

25 in 5 Network for
Poverty Reduction



Common Ground

A Strategy for Moving Forward
on Poverty Reduction

Third Annual Progress Report on Poverty Reduction in Ontario

December 5, 2011

The 25in5 Network for Poverty Reduction is a multi-sectoral network comprised of more than 100 provincial and Toronto-based organizations and individuals working on eliminating poverty.

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**25 in 5 Network for
Poverty Reduction**



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“Hear the voices of those with a lived experience of poverty. You can’t miss us. We’re on every street corner in every small town, village, and city from north to south to east to west, from sea to sea. The number of Canadians living in poverty grows with each passing day. Will we have the courage to no longer allow this injustice to continue, to rob our country of so many citizens who live and die in poverty? The cost of not fighting poverty in Canada is a cost that not one of us can afford. We are weaker as people and we are weaker as citizens and we are weaker as a nation when we leave so many behind.”

Mike Creek,
Voices from the Street and
Co-Chair of the 25 in 5 Network

Common Ground

A Strategy for Moving Forward on Poverty Reduction

Third Annual Progress Report on Poverty Reduction in Ontario

Ontario has officially passed the halfway point to its promised target date of reducing child poverty by 25 per cent by December 2013.

Much has happened since December 4, 2008, the date the Ontario government announced its first five-year poverty reduction commitment. But, especially in light of ongoing economic turmoil, much more needs to be done in order to meet the target.

This report examines the progress Ontario has made to date and lays out the next steps required to make good on the promise.

The table on pages 10 to 29 lays out 25 in 5's five Key Tests for a successful poverty reduction strategy, the commitments government made in these areas in its 2008 strategy, and the steps it has taken to meet these commitments over the past three years.

Given the new reality of a minority government in Ontario, this report also identifies actionable initiatives that all three political parties have already expressed agreement on, showing

there is enough common ground between them to continue efforts to lift 90,000 children out of poverty in this province by December 2013.

In other words, a minority government should not be a barrier to moving forward, together, to achieve the goal.

In 2009, the government passed legislation holding future governments to account—the legislative premise on which the poverty reduction promise was built. Ontario's two opposition parties voted in favour of this legislation, turning action on poverty reduction into an all-party effort that holds the potential to rise above petty politics.

We at 25 in 5 hold fast to our firm belief that tackling poverty can – and must – be done. We're also renewing our call for a robust poverty reduction strategy that includes a commitment to reduce adult poverty as well as child poverty, and to address the disproportionate impacts of poverty on particular communities. We view these as critical first steps on the road to eliminating poverty in Ontario.

COMMON GROUND

Recession and Slow Growth

The year Ontario's three political parties agreed to the provincial government's promise to reduce child and family poverty by 25 per cent, the global economic meltdown of 2008 plunged the province into a recession that knocked hundreds of thousands of Ontarians into the ranks of the unemployed and the new poor. By December 2009, a year into the promise to reduce poverty, the damaging effects of the recession had taken root in every community in this province.

During the worst of the recession, Ontarians looked to their governments for leadership. The Ontario government joined federal and municipal jurisdictions in unleashing important stimulus investments to help beat back the worst effects of recession, resulting in a fiscal deficit that remains manageable despite the ongoing reality of slower economic growth. The provincial government now expects the economy to grow by 1.8 per cent this year – slightly lower than the predicted 2.4 per cent growth rate.

As the world economy remains stuck in a holding pattern of tepid or tenuous growth and the U.S. appears to have entered what some are calling 'the lost decade', Ontario is entering a new phase of slow growth. As the government signaled in its November 22 Throne Speech and November 23 Fall Economic Statement, a tumultuous world economy presents ongoing challenges, adding to the emerging pressure to focus on innovative job creation in this province. Disappointingly, however, these important statements from government were silent on its own poverty reduction plan. And they made no reference to the growing discontent

over worsening income inequality, voiced by new social movements, editorial pages, bankers, and beyond.

The Gap Keeps Growing

Ontario's income gap worsened during the best of economic times in the early- and mid-2000s and the trend shows no sign of abating. Historically, income inequality grew during recessions as middle-income workers lost jobs, but the gap narrowed once the economy recovered and jobs were aplenty. But that historical trend has changed. A growing body of research indicates income inequality is getting worse because of a new trend: the richest 10%, especially the top 1%, have become even better off, while those in the middle work longer and harder just to stay afloat – and the growing ranks of those at the bottom struggle harder to rise up the income ladder. The Conference Board of Canada recently indicated income inequality is growing at a faster pace in Canada than it is in the U.S. Action is urgently needed.

Governments used to do far more in Canada to keep a lid on the growing income gap, offering economic stabilizers such as a more robust Employment Insurance and social assistance system than exists today. Governments also ensured revenue sources for vital public services were protected through a progressive income and corporate tax structure.

But more than a decade of tax cuts at every jurisdictional level has resulted in an increasingly regressive tax structure, benefiting the richest Ontarians while revenue-anemic governments wage austerity battles with the public

sector that result in more unemployment at a time when Canadians need jobs, and in a reduction of public services that everyone needs and values.

Cutting the taxes of those at the top has not led to the kind of growth that provides enough support for the rest of us. The gap keeps growing – not only in income, but also in access to jobs, education, services, and opportunity. It's a trend that Ontario can no longer afford to ignore, particularly in the current slow economic growth reality. The poverty reduction promise will grow cold without significant action in the upcoming provincial budget.

The Growing Consensus on Government Revenue

The growing chorus of Ontarians and Canadians calling for new tax measures to secure government revenues has recently been joined by some wealthy and powerful voices – giving governments all the more reason to do the right thing.

TD Bank CEO Ed Clark has been quoted as saying “almost every person at a recent meeting of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives said ‘raise my taxes’” in order to slay the recession-induced deficit.

This October, the Conference Board of Canada's Glen Hodgson wrote: “Canadian governments still need to generate enough revenue to sustain key public services, re-balance the budget and manage public debt.”

Ontario must turn the corner on its lingering tax revenue problem. Doing so now would put

the province in an excellent position to make haste on the remaining poverty reduction commitments required to meet the 2013 goal.

Policy + Action = Results

The province's early actions are already bearing fruit, though not enough. When Ontario's poverty reduction strategy was announced, the global recession was in full swing. Anti-poverty groups urged the provincial government to take bold steps to protect people from the economic downturn. They urged government to increase the Ontario Child Benefit, boost the minimum wage, and match federal stimulus spending. They also called on the province to raise incomes for adults living in poverty.

The McGuinty government followed through on the first three steps. It also introduced full day junior and senior kindergarten. But, crucially, it did not do anything substantial to deal with income security for adults.

The results: Child poverty dropped. It is a little off pace of the government's target for a 25% reduction in five years. But it is a move in the right direction.

By contrast, poverty rates for working age adults in Ontario continued to climb. But even there, the story is more nuanced. Unemployment hit men harder than women during the recession. As a result, poverty among single men climbed steadily. Poverty rates for single women actually fell.

This suggests that those who were able to keep or find work benefitted from the protection of a higher minimum wage – since more women

than men work for minimum wage. Those who lost jobs – particularly men – suffered from Ontario’s punishing social assistance system.

Lessons Learned

The first lesson to be learned is that a government commitment matched by good policy can make a big difference in people’s lives. The second lesson is that social and economic problems only grow when governments ignore them – wishing them away yields no fruitful results.

