



Nunavut Poverty Progress Profile

CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY, 2015

OVERVIEW

As for many Indigenous populations in Canada, the legacy of colonialism is a contributing factor to poverty in Nunavut. Although the data is limited, it is clear that poverty in Nunavut is amongst the highest in the country.¹ Indicators such as housing need and food insecurity are incredibly high; population health measures are exceptionally poor.

In 2012 the Government of Nunavut and *Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI)*² developed a poverty action plan called *The Makimaniq Plan: A Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction*.¹ *The Makimaniq Plan* 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*.² The Act reinforces the collaborative approach, mandating several accountability measures and addressing poverty funding for the territory. The territory is now in the process of putting together the *Five Year Poverty Reduction Action Plan*, which will specify targeted objectives for poverty reduction.³

Backgrounder: The Makimaniq Plan Development

The Makimaniq Plan was developed over the span of two years.⁴ Beginning in 2010 the Government of Nunavut and *NTI* led a public engagement process with consultations across the territory.⁵ *The Makimaniq Plan* targets social exclusion, which has been identified as a root cause of poverty in the territory.⁶ In Nunavut, social exclusion involves a language barrier, access to education, the digital divide and the lasting impact of colonialism.⁷

- i 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 more information, see *Understanding Poverty in Nunavut* available at http://makiliqta.ca/sites/default/files/anti-poverty_content_april18.pdf
- ii Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated is the organization representing the Inuit population in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) process
- iii See Appendix A for more information on the six themes in *The Makimaniq Plan*.

The vision for *The Makimaniq Plan* is to promote a higher, sustainable quality of life and improve the standard of living for those in need. It also seeks to enhance self-determination and self-reliance for Nunavut communities.⁸ Recognizing this vision, *The Makimaniq Plan* outlines goals for poverty reduction under six main themes³:

- Collaboration and Community Participation
- Health and Well-being
- Education and Skills Development
- Food Security
- Housing and Income Support
- Community and Economic Development⁹

Progress to Date

One of the most significant breakthroughs for *The Makimaniq Plan* was the passing of the *Collaboration for Poverty Reduction Act* in May 2013. The Act 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)*.¹⁰ The Act also establishes a Poverty Reduction Fund. The fund promotes a collaborative approach for a five-year action plan and supports community-driven initiatives.¹¹ In November 2014 the *NRPR* reviewed a new version of the *Five Year Poverty Reduction Action Plan*.¹² A rough draft of the plan is available online and a final version is expected for approval in 2016.¹³

There has been other progress particularly in the areas of housing, food security, education and health needs of Nunavummiut. In 2013 the Government of Nunavut released *The GN's Long-Term Comprehensive Housing and Homelessness Strategy (CHHS)* and is now working to set specific timelines for many of these goals.¹⁴ As an extension of *The Makimaniq Plan*, Nunavut has also introduced the *Nunavut Food Security Strategy and Action Plan 2014-16 (FSSAP)*.¹⁵ The Nunavut Government continues to increase funding for education to 14% of the overall territorial budget.¹⁶ The government has also committed to increasing funding to mental health addictions programming by 35%, introducing the *Mental Health and Addictions Framework*.¹⁷

MEASURING PROGRESS

Proxy Indicators of Poverty (Unofficial Measurement Tools)⁴

	Welfare Recipients ¹¹	Household Food Insecurity
2005	12,392 40.9%	38.0%
2008	15,523 48.7%	34.6%
2009	14,037 43.1%	31.0%
2010	13,716 41.1%	31.0%
2011	13,197 38.6%	36.4%
2012	13,797 39.7%	45.2%
2013	14,578 41.1%	*
2014	*	*

* – Data not available

Comparative Data

Indicator	Year of latest available data	Nunavut	Canada
Life expectancy at birth ¹⁹	2007 - 2009	71.6	81.1
High school graduation rate ²⁰	2011	54%	89%
Population with core housing needs ^{21 v}	2011	49.4%	10.6%
Population living in public housing	2013	57.5% ²²	*

* – Data not available

iv 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)

v The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) defines a household with core housing need as one residing in housing that falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability CMHC standards. It would also 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). More information on core housing need available at http://cmhc.beyond2020.com/HiCODefinitions_EN.html#_Core_Housing_Need_Status

Government of Nunavut's Success Indicators

The current plan does not outline targets or indicators of success. The *Five Year Poverty Reduction Action Plan* to be finalized in January 2016 will set specific objectives and timelines for poverty reduction.

