



Saskatchewan Poverty Progress Profile

OVERVIEW

Currently, Saskatchewan does not have a provincial poverty strategy in place. Employment is booming, but poverty remains a sore point in the social fabric of the province. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), 64% of First Nations Children are living below the poverty line. This is compared to the 16% of non-indigenous children in the province below the poverty line.¹ With trends of high poverty rates among marginalized groups in Saskatchewan, and the third highest provincial child poverty rates in Canada, it is clear that Saskatchewan needs a poverty strategy. The government has put forward a poverty program report (PPR), *From Dependence to Independence: Actions and Investments for Saskatchewan's Most Vulnerable People*. While this report contends that the government has an anti-poverty plan, there is no official strategy in place. Community organizations in Saskatchewan are building momentum for a poverty strategy and encouraging the provincial government to take steps to implement a plan.

Action on the Ground

The government of Saskatchewan has suggested that their PPR *From Dependence to Independence: Actions and Investments for Saskatchewan's Most Vulnerable People* represents their provincial anti-poverty action plan. However, the report lacks many of the features of a provincial poverty action plan including community engagement, clear goals, targets and timelines or an implementation strategy. The report also does not use a human rights framework as a tool.

The report is separated into four pillars. The first pillar addresses sustaining a strong economy and the government's overall financial direction. The second pillar ensures that citizens have disposable income and addresses minimum wage increases and tax credits. The third pillar identifies areas where the government seeks to remove barriers for people to attain "independence". This includes areas such as increased childcare spaces, sexual assault and family services and low cost housing. The final pillar of the report describes financial support for what they identify as vulnerable populations.

The report fails to address the distinctive ways in which poverty affects certain marginalized groups. For example, according to the CCPA in 2005, 25.8% of individuals with aboriginal ancestry in the province were living below the LICO-AT.² Despite these alarming poverty rates for Aboriginal persons, the report focuses on getting aboriginal people off of welfare rather than looking at other systemic factors that would contribute to these alarming statistics.³ Overall, the report focuses on reducing poverty by encouraging low income persons to gain employment rather than addressing the systemic issues that contribute to poverty.

The Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition

Community organizations, such as the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition (SAPC), are encouraging the province to adopt a provincial anti-poverty plan. The SAPC is a group of concerned citizens and community based organizations that have come together to address the causes and effects of poverty among the residents of Saskatoon. They are committed to promoting more community involvement and input into a long-term anti-poverty strategy. SAPC’s strategy “Nothing About Us Without US” supports the idea that persons living in poverty can make a meaningful contribution to the creation of a provincial anti-poverty plan.

In April 2013, The SAPC co-hosted a shared community planning day with Poverty Free Saskatchewan and The Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership entitled “How We Talk Together About Eliminating Poverty”. The event enabled anti-poverty advocates and people with lived experiences of poverty to come together and discuss strategies for the elimination of poverty in the province.

Poverty Free Saskatchewan

Poverty Free Saskatchewan (PFS) is a network of businesses, individuals, organizations, individuals and governments dedicated to addressing poverty in Saskatchewan. In October 2012, PFS conducted consultations across the province. Over 170 people attended the sessions where poverty elimination strategies were discussed. The issues and solutions raised in these consultations will be used by the community to create a comprehensive poverty elimination plan.⁴

In prior years, PFS created a [strategy to eliminate](#) poverty that focuses on accountability, community involvement and public involvement.

*See our [2012 Poverty Progress Profile](#) for more detail.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Statistical Indicators of Poverty in Saskatchewan (unofficial measurement tools)

	LICO⁵ Low Income Cut-off After-tax	LIM⁶ Low-Income Measure	MBM⁷ Market Basket Measure	Food Bank Usage⁸	Household Food Insecurity⁹	% of Population on Social Assistance¹⁰
2005	99,000, 10.8%	164,000, 17.8%	115,000, 12.5%	24,600, 2.5%	-	4.9%
2008	69,000, 7.3%	139,000, 14.7%	98,000, 10.3%	17,751, 1.7%	9.7%	5.3%
2009	68,000, 7.1%	113,000, 11.7%	99,000, 10.3%	18,878, 1.84%	8.2%	4.8%
2010	63,000, 6.4%	116,000, 11.9%	99,000,	22,662,	9.2%	5.1%

