

PROVINCIAL ELECTION 2023

DEMANDS FOR ACTION

2023

SMART POLICY CHOICES CAN
ELIMINATE POVERTY IN MANITOBA



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Introduction

Poverty is a political choice; there is no reason people should live in poverty in a wealthy country like Canada or in Manitoba. Make Poverty History Manitoba (MPHM) is committed to changing public policy to achieve a province without poverty. MPHM takes a holistic and comprehensive approach to poverty reduction, we define poverty in line with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights:

*Economic deprivation – lack of income – is a standard feature of most definitions of poverty. But this in itself does not take account of the myriad of social, cultural and political aspects of the phenomenon. **Poverty is not only a deprivation of economic or material resources but a violation of human dignity.***

In 2023, the visible effects of poverty are more stark than ever. The homelessness crisis has resulted in people sheltering in public spaces, and the poisoned drug supply has meant higher overdoses and increased hospitalizations.

Over 100,000 Manitobans are trapped in poverty. Manitoba stands on Indigenous land, but we know that First Nations, Métis and Inuit people experience some of the deepest poverty in Canada. Indigenous Manitobans are still dealing with colonial governments and the legacies of residential schools. Government systems are not helping people; siloed approaches mean a lack of access to identification prevents access to Employment and Income Assistance, which is already horribly below the government's official poverty line. Children, youth and adults involved in child welfare or incarceration are released into homelessness with little support not only to survive but to access literacy, education, training and decent jobs. The lack of income and truly affordable housing mixed with trauma and a mental health crisis has left the most vulnerable subject to increased risk of overdose from the toxic drug supply in the streets of Manitoba's towns and cities.

The situation will only worsen unless governments work in meaningful partnerships with people with lived experiences of poverty, and the Indigenous and community-based organizations who serve them.

The provincial government has jurisdictional responsibility for key policy areas to address poverty: social assistance, education and childcare, health, housing, justice and community support. The

Manitoba Poverty Reduction Strategy and Social Inclusion Act legislates the government to create and report on a provincial poverty reduction strategy. Manitoba must act to eliminate poverty in the province. Instead of addressing these issues, the provincial government has spent the last seven cutting taxes for the most wealthy individuals and corporations doing business in Manitoba.

The pandemic benefits substantially brought down poverty rates. This proves that Government transfers significantly reduce poverty and are key to addressing growing income inequality. But we have also seen the opposite: With years of government cuts, global uncertainty and rising inflation everyone is feeling the pinch - but the most vulnerable are being pushed aside altogether.

Manitoba is located in the homeland of the Anishinabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, Dakota and Innu peoples and the first five treaties in Canada. Manitoba is also located in the homeland of the Red River Métis. Thankfully a clear path is available to stop the over-representation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples amongst those in poverty - the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action and the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls to Justice.

The TRC Calls to Action, and the MMIWG Calls to Justice take comprehensive approaches to addressing systemic racism and inequality amongst Indigenous peoples. Many of the recommendations in these reports are related to poverty reduction: truly affordable housing, adequate income supports, mental health, addictions and healing supports and more. Any poverty reduction strategy in Manitoba must have reconciliation at its core.

Addressing poverty must include considerations of race and of gender.

Gender-based analysis and an intersectional lens are critically important to poverty reduction strategies so that any government response supports the empowerment of people systematically marginalized from the economy and society.

Health care is the leading crisis in Manitoba. Poverty is a Social Determinant of Health. Extensive research shows that income, housing conditions, food security, and education impact social inclusion. [Manitoba's chief public officer of health](#) has identified racism, colonialism and low-income as crucial factors in the reason why some Manitobans are living shorter, less healthy lives than others. Spending on poverty alleviates the burden of disease, chronic disease and the burden on the health care system. Turning this around will take time; a long-term approach and dedication is needed.

The Demands for Action detailed here were developed by the volunteers at **Make Poverty History Manitoba**, a multi-sectoral collaborative coalition representing Indigenous, newcomer, labour, women's, LGBTTQ*, disability, urban, rural, northern, business, education, student and youth communities. We are keenly aware that there is a rising tide of populist politics that is increasingly hostile to these communities and those living in poverty.

In developing the provincial election campaign, MPHM held two consultations, one online in January 2023 and one in person at Knox Church on February 8th, 2023 in Winnipeg. The criteria for developing the Demands for Action are as follows:

1. Impact the most number of Manitobans
2. Address the depth of poverty
3. Focus on provincial policy areas, province-wide in scope
4. Represent issues with emerging community consensus

In short, MPHM has done the leg work on researching and identifying the problems and challenges, and action, not more study, is required from governments on these areas at this time.

These Demands for Action were drafted in consultation with people with lived experiences and local organizations and reviewed by the MPHM provincial committee. A motion to approve was passed at the MPHM AGM in March 2023.

MPHM Demands for Action: Summary

1. Act on the TRC and MMIWG Calls to Action and Justice

- 1.1 The Manitoba government must develop and implement a comprehensive implementation plan, in meaningful partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities to act on the TRC Calls to Action and MMIWG Calls to Justice with a priority on ending poverty among Indigenous peoples in Manitoba.
- 1.2 The Manitoba government should legally adopt UNDRIP.
- 1.3 The Manitoba government should not enact policies, programs or other actions that go against the TRC and MMIWG Calls and UNDRIP.

2. Implement Provincial Poverty Reduction Legislation

- 2.1 The Province of Manitoba immediately establishes a bold target and timeline within a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy to end poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba.
- 2.2 The province ensures accountability and transparency in implementing the plan, with meaningful community representation, including one representative from Make Poverty History Manitoba and annual reporting back to the community. Any consultation should be meaningful, including Indigenous simultaneous translation and proper accessibility measures like ASL.

