

Ontario should raise the bar on poverty reduction

TORONTO, Jan. 28 – The Ontario government needs to aim high with its poverty reduction strategy, according to 250 poverty reduction advocates and activists at a 25 in 5 Poverty Reduction Network meeting on Monday.

The Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction will convene on Feb. 4 to begin planning the government's approach.

“There is a huge appetite for the Ontario government to do the right thing and set their standards high. The upcoming Cabinet Committee's retreat will be critical in starting off on the right foot, and we will be looking for bold targets and solutions that take inclusive, community-based consultation into account,” said Cindy Wilkey, staff lawyer with the Income Security Advocacy Centre and a member of 25 in 5.

Despite record economic growth, poverty has persisted at the same rates in Ontario for a generation. A 25 per cent reduction in poverty over five years would lift 400,000 Ontarians out of poverty.

“These goals are achievable. We've seen it work in the UK. And here in Canada, Quebec and Newfoundland & Labrador have implemented poverty reduction strategies which are making real progress as a result,” said Marvyn Novick, a policy consultant for the Social Planning Network of Ontario and Campaign 2000.

The 25 in 5 Poverty Reduction Network believes that these key principles should guide Ontario's approach:

- If you work full time, you should not be living in poverty. Ontario needs to increase the minimum wage, step up the enforcement of labour standards, and break down barriers based on discrimination.
- Ensure adults and children real income security. Bolster the new Ontario Child Benefit and provide adequate systems of support for those who cannot work full time.
- Include policies that address the disproportionate impact of poverty on racialized communities, aboriginal people, women, persons with disabilities and newcomers.
- Make affordable housing and quality child care top provincial priorities.
- Ensure that everyone has real access to medical and dental care.

The 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction is a multi-sector network comprised of 100 provincial and Toronto-based organizations and individuals working on eliminating poverty. The name reflects the call for a 25 per cent reduction in poverty levels in Ontario over the next five years. For more information, visit www.25in5.ca.

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