

Let's do something
ABOUT POVERTY!





Poverty Free Saskatchewan (PFS)

PFS is a network of individuals and organizations working toward poverty elimination.

PFS recognizes there have been anti-poverty groups working hard for decades in all regions of our province and we wish to support a province-wide movement.

PFS believes people living in poverty are key to our work and should be involved in our

decision-making. All regions of the province and its diverse populations should be involved as everyone has valuable insights into their own unique situations.

Poverty elimination will require involvement and commitment from governments, business, community organizations and individuals. PFS values and promotes respect for all perspectives in its poverty elimination campaign.

Poverty Free Saskatchewan Founding Members

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Saskatchewan (CCPA SK)

Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry (RAPM)

Regina Anti-Poverty Network (RAPN)

Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition (SAPC)

Social Policy Research Unit (SPR) – Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina

Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers (SASW)

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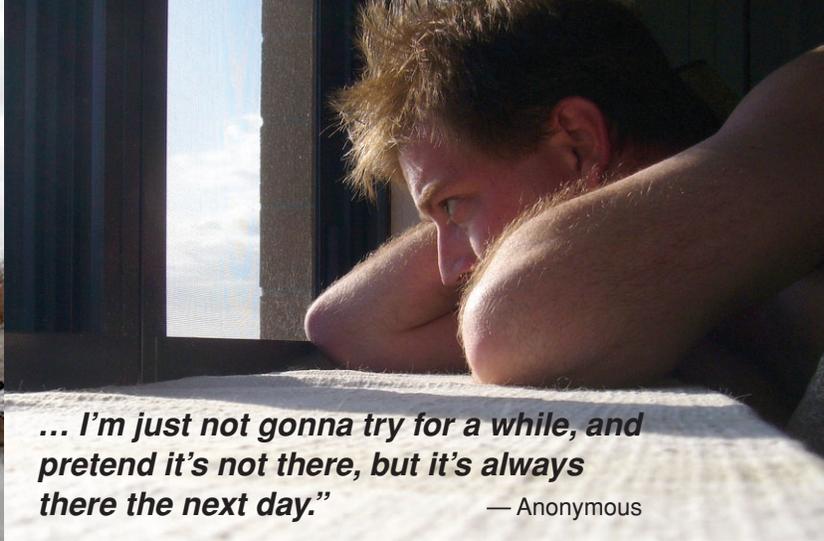
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“You do have those days where you’re just gonna be like, I’m tired of worrying, I’m tired of trying ...”



... I’m just not gonna try for a while, and pretend it’s not there, but it’s always there the next day.”
— Anonymous

Poverty Free Saskatchewan (PFS) created this document in the hope that it can serve as a catalyst for a much-needed discussion on poverty in our province.

We would like this document to encourage a renewed dialogue on poverty and foster new and innovative proposals and solutions from concerned citizens. This is your invitation to get involved in creating an action plan to eliminate poverty in Saskatchewan. Our network extends an invitation to connect with us. We want to hear from everyone concerned with the issues of poverty in our province.

This discussion document will explain that:

- Poverty still exists today and is a serious problem.
- Economic inequality is associated with many social and health problems.

- Poverty costs us all. Eliminating poverty has many benefits and will save society money.
- Poverty is not just about money, it’s about being excluded from community life.
- Poverty can be eliminated. Other provinces and countries have reduced economic inequality through the development of anti-poverty programs.
- We can all work together to end poverty in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan has experienced an economic boom over the past decade. However, poverty still exists here and throughout Canada. A large group from around the province have joined together to create PFS and are working to end poverty now!

To learn how you can get involved, go to the end of this document.

Poverty still exists today and is a serious problem that affects us all.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional social problem that often includes issues concerning income, cost-of-living, health and social cohesion. Poverty affects a diverse group of persons in our communities and no one is immune to its consequences.

- Saskatchewan’s (2006) overall poverty rate is 15.3% — affecting 140,000 people. Canada’s overall poverty rate is 14.5%.

- Saskatchewan has the third highest provincial child poverty rate in Canada.
- In 2007, there were 35,000 children under age 18 living beneath the poverty line (before-tax Low Income Cut-off) in Saskatchewan. This was 16.7% of all children.
- 45% of Aboriginal children in Saskatchewan live in low-income families.