3. Transform EIA into a Basic Needs Benefit

- 3.1 The Province of Manitoba will transform Employment and Income Assistance into a livable basic needs benefit within 18 months, as part of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. As a province with high persistent levels of child poverty, Manitoba should provide leadership at the Council of the Federation to advocate the federal government to ensure Manitobans and all Canadians have benefits at or above the poverty line.

4. Advance inclusive, equitable, decent employment

- 4.1 Make the minimum wage a living wage in Manitoba based on the living wage methodology developed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 4.2 Including living wages in Manitoba contracted and subcontracted services, include a legally binding clause requiring contracted service workers, including those working for subcontracted companies, to be paid the living wage for Manitoba.
- 4.3 The provincial government update the Employment Standards Code to ensure all workers have 10 days of mandatory paid sick leave per year.

- 4.4 The province support inclusive and equitable economic development strategies that emphasize poverty alleviation through:
 - 4.4.1 A Community Economic Development Framework and Lens
 - 4.4.2 Supporting social enterprises, particularly those focused on workforce development as a key outcome, through a provincial Social Enterprise Strategy
 - 4.4.3 Increase workforce training funding for organizations and social enterprises who work alongside low-income individuals facing barriers to employment
 - 4.4.4 Implementing Social Procurement and Community Benefits Agreements

5. Implement a Comprehensive Housing Strategy

- 5.1 The province should act to end homelessness and core housing need through a comprehensive strategy that includes protecting and expanding the social housing supply, providing tenants in social housing with access to comprehensive supports, supporting private market renters, and creating training and job opportunities through social housing.

6. Support Education, Early Learning, and Childcare

- 6.1 School Nutrition
 - 6.1.1 Create an adequately funded school nutrition program in all Manitoba schools, including breakfast, lunch and snacks.
- 6.2 Early learning and childcare:
 - 6.2.1 Manitoba act immediately on the Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA) Roadmap to a High-Quality Early Learning and Child Care System in Manitoba.
- 6.3 Adult education:
 - 6.3.1 Double the annual budget for Adult Literacy and Learning, which is flat and is less than one percent of what we spend on K-12 education, and less on a per capita basis than what we spend on prisons and prisoners. To double the annual budget would cost an additional \$20 million.
 - 6.3.2 Ensure that the Manitoba Income Support program switches from a “work first” orientation to “adult education wherever possible” approach to support recipients to improve literacy and education levels.
 - 6.3.3 Move rapidly toward the creation of “adult learning hubs,” which would combine Adult Learning Centres, Adult Literacy Programs, and a childcare centre. Many in need of adult basic education have young children. The availability of childcare would make it possible for them to improve their education. Manitoba is rolling out the universal, affordable childcare program, and so should locate childcare centres to meet this need.
- 6.4 Post secondary education
 - 6.4.1 Immediately establish a timeline for transitioning provincial student loans into provincial student grants.

- 6.4.2 Increase the minimum annual living allowance of Manitoba Student Aid to the official poverty line.
- 6.4.3 Eliminate full-time status criteria as an eligibility requirement for Manitoba Student Aid loans and bursaries.
- 6.4.4 Re-establish Manitoba's ACCESS programs can meet the needs of the growing Indigenous and second-chance learner student body in Manitoba.

7. Increase Funding for Mental Health Care Services

- 7.1 Increase funding to mental health and harm reduction by approximately \$500 million to bring it to the recommended 12 percent of total healthcare expenditure, including safe consumption.
- 7.2 Advance mental health through the Community Health Centre model in vulnerable communities. Approach mental health services with a harm reduction lens.

8. Increase Support for Restorative Justice Programs

- 8.1 In the first post-election budget, the Province of Manitoba should double the funding available to community-based restorative justice programs as the first step towards transforming Manitoba's current justice system to one fully based on restorative justice values and practices. Funding priorities should emphasize programs that offer evidence-based and culturally appropriate supports that address the root causes of crime.
- 8.2 Direct Manitoba Justice to immediately engage with community partners to develop an action plan with targets and timelines to move away from the current system that emphasizes incarceration and not rehabilitation. This will necessitate yearly funding increases available to community-based restorative justice programs.

9. Support Children in Care and Youth Aging Out of Care

- 9.1 Increase funding to child welfare authorities to replace funding that had been cut in 2019 when the province shifted to a single envelope block funding model, and work with child welfare authorities and Indigenous governments to establish adequate funding levels.
- 9.2 Youth aging out of care will have access to a wide variety of supports up to at least age 25, providing assistance with education, training, income support, employment and system navigation.

10. Invest in Equitable Public Transportation

- 10.1 As the province transitions to a Basic Needs Benefit, increase funding to the City of Winnipeg to support increasing the WINNpass subsidy to 80 percent off the cost of a monthly pass and support equivalent programs in communities outside Winnipeg, alongside quality public transportation development in the province.
- 10.2 Provide funding to municipalities to support piloting fare-free public transit.
- 10.3 The province explores a new publicly-owned inter-provincial transit service for rural and northern transportation.

1. Act on the TRC and MMIWG Calls to Action and Justice



Manitoba must act on the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and Murdered and Missing Women and Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirited+ Calls to Justice.

Demands for Action

1.1 The Manitoba government must develop and implement a comprehensive implementation plan, in meaningful partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities to act on the TRC Calls to Action and MMIWG Calls to Justice with a priority on ending poverty among Indigenous peoples in Manitoba.

