

Why a Canadian National Action Plan on Poverty Makes Sense

- Canada ranks 23rd on the Organization for Economic and Co-operation Development (OECD) list of relative poverty rates using the Low Income Measure, behind countries including the Czech Republic, Finland, Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia, and Poland (http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/oecd-factbook-2014/poverty-rates-and-poverty-gaps_factbook-2014-table57-en). Canada has one of the strongest economies in the world, yet we still have high poverty rates, compared to countries with less robust economies.
- Over 1.6 million Canadian households (1 in 8 families) struggle to put enough food on the table every day, let alone food that is healthy. Food bank usage continues to rise. A problem this large can't be solved primarily by food banks but by addressing the root causes of hunger including low income and a lack of affordable housing.
- Over 12% of Canadian households are in core housing need. In Niagara region alone there are over 4500 households on the Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) centralized affordable housing waiting list. The federal/provincial Investment in Affordable Housing program and its latest extension (IAH-E program) are important but NRH projects that only about 640 households will be assisted through the five-year program, which is less than 15% of those in need.

There are many valid reasons for creating a national action plan on, including:

- Having a national plan would **raise the profile and priority of the challenge of poverty**, and how its needs to be addressed, with all Canadians. This will also **help to educate Canadians on the root causes of poverty and reduce blaming it as a personal failure**.
- **Poverty reduction plans work** - A poverty reduction plan that includes timelines, targets and a coordinated set of policies has been shown to deliver results in other countries and in Canadian provinces where they have been implemented. **Canada has never had a comprehensive national anti-poverty strategy**. As a result, poverty rates are much higher in Canada than they are in many European countries where governments have made poverty reduction a priority.
- **Increasing communication and collaboration between all levels of government to better coordinate efforts to address and reduce poverty – develop common language, measures, goals, and evaluation strategies**. Many provincial poverty reduction strategies have asked for a federal partner at the table to make further progress on their plans and actions.
- **Ensuring Canada's social safety net is working at its best**, so that Canadians don't get trapped between federal and provincial/territorial programs – i.e. Employment Insurance and social assistance/Ontario Works. Funding and delivering "poverty reduction-focused" programs, without ensuring they are coordinated, effective, efficient, and actually reducing poverty across the country, is not enough.

