



Nunavut Poverty Progress Profile

OVERVIEW

As for many Aboriginal populations in Canada, the legacy of colonialism is one of many factors that contribute to poverty in Nunavut. Although the data is limited, it is clear that poverty in the territory is amongst the highest in the countryⁱ with the Inuit and other Aboriginal communities overrepresented among the homeless in Canada.¹

The Government of Nunavut and Inuit organization Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) engaged in a public engagement process to develop a poverty action plan (PAP) called *the Makimaniq Plan: A Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction (The Makimaniq Plan)* in February 2012. The PAP emphasizes Inuit values and working collaboratively to reduce poverty in the territory. In spring 2013, the Government of Nunavut passed Bill 59 – the *Collaboration for Poverty Reduction Act* (the Act). The Act reinforces the collaborative nature of the approach to poverty reduction in Nunavut, mandates several accountability measures and addresses poverty reduction funding for the territory.

Backgrounder: The Makimaniq Plan Development

Nunavut's PAP was developed in a highly collaborative process over two years.² The Government of Nunavut initiated the project in partnership with Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat.³ The approach for the PAP was to address social exclusion, which was identified as a root cause of poverty in the territory. In Nunavut, social exclusion involves a number of factors, including a language barrier, issues in access to education, the digital divide and the lasting impact of colonialism.⁴

The vision for the PAP was to promote a higher, sustainable quality of life and improve the standard of living for those in need. As well, communities would become more self-reliant according to Inuit societal values.⁵

To bring this vision to reality, the PAP's development included extensive public engagement resulting in six areas of focus:ⁱⁱ

- Collaboration and Community Participation
- Health and Wellbeing
- Education and Skills Development
- Food Security
- Housing and Income Support
- Community and Economic Development⁶

ⁱ Statistics Canada does not collect or compile data directly measuring poverty in Nunavut. A report prepared for the Nunavut Roundtable on Poverty Reduction includes poverty-related indicators with data that is available for the territory, and the results reflect the magnitude of poverty in Nunavut. For example, high school graduation rates are the lowest in Canada, life expectancy rates are markedly lower than the Canadian average and median income is the second lowest in the country. For more information, see endnote 16.

ⁱⁱ See Appendix A for more information on the six themes in the PAP.

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Work began on the PAP in October 2010 and included the Government of Nunavut, NTI, individuals, Inuit organizations, municipalities, community organizations and the business community. In fall 2011, the PAP was fully developed.

Progress to Date

One of the most significant breakthroughs for Nunavut’s PAP was the passing of the *Collaboration for Poverty Reduction Act* in May 2013. The Nunavut Legislative Assembly unanimously supported the Act. It requires the territory’s government to work collaboratively with NTI, Inuit organizations, other governments, non-government organizations and businesses on the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (NRPR) to implement the PAP and develop a five-year poverty reduction action plan (PRAP).⁷ The Act also establishes a poverty reduction fund. The fund is intended to promote collaboration in the implementation of the plans and support community-driven initiatives and those of local networks of community organizations that are engaged in poverty reduction.⁸

There has been other progress related to the PAP, particularly regarding the housing, health, food security and educational needs of Nunavummiut. A housing and homelessness strategy is in progress,⁹ and the federal government has announced plans to invest \$100 million for additional housing in the territory.¹⁰ The Government of Nunavut has begun facility renovation and development projects to improve and expand healthcare options in the region.¹¹ To combat high rates of food insecurity in the territory, a food security strategy is being developed.¹² The Government of Nunavut is investing nearly \$2 million into educational programs to promote adult education and over \$1 million in federal funding is being invested in train more early childhood educators.¹³ As well, most initiatives emphasize the collaborative and community building goals of the PAP.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Proxy Indicators of Poverty in Nunavut (unofficial measurement tools)ⁱⁱⁱ

Indicator	Year of latest available data	Nunavut	Canada
Life expectancy at birth, males ¹⁴	2007 - 2009	72.5	78.8
Life expectancy at birth, females ¹⁵	2007 - 2009	78.2	83.3
High school graduation rate	2010	39.5% ¹⁶	75% (2008-2009) ¹⁷
Household food insecurity	2011	36.4% ¹⁸	12% ¹⁹
Inadequately housed	2009 - 2010	49% ^{20 iv}	13.5% (2009) ²¹
Population living in public housing	2010	57% ²²	– (approx. 6%) ^{23 v}
Welfare recipients ²⁴	2011	13,197 (39.3%)	–

* 2012: PAP came into place

* – data not available

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistics Canada does not collect or compile data directly measuring poverty in Nunavut, such as the Low Income Cut-off (LICO), Low-Income Measurement (LIM), or Market Basket Measure (MBM). The discrepancy between average and median incomes indicates income inequality.