The *Collaboration for Poverty Reduction Act* also includes several accountability measures for the plan. The Act appoints a new Minister responsible for poverty reduction in the territory.²³ The Minister is mandated to monitor the budget, programs, initiatives and government policies for consistency with *The Makimaniq Plan* and the *Five Year Poverty Reduction Action Plan* and actual results.²⁴ The Minister is also required to make annual reports to Nunavut's legislative assembly.²⁵ The current Minister, the Honorable Jeannie Ugyuk, tabled the first report in the Nunavut Legislative Assembly on May 27, 2015.²⁶ The detailed report includes information about *The Makimaniq Plan*, government involvement, policies, programs, and other initiatives created to reduce poverty.²⁷ The Minister's report describes a 7-step framework created in order to measure and monitor successes in reducing poverty.²⁸ This framework will be used by collaborating organizations to continuously review and revise initiatives to reduce poverty.

Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

1. **HUMAN RIGHTS:** The *Makimaniq Plan* does not clearly connect poverty elimination to a human rights framework. However, the *FSSAP*, developed by *NRPR* and the *Nunavut Food Security Coalition*, integrates a human rights perspective into its guiding principles. It defends Nunavummiungulluta's right to adequate, accessible and appropriate food systems.²⁹
2. **INCOME SUPPORT:** In 2010 the median income levels in Nunavut were the lowest in the country.³⁰ When compared to the national dependency ratio (59.2), income-earning Nunavummiut support more dependents than anywhere else in Canada (82.1).³¹ *Nunavut's Income Assistance Program (IA)* is framed as a last resort for individuals and families struggling to meet their basic needs.³² In 2013 40% of the Nunavut population (or 14,578 individuals) received social assistance from the *Nunavut Income Support Program*.³³

Nunavut continues to reduce its welfare benefits by the amount of the *National Child Benefit Supplement* (only eligible to low-income families). The three territories are the only jurisdictions that continue this practice in Canada.³⁴ The Nunavut Government recognizes there are gaps in the income assistance system and has announced that it will be launching a full review of Nunavut's social assistance program.³⁵

Nunavut provides other forms of income benefits to residents. The *Nunavut Child Benefit (NUCB)* provides income-adjusted monthly cash benefits towards the cost of raising children.³⁶ The *Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit (SCSB)* provides low-income seniors receiving the federal *Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)* or *Spouse's Allowance* with an additional monthly income of \$175.³⁷ In 2013 more than a quarter of Nunavut's residents aged 60 and over (approximately 579 residents) received the SCSB.³⁸ Nunavut also offers the *Territorial Workers' Supplement (TWS)*, a work income supplement for income-earning households with children.³⁹

3. **HOUSING:** Nunavut's housing need is very high, marked by levels of overcrowding twice that of the national average.⁴⁰ The *2010 Nunavut Housing Needs Survey* showed that 49% of occupied dwellings are overcrowded or in need of major repairs.⁴¹ Currently the Government of Nunavut directly subsidizes more than 80% of all housing in the territory.⁴²

In 2013 the government indexed the public housing rent scale to Nunavut's minimum wage, increasing the percentage of tenants eligible for minimum rent from 58% to 76%.⁴³ Between 2013 and 2014, the *Nunavut Housing Corporation (NHC)* applied funding from the *Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)* to the construction of 231 units across 12 communities.⁴⁴

In 2014 the *NHC* also completed 726 units, which were federally funded under the *2006 Nunavut Housing Trust*.⁴⁵ Despite these developments, Nunavut currently holds a twenty-year waiting list for public housing.⁴⁶ To meet the current need, it is estimated that Nunavut would have to build 3,300 units this year alone and continue building 100 every year to respond to growth.⁴⁷