The story in Ontario during the worst of Canada’s recession is telling on this front:

In Ontario, child poverty actually fell between 2008 and 2009, inching down from 15.2% to 14.6% using the province’s own Low Income Measure. This 4.0% decrease means that 19,000 Ontario children and their families were moved out of poverty, despite very tough times. It’s nowhere near the 25% target goal, but it’s a stark contrast to other provinces that were also hit hard by the recession.

In Alberta, for example, child poverty soared by 25 per cent in the same period. What’s the difference? Ontario took concrete action to reduce child poverty. Provinces like Alberta didn’t.

The Need to Do More

But as we begin to see the rewards from investing in a poverty reduction plan aimed at children, the ramifications of ignoring adult poverty come into clearer view.

The poverty rate for all Ontarians aged 18-64 years – whether in families or single – was 13.4% in 2009. This means that 102,000 more

Ontarians in this age bracket lived in poverty than in 2008 – almost a 10% increase over one year. The number of single people living on low income decreased slightly from 25.1% in 2008 and 24.6% in 2009. But 410,000 single people living in poverty – 198,000 men and 212,000 women – is still unacceptably high.

And we know that poverty discriminates. People in particular demographic groups – like people from racialized communities, Aboriginal people, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, newcomers, and people living in specific geographic areas – are at greater risk, for structural and systemic reasons that must be addressed. Without additional, targeted action to deal with the disproportionate impact of poverty on people in these groups, the growing gap between the rich and the rest of us will continue to leave certain groups of people behind.

Social Assistance Means Poverty

Addressing the failures of Ontario’s social assistance system would yield immediate and positive results. One small example of that failure – beyond the punishing legislative and regulatory structure that both blames people for and keeps them trapped in poverty – is the lack of a logical framework through which decent social assistance incomes can be set.

When Premier McGuinty first took over from Mike Harris in 2003, singles on social assistance received a mere \$520 a month. Not only had Harris cut Ontario Works benefits from \$663 in 1995, he had also let them erode between 1995 and 2003 by not indexing rates to inflation. Since 2003, social assistance rates

have increased, but not as much as inflation. The \$520 that Premier McGuinty inherited from Harris has only increased by \$79 – to \$599 as of this month – instead of to the \$608 that indexing to inflation would have produced.

What this all means is that the rate for singles on Ontario Works – in real dollars – is actually lower now than what Harris cut it to in 1995; \$520 in 1995 translates into \$716 in 2011. And without Harris' 21.6% cut, the inflation adjusted single rate would be \$932 – \$333 more than it is today. The refusal to address the depth of poverty experienced by singles on OW has created a class of urban nomads in Ontario's towns and cities, hunter-gatherers walking and biking from one food program to another in search of basic survival. Those who live in areas with no access to such programs become more desperate by the day.

The province's December 1st increase in social assistance rates amounts to a paltry 1%, which doesn't even begin to redress the issue and flies in the face of a political commitment to poverty reduction.

Food Bank Use Soaring

It's no surprise that food bank use in Ontario has soared since the recession. Between 2008-11, 395,106 people found help from a food bank – a 25.7% increase in usage over a three-year period. And 37.5% of people accessing food banks were children. Clearly, Ontario's poverty reduction plan has a long way to go to call it a success.

Affordable Housing On the Brink

Persistent poverty creates and is exacerbated

by other pressures. There are unacceptably long wait lists for subsidized housing in Ontario as housing affordability grows increasingly out of reach. Yet both the federal and Ontario governments are engaged in a political game of re-announcing previously committed funds for housing projects rather than boldly addressing the biggest pressure on any household budget – the cost of rent or mortgage. As a result, one out of two Canadians report they feel they are one or two paycheques away from being poor.

The Ontario government's fall economic statement notes the ongoing cuts to both operating and capital funding the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The operating budget for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing will be \$608.8 million – a sharp cut of 16% from the \$725 million spent in fiscal 2008. Capital funding, which pays for the brick-and-mortar of new affordable homes and urgent repairs to rundown housing, among other items, is facing an even bigger cut from \$668 million last year to \$58.7 million this year – a cut of 91%. Combined with equally harsh federal housing cuts, the provincial termination of housing supply and repair programs will reduce the funding available to municipal service managers to a relative trickle.

Child Care Needs a Fix

Meanwhile, parents trying to maintain a foothold in the paid labour market during increasingly difficult economic times find decreasing options for affordable early learning and child care in Ontario. While the Province's introduction of full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds is a welcome and visionary move, the

roll-out of the program without a robust accompanying childcare policy and the insufficient support for child care to repurpose programs to provide services for younger children has created a social and economic problem in need of a fix.

The Cost of Poverty: We Have a Choice

There is a growing body of research itemizing the cost of ignoring poverty. Ontario residents pay an estimated \$38 billion a year – the price of allowing poverty to remain entrenched in our communities rather than nip it in the bud. There are long-term social and health costs associated with ignoring poverty as well.

The National Council of Welfare reports that about 20% of health care spending in Canada results from socio-economic issues, including income related disparities. “Canadians are paying the most in the least productive areas,” says the NCW in *The Dollars and Sense of Solving Poverty*, “trying to fix costly problems linked to inequality, insecurity and poverty that are preventable.”

Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer reports that “the effect of social and economic status and/or differential access to health care, education, employment and housing can contribute to inequalities in health outcomes at every stage of life, including for youth and young adults.”

And Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett have demonstrated in their international research that income inequality results in greater social unrest, less trust in each other and in public institutions, higher levels of crime, greater

incidence of depression and anxiety, and deteriorating health conditions.

Should Budget 2012 focus on protecting health and education spending at the expense of spending in other areas, the societal and financial implications could be considerable. Additional costs in health care and other areas – costs that arise directly from ignoring poverty and income inequality – are significant.

It’s a steep price to pay for a problem with ready solutions at hand. Poverty reduction must not be ignored.

10 Areas of Common Ground on Poverty Reduction

Over the past three years, there have been notable examples of provincial political parties rising above partisan politics to seek common ground in Ontario’s fight against poverty.

All parties – Liberals, Conservatives and NDP alike – unanimously passed the Poverty Reduction Act in 2009, committing to take action to ensure that every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario.

All parties also put poverty reduction on the agenda during the last election, and made significant commitments to continue to build on the provincial strategy.

This common ground was secured on the understanding that addressing poverty is key to the social and economic well-being of Ontario. Poverty hurts the health and well-being of people and communities, it adds a tremendous

cost to our long-term health and social services, robs Ontarians of their potential to pursue opportunities, and saps our collective capacity to build a strong, prosperous province.

Significant steps have already been taken to begin to reverse these trends. All parties have now made their commitments to keep moving forward in building a more prosperous Ontario for all.

During the 2011 election campaign, common ground on poverty reduction emerged in ten distinct areas. Taking action on these “Common Ground Commitments” would go a long way in reducing child and family poverty in Ontario by 25% in 2013.

1. Introduce a new Housing Benefit: Housing costs are the biggest pressure on the budgets of low income households. Providing targeted relief to help Ontarians close the gap on rent is key to promoting stability and reducing poverty. That is why a new Ontario Housing Benefit has gained the support of parties across the aisles at Queen’s Park. The government’s campaign pledge to consider implementation must be followed up with action.

2. Reform Social Assistance: Every election platform in 2011 made the recognition that Ontario’s social assistance system must be reformed, to ensure basic needs are met and to give people real opportunities. Getting progressive recommendations from the Commission on Social Assistance Reform, which will be released this summer, is critical.

