



Manitoba Poverty Progress Profile

OVERVIEW

Established in 2009, Manitoba's Poverty Action Plan (PAP) "celebrates ten years of reducing poverty in Manitoba."¹ The PAP recognizes that poverty is complex and encompasses social exclusion, and that combating poverty requires a multi-faceted approach. The PAP builds on existing programs and initiates new ones to strengthen the four pillars of the PAP framework, bringing them all together under one plan. The PAP includes programs addressing poverty prevention, reduction, alleviation, and the transition out of poverty,² and was recently anchored by poverty legislation in June 2011 (only the third province to implement such legislation).

Plan Components and Highlights

The following four pillars reflect Manitoba's will for "a strong and prosperous Manitoba for all"³:

1. Safe, affordable housing in supportive communities

- Homelessness strategy based on Housing First principle⁴
- RentAid enhancements
- Homeless Outreach Mentor (HOM) program
- Funding for improvements in cities and communities
- A new law to combat drugs⁵

2. Education, jobs and income support

- Reforms to income support to incentivize returning to work through transitional benefits⁶
- Increase in the Northern Allowance
- Targeted job search support, skills training, high school education, and literacy programs for youth, adults, and Northern residents⁷
- Increase in the minimum wage⁸

3. Strong, healthy families

- Mother and child support programs and family resource centers⁹
- Children's Opticare program
- Increased funding for additional child care spaces¹⁰
- Continuation of the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative (NHFI)¹¹

4. Accessible, co-ordinated services

- Enhanced accessibility of the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program
- Increased collaboration of a number of stakeholders to run programs (such as NHFI)
- More stable funding for community non-profit organizations¹²

Community Engagement in Plan Development and Implementation

The PAP was drafted by the provincial government with limited community involvement. Consultations with partners from a variety of sectors took place *after* the strategy was issued to “ensure that [it] makes sense.”¹³ In the two years after the PAP was launched in May 2009, community consultations were held and feedback was given that the PAP should be made into law.¹⁴

The PAP and progress newsletters point to the importance of collaboration among multiple levels of government and with community-based non-profits for the strategy’s success.

Manitoba’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Act – (enacted June 2011)

Purpose

To establish the government’s responsibility to implement a long-term strategy to reduce poverty and increase social inclusion, including to establish indicators to measure progress and provide annual progress reports to the public.

Key provisions

- Outlines the seven areas of need that the PAP must address (education, training, employment, income support, housing, communities, and family), stipulates that the PAP must be targeted at groups especially at risk of poverty, and addresses that the PAP should be coordinated across government.
- Establishes the formation of a Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Committee that consists of Ministers, a member of the Premier’s Advisory Council on Education, Poverty, and Citizenship (who is a regular citizen), and three community members.
- Committee provides advice on the content of the PAP, progress indicators, and proposed programs or policies. The Committee monitors PAP implementation, including coordination across government and community involvement, but is not responsible for distributing funds.
- Requires the government to include the PAP in the annual budget. Requires the Minister and Committee to prepare and table an annual report on PAP implementation and progress. Requires the PAP to be reviewed and updated every five years.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Statistical Indicators of Poverty in Manitoba (unofficial measurement tools)

	LICO¹⁵ <i>Low Income Cut-off After-tax</i>	LIM¹⁶ <i>Low-Income Measurement</i>	MBM¹⁷ <i>Market Basket Measure</i>	Food Bank Usage¹⁸	Welfare Caseloads¹⁹
1995	163,000, 15.3%	133,000, 12.5%	-	-	-
2000	144,000, 13.4%	155,000, 14.4%	117,000, 10.8%	-	59,026
2005	139,000, 12.7%	161,000, 14.7%	-	46,161, 3.9%	37,933
2009	102,000, 8.9%	175,000, 15.3%	111,000, 9.7%	47,925, 3.9%	59,734
2010	-	-	-	57,966, 4.7%	-

* PAP came into place

**It is important to note that many income-based indicators are not available on reserves, which excludes a significant portion of Manitoba's Aboriginal population from reported data.*

The Manitoba Government's Success Indicators

Indicated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act as of March 26, 2012:

