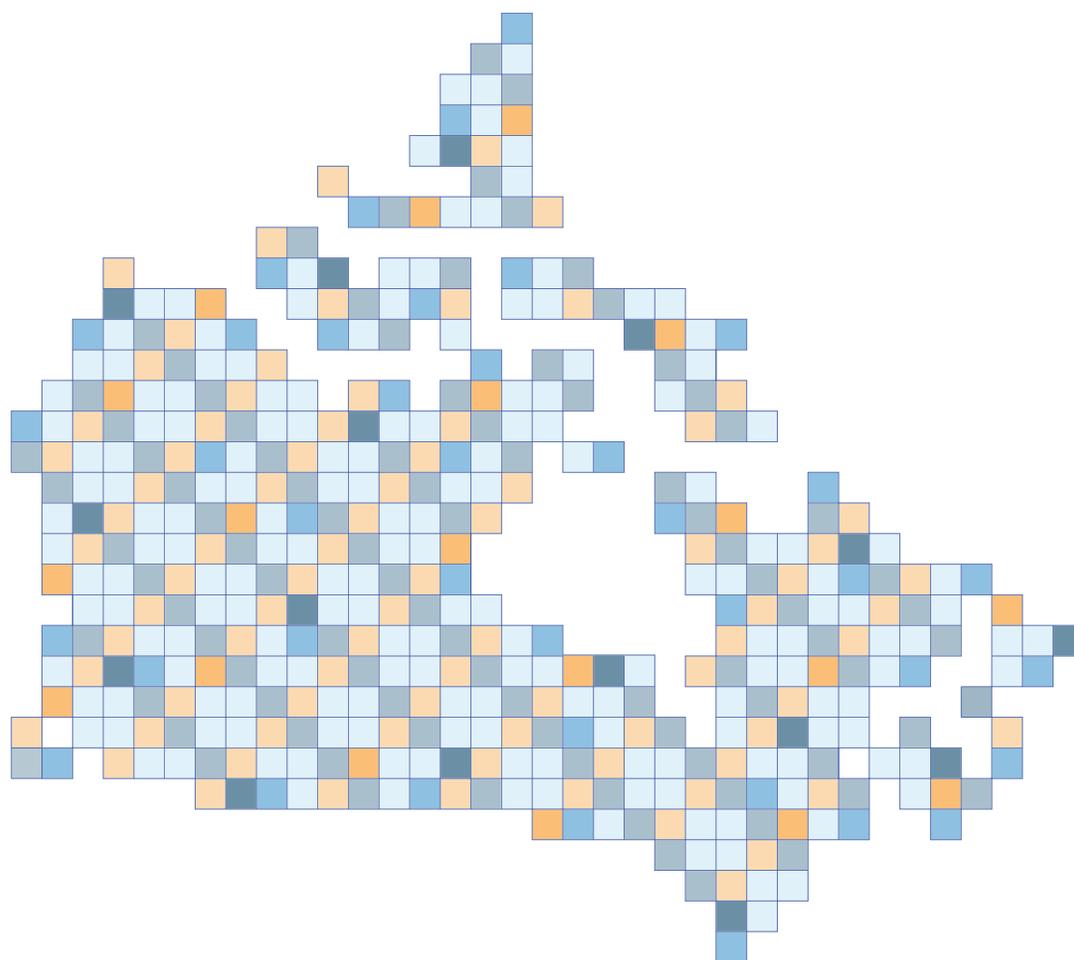
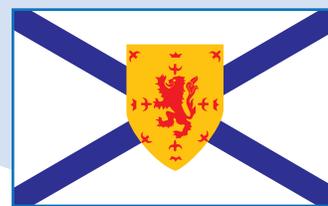


Nova Scotia Poverty Progress Profile



2016



CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

Poverty is a violation of human rights.