3. Support Transition to Work: All parties committed in their 2011 platforms to allow

social assistance recipients to keep more of what they are able to earn through paid work. This is not an area that needs to wait for further study and consideration. Action should be taken now to help promote income security and labour market transition.

4. Raise the Ontario Child Benefit: The Ontario Child Benefit has been a critical part of Ontario’s poverty reduction efforts thus far. Increasing the Ontario Child Benefit to \$1,310 found multi-party support in the 2011 platforms.

5. Take Action on Minimum Wages: From 2003 to 2010, the Liberal government increased the minimum wage every year. On the 2011 campaign trail, both the Liberals and NDP committed to go further. The Liberal Government has committed to appointing a minimum wage advisory committee to make recommendations on determining future minimum wage increases. The NDP has called for the next necessary phase of the increase: \$11 by 2011.

6. Step up for Fair Employment: Building on actions taken in the last term to beef up employment protections for vulnerable workers in Ontario, there is multi-party support in the next term to continue to ensure that employment standards protections reflect Ontario’s ever-changing workforce.

7. Build New Affordable Housing: Both the Liberal and NDP platforms identified the need to find opportunities to build affordable housing across the province, as well as to keep pressing federal government for National Affordable Housing Strategy.

8. Make Early Learning Vision a Reality: The election campaign featured all-party support to complete the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten for 4 & 5 year olds by 2014. There is also multi-party support to expand programs to other age groups and make good quality, affordable childcare available to all families in Ontario.

9. Support Affordable Education: All-parties recognize that education is a key to opportunity. All platforms introduced concrete measures to make post-secondary education more accessible to low and modest income families.

10. Set the next target: All parties brought the Poverty Reduction Act into fruition with a commitment to set a new target on poverty reduction every five years. In keeping with legislation, the Liberal platform commits to developing a new poverty reduction strategy for 2013 in consultation with stakeholders, other levels of government and individuals living in poverty. We need to get moving on these consultations.

Action on these ten Common Ground Commitments can and should be taken right away. In addition, 25 in 5 recommends action in six further areas, which must be on the radar screen of all Ontario's political parties.

1. Raise social assistance incomes: Social assistance incomes today have the same purchasing power as they did in 1967. Ontario must immediately take steps to bolster the incomes of people on social assistance. Getting progressive recommendations from the Commission on Social Assistance Reform, which will be released this summer, is critical.

2. Invest in community-based services that Ontarians turn to when they need help and support: Community agencies are critical local resources that are efficient in meeting immediate needs and innovative in creating lasting changes in neighbourhoods across the province.

3. Build a public education system that focuses on equitable outcomes: Any grants intended to improve equity should be used only for that purpose. Such grants should be designated solely for providing programs to mitigate socio-economic and ethno-racial factors affecting students, and include a built-in accountability process to mandate that school boards report annually on the programs and services funded by the grant and on their effectiveness.

4. Introduce a strategy for disproportionately poor communities: Women, Ontarians from racialized groups (communities of colour and Aboriginal Peoples), people with disabilities, newcomers, and specific geographical areas are disproportionately poor. The province needs a poverty reduction strategy that uses targeted measures to effectively address the structural and systemic poverty within diverse communities – one that offers hope and opportunity for this and future generations.

5. Introduce dental care for all low-income Ontarians: The province promised a new dental program for low-income Ontarians. It has moved ahead on a new community-based, prevention-focused program targeted at children. But full implementation of this commitment that ensures services are available to low income adults as well as children has yet to take place.

6. Create a transit infrastructure for opportunity: Keep investing in affordable, dependable transit to help people get to work – and to make our cities work too.

As poverty and inequality create a growing disenchantment with the status quo, the changing conversation is shining a light on the dim reality that governments everywhere are not responding to the growing needs of the majority. Ignoring the problem will fuel greater social unrest. It's time for Queen's Park to enter the conversation and take the leadership Ontarians crave. As an Environics Poll in 2009 indicated, 90% of Ontarians would be proud if their Premier took leadership on poverty reduction.

In Ontario we have a choice: Do we allow income inequality to worsen? Do we allow Ontario to turn into a divisive, socially volatile province?

Or do we step up on the province's poverty reduction plans in order to meet the promised target by 2013, set new and more ambitious targets post-2013, and take action now to address income inequality?

Protecting and enhancing public services, ranging from affordable housing to child care, and tweaking the tax system to ensure those who are in the best position to contribute do so, will be important steps to return Ontario to the road of recovery.

If we don't start planning for the future, the economic, social and political challenges that define 2011 will get worse. But the solutions are readily at hand. All that's missing is the political will to move forward, with confidence, with vision, and with the goal of putting the needs of the 99% ahead of the privileged few.

With the reality of a minority government in Ontario, we've laid out 10 areas where the parties agree on practical steps we can take to achieve the 25 in 5 child poverty reduction promise by 2013 – and another six areas where further action is required.

The conditions exist for "moving forward, together". Let's get it done.

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy Commitments and Results to Date (2008-2011)

This chart compares the Government of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Commitments with the Five Tests outlined in 2008 by the 25 in 5 Network, and shows the government's progress on its commitment in Year Three of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. More detail on progress in years 1 and 2 can be found in previous annual progress reports, which are available at www.25in5.ca/publications/

Legend

- Needs Improvement
- ½ Good Effort, But Incomplete
- 1 Good Achievement

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
TEST #1: A 25in5 TARGET			
An overall target of reducing poverty by 25% in 5 years	Reduce the number of children living in poverty by 25 percent over 5 years.	<p>A target was set for child poverty, but not adult poverty.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>The 25 in 5 Network continues to advocate for a broader poverty reduction strategy to address adult poverty as well as child poverty. It calls for specific actions to address the disproportionate impact of poverty experienced by people in particular groups, including people from racialized communities, Aboriginal peoples, women, single mothers, and people with disabilities.</p>	½

**FIVE TESTS FOR
A SUCCESSFUL
POVERTY
REDUCTION
STRATEGY**

**GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY
REDUCTION STRATEGY
COMMITMENTS**

RESULTS TO DATE

TEST #2: A SOLID MEASURING STICK

A clear way to measure progress: A lead income-measure combined with a set of additional indicators

Lead Income Measure: see Measure #6.

Measure #1: School Readiness - Indicator: Early Development Instrument.

Measure #2: Educational Progress - Indicator: EQAO Score.

Measure #3: High School Graduation Rates - Indicator: Graduation Rates.

Measure #4: Birth Weights - Indicator: Healthy Birth Weights.

Measure #5: Depth of Poverty - Indicator: Low Income Measure (40%).

Measure #6: Low Income Measure - Indicator: Low Income Measure (50%).

Measure #7: Ontario Housing Measure - Indicator: Housing Measure.

Measure #8: Standard of Living - Indicator: Deprivation Index.

The 25 in 5 Network called for a lead income-measure - the Low Income Measure (LIM50) combined with a set of additional indicators. The government has followed that advice.

YEAR 3

The government's 2010 Poverty Reduction Strategy Annual Report indicates that "As we move forward, the LIM50 will be fixed to the baseline of 2008 and adjusted for inflation in future years." The 25 in 5 Network is concerned that "fixing" the LIM50 to the 2008 figure will bias Ontario's poverty statistics downward as median income rises. If the government uses a fixed 2008 baseline for the depth of poverty indicator (LIM40), the same bias will affect the depth of poverty indicator and the Housing Measure which incorporates the LIM40.