1.2 The Manitoba government should legally adopt UNDRIP.

1.3 The Manitoba government should not enact policies, programs or other actions that go against the TRC and MMIWG Calls and UNDRIP.

In Manitoba, 27 percent of Indigenous people live in poverty. As stated in the [TRC's report](#), the depths of poverty seen by Aboriginal adults are much greater than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Unemployment rates among First Nations Peoples are at least three times higher than the Canadian average. The income disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is 30 percent lower than that of non-Aboriginal workers.

The TRC's final report compels the Federal and provincial governments to meet its human rights obligations and work to restore Indigenous communities with the adequate standard of living that was deprived of so many for so many generations.

The Manitoba government has a legislated responsibility to act on at least 20 of the Calls to Action. The Manitoba [Path to Reconciliation Act](#) was passed unanimously in 2016. It requires annual reports on the progress of implementing the Calls to Action. In 2022, it was amended to include MMIWG [Calls to Justice](#).

The province has a responsibility to act on these Calls in the following areas that also impact poverty, income inequality and social inclusion:

- TRC Call #1 on adequate resources to keep families together
- TRC Call #2: Recognizing health-care rights
- TRC Call #30: Eliminate overrepresentation in custody
- MMIWG Call #1.1: Equitable access to basic rights such as employment, housing, education, safety and health care
- MMIWG Call #1.3: Eliminate social, economic, cultural and political marginalization of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA when developing budgets and determining government activities and priorities
- MMIWG Call #4.1: Safe housing, clean drinking water and adequate food
- MMIWG Call #4.5: Guaranteed annual livable income
- MMIWG Call #12.4: Prohibit the apprehension of children based on poverty and cultural bias
- MMIWG Call #17.19: Address Métis unemployment and poverty as a way to prevent child apprehension

The province publishes a report on the implementation of the TRC Calls to Action annually, [the latest being from 2021-2021](#). Current reporting at the province does not take into account the principles of reconciliation, which should be considered as a foundation of framework before the Calls. The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was the foundation for implementation of the TRC Calls to Action, but Manitoba has not yet put UNDRIP into law [as BC has done](#). Actions of the province of Manitoba have gone against the spirit of the TRC Calls to Action, as highlighted in [this analysis by Shauna Mackinnon](#).

Additionally, the Auditor General of Manitoba finds the Government of Manitoba has not fulfilled its Commitments under the Pathway to Reconciliation Act (see [Manitoba's Implementation of The Path to Reconciliation Act](#), April 2022). The audit found the government had not developed a strategy for reconciliation, which is required under the Act. “Without a strategy, efforts towards reconciliation are hampered, ultimately lacking focus and vision,” [said the Auditor General](#). In addition, the audit found reconciliation efforts were lacking cross-government coordination, and there was no direction given to departments.

2. Implement Provincial Poverty Reduction Legislation



Demands for Action

2.2 The Province of Manitoba immediately establishes a bold target and timeline within a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy to end poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba.

2.3 The province ensures accountability and transparency in implementing the plan, with meaningful community representation, including one representative from Make Poverty History Manitoba and annual reporting back to the community. Any consultation should be meaningful, including Indigenous simultaneous translation and proper accessibility measures like ASL.

Manitoba must establish a bold target and timeline within a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy to end poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba.

In 2009, Make Poverty History Manitoba released *The View From Here: Manitoba Calls for a Poverty Reduction Plan*. Five years later, the community came together to give input into an updated poverty reduction strategy and the second edition of [*The View from Here 2015: Manitobans Call for a Renewed Poverty Reduction Strategy*](#) was published and endorsed by over 100 community groups. This widely supported document included recommendations as well as timelines and targets.

As a result of this community advocacy, Manitoba implemented its first poverty reduction plan in 2009. In 2011, it enacted the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act, legislating the government to create and report on a provincial poverty reduction strategy. In 2014, the Commission of Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Phoenix Sinclair agreed with the importance of a comprehensive approach to poverty. Included in its 62 recommendations was a call to implement all recommendations outlined in *The View From Here*, recognizing poverty as a root cause of many of the systemic failures that led to Phoenix Sinclair's tragic death.

According to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act, a review and update to the strategy, required every five years, was

due in 2017. The province finally released an updated strategy in March 2019, two years after the due date. The release of a provincial poverty strategy would not have occurred were it not for community advocacy to create the initial legislation. MPHM repeatedly called for the current provincial government to release an updated strategy based on community priorities as outlined in *The View from Here*. It was extremely disappointing that little community wisdom around targets and evidence-based policy ideas was taken from *The View From Here* within Manitoba's new strategy, *Pathways to a Better Future*.

The current provincial poverty reduction strategy commits to the federal goal of reducing the national poverty rate by 20 percent by 2020 and 50 percent by 2030. Notably, the federal government's baseline year starting place for this target is 2015, the year before the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit. In February 2019, the federal government announced their target was met three years ahead of schedule. Setting a target that is easy to achieve reduces the urgency and pressure on the federal government to reduce poverty rates and the commiserate suffering experienced by low-income Canadians sooner. In Manitoba's strategy, the provincial government committed to reducing the child poverty rate by 25 percent by 2025 relative to the 2015 baseline, the year before the federal Canada Child Benefit and the Manitoba rent supplement program Rent Assist. Likely due to these two benefits, poverty rates declined.

Poverty rates also declined in 2020 - 2022 due to CERB, however, they are trending upwards again as CERB has been wound down. Worse, the CERB claw-back requires recipients, many of whom are very low income and were deemed eligible at one point, to repay these benefits.

