

# The Nova Scotia provincial government unveils its Poverty Reduction Initiative

The government's poverty reduction strategy is a 40+ page document available online. We are reproducing its executive summary to provide you with an idea of what is being covered by the document. The initiative's release date was April 13th, 2009.

Our poverty reduction strategy provides a framework for addressing the needs of those most vulnerable and those at risk of falling into poverty, while promoting the prosperity necessary for Nova Scotia to grow.

## Building on progress

We are already making significant strides in our fight against poverty. For example, the percentage of Nova Scotians living in low-income circumstances is the lowest it's been in a decade—and lower than the Canadian average.

But we need, and plan, to do more.

## Setting our vision, objectives, and actions

Our vision for 2020 is clear: to break the cycle of poverty by creating opportunities for all Nova Scotians to participate in the prosperity of the province and enjoy a better standard of living.

Change does not come overnight. This is a multi-year plan that begins right now—with new investments of \$ 155 million. This builds on additional government investments totalling almost \$ 200 million in programs over the past three years.

We are committed to reducing the number of people living in poverty. When we help one, we help us all.

## Summary of new investments

### Goal 1: Enable and reward work

Training \* \$ 88 million

End treatment of tax refunds as income for IA clients \$400,000

### Goal 2: Improve supports for those in need

Increase income assistance rates \$2 million

Housing \$59 million

### Goal 3: Focus on our children

Expand Nova Scotia child benefit, low-income pharmacare \$ 2.5 million

Create more subsidized portable child-care spaces, increase subsidy \$ 3.5 million

\* Includes federal contribution.

Actions—immediate, short term, and long term—have been identified for each of our four goals: enable and reward work, improve supports for those in need, focus on our children, and collaborate and coordinate.

## Enabling and rewarding work

Current economic circumstances demand a focus this year on strategic and targeted investments in training and creating jobs.

This year, we will invest \$ 88 million in training.

\* \$ 81 million transferred from the federal to the provincial government, which Employment Nova Scotia (a new division of the Department of Labour and Workforce Development) can use to meet the specific needs of our labour market

\* 7 million targeted toward recommendations from the Poverty Reduction Working Group such as helping groups traditionally under-represented in our work force and supporting equitable access to literacy, adult education, and training

We will also invest \$400,000 this year in removing disincentives to work. Specifically, income tax refunds will no longer be treated as income for income assistance clients.

This builds on work already under way, such as

expansion of community college programming, school programs to prepare students for the world of work, and workplace training programs; help to make post-secondary education more affordable; and increases in the minimum wage.

## Improving supports for those in need

Our major priorities this year are to

\* begin the review of the Employment Support and Income Assistance Program

\* increase income assistance allowances in line with the rate of inflation

\* substantially increase the availability and quality of public and affordable housing

\* begin developing a provincial long-term housing strategy

The Poverty Reduction Working Group, and many others, has identified the need to review the Employment Support and Income Assistance Program. The review will examine ways to help more people find work and become financially self-sufficient and to better address the needs of people in greatest need.

In the interim, government will increase income assistance by the rate of inflation, requiring a \$ 2-million investment.

Housing is one of our basic and most costly necessities. With federal funding available, we have the opportunity to more than double our money and invest \$ 59 million over three years to expand and upgrade affordable housing. This is part of the province's Building for Growth plan and is estimated to have the added benefit of creating or maintaining 1600 jobs.

Seniors and people with disabilities will be among those receiving assistance. As well, construction and upgrades are also an opportunity to make public and affordable housing

energy efficient, reducing heating costs and supporting our commitments under the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act.

In line with this work, we will develop a long-term housing strategy for Nova Scotia, as identified by the Poverty Reduction Working Group. We also commit to developing a sustainable transportation strategy, as recommended by the Poverty Reduction Working Group.

These immediate and longer-term efforts build on work already under way. For example, since 2003, more than 1,100 affordable housing units have been created or preserved.

## Focusing on our children

Our future prosperity—including our ability to significantly reduce poverty—depends on how effectively we support children today.

Our first priority this year is to invest \$2.5 million to make the Nova Scotia Child Benefit and the Low Income Pharmacare for Children Program available to more families (benefiting about 3,700 more children).

We will invest \$3.5 million to create more subsidized child-care spaces and to increase the subsidy. As well, all subsidized spaces will now be portable—meaning that they are approved for the child rather than the child-care centre. This has been a priority for low-income families, as it protects their day care if they need to move to find work.

Future directions also include developing a provincial learning disabilities strategy, expanding programs that give families more access to recreation, and improving access to primary health care.

This builds on work that continues to receive considerable investment and attention across government. We will fully align our efforts with the province's child and youth strategy. As well, pharmacare programs, introduced within the past three years, are

helping children get the prescriptions they need to stay healthy.

The number of children living in low-income families has fallen from 19.3 per cent in 1997 to 8.7 per cent in 2006.

## Coordinating and collaborating

Over the past three years, government has made additional investments of almost \$200 million in programs to help Nova Scotians in need. Through better coordination and collaboration, we believe we can do more with this investment and increase awareness about these programs.

To lead this effort, ministers from nine government departments, supported by their deputies and senior staff, will form a committee to guide, direct, and share accountability for this strategy. A new position—a coordinator of Poverty Reduction—will also be created.

We also want to increase public awareness. Specifically, we will use a community development model to allow opportunity for public involvement in the fight against poverty.

We will also continue to encourage business to become actively engaged.

## Measuring and reporting our progress

The Poverty Reduction Working Group stressed the importance of measuring and reporting our progress. We agree. We have set some benchmark measures associated with each goal, and we will immediately begin work to establish more, and more refined, measures. We will also periodically report progress to the public, beginning next year.

We also encourage people to share their thoughts, time, or opportunities in the fight against poverty—because this is all about making the province a better place to live for all Nova Scotians.

You can share ideas, or ask questions, by contacting:  
Poverty Reduction Strategy  
PO Box 696  
Halifax, NS B3J 2T7  
E-mail: [poverty@gov.ns.ca](mailto:poverty@gov.ns.ca)

*Editor's Note: The trend by government and industry to assume that ALL consumers have the ability to send/receive e-mail messages, or even access the internet with no degree of difficulty, is a negation of the reality of our communities. Reports such as this one, and the invitation to communicate with the sponsoring department, should include a physical address, a phone number and a fax number, to accommodate the different communications needs of our citizens.*

*We also recommend the use of a spell checker - the city's name is Halifax and not Haltifax [see contact information above].*

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