The overall poverty rate (LIM50) in Ontario rose from 12.5% to 13.1% between 2008 and 2009, the first year of the province's poverty reduction strategy. What is striking and encouraging is that the child poverty rate declined between 2008 and 2009, from 15.2% to 14.6 %. Given the government's focus on reducing child poverty, and decisions like the increases to the Ontario Child Benefit in the 2009 budget, suggests that public commitment matched by action can reduce poverty -- even in hard economic times.

Unfortunately, between 2008 and 2009 poverty rates for working age adults rose from 12.4% to 13.4%. The rate for seniors also increased slightly -- from 8.7% to 8.8% continuing a troubling trend in seniors poverty which was as low as 6.1% in 2006.

These results further emphasize the need for a provincial poverty reduction strategy that aims to reduce and eradicate poverty for everyone -- a strategy matched by policies that achieve that goal.

1/2

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
TEST #3: POLICY SPECIFICS			
Sustaining Employment			
Poverty-proof the minimum wage for full-time earners	Confirm commitment to raise minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour by 2010.	<p>The minimum wage was raised to \$10.25 an hour in March 2010, as scheduled.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>The minimum wage remained at \$10.25 in 2011. The government announced that it will create a Minimum Wage Advisory Committee to give advice on future changes to the Minimum Wage. It will be important for this committee to give specific instruction on how to poverty proof the minimum wage. The 25 in 5 Network joins other advocates in continuing to call for \$11 an hour minimum wage in 2011, and indexing it to inflation.</p>	1/2
Update and enforce employment standards for all workers.	Invest \$10 million annually to hire new employment standards officers, improve Employment Standards Act compliance and reduce the backlog of claims.	<p>Budget 2009 invested an additional \$4.5 million annually to hire more Employment Standards Officers. The Open for Business Act (Bill 68), which was passed on October 21, 2010, created a Task Force and Modernization Strategy in the Ministry of Labour to help ease the backlog in dealing with Employment Standards complaints and violations.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>According to Budget 2011, the provincial government has invested an additional \$6 million over two years to help reduce the backlog of employment standards claims.</p> <p>In July 2011, the Ministry of Labour announced that the backlog of employment standards claims had been reduced by more than two-thirds, and was on track to be eliminated by March 2012. On November 24, 2011 the Minister of Labour announced that the backlog had been eliminated. According to the Ministry, clearing up the backlog of claims would free up more employment standards offers to conduct inspections and enforce standards.</p> <p>Advocates report that effective enforcement of employment standards remains an issue. The \$6 million of additional funding to alleviate the backlog of claims was allocated for 2 years - it will be crucial to ensure that in the 2012 Budget that this additional funding is reallocated to support a proactive inspection strategy and increased enforcement.</p> <p>Advocates also report that the measures taken to address the backlog have placed a burden on workers when it comes to filing claims - there is less support available for workers to understand their rights, stricter timelines for filing, and much of the filing process has been moved online, which often creates a burden for precarious, low-wage workers. On the positive side, advocates report that workers' claims are being resolved within 2-3 weeks of filing, rather than 12-18 months.</p>	1

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Sustaining Employment			
Update and enforce employment standards for all workers. [cont'd]	Propose legislation related to temporary help agencies.	<p>Bill 139, The Employment Standards Amendment Act (Temporary Help Agencies) was passed on May 4, 2009 and came into effect November 6, 2009 to provide new protections to workers.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>While this is welcome legislation, advocates report that there have not been sufficient resources allocated to ensure strong enforcement. In some cases, temp agencies have restructured their hiring practices in order to avoid paying severance or termination to workers. At the lower wage scale, there continue to be reports of agencies paying less than minimum wage.</p>	1/2
Create strong employment and pay equity programs.	No commitment was made.	<p>YEAR 3</p> <p>No progress to report.</p>	O
Expand access to dental, drug and vision coverage.	Invest \$45 million annually to provide dental care for low-income Ontarians.	<p>In January 2009, the Children in Need of Treatment (CINOT) program was expanded to include children up to age 18. On Oct. 1, 2010 the government launched the Healthy Smiles Ontario Program which delivers free preventive dental health services to children 17 and under whose family net income is below \$20,000 and who are not eligible for any other form of dental coverage. The 36 local Public Health Units across Ontario are leading the program in communities and are working with local partners such as Community Health Centres, primary care providers, dentists, dental hygienists, hospitals, schools and universities to deliver this program.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>On June 20, 2011 the government announced a partnership with the Ontario Association of Optometrists and industry partners to provide free glasses for junior kindergarten students with vision problems. The program is being piloted in four school boards during the 2011/2012 school year (Dufferin Peel, Hamilton-Wentworth, Halton and Windsor Essex). The program is intended to cover all school boards by 2015.</p> <p>The Healthy Smiles Program has allowed participating community health centres to install dental equipment and has enabled greater community outreach not only about the Healthy Smiles program but other dental services delivered by public health units, too. The most significant challenge to the program is that the income threshold is too low and therefore will be accessible to only a very small group of people. Raising the threshold level and including those with very limited benefit plans would significantly improve the opportunity to reach those above the current income cut off yet who could really benefit from access to this program. As expected, community outreach promoting this program has led to the inevitable questions and concerns about lack of services for adults.</p>	1/2

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Sustaining Employment			
Make training and education real, meaningful and easy to access.	Invest \$2 billion over three years in Skills to Jobs Action Plan, including the Second Career Program, a retraining program for workers laid off since 2005, with a grant of up to \$28,000 to help pay for tuition fees, books and living expenses.	<p>To cope with overwhelming demand, on November 13, 2009 the government announced new guidelines for the Second Career Program to include family income testing. In the first year of the poverty reduction strategy, 28,000 workers were served by the Second Career program. Additional funding of \$78 million in the 2010 budget allowed another 30,000 workers to receive support over two years.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>To date, nearly 45,000 Ontarians have enrolled in training funded through Second Career and about 74 per cent of surveyed participants found employment within one year of completing their skills training. MTCU's annual results based plan for 2010/2011 committed to bringing the total number of participants in Second Career to nearly 60,000.</p> <p>Advocates report that the program holds tremendous promise, but does not meet demand, despite changes to assessment and eligibility introduced in 2010. The program hasn't been adjusted over the past year, despite depressing unemployment numbers. Moreover, there have been no staffing adjustments in the Ministry to respond to the volume of applications and could create significant backlogs in the event of another wave of job loss.</p> <p>On June 23, 2011, the government announced an \$8.8 million investment to renew 12 programs across the province for internationally-educated dietitians, social workers and midwives. These programs are intended to help more than 2,200 highly skilled newcomers.</p>	1/2
Call on Ottawa to enrich the Working Income Tax Benefit .	Call on federal government to increase its support for the Working Income Tax Benefit.	<p>The 2009 federal budget increased the maximum WITB for families to \$1,680 from \$1,044 and indexed the benefit for inflation. In 2009 and 2010, Ontario had not responded to Ottawa's invitation to discuss tailoring the WITB to the provincial strategy.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>Budget 2011 indicates that Ontario continues to call on the federal government to increase the annual benefit significantly. The provincial government has not yet taken Ottawa up on its offer to tailor the design of the WITB to provincial programs.</p>	1/2