3. Transform EIA into a Basic Needs Benefit

Manitoba must transform Employment and Income Assistance into a basic needs benefit within 18 months, as part of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan.



Demands for Action

3.1 The Province of Manitoba will transform Employment and Income Assistance into a livable basic needs benefit within 18 months, as part of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. As a province with high persistent levels of child poverty, Manitoba should provide leadership at the Council of the Federation to advocate the federal government to ensure Manitobans and all Canadians have benefits at or above the poverty line.

Make Poverty History Manitoba and Basic Income Manitoba are advocating for replacing the basic needs portion of EIA with a new Basic Needs Benefit (BNB) that would be available for all low-income households, including those currently receiving EIA as well as low-income households not receiving EIA. Previously the shelter benefit became Rent Assist, a portable benefit in Manitoba that fixes the benefit for people on social assistance to 75 percent of the Median Market Rent (CMHC). The BNB completes the transformation of EIA on the “basic needs” side of social assistance.

The LBNB is a financial benefit that provides sufficient resources to allow all households in Manitoba to meet their basic needs and replaces the basic needs budget of those on assistance. Combined with Rent Assist and federal financial benefits such as the Canada Child Benefit, it would raise the incomes of all households in Manitoba to at least Canada’s official poverty line. This was developed with Basic Income Manitoba in 2018.

The LBNB breaks down the “Welfare Wall”, defined as barriers and disincentives to seeking paid work or employment. Anyone, working or not, should have the resources to live decently. But everyone should also be able to choose to work to

3.2 As the LBNB benefit is being developed and implemented, the Province of Manitoba will make the following changes to EIA to help people surviving on this benefit:

3.2.1 Reduce intake times - i.e. the length of time it takes between first applying to EIA and first receiving the benefit

3.2.2 Reduce caseload sizes - i.e. the number of participants each EIA caseworker is assigned at one time

3.2.3 Increase community-based service delivery

3.2.4 Collaborate with EIA participants and community-based EIA advocates to align policy with a Housing First and Human Rights-based approach to income security so that no one is denied support.

3.2.5 Implement mandatory training for all EIA staff who work directly with program participants on anti-oppression, trauma-informed care and harm reduction

3.2.6 Provide all EIA participants with a budget for a cell phone

enjoy financial and social inclusion.

This benefit would replace a major portion of the EIA system with a universal income benefit not conditional on work, education or job seeking. Combined with other federal and provincial programs such as Rent Assist and Canada Child Benefit, it would approach much closer to an adequate income. The LBNB would be income tested and decline in value as other income sources rise at 30 percent.

4. Advance inclusive, equitable, decent employment



Manitobans must receive a living wage and 10 paid sick days per year.

Demands for Action

4.1 Make the minimum wage a living wage in Manitoba by adopting the living wage methodology developed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and

4.2 Including living wages in Manitoba contracted and subcontracted services, include a legally binding clause requiring contracted service workers, including those working for subcontracted companies, to be paid the living wage for Manitoba.

4.3 The provincial government update the Employment Standards Code to ensure all workers have 10 days of mandatory paid sick leave per year.

Employment, or pensions derived from a life of employment, is the largest source of income for the vast majority of Manitoba families. However, employment is only a sustainable path out of poverty if it provides a good job with a living wage and good benefits. Unfortunately, many jobs have inadequate pay and few benefits. The rise of temporary and gig work and changes to employment have increased work from home and reliance on digital platforms. In the face of government cuts, inflation and global supply chain uncertainty, many working Manitobans are finding it harder to make ends meet.

Incremental increases to minimum wage have not substantially reduced poverty in Manitoba. The provincial government has made regular increases to the minimum wage, but the pace of these increases is not enough to lift low-income working families out of poverty.

The Manitoba minimum wage is \$14.50 per hour and will rise to \$15.30 on October 1, 2023. The current minimum wage is not based on any estimate of the cost of living. A two-parent family with both parents working full time on minimum wage barely reaches the poverty line. A single parent with two children working full time at minimum wage earns an income that falls more than \$5,000 below the poverty line even when federal

4.4 The province support inclusive and equitable economic development strategies that emphasize poverty alleviation through:

4.4.1 A Community Economic Development Framework & Lens

4.4.2 Supporting social enterprises, particularly those focused on workforce development as a key outcome, through a provincial Social Enterprise Strategy

4.4.3 Increase workforce training funding for organizations and social enterprises who work alongside low-income individuals facing barriers to employment

4.4.4 Implementing Social Procurement and Community Benefits Agreements

Canada Child Benefits are included in income. However, minimum wage workers are 5 times more likely to work part-time, meaning that many households living on minimum wage jobs will be in even greater poverty.

According to Statistics Canada, 38,600 Manitobans work for minimum wage, 55 percent are over age 20. Another 73,700 Manitobans earn 10 percent above the minimum wage. This means that over 100,000 Manitobans, despite working, are living on or at poverty wages.

When lower-income workers earn more money, they have more spending power and can meet their basic needs. Earning enough to meet basic needs means lower-income workers and their families are healthier and don't have to rely on social services or other forms of assistance. Employers elsewhere have found that employee retention increases, making training investments in staff make economic sense, and lowering hiring costs for business.

Manitoba should raise the minimum wage to living wage for all employees. The most recent calculation based on the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives was \$18.34 for 2022. This should be updated annually to account for rising living costs. The Manitoba Government can show leadership by immediately adopting a living wage policy for all government employees, including those contracted through third parties, implementing a community economic development framework through its procurement and contracting policies to provide greater employment and support through social enterprises and by updating labour standards to require at least 10 days of sick leave per year for all employees.