- The poorest in Saskatchewan are children living in female single-parent families, with a poverty rate of 47.5% (19,000). The national rate among this group is 42.6%.
- Northern Saskatchewan is considered one of the five poorest regions in the country. With an annual median income of \$13,600. Specifically, La Ronge was ranked as the second-poorest region in Canada.
- Lower income earnings are particularly acute for Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis people, women, seniors, people with disabilities, recent immigrants, and racialized or marginalized groups.¹

Saskatchewan's economic growth has brought with it rising costs for many basic goods and services that we all require to live a full and dignified life. For those of us on fixed incomes, rising costs worsen the anxieties and burdens of living with poverty.

- Food prices rose 6% in 2009, compared to the core inflation rate of 1%. Prices for dairy products rose 6.6% and for vegetables rose 8.3%.
- Saskatchewan was the **only** province to experience an increase in water, fuel and electricity costs.
- Problems with affordable housing are well known for Saskatchewan residents. Rental costs have gone up in many locations across the province, including rural and northern areas.

- In 2009, Saskatoon's average rent increased 8.3% — the second highest increase in Canada. The average rent in Regina for all types of suites was \$752 — the provincial average was \$760 monthly.
- In 2009, Regina, had the lowest vacancy rate in Canada at 0.6%, resulting in one of the country's tightest rental markets.
- Northern residents experience much higher cost-of-living expenses which create greater stresses for those living on low-incomes.²

Despite Saskatchewan's low unemployment rate relative to the rest of the country, the social assistance caseload increased by 8.4% between October 2008 and December 2009. In January 2010, the caseload increased to 26,295 — a three-year high.

While the Saskatchewan government did increase social assistance rates in 2007, the level of economic assistance through the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan (SAP) is still far too low to raise people out of poverty.

- For a single adult living in Regina or Saskatoon, SAP rates are \$455 per month or \$5,460 per year. For an adult with one or two children living in Regina or Saskatoon, the SAP rate is \$865 per month or \$10,380 per year.
- Due to a four-tier system based on residency, SAP recipients in some cities, towns and other locations may receive even less funding for housing.³



Economic inequality is associated with many social and health problems.

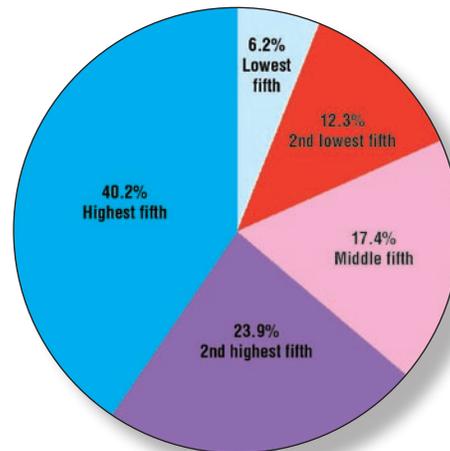
Health costs, crime and other problems are greater in societies with greater income inequality. **The most economically unequal societies experience the most serious social and health issues.**

This pie chart shows us a snapshot of income distribution in Saskatchewan in 2006. That year the top 20% of families with children took 40% of after-tax income and the bottom fifth were left with only 6%.⁴

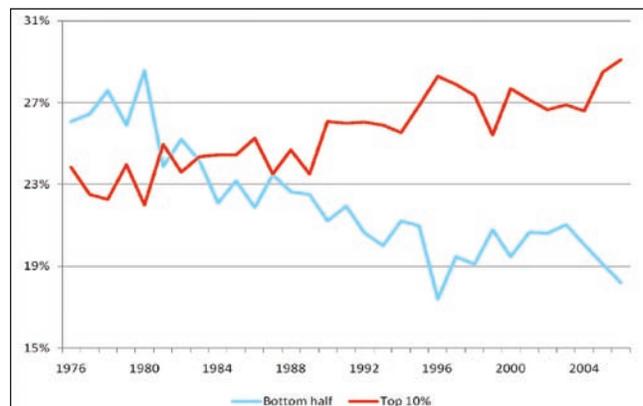
In a study of incomes and health, epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett found that a smaller gap between rich and poor means a happier, healthier, and more successful population overall.