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Livable incomes			
Close the gap between life on social assistance and moving out of poverty.	Review social assistance with the goal of removing barriers and increasing opportunity.	<p>Since the Poverty Reduction Strategy was announced, basic social assistance rates were increased three times - by 2%, 1% and 1% respectively. These increases have not kept pace with inflation, let alone helping to address the depth of poverty that people on OW and ODSP continue to face.</p> <p>In July 2009, when the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) was increased by two annual steps as an economic stimulus measure, basic needs rates for people with children on OW and ODSP were “restructured”, meaning that many families (particularly single parents of older children) did not receive the full value of the increased OCB.</p> <p>The government announced the creation of the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council (SARAC) on December 2, 2009. In June 2010, SARAC issued a report calling for a broad review of income security programs in Ontario led by two commissioners. The report also pointed to the need for an immediate increase in incomes for adults receiving social assistance.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>In January 2011, the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance, led by Frances Lankin and Munir A. Sheikh, began its work. In early June, the Commission released its public discussion paper and workbook. Public input was due by September 1, 2011.</p> <p>The Review is a critical opportunity to make positive structural change to OW and ODSP. Some advocates are concerned about the Review’s narrow focus on social assistance programs, rather than on income security, as the concentration on employment doesn’t adequately acknowledge the impact of Ontario’s degraded labour market, and risks moving backward on support for people with disabilities - among other concerns.</p> <p>The Commission will release an Options Paper in early 2012. Its final report is due in June 2012. The Commission’s website is: http://www.socialassistancereview.ca.</p> <p>Other resources from advocates are available at http://sareview.ca.</p>	0
	Fully exempt as income the earnings of persons on social assistance who are participating in post-secondary education.	<p>YEAR 3</p> <p>A number of other rule change recommendations were made by the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council at the request of government. Many of these rule changes could be made concurrent with the Social Assistance Review, and would have a positive effect on the lives of people on OW and ODSP. These other rule changes have not yet been made. For the complete list of these rule changes, please see: http://sareview.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Short-termrecommendationsFinal.pdf</p>	1

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Livable incomes			
Close the gap between life on social assistance and moving out of poverty. [cont'd]	Extend the Up-Front Child Care Benefit to participants who may require support to maintain their participation in employment and employment assistance activities.	YEAR 3 See above	1
	Extend the time period to request an internal review from 10 days to 30 days.	YEAR 3 See above	1
	Look at our programs with a person-centred approach.	While there have been some moves in this direction in the administration of ODSP, and in some municipalities that administer OW, there is little evidence that a coordinated approach has been taken on this commitment.	O
Make it easier for people with disabilities to get access to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).	No commitment was made.	YEAR 3 Access to ODSP has been a continuing problem for people with disabilities in Ontario, as identified by recipients and advocates for many years. Some advocates are concerned that the Social Assistance Review may result in the narrowing of the definition of disability so that only people with "severe" disabilities who are "unable to work" would receive additional disability supports. This would be a step backward for people with disabilities. For more information, see the ODSP Action Coalition's submission to the Commission for the Review of Commission: http://sareview.ca/isac-resources/an-activation-agenda-for-people-with-disabilities-on-odsp/	O
Enrich the Ontario Child Benefit . Remove rules that claw the OCB back from people on social assistance.	Increase the Ontario Child Benefit to a maximum of \$1,310 per child per year.	The maximum Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) was raised to \$1,100 a year (from \$600) in July 2009, two years ahead of schedule and an excellent policy response in light of the economic recession. But social assistance benefits for people with children were restructured downward once again. Budget 2010 reiterated the government's commitment to raise the maximum OCB to \$1,310 by 2013. YEAR 3 The 2011 Budget held the Ontario Child Benefit rate at \$1,100 per year per child. The budget again reaffirmed the government's commitment to increase the OCB to a maximum of \$1,310 per child annually, but did not provide a time frame for the increase.	1/2

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Livable incomes			
<p>Enrich the Ontario Child Benefit. Remove rules that claw the OCB back from people on social assistance. [cont'd]</p>	<p>Increase the Ontario Child Benefit to a maximum of \$1,310 per child per year. [cont'd]</p>	<p>While the OCB is an important step toward poverty reduction for Ontario's children, some children are benefitting more than others. When the OCB was introduced, and again when it was increased, changes were made to the incomes of people with children on Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (OW) - certain annual benefits (the Winter Clothing Allowance and the Back To School Allowance) were ended, and basic needs benefits were "restructured". This has resulted in a very uneven distribution of benefit for families on OW or ODSP, depending on how many children they have and how old the children are. Single parents on OW who have older children, for example, have seen the least benefit from the OCB.</p> <p>25 in 5 is calling for the OCB to be increased to \$1,310 in 2012, with no additional "restructuring" of basic needs benefits for people with children who are on OW or ODSP.</p>	
<p>Tighten the regulation of payday lending and other financial services.</p>	<p>No commitment was made.</p>	<p>Bill 48, the Payday Loans Act was passed on June 9, 2008, tightening regulations on payday lenders and setting a maximum total cost of borrowing cap for payday loan agreements in Ontario at \$21 per \$100 borrowed. As of 2010, key parts of the Act had yet to be implemented.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>Outstanding sections of the Act were implemented. Section 66 of the Payday Loans Act (which mandates the establishment of an Education Fund to promote understanding of the Act and general financial planning, paid for by the industry to inform customers about their rights regarding payday loan services) was proclaimed and came into force on March 1, 2011. Additional regulatory adjustments were made to the Act in June 2011 to increase the protections extended to borrowers by adding to the disclosure obligations of payday lenders and by adding to the prohibited practices of licensees.</p> <p>While this is welcome legislation, the maximum allowed rate remains higher than in other jurisdictions - for example, in Manitoba the rate is \$17 per \$100 and there is a lower rate for low income people. Advocates are concerned that without sufficient regulation, the education fund, may be appropriated by Payday Lenders, who might use the fund to provide education that minimizes the risks and costs of payday loans.</p>	1

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Livable incomes			
Call on Ottawa to expand coverage of Employment Insurance (EI) and enrich the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB).	Call on the federal government to host a summit to discuss Employment Insurance modernization.	<p>The Ontario government called on the federal government to expand EI coverage and enrich the CCTB when they released the Poverty Reduction Strategy and again in the 2009 provincial budget.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>The Canada Child Tax Benefit has currently reached its maximum of \$3,416 per child and the federal government has made no commitment to increase it.</p> <p>Ontario's Minister of Finance's response to the Federal Budget made clear that the province was unhappy with the federal government's failure to modernize EI. The 2011 Budget called for reforms to the retirement income system.</p> <p>The provincial government reports that it continues to advocate for an EI program that is responsive to labour-market conditions, facilitates productivity in all regions of the country, and ensures fairness for Ontario workers.</p>	1/2
	Develop and implement a Sustainable Procurement Strategy.	<p>YEAR 3</p> <p>The provincial government reports that it continues to pursue sustainable procurement initiatives, as appropriate, that support social enterprises seeking to do business with the provincial government. No further information about the criteria for appropriate conditions is available.</p>	1/2
	Develop a Social Venture Capital Fund.	<p>YEAR 3</p> <p>Funding for the Social Venture Capital Fund was deferred in 2008. There has been no movement to reestablish the Fund as originally envisioned since then.</p>	O
	Encourage social investment, innovation and collaboration.	<p>Government had funded research by Social Innovation Generation at MaRS on social venture financing.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>On May 16, 2011, the Ministries of Research and Innovation, Citizenship and Immigration, and Children and Youth Services co-sponsored a Social Innovation Summit. The Ontario Social Innovation Wiki was launched to engage social innovation experts in the development of a social innovation policy framework. In June 2011, a draft social innovation policy paper was delivered to the Ontario government, identifying better ways to unleash the sector's potential as well as new opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration. The three ministers convened a table of experts to discuss social innovation in late July. Due to official election rules which prohibit public consultation during an election campaign, the Social Innovation Wiki had to be taken down in the Fall of 2011. Social innovation advocates look forward to the swift revival of these initiatives.</p>	1/2

