



2023 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation

*Submission by the Canadian Poverty Institute
Ambrose University*



The Canadian Poverty Institute is an inter-disciplinary institute housed within Ambrose University in Calgary. The mission of the Canadian Poverty Institute is to advance the eradication of poverty in Canada through teaching, research and action that promotes systems change. In accordance with this mission, the Canadian Poverty Institute respectfully submits the following priorities and recommendations to the federal government in advance of the 2023 budget.

1. Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals

Canada is a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and therefore has a duty to protect and fulfil the rights articulated by the Covenant. Canada has also adopted and made a commitment to realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Through these international instruments, Canada must continue to make progress on ending poverty and hunger, protecting the health of Canadians, providing accessible education, reducing inequalities, creating decent work and ensuring adequate income support and social protection. Accordingly, the Canadian Poverty Institute makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

- The federal budget should align with and support movement towards the full realization of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Canadians as articulated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
- The federal budget should advance progress on Canada's commitments to the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. Income Supports

All Canadians enjoy a right to social security, including social insurance (ICESCR Article 9). Over the past several decades, social protections in Canada have eroded. This has involved reductions in eligibility and benefit amounts for both Employment Insurance as well as provincial Social Assistance. In its report to Canada following the sixth periodic review of the ICESCR, the United Nations Committee on Economic and Social Rights made the following recommendations.

30. The Committee recommends that the State party ensure that social assistance rates are increased in all provinces to levels that allow a decent living for beneficiaries and their families so as to ensure an effective income safety net. The State party should also integrate accountability provisions in the Federal Social Transfer as a means to allow monitoring of how the funds are allocated to social assistance benefits.
32. The Committee recommends that the State party revise the eligibility thresholds for and amounts of employment insurance, with a view to ensuring that all workers, including part-time and temporary foreign workers, can access adequate employment insurance benefits without discrimination.

Accordingly, the Canadian Poverty Institute makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- Continue with reforms to the Employment Insurance program to extend coverage, particularly for non-standard and part-time employees, and increase benefit amounts to ensure recipients receive an appropriate standard of living while on claim.
- Increase transfer payments to the Provinces through the Canada Social Transfer to ensure that provincial Social Assistance benefits are accessible and sufficient to enable recipients to live with dignity. To achieve this, conditionality must be restored to Canada Social Transfer payments to establish minimum national standards for Social Assistance provision.
- Move toward the full realization of the right to social security through the incremental development a Universal Basic Income by expanding the eligible age range for the Guaranteed Income Supplement to those aged 55 and older, and fully implementing the Canada Disability Benefit.

3. Jobs and Economy

All Canadians have the right to work, including the right to just and favourable working conditions. This includes the right to fair wages that provide a decent living for workers and their families (ICESCR Articles 6 and 7). Canada has also committed to ensuring that people have decent work opportunities as part of its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Goal 8). The International Labour Organization defines decent work as “*work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.*”¹

Over the past several decades, the quality of work in Canada has declined with increasing numbers of workers employed in precarious working conditions. Precarious work is work that is typically low-wage and non-permanent or part-time. Precarious work has important social impacts including reduced health and well-being of workers, their families and communities which result in increased public costs for associated health and social services. To fulfill its human rights duties and its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, the federal government must create the conditions that support decent work. Accordingly, the Canadian Poverty Institute makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- Incentivize the creation of decent work and recoup the public cost of low-wage and precarious employment through the adoption of a variable tax structure that gives preferential tax treatment to those organizations with higher social performance, including specifically the provision of a living wage.
- Support employers that can demonstrate strong social and environmental performance by giving priority in federal procurement to contractors that provide decent work according to the ILO definition.

¹ International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

- Provide preferential Social Finance to emerging and established enterprises that meet federal environmental and social performance standards in alignment with those applicable to federal procurement contracts.
- Recognizing the investment of time and resources required for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop policies and procedures for social performance and apply for certifications, create a program to support SMEs in these activities including:
 - Resources that provide guidance to organizations seeking to develop such policies and procedures or pursue certification;
 - Consulting support or grants to procure such support;
 - Favourable tax incentives to offset the cost of such development for SMEs.

4. Housing

All Canadians have the right to housing (ICESCR Article 11). The Canadian Poverty Institute supports the Government of Canada's acknowledgement of the right to housing in the National Housing Strategy and urges enhanced funding to continue strategy implementation. Accordingly, the Canadian Poverty Institute makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- Continue the implementation of the National Housing Strategy through increased investments in the further expansion and upgrade of Canada's social housing stock.
- Increase investment in, and support for, the development of new cooperative housing.

5. Food Security

All Canadians have the right to food (ICESCR Article 11). Canada has also committed to ending hunger as part of its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Goal 2). Recent increases in the cost of food have strained the ability of many Canadians to afford adequate and appropriate food, particularly those with lower incomes. Enabling Canadians to access food with dignity requires that they have an adequate income to enable people to purchase appropriate food. Accordingly, the Canadian Poverty Institute makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- Develop and implement policies and initiatives that incent the creation of decent work to ensure that those with employment have sufficient income to afford healthy food.
- Increase transfer payments to the Provinces through the Canada Social Transfer to ensure that provincial Social Assistance benefits are accessible and sufficient to enable recipients to live with dignity. To achieve this, conditionality must be restored to Canada Social Transfer payments to establish minimum national standards for Social Assistance provision.
- Move toward the full realization of the right to social security through the incremental development a Universal Basic Income by expanding the eligible age range for the Guaranteed Income Supplement to those aged 55 and older, and fully implementing the Canada Disability Benefit.

6. Environment and Climate Change

As Canada moves to reduce its carbon emissions in response to the threat of climate change, lower income households will require support to increase the energy efficiency of their homes. Many low-income households already live in energy poverty, paying an above average proportion of their income on utilities. These households often live in the least energy efficient dwellings and are also least able to invest in efficiency retrofits and upgrades. As a result, many live in inadequate housing that impacts their overall mental and physical health and well-being. Addressing this gap provides economic, social and environmental benefits. Accordingly, the Canadian Poverty Institute makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations

- Invest in low or no cost programs and initiatives that support lower-income households to upgrade the efficiency of their homes, with the specific goal of reducing their energy consumption and improving affordability.
- Commit to funding the retrofit of Canada's social housing stock to address deteriorating quality and energy efficiency.

7. Transportation

Access to public transportation is essential for social participation and inclusion. Persons living on a low-income often have difficulty accessing work, medical appointments, social engagements and other important daily activities due to the lack of transportation. This is especially problematic in rural communities. Accordingly, the Canadian Poverty Institute makes the following recommendation:

Recommendations

- Commit to funding efficient and affordable public transportation, including restoring an affordable national inter-city transportation network, especially to and between rural and remote communities.

8. Health Care

All Canadians have a right to health (ICESCR Article 12). Canada has also committed to ensuring good health and well-being as part of its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Goal 4). While Canada's universal health care system ensures all have access to necessary primary care, too many low-income Canadians are unable to afford prescription medications, dental and vision care. Accordingly, the Canadian Poverty Institute makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations:

- Work with Provincial and Territorial Governments to establish a universal Pharmacare program to ensure access to necessary prescription medications for all Canadians regardless of income.
- Work with Provincial and Territorial Governments to establish a universal Dental program that will ensure access to necessary dental services for all Canadians regardless of income.

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