

MANITOBA POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

DEMANDS FOR ACTION

2024

SMART POLICY CHOICES CAN
ELIMINATE POVERTY IN MANITOBA



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Introduction

Poverty is a political choice and 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. Taking 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.

No social phenomenon is as comprehensive in its assault on human rights as poverty. Poverty erodes economic and social rights such as the right to health, adequate housing, food and safe water, and the right to education.

Poverty in Manitoba: A dire situation

In 2024, 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 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, and government systems are not helping; Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) incomes for single individuals and people with disabilities do not come close to the deep poverty income threshold, let alone the official poverty line.

Poverty is entwined with the health care system

Addressing poverty is crucial to improving the health care system, which Manitobans have named as a top priority. 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 cost of poverty

[Recent research](#) from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) finds that poverty costs Manitoba \$2.5 billion every year due to increased costs to the health care and justice systems and lost tax revenue. Poverty is making Manitobans sicker and driving criminalization. Already vulnerable groups like racialized people, Indigenous people, women, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA* people are disproportionately affected.

Children, youth and adults involved in child welfare or incarceration are released into homelessness with little support, making it nearly impossible for them to survive, let alone access literacy, education, training and decent jobs. The lack of income supports and truly affordable housing mixed with a mental health and trauma 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. Manitobans have a human right to a basic standard of living, and by allowing this broken system to continue, Manitoba violates these rights.

The Manitoba government must act now

The situation will only worsen unless governments take the lead and works 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 over key policy areas to address poverty – social assistance, education and childcare, health, housing, justice, and community support – and must invest strategically in these areas to eliminate poverty in the province. The Manitoba Poverty Reduction Strategy and Social Inclusion Act legislates the government to create and report on a provincial poverty reduction strategy.

In the fall of 2024, the Manitoba government will begin conducting consultations to create a new, five-year poverty reduction strategy for Manitoba. This strategy is legally required by the Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy Act and guides all of the province's policy and program work on poverty. Now is an important time for anti-poverty advocates to make our voices heard.



Provincial poverty reduction strategy must be intersectional

In an unusual move, the Manitoba government indicated that the poverty reduction consultations will be focused on children, youth aging out of care and seniors. Make Poverty History Manitoba agrees that action on poverty with these vulnerable groups is important. The province is responsible to all Manitobans, and therefore should consider how poverty rates can be brought down for all those impacted in Manitoba - single adults, single parents, people with disabilities. An intersectional lens that considers how the province can ensure equity among equity-seeking groups, those who are racialized, women and gender diverse folks, those who are differently abled and more, should be used so that any government response supports the empowerment of people systematically marginalized from the economy and society.

Data and lived experience should guide the engagement and consultation process of the poverty reduction strategy. For example, single individuals are those in deepest poverty in Manitoba - their income is 60 percent below the Market Basket Measure (MBM) of poverty. Single people with disabilities are 45 percent below the MBM. Single-parent households are 30 percent below the MBM and couple parents 27 percent below. People with disabilities are also at a higher risk of poverty. Notably, Manitoba has one of the lowest poverty rates among seniors at 3.9 percent, which is 20 percent lower than the national average of 4.7 percent

The province should base its Poverty Reduction Strategy on Make Poverty History Manitoba's 10 Demands for Action – evidence-based policy recommendations to the provincial government to substantially cut poverty rates in Manitoba. This includes transforming EIA into a Livable Basic Benefit to raise all Manitobans' incomes to the poverty line. This would afford everyone a basic level of dignity and ensure that their human right to an adequate standard of living is met.

Community has the answers

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, 2SLGBTQIA*, disability, urban, rural, northern, business, education, student and youth communities – as the result of two consultations, one online in January 2023 and one in person at Knox Church on February 8th, 2023. They were drafted in consultation with people with lived experiences and local organizations, and reviewed by the MPHM provincial committee. A motion to approve them was passed at the MPHM AGM in March 2023.

The criteria for these Demands for Action was that each one must:

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

In short, MPHM has done the leg work on researching and identifying the problems and challenges of addressing poverty in Manitoba. We need action from the government now - not more studies.