1. Safe, Affordable Housing in Supportive Communities

- Average number of persons receiving coordinated home care services; Total units of social and affordable housing supported by Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation; New Households served through Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation programs and services; Households in core housing need

2. Education, Jobs and Income Support

- High school graduation rate; Average weekly earnings; Employment rate; Minimum wage rate; Low income rate; Income inequality; Post-secondary education participation; Potential years of life lost by income quintile

3. Strong, Healthy Families

- Early development instrument scores; Number of children in care; Teen birth rate; Prevalence of chronic diseases by income quintile; Continuity of physician care; Number of children in care; Sense of community belonging

4. Accessible, Co-ordinated Services

- Participation in adult learning programs; Availability of child care; Number of people using Access Centres

Progress to Date

Historically, Manitoba has had one of the highest overall poverty rates and child poverty rates in the country, and thus has emphasized improving the welfare of children and families for years with some success between 2000-2009.²⁰ However, in 2008, 10.2% of children living in families with one full-time working parent were still poor; Manitoba was the second worst province in this regard.²¹ It is also

Manitoba Poverty Progress Profile
Canada Without Poverty, May 2012

important to note that statistics do not include children living on First Nation reserves, the inclusion of whom would likely drive up the poverty rate even higher.

Nevertheless, with an annual investment of more than \$744 million in 2009, including \$212 million in new investments, the PAP seems to be moving in the right direction.²² In 2009, the Canadian Social Development Review criticised Manitoba for having innovative, community-based approaches to reducing poverty, but not enough funding.²³

Views From Outside the Manitoba Government

Civil society organizations have widely criticized the PAP for its lack of clear plans for action and implementation, including a lack of targets, benchmarks, timelines, and reporting mechanisms. Without these elements of a well-defined action plan, measuring success is difficult and the real strength of the plan remains to be seen.²⁴ The PAP also does not increase welfare rates, which have been steadily declining in the province since 1992.²⁵ Major civil society organizations, such as the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives- Manitoba, and the Siloam Mission, call on the government to increase these “severely inadequate”²⁶ social assistance rates and index the rates to the cost of living. Similarly, while the minimum wage has increased under the PAP, it has not been indexed nor adjusted annually to average wages,²⁷ which must happen to ensure that it keeps pace with the cost of living.

Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

- 1. Human Rights:** Neither the PAP nor the progress reports situate poverty elimination clearly within a human rights framework. The Act only legalizes the requirement of having a PAP, rather than legalizing the requirement of eliminating poverty as a basic human right. However, the first newsletter does draw attention to Canada’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and invites citizens to explore the Convention’s impact on the province by contacting the Disability Issues Office.²⁸
- 2. Income Support:** The government committed to modest improvements in specific areas of income support. In 2011, about 1,700 Northern residents receiving income assistance saw a five percent increase in their Northern Allowance,²⁹ and low-income students can now continue to receive their full income support benefits while pursuing higher education.³⁰ However, the PAP contains no commitment to increase or index income support rates. The government committed to making it easier for people to navigate the social security system through creating a new online tool called ServiceLink and a series of plain-language brochures.³¹
- 3. Housing:** The government committed to affordable housing, including a long-term housing vision and a Homeless Strategy based on the ‘housing first’ principle. In 2009, the government invested \$387 million in social housing³² but did not explicitly state what the expected results of this

Manitoba Poverty Progress Profile
Canada Without Poverty, May 2012

investment would be. The government invested an additional \$1.6 million in enhancements to RentAid, which is a program that helps people with disabilities, seniors, and low-income individuals and families pay their rent. This investment should result in 10,500 households on EIA and 2,000 low-income individuals/families benefitting from the supplements.³³

