

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY IN CANADA

Challenges and Solutions



OCTOBER 2024

Prepared by

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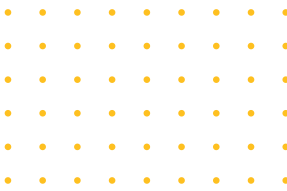
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1989, the Canadian government pledged to eliminate child poverty by 2000. Despite this commitment, approximately one in five Canadian children still live in poverty today. This report, “Intergenerational Poverty in Canada: Challenges and Solutions,” examines the persistent challenge of intergenerational poverty—poverty that is passed down from one generation to the next—and highlights the limitations of current policies, emphasizing the need for systemic, sustainable solutions.

Understanding Poverty:

- Poverty extends beyond financial constraints, encompassing a lack of opportunities, choices, and power.
- Canada ranks poorly in reducing child poverty and overall child well-being, with significant disparities in income and access to essential services.

Using the Iceberg Model and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, we examine the phenomenon of intergenerational poverty to identify and analyze both the visible symptoms and the deeper systemic causes of poverty.

Key Findings:

- Intergenerational Poverty is a persistent challenge despite various poverty reduction strategies
- The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated child poverty, pushing more families into financial hardship and exposing weaknesses in Canada's social protection systems.
- Standardized poverty reduction policies often fail to meet the unique needs of Canada's diverse communities.
- Public perception and media coverage significantly influence societal attitudes toward poverty, often perpetuating misconceptions that hinder effective policy responses.
- Access to high-quality early childhood education and after-school programs is crucial for supporting child development and enabling parents to participate in the workforce.
- Canada's fragmented social safety net often forces families to navigate disconnected programs with varying eligibility criteria.
- Examining successful poverty reduction models within Canada and abroad provides valuable insights.
- A holistic approach to poverty reduction recognizes the complex web of political, economic, environmental, and socio-cultural factors that contribute to poverty.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report recommends targeted actions to address both immediate and systemic needs in poverty reduction

- Community-Level Initiatives:
 - Appoint a leader for children's issues to raise awareness and drive action.
 - Improve advertisement of community resources and involve children in decision-making processes.
- National-Level Strategies:
 - Increase family incomes to ensure no child lives in poverty.
 - Connect various government policies to address the interconnected nature of poverty.
 - Provide paid vacation for parents and establish a universal childcare program.
- Learning from Other Countries:
 - Adopt best practices from countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, which have strong social programs and low child poverty rates.

Gaps and Leverage Points:

- Address gaps such as the lack of a Commissioner for Canadian Children, inadequate advertisement of resources, and insufficient child-friendly public policy consultations.
- Leverage points include supporting basic income implementation, creating place-based strategies, and developing a national strategy for food insecurity.

Conclusion:

Intergenerational poverty in Canada is a multifaceted issue that requires a systemic approach. By addressing root causes and shifting public perceptions, we can develop more effective policies and programs to support children and families, ultimately breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting social and economic mobility for future generations.

This report aims to provide policymakers, stakeholders, and the public with a comprehensive understanding of intergenerational poverty and actionable strategies to create a more equitable and prosperous future for all Canadian children.

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UNDERSTANDING CHILD POVERTY



THE MULTIFACETED NATURE OF POVERTY

Despite global efforts, millions of people, especially children, still live in extreme poverty. Children make up one-third of the world's population but account for half of those living on less than \$2.15 a day, with an estimated 333 million children in extreme poverty (UNICEF, 2020). This highlights the severe and widespread nature of child poverty globally.

THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

UNICEF reports that Canada needs to improve its efforts to help poor children. Canada ranks 19th out of 39 high-income countries for its child poverty rate, with 17.8% of children living in poverty in 2021. This is an increase from 15.2% in 2020, largely due to the end of pandemic income programs and rising living costs (UNICEF, 2023). Specifically, Canada ranks:

- **11th out of 39** in reducing child poverty
- **30th out of 38** in child well-being
- **26th out of 35** in overall child inequality

The poorest children in Canada live in families with incomes 53% lower than the average. These children face significant challenges, including poor health, limited access to education, food insecurity, and exposure to violence, which can lead to lifelong issues (Hughes et al., 2009).

“Every child, in every society, has the right to a fair start in life... To the degree that any society is blind to this issue, it also fails to see its future self-interest. Because these disparities create lasting divisions – economic divisions and social divisions – that are not easily overcome. They can reverberate through generations at great cost to us all.”
Tony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director (UNICEF, 2016)

CANADA'S ONGOING CHALLENGE WITH CHILD POVERTY

In 2015, through the adoption of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG), Canada committed to eliminating extreme poverty (people living on less than \$2.15 a day) by 2030 and halving the number of children living in poverty by national standards (United Nations, 2015). However, long before this, in 1989, the Canadian House of Commons unanimously resolved to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000 (House of Commons Journals, 1989). Despite some initial success, with the child poverty rate falling from 15.8% in the mid-1980s to 12.8% in the mid-1990s, the rate has remained relatively high over the past few decades. According to Statistics Canada, the poverty rate for children under 18 has fluctuated but has not significantly decreased over time, indicating that despite various efforts and policies, the issue persists at levels similar to those seen in the late 1970s (Conference Board of Canada, n.d.).