MPHM Demands for Action: Summary

The Province of Manitoba must:

1. Transform EIA into a Livable Basic Benefit

- 1.1 Transform Employment and Income Assistance into a Livable Basic Benefit within 18 months, as part of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan.
- 1.2 Bring all households to 75% of the MBM poverty rate, and work with the federal government to bring all households to the MBM poverty line.
- 1.3 Make critical changes to EIA while the Livable Basic Benefit is being developed and implemented, including:
 - 1.3.1 Reduce intake times - i.e. the length of time it takes between first applying to EIA and first receiving the benefit
 - 1.3.2 Reduce caseload sizes - i.e. the number of participants each EIA caseworker is assigned at one time
 - 1.3.3 Increase community-based service delivery
 - 1.3.4 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.
 - 1.3.5 Implement mandatory training for all EIA staff who work directly with program participants on anti-oppression, trauma-informed care and harm reduction
 - 1.3.6 Provide all EIA participants with a budget for a cell phone

2. Act on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls for Justice

- 2.1 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 for Justice, with a priority on ending poverty among Indigenous peoples in Manitoba.
- 2.2 Legally adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- 2.3 Refrain from enacting policies, programs or other actions that go against the TRC Calls to Action, MMIWG Calls for Justice, or UNDRIP.

3. Establish a bold target and timeline to end poverty

- 3.1 Immediately establish a bold target and timeline within a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy to end poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba.
- 3.2 Ensure 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.

- 3.3 Ensure that consultation is meaningful, including Indigenous simultaneous translation and proper accessibility measures like ASL.

4. Advance inclusive, equitable, decent employment

- 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.
- 4.2 Require with a legally binding clause that contracted service workers, including those working for subcontracted companies, be paid the living wage for Manitoba.
- 4.3 Update the Employment Standards Code to ensure all workers have 10 days of mandatory paid sick leave per year.
- 4.4 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 Increasing 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 Increase the social housing supply by 1,000 rent-geared-to-income units annually for at least ten years.
- 5.2 Protect existing social housing to ensure no loss of rent-geared-to-income units due to disrepair, lack of subsidies, or the sale of properties.
- 5.3 Increase and stabilize funding to ensure all social housing tenants have access to comprehensive supports with a minimum ratio of one support worker per one hundred units.
- 5.4 Enhance security of tenure by limiting exemptions to rent regulations, limiting above-guideline rent increases, disallowing rent discounts, enhancing compensation for no-fault evictions, and ensuring evictions occur as a last resort.
- 5.5 Support and partner with social enterprises to provide people facing barriers to employment with training and employment in the construction and maintenance of 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 Act immediately on the 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 child care 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% 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 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.
- 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 Provide youth aging out of care with access to a wide variety of supports until at least age 25, ensuring they receive assistance with education, training, income support, employment and system navigation.

10. Invest in equitable public transportation

- 10.1 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.



1. Transform EIA into a Livable Basic Benefit

Manitoba must transform Employment and Income Assistance into a Livable Basic Benefit within 18 months, as part of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan.

Manitoba must...

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1.2 Bring all households to 75% of the MBM poverty rate, and work with the federal government to bring all households to the MBM poverty line.

1.3 Make critical changes to EIA while the Livable Basic Benefit is being developed and implemented, including: :

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

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

1.3.3 Increase community-

EIA is failing to lift Manitobans out of poverty

Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program, which [62,500 Manitobans](#) rely on, is woefully inadequate and does not provide enough income for recipients to live a dignified, healthy life. Single individuals receive only [\\$274 per month](#) (approx. \$9/day) for basic needs (i.e. food, clothing, medication, toiletries, laundry, transportation, phone service, household goods, etc), which is barely enough to buy a single fast-food meal, let alone provide for all the necessities of a well-balanced life.

To make matters worse, recipients' benefits are clawed back if they earn more than \$200 per month, discouraging many from entering the workforce at all. Furthermore, recipients are required to meet strict behavioural restrictions related to education or employment-seeking, posing yet another hoop to jump through on an empty stomach. Rather than helping Manitobans rise out of poverty, the current EIA system keeps people trapped in it.