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			10.1%	2.2%		
2011	52,000, 5.3%	112,000, 11.3%	97,000, 9.8%	25,433, 2.4%	11.8%	5.2%
2012	-	-	-	24,621, 2.3%	12.5%	5.1%

* - data not available

Views From Outside the Saskatchewan Government

The release of *From Dependence to Independence* in September 2012 has made a clear statement on where the Saskatchewan government stands in regards to a poverty plan – they believe they have one. What it has also done open the door to criticism, which has in turn illustrated why this is not the case. Leading the conversation is the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives who released a counter-report entitled, “*Saskatchewan’s Anti-Poverty Plan, From Dependence to Independence: Does It Measure Up?*” which offered an analysis of established provincial poverty plans in comparison to the programs referenced by the Saskatchewan government. The conclusion was simple – the government report does not constitute a poverty plan.

The CCPA report pointed to a number of critical pieces missing in the government report, and contends that the narrative paints a picture of the ‘dependent poor’.¹¹ The ‘plan’ that the government speaks to also lacks key components such as benchmarks, goals, a reporting function, an overarching strategy, reporting structure, legislation and human rights principles. Most importantly, there has been no consultation with people living in poverty or community members in regards to their needs.¹² Citing Canada Without Poverty’s own compilation of provincial/territorial poverty plans, the CCPA notes that without developing these areas further it is difficult to label the government report as a strategy.

Another area of critique is in regards to housing. While the government has touted progress in this area, their current programs fail to address some of the growing concerns for individuals who require housing support such as shelters; Statistics Canada’s Transition Home Survey revealed that “In 2012, Saskatchewan had 2,965 children admitted to shelters compared to 2,668 women. By comparison, Canada had 62,594 women and 36,105 children admitted to shelters”.¹³ It has also been noted that Saskatchewan is facing high housing costs, increased homelessness and rising inequality.¹⁴

Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

- 1. Human Rights:** The Saskatchewan government does not reference Human Rights legislation in regards to eliminating poverty. The PPR does not address the goal of eliminating poverty and does not consider a human rights framework in relation to their poverty programs.
- 2. Income Support:** In 2012, 5.1% of Saskatchewan’s population was receiving welfare benefits. The Throne Speech of 2013 does not mention changes or improvements to the general welfare program, the Saskatchewan Assistance Program (SAP). The PPR mentions prior changes to the SAP including

an increase to the shelter allowance cost and transportation subsidies, however there is no consideration of future improvements to SAP.

The Throne Speech also identified rate increases to Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) program benefits. This includes the \$200 per month benefits increase as of June 2012 for single individuals and \$230 for couples with the goal of increasing this amount by \$350 and \$400 per month respectively over four years. People in residential care received an additional \$40 per month in June 2012 in respect of their four year commitment to increase benefits by \$150 per month. Income support benefits from both the SAP and SAID programs remain far too low to raise people out of poverty. The Market Basket Measure rate for a family of four in Saskatoon in 2011 was \$34,897 per year.¹⁵ In 2012, two parent families with two children could receive a maximum of \$24,578 in SAP benefits.¹⁶

- 3. Housing:** According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) “housing prices have risen to unprecedented highs, the availability of low cost housing has reached historic lows and homelessness is a growing public issue”.¹⁷ The rental vacancy rate in Saskatchewan for 2012 was 2.3%, below the national average vacancy rate of 2.8%.¹⁸

In the PPR and the Throne Speech, the provincial government announced that their \$344 million investment will result in 12,600 new units and 24,000 repaired and updated units by 2016. However, as CCPA states “the report doesn’t establish a base year for statistical comparison, there are no solutions for short-term housing needs, and no plans for achieving the five year target.”¹⁹ According to the PPR, the government increased spending for emergency shelters, increased available emergency shelter space in Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert and invested \$1 million in capital funding for the construction of a youth emergency shelter.