Despite these challenges, several interventions have significantly improved the lives of children and their families. Programs like the Canada Child Benefit, Canada Workers Benefit, and enhancements to the Canada Pension Plan provide financial support and address inequalities. The 2018 Poverty Reduction Strategy, “Opportunity for All,” aims to reduce poverty by 20% by 2020 and by 50% by 2030, relative to 2015 levels (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2022).



INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY

The term "**intergenerational poverty**" originated from 20th-century research on social mobility, as researchers sought to understand how poverty persists across generations due to systemic barriers to economic advancement (Becker & Tomes, 1979). Oscar Lewis's concept of the "culture of poverty" contributed early ideas on how poverty can be perpetuated through social behaviours and limited opportunities (Lewis, 1966). Today, the term underscores that poverty is not merely an individual condition but a systemic issue sustained by structural challenges like limited access to education, healthcare, and employment (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Corak, 2006). In contrast, **situational poverty** is typically temporary and results from a crisis or sudden income loss (Georgia Center For Opportunity, 2024).

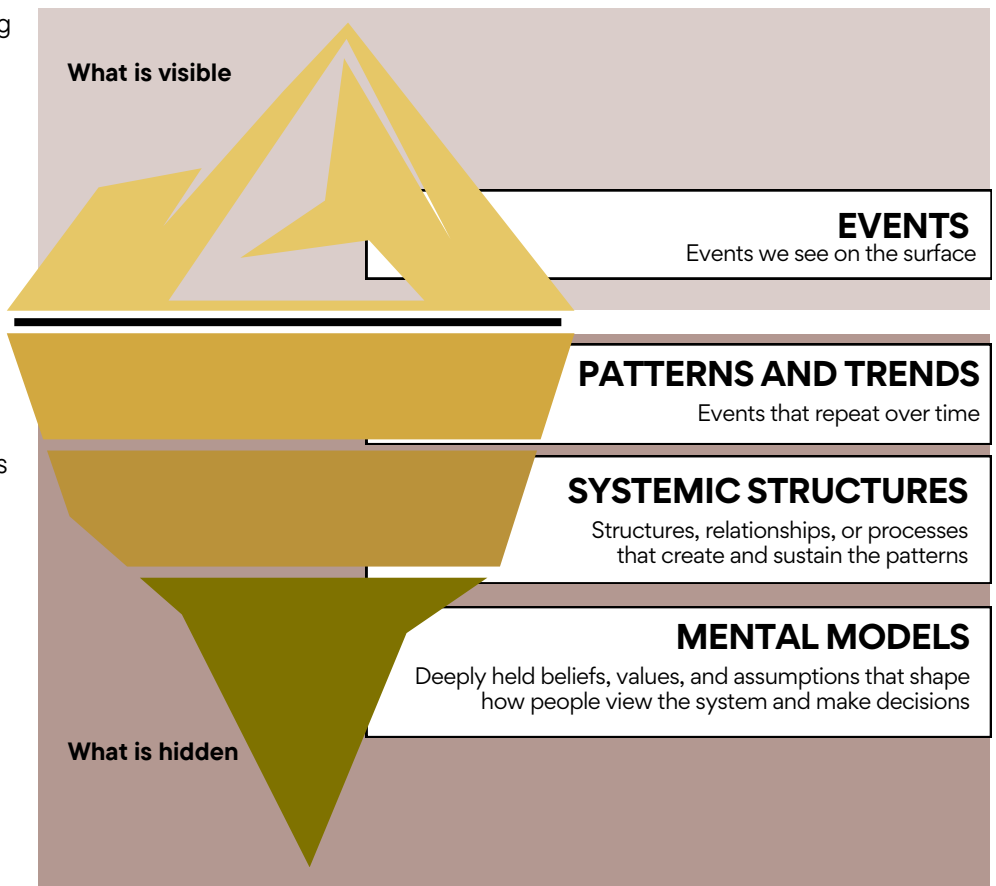
In Canada, the persistence of intergenerational poverty despite efforts highlights the need for targeted policies that address the root causes and aim to create supportive environments that promote economic mobility.

COMPLEXITY OF INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY

To effectively understand and address intergenerational poverty, we must recognize its complex nature. This type of poverty is influenced by various interrelated factors, including income, education, health, social inequalities, and historical issues such as colonialism (Hughes et al., 2009). Given the multifaceted and challenging nature of this issue, we employed a systems thinking approach using an iceberg analysis model. This model enables us to look beyond the visible symptoms of poverty and uncover the deeper, hidden drivers that contribute to its persistence.

THE ICEBERG MODEL FOR A SYSTEM THINKING MODEL

The Iceberg Model is a systems thinking tool that helps us understand the underlying structures, patterns, and mental models driving complex issues Meadows, D. H. (2008). By visualizing a problem as an iceberg, the model illustrates how surface-level events are often symptoms of deeper, less visible layers of the system. It encourages a more comprehensive analysis by looking beyond immediate occurrences to understand what sustains and drives them over time.



Many anti-poverty efforts have primarily targeted adults and situational poverty, with most programs aimed at alleviating immediate issues such as unemployment, income assistance, and housing stability through welfare and job training initiatives. However, these efforts often overlook the root causes of poverty and fail to address the specific needs of children and families.

Given the complexity and challenges associated with intergenerational poverty, a systems thinking model is essential for uncovering hidden factors and revealing the structural issues that perpetuate poverty across generations. It is well established that growing up in poverty significantly impacts children's development and opportunities as they transition into adulthood. Therefore, our analysis begins by examining the visible situations of children living in low-income families. This is followed by a deeper exploration of the underlying events, patterns, trends, systemic structures, and mental models that contribute to their continued poverty into adulthood.

