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Poverty Reduction Strategy (Annual Report 2016)

In this report, we highlight our efforts to remove barriers and help Ontarians seize opportunities by reducing child poverty, working towards eliminating chronic homelessness, helping people move towards employment and income security and investing in innovative grassroots programs and community-designed solutions. Learn more about our progress – and what we plan to do next.

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Minister's Message

In the days and months since I was appointed Ontario's Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, one thing has become abundantly clear: Ontario's best resource is its people and our potential is limitless.

As an Ontarian, and in my work as a minister, I have learned that a community isn't a bunch of people living in the same place. It's a shared sense of responsibility to one another that binds us together in times of success and failure.

The success or failure of our neighbours touches every one of us. We have more than a shared responsibility to one another – we also have a real stake in seeing one another succeed. Living together as a community is a daily commitment to making that possible.

The initial Poverty Reduction Strategy was launched in 2008 with that same spirit of inclusion, support for our people and commitment to strengthening our communities. Nearly a decade into this important work we have remained committed to setting targets, building on what works, sharing our progress and fostering partnerships across and beyond government that will help Ontarians leave poverty behind.

The success of the strategy is seen in its results – the everyday differences in the lives of Ontarians who, with a little support, are now building an entirely new life for their families and their futures.

For children across the province, that difference is happening because of the creation of the Ontario Child Benefit and reforms to child care and full-day kindergarten. Through these and other supports, we have reduced child poverty by over 20 per cent, which will help today's children become the successful adults of tomorrow. While we know there is more work to do, we are firmly committed to building on this significant progress towards our goal of reducing child poverty by 25 per cent in five years. Of course, youth continue to face real obstacles as they near and reach adulthood. Under the strategy, we have responded to the changing nature of work by connecting youth and working age Ontarians to education, employment and training opportunities, helping to remove barriers on their path to success.

Education is a large step forward on that path and, for the first time in the province's history, 85% of Ontario youth are now successfully completing high school. It's a key milestone that is opening up new opportunities for these graduates and their families.

Few things expand opportunity for a family like being able to afford everyday life. When we're able shift our focus from just getting by to finally getting ahead, the future we dream for ourselves and for our families becomes a whole lot brighter.

That difference is becoming a reality for Ontario families because of our decision to increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation. Between 2013 and 2014, household incomes across the province rose by 5% – a world of difference to hard-working families where every dollar counts.

As the minimum wage continues to rise, we'll keep looking for new ways to address the day-to-day needs of Ontario's families. I'm optimistic that a new Basic Income Pilot will give us greater insight into the challenges Ontario families face and new ways that their government can make everyday life easier.

The same commitment that is driving our work on a Basic Income Pilot can be found in our Local Poverty Reduction Fund. The fund continues to be a success because it operates on the proven principle that by harnessing the creativity of local partners, identifying innovative community-driven solutions, and building on evidence-based best practices, we can make strong inroads in tackling poverty. In fact, we already are.

As we make progress on each target, we continue to boldly set even more ambitious goals along the way – like helping Ontario's most vulnerable take the first step out of poverty by ending chronic homelessness by

2025. Many have said it will take everything we have in our arsenal to meet this goal. We agree that it will. But it is our responsibility to ensure that every Ontarian has a safe place to come home to.

‘Every Ontarian’ must include Indigenous people, not just in our work to end chronic homelessness, but also in the fight against poverty. It is clear from my conversations with Indigenous leaders, communities and organizations that we must take a culturally appropriate approach to closing gaps and removing barriers that will meet the unique needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples. I want to thank Indigenous leaders from across the province for welcoming me on this journey. I look forward to continuing to walk this path with you so we can make the greatest impact in the lives of all Ontarians.

As we look towards the future, we know our work is far from done. We continue to take on new challenges with the same grit, determination and boldness that defined our first Poverty Reduction Strategy nearly a decade ago. As we move forward, we will build on the results collected in this report and continue our relentless pursuit of our targets so that every Ontarian has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Sincerely, Hon. Chris Ballard Minister of Housing/Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy

Breaking the Cycle for Children and Youth

From the very beginning, our Poverty Reduction Strategy has been rooted in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty by supporting children and youth. Children who have the opportunity to learn, grow and obtain an education also have the opportunity to enter the workforce and leave poverty behind. That is why we continue to invest in programs that give all children in Ontario the best possible start in life.

Making Progress

This year, Ontario has sustained its focus on providing supports that help children thrive, from birth to young adulthood, including investments in affordable child-care options, high quality early learning and accessible post-secondary education. Working together, these investments create a network of supports that lift children out of poverty.