OVERVIEW

In April 2009, Nova Scotia introduced its poverty reduction strategy: *Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity*.¹ The plan includes provincial and federal investments in each of its primary goal areas. It also outlines the provincial commitment of reducing the number of people living in poverty by the year 2020.²

Although the plan is in its sixth year, there are no clear measures of progress available. Without these measures, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the provincial strategy. The cost of poverty in Nova Scotia in 2010 is estimated between \$1.5-2.2 billion per year.³

Plan Components and Highlights

The vision included in the 2009 plan is: “to break the cycle of poverty by creating opportunities for all people living in Nova Scotia to participate in the prosperity of the province and enjoy a better standard of living.”⁴

The plan is organized around four main goals:

Enable and reward work

- Investments in training and job creation.
- Tax refunds no longer considered income for Income Assistance clients.

Improve supports for those in need

- Increase income assistance rates in line with inflation.
- Increase availability of affordable housing.

Focus on our children

- Increase availability of the Nova Scotia Child Benefit and the Low Income Pharmacare for Children Program.
- Create more subsidized childcare spaces.

Collaborate and coordinate

- Increase public awareness.
- Use community development model to increase public involvement.

Community Engagement in Plan Development and Implementation

In December 2007, the Nova Scotia Government passed the *Poverty Reduction Working Group Act*.⁵ This *Act* was passed in response to advocacy by community groups and the publication of the “Framework for a Poverty Reduction Strategy” by the Community Coalition to End Poverty from October 2007. The *Act* appointed a group responsible for making recommendations for a poverty reduction strategy in the province.

The Working Group was mandated to be composed of representatives from government departments, community action groups, public interest agencies, and a

group representing Indigenous interests. Unlike some other provinces (such as New Brunswick), the *Act* does not require prior consultation with people who have lived experiences of poverty, but several people living in poverty were appointed. The Working Group reviewed current programs and supports available and the results of public consultation (which included a public survey receiving 1300 responses). It made recommendations in 2008 to the Government of Nova Scotia regarding strategies, priorities, and implementation of a poverty reduction strategy.

MEASURING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

Statistical Indicators of Poverty (unofficial measurement tools)[†]

	LICO Low-Income Cut-off After-tax ⁶ ***	LIM Low-Income Measure After Tax ⁷	MBM Market Basket Measure ⁸	Food Bank Usage⁹	Social Assistance** Recipients¹⁰	Minimum Wage¹¹
2000	105,000, 11.6%	*	129,000, 14.2%	20,917, 2.2%	73,700	\$5.35
2005	78,000, 8.6%	145,640	130,000, 14.3%	25,453, 2.7%	52,300	\$6.80
2009 ****	73,000, 8.0%	141,260	142,000, 15.5%	20,344, 2.2%	42,300	\$8.60
2010	71,000, 7.7%	137,410	132,000, 14.5%	22,573, 2.4%	43,200	\$9.65
2011	64,000, 7.0%	134,890	131,000, 14.3%	22,550, 2.4%	43,100	\$10.00
2012	77,000, 8.4%	133,940	145,000, 15.8%	23,561, 2.5%	43,700	\$10.15
2013	*	135,910	*	21,760, 2.3% ¹²	43,800	\$10.30
2014	*	137,150	*	19,664, 2.1% ¹³	43,100	\$10.40
2015	*	*	*	19,722 2.1%	41,339	\$10.60
2016	*	*	*	23,840 2.5% ¹⁴	*	\$10.70

[†] The LICO, LIM and MBM rates in this chart should be compared vertically to understand trends in poverty from year-to-year. As there is no official low-income threshold, and data is calculated differently based on a variety of factors, these rates are not comparable horizontally.

* Data not available.

** "Social Assistance" refers to the total number of people assisted by all Social Assistance programs in the province. The Social Assistance rates do not include individuals receiving support who are also living on a First Nations Reserve. This lowers the rates significantly.¹⁵

***The provincial poverty plan uses LICO (After Tax) as its statistical indicator of poverty in the province.

**** *Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity* was introduced in 2009.

The Nova Scotia Government's Success Indicators

The Nova Scotia plan lacks clear timelines, outcome measures, or reporting mechanisms. No progress reports have been released, so there is little clarity on how the poverty strategy is being implemented. In the 2009 plan, there is some reference to the following initial measures to assess success with the strategy:

Enable and reward work

Initial Measure: Uptake in the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB).