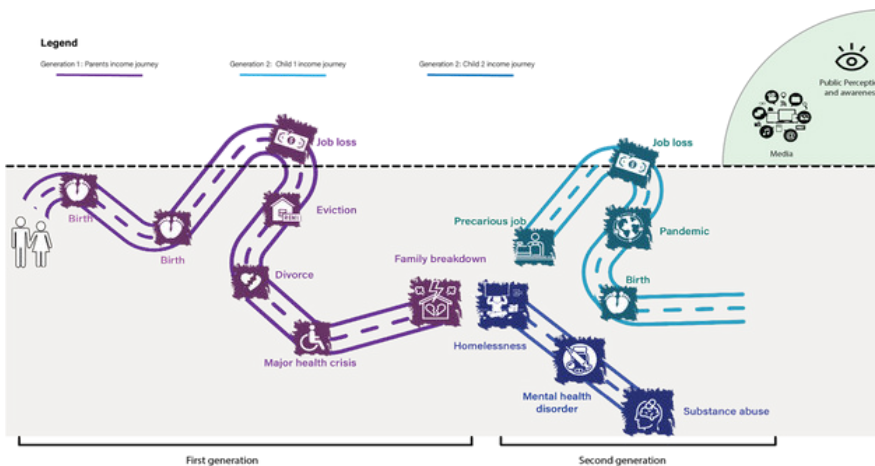
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INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY IS NOT A CYCLE

Commonly referred to as a "cycle," the phenomenon of intergenerational poverty is often misunderstood. Using the term "cycle" to describe this issue is not only misleading but also counterproductive, as it implies that the same factors driving parents into poverty will similarly influence their children. While there are many reasons why low-income individuals and their children may appear trapped in this "vicious cycle," the reality is that the factors contributing to intergenerational poverty are far too complex for a straightforward, linear explanation.



A FAMILY INTERGENERATIONAL JOURNEY THROUGH POVERTY



This image is a "Family Journey Map" that illustrates the progression of intergenerational poverty through a series of life events and structural barriers affecting a family over time. The map demonstrates that poverty is not a simple cycle but a web of interconnected issues involving personal hardships, structural barriers, and societal attitudes. This nuanced view underscores the need for interventions that address not only immediate needs but also underlying systemic issues that perpetuate poverty across generations.

First Generation (Purple Path): This path begins with the birth of two children. The family experiences several destabilizing events, including job loss, eviction, divorce, and a significant health crisis. Each of these setbacks reduces the family's stability, leaving them more susceptible to the persistent threat of poverty. These cumulative hardships highlight how a single disruption can cascade into further challenges, trapping the family in an increasingly vulnerable position.

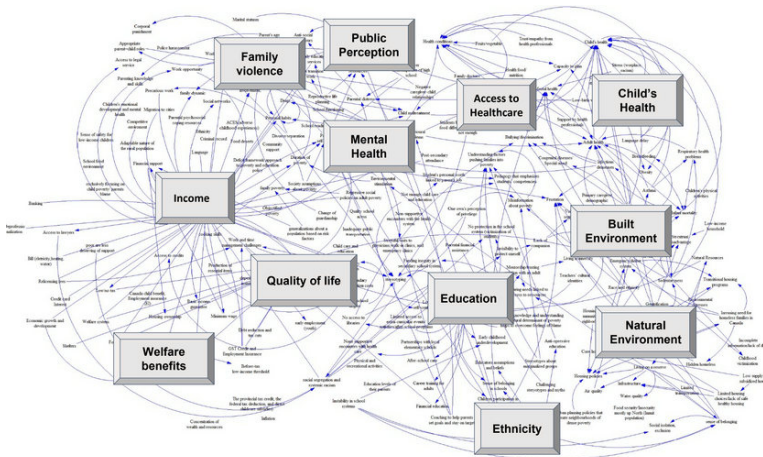
Second Generation (Blue Path): In the next generation, the first child faces precarious employment, and the second child encounters homelessness. For the first child, the journey is further complicated by job loss, a major crisis (e.g., pandemic), and the birth of a child, which adds both financial and emotional pressures. Meanwhile, the second child's journey takes a darker turn as mental health issues combine with substance abuse, leading to a downward spiral. These challenges reflect how childhood instability can continue into adulthood, often resulting in a lack of access to stable jobs, housing, and supportive resources.

Public Perception and Awareness (Right Side): This section, positioned on the right, highlights the role of media in shaping society's views on poverty. Public perception, influenced by media coverage, can lead to stigma and affect the social and policy responses families receive. Media narratives often fail to capture the full picture of poverty's complexities, which can contribute to judgmental attitudes and hinder empathy and support.



2

FAIRNESS AND EQUAL CHANCES IS A MYTH



A causal loop diagram of intergenerational poverty reveals a complex web of factors, often exceeding 255 elements, that interact dynamically. These factors typically revolve around three main areas: income, education, and health. Here's an overview of how these elements may interact



This image is a "Causal Loop Diagram" visually representing the complex, interconnected factors contributing to poverty and socioeconomic outcomes. In the diagram, key factors are highlighted in large.