Creating a stable footing for families

As soon as a child is born, our government helps their family get financial support to manage the rising costs of raising a child. We continue to invest in the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB). Monthly benefits to children under 18 have more than doubled since 2008 and the current maximum annual payment for the OCB is \$1,356 per child.

In July 2016, we welcomed the federal government’s investment in children and families through the

Canada Child Benefit (CCB) which compliments the OCB and other supports. Ontario has ensured families benefit fully from the CCB without impacting their social assistance.

In addition, starting in 2017, child support payments will be fully exempt from social assistance benefit calculations to help increase incomes for families who receive both social assistance and child support. The full exemption will help increase the monthly income of almost 19,000 families, most of whom are single-parent households.

Supporting children and families in the early years

Our government continues to ensure the right supports are in place to help give children the best start in life and help connect their parents to community-based resources to make parenting easier.

In February 2016, the government announced a plan to modernize Ontario's existing system of early-years centres and programs into the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres. Access to this new network of centres will be free for children ages 0 to 6 and their parents and caregivers. They will be convenient to access and built on a model where local services collaborate to meet the needs of children and families. As a result, Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres will both promote early learning and development and provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to participate in their communities.

Work is already underway to bring Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres to communities across Ontario by 2018.

Building a foundation for learning

Every year about 260,000 four- and five-year-olds receive publicly-funded, child-centred and developmentally-appropriate learning throughout the school day. **Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK)** establishes a strong foundation of learning in a safe and caring, play-based environment. FDK promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of children to ensure all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, get the best start in life.

Full day kindergarten will save Ontario families up to \$6,500 per child per year in child care costs.

The 2016-17 school year is the third year of full implementation of FDK across Ontario, and the seventh year of the program overall. To date, more than one million children have benefitted from the high-quality education that FDK offers. At the same time FDK makes it easier for parents to fully participate in the workforce by replacing child care throughout the school day.

Helping children and youth succeed in school

When children are in school it is important that they have the right supports in place to help them succeed.

That is why Ontario invests \$32.3 million in the Student Nutrition Program (SNP) every year. The SNP helps provide healthy meals and snacks to more than 896,000 children and youth during the course of the school year. The program also serves meals to children and youth in 63 First Nations communities.

Evidence suggests that nutrition programs can have a positive impact on student learning through improved attendance and attentiveness in the classroom. The SNP also fosters social inclusion by creating a space where students can eat meals together with their classmates and volunteers from the community.

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Cooking up friendships with student nutrition

In my job as a Community Development Coordinator with the Red Cross Student Nutrition Program and as a parent volunteer, I spend a lot of time in schools. I love to hear what children and youth have to say about food. I think often of the six-year-old who told me, “I really like pancakes for breakfast, but my grandmother doesn’t have the money for pancake stuff.” She has the option of eating pancakes at school every two weeks. And that matters.

In addition to providing good food, student nutrition programs build a sense of community at school. At one high school, where students are offered life skills and confidence along with the opportunity to cook their own food, I was invited to taste a strawberry chicken pizza. The young chef was proud despite good natured ribbing from friends. I sat among students and teachers and bravely took a bite. I couldn’t help blurting, “This is the best pizza I’ve ever put in my mouth!” There were high fives and guffaws all around. Suddenly, we weren’t students and teachers and guests. We were just people enjoying a meal together.

— Maggie Vaughan, Community Development Coordinator with the Red Cross Student Nutrition Program, Timmins, Ontario

Increasing access to post-secondary education

The link between obtaining a post-secondary education credential and obtaining employment has never been clearer: 65.9% of jobs created by economic expansion in the next ten years will require a post-secondary education^[1]. Although record numbers of Ontario youth are graduating from high school, we know that youth from low-income families participate in post-secondary education at much lower rates than those from higher-income families. That is why in 2016, Ontario announced the transformation of the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). The multi-phased transformation focuses on removing both financial and non-financial barriers to post-secondary education for low-income families.

In the first phase of this transformation, Ontario will consolidate many provincial grants and a new single, up-front grant will be implemented. Additionally, the Ontario weekly assistance limits will be increased to help ensure students have the support they require to be successful throughout the school year.

Only 38% of youth aged 18–21 from families with an annual income of \$20,000-\$30,000 attend postsecondary studies. **77%** of students from families with an annual income of over \$180,000 attend postsecondary studies.

Current Status

In 2014-15 a four year university student had an average of **\$23,210** in **OSAP repayable debt**.

2017-2018 Implementation of the new OSAP

Eligible students whose parents earn less than \$50,000 a year will receive all Ontario aid as grant – resulting in **no provincial student loan debt**.