Benchmark: Forthcoming.

Improve supports for those in need

Initial Measure: Poverty-gap (or low-income gap) for persons with work-limiting disabilities.

Benchmark: To be developed.

Focus on our children

Initial Measure: Prevalence and number of children under 18 living in low-income.

Benchmark: 16,000 children under 18 representing 8.7% of the population.

Collaborate and coordinate

Initial Measure: Percentage of the population informed about the causes and consequences of poverty

Benchmark: None.

Notes on Thematic Areas

Human Rights: There is no specific mention of any human rights framework within the current poverty reduction strategy.

Income and Employment Support: There were 41,339 Nova Scotians receiving social assistance in 2015.¹⁶ The 2016 budget announced that income assistance will be going up by \$20 per month, a change that will affect benefits for 24,000 individuals.¹⁷

In April 2016, minimum wage in Nova Scotia increased to \$10.70.¹⁸ Nova Scotia's unemployment rate in 2016 is 8%, almost 2% higher than the national average.¹⁹

Housing: Three years have passed since the government revealed plans to deliver the province's first long-term housing strategy.²⁰ Phase 1 of the *Housing Nova Scotia* initiative began in April 2014 with a \$4 million investment by the government, which was to be allocated to building new units as well as upgrades to improve accessibility in social housing units.²¹

The housing strategy's goal is "to ensure that Nova Scotians can find the housing choice that's right for them and their families, at a price they can afford, in a healthy, vibrant community that offers the services, supports and opportunities they need." The plan focuses on strategic partnerships between governments with the aim of reducing homelessness and protecting vulnerable citizens.²² Currently, the waitlist for affordable housing in Nova Scotia is approximately 4,300-4,500 households per year.²³ In early 2016, there were almost 1,300 people on the waitlist in Halifax alone.²⁴

Homelessness is another factor affecting the lives of many Nova Scotians. In a count of the visible homeless population, 284 individuals were found to be living rough or staying in shelters in March 2015. Additional data from the Halifax Census Metropolitan Area shows that 25.4% of all households spend 30% or more of their income on housing and 1 in 8 households spend 50% or more on housing costs.²⁵ It is important to note the various challenges faced by Nova Scotians depending on their geographic location. People living in rural parts of Nova Scotia experience a

wide range of housing problems including access to housing needs, lack of affordable housing, and lack of accessible or affordable transportation.²⁶

Education: The *SchoolsPlus* program was expanded in 2014, providing accessible services for low-income families. Some of the services that *SchoolsPlus* offers include health services, homework support, a social worker, and justice services.²⁷ Recent changes include providing mental health clinicians to school-aged children.²⁸ Support services like this are crucial for low-income children, as they are disproportionately affected by poorer educational outcomes.²⁹ The 2016 budget has committed to create four more *SchoolsPlus* sites.³⁰

Young adults in Nova Scotia experience barriers in retaining a post-secondary education. Nova Scotia had the third-highest tuition fees at \$6,440 for the 2014-2015 year, compared to the national average of \$5,959.³¹ A poll performed in 2013 by the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Education Coalition found that 1 in 3 Nova Scotians would not, or knew someone who would not, apply to post-secondary institutions as it would create an accumulation of too much debt.³²

Early Childhood Education and Care: Nova Scotia has the highest rates of child poverty in Atlantic Canada.³³ The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' (CCPA) 2016 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Nova Scotia states that child poverty in Nova Scotia has increased from 18.1% in 1989 to 22.5%. Of these children, 50% come from lone-parent families. Shockingly, those most at risk are children under six years old – showing an overall poverty rate of 27% in 2014. In specified regions, it is often much worse; for example, Cape Breton shows rates as high as 42.7% for children under six.