The Nunavut Government continues to work towards delivering a sustainable response to this housing crisis. In 2013 the Government of Nunavut released the *CHHS*.⁴⁸ The *CHHS* aims to increase public housing stock, improve transitions along the housing continuum and enhance private sector incentive to supply housing.⁴⁹ The *NHC* is now in the process of completing a new action plan entitled *Blueprint for Action: Building a Commonsense Approach for Overcoming Nunavut's Housing Crisis*.⁵⁰

4. **EDUCATION:** The Government of Nunavut has identified education as a key area for improving overall wellbeing and economic prosperity.⁵¹ In *Sivumut Abluqta*, the government's current mandate, the development of self-reliance through education and employment is a top priority.⁵² This continues to be reflected in the territorial budget. In 2014 Nunavut spent \$184 million towards education.⁵³ For 2015-2016, the government has increased its commitment, allocating \$203 million to education.⁵⁴

In 2013 the Ministry of Education introduced the *Pathway to Adult Secondary School (PASS)* program, giving adult students over the age of 19 a new opportunity to complete their high school diploma.⁵⁵ Currently offered through *Nunavut Arctic College*, the government aims to eventually offer *PASS* in all 25 Nunavut communities.⁵⁶

Nunavut currently offers *Young Parents Stay Learning* to subsidize daycare for students under the age of 18.⁵⁷ *Financial Assistance for Nunavut Students (FANS)* offers funding for post-secondary students with special supplement grants for beneficiaries under the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA)*.⁵⁸

5. **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE:** Family fees for childcare in Nunavut remain the highest among the Inuit regions of Canada and represent 45-58% of the median Inuit personal income.⁵⁹ Employment officers state that high fees for childcare pose a barrier to Nunavummiut employment – families earn too much to qualify for subsidies but too little to pay for the full cost of childcare.⁶⁰

In 2013 *Nunavut Arctic College* received \$1.1 million in federal funding to expand early childhood education training and support and enhance culturally sensitive programming.⁶¹ In 2014 the Minister of Education participated in a consultation with Inuit Elders on early childhood education programs.⁶² The consultation hosted by *Nunavut Arctic College* was designed to help integrate Inuit knowledge and language into early childhood education training.⁶³

6. **HEALTH:** Health outcomes in Nunavut are among the poorest in Canada. In a health report card published by the *Conference Board of Canada*, Nunavut ranks near the bottom of all health indicators.⁶⁴ In the report card, which uses letter grades to rate provincial and territorial health indicators, Nunavut receives a “D-” in life expectancy, premature mortality, infant mortality, suicides, mortality due to cancer and mortality due to respiratory disease.⁶⁵ Notably, only 20% of Nunavut residents have a regular doctor compared to 83% of Canadian residents overall.⁶⁶

Nunavut continues to increase its investments in a better mental health system. In 2013 the Government of Nunavut relocated the *Akasisarvik Mental Health Treatment Centre* to a newly renovated location in Iqaluit, investing \$860,000 to expand the centre’s mental health programs.⁶⁷ The government has also converted a hostel in Cambridge Bay into a residential mental health and addictions treatment facility.⁶⁸ Five new mental health staff

have been hired across the territory and have trained over 800 Nunavummiut in *Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)* since 2011.⁶⁹ As mentioned above, the government is set to introduce the *Mental Health and Addictions Framework* within the next year.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, Nunavut's *Suicide Prevention Strategy* implemented in 2011 has seen few results. Nunavut's worst year for suicides was 2013 when 45 Inuit committed suicide.⁷¹ Nunavut's suicide rate is now 10 times the Canadian national average.⁷² The Chief Coroner of Nunavut has announced she will be holding an inquest into several suicides to provide recommendations on better suicide prevention.⁷³

Currently there are only four long-term care facilities in Nunavut.⁷⁴ Community members continue to express a need for more elders' care facilities. The government has stated that it will be conducting a long-term care assessment.⁷⁵