A Livable Basic Benefit will drastically reduce poverty

The solution is to transform the basic needs portion of EIA into a Livable Basic Benefit (LBB), an income-tested, portable benefit which, when combined with Rent Assist and federal financial benefits such as the Canada Child Benefit, would raise the incomes of all households in Manitoba to at least Canada's official poverty line. Implementing the LBB would complete the work that was started when the shelter benefit portion of EIA was converted into Rent Assist, which fixes the shelter benefit for people on social assistance to 75 percent of the Median Market Rent (as defined by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC).

Key features of the LBB

The LBB would have several features that would make it effective at lifting Manitobans out of poverty, including being portable, unconditional, indexed to inflation and income-tested.

Livable – The LBB would provide an income sufficient for a person's basic needs, as defined by the Market Basket Measure (MBM)

based service delivery

- 1.3.4 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.
- 1.3.5 Implement mandatory training for all EIA staff who work directly with program participants on anti-oppression, trauma-informed care and harm reduction
- 1.3.6 Provide all EIA participants with a budget for a cell phone

poverty line. EIA is currently at 40% of the poverty line. MPHM is asking the province of Manitoba to bring all incomes to 75% of the poverty line and work with the federal government to get to 100%.

Portable – Like Rent Assist, the LBB would be a portable benefit, meaning that recipients would continue to be eligible for it as they transition out of EIA. In addition, it would be available to those who are not on EIA at all. This is critical to addressing poverty among the working population, which is growing at a shocking pace as food prices skyrocket. In 2023, [Harvest Manitoba reported](#) that 40 percent of their clients were employed, a 66 percent increase from the previous year.

Unconditional – The LBB would be free of behavioural conditions related to work, education, and job seeking. In other words, recipients will not be required to jump through hoops to prove that they are deserving of the benefit. This would allow Manitoba to grow out of the long-outdated notion of “deserving” or “undeserving” poor, which for too long has stood in the way of people receiving the help that they need to flourish.

Indexed to Inflation – The LBB would be set to the MBM poverty line, which is indexed to inflation, to ensure that recipients do not lose purchasing power over time. Currently EIA is not indexed to the cost of living. EIA rates in Manitoba have not kept up with inflation. In November 2022, the basic necessities amount increased in Manitoba, marking the first increase in years. However, this “increase” was negated by inflation, so [recipients still lost purchasing power](#). Accounting for inflation, the real

purchasing power of households on EIA has [declined by \\$1,040 per year](#), or about 10 per cent, since 2018.

Income-tested – The LBB would be income-tested and decline in value by 30 percent as other income sources rise. This would help eliminate the “welfare wall” – barriers and disincentives to seeking employment – posed by EIA. Many recipients are discouraged from seeking employment because of the penalizing clawbacks of earned income: 70 percent of earnings over \$200 are deducted from EIA benefits. By tapering off benefits at a more gradual rate, the LBB would empower those transitioning from EIA into the workforce, resulting in more autonomy and dignity for recipients.

Poverty violates human rights

The poverty that EIA recipients are currently experiencing is a violation of their human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. ([Article 25.1](#))

To end this violation on the health and dignity of Manitobans, the provincial government must transform EIA into a Livable Basic Benefit. In the meantime, they must address the most pressing issues within the EIA system, to provide for those surviving on this benefit.

We know that government transfers work, because during the pandemic, government-issued benefits like the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) substantially [brought down poverty rates](#). We have also seen the opposite: with years of government cuts, combined with global uncertainty and inflation, everyone is feeling the pinch – but the most vulnerable are being pushed aside altogether. Like the housing-first model, which asserts that people’s basic needs must be met before they can address other issues, the LBB is an “income-first” approach to poverty reduction. Once people have a reliable way to meet their basic needs, they can begin to invest in their futures through education, cultural revitalization, and improvements to their quality of life.



2. Act on the TRC Calls to Action and MMIWG Calls for 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.

Manitoba must...

2.1 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 for Justice, with a priority on ending poverty among Indigenous peoples in Manitoba.