Moving Forward

In the immediate term, we look forward to building on the momentum and success of the programs targeted to children, youth and their families including:

- creating 100,000 licensed infant, toddler and preschool child care spaces in the next five years, starting in 2017
- working with the federal government on a National Early Learning and Child Care Framework
- establishing an evidence-based middle years developmental framework to support positive development for children age 6-12, and launching a Middle Years Strategy for Ontario in summer 2017,
- implementing the second phase of the OSAP transformation that will make tuition costs more transparent when students apply to college and university

In the long-term, we know that we can do more to shape the quality of childhood in Ontario. We know that cross-cutting investments in income work — we have the results to prove it. Our investments helped us lift 20.6% of children from poverty. As our federal partners align their programs with ours, we will continue to build on our investments and maximize our impacts. Together we will give parents and families every opportunity to help their children reach their full potential.

Making an Impact in 2016: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty for Children and Youth

Creating a stable footing for families

- starting in 2017, fully exempting child support payments from social assistance benefit calculations to help increase incomes for almost 19,000 families, most of whom are single-parent households

Supporting children and families in the early years

- establishing Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres by 2018

Building a foundation for learning

- saving families up to \$6,500 per child, per year in child care costs through the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten

Helping children and youth succeed in school

- implementing a First Nations stream of the Student Nutrition Program in over 120 educational settings across 63 First Nations and serving approximately 11,000 children and youth

Increasing access to post-secondary education

- making tuition free for more than 250,000 eligible low- and middle-income students starting in the 2017-18 school year by implementing the Ontario Student Grant

Helping People Achieve Employment and Income Security

A good income provides the means for a life of dignity; steady employment provides the confidence to keep moving forward and connects people to their communities. There are too many Ontarians who have the capability, skills and desire to work, but who are excluded from the workforce, like youth and people with disabilities. That is why Ontario is committed both to building up our economy to boost job creation and investing in initiatives that connect people to employment opportunities and increase household incomes.

Making Progress

The pathways to employment are not always easy, so this year we are strengthening training and work experience programs for youth, and modernizing employment and training supports to help make those pathways clearer. We are also leveraging our partnerships with the business community to better connect Ontarians with employment opportunities and ensure businesses have the skilled workforce they need to succeed.

Providing a foundation for Ontarians to participate in the economy and community life

Ontario is investing in income supports that provide a solid base— a foundation that ensures low-income individuals and families can participate and share in our economy and community life.

Since 2003, the provincial minimum wage has risen by 66%. In 2014, the government increased the minimum wage from \$10.25 to \$11.00 and indexed it with annual increases starting in 2015. As of October 1, 2016, Ontario's minimum wage is now \$11.40, up from \$10.25 in 2013. As a result of the **minimum wage increase**, full-time full-year minimum wage earners in the province are making \$2,242 per year more

than they did three years ago. Because of our progress and increased federal support, the total annualized income of a single parent with two children (ages 9 and 10), working full time at minimum wage, was \$38,728 (before taxes) in 2016 – up from less than \$20,000 in 2003.

We have also made progress improving the **social assistance system** over the past several years with important first steps to improve incomes, promote better employment outcomes and increase fairness. Our government has raised rates in 12 of the last 13 years. Ontario has increased social assistance rates by just over 20% for Ontario Works families and individuals with disabilities receiving support from ODSP, and by 33.8% for single adults without children receiving Ontario Works. Today a single adult without children is receiving \$100 more per month through Ontario Works than they did in 2012. Further, we have simplified the ODSP application process for individuals deemed eligible for ministry-funded adult developmental services.

Social assistance helps to stabilize incomes, but it is just one aspect of broader income security. While we continue to improve our social assistance programs through rate increases, important changes to social assistance, and through targeted measures in our poverty reduction strategy, many Ontarians continue to live in poverty. Job uncertainty as a result of precarious work can be a major source of stress for individuals and families, regardless of income level, and can lead to longer-term impacts on mental health.

We want to test a new approach to improving the health and well-being of people living on low incomes. That's why in June 2016, Ontario asked the Honourable Hugh Segal for advice on how to design and implement a basic income in Ontario. Mr. Segal submitted a discussion paper, [Finding a Better Way: A Basic Income Pilot for Ontario](#), which we used as the starting point for our consultations with Ontarians.

We sought input from people across the province, including people with lived experience, municipalities, experts, academics, and the general public. We are also working with Indigenous organizations to engage with First Nations, urban Indigenous, Métis and Inuit communities in culturally appropriate ways.

Building on this feedback, Ontario will introduce a **Basic Income Pilot** that will test an evidence-based model on how to improve health, employment and housing outcomes for the people of Ontario.

The Pilot will be an important piece of research to complement important elements of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Basic Income Pilot learnings will also inform longer-term income security reform through the **Income Security Reform Working Group**. Together with engagement with First Nations communities and Indigenous organizations, the working group will build a multi-year