5. Implement a Comprehensive Housing Strategy

Manitoba must act to end homelessness and core housing need through a comprehensive housing strategy.



Demands for Action

5.1 The province should act to end homelessness and core housing need through a comprehensive strategy that includes protecting and expanding the social housing supply, providing tenants in social housing with access to comprehensive supports, supporting private market renters, and creating training and job opportunities through social housing.

Make Poverty History Manitoba works closely with the **Right to Housing Coalition of Manitoba**. This Coalition is currently developing their provincial election campaign. This Demand for Action will be updated once this is available.

6. Support Education, Early Learning, and Childcare

Manitoba must invest in programs to support the educational pursuits of residents of all ages.



Demands for Action

6.1 School Nutrition:

6.1.1 Create an adequately funded school nutrition program in all Manitoba schools, including breakfast, lunch and snacks.

6.2 Early learning and childcare:

6.2.1 Manitoba must act immediately on the MCCA Roadmap to a High-Quality Early Learning and Child Care System in Manitoba.

School Nutrition

Existing nutrition/meal programs now operating in schools across Manitoba are often partial, oversubscribed or non-existent. Large segments of the province have absolutely nothing formal in place, often relying solely on the generosity of teachers and other staff reaching into their own pockets to provide what they can. A Manitoba Teachers' Society survey of teachers showed almost 25 percent spent their own money to feed kids. It is unacceptable in this day and age that many Manitoba students are food-insecure and are frequently going hungry.

As such, Manitoba needs a province-wide funding approach to replace the current ad hoc/ charitable funding model that now covers only parts of Manitoba. To illustrate, during the 2020-2021 school year, the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba (CNCM), the largest organization involved in school nutrition programs province-wide, were actively supporting healthy snacks and meals during the school day in 302 schools to 40,902 school-age students.

6.3 Adult education:

6.3.1 Double the annual budget for Adult Literacy and Learning, which is flat and is less than one percent of what we spend on K-12 education, and less on a per capita basis than what we spend on prisons and prisoners. To double the annual budget would cost an additional \$20 million.

6.3.2 Ensure that the Manitoba EIA program switches from a “work first” orientation to “adult education wherever possible” approach to support recipients to improve literacy and education levels.

6.3.3 Move rapidly toward the creation of “adult learning hubs,” which would combine Adult Learning Centres, Adult Literacy Programs, and a childcare centre. Many in need of adult basic education have young children. The availability of childcare would make it possible for them to improve their education. Manitoba is rolling out the universal, affordable childcare program, and so should locate childcare centres to meet this need.

In 2021/22, the Breakfast Club of Canada served 91 school nutrition programs and reached 17,042 students daily in Manitoba. There are roughly 700 public schools across Manitoba. Poverty and food insecurity are to be found in all areas of the province, and there remains enormous unmet student need in many locales.

The Manitoba government released the [Poverty and Education Task Force report](#) in February 2023. This report recommends enhancing food security and increasing access to nutritious food for students living in poverty.

Early Learning and Childcare

In line with the [Manitoba Child Poverty report card 2023](#) from Campaign 2000 report, and the [Roadmap to a High Quality Early Learning and Child Care System in Manitoba](#) created by the Manitoba Child Care Association, MPHM recommends the new bi-lateral child care agreement between the Federal and Provincial governments to ensure low-income parents and children have access to high quality, free, accessible early learning and child care, and to support the Early Childhood Educator workforce.

Access to childcare is essential for parents. However in Manitoba currently low income parents are required to pay \$2 per day for child care. It is essential that the Manitoba government modernize the affordability mechanisms and move the ELCC subsidy to a sliding scale based on annual tax returns, with low-income parents (any who fall below the CFLIM-After Tax measurement) paying no fee.

Currently, parents who work or attend education or training programs are eligible for fee support. Affordable early

6.4 Post secondary education

- 6.4.1** Immediately establish a timeline for transitioning provincial student loans into provincial student grants.
- 6.4.2** Increase the minimum annual living allowance of Manitoba Student Aid to the official poverty line.
- 6.4.3** Eliminate full-time status criteria as an eligibility requirement for Manitoba Student Aid loans and bursaries.
- 6.4.4** Re-establish Manitoba's ACCESS programs can meet the needs of the growing Indigenous and second-chance learner student body in Manitoba.

learning and child care must be available for all children and families as quality child care is good for child development and provides needed respite for lone parents and dual parents.

Manitoba has a shortage of licensed child care spaces. More than 76 percent of pre-school aged children in the province live in postal codes that currently have a shortage of available child care spaces, according to a [May 2023 report](#) from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Access is worse in rural and northern communities. The province should prioritize the creation of licensed space in low-income neighbourhoods.

The expansion of childcare spaces will increase demand for early childhood education workers. This creates the opportunity to design ECE training programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of people living in poverty. Programs should be developed to support people with barriers to employment to train as Early Learning and Child Care educators to staff new spaces.

Early childhood education of young children is a very important job, but unfortunately is not adequately compensated. Most Early Childhood Educators earn 20-25 percent less than jobs that require similar qualifications and experience. Many licensed childcare centres cannot recruit employees with the qualifications required by the Community Child Care Standards Act. All Early Learning and Child Care programs must be staffed by well-educated and fairly compensated educators who enjoy good working conditions, have opportunities for ongoing learning and career advancement, and are respected for their contributions to the well-being, education and development of children.