- 4. Education:** The Throne Speech identified the Student First approach to education, which will build on successes that have already been achieved in schools.²⁰ This approach includes consulting with teachers, administrators, parents and students. The Throne Speech also outlined that more than 40,000 students have received part of their tuition back through the Saskatchewan Graduate Retention Program and the Student Advantage Scholarship has benefited over 4,500 students in the 2012-2013 academic year.

The PPR outlines a number of programs that are aimed at transitioning youth into the workforce and providing job skills training. However, there is a lack of focus on improving provincial literacy, adult education, and the provincial student loans program in the PPR.²¹

- 5. Early Childhood Education and Care:** According to the Throne Speech, the government of Saskatchewan has increased the number of licensed childcare spaces by 48% since 2007. Currently, there are more than 13,700 licensed childcare spaces²² in comparison to 7,910 in 2004.²³ In the PPR the government committed to creating 2,000 additional licensed childcare spaces over four years beginning in 2012-2013. Saskatchewan remains the province with the lowest share of regulated childcare spaces at 10.5%.²⁴ The government has also committed an additional \$0.7 million of new

funding to Child Care Parent Subsidies, which brings the total annual funding of the program to \$18.2 million.

- 6. Health Care:** The 2009 goal of improving timely access to healthcare in Saskatchewan was achieved, as patients have a maximum waiting period of three months for surgery. To address mental health and addictions, the government recently announced it will be developing a comprehensive action plan to improve access to mental health and addictions services.

The PPR addresses two primary health concerns: children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). In the PPR, the government promised \$411 million in ASD and FASD programming. The report also reviewed some of the government's actions to improve mental health and addiction services, including investing in supportive housing. However, the PPR fails to address any other health care concerns related to poverty in the province such as "low birth weight, adolescent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS, drug use rates, obesity and diabetes, heart disease and chronic lung disease" that are commonly found in youths and minorities.²⁵

- 7. Employment support:** Industry in Saskatchewan is providing many jobs in the province. In February 2013 the unemployment rate in Saskatchewan was at 3.8%. This is the lowest unemployment rate in the country and well below the national unemployment rate of 7%.²⁶

The Saskatchewan Employment Supplement (SES) increases the income of low-income parents who are working. To be eligible, recipients must be parents with children under 18 years of age and must receive more than \$125/month in income. The supplement is based on the recipient's income and increases as the recipient's income increases. According to the PPR, the SES was increased by 14 per cent, as was the earnings threshold by approximately 16 per cent.

In September 2012, the province held the lowest minimum wage in the country at \$9.50 per hour.²⁷ However, as of December 1, 2012, the minimum wage was increased to \$10 per hour.²⁸ CCPA compiled a report in which they concluded that a living wage in Regina is \$16.46 per hour. According to the CCPA "Fully 27 percent of workers in Regina earned less than the Living Wage in 2012. That's at least 30,000 employees struggling every day to make ends meet".²⁹

- 8. Community Building/Investment:** The Throne Speech highlighted the HUB program, a community mobilization program which fosters participation between the police, community organizations, government ministries and human services agencies.³⁰ The program's intention is to prevent crime in Saskatchewan by assisting individuals who are at-risk.³¹

THE BOTTOM LINE

Saskatchewan's child poverty rate is the third highest provincial rate³² in all of Canada and the overall poverty rate from 2011, the last date for which data is available, is between 5.3% (LICO-AT), 9.8% (MBM)

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and 11.3% (LIM).³³ In order for poverty to be eliminated in Saskatchewan, a provincial poverty plan must be developed with detailed targets, timelines, benchmarks, adequate funding, a reporting process and meaningful consultation with community and individuals living in poverty. The Saskatchewan government's poverty report is not a provincial anti-poverty plan, it is however, a much needed update on what programs are available. Organizations such as The Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition and Poverty Free Saskatchewan are pushing the provincial government take action and create a plan that considers input by community members. Booming industry in the province, which contributes to the creation of jobs and the low unemployment rate plays a key role in eliminating poverty in Saskatchewan. However, the provincial government must go further and look beyond employment in order to address poverty. The government can do this by building on the momentum of community organizations and developing an official provincial anti-poverty policy grounded in legislation and human rights.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ENDNOTES

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