7. **EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT:** The unemployment rate in Nunavut is 16.8%, 10 percentage points above the national rate.⁷⁶ The mining sector appears to offer the greatest opportunity for full-time jobs in the future, however, without literacy and numeracy skills, these jobs may not be sufficient to transition from welfare.⁷⁷

Unless exempt for disability or age cut-offs, *IA* recipients are expected to create a "Productive Choice" plan with an *IA* worker, supporting them to work towards gainful employment through education, training and counseling.⁷⁸ Other Nunavut residents can receive funding for short-term training programs through the *Adult Learning and Training Supports (ALTS)* program.⁷⁹

Under the *NLCA*, the Government of Nunavut is obligated to achieve a workforce that is representative of the population.⁸⁰ In September 2013 Inuit representation across all public services departments, boards and agencies was 50%.⁸¹ Representation varies between communities; representation in Iqaluit is as low as 35%.⁸² In order to increase opportunity for Inuit employment, the government has committed to decentralization and maintaining over 60% of the public service outside of Iqaluit.⁸³

8. **FOOD SECURITY:** Almost 70% of Inuit households in Nunavut are food insecure.⁸⁴ Not only is this eight times higher than the Canadian national average, but it is also among the highest documented food insecurity rates for an indigenous population in a developed country.⁸⁵

Government departments, Inuit organizations, and community groups have formed the *Nunavut Food Security Coalition*. As mentioned above, the *Coalition* has published the *FSSAP*.⁸⁶ The *FSSAP* is based on six key areas of action: Country Food, Store-Bought Goods, Local Food Production, Life Skills, Programs and Community Initiative, and Policy and Legislation.⁸⁷ Objectives include supporting harvesters in pursuing traditional livelihoods; exploring measures to increased healthy food options and reduce costs in food stores; supporting research into producing food locally; and assessing the adequacy of food allowances provided by the *IA* program.⁸⁸

Views from Outside the Nunavut Government and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

The Makimaniq Plan has captured the attention of onlookers. Commentators have acknowledged that the Government of Nunavut's emphasis on collaboration and public engagement heightens transparency and government accountability.⁸⁹ The inclusive approach includes communities in the planning and delivery of plans and some experts say it is worth considering by other governments in Canada.⁹⁰ Community members have also expressed enthusiasm about the approach. In particular, efforts to engage the voices of elders in the community during this process have been applauded, as they are considered the guardians of cultural values and principles.⁹¹

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Makimaniq Plan has received significant attention for its collaborative approach. During its early stages, the emphasis has remained on reaching out to communities and public engagement. 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. The government has asserted that the approach is meant to help restore self-reliance in Inuit communities. This approach has been met with approval and optimism in Nunavut and elsewhere. In fact, experts have suggested that other solutions for homelessness policy, programs and services aimed at Aboriginals should be as culturally sensitive and collaborative as in Nunavut.⁹² The government's newest initiatives continue to emphasize this collaborative practice.

Recently Nunavut has seen significant developments in areas like housing, food security and health. However, rates for housing need and household food security remain incredibly high. Many areas such as income, employment support and childcare are still in great need of improvement. A review of Nunavut's social assistance, an assessment of its long-term care system, an inquest into its high suicide rates and the introduction of the *Mental Health and Addictions Framework* are all pending. Evaluations of these efforts and *The Makimaniq Plan* will offer extensive critical analysis helping to steer Nunavut towards further successes in the coming years.

For More Information

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APPENDIX A

The Makimaniq Plan Components and Highlights

The *Makimaniq Plan* includes six major themes and priority actions⁹³:

1. **COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION** (*Inuit Value Piliriqatigiingniq Or Ikajuqtigiingniq - Working Together And Helping One Another*)
 - Improvement of the working relationships between the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and Regional Inuit Associations
 - Increased support for community action
 - Enact poverty reduction legislation
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 funding⁹⁴
3. **EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**
 - The development of a comprehensive early childhood education plan
 - Increased support for working parents
 - Workforce development⁹⁵
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 initiatives⁹⁶

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 Nunavut⁹⁷

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 level⁹⁸

ENDNOTES

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