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Livable incomes			
Call on Ottawa to expand coverage of Employment Insurance (EI) and enrich the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). [cont'd]	Encourage social investment, innovation and collaboration. [cont'd]	<p>The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration's Partnership Project Report was released March 3, 2011 with recommendations on strengthening the relationship between government and the not-for-profit sector. On June 27, 2011, a new Partnership Grants Program of \$3 million over three years was announced for projects that build capacity and encourage collaboration in the nonprofit sector.</p> <p>Pending approval by the Ontario Securities Commission, the SVX – a local, impact-first market connecting social ventures, impact funds and impact investors, which is funded by private foundations – will launch and be housed in the Centre for Impact Investing, which will open in December 2011 at MaRS.</p>	
Strong and Supportive Communities			
Make housing easier to afford. Build it to suit people's needs. Keep it in good repair.	Stabilize the Provincial Rent Bank Program with dedicated annual funding of \$5 million.	<p>Budget 2009 allocated \$5 million a year, beginning in 2009-2010 for municipal rent bank programs, designed to help tenants pay arrears and avoid homelessness.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>Budget 2011 indicates that \$33.8 million has been invested in the provincial rent bank since 2004. There was no indication of how much would be invested for 2011.</p> <p>Advocates report that rent bank funding is not scaled to actual need across the province. The Province has not measured the need for rent bank funding (i.e. counting households facing affordability challenges and economic eviction) and as a result, funding allocations are based on political calculations rather than on need.</p>	1/2
	Institute a new 10-year, \$60 billion infrastructure plan, including social housing, in 2009.	<p>An infrastructure plan had not yet been released in 2009 or 2010.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>The Strong Communities through Affordable Housing Act was passed on April 19, 2011. The legislation was intended to: clarify the roles and responsibilities of municipalities and the province to increase accountability; expand affordable housing options by requiring municipalities to allow second units and require the province and municipalities to measure and report on the progress being made, to ensure the new strategy is helping those with housing needs.</p> <p>Overall, housing advocates welcomed the new provincial commitment as erecting the scaffolding necessary to create a truly comprehensive long-term affordable housing plan for Ontario, but noted that the new commitment does not provide the necessary funding and tools to allow the work to proceed.</p>	1/2

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Strong and Supportive Communities

Make **housing** easier to afford. Build it to suit people's needs. Keep it in good repair. [cont'd]

Institute a new 10-year, \$60 billion infrastructure plan, including social housing, in 2009. [cont'd]

On June 24, 2011, the provincial government released its **Long Term Infrastructure Plan**. The plan did not emphasize commitments to affordable housing, but it committed to working with other orders of government to meet local housing needs in a way that complements the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy and to helping women fleeing domestic violence to move from shelters into affordable long-term housing. The Ministry of Infrastructure is currently providing \$89 million in funding for affordable housing projects valued at \$267 million, but there are no specific affordable housing projects under the Long Term Infrastructure Plan.

On November 8, 2011, the Provincial and Federal Governments announced \$481 million of funding under a new **Federal-Provincial Affordable Housing Agreement**. This investment is expected to provide funding for the construction of 1,000 new housing units and repairs to 6,000 existing units.

Advocates point out that this investment is a re-announcement of the same funding that was first announced in September 2008. For more information see: <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/news/feds-ontario-re-announce-yet-again-2008-housing-funding/>

The provincial government has, on several occasions, offered its support for a **Housing Benefit** that would cover the gap between a low-income household's income and their housing costs. However, no detailed mechanism has been announced and no funding has been allocated.

YEAR 3

Increased energy costs have a disproportionate impact on low-income households, eroding housing affordability and reducing the funds available for food, clothing, medicine and other basic necessities. The Ontario government's Long-Term Energy Plan (2010-2030) estimates that electricity bills will increase 7.9 per cent each year for the first five years and by an average of 3.5 per cent each year over the entire 20-year plan. Oil and natural gas prices have been volatile over the past decade.

The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) reports that:

To lessen the impact of the anticipated increase in electricity costs on consumers, the provincial government is providing an Ontario Clean Energy Benefit of 10% on the total electricity bill, for five years (January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2015).

As of January 1, 2011, grants of up to \$600 per eligible household per year are available under the Emergency Financial Assistance component of the Ontario Energy Board's Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) to help low-income gas and electricity consumers who are facing short-term problems paying their bills. Grants are also available to eligible low-income consumers of sub-metering providers.

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easier to afford.
Build it to suit
people's needs.
Keep it in good
repair. [cont'd]

As of October 1, 2011, customer service rules specifically developed for eligible low-income consumers under the OEB's LEAP include provisions for waivers of security deposits and other service charges, a 21-day disconnection suspension, and extended time periods to pay bill arrears.

Also under LEAP and starting in 2011, a low-income electricity conservation program delivered by participating electricity utilities and funded through the Ontario Power Authority will be gradually rolled out across the province. This program will offer free direct-installation of energy efficiency measures and conservation education to low-income residential electricity consumers and will be coordinated with natural gas conservation programs offered by natural gas utilities wherever possible. Qualifying participants will receive a home energy audit to determine which measures will be installed in their homes. The program will focus on providing deep retrofits (e.g. attic insulation, replacement of old inefficient refrigerators with new ENERGY STAR refrigerators) in participating homes to help participants reduce their electricity use and manage their utility costs in the long-term.

LIEN continues to work toward making energy more affordable for low-income consumers, and to propose and promote practical programs and solutions that can be implemented. LIEN has recommended the establishment of a home energy rate affordability program for low-income consumers to proactively prevent households from falling into arrears. Learn more at www.lowincomeenergy.ca.

Make **early learning
and child care**
both universal and
affordable.

Implement full-day learning for
four- and five-year olds.

On October 27, 2009 the government announced the phase-in of full-day kindergarten (FDK) for four and five year olds starting September 2010 with the goal of full implementation across Ontario by 2015. Nearly 600 schools offered full day kindergarten in 2010. In 2010, the government announced a permanent \$63 million annual investment in child care subsidies to replace federal funding that had expired.

YEAR 3

As of September 2011, FDK was available in nearly 800 schools. On March 2, 2011, the government announced the 900 schools that will offer FDK in 2012, which will extend FDK coverage to 49% of schools and approximately 122,000 students. On June 1, 2011, the government announced that every four- and five-year-old child will have access to full-day kindergarten by September 2014. Full day kindergarten saves families up to \$6,500 per child per year in child care costs.

On June 22, 2011, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services announced updates on the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres. The Province launched a Community Action Research project. A two-pronged approach to studying and learning from communities as they continue to develop the Best Start Centres concept and demonstrate what the model of a coordinated and integrated system of services for families and children from 0-12 might look like.