^{iv} This represents dwellings that were below housing standards – inadequate and/or crowded.

^v This represents the percentage of housing that is public housing, not the percentage of population living in public housing.

Government of Nunavut's Success Indicators

Nunavut's PAP does not explicitly outline targets or indicators of success. However, the Act includes several accountability measures for the plan. One of the most significant is the provision of a new minister who will be responsible for poverty reduction in the territory.²⁵ The minister will be responsible for ensuring that the PAP and the five-year action plan are available online for the public.²⁶ As part of the five-year plan, a definition of poverty in Nunavut will be collaboratively developed, including consideration of Inuit culture and encouraging self-reliance and cultural and social well-being.²⁷ The Act also mandates that the minister be the principal representative of the Government of Nunavut at the NRPR²⁸ and collaborate with members of the Roundtable to develop indicators of poverty reduction.²⁹ As well, the minister must monitor whether the budget, programs, initiatives and policies of the Government of Nunavut are consistent with both plans and actually result in poverty reduction based on the specified indicators.³⁰ The minister is also required to make annual reports regarding poverty reduction to Nunavut's legislative assembly.³¹

Views from Outside the Nunavut Government and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

The collaborative nature of the PAP has captured the attention of community members and interested onlookers. Commentators have acknowledged that the Government of Nunavut has taken a novel approach to poverty reduction by emphasizing collaboration and public engagement.³² There has been speculation that some ministers and officials may doubt the effectiveness of Nunavut's collaborative strategy, considering it a risk factor for gridlock and bad decision-making.³³ However, this has not dampened proponents' calls for its use elsewhere. Since the collaborative process will heighten transparency and government accountability as well as include communities in the planning and delivery of plans, some experts say it is worth considering by other governments in Canada.³⁴ Community members have also expressed enthusiasm about the collaborative approach. In particular, the effort made to hear and understand the voices of elders in the community during this process has been applauded, as they are considered the guardians of cultural values and principles.³⁵

Despite widespread approval for the poverty reduction strategy, limited progress in some areas, particularly food security, has garnered criticism. The year the PAP came into place, the exorbitantly high cost of food in the territory made national headlines.³⁶ The UN Right to Food Envoy visited Canada and found the rates of food insecurity in the region unacceptable.³⁷ Government officials, including at least one Nunavut MP, denied there were food security issues for Aboriginals in the north.³⁸ In fact, 70 percent of Inuit homes were food insecure in 2012.³⁹ Community activists have organized protests and developed online social media platforms in response noting the ineffectiveness of the current Nutrition North Program to ensure greater access to food.⁴⁰

Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

- 1. Human Rights:** The PAP and the Act do not situate poverty elimination clearly within a human rights framework.
- 2. Income Support:** Over half of Nunavummiut access income and public housing support, which help them to meet their basic needs.⁴¹ Nunavut's Income Support program is meant to be a last resort to help individuals and families have a basic standard of living while encouraging them to become

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more independent through counseling and training.⁴² However, more people are on welfare in Nunavut than any other part of the country. In 2011, 39.3 percent of Nunavut's population received some form of assistance through the program.⁴³ All income support recipients must participate in the Productive Choices program in which helps them access community-based opportunities in wellness, learning, training and work experience to gain and maintain increased financial independence.⁴⁴ The PAP commits to improving the income support system and increasing understanding of how the system works among Nunavummiut.⁴⁵