Countries with reduced income inequality showed reduced crime rates, mental illness, obesity, and teen births and increased levels of trust in society. Although the poorest would gain the most from a decrease in inequality, people of all income levels would benefit.⁵

Quintile Shares of after-tax income of families with children, Saskatchewan, 2006



In Saskatchewan, income disparity has grown dramatically over the past decade, with the gap between the richest and poorest families mushrooming since 2000, as seen in this graph.





Poverty costs us all. Eliminating poverty has many benefits and saves money.

While we are quick to consider the costs of aiding the poor, we rarely consider both the social and economic costs that poverty inflicts on our society. Below we consider some of the costs in health, education and productivity that we all bear due to the existence of poverty in our society.

A study of health outcomes in the City of Saskatoon demonstrated that low-income residents consume an extra \$179 million in annual healthcare costs than if they were middle income. The study found that low-income residents are:

- **3360% more likely to have hepatitis C**
- **118% more likely to have heart disease**
- **165% more likely to have diabetes**
- **448% more likely to have an infant die in the first year of birth**

In comparison to higher income children, Saskatoon children aged 10-15 years that are low income are:

- **180% more likely to have low self reported health**

- **72% more likely to not be fully immunized against disease**
- **80% more likely to be physically inactive**
- **1140% more likely to be smoking already⁶**

In Canada, low-income has also been negatively correlated with lower functional health, increased hyperactivity, reduced vocabulary and math skills, and higher drop-out rates among children.⁷

A Canadian study found potential cost savings that could be realized by reducing inequalities in health among its residents. Bridging the gap between all other neighbourhoods and the wealthiest neighbourhoods would have resulted in a savings of about \$62 million in 1999 — or 15% of all hospital and physician expenditures in Winnipeg in 1999.⁸

The Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) has estimated that the private and social costs of poverty in Canada result in \$7.6 billion in extra healthcare costs; \$1-2 billion in costs of increased crime and \$35-42 billion in lost productivity costs.

In Ontario alone, the social and private costs of poverty are estimated to be equal to 5.5 to 6.5% of the province's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁹



Poverty is not just about money — it's about being excluded from community life.

While not easy to measure, there are very real consequences for individuals, families and communities when poverty and the disempowerment it creates result in people being socially excluded from education, athletic, cultural and community activities and from being a full participant in civic life.

Enduring poverty has drastic consequences for mental and emotional health. For instance, the Saskatoon study found that low-income adults were 1458% more likely to attempt suicide and 367% more likely to experience suicidal thoughts. Even more disturbing were the study's findings that low-income children aged 10 to 15 were 200% more likely to be depressed and 190% more likely to experience suicidal thoughts.¹⁰

Exclusion and isolation only further exacerbate poverty's harmful effects. The elimination of poverty will help create more vibrant communities by giving people the opportunity to fully engage and participate in the life of their respective community.

“Poverty directly harms the health of those with low-incomes while income inequality affects the health of all Canadians through the weakening of social infrastructure and the destruction of social cohesion.”

Dr. Dennis Raphael



Poverty can be eliminated. Other provinces and countries have reduced economic inequality through the development of anti-poverty programs.

Some people think that poverty is inevitable. However, other provinces and countries have demonstrated that through concerted action people can drastically reduce the incidence of poverty and contribute towards the elimination of poverty altogether.

Since developing and implementing its 2006 poverty reduction action plan, Newfoundland and Labrador have taken the lead in poverty reduction, setting a new precedent for poverty reduction rates in Canada. Through the program, Newfoundland has:

- Increased the minimum wage to \$10 per hour.
- Lowered rental rates for employed low-income earners and those aged 55 and older.
- Providing a Job Start benefit of \$125 to single people and \$250 to families to assist with making the transition from Income Support to employment.
- Reduced the incidence of low-income people and families in Newfoundland by almost half; from 12.2% to 6.5%.
- **Newfoundland now has the smallest low-income gap in Canada.**¹¹