2.2 Legally adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

2.3 Refrain from enacting policies, programs or other actions that go against the TRC Calls to Action, MMIWG Calls for Justice, or UNDRIP.

Indigenous people are overrepresented in poverty

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% lower than that of non-Aboriginal workers.

The road to reconciliation is clearly marked

Thankfully, a clear path is available to end the overrepresentation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples among 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. These reports take comprehensive approaches to addressing systemic racism and inequality amongst Indigenous peoples, and many of their recommendations 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.

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

An obligation to address the TRC and MMIWG reports

The province has a responsibility to act on the following calls that impact poverty, income inequality and social inclusion:

- TRC Call 1.2: Provide adequate resources to keep Indigenous families together.
- TRC Call 18: Recognize the health-care rights of Indigenous peoples.
- TRC Call 30: Eliminate Indigenous overrepresentation in custody.
- MMIWG Call 1.1: Ensure equitable access to basic rights such as employment, housing, education, safety and health care.
- MMIWG Call 1.3: Eliminate the social, economic, cultural and political marginalization of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQ+ when developing budgets and determining government activities and priorities.
- MMIWG Call 4.1: Ensure that Indigenous peoples have access to safe housing, clean drinking water, and adequate food.
- MMIWG Call 4.5: Establish a guaranteed annual livable income for all Canadians.
- 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.

Manitoba is falling short on reconciliation efforts

The province publishes a report on the implementation of the TRC Calls to Action annually, the latest being from [2021-2022](#). 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 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.



3. Establish a bold target and timeline to end poverty

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

Manitoba must...

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

3.2 Ensure 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.

3.3 Ensure that consultation is meaningful, including Indigenous simultaneous translation and proper accessibility measures like ASL.

Poverty reduction strategies are essential

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.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act

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*.

Weak targets prolong the suffering of those in poverty

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 have trended upwards again since CERB was wound down. Worse, the CERB claw-back required recipients, many of whom were very low income and were deemed eligible at one point, to repay these benefits.



4. Advance inclusive, equitable, decent employment

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

Manitoba must...

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.

4.2 Require with a legally binding clause that contracted service workers, including those working for subcontracted companies, be paid the living wage for Manitoba.

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

4.4 Support inclusive and equitable economic development strategies that emphasize poverty alleviation through:

4.4.1 A Community Economic Development Framework & Lens.

A living wage is essential to exit poverty

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.

Minimum wage increases are not enough

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 \$15.30 per hour and will rise to \$15.80 on October 1, 2024. 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 Canada Child Benefits are included in income. However, minimum wage workers are five times more likely to work part-time, meaning that many households living on minimum wage jobs will be in even greater poverty.

Many working Manitobans are in poverty

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 Increasing 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.

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 must implement a living wage for all

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 \$19.21 for 2023. 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.

Manitoba must...

5.1 Increase the social housing supply by 1,000 rent-geared-to-income units annually for at least ten years.

5.2 Protect existing social housing to ensure no loss of rent-geared-to-income units due to disrepair, lack of subsidies, or the sale of properties.

5.3 Increase and stabilize funding to ensure all social housing tenants have access to comprehensive supports with a minimum ratio of one support worker per one hundred units.

5.4 Enhance security of tenure by limiting exemptions to rent regulations, limiting above-guideline rent increases, disallowing rent discounts, enhancing compensation for no-fault evictions, and ensuring evictions occur as a last resort.

Manitoba needs a housing strategy

Housing is a basic human need, essential to survival, health and well-being. Housing provides the foundation to address poverty, crime, addiction, poor health, unemployment, gender-based violence, and the apprehension of children by Child and Family Services. Additionally, we cannot end homelessness without ensuring access to low-rent housing.

In Manitoba, thousands of people are unable to find stable housing. The private rental market is increasingly unaffordable to people experiencing poverty and homelessness, exacerbated by rent regulations which allow landlords to hike rents in specific circumstances. Households in the lowest income quartile spend an average of 68% of their incomes on housing. This has escalated the demand for non-market, social housing where rents are capped at 30% of a household's income. Nearly 6,000 households are on the waitlist for a social housing unit. With nowhere else to go, many people end up staying with friends/family, in shelters, or outside. According to the [2022 Winnipeg street census](#), there are more than 1,200 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in Winnipeg alone.