- 4. Education:** The 2009 PAP situates commitments to higher education and adult basic education and literacy within the broader goal of improving job readiness and employability.³⁴ The government has invested \$19 million annually in Manitoba's Adult Learning Centers (ALCs) and Adult Literacy Programs (ALPs). As a result, about 8000 adult learners attend ALCs, completing an average of 10,000 high school courses and earning 1000 high school diplomas.³⁵ The PAP makes minimal commitments to improving K to 12 education.
- 5. Early Childhood Education and Care:** The government committed to supporting the child care agenda through investing \$21.3 million in 2,100 new child care spaces. The government will continue the Manitoba Child Benefit, which gives up to \$480 per child per year for low-income families to pay for their children's needs, and reached 8,600 children in 2011.³⁶ Families receiving the Benefit will be eligible for a new Children's Opticare program, which is expected to benefit 1,665 children each year.³⁷ The government also committed to continue the funding of programs for family support and early intervention. Reported results include the creation of one new Family Resource Center serving 150 families (with three additional centers committed),³⁸ support to community non-profit organizations delivering Healthy Baby programs,³⁹ a child recreation pilot program serving 40 families,⁴⁰ and the development of a provincial parent resource website and hotline.⁴¹
- 6. Health Care:** The government committed to continued support for the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative (NHFI) and to creating a Healthy Foods Action Fund.⁴² As of winter 2011, results include over 73 garden beds cared for by students, 400 people provided with energy efficient freezers to store healthy foods, and over 600 gardens planted during the last planting season.⁴³ NHFI is active in 70 communities, and the affiliated Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba (CNCM) provides free healthy breakfast and snack programs to 130 schools reaching 15,000 students.⁴⁴ The government also invested in a new addictions center, which is set to open in 2013 with 68 treatment beds and a number of mental health and addictions services.⁴⁵
- 7. Employment Support:** In the 2009 PAP, the government committed to their *Rewarding Work* approach. *Rewarding Work* incentivizes work through transitional benefits (which extend rent and health benefits one to two years after leaving income support for work) and supporting initiatives to improve the level of employment for low-income people.⁴⁶ The government also committed to job readiness programs (some targeting Northern residents and persons with disabilities), and regular increases in the minimum wage, which is set to reach \$10/hr in 2011.

- 8. Community Building/Investment:** The PAP committed to increased funding for the *Neighbourhoods Alive!* program.⁴⁷ The 2011 budget announced an additional investment of \$450,000 annually for the next four years for five community-led revitalization projects in Winnipeg.⁴⁸ The government has also committed to more stable, multi-year, and multi-program funding for community non-profit organizations through a two-year plan announced in April 2011. Expected results are that community non-profits will spend less time on paperwork and more time delivering services that support the PAP.⁴⁹

THE BOTTOM LINE

Manitoba's PAP and Act move the province in the right direction, but the lack of concrete targets, timelines, and clear programmatic plans make it difficult to hold the government accountable and evaluate success. The PAP also lacks gender diversity and analysis, and while the Act acknowledges that poverty affects some groups of people more than others, it does not name these groups, thus failing to hold the government explicitly responsible to them. Nevertheless, the government has made some positive commitments in affordable housing, expanding childcare spaces, and investing in *Neighbourhoods Alive!*. Urgently, the government needs to respond to civil society's repeated call for increasing social assistance rates to match the current cost of living and should situate poverty elimination within the human rights framework.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Manitoba Poverty Progress Profile
Canada Without Poverty, May 2012

ENDNOTES

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- ⁴ Ibid, 4.
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- ⁶ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs, "All Aboard: Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy: Issue 2," (Winter 2011), 4, <http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/allaboard/>
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- ¹² Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (Summer 2011), 2, 7, 9.
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- ¹⁴ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (Summer 2011), 6.
- ¹⁵ Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 202-0208.
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- ¹⁷ Ibid
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- ³¹ Ibid, 2.
- ³² Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (2009), 4.
- ³³ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (Summer 2011), 2.
- ³⁴ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (2009), 5.
- ³⁵ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs, "All Aboard: Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy: Issue 1," (Spring 2010), 5. <http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/allaboard/>
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- ³⁸ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (Winter 2011), 7.

Manitoba Poverty Progress Profile
Canada Without Poverty, May 2012

³⁹ Ibid, 3, 5.

⁴⁰ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (Spring 2010), 3.

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⁴² Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (2009), 3, 5.

⁴³ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (Winter 2011), 8.

⁴⁴ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (Summer 2011), 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁶ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (2009), 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁸ Manitoba Family and Consumer Affairs (Summer 2011), 8, 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 9.