Each of these primary factors is connected through a web of arrows, indicating relationships and interactions between various sub-factors, such as employment, housing stability, social support, discrimination, access to education, and healthcare quality. These relationships illustrate how one factor, like income, can influence others, such as education and mental health, in a complex feedback loop. The arrows in the diagram show the direction of influence, with some indicating reinforcing loops where certain conditions exacerbate each other and others showing balancing loops where factors may counteract each other. This interconnected web of causes and effects underscores the multifaceted nature of poverty, demonstrating that it's not driven by a single factor but rather a combination of social, economic, health, and environmental elements. The diagram highlights the need for a holistic approach to address poverty and its generational impacts.

3

UPWARD ECONOMIC MOBILITY IN CANADA IS LIMITED



Only **6%** of children born into low-income families make it to the highest income group as adults (OECD, 2018)

Social or economic mobility refers to the ability of a person, family, or group to improve (or decline) in their social class or financial status. In Canada, moving up the economic ladder is challenging. Research from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) shows that about 40% of children from low-income families stay in the lowest-income group as adults (CCPA, 2018). This reality goes against the idea of equal opportunity, highlighting the need for policies that tackle the root causes of poverty.

As Canadian economist Miles Corak states, intergenerational mobility is defined as "the capacity for children to become all they can be without regard to their starting point in life" (Corak, 2013).

Upward economic mobility in Canada is constrained by various systemic factors, illustrating the complex nature of inequality. While Canada is often seen as a land of opportunity, many Canadians face significant barriers that hinder their ability to improve their social and economic status.



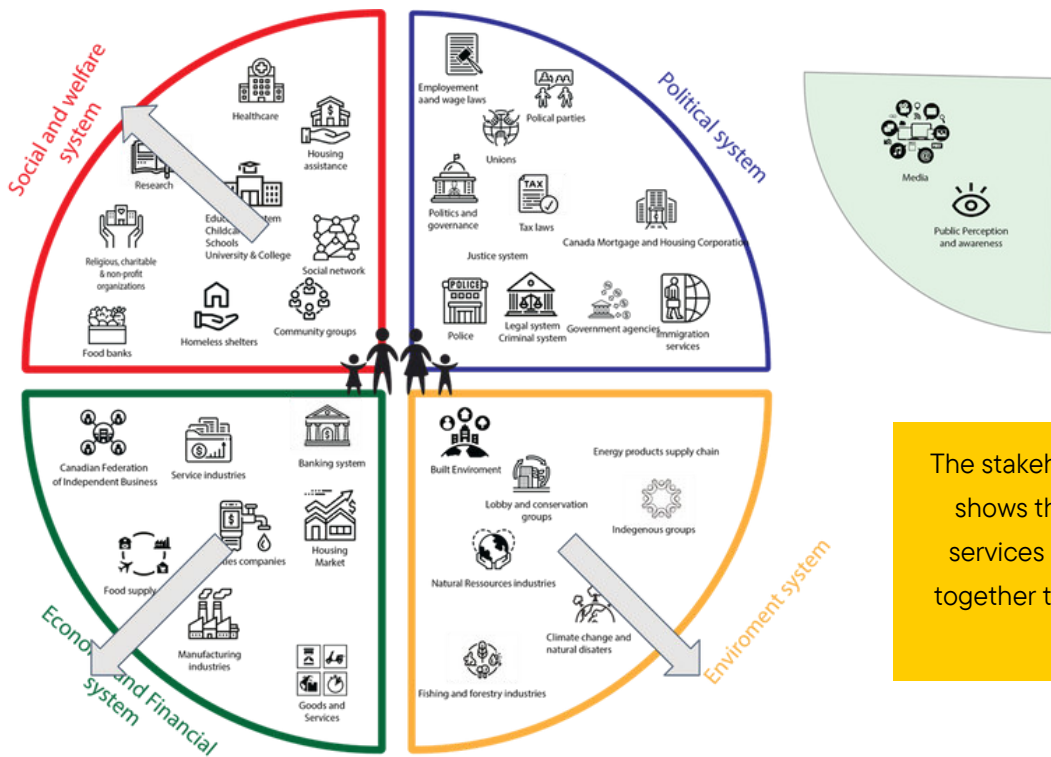
Those born into wealthier families are more likely to remain in higher income brackets due to the benefits of inherited wealth and resources, creating a cycle that is difficult to break (CCPA, 2015).



This is compounded by the fact that over one-third of children from low-income families are likely to remain in poverty as adults, demonstrating the persistence of economic disadvantages across generations (CCPA, 2013).

4

LACK OF A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO ERADICATING POVERTY



The stakeholder map analysis shows that programs and services don't always work together to help families and children.

Social and Welfare System (Red) - Includes social services like healthcare and research institutions, which play a role in supporting vulnerable populations. These services help address immediate needs, but without integration with economic policies, they may only provide temporary relief.

Political System (Blue) - Encompasses taxation, legislation, and other government policies that influence poverty dynamics through fiscal and social policies. These factors shape poverty dynamics through fiscal and social policies, influencing how resources are allocated to low-income families.

Economy and Financial System (Green) - Reflects economic factors like employment, housing, and financial services that are essential for stability and mobility. Economic policies directly affect income security but often lack coordination with social support measures, limiting their effectiveness.

Environment System (Orange) - Shows environmental factors, including community support networks and sustainability efforts, that contribute to social resilience. These community efforts enhance support, but without cohesive ties to government and economic policies, they may not fully address poverty's root causes.

FAILURE OF ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL" APPROACH TO POVERTY REDUCTION

The analysis highlights a key issue in poverty reduction efforts: the limitations of a "one-size-fits-all" approach, which often fails to account for the unique challenges faced by diverse communities.