- 3. Housing:** In a 2009-2010 survey, it was revealed that most housing occupied by Nunavummiut is classified as public.⁴⁶ At that time, public housing had the highest proportion of dwellings that were below housing standards.⁴⁷ As well, one out of five people aged 15 years and over were on a waiting list for public housing.⁴⁸ In support of the PAP's goals, the Nunavut Housing Corporation announced that there would be adjustments to the rent payment scheme for public housing. Its structure previously dissuaded people from working because of significant increases in rent when they became employed.⁴⁹ In fall 2013, former Nunavut premier, Eva Aariak, indicated that the Government of Nunavut and NTI are working on developing a long-term housing and homelessness strategy.⁵⁰ As well, the federal government announced that \$100 million would be provided to fund additional housing in Nunavut in spring 2013.⁵¹ Estimates are that 1,672 new public housing units will be needed by 2025.⁵²
- 4. Education:** The Government of Nunavut offers the Young Parents Stay Learning daycare subsidy to assist young parents in school with childcare costs.⁵³ Nunavut's 2013-2014 budget priorities include \$1.9 million for the Pathway for Adult Secondary School program, which helps adults in Nunavut to complete high school.⁵⁴ The Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre is partnering with the Nunavut Territorial Parenting Advisory Committee, Nunavut Literacy Council and a number of other stakeholders to develop, administer and evaluate a parenting support program in English and Inuktitut that is grounded in Inuit cultural values.⁵⁵
- 5. Early Childhood Education and Care:** The Government of Nunavut offers a daycare subsidy for low-income families to enable caregivers to attend work or school.⁵⁶ There will also be an increase in the early childhood education training in the territory. Nunavut Artic College will be using \$1.1 million in federal funding over the next two years to expand early childhood education training and support and enhance culturally sensitive programming.⁵⁷
- 6. Health:** The Government of Nunavut relocated the Akausisarvik Mental Health Treatment Centre to a newly renovated location in an effort to improve and increase mental health services to clients. A total of \$2.4 million was invested into the project, enabling 24-hour a day services, seven days a week. The government also committed an additional \$860,000 to expand the mental health program at the facility in 2013.⁵⁸ As well, the Government of Nunavut is considering options to open new mental health and addiction treatment facilities in Rankin Inlet and Cambridge Bay.⁵⁹
- 7. Employment Support:** The unemployment rate in Nunavut is 14.2 percent, double that of the rest of Canada.⁶⁰ The PAP highlights the need for broader, flexible workforce development programs and commits to exploring formal and informal avenues for workplace education, mentoring, and development programs. An emphasis is put on teaching traditional Inuit skills alongside oral language and literacy skills.⁶¹ The mining sector offers the greatest opportunity for full-time jobs in the future, however, without the requisite skill set (literacy and numeracy) the low-skilled jobs may not provide enough to draw some individuals off of welfare.⁶²

- 8. Food Security:** Nunavut has the highest rate of household food insecurity in the country, but there has been some movement on this front.⁶³ Food insecurity is a social and public health problem that exists in households that struggle with inadequate access to food due to financial hardship.⁶⁴ In response, Government departments, Inuit organizations, and community groups formed the Nunavut Food Security Coalition. The Coalition is developing a territorial food security strategy and set its priorities during a symposium in Iqaluit in January 2013. Among the subjects addressed were policies and legislation, local food production and life skills.⁶⁵

THE BOTTOM LINE

Nunavut's PAP has received significant attention for its collaboration approach. During its development and the early stages of its implementation, the emphasis has remained on reaching out to communities and public engagement. As well, the Act reinforces the collaborative nature of poverty reduction in the territory. The unique social and economic history surrounding poverty in Aboriginal communities is a contributing factor to this approach as is the importance of community development, which is woven throughout the PAP. Notably, former premier, Eva Aariak, asserted that the PAP's collaborative approach is meant to help restore self-reliance in Inuit communities.⁶⁶ This approach has been met with approval and optimism in Nunavut and elsewhere. In fact, experts outside of Nunavut suggest that solutions for homelessness policy, programs and services aimed at Aboriginals should be culturally sensitive and collaborative,⁶⁷ such as the approach used in Nunavut.

The PAP and the Act are still fairly new. There have been some directly related developments, however, clear progress remains to be seen in some areas, particularly in regard to income and employment support. Though the collaborative nature of the plan has received widespread support, a few years of evaluation post-implementation will allow for more critical analysis of Nunavut's poverty reduction efforts.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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APPENDIX A

PAP Components and Highlights

The PAP includes six major themes and priority actions for the first 18 months:

1.) Collaboration and Community Participation (Inuit value *piliriqatigiingniq* or *ikajuqtiigiingniq* - working together and helping one another)

- Improvement of the working relationships between the Government of Nunavut, NTI and Regional Inuit Associations
- Increased support for community action
- Enact poverty reduction legislation⁶⁸

2.) Healing and Wellbeing

- Support community-driven actions through the creation of ongoing community wellness plans
- Further incorporate local resources in addressing mental health and addictions
- Create a territory interagency committee to better integrate and administer wellness-related program funding⁶⁹

3.) Education and Skills Development

- The development of a comprehensive early childhood education plan
- Increased support for working parents
- Workforce development⁷⁰

4.) Food Security

- The establishment of a “Nunavut Food Security Coalition”
- Enhancement of healthy breakfast and lunch programs in schools
- Increased support for community-driven food security initiatives⁷¹

5.) Housing and Income Support

- Improvements to the income support system and related supports available to those who access income support programs
- Increased collective understanding of the income support system overall and clarification of specific policies and programs
- Exploration of affordable housing options through cooperation and partnership
- Multi-party inquiry and public dialogue on the history of housing in Nunavut⁷²

6.) Community and Economic Development

- Ensure that community wellness planning is an integral component of economic development
- Increase daycare services to support parents’ ability to access employment and training
- Support capacity building for NGOs at the local level⁷³

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