While early learning and child care must be universal in approach, additional supports and processes are needed to address and reduce barriers to access. Children with developmental delays or disabilities are welcomed into and can fully participate in all childcare settings with the required support. Programs serving Indigenous families, newcomer families, francophone families, low-income families, and families living in conditions of risk have the resources necessary to provide the additional supports that may be needed.

Adult education

The Manitoba government reports there are 192,600 Manitobans between the ages of 16 and 65 whose literacy levels were too low to enable them to participate fully in society. Adult learners who do well in Adult Learning Centres that offer the mature high school diploma and Adult Literacy Programs that prepare adults for high school courses have a much-improved chance of finding a job that will pull them and their families out of poverty. Also, the evidence shows that children of parents in adult education are themselves more likely to do well in school and thus more likely to avoid a life lived in poverty. Everyone benefits.

Reconciliation would be advanced by enhancing adult basic education. Almost one in five Manitobans is Indigenous. Winnipeg has Canada's largest urban Indigenous population. Indigenous youth are graduating high school at a lower rate than the population at large, but Indigenous adults are particularly eager participants in adult education, enrolling at a rate two and a half times their share of the population. Justice Murray Sinclair has frequently said that "education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of it." This must, of necessity, include adult education.

The Adult Education Demands for Action are taken from the report "[Building the Best Adult Education System in Canada: A Roadmap and Action Plan for Manitoba](#)" by Jim Silver (2022).

7. Increase Funding for Mental Health Care Services

Manitoba must increase funding for mental health and harm reduction programs to support low-income residents.



Demands for Action

7.1 Increase funding to mental health and harm reduction by approximately \$500 million to bring it to the recommended 12 percent of total healthcare expenditure, including safe consumption.

7.2 Advance mental health through the Community Health Centre model in vulnerable communities. Approach mental health services with a harm reduction lens.

Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic poverty has taken a toll on the mental health of many Manitobans. At the onset of the pandemic, approximately half of Canadians attempting to access mental health care reported receiving insufficient treatment or services, [according to Statistics Canada](#). In particular, only 22 percent of all Manitobans accessing mental health and substance use services in 2022 reported having sufficient support in navigating treatment, the second lowest rate in the country [according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information](#). For those impacted by poverty, this statistic was even lower.

The effects of poverty on mental health in Manitoba are apparent. As a result of insufficient funding for preventative public mental healthcare, urban Manitobans in the lowest income quintile are 8 percent more likely to receive mental illness diagnoses than Manitobans with higher incomes, despite having less access to diagnostic services. A similar trend exists for rural Manitobans. In particular, urban Manitobans in the lowest income quintile are more than four times as likely to develop schizophrenia, 2.5 times more likely to develop

psychotic disorders, and 3 times more likely to develop substance use disorders than their high-income counterparts, according to a [study by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy](#).

Similar disparities exist for hospitalizations related to mental health disorders. For instance, urban and rural Manitobans in the lowest income quintile are [four times more likely to be hospitalized](#) for

attempted suicide than their higher-income counterparts. More recently, from 2019-2021, [40 percent of all children and youth hospitalized for mental disorders in Manitoba were from the lowest-income quintile neighbourhoods](#). These discrepancies are structural and can be addressed; Manitoba must reinvest in new poverty reduction strategies to achieve accessible and equitable access to mental health services for Manitobans affected by poverty.

By our estimate, the province's 2023 budget only 5.8 percent of the total healthcare enveloped is dedicated to mental health services. This is already short of the 7-9 percent of total healthcare expenditure recommended by the VIRGO report, an analysis of Manitoba's mental healthcare infrastructure commissioned by the province in 2018. However, groups such as the [Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health](#) and the Royal Society of Canada have recently advocated for the proportion of mental health expenditure to increase to 12 percent of total healthcare expenditure as a result of the pandemic's isolating and damaging effect on mental health, which has disproportionately affected Manitobans in poverty. To meet this new target, provincial expenditure on mental health services must be more than doubled in the coming years, with priority given to programs that address the specific challenges to mental health that poverty poses to many Manitobans. Increasing mental health expenditures by approximately \$500 million will bring it to the recommended 12 percent of total healthcare expenditure.

Further investments are necessary for Community Health Centres, which provide mental health services and other wraparound support critical for Manitobans affected by poverty. However, long wait times for mental health services have caused Manitobans with higher incomes to seek out private mental health services, while the public mental health system on which most Manitobans depend has seen minimal investment, according to the Winnipeg Free Press. Investing in Community Health Centres also helps reduce the economic burden of hospitalizations for acute mental health disorders as they provide preventative mental health services. Because those experiencing poverty see disproportionately higher hospitalization rates for mental health disorders, properly funding equitable mental health services is in the best social and economic interest of all Manitobans.

Many recent investments in Manitoba's mental health infrastructure have been in digital services and programming. While these investments were crucial during COVID-19 lockdowns, they were most beneficial to Manitobans with stable housing and sufficient technology, conditions which are not guaranteed for those living in poverty. As a result, Manitobans in the lowest income quintile benefited from online mental health services the least compared to those with higher income according to Statistics Canada. Providing safe, in-person, affordable, accessible, and equitable mental health services is a necessary step in lifting people out of poverty. Remote services will be necessary in rural and northern communities within the public health system.

8. Increase Support for Restorative Justice Programs

Manitoba must double the funding available to community-based restorative justice programs.



Demands for Action

8.1 In the first post-election budget, the Province of Manitoba should double the funding available to community-based restorative justice programs as the first step towards transforming Manitoba's current legal system to one fully based on restorative justice values and practices. Funding priorities should emphasize programs that offer evidence-based and culturally appropriate supports that address the root causes of crime.