Standardized policies may overlook the varied socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural factors that influence poverty, making them less effective in addressing root causes.

For instance, research by Deeming and Smyth (2015) shows that social investment policies that do not adapt to local contexts struggle to improve outcomes effectively for marginalized populations. This critique is echoed by Blank (2008), who argues that poverty metrics based on uniform standards do not capture the realities of different groups, such as single-parent households or ethnic minorities, who may face unique barriers to economic stability. Similarly, Sen (1999) advocates for a capabilities approach, emphasizing that poverty reduction should focus on expanding individuals' freedoms rather than merely increasing income levels.

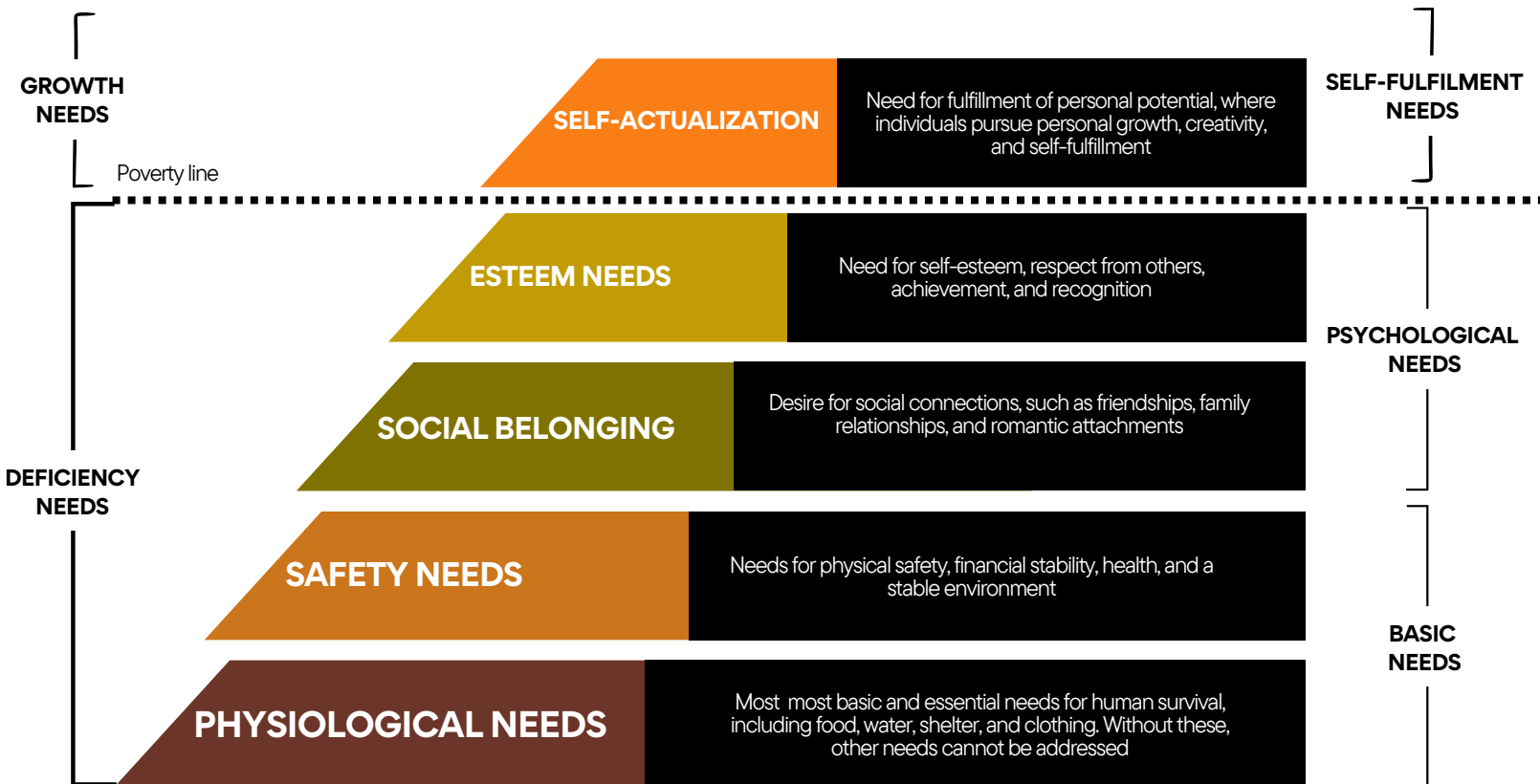
The concept of a one-size-fits-all approach falls short because it assumes that all individuals or families experiencing poverty face the same challenges and can be uplifted by identical solutions. However, the hierarchy of needs demonstrates that people require different levels of support based on their specific circumstances. For instance, some individuals may need help with basic physiological needs, such as food and housing, while others may have these basic needs met but still struggle with social, emotional, or self-esteem issues that impact their ability to achieve long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

In the context of poverty, a one-size-fits-all approach that focuses only on addressing immediate, visible symptoms (such as temporary financial assistance) fails to consider the different layers of need. Policies that do not adapt to varied needs across communities or individuals miss opportunities to address underlying issues such as mental health, community support, and access to employment opportunities. Without addressing these fundamental and individualized needs, poverty alleviation efforts may only provide short-term relief without creating pathways to lasting change.

