

We Must Do Better

It's Time to Make Alberta Poverty-Free

Highlights

Strong support for a comprehensive poverty plan

- Over the past year, Public Interest Alberta, Edmonton Social Planning Council, and other organizations published the *We Can Do Better* report and hosted seven forums around Alberta.
- Forum participants were troubled that, despite living in one of the wealthiest places in the world, there are many people who live in poverty. They expressed commitment to work with all orders of government to establish a comprehensive plan to reduce, prevent and ultimately eliminate poverty in Alberta.
- Other countries and six Canadian provinces (with governments across the political spectrum) have established poverty reduction strategies.

What's happening now – There are many concerns but also many solutions

- Many organizations and people are working hard to address poverty, but despite many innovative programs, most people who work in communities feel programs are limited and underfunded, and not able to address the root causes of poverty.
- Responding to basic needs is essential - increase in food bank usage by 61%,
- Housing security is vital, but funding cuts to programs make it difficult to achieve.
- Childcare is underfunded and, even with subsidies, too many low-income families cannot afford or find quality childcare and early learning programs.
- Many seniors are struggling to survive on very low pensions and increasing costs being transferred on to them.
- Community service providers play a vital role in supporting people but have to cut programs as costs are going up and government support is not keeping pace with increasing demands.

Failing to act will worsen poverty Alberta's boom – bust economy creates serious poverty challenges.

- At the height of the economic boom, 59,000 children, (one in twelve) lived in poverty. The majority of these children were from families where parents worked and 49% had at least one family member working full time, full year.

- As of April 2009, one in four employed Albertans works for wages lower than \$15/hour, with over 50% older than 25 years of age and the majority (69%) being women.
- Rising unemployment is hitting vulnerable Albertans hard – particularly aboriginal people, recent immigrants, and young people. We have lost 83,200 full time jobs since October 2008. There were net job losses of 31.2% for workers with hourly wages of less than \$10/hour. Social assistance case loads are up 36% from the year before, but funding has not increased to keep pace with the greater need.

A comprehensive plan is a long-term investment

- A comprehensive poverty elimination plan that integrates effective policy with local place-based solutions would address the root causes of poverty. Poverty is a complex issue and needs many solutions. We know much that has proven successful here and in other jurisdictions.

Action is needed now – Campaign to make Alberta Poverty-Free

- Forum participants not only agreed “we can do better,” but said “we **must** do better.”The provincial government must work with municipal governments and the broader community to take leadership in developing a plan to make Alberta poverty-free.

To achieve that goal the provincial network will:

- Build political support and leadership;
- Expand the network that began with the forums, and broad public support;
- Research the challenges of poverty and profile solutions;
- Continue to get people to speak out about making Alberta poverty-free;
- Get individuals and organizations to join the campaign for a Poverty-Free Alberta and send messages to their MLAs and city councils urging them to establish a provincial poverty elimination strategy.

The full report, “We must do better: It's Time to Make Alberta Poverty-Free” is available at www.pialberta.org .