Manitoba has the [second-highest incarceration rate](#) among provinces in Canada at 153 people per 100,000 compared with 67 per 100,000 nationally in 2021/22. Only Saskatchewan's rate is higher. Among youth, Manitoba's incarceration rate is the highest among all provinces with 9.5 out every 10,000 young people in incarceration, four times higher than the national average.

Meanwhile, Manitoba maintains a [crime severity index](#) well above the national average. Manitoba's crime rates compared to these other jurisdictions is proof that the current custodial system is not creating safer communities. The physical state of the majority of the province's jails and prisons, especially when combined with habitual overcrowding, contributes to the failure of the system to rehabilitate those who are given custodial sentences. Recidivism rates, the rates at which people are re-incarcerated after being released from custody, remain too high, given the amount of money invested annually. Of those leaving

custody, [21 percent](#) are convicted of a new offence and returned to provincial custody within two years of their release. Manitoba spends \$249,468 million on custody corrections and only \$26,987 million on community corrections. The latter includes Probations Services and the Restorative Justice Centre, which comprise the bulk of that budget. The community-based restorative justice programs are funded pennies to dollars in comparison.

8.2 Direct Manitoba Justice to immediately engage with community partners to develop an action plan with targets and timelines to move away from the current system that emphasizes incarceration and not rehabilitation. This will necessitate yearly funding increases available to community-based restorative justice programs.

The data on who Manitoba incarcerates demonstrates the racism built into the system. Indigenous incarceration rates are exceptionally high. While [75 percent](#) of those in incarceration in Manitoba are Indigenous, Indigenous people make up only 16 percent of the Manitoba population. While Manitoba Justice does not track the ethnicity of any other admissions, in those provinces which do [track custodial admissions by ethnicity](#), Black and other People of Colour are also over-represented. These groups are also over-represented among those we allow to grow up in poverty in

Manitoba, which all too often leads to Child and Family Services involvement and has long been identified as another pathway to incarceration.

Poverty, and all of its detrimental effects, such as mental health and addictions, are the leading root causes of crime. And the majority of Manitoba's Justice budget is spent on the ongoing failure that is incarceration.

Restorative justice is more humane and effective in dealing with crime. It focuses on accountability from the person who has harmed and on healing as much as possible to those harmed. More importantly, without the adversarial approach of the court system, the community gains a better understanding of what led to the crime and can work on solutions that work.

Restorative justice programs can, and have been, successfully used to manage people who have done harm in community as opposed to prisons or jails. An evidence-based and culturally appropriate program can provide the support needed for a person to learn to take responsibility for their actions and make the necessary changes to avoid future criminal activity. Community restorative justice organizations could take on far more cases if they were adequately funded.

9. Support Children in Care and Youth Aging Out of Care



Manitoba must increase the support available to children in care and youth aging out of care to break cycles of poverty.

Demands for Action

9.1 Increase funding to child welfare authorities to replace funding that had been cut in 2019 when the province shifted to a single envelope block funding model, and work with child welfare authorities and Indigenous governments to establish adequate funding levels.

9.2 Youth aging out of care will have access to a wide variety of supports up to at least age 25, providing assistance with education, training, income support, employment and system navigation.

Manitoba's child welfare system is a key driver in perpetuating poverty. Children living in foster care or involved in the child welfare system have a much greater chance of experiencing poverty in subsequent stages of life. For example, the 2022 Winnipeg Street Census survey of people experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg found that that 50 percent of individuals experiencing homelessness had had experience in the child welfare system. There is also a tragic link between the child welfare system and the high number of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people. Of [9,700 missing children in Manitoba in 2016](#), 87 percent were in CFS care, and 70 percent were girls. The harm caused by our child welfare system is often life-long. Social dislocation, alienation from cultural backgrounds and disruption of family and community supports places children undermine access to education, job opportunities and social inclusion.

Moreover, Manitoba's child welfare system is marked by its history as an institution of colonialism and assimilation of Indigenous children. Many [Indigenous activists and scholars](#) draw

a continuous line between the Residential School System, the Sixties Scoop, and the modern child welfare system. According to Indigenous Services Canada, [58 percent](#) of all children in care across Canada are Indigenous, while Indigenous children represent only 7.7 percent of Canada's child population. The disparity in Manitoba is even greater where 90 percent of nearly 11,000 children in care are Indigenous.

While there have been reforms to the child welfare system at the federal and provincial levels in recent years to devolve greater authority to Indigenous communities, lack of funding continues to hamstring child welfare authorities preventing them from providing the necessary supports to children in care, to support families so that children do not end up in care and support youth transitioning out of the Child Welfare system.

In 2017, the provincial government introduced reforms to the child welfare system in Manitoba. The plan sought to resolve a long-standing conflict over child welfare funding. At issue was a section of the Canada [Children's Special Allowance Act](#). Children's Special Allowances are payments made by the federal government equivalent to the Canada Child Benefit for children in foster care. The Act requires that "a special allowance shall be applied exclusively toward the care, maintenance, education, training or advancement of the child in respect of whom it is paid." Despite this legal requirement, successive Manitoba provincial governments illegally misappropriated these funds and directed them towards general revenue.

In 2019, the Province addressed this issue by ending the requirement that child welfare authorities remit the federal funds from the Special Allowance to the Province. As a result, the Province estimated that authorities would retain an additional \$30 million. However, this change did not result in any increase in actual funding for children in care. Instead, [the Province reduced single envelope block funding](#) by nearly the same amount. The net effect is that child welfare authorities continue to lack the resources to help the families they are designed to serve.