Quebec was the first province in Canada to enact legislation for a poverty reduction strategy in 2002. Since that time, Quebec has:

- Delivered 16,002 new social, community and affordable housing units.
- Increased the provincial minimum wage from \$7.00 to \$9.00 per hour.
- Introduced a child assistance tax credit worth up to \$2,924 for one child, and up to \$4,007 for two children.
- Fully indexed social assistance benefits to cost-of-living increases.
- Decreased low-income rates from 12.1% to 9.8% of the provincial population.¹²

In Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario have also adopted comprehensive anti-poverty programs in recent years. In addition, American states such as Connecticut, Delaware, Oregon, Vermont and Alabama, and countries like Ireland and the United Kingdom have also launched initiatives to reduce poverty over the past decade.¹³

Other groups are approaching poverty from a human rights perspective, through a Charter of



Rights challenge recently filed by a coalition of social welfare groups in Ontario.¹⁴ They hope to convince the Canadian and Ontario governments to create low-cost public housing.

Others consider poverty with regard to sustainability. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada,

*Sustainable development cannot take place in societies marked by persistent socioeconomic inequalities, large-scale environmental degradation or widespread disease. Similarly, the promotion of public health requires sound physical and built environments, a prosperous economy and a just society.*¹⁵

A recent Senate report calls for federal-provincial initiatives to lift people out of poverty. Senator Hugh Segal stated,

*By breaking the cycle of poverty once and for all, we will be investing in human empowerment — which will drive the health and prosperity of our cities and yield benefits for all of us.*¹⁶

These initiatives demonstrate that poverty can be drastically reduced and eventually eliminated. By adopting many of these ideas and creating our own, we can develop a “Made-in-Saskatchewan” action plan that can do the same in our province.

We can all work together to end poverty in Saskatchewan.

Poverty is not inevitable, there are concrete actions that government, communities and business can take to eliminate the scourge of poverty in our province. The history of our province is full of examples of people working together to bring about change. In Saskatchewan, thousands of people work daily to lessen the burden of poverty; in our streets, at food banks, through church groups, in schools, hospitals and out of neighbourhood and community centres. As well, governments provide services such as income assistance,

child benefits and affordable housing. Yet poverty still exists — even in a province as rich as ours.

We need to continue to work on solutions that include citizens and governments alike in order to create a “Made-in-Saskatchewan” action plan to eliminating poverty.

This is your invitation to get involved to eliminate poverty in Saskatchewan. Our network, Poverty Free Saskatchewan (PFS), invites you to connect with us. We want to hear from everyone concerned with the issue of poverty in our province.



Here are some of the ways you can help PFS.

- 1 Send us an email so we can send you and/or your organization updates of our events and activities.
- 2 Attend a PFS public meeting.
- 3 Ask your organization to officially support the efforts to create an action plan.
- 4 Tell others what you are doing about poverty and the work of PFS.
- 5 Give them our website information: www.povertyfreesask.ca
- 6 Talk to business owners and leaders of other organizations.
- 7 Let us know if you/your organization are holding a special poverty event or perhaps meeting with the government or other organizations.
- 8 Contact us with your personal answers to the **questions listed on the back cover**. We would be glad to receive email, written letters, audio or video commentaries, or other artistic input that express your thoughts about poverty in our province. And yet, doing something about poverty will not be just an exercise on paper, it will require real action in the real world.
- 9 Consider using your answers to write a letter to your local newspaper, your Saskatchewan MLA, or other government representatives.
- 10 Get together with a group of people you know who are living in poverty or working with those who live in poverty, discuss the questions below, and send us your response.

PFS will gladly accept your responses and ensure they are considered when an action plan is drafted. We will not use any identifying information in the material we produce, or on our website, unless you give us permission in writing. However, please include your name, address, phone number and email address so we know which communities have participated in this work so we can include you as we move forward. Thank you very much!

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Questions for a Saskatchewan Action Plan

- 1. What does poverty mean to you?**
- 2. Why should we worry about poverty in Saskatchewan?**
- 3. What would a poverty-free Saskatchewan look like?**
- 4. How can we achieve a poverty-free Saskatchewan?**
- 5. What targets and policies should we adopt?**

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