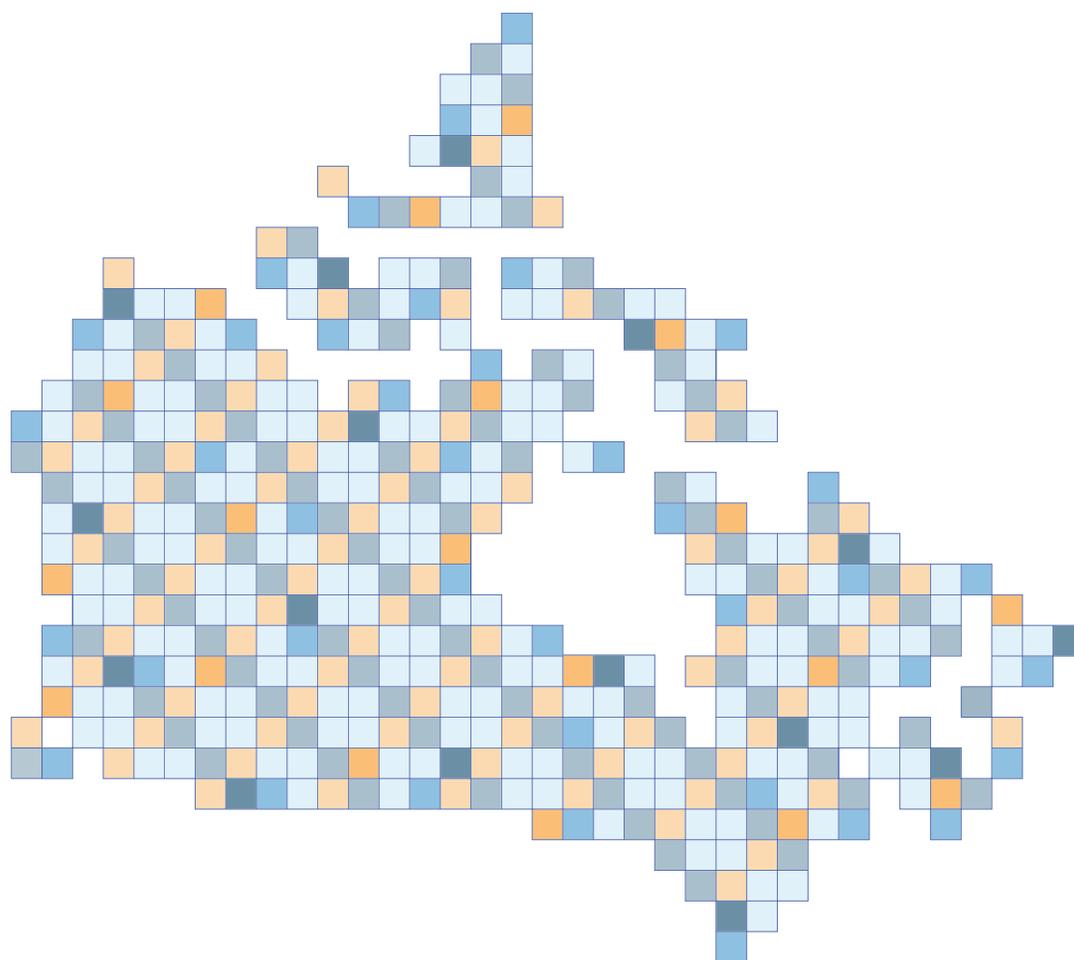


Yukon Poverty Progress Profile



2016



CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

Poverty is a violation of human rights.

OVERVIEW

The cost of living in the North is substantially higher than in the rest of Canada — costs such as housing, food, childcare, and healthcare skyrocket due to the geography and remoteness of the Territories. In 2016, Whitehorse had a living wage estimated at \$19.12 per hour, while its minimum wage was significantly lower at \$11.07 per hour.¹

The Yukon Department of Health and Social Services released the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy entitled, *A Better Yukon for All: Government of Yukon's Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy (Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy)*, in December 2012. Although the report is presented as an action plan, it appears to be more of a descriptive document. Since its release, there have been no reported updates.²

Plan Components and Highlights

The 2012 *Poverty Reduction Strategy* highlights three goals including:

Improving access to services, with a specific focus to:

- Improve programs, policies and service delivery to remove barriers to access
- Improve coordination and collaboration within government, with other levels of government, and between government and other service providers
- Promote awareness of government programs and services

Reducing inequities, with a specific focus to:

- Create opportunities to improve income by reducing barriers to employment
- Strengthen supports and access to necessities (such as food) for those most in need
- Address homelessness, housing availability, affordability, and the quality of housing
- Provide supports for families with children to break the cycle of poverty
- Provide citizens with the opportunities and the tools to make healthy and safe lifestyle choices

Strengthen Community Vitality, with a specific focus to:

- Increase awareness about the benefits of a socially inclusive society and promote a culture of inclusion
- Create conditions to achieve greater participation in the civic life of the community
- Create broader access to participation in sports, recreation, arts, and culture
- Improve conditions that result in a safe community³

Community Engagement and Plan Development

In preparation for the release of the strategy, the Health and Social Services and the Yukon Bureau of Statistics (YBS) conducted research and provided expertise to the two committees formed to inform the strategy. These committees included the Interdepartmental Steering Committee (ISC), which was made up of representatives from departments of the government and the Community Advisory Committee (CAC), which was comprised of community organizations.

According to *A Better Yukon for All*, the key priorities, vision, and guiding principles were developed collaboratively through a series of workshops held with community organizations, First Nations groups, and government representatives. A second set of workshops was given to determine the strategy's goals and development with the ISC and other government employees.

A major symposium was held to start community consultations for the strategy. According to the strategy, additional workshops were conducted with persons with lived experience of poverty in communities across Yukon where they were given the opportunity to propose policy solutions to poverty in the territory.⁴

MEASURING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

Statistical Indicators of Poverty (unofficial measurement tools)

According to the *Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy*, the Low-Income Cut-offs (LICOs) suggest that in 2012:

- 4.3% of all economic families were living below the LICO
- 9.3% of lone-parent families were living below the LICO⁶

	LIM Low-Income Measure After Tax ⁷ ****	Minimum Wage⁸
2010	3,150	\$8.93
2011	3,140	\$9.00
2012 ***	3,230	\$10.30 **
2013	3,250	\$10.54
2014	3,310	\$10.72
2015	*	\$10.86
2016	*	\$11.07

* Data unavailable.

** In 2012, the minimum wage first rose to \$9.27 in April and then to \$10.30 in May.

*** The Yukon *Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy* was introduced in 2012.

****The Yukon *Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy* uses an approximate calculation of the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) as its statistical indicator of poverty in the territory. The number is an estimate, as the LICO is not calculated specifically for the Yukon.

Additional Indicators	
Rate of Food insecurity*	17.1% (2012) ⁹
Unemployment Rate (2016)	7.5% (a 0.8% increase from the previous year) ¹⁰
Population over 25 years old with less than a high school diploma (2011)	8.5% non-Indigenous Yukoners 28.7% Indigenous Yukoners ¹¹

* In 2013 and 2014 the government of the Yukon decided not to take part in the Household Food Security Survey Module, therefore no updated data on food insecurity in the territory is available.¹²

Vulnerable Groups

In Yukon, First Nations people, single parent families, and women are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty.

First Nations comprise almost 25% of the Yukon population.¹³ Colonial experiences, insufficient services (specifically in remote and isolated communities), lack of access to employment and educational opportunities, and inaccessible housing have all contributed to high poverty rates amongst the Yukon First Nations population.¹⁴ This population has also suffered widely from the residential school system, aimed at the forced assimilation of First Nations children. There were five residential schools in the Yukon Territory and a sixth on the Yukon and British Columbia border; the last residential school closed in 1969.¹⁵ Children in these schools experienced physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse. The intergenerational trauma persists today in various forms, including domestic violence and poverty.¹⁶

37% of Indigenous persons did not have a high school education in 2006.¹⁷ Indigenous persons are also more likely to be homeless¹⁸ and more likely to reside in overcrowded houses.¹⁹ Most children in the care of the child welfare system are First Nations.²⁰ There are startling differences in life expectancy between First Nations and non-First Nations communities: First Nations men and women live an average of 8.8 and 7.3 years less, respectively, than their non-First Nations counterparts.²¹

Indigenous people also continue to be overrepresented in the Canadian correctional system.²² The Whitehorse Correctional Center (WCC) costs \$10 million a year to operate and is primarily comprised of Indigenous prisoners living with substance abuse issues.²³ In March 2016, the Government of Yukon announced that it will be engaging Yukon First Nations to acquire feedback on implementing culturally relevant programming at the Center.²⁴

Single parent families face higher poverty levels – up to three times higher than two-parent families in Yukon.²⁵ Thirty percent of single parent families earn below \$30,000 and 75% of lone-parent families are headed by women.²⁶ Single mother-led households are twice as likely as the rest of the population to live below the poverty line and in overcrowded houses.²⁷ In 2011, over 40% of Indigenous children lived in single parent households, twice as many as non-Indigenous children.²⁸ Single mothers also face intersectional marginalization in relation to other issues such as violence, inadequate social supports, and universal social

policies.