As a result, the ongoing trauma of Manitoba's colonial and inadequate child welfare system continues to harm a new generation of children, youth and families. The Block funding model is set at an arbitrary and inadequate level, providing agencies insufficient resources to address changes in needs. This leads to fewer extensions of care for youth ages 18 to 21. In some cases, due to a lack of transitional funding and an absence of affordable housing options, agencies have resorted to taking children to homelessness shelters when they turn age 18. Too often, former children in care enter into a cycle of homelessness immediately on transitioning from CFS.

Manitoba needs to uphold the spirit of the Children's Special Allowance Act by redirecting the full amount of the allowances to child welfare authorities to allow Indigenous agencies as well as the general authority the resources and autonomy they need to fulfill their obligations to children and families and to undo the harm caused by Manitoba CFS system over successive generations. **This** increase in funding should be ongoing and predictable to sustainably meet the needs of children, families and agencies. Moreover, the increases in funding demanded by Make Poverty History Manitoba are not meant as redress for past harms, and should not be seen as displacing any legal actions being taken by Indigenous governments or organizations for previous failures of the Manitoba government to adequately fund child welfare.

10. Invest in Equitable Public Transportation

Manitoba must increase funding for subsidized WinnPass transit passes and invest in inter-community transportation.



Demands for Action

10.1 As the province transitions to an LBNB, increase funding to the City of Winnipeg to support increasing the WINNpass subsidy to 80 percent off the cost of a monthly pass and support equivalent programs in communities outside Winnipeg, alongside quality public transportation development in the province.

10.2 Provide funding to municipalities to support piloting fare-free public transit.

10.3 The province explores a new publicly-owned inter-provincial transit service for rural and northern transportation.

Transportation is essential for getting almost everything we need daily. Finding a job or going to work, getting groceries or other supplies, participating in social activities, and accessing healthcare or social services all require the ability to get there. The inability to travel when and where one needs without difficulty can be understood as a ‘transportation disadvantage’. A person is more likely to experience transportation disadvantage if they are low-income, minority status, and lack motorized transportation.

As documented in [Green Light Go: Improving Transportation Equity](#), increased bus fares have heightened transportation inequity in Winnipeg. It is vital that a low-income bus pass program be integrated with a reduction in general fares to make transit affordable for everyone. Transit riders in Winnipeg already pay one of the highest ratios of fare-to-service revenues of any major city in Canada. A low-income bus pass cannot be implemented at the cost of higher fares for other riders. The provincial government spends several million dollars on transit subsidies for EIA recipients and participants in other provincial programs in Winnipeg. This included 3,100 bus passes, 2,400 partial passes and 7,500 tokens or tickets each month for the EIA program alone in 2017/18. As in Alberta, a sliding scale low-income bus pass program will be best implemented with

provincial funding support. The administration of the low-income bus pass program could be integrated with the provincial EIA offices, offering easier and more efficient service for low-income people.

Inter-community Transportation

Since the loss of Greyhound, Manitobans are also faced with severe challenges when it comes to traveling between communities. While a few bus lines run by other small private providers have sprung up, the network has shrunk considerably. And these small lines are precarious, with operators setting up and closing down year to year as they struggle to make a profit in the sparsely populated rural and northern regions of the province.

All of this demonstrates the need for inter-city transportation, like urban transit, to be publicly owned and operated. Inter-city transportation should be a public good provided by the province—like urban transit, healthcare, and other social services. Rural transportation service links people in rural and remote communities to educational and economic opportunities and helps them access medical services, social services, and the justice system. It can also be integrated with freight service and medical transport.

The provincial government has a duty to ensure all Manitobans can access essential medical care, regardless of where they live. To that end, the province currently subsidizes medical transportation costs through the Northern Patient Transportation Program. A publicly owned transportation service would go further, ensuring northern Manitobans actually have convenient, affordable options for medical travel, and eliminating the need to subsidize the private sector to provide this service.

A provincial bus service would provide a safe, affordable means of transportation, especially for those unable to afford a car and who may otherwise resort to hitchhiking. One of the recommendations in the MMIW Inquiry, which the province has committed to implementing, was to ensure that safe and affordable transit and transportation services and infrastructure is in place for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people living in remote or rural communities. This provincially owned company would provide another source of stable employment for people living in communities across the province.

A provincial-wide, publicly-owned transportation service would ensure the connectivity, consistency, affordability, safety and accessibility Manitobans deserve, compared to a patchwork of private operators. Private operators tend to have a lower level of safety and accessibility, require subsidies without guaranteeing a return on investment, and will pull out if they are not able to make a profit (as with Greyhound).

Conclusion

Everyone should be able to live a full life in strong communities. But poverty hurts communities, hurts the most vulnerable and makes solving other problems more difficult.

We are also facing a rising tide of populist politics that is increasing hostility towards the poor, particularly racialized, Indigenous, female and gender diverse, people with disabilities and LGBTQ2S+ people living in poverty.

The stakes are too high to let poverty be ignored by yet another election campaign. So Make Poverty History Manitoba is here to shine a light on poverty, how it got this bad - and what we can do to eliminate it.

We know that poverty can feel complex and hard to talk about. But getting smart about solutions can make a real difference. Smart policy choices can eliminate poverty in Manitoba. That's why Make Poverty History has worked in partnership with community-based organizations on the front-lines to develop real, tangible Demands for Action to eliminate poverty. And that's why we're reaching out to everyday Manitobans to help spread the word about how we can make poverty history in Manitoba.

To learn more and get involved, please visit www.MakePovertyHistoryMB.com.

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Vote to end poverty.
Smart policy choices can eliminate poverty in Manitoba.
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