1/2

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Strong and Supportive Communities			
Make early learning and child care both universal and affordable. [cont'd]	Implement full-day learning for four- and five-year olds. [cont'd]	<p>Advocates report that long-term underfunding of child care and the impacts from the implementation of full day kindergarten mean the child care sector is facing a financial crisis. Funding for child care subsidies remains limited. Loss of child care spaces could be mitigated with capital and operating funding to transition child care centres for younger children.</p> <p>Full day kindergarten has affected child care and highlights the need for a provincial policy framework for child care. A robust provincial child care policy should include the following measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A short term plan to stabilize our child care system and a long term plan for a new funding formula to address the affordability of child care for younger age children. 2. Indexation of child care funding similar to funding for school boards to allow child care to maintain funding levels and address the increased cost of providing care. 3. Capital funding to convert vacated 4-and 5-year old rooms into space for younger age children. 4. Support to enable school boards to provide extended day programming for school aged children that exemplifies a seamless day. 	
Build a public education system that focuses on equitable outcomes.	Triple the number of Parenting and Family Literacy Centres to 300.	<p>In 2010 the Ministry of Education reported that there were 145 Parent and Family Literacy Centres across Ontario.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>According to Budget 2011, the provincial government has established 145 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres across the province to date, investing \$9.4 million in the program in the 2010–11 school year.</p>	1/2
	Invest \$10 million annually in an After School Program to support children in high needs neighbourhoods with new after-school programs and new initiatives focused on physical activity and wellness.	<p>The government reported that as of 2010, the program was being offered by 100 organizations at more than 300 locations, serving 18,000 children.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>In 2011 the After-School Program provided programming for approximately 18,000 children and youth at 320 sites throughout the province, including on First Nations reserves. No funding commitments for the After-School Initiative were announced in the 2011 Budget, but the Ministry confirms that the current funding allocation for the After School Program is \$10 million.</p> <p>On June 27, 2011, the government announced \$28.5 million over three years in new funding for Pathways to Education Canada to expand educational success programs for students from low-income communities in Ottawa, Kitchener, Hamilton, Kingston and Toronto. In Regent Park with the help of Pathways the high school drop out rate has decreased by more than 70% since the program began.</p>	1/2

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Strong and Supportive Communities			
Build a public education system that focuses on equitable outcomes. [cont'd]	Focus a portion of the Learning Opportunities Grant on helping low-income students who need it most.	<p>The government reported that the funding formula for Learning Opportunities Grants had been adjusted so that low income status is given more weight.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>The Demographic Allocation of the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) was restructured for the 2010-11 school year so that the prevalence of low income in a board's community plays a greater role in determining funding levels.</p> <p>People for Education reports that since 2005, the per-pupil amount in the LOG has been reduced by 9%, and the grant is now intended to cover the costs of not only programs based on demographic needs, but also a range of literacy and numeracy programs, the School Effectiveness Framework, the Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP) Tutoring program, and the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM). As a result, the Grant is stretched thin and cannot target programs for disadvantaged students. As such, it is insufficient to support programs that would alleviate the effects of poverty. For more information, see: http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Annual-Report-on-Ontario-Schools-2011.pdf</p>	1/2
	Encourage school boards to ensure that all students can participate in class activities, not just those who can afford it.	<p>In November 2009, a Draft Access to School Activity Fees guideline was circulated to Ontario's school boards for consultation.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>Following consultations, the Ministry of Education released its final "Fees for Learning Materials and Activities Guideline" on March 25, 2011. The guidelines came into effect September 1, 2011 and boards are required to publish their policies on their websites. The guideline provides suggested best practices for boards to support full student participation in programs and activities regardless of individual economic circumstances. The guideline also clarifies that fees cannot be charged for materials needed to graduate. The ministry also released a draft fundraising guideline for consultation.</p> <p>People for Education had concerns with the guidelines because they accept the presence of fees as necessary and appropriate. People for Education continues to recommend that the province articulate a clear vision for education that goes beyond targets for test scores and graduation rates, and that outlines which materials, activities and programs should be available at no extra charge to all students in every school in Ontario. For more information see: http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/pfe-news/new-fee-guidelines-released-by-the-ministry-of-education/</p>	1/2

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Strong and Supportive Communities			
Build a public education system that focuses on equitable outcomes. [cont'd]	Re-focus a portion of the Parents Reaching Out Grants' funding to better help parents in higher-need areas participate in their child's education.	<p>Approvals for Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant applications from Priority Schools had increased by 25% between 2009 and 2010. Since the 2008/09 school year, there had been a 354% increase in approvals for PRO Grant applications from Priority Schools.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>In the most recent grant cycle, 115 priority schools applied for a grant, of which 113 were approved for funding. Over the past four cycles, there has been an increase of over 260% in applications from priority schools, and an increase of over 370% in priority schools' initiatives approved for funding.</p>	1/2
Fund vibrant community-based programs that connect and enrich us.	More than double funding for the Youth Opportunities Strategy to over \$22 million annually.	<p>Total investment in 2010 was \$24 million, with the program operating in 32 communities across the province.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>Budget 2011 committed to an additional \$22.5 million in 2011-12 for the Summer Jobs Strategy, including targeted resources for youth in high-needs neighbourhoods, to help over 100,000 students access jobs and services this summer.</p>	1
	Invest \$5 million annually in a Community Opportunities Fund to encourage neighbourhood revitalization.	<p>YEAR 3</p> <p>No progress to report.</p>	0
	Invest \$7 million annually in the development of a Community Hub Program, using schools as hubs that respond to community needs related to poverty reduction and student achievement.	<p>Budget 2009 allocated \$3 million in 2009-2010 to establish Community Hubs in selected low-income neighbourhoods. The Ministry of Education released a Facility Partnerships Guideline for all Ontario school boards to encourage better use of school board facilities by community partners.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>Budget 2011 indicated that \$39.9 million was invested during the 2010-11 school year to make it easier and more affordable for people to use schools after hours. Funding is provided to school boards so they can make school space more affordable for use after hours and 220 priority schools offer free space to not-for-profit groups so that they can deliver more affordable after-hours programming.</p>	1/2

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Fund vibrant **community-based programs** that connect and enrich us. [cont'd]

Invest \$7 million annually in the development of a Community Hub Program, using schools as hubs that respond to community needs related to poverty reduction and student achievement. [cont'd]

The government has also recently expanded the Infrastructure Ontario Loan Program to not-for-profit organizations in Ontario that own or operate a community health and social services hub. Advocates are concerned that this will put community organizations in the position of having to take on large capital loans.

Together with private funders and key agencies, the Province has partnered with the United Way of Toronto to develop community hubs in 8 of the city's 13 priority neighbourhoods. Four hubs are currently operational, with the fifth set to open at the end of 2011. These hubs provide accessible community space and bring together health and social services in one location. For more information see: <http://www.uwgt.org/whatWeDo/communityHubs.php>

Enhance the Crown Wards success strategy with the goal of improving educational outcomes and smoothing their transition to adulthood. Invest \$19 million more annually to support these kids as they leave care and make the transition to independence.

On November 12, 2009 the government announced that 7 new Crown Ward Education Championship Teams would offer mentorship, peer support, motivation, and guidance to Crown wards across the province. Advocates reported that in 2010 no movement had been made on the \$19 million annual investment in the Crown Wards Success Strategy.

YEAR 3

On June 1, 2011 the Building Families and Supporting Youth To Be Successful Act, 2011 was passed by the Legislature. To help with the transition to adulthood, the Act also allows older youth whose care was terminated at ages 16 or 17 to return to their Children's Aid Societies (CASs) and receive financial and other supports until the age of 21. The government is also exempting CAS financial support from OSAP applications, in order to make it easier to attend college or university, effective September 2011.

Budget 2011 re-articulated support for the Crown Ward Success Strategy and for supports such as the Education Championship Teams, but made no specific financial commitments and advocates report that the \$19 million annual funding has not been allocated.

Advocates report that the Crown Ward Championship programs are now in place across the province with limited funding, but strong collaboration efforts.

