



End Child & Family Poverty in Canada

September 17, 2008

Federal Election 2008: Key Questions to Leaders of All Parties

Background:

Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of over 120 national, provincial and community organizations united in securing the implementation of the 1989 House of Commons' resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000.

We believe our nation can afford to include everyone in prosperity. It is not acceptable that 19 years after deciding to end child poverty, there has been little improvement. We urge all the parties to develop and implement a National Poverty Reduction Strategy that includes clear targets and timetables. This letter was sent to the following federal parties (in alphabetical order): The Bloc Québécois, The Conservative Party of Canada, the Green Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada, and the New Democratic Party of Canada.

The latest data from Statistics Canada (Incomes in Canada, 2006) indicate that 1.13 million children live below the poverty line for a national poverty rate of 11.7 % (after tax). The risk for all children, however, is not the same. The rate is much higher for specific groups such as new immigrant families, First-Nation communities and urban Aboriginals, visible minority families, children with disabilities, and children in female lone-parent led families.

WE ARE ASKING EACH OF YOU TO RESPOND TO THE KEY QUESTIONS BELOW:

In a recent Environics poll 85% of Canadians said that if government took concrete action, poverty in Canada could be reduced. A new approach is needed in which measurable poverty reduction targets, clear timetables and strategies are established.

Question 1:

An effective poverty reduction strategy will include a multi-year action plan with targets, timetables and transparent accountability.

- Is your party willing to adopt specific targets and timelines to drastically reduce poverty?
Will your party commit to reducing poverty by 25% in five years and by 50% in ten years?

Question 2:

In which ways is your party prepared to use the following tools to accomplish this goal:

- The Canada Child Tax Benefit and the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) play an important role in supporting low income families. However, far too many children are still living in poverty.

- Will your party raise the combined Canada Child Tax Benefit and UCCB to \$5,100 (\$2007) per child per year? Will you ensure that all low income families, including those on income assistance, receive and keep the full benefit?

Question 3:

A universally accessible system of early childhood education and care services (ECEC) is a critical element in a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. The patchwork of services in most of the country outside of Quebec means there are only enough regulated ECEC spaces for 17.2% of children (0 – 12 years).

- Will your party commit to make a system of high quality ECEC a reality over the next decade for all who want it? If so, what steps would you take to implement that commitment?
- Will your party improve maternity/parental leave policy to complement the new ECEC program?

Question 4:

About 1.5 million Canadians live in housing that is either not affordable, over-crowded, substandard, or all three. Estimates suggest that at least 200,000 Canadians are homeless.

- Will your party invest in a National Housing/homelessness Strategy?
- If elected, how many new affordable housing units would your party finance per year?
- Will your party immediately extend the current Homelessness Partnerships Initiative and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program which are due to expire in fiscal 2008?

Question 5:

A key component of a poverty reduction strategy is to assure every adult working full time, year round a living standard out of poverty. For a single person, this would require earning at least \$10/hour with annual indexation to reflect the cost of living, as well as enriching the Work Tax Benefit to all adults with income from employment.

- Will your party commit to undertaking strategies to achieve sustaining employment and livable incomes?
- Will you increase the Work Tax Benefit to \$2,400 per year for all employed adults?

Question 6:

Only approximately 40% of Canadians are currently eligible for Employment Insurance should they temporarily be without work, even though EI was designed to protect workers from falling into poverty during periods of wage loss.

- How will you restore eligibility for Employment Insurance?

Question 7:

The poverty rate for new immigrant families and racialized communities is alarmingly high.

- What plans do you have to improve the economic conditions of new immigrants and racialized communities living with poverty?

Question 8:

The persistence of high poverty rates among Aboriginal peoples is a continuing shame for Canada.

- Will your party commit to a poverty reduction strategy for Aboriginal peoples that addresses the basic needs of every Aboriginal child and youth?
- If so, what strategies will be developed to ensure those in First Nations communities and those who are in rural or urban areas will have adequate food, clothing, clean drinking water, safe housing, early childhood education and child care?

Question 9:

Canadians with disabilities are often subject to ineffective and stigmatizing systems of income support and are more likely to live in poverty than other Canadians.

- What steps will your party take to develop a guaranteed income system for people with disabilities equivalent in adequacy and design to that afforded seniors?

Question 10

Child poverty is consistently higher in cities across Canada.

- What actions will your party take to undertake an urban agenda that enables cities to contribute to poverty reduction?

Question 11

Post-secondary education and training are crucial elements to creating a productive workforce.

- What will your party do to improve access to post-secondary education as well as opportunities for up-to-date training and skills upgrading?

We look forward to receiving your response before September 24. During the week of September 29th, we will be releasing a major statement to the media and let Canadians know where your party stands on these key issues.

Sincerely,



National Coordinator
Campaign 2000

Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of over 120 national, provincial and community organizations united in securing the implementation of the 1989 House of Commons' resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000. A list of Campaign partners is available at <http://www.campaign2000.ca/about/partners.html>.