



# Poverty Roundtable

## Hastings Prince Edward

### Our Community Recommendations for Social Assistance Reform

October 11, 2018

We are making the following recommendations based on community conversations and consultations with community members who have lived experience of poverty. The Creating Community Project is a project of the Poverty Roundtable HPE, undertaken to help us take action on poverty in our communities. As part of that project, the Poverty Roundtable HPE talked to more than 400 people from all over Hastings and Prince Edward counties, who are currently experiencing poverty. From those conversations our reports, [Leaning In](#) and [Moving Forward](#), were created. In addition, on Sept. 13, 2018, the Poverty Roundtable advisory council of people with lived experience, Voices of HoPE, hosted a community conversation to discuss the upcoming social assistance reform.

#### **Create a program that will address income inadequacy**

If we fail to address income inadequacy, people will continue to experience homelessness, food insecurity, and poorer health outcomes. When we address income inadequacy, we have the opportunity to lift people out of poverty and position people to have a standard of living that promotes health, growth, productivity, and well-being.

**Increase OW and ODSP rates.** Current rates are extremely low, and put people at an increased risk for homelessness, food insecurity, and poorer health outcomes. The stress of poverty has a direct impact on the physical and mental health of individuals and families. An immediate and significant increase is needed to ensure that basic needs — such as housing, transportation, and healthy food — are met, as well as the costs associated with health supports such as housekeeping, personal hygiene, and medical supplies.

**Exempt employment earnings** from deductions or clawbacks until people are above the poverty line (MBM to align with Federal measurement). Encourage those who cannot work full time to engage in meaningful part-time or volunteer work, instead of preserving systematic disincentives. Recognize that although everyone wants to feel purposeful, not everyone can participate in the workforce on a full-time basis, or return to work immediately. Inadequate incomes severely impact people who have physical, mental, and intellectual disabilities, making it even more difficult to become and stay employed.

**End abrupt benefit suspensions.** Avoid punitive policies that cause fear, increase stress and hypervigilance, and create further destabilization. Avoid timelines that result in ending benefits. Poverty is trauma, and needs to be recognized as such. Consider what purpose is served by many policies, and whether the outcomes justify contributing to poorer mental health.

#### **Create a person-centric, compassionate social assistance program**

We have heard that poverty is trauma, poverty is stress, and poverty is stigmatizing and isolating. People who experience poverty, or are at risk of experiencing poverty, require trauma-informed services, compassion, and understanding. By failing to create a system that compassionately responds to and attempts to meet a person's needs, the traumatic cycle of poverty is exacerbated and perpetuated.



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Ensure policies do not discriminate based on income, disability, sex, gender, ethnicity, family configuration or prohibited grounds, and are modern and realistic enough to reflect our social climate and cost of living.

**Set a standard rate and eliminate the distinction between basic needs and shelter.** A lack of available, affordable housing has necessitated alternate living arrangements that are not recognized effectively in the current structure of benefits. People with disabilities who live in board and lodge situations face discrimination that affects their ability to purchase and prepare their own food.

**Align spousal obligations to coincide with the Family Law Act,** to allow for healthy development of relationships without financial poverty. (3 years unless self-declared).

**Align the Temporary Care Allowance to match foster care allowances** and ensure that the benefit reflects the child's income, is accessible, and is interpreted consistently across the province.

Ensure that through training, capacity building, and staffing, front-line workers are well positioned to act in a supportive, collaborative, trauma-informed manner with all clients.

Simplify programs and eliminate the need for a system based on rules and policing.

### **People with lived experience hold valuable expertise and need to be heard**

**Create a provincial advisory board on poverty,** and ensure that this board is comprised of people who are living with, or have recent lived experience with, low-income.

**Regularly consult with service users** on the effectiveness of programs and initiatives.

**Ensure social service programs do not perpetuate stigma;** that they are developed with the input of and involve people with lived experience of poverty in their design, implementation and evaluation.

65 Station Street, Belleville, ON, K8N 2S6

PHONE: 613 779 7477 [prt@povertyroundtablehpe.ca](mailto:prt@povertyroundtablehpe.ca)

