

Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change welcomes National Poverty Reduction Strategy

Toronto / August 23, 2018 - Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change (COP-COC) applauds the [National Poverty Reduction Strategy \(NPRS\)](#) launched on August 21, 2018 for its recognition of the unique and disproportionate impact of poverty on Indigenous peoples, and peoples of colour.

We commend the government on taking the bold and historic step of establishing an official Poverty Line for Canada, as well as poverty reduction targets. The government has promised to enshrine these measures, as well as a National Advisory Council on Poverty, in a Poverty Reduction Act to be introduced next year.

We are encouraged by government's promise to expand the collection of disaggregated data to track progress on poverty reduction, including gender, race and other intersecting identities. This is critically important when considering that racialized poverty is 32% in Canada while, racialized people are only 22.3% of the population. The disparities facing racialized groups are amplified if we take into account such other factors as gender, immigration status, ability, and more.

People of diverse immigration status are presently excluded from many of the poverty reduction measures that are available to all other Canadian residents. While the NPRS mentions poverty reduction efforts must acknowledge the different realities and lived experiences of diverse residents such as refugees and recent immigrants, and mentions the Visible Minority Newcomer Women pilot as an example, it does not commit to removing the systemic legal and policy barriers that exclude them from poverty reduction measures.

In fact the adoption of the Market Basket Measure as the official poverty line could make family reunification through immigration sponsorship even more inaccessible for low-income Canadians.

It is important that these systemic gaps are identified and remedied before they become further entrenched through the promised Poverty Reduction Act.

We urge the government of Canada to adopt the following measures in order to ensure real equity and inclusion in its poverty reduction strategy:

1. Allow parents with precarious immigration status to qualify for the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) by removing immigration status as an eligibility requirement under the Income Tax Act. At present, even Canadian-born children of parents with precarious immigration status are denied access to the CCB.

2. Change Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) and Old Age Security (OAS) rules so that immigrant seniors are not forced to wait ten years before they can access these benefits.
3. Open up eligibility criteria for Canada Learning Bond, Pathways to Education, Canada student grants and loans and other student-centered poverty reduction programs so that refugee claimants and other low-income students with precarious immigration status are included.
4. Ensure that all new poverty reduction initiatives, such as the National Housing strategy and plans for National Pharmacare, do not exclude Canadian residents on the basis of immigration status.
5. Ensure the expansion of disaggregated data collection and data sources does not inadvertently endanger people with precarious immigration status and put them at risk of deportation.
6. Attach Mandatory Employment Equity requirements for all jobs created as a result of Federal funding and investments for all public and private projects.

COP – COC welcomes the government’s re-stated commitment to address systemic barriers of racism, starting with a cross-country consultation on a national anti-racism approach. We note with concern however that the consultations were first promised in the February 2018 budget but have yet to take place. We note that the commitment appears to be downgraded from an anti-racism ‘strategy’ to an ‘approach’ and are concerned that change may indicate a reduced commitment to tackling systemic racism and racial discrimination. This is deeply worrying given the clear link between systemic racism, racial exclusion and poverty, including as recognized in the NPRS.

Native Women’s Association of Canada has put forward [several recommendations following a country-wide engagement on poverty reduction](#), and has called for an end to the political disenfranchisement and economic marginalization of Indigenous women. We urge the government to adopt these recommendations going forward, as a way to fulfil the NPRS commitment to address the unique and different realities faced by Indigenous women in Canada.

COP-COC is a province-wide initiative made up of individuals, groups and organizations working to build community-based capacity to address the growing racialization of poverty – for both First Peoples and peoples of colour – and the resulting increased levels of social exclusion and marginalization of racialized communities across Ontario.

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