Women are disproportionately affected by poverty in Yukon. Women are more susceptible to domestic violence and are often forced to stay in violent relationships because of housing insecurity.²⁹ In 2011, the rate for spousal abuse towards females in Yukon was three times that of most provinces – only the NWT and Nunavut had higher instances.³⁰ Women’s shelters are used between three to ten times more often per day in the Territories than elsewhere in Canada. There are currently three women shelters operating in the territory: Yukon Women’s Transition Home: Kaushee’s Place (Whitehorse), Dawson City Women’s Shelter (Dawson City) and Help and Hope for Families (Watson Lake).³¹

In 2016, the Yukon Government made some commitments to address the inequalities faced by women in poverty. This includes \$84,000 to the Victoria Faulkner Women’s Centre to support A Safe Place — a program for women and children to access referrals to services and basic amenities. Additionally, in the 2016 budget, the government committed \$150,000 for Indigenous women’s organizations to implement projects stemming from recommendations made at the Yukon Regional Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.³²

The Yukon Government is entering the international stage in discussion of women’s rights. The Deputy Premier and Minister for the Women’s Directorate, Elaine Taylor, spoke on behalf of Canada at the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women regarding gender data design, collection, and analysis.³³ Prior to the session, which featured a focus on women’s empowerment and sustainable development, Minister Taylor stated that “[a]dvancing gender equality through policies, training and information sharing is a priority for the Government of Yukon and an area where we’re making great progress.”³⁴

Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

Human Rights: The Yukon Government does not reference a human rights framework in regards to eliminating poverty. Although the 2012 *Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy* discusses valuing all individuals equally and distributing opportunity fairly, it does so without a clear mention of human rights.³⁵

Income Support: The social assistance rate for a single person is \$16,092 annually, or \$19,092 annually for a single person with a disability.³⁶ These rates have not increased in eight years.³⁷ Unemployment in the Yukon is relatively low at 5.4% in 2016.³⁸ In April 2016, minimum wage was increased to \$11.07,³⁹ indexed to the annual Whitehorse Consumer Price Index.⁴⁰

Employed parents of missing, murdered, or critically ill children are now eligible for financial benefits for up to 35 weeks and job protection under the *Employment Standards Act*.⁴¹

There is increasing awareness over implementing a living wage — a standard minimum wage that will ensure families obtain enough income to address their

basic needs involving adequate food, shelter, clothing, transportation, healthcare, and other basic necessities — in Yukon. For families, the living wage is being put forward at \$19.12 per hour.⁴²

Housing: 18% of people in Yukon spend more than 30% of their income on housing,⁴³ a measure of core-housing need. Unaffordable housing is recognized as a significant cause of poverty in this region.⁴⁴ The median rent in Whitehorse was \$950 in 2015, an increase of 5.5% from the previous year and a new record high for the city.⁴⁵ In 2014, the vacancy rate for rental accommodation⁴⁶ jumped to 4.7%, more than three times what it was in March 2013.⁴⁷ Between 2005 and 2011, the average price of a house increased by 80% (including an adjustment for inflation).⁴⁸ Since 2013, however, house prices have been steadily declining.⁴⁹

Yukon currently has limited space in emergency shelters. The Salvation Army is the only shelter for adults in Whitehorse. Although it is an “emergency shelter”, clients are staying for extended periods of time due to the lack of transitional housing.⁵⁰ In the 2016 budget, the Yukon Government committed \$8.37 million for the new Salvation Army Centre of Hope to provide enhanced programming, 20 transitional housing units, and 25 emergency beds. The 2016 budget also allocated \$487,000 for the St. Elias Group Home to provide housing and support to adults with mild to severe cognitive disabilities and to double the number of available rooms.⁵¹

In 2015, five transitional living units were slated to open for individuals with mental health issues – the first of its kind in the territory.⁵² These individuals would be able to live in the units from six months to two years, provided they meet certain criteria (e.g. that they are willing to follow a treatment plan).⁵³ However, as of December 2015, the government has only opened one new transitional home for individuals living with mental illness.⁵⁴

The Yukon Housing Corporation released “*Ours to Build: Housing Action for Yukon 2015 -2025*” in June 2015. The vision of the plan is for “[a] Yukon where a diversity and abundance of housing options increases the health and stability of all individuals and communities”⁵⁵ The pillars of the housing action plan include:

- **Pillar One:** Housing with Services: Help people gain and maintain housing with services.
- **Pillar Two:** Rental Housing: Increase access to adequate and affordable market and non-market rental housing and support for tenants and landlords.
- **Pillar Three:** Home Ownership: Increase and diversify home ownership options.