Therefore policies aimed at reducing inequality must be tailored to reflect the specific labor market and social conditions of each community. Uniform policies can inadvertently exacerbate inequalities by failing to address local challenges, such as access to affordable housing or quality healthcare OECD reports (2019, 2020). A comparative study by Chung and van Oorschot (2011) supports this view, demonstrating that welfare programs tailored to the demographic and economic conditions of different populations are more effective at reducing poverty.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a psychological theory developed by Abraham Maslow in 1943 (Maslow, A. H. 1943). The theory suggests that human motivation is driven by a series of hierarchical needs, where each level of need must be fulfilled before moving to the next. Maslow proposed five primary categories of needs, typically represented as a pyramid.



Maslow suggested that people are motivated to achieve these needs sequentially, but he acknowledged that the hierarchy is not rigid. For instance, people may pursue higher-level needs even if some basic needs remain unmet, especially based on individual circumstances, culture, and values.

In poverty reduction, Maslow's theory highlights the importance of addressing basic needs like food and housing first. However, to create lasting impact, policies should also consider higher needs, such as social connection and self-esteem, to enable individuals to fully integrate into society and pursue personal goals.

THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

THE CASE OF FOOD INSECURITY

In 2022, food insecurity affected 16.9% of Canadians, a significant increase from 12.9% in 2021, showing a troubling rise in the proportion of individuals facing challenges in accessing sufficient food. Since 2018, food insecurity has increased by 5.3 percentage points, indicating a worsening trend in Canada. Approximately 1 in 10 Canadians (9.9%) were living in poverty in 2022, with children in lone-parent families at particularly high risk: 36.4% of these children experienced food insecurity, compared to 18.3% of those in couple families and 18.6% in other family types (StatsCAN Plus, 2024).



FRAGMENTED SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

In Canada, food-insecure families often depend on public and community-based services to meet essential needs as income supports alone are often inadequate. Unfortunately, poverty reduction programs—including social assistance, housing support, and food banks—often operate in isolation, lacking an integrated approach that fully addresses the complex needs of low-income families. This lack of coordination can create service gaps, leaving critical needs unmet. For instance, families may need to navigate multiple agencies, each with different eligibility criteria and application processes, which can be confusing and discourage access to essential resources (McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005).

Research shows that fragmented services can perpetuate cycles of poverty, as individuals are unable to rely on a cohesive support network to address foundational issues, such as accessing stable employment and affordable childcare (McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005). Additionally, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2020) notes that many social assistance programs fall short of covering basic expenses, leaving low-income families struggling to afford nutritious food. Their report, *The Cost of Poverty in Canada*, underscores the need for policy reforms to improve coordination and financial support. Experts recommend consolidating services under a single, integrated framework that aligns income support with housing and food programs. Such reforms could reduce redundancy, improve access, and support more sustainable poverty reduction outcomes (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2020).

BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND INEFFICIENCY

The disjointed structure of Canada's social services means families must often apply to multiple programs, each with distinct requirements and processes—a situation that can be confusing and overwhelming. Research by Tarasuk and Mitchell (2020) underscores that food insecurity remains prevalent despite income assistance because support programs neither adequately cover essential needs nor address the systemic roots of poverty. Without a coordinated, synergistic approach to poverty reduction, families are left to navigate a patchwork of services that may alleviate immediate needs but fail to provide sustainable, long-term solutions.

6 STIGMA, SHAME AND POVERTY



Our society often carries misguided perceptions about poverty, leading to simplistic and uninformed judgments about those who experience it. While some stereotypes about poverty contain grains of truth, they ignore broader systemic factors that significantly shape individuals' lives, such as economic instability, discrimination, health challenges, and unequal access to quality education. Misconceptions like the notion that poverty results solely from personal failure—or that everyone has equal opportunities to succeed—oversimplify a complex issue and hinder effective responses to poverty (Gorski, 2018; APA, 2020).

The consequences of these stereotypes are profound. A society that should protect and support all children often fails to recognize the systemic injustices affecting low-income families. Rather than addressing the root causes of poverty, we risk reinforcing it by marginalizing those in need of support. When society views low-income families with suspicion or disdain, it limits their access to opportunities, intensifying economic hardship and perpetuating poverty across generations (Heckman, 2006).

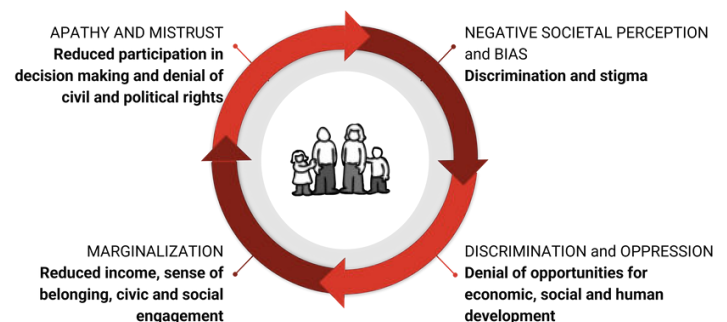


Research shows that societal stereotypes around poverty can significantly contribute to bullying and exclusion even for children. A study published in BMC Public Health found significant associations between social poverty indicators and school bullying victimization (BMC Public Health, 2024). The study highlighted that higher levels of absolute poverty were related to increased prevalence of bullying, particularly verbal bullying.

Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. (2014)

If We Believe the Primary Cause of Poverty Is . . .	Then We Will Primarily Try to . . .
A Lack of Knowledge	Educate the Poor
Oppression by Powerful People	Work for Social Justice
The Personal Sins of the Poor	Evangelize and Disciple the Poor
A Lack of Material Resources	Give Material Resources to the Poor

The vicious cycle of Poverty and Stigma



SOLUTION LANDSCAPE



The government of Canada has implemented a variety of programs aimed at reducing poverty and supporting low-income individuals and families.

Douzen

Federal, Provincial and Territorial Support programs and initiatives

Collectively address various aspects of poverty, from child and family support to housing and income security, aiming to provide a comprehensive safety net for Canadians.

However, these initiatives and programs are often siloed with a unidimensional focus. We suggest creating coordinated approaches that consider different intersects of the factors that trap children into poverty. We suggest seeking systemic structural transition rather than change, understanding transition as something that is happening, as compared to something that will change in the future. In our opinion, all relevant systems, subsystems and structures are interlinked with each other, both vertically and horizontally. To work on intergenerational poverty reduction and ultimately to lead to sustainable development, we argue that we will have to think of the condition of intergenerational poverty as a constructed system of political, economic, environmental, and socio-cultural arrangements that excludes the underprivileged from economic and social opportunities.

GAPS AND LEVERAGE POINTS

Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment

The Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment (Mincome project), conducted in 1974 in Dauphin, Manitoba, was an innovative socio-economic experiment that provided residents with a guaranteed income sufficient to cover basic survival needs. Known as a "minimum income" or "basic income" project, Mincome aimed to assess the impacts of guaranteed income on individuals and communities. The data collected over the project's four years demonstrated significant positive outcomes: residents reported better mental and physical health, and reductions were observed in dropout rates, criminal justice involvement, and workplace absenteeism. The basic income also helped reduce the stigma often associated with conventional welfare, as residents received support without the conditional requirements and associated labels of other aid programs. However, concerns about the project's cost led the federal government to end the experiment in 1978.



Building on the insights from the Mincome project and successful international examples, here are seven proposed initiatives that could contribute to significant improvements in poverty reduction and child well-being in Canada:

Implement a Standard Minimum Income

Providing a guaranteed basic income to low-income individuals and families could offer financial stability and reduce poverty. Studies from similar programs, like Canada's Mincome experiment in the 1970s and recent pilot projects in Finland, demonstrate that guaranteed income leads to improvements in mental health, education retention, and economic security (Forget, 2011; Kangas et al., 2021). Implementing a basic income could help lift families out of poverty, allowing them to focus on long-term needs like education and health.

Appoint a Commissioner for Canadian Children and Young Leaders

Over 40 countries, including the UK, New Zealand, and Norway, have a Children's Commissioner or Ombudsperson dedicated to protecting children's rights and advocating for their welfare (UNICEF Canada, 2018). Establishing this role in Canada would ensure children's needs are prioritized in policymaking and help address issues like poverty, health, and education disparities.

GAPS AND LEVERAGE POINTS



Create an All-Party Advisory Council

Forming a council with representatives from all political parties can foster a non-partisan, unified approach to addressing child poverty, encouraging long-term, stable solutions. In Norway, all-party collaboration on social welfare has contributed to consistent, robust child poverty reduction measures, demonstrating that such councils can create lasting impact (Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, 2020).

Promote Community Resource Awareness

Many families are unaware of the resources available to them, including food, housing, and educational assistance. Community partnerships and media campaigns to increase awareness could improve access and encourage utilization of these supports (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2020). Effective resource promotion has been shown to enhance social program reach and reduce gaps in service delivery.

Develop High-Quality, Affordable Children's Programs

Access to quality early childhood education and after-school programs supports children's development and helps parents remain in the workforce. Studies indicate that high-quality early childhood programs, like those in Denmark, reduce educational disparities and support long-term economic stability for families (Heckman, 2006; OECD, 2018).

Increase Child-Friendly Public Policy Consultation

Including children and families in policy discussions ensures that their perspectives shape programs designed to serve them. Programs like the Family-Centered Community Change initiative in the U.S. have shown the value of a "two-generation approach" that addresses the needs of both children and parents (Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2017). This type of engagement in Canada could make child welfare policies more relevant and effective.

Establish a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Modeled after the U.S. SNAP program, a targeted food assistance program could provide nutritious food options to low-income families, reducing food insecurity and promoting better health outcomes (Tarasuk et al., 2016). Direct food assistance has been shown to improve children's diets and alleviate the pressures on food banks, which often struggle to meet demand.

KEY TAKE AWAYS



COMPLEX NATURE OF POVERTY

Poverty is not merely a lack of income but a multifaceted problem influenced by various factors, including economic instability, educational inequality, health disparities, social inequities, and historical legacies like colonialism. Effective poverty reduction strategies must acknowledge these interconnected factors, reflecting a nuanced understanding of the conditions that sustain poverty across generations.



IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated child poverty in Canada, pushing more families into financial precarity and revealing the limitations of current social protection systems. This urgent reality underscores the need for more resilient social safety nets that can withstand economic shocks and support families during crises.



PERSISTENT CHALLENGE OF INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY

Despite numerous policies aimed at reducing poverty, intergenerational poverty continues to affect a significant portion of the Canadian population. This persistence highlights the need for new, systemic approaches that address the root causes of poverty and create sustainable pathways out of hardship for future generations.



LIMITATIONS OF ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACHES

Standardized poverty reduction policies often fail to address the unique challenges of diverse communities. Tailored approaches that consider specific community needs—such as Indigenous and rural populations—are essential for more effective and equitable poverty alleviation.