Social housing action plan: five key pillars

It is time for all levels of government to finally do what is necessary to address the housing crisis. The Right to Housing Coalition has put forward a [social housing action plan](#) for Manitoba that pulls together solutions based on decades of research and consultation. MPHM echoes them in calling on the Manitoba government to commit to implementing a social housing action plan that features the following five key pillars:

1. Increase the social housing supply by 1,000 rent-geared-to-income units annually for at least 10 years. According to the housing needs analysis conducted by the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association in 2023, Manitoba requires at least 10,000 additional units of social housing right now to meet the housing needs of the lowest-income Manitobans. This includes people

5.5 Support and partner with social enterprises to provide people facing barriers to employment with training and employment in the construction and maintenance of social housing.

whose income comes from social assistance, disability benefits, or seniors benefits as well as the working poor. At least half of new units should be publicly-owned and the remainder owned by non-profit, co-operative, and Indigenous-led housing providers. New units should be prioritized for communities, populations, and household sizes with the greatest need. Newly constructed units should be built to the highest efficiency and performance standards. The Manitoba government will need a plan that explores all opportunities for expanding supply through new construction, the acquisition and redevelopment of existing properties, and the use of public land banking and land trusts. A funding mechanism is required to ensure new supply can operate

with rent-gear-to-income rents for as long as it is needed.

2. Protect existing social housing to ensure no loss of rent-gear-to-income units due to disrepair, lack of subsidies, or the sale of properties. New social housing supply will not help to reduce homelessness and housing insecurity if we don't prevent the loss of existing units. There are social housing units in Manitoba that sit vacant or have been demolished because of inadequate investment in capital repairs and maintenance. Publicly-owned units have been sold to the private sector and no longer offer affordable rents. Nonprofit social housing providers have had to increase rents or sell their properties to the private sector when government subsidies were not renewed or replaced after they expired. Going forward, the Manitoba government must prevent these losses to ensure new social housing supply results in a net gain. This requires: a \$1.5b (over 10 years) capital maintenance fund to bring existing buildings up to standard; retaining ownership of public housing assets; legislation to prevent the sale of non-profit owned social housing that has received government funds; and a new funding mechanism to sustain rent-gear-to-income rents and the operation of public, non-profit, co-operative, and Indigenous-led social housing when subsidy agreements expire.

3. Increase and stabilize funding to ensure all social housing tenants have access to comprehensive supports with a minimum ratio of 1 support worker per 100 units. People who live with low incomes often face challenges accessing physical and mental health care, food, transportation, childcare, education, training, and employment. Poverty also increases the risk of experiencing gender-based violence, physical and mental illness, addiction, and involvement with the child welfare and justice systems. These experiences can threaten tenancies and trap people in poverty. There are many organizations in Manitoba that help low-income households stabilize their tenancies by connecting them to resources related to landlord-tenant mediation, basic needs, budgeting, pest management, and hoarding. They also help households achieve other goals and improve their economic conditions by connecting them to resources related to family reunification, newcomer settlement, reintegration from incarceration, Indigenous cultural practices, health, trauma, mental health, substance use, childcare, education, job training, and employment. The Manitoba government can help prevent evictions and homelessness by increasing and stabilizing funding to expand proven models for delivering supports to social housing tenants. This includes funding for resource centres located onsite or nearby, funding to operate transitional and permanent supportive housing, and funding for mobile support workers that can meet tenants where they're at in the community.