Education: In April 2016, the Government of Yukon committed \$520,000 for school supplies to offer financial respite for struggling families who cannot afford educational necessities for their children. This will translate to approximately \$100 per student and is still pending legislative approval for 2016/2017.⁵⁶

Early Childhood Education and Care: The *Childcare Subsidy Program* assists eligible low-income households with the costs of childcare services at licensed centres or family day homes.⁵⁷ Rates depend on an income test which assesses household net income, family size, and community of residence. The maximum subsidy available for infants is \$688.00.⁵⁸

Healthcare: The prevalence of risk-taking behaviours (e.g. problematic alcohol, drug, and tobacco use), especially among youth, is comparatively higher in the Yukon than the rest of the country. In 2012, 48% of Yukoners (compared to 12% of all Canadians) reported binge drinking within the last year.⁵⁹ Problematic substance abuse has reached such high proportions in Yukon that the 2015 *Yukon Health Status Report* was focused on reporting on the extent, intricacies, and implications of the issue.⁶⁰ Land-based treatment options for First Nations people are severely lacking.⁶¹

There are approximately 75 family physicians in Yukon.⁶² The territory also suffers an extreme shortage of specialists such as psychiatrists, cardiologists, and surgeons.⁶³ Many patients do not have access to healthcare services, therefore, access to quality healthcare is a serious concern. To address accessibility issues, new hospitals have been built in Watson Lake and in Dawson City.⁶⁴

Food Security: In 2012, 17.1% of households in Yukon experienced food insecurity.⁶⁵ As the Yukon Government declined to participate in the 2013 and 2014 Statistics Canada Household Food Security Survey Module, there is no recent data to measure the extent of food insecurity in the province past 2012. There are two food banks in Yukon, including one in Whitehorse⁶⁶ and the other in Watson Lake.⁶⁷ These food banks experience food shortages as the demand from residents continues to increase. Although there is no isolated data specific to Yukon, all three of the Northern territories experienced a 24.9% increase in food bank usage from 2015 to 2016.⁶⁸

Some communities are only accessible by air during certain times of the year, such as the community of Old Crow, which is not accessible by road. Some depend solely on air transportation to access perishable foods which is extremely costly. Users pay anywhere between \$0.83-\$2.63 per kilogram plus surcharges and taxes depending on the food item.⁶⁹ This drives up the price of consumer goods. For example, the price of milk in Old Crow, Yukon in 2014 was more than double the price of milk in Edmonton, Alberta.⁷⁰

Views From Outside the Yukon Government

The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition (YAPC) is at the advocacy forefront, spreading awareness about persistent poverty, facilitating actions to diminish poverty, and providing a voice to disadvantaged populations since 1996.⁷¹ The YAPC has taken action to respond to the housing crisis in Yukon. According to the YAPC, housing support for economically disadvantaged populations is practically nonexistent. There is also an absence of transitional and emergency shelter for families, with serious implications for child apprehensions.⁷² Although the *Child and Family Services Act (2008)* has helped reduce child apprehensions, improvement is

certainly needed.⁷³

In June 2015, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* published a report outlining the devastating impacts of residential schools on Indigenous families, communities, and culture. The displacement of children was identified as a major contributing factor to many of the social problems facing Indigenous communities today. With a significant link between Indigenous descent, poverty, and child apprehensions, some groups have suggested that a dark part of history is seeping into the present.⁷⁴

THE BOTTOM LINE

Yukon residents are experiencing high levels of poverty and food insecurity. The current government's anti-poverty plan is missing targets, timelines, and measurable goals. Important next steps include investments to ensure affordable housing, emergency shelters and transitional accommodations, and housing with supports for vulnerable groups.

There are significant disparities between Yukon and the rest of Canada. Both men and women in the territory have a shorter projected life expectancy at birth compared to the Canada's average and are projected to live approximately four less years than the national average. A drastic change within the territory is needed if Yukoners are to possess the same opportunities as the rest of the country.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

251 Bank Street, 2nd Floor
Ottawa, ON K2P 1X3
613-789-0096 (1-800-810-1076)
info@cwpcsp.ca

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