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) continues to advocate for:

- Legislative change to increase the age of a child in need of protection from 16 to 18
- Legislative change to increase the up to which young people can receive care to 24 or 25, in keeping with societal norms
- Policy change so that youth can stay in family based care until 21, rather than having to leave prior to turning 18

1/2

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Strong and Supportive Communities			
Fund vibrant community-based programs that connect and enrich us. [cont'd]	Enhance the Crown Wards success strategy with the goal of improving educational outcomes and smoothing their transition to adulthood. Invest \$19 million more annually to support these kids as they leave care and make the transition to independence. [cont'd]	OACAS is currently undertaking a two-year pilot project with Sheppell-FGI (an employee support services organization) to provide crown ward aftercare employment assistance plan-type supports for youth up to the age of 23; they continue to advocate for health and dental benefits up to the age of 25.	
	Target a portion of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy to low-income youth who have severe mental illness and/or substance addictions.	<p>On February 24, 2009 the government announced that the all-party Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions will give input to the government's long-term Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, including a focus on children and young adults.</p> <p>YEAR 3</p> <p>On June 22, 2011, the provincial government announced its Mental Health and Addictions strategy, which focuses on children and youth in the first 3 years. A central component of the 2011 Budget, the government committed to providing \$93 million per year by 2013-14 to support the strategy. The strategy focuses on 1) fast access to high-quality services, 2) early identification and support, and 3) helping vulnerable kids with unique needs.</p> <p>While the strategy seeks to improve access to mental health care for all Ontario children and youth, it does not explicitly target low-income youth or youth with severe mental illness and/or addiction. Nonetheless, advocates are hopeful that in funding mental health and addiction services across the board and making them universally available, this will capture a significant portion of low-income children and youth.</p>	1/2
	Develop culturally sensitive programs in communities with Aboriginal populations.	<p>YEAR 3</p> <p>No progress to report.</p>	O

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Strong and Supportive Communities			
Support public and community transit . Improve access. Make it affordable.	No commitment was made.	Capital investments and gas tax transfers were made, but no sustained operating funding was provided to address access and affordability. YEAR 3 The government has made investments to increase passenger capacity and frequency of service on existing GO Transit routes, creating new GO Transit routes, and modernizing municipal bus fleets across the province. While there have been improvements to access through the expansion of service, no specific commitments for public transit were made in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the absence of additional funding for municipal transit operations means that affordability remains an issue.	O
Test #4: LEGISLATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY			
Table legislation that brings the plan into law and invites all parties to support a poverty reduction strategy.	Introduce legislation in spring 2009 to enshrine an ongoing commitment to a long-term strategy.	The Poverty Reduction Act (Bill 152) was passed into law with all-party support on May 6, 2009.	1
Maintain the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction and create a Poverty Reduction Secretariat that is responsible for bringing together various Senior Ministers, driving implementation, and tracking progress.	Create a Cabinet-level committee tasked with implementing the Poverty Reduction Strategy and supported by a dedicated secretariat. This team will seek advice from external experts and will be responsible for overseeing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing decisions; • Annual reporting on progress; • Ongoing consultations with key stakeholders and the public. 	In January 2009, a Results Team was created to oversee the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, chaired by the Minister of Children and Youth Services; it included members of Cabinet, MPPs and advisors, and received staff support. A dedicated secretariat was never confirmed. YEAR 3 Following the October 2011 election, the Results Team has not yet been reconvened. As the legislature returns, government reports that it is committed to re-establish the Team and the Committee, with further details to be released. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services will remain the Ministry lead responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy.	1/2
LEGEND: O = Needs Improvement 1/2 = Good Effort, But Incomplete 1 = Good Achievement			

FIVE TESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY COMMITMENTS	RESULTS TO DATE	
Annual public reporting on progress.	Report back every year to Ontarians on the indicators of opportunity.	The government tabled its first year report in December 2009, and its second year report in December 2010. YEAR 3 The government is expected to report again either in December 2011 or January 2012.	1
Create an Advisory Committee that includes grassroots leaders, experts, and people living in low income.	No commitment was made.	The government made no commitment to an Advisory Committee on poverty reduction either in the Poverty Reduction Strategy or in the Poverty Reduction Act. YEAR 3 25 in 5 continues to call for a community-based and inclusively representative Advisory Committee to be established.	O
Commit to ongoing public consultation as the plan unfolds.	Engage people in their communities at the halfway point of the five year target to make sure the plan is on track.	YEAR 3 The halfway point of the current strategy was mid-2011, immediately prior to the provincial election. The government reports that in 2011, the Minister of Children and Youth Services visited a number of community roundtables across the province (in Brant County, Peterborough, Kitchener-Waterloo, Hamilton, Windsor, Sudbury) to discuss how the strategy is unfolding and to meet the commitment to halfway point consultations. The government reports that the new Minister of Children and Youth Services, Eric Hoskins, is committed to continuing consultations throughout 2012.	1/2
	Create an independent Social Policy Institute to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate social policy, including economic evaluation; • Identify best practices in other jurisdictions for use in Ontario; • Work with international experts to develop innovation roadmaps for Ontario in specific areas of competitive strength, social policy and economic importance. 	YEAR 3 No progress to report.	O

**FIVE TESTS FOR
A SUCCESSFUL
POVERTY
REDUCTION
STRATEGY**

**GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY
REDUCTION STRATEGY
COMMITMENTS**

RESULTS TO DATE

TEST #5: BUDGETARY ACTION

Make a significant down-payment on poverty reduction in the 2009 budget, with ongoing investments annually.

Budget 2011

- Ontario Child Benefit at \$1100; commitment to raise the OCB to \$1310;
- Transforming the delivery of refundable property and sales tax credits;
- Invested \$704 million over the past two years for social housing rehabilitation
- \$4.5 million annually since 2009 to hire employment standards enforcement officers; \$6 million over 2 years to reduce the backlog of claims
- Increase social assistance rates by 1%.
- Minimum wage remains at \$10.25/hour; will appoint a committee in Fall 2011 to provide advice on minimum wage for 2012.

YEAR 3

Government reiterated the commitment to increase the Ontario Child Benefit to \$1,310, but has not specified a time frame within which the increase will occur.

The government reports that it has invested \$1.4 billion in additional assistance to low- and moderate-income people through the Ontario Sales Tax Credit, the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit and the Northern Ontario Energy Credit. The government proposed to combine the payments of these credits (currently paid out quarterly) and deliver them monthly starting in July 2012. While advocates support the additional stability that this delivery system will provide, there are concerns that government has not adequately informed low-income people of this change, as many have relied on the lump-sum amount they receive after tax time to make larger purchases. And additional free tax-filing assistance for low-income people must be a priority for government.

Through stimulus investments, the provincial and federal governments collectively invested \$704 million in 2009-10 and 2010-11 for social housing rehabilitation and energy retrofits. Approximately \$450 million is invested annually by the Province in housing and homelessness services.

The investment in reducing the backlog of employment standards claims seems to have paid off – it had been reduced by two-thirds as of July 2011 and is set to be eliminated by March 2012.

The 1% increase in social assistance does not meet the increase in inflation. People receiving Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program continue to struggle in poverty.

The government has committed to appoint a task force on the minimum wage. Advocates continue to press for an \$11 minimum wage in 2011, indexed to inflation.

The 2011 Budget made no new funding commitments on Poverty Reduction (i.e. funding commitments that had not already been introduced in some form in previous years.) 25 in 5 calls on the government to maintain its financial commitment to realizing the goals set out in the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

1/2