4. Enhance security of tenure by limiting exemptions to rent regulations, limiting above-guideline rent increases, disallowing rent discounts, enhancing compensation for no-fault evictions, and ensuring evictions occur as a last resort. Manitoba's Residential Tenancies Act prevents the loss of housing through unforeseen and unreasonable rent increases by establishing a guideline that limits the percentage rate of annual rent increases. Unfortunately, the rent regulations do not cover all buildings. Units rented at \$1,615 a month or higher are exempt. Units in buildings first occupied after 2005 are also exempt for 20 years. The law also permits landlords to seek rent increases above the annual guideline if they can establish operating cost increases or capital costs, such as repairs. Unlike jurisdictions such as Ontario, there are no limits to the increase that can be granted and few limits on what expenses can be claimed. Manitoba's amortization period is also much shorter, resulting in higher rent increases. Landlords are able to unfairly increase their profit margins through this process; after the expenses have been fully paid by tenants through higher rents, the rents do not go back down. The severe loss of low-rent units in the private market is largely the result of rent increases, though conversions to other uses like short-term rentals and demolitions play a part.

Another issue that threatens affordability is the ability for landlords to remove, with little notice, rent discounts tenants receive when there is insufficient demand to charge legal rents. Renters can be forced to find more affordable housing, placing them at risk of homelessness, and increasing the demand for rent-geared-to-income housing. Investment in social housing must be paired with strengthened rent regulations and tenant protections that ensure evictions occur as a last resort and that tenants receive adequate compensation for no-fault evictions. This will help ensure that Manitoba renters, regardless of the type of housing in which they live, have stable, secure homes.

5. Support and partner with social enterprises to provide people facing barriers to employment with training and employment in the construction and maintenance of social housing. Public investment in social housing stimulates the economy. The construction, maintenance, renovation and retrofitting of social housing offers opportunities for training, apprenticeship, and long-term employment. The Manitoba government can partner with construction-based social enterprises that can help ensure some of these opportunities are provided to low-income people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to enter the workforce. This approach can deepen Manitoba's pool of skilled workers, which are desperately needed to fill the growing labour shortage within the construction industry - a shortage that is fuelling the affordable housing crisis across the country. Partnering with social enterprises can generate a greater return on public investments in the construction and maintenance of social housing. When previously unemployed workers become attached to the labour market, their wages help fuel the economy. This model generates new tax revenues while reducing poverty, and decreases associated costs related to social assistance, child welfare, health care and incarceration. The Manitoba government can help maximize these outcomes by expanding social procurement practices within Manitoba Housing, enhancing funding for training within social enterprises, and implementing a social enterprise strategy to support sector development and expansion.



6. Support Education, Early Learning, and Childcare

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

Manitoba must...

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 Act immediately on the 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

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.

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, MPMH recommends the new bilateral child care agreement between the Federal and

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 child care 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

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 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 preschool 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

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.

The Manitoba government [reports there are 192,600 Manitobans](#) between the ages of 16 and 65 whose literacy levels are 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).

Post-Secondary Education

Success in today's knowledge-based economy can depend on having higher levels of education and specialized skills. Expanding opportunities for accessing post-secondary education is an important component of a poverty reduction plan. Post-secondary education is associated with increased access to better jobs, higher earnings, improved health outcomes, and reduced crime.

Making post-secondary education accessible to all with targeted investments in vulnerable students requires a commitment to universal access policies. These policies include lowering user fees with the goal of eliminating these upfront barriers, providing good grants and bursaries for students, and ensuring adequate funding for post-secondary institutions. Broad measures like these can ensure a strong, sustainable post-secondary education system.



7. Increase Funding for Mental Health Care Services

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

Manitoba must...

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, in the province's 2023 budget, only 5.8 percent of the total healthcare envelope 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.

Manitoba must...

8.1 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.

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.

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.

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 vast majority of Manitoba's Justice budget is 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.

Manitoba must...

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 Provide youth aging out of care with access to a wide variety of supports until at least age 25, ensuring they receive 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 be felt by 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 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.

Manitoba must...

10.1 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 Explore a new publicly-owned inter-provincial transit service for rural and northern transportation.

A transportation disadvantage

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, devastates the most vulnerable, and makes solving other problems more difficult.

We are also facing a rising tide of populist politics that is increasing hostility toward 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 the most vulnerable Manitobans be ignored by yet another poverty reduction strategy. 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.**

Thank You, Miigwetch, Merci, Maarsii, Ekosani, Pidamaya

To learn more about our campaign activities, donate, or volunteer, please visit www.MakePovertyHistoryMB.com or email Chair@MakePovertyHistoryMB.com.

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