KEY TAKE AWAYS



IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Access to high-quality early childhood education and after-school programs is critical for supporting child development and allowing parents to participate in the workforce. These programs can help reduce educational disparities and support long-term economic stability, creating a more equitable foundation for all children.



NEED FOR INTEGRATED SOCIAL SERVICES

Canada's fragmented social safety net often requires families to navigate multiple, disconnected programs with different eligibility criteria. An integrated service model, where programs are coordinated across federal, provincial, and municipal levels, would provide comprehensive and streamlined support, reducing redundancy and barriers to access.



ROLE OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND MEDIA

Public perceptions and media coverage significantly shape societal attitudes towards poverty, influencing policy responses. Reducing stigma and correcting misconceptions about poverty are crucial steps in creating a supportive environment for low-income families.



LEARNING FROM NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES

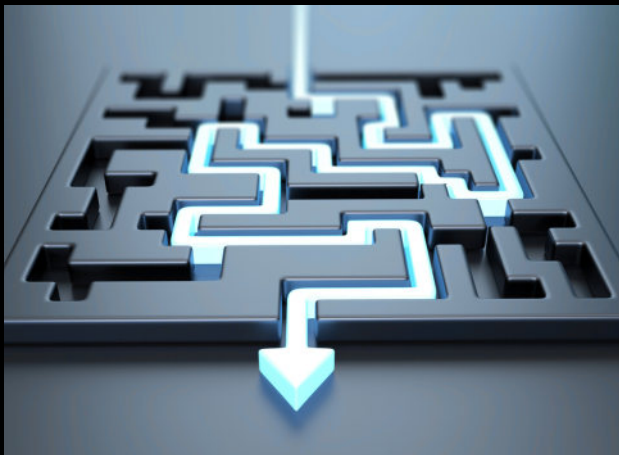
Adopting best practices from countries with effective poverty reduction programs can benefit Canada. Successful models, such as the Mincome project in Manitoba and recent pilot projects in Finland, demonstrate the potential positive impacts of basic income and comprehensive social programs.

KEY TAKE AWAYS



HOLISTIC AND SYSTEMIC APPROACH

A holistic approach to poverty reduction recognizes the political, economic, environmental, and socio-cultural factors contributing to poverty. By addressing these systemic issues and shifting public perceptions, Canada can break the cycle of poverty and promote social and economic mobility for future generations.



PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

This report suggests seven key initiatives, including implementing a guaranteed basic income, establishing a Commissioner for Canadian Children, forming an all-party advisory council, promoting community resource awareness, developing affordable children's programs, increasing child-friendly policy consultations, and introducing a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These recommendations address both immediate and systemic needs in poverty reduction.

CONCLUSION

Addressing poverty in Canada requires a more tailored, systemic approach than conventional policies have offered. Intergenerational poverty remains a persistent issue, despite decades of well-intentioned policies. This persistence underscores the limitations of a "one-size-fits-all" approach, which often fails to account for the varied socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural factors that shape poverty for different groups (Deeming & Smyth, 2015; Blank, 2008). Standardized policies may inadvertently reinforce inequalities by overlooking the unique barriers faced by marginalized communities, such as single-parent households, Indigenous populations, and racialized minorities. Research shows that policies tailored to local contexts—considering factors like housing availability, healthcare access, and labour market conditions—are far more effective in sustainably reducing poverty (Chung & van Oorschot, 2011; OECD, 2019, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the inadequacies of current social protection systems, exacerbating child poverty and pushing more families into financial insecurity. This reality highlights the urgent need for robust, resilient social safety nets capable of adapting to crises and supporting the diverse needs of Canadian communities.

In light of these limitations, a holistic, layered approach is essential. This aligns with the capabilities approach advocated by Amartya Sen (1999), which emphasizes expanding individual freedoms and addressing a broader range of human needs beyond mere financial assistance. Policies that support mental health, social inclusion, and community resources are key in fostering long-term self-sufficiency and economic mobility. This nuanced approach recognizes that poverty is a complex condition, impacting individuals on multiple levels, from basic needs like food and shelter to less tangible elements, such as self-esteem and social support.

Policymakers must prioritize flexibility and adaptability in designing poverty reduction strategies, allowing for adjustments based on community-specific challenges and strengths. Programs that are integrated across federal, provincial, and community levels—such as one-stop service hubs for healthcare, education, and social assistance—can provide a more cohesive support network for families. Evidence from countries with successful poverty reduction strategies, such as Finland and Denmark, suggests that inclusive, tailored approaches lead to more effective, sustainable outcomes.

The seven proposed initiatives in this report—ranging from a guaranteed basic income to a Commissioner for Canadian Children—are grounded in evidence-based strategies and international best practices. They reflect a shift towards customized solutions that leverage local resources and engage communities, creating pathways out of poverty more suited to Canada's diverse population.

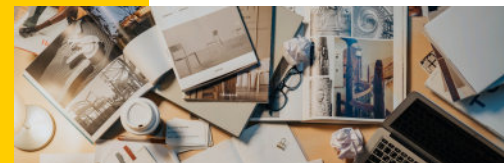
To break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, Canadian policymakers and advocates must adopt a comprehensive, systemic approach. By addressing structural barriers, fostering economic mobility, and adapting policies to specific community needs, Canada can create a more equitable future for all children and families.

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