers to employment and advancement for under-represented groups.
 - Make First Nation and Métis employment and career advancement a priority for Saskatchewan by helping businesses create workplaces where Aboriginal people will feel accepted and safe from discrimination.
 - Support high school and post-secondary programs that help students from under-represented groups move into the workplace.
 - Partner with employers to strengthen employment, staff retention and career advancement of under-represented groups.
- 4) Help communities sustain themselves and increase employment.
 - Partner with the First Nations and Federal Government to make sure reserves have needed supports in place, such as transportation for students who are leaving their reserve for education/training, employment, or licensed child care.
 - Increase opportunities for people to start and grow businesses that are tied to local economic growth.

Measures:

- Employment rate/participation rate for the general population and under-represented groups such as First Nation and Métis people, people with disabilities, lone parents, and new immigrants (less than five years in Canada).
- Percentage of long-term social assistance recipients with part-time employment earnings.

Health and Food Security

People living in poverty are more likely to experience ill health, compared to those who have their basic needs met. Ill health has been known to be both the cause and the effect of poverty. Focusing on health promotion, disease prevention, and improved access to health services can lead to improved health outcomes.

- 1) Target health promotion and disease prevention to prevent or reduce illnesses associated with poverty.
 - Target health promotion and disease prevention in communities with higher rates of poverty through health education and supports that make healthy choices the easy choice.
 - Continue to support community organizations that offer preventative health services.
 - Invest in community-oriented health models, including those delivered by community-based organizations tailored to local needs.



PROMISING PRACTICE #8

Community Mobilization Prince Albert (CMPA), also known as the Hub model, is an initiative that brings together many community leaders to improve community safety and wellness. The Hub is a forum where human service professionals (police, corrections, social work, education, and health) meet weekly to mitigate risk in a collaborative manner within 24-48 hours and connect individuals and families to services.

The Hub in Prince Albert is breaking down long-standing institutional silos. Limited but necessary information now has been shared between human service agencies to help frontline professionals to be more collaborative around the needs of their shared clients. In Prince Albert, approximately 89 per cent of people served by the Hub are connected or informed of services. This initiative has helped thousands of people with many difficult issues to access services they need.

- 2) Improve equity of access to services for people with illnesses related to poverty.
 - Make health equity reviews part of quality improvement initiatives to improve access and outcomes for individuals living in poverty.
 - Improve access to community-oriented primary health care teams for people with low incomes.
 - Invest in technology so that patients in rural and remote areas can easily access doctors and other health services.
 - Ensure transportation is not a barrier for those who require in-person care.
- 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.
 - Identify strategies that ensure Northern communities have access to healthy, affordable food.
 - Explore innovative ways to ensure underserved neighbourhoods have access to healthy and affordable food.
 - Encourage the development of local food production in the North.

Measures:

- Number of emergency room visits by targeted populations.
- Rates of chronic diseases such as Type II Diabetes, tuberculosis, HIV, and Hepatitis C.
- Number of food secure households.
- Percentage of targeted populations with a primary health care provider.

Conclusion

Poverty is an enormous challenge, but Saskatchewan is well positioned to take a leading role in reducing poverty. A province-wide effort, in partnership with the community, will be needed to make a positive and lifelong impact on the lives of people experiencing poverty. The Advisory Group believes that the recommendations in this document will provide guidance on short, medium and long-term actions for the Province to consider in developing a Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy.

We urge the Government to take swift action to develop and implement a Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy to reach the goal of a 50 per cent reduction in poverty by the end of 2020. We thank the Government of Saskatchewan for asking for our insight on this very important matter. We also thank the many individuals who told us their stories, shared their experiences and let us know how we can help reduce poverty in Saskatchewan.

Appendix A

Focus Area	Recommendations/Actions /Statements/Programs Relevant to Poverty Reduction	Strategy/Initiative
Housing/Homelessness	Enhance supportive housing options available in the community and ensure appropriate intensive team-based supports accompany their development.	Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan
Housing/Homelessness	Explore partnerships with the private sector and municipal governments to create safe and stable housing options for people living with mental health and addictions issues.	Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan
Housing/Homelessness	Sustain the existing housing stock through incentives to repair rental and homeowner units.	Housing Strategy
Housing/Homelessness	Incent the private sector to increase the supply of affordable rental housing for low- to moderate-income households.	Housing Strategy
Housing/Homelessness	Incent organizations to renovate existing shelter units to maintain the current supply and provide incentives to increase supply.	Housing Strategy
Housing/Homelessness	Work with Northern communities to identify housing needs and improve Saskatchewan Housing Corporation programs targeted to Northern residents.	Housing Strategy
Housing/Homelessness	Continue to collaborate with the federal Homelessness Partnering Secretariat and increase co-ordination with the Homeless Partnering Strategy Community Advisory Boards.	Housing Strategy
Housing/Homelessness	Improve access to subsidized rental housing for individuals and families in greatest need.	Housing Strategy
Housing/Homelessness	Support individuals with disabilities to remain in their homes.	Housing Strategy
Housing/Homelessness	Reduce homelessness for those at-risk of or those living with HIV, by developing a supportive housing model through Regional Intersectoral Committees and other inter-Ministerial forums such as the Human Services Integration Forum.	Saskatchewan HIV Strategy
Early Childhood Development	Increase access to pre-school programs for at-risk children.	Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan

Focus Area	Recommendations/Actions /Statements/Programs Relevant to Poverty Reduction	Strategy/Initiative
Early Childhood Development	The Joint Task Force recommends the Province and the Federal Government, working with First Nation and Métis authorities, articulate an integrated comprehensive Early Childhood Strategy both on- and off-reserve with attention to isolated communities.	Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People
Early Childhood Development	We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
Early Childhood Development	We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to recognize as a high priority the need to address and prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and to develop, in collaboration with Aboriginal people, FASD preventive programs that can be delivered in a culturally appropriate manner.	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
Early Childhood Development	Offer parenting supports to families struggling with addiction to help maintain stable families.	FASD Prevention Framework
Education/Training	The Joint Task Force recommends the Province utilize the provincial library system for an enhanced focus on literacy development in the early years with emphasis on Northern, rural and inner city communities with significant First Nations and Métis populations.	Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People
Education/Training	The Joint Task Force recommends that the Province continue to expand Adult Basic Education, particularly on-reserve.	Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People
Education/Training	The Joint Task Force recommends that the Provincial and Federal Governments articulate a strategy for First Nations and Métis people to facilitate one-stop access and supports for training and employment.	Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People
Education/Training	We call upon the Federal Government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
Education/Training	We call upon the Federal Government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
Education/Training	In partnership with First Nations and Métis stakeholders, develop a First Nations and Métis student achievement initiative.	Education Sector Strategic Plan

Focus Area	Recommendations/Actions /Statements/Programs Relevant to Poverty Reduction	Strategy/Initiative
Education/Training	Identify and implement a unified set of provincial high impact reading assessment, instruction, and intervention strategies in 2014-15.	Education Sector Strategic Plan
Employment	Work with the private sector to promote greater employment opportunities for people living with mental health and addictions issues.	Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan
Employment	The Joint Task Force recommends that the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with First Nations and Métis authorities, and the Province, develop an inclusive First Nations and Métis workplace framework that highlights essential characteristics for recruitment, retention and long-term employment of First Nations and Métis people.	Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People
Employment	The Joint Task Force recommends that the Provincial and Federal Governments articulate a strategy for First Nations and Métis people to facilitate one-stop access and supports for training and employment.	Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People
Employment	We call upon the Federal Government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
Health/Food Security	Facilitate improved access in northern, rural and remote communities through the use of technology, mobile services or other innovations.	Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan
Health/Food Security	Support the work of primary health care providers through team approaches that include ready access to mental health and addictions counselors, and consultant psychiatry.	Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan

Focus Area	Recommendations/Actions /Statements/Programs Relevant to Poverty Reduction	Strategy/Initiative
Health/Food Security	<p>We call upon the Federal Government, in consultation with Aboriginal peoples, to establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and to publish annual progress reports and assess long term trends. Such efforts would focus on indicators such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • infant mortality, • maternal health, • suicide, • mental health, • addictions, • life expectancy, • birth rates, • infant and child health issues, • chronic diseases, • illness • injury incidence, and • the availability of appropriate health services. 	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
Health/Food Security	Support adults who may have FASD to access adult diagnostic services and follow up supports with the goal of reducing alcohol-exposed pregnancies.	FASD Prevention Framework
Health/Food Security	Continue to enhance addictions prevention initiatives; and increase capacity and accessibility to treatment services through improved service delivery.	Saskatchewan HIV Strategy
Health/Food Security	Develop culturally responsive child development programs and supports that involve both mothers, fathers, and other significant family members.	FASD Prevention Framework
Multiple Areas	Use a cross-sector approach to better identify and address the needs of individuals and families who have significant mental health and/or addictions issues that may require more than a single type of service to provide early intervention, improve stability, and decrease the risk of adverse events.	Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan
Multiple Areas	Improve the cultural responsiveness of services for newcomers.	Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan
Multiple Areas	Improve the cultural responsiveness of services respecting the history of First Nation and Métis peoples.	Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan
Multiple Areas	The Joint Task Force recognizes the importance of poverty reduction and anti-racism as complementary strategies to improve outcomes in education and employment for First Nations and Métis peoples.	Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People

Appendix B

In Canada, there is no official poverty measure endorsed by the Federal Government. Rather, the Federal Government uses three measures that serve as proxies for an official “poverty line.” Statistics Canada produces these three main measures of low income: the Market Basket Measure (MBM), the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), and the Low Income Measure (LIM).

Market Basket Measure (MBM)

The Market Basket Measure (MBM) was developed by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) in the late 1990s to describe the disposable income needed to purchase a modest but adequate basket of goods and services (e.g., nutritious food, shelter, clothing, transportation, etc.) across Canada. The MBM uses a two-parent family with two children as its base and disposable income as a key measurement. The MBM is tailored to local costs for 48 regions across Canada, and is more attuned to local and regional differences than the LICO.

The Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO)

Introduced by Statistics Canada in 1968, the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) is the most commonly used and longest standing measure. The definition of the LICO is the level where an individual or family must spend 20 per cent more of their income on basic necessities (e.g., food, shelter, and clothing) than the average for their household size and community. Due to the length of time the measure has been in place, the LICO provides the most consistent data for year to year comparisons. One challenge with using the LICO is that the expenditure areas are more limited than the MBM and are not sensitive enough to account for the large variations in household spending across geographical areas.

Low-Income Measure (LIM)

The LIM is a purely relative measure of low income. Using this measurement, a household is considered to be low-income when their annual income falls below the threshold of 50 per cent of the median of the distribution for a given household size. Income is adjusted according to household needs determined by its size. The LIM is a common internationally used measurement and is easy to calculate and explain. Unlike the LICO and MBM, the LIM accounts for cost differences between sizes of families, but does not account for the costs of living in different communities.