As part of a four-year commitment in the 2014/15 budget, the Government of Nova Scotia promised to re-invest \$65 million in education for the 2015/16 budget. The 2015/16 budget accounted for \$20.4 million in early childhood education and care. This amount includes \$1.3 million to reduce wait lists for community-based *Early Intervention*, a program which delivers support services for children who are at-risk or have been diagnosed with a developmental delay.³⁴ This is particularly relevant for low-income households, as poverty rates for children with disabilities in Nova Scotia have been found to be three times higher than other children.³⁵ Additionally, \$500,000 in the recent budget was allocated for *SchoolsPlus*.³⁶

Healthcare: The 2015 provincial budget allocated only a 0.8% increase in funding for the Department of Health and Wellness, the lowest increase in over a decade.³⁷ Several recent changes include a call for a better mental healthcare system³⁸ and the launch of the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) in April 2015.³⁹

In 2014, the government also eliminated the *Extended Pharmacare program*, which provided drug coverage to low-income Nova Scotians who, if drug expenses were included, would otherwise be eligible for Income Assistance.⁴⁰ Individuals on this program are being transferred to the provincial *Family Pharmacare* program.⁴¹ This is a program in which premiums are geared to income. The 2016 budget allocated \$3 million to help with prescriptions, although only for seniors.

Community Building/Investment: In 2014, the government announced a \$500,000 investment toward the *Community Transportation Assistance Program (CTAP)* to assist communities without bus service.⁴² The CTAP service is especially beneficial for low-income populations accessing public transportation, and in particular the 43% of Nova Scotians who live in rural areas with limited or no means of accessing services.⁴³ This service is not yet accessible to all rural regions in Nova Scotia.

Food Security: Nova Scotia is the only province that experienced an increase in farms from 2006-2011 at 2.9%.⁴⁴ However, food insecurity continues to be a serious issue in Nova Scotia. Despite a slight decrease to 15.4% in 2014, Halifax has the highest level of food insecurity among 33 of the major metropolitan cities in Canada, with 1 in 5 homes being food insecure.⁴⁵ An estimated 22% of children in the province live in food insecure households.⁴⁶

According to the *Food Action Research Centre (FoodARC)*, fewer than one in four people experiencing food insecurity use food banks in the province.⁴⁷ In addition, it is important to note that 82.1% of families on social assistance report being food insecure in Nova Scotia. There are over 60,000 individuals classified as extremely food insecure in Nova Scotia, with female lone parent households being overrepresented in all levels of food insecurity.⁴⁸ In the same year as the latest food insecurity report, food banks only served 19,664 people – not even a third of those classified as extremely food insecure.⁴⁹

Views from Outside the Nova Scotia Government

Many feel that the current initiatives are inadequate. The CCPA-NS is clear in its *2015 Report Card on Child Poverty and Health* that the Nova Scotia Government has not done enough to combat child poverty. Despite the significant drop in child poverty from the record high in the year 2000 to now, the child poverty rate is still 7.7% higher than when the government vowed to end it completely in 1989. These rates disproportionately affect lone parents, especially women, and are increasingly worse in rural communities. The CCPA-NS calls on the government to invest in children and families in order to solve the child poverty epidemic in Nova Scotia.⁵⁰

Civil society organizations have also expressed concerns that marginal improvements to programs do not reflect the lived experience realities of low-income populations. For example, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) commented on the \$20 monthly increase in social assistance as marginal at best, as the increased cost of groceries and housing far surpass the minimal raise.⁵¹

In June 2016, the Housing and Homelessness Partnership brought its serious concerns about housing to a municipal committee in Halifax that no new social housing had been built in the city since 1993. This lack of housing is becoming more serious as 20% of the population cannot afford average rents. The group recommended revolutionary change to the way affordable housing is approached by the city, and in particular, they pointed to the lack of housing options for people with disabilities, families who want to stay together, and transgendered individuals

in the community.⁵²

THE BOTTOM LINE

Since the introduction of Nova Scotia's poverty reduction strategy in 2009, no tangible targets have been set to measure progress. In fact, no progress reports have been released since the strategy was created seven years ago. The province is host to extremely high rates of food insecurity and child poverty, issues that can only be addressed through the implementation of an effective and comprehensive strategy. Without proper targets, timelines, reporting and accountability mechanisms, Nova Scotia will face significant obstacles to meeting its goal of reducing poverty by 2020.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



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