

## RESOLUTION 1

## Advocacy for a Poverty-Free Canada

*BE IT RESOLVED*, That the Canadian Nurses Association lobby for a comprehensive, integrated federal plan for poverty reduction.

### Background

Taking action on poverty is literally a matter of life and death.<sup>1</sup> There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that those who live in poverty and are socially excluded experience a greater burden of disease and die earlier than those who have better access to economic, social, and political resources.<sup>2 3 4</sup>

Internationally, jurisdictions are showing that it is possible to reduce poverty through political will. Leaders of the European Union (EU) established the Social Inclusion Process in 2000 “to make a decisive impact on eradicating poverty by 2010.”<sup>5</sup> The United Kingdom’s multi-pronged approach to child poverty has resulted in 800,000 fewer children in 2006 living in relative-low-income households than in 1997.<sup>6</sup> Sweden’s equity-orientated health and social policies have resulted in higher levels of workplace participation, less income inequality, lower poverty rates, low mortality rates, high life expectancy, and favourable health outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

A federal Act to eliminate poverty, promote social inclusion and strengthen social security will ensure an ongoing federal role and responsibility for social development. A comprehensive, integrated federal plan for poverty elimination that is linked to and supportive of provincial and territorial poverty action plans is needed. Key elements of this plan should include: a meaningful, inclusive consultation process with a wide range of stakeholders, especially those with direct experience of living in poverty; bold but achievable targets for poverty reduction within a specific time; and accountability measures to track progress.

Actions that would improve the conditions of daily life of people living in poverty include:

- Strategies for good jobs that pay a living wage.<sup>8 9 10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The evidence is clear: differences in social and economic status are directly linked to inequitable health outcomes. As Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer noted, “if all neighbourhoods had the age- and sex-specific mortality rates of the highest-income quintile neighbourhoods, then the total potential years of life lost for all urban neighbourhoods would have been reduced by approximately 20%.” Butler-Jones, D. (2008). *The Chief Public Health Officer’s Report on the State of Public Health in Canada, 2008*. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 37.

<sup>2</sup> Marmot, M. & Wilkinson, R. (Eds.) (1999). *Social Determinants of Health*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Raphael, D. (Ed.) (2009). *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Lightman, E., Mitchell, A., & Wilson, B. (2008) *Poverty is Making Us Sick: A Comprehensive Survey of Income and Health in Canada*. Toronto: Community Social Planning Council of Toronto and the Wellesley Institute, 25.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission website on Social Protection Social Inclusion.

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/spsi/poverty\\_social\\_exclusion\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/poverty_social_exclusion_en.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Department for Work and Pensions. (2006). *Working Together: UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2006-2008*. London: Author, 8. <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2006/nap/>

<sup>7</sup> Burstrom, B., Diderichsen, F., Ostli, P., & Ostergren, P. (2002) Chapter 19—Sweden in *Reducing Inequalities in Health: A European Perspective*. Bakker, M. & Mackenbach, J. (Eds). London: Routledge, UK, 274-284.

<sup>8</sup> Good Jobs for All Coalition (2008). *Good Jobs for All for a Greater Toronto Summit Background Papers*. Toronto: Author. [http://www.goodjobsforall.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=86&Itemid=58](http://www.goodjobsforall.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86&Itemid=58)

<sup>9</sup> Mackenzie, H. & Stanford, J. (2008). *A Living Wage for Toronto*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

<sup>10</sup> Benach, J., Muntaner, C., & Santana, V. (chairs). (2007). *Employment Conditions and Health Inequalities. Final Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health*. Employment Conditions Knowledge Network.

- Reforming Canada's Employment Insurance (EI) system by expanding eligibility and improving benefit levels. There is a broad consensus that entrance requirements across the country should be uniform and reduced to 360 hours. The 55 per cent benefit rate is too low a rate for many people, especially the most economically vulnerable workers with low wages and dependents.<sup>11</sup>
- Invest in a national affordable housing plan. Increase access to affordable housing by making major investments in the construction and maintenance of affordable housing units, and invest in supportive housing for those with physical, cognitive and/or mental health needs.
- Ensure income support so that all may live in health and dignity. People receiving social assistance,<sup>12</sup> public health officials,<sup>13</sup> and the National Council of Welfare<sup>14</sup> all note that social assistance rates and the actual cost of living bear little relationship.
- Increase the National Child Benefit (NCB) to a maximum of \$5,200 (2009\$).
- Invest in universal, regulated, affordable, not-for-profit, public systems of early learning and child-care.
- Expand Medicare to include a publicly funded and publicly controlled national pharmacare program.<sup>15</sup>

Poverty is not random. Those found to be more vulnerable to persistent low income include: lone parents (most frequently mothers); individuals aged 45-64 years who are living alone; recent immigrants; persons with a work-limiting disability; Aboriginal people; high school drop-outs;<sup>16</sup> women;<sup>17</sup> and racialized group members.<sup>19</sup> For this reason:

- Equitable access to employment, availability of good jobs, and good working conditions are essential to ending poverty and securing full citizenship for all members of society.<sup>20</sup>
- Implement a distinct poverty reduction strategy that is meaningful and accountable to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.
- It is important to ensure that data is disaggregated so that population-specific targets and interventions will be able to address disproportionately higher levels of poverty among racialized communities, Aboriginal people, lone mothers and people with disabilities.

Submitted by the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario

<sup>11</sup> Yalnizyan, A. (2009). *Exposed: Revealing Truths About Canada's Recession*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 38.

<sup>12</sup> Campaign 2000 and the Income Security Advocacy Centre, (2008). *Solutions Start with Us: Voices of Low-Income People in Ontario*. Toronto: Authors.

<sup>13</sup> McKeown, D. (2008). *Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket—Toronto 2008*. Toronto: Toronto Public Health.

<sup>14</sup> National Council of Welfare (2006). *Welfare Incomes 2005*. Ottawa: Author.

<sup>15</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Canadian Health Coalition (2008). *Life before Pharmacare: Report on the Canadian Health Coalition's Hearings into a Universal Public Drug Plan*. Ottawa: Authors.  
[http://www.policyalternatives.ca/~ASSETS/DOCUMENT/National\\_Office\\_Pubs/2008/Life\\_Before\\_Pharmacare.pdf](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/~ASSETS/DOCUMENT/National_Office_Pubs/2008/Life_Before_Pharmacare.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Hatfield, M. (2004). Vulnerability to Persistent Low Income. *Horizons*. 7 (2), 19-26.

<sup>17</sup> Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity (2007). *Prosperity, Inequality, and Poverty*. Working Paper 10. Toronto: Author, 28-40.

<sup>18</sup> Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (2005). *Women and Poverty*. Ottawa: Author.

<sup>19</sup> Colour of Poverty (2007). Understanding the Racialization of Poverty in Ontario: An Introduction in 2007. Fact sheets are available from the Colour of Poverty Campaign website <http://www.colourofpoverty.ca/>

<sup>20</sup> Galabuzi, G. (2008). *To end poverty, we need equity in employment*. Toronto: Colour of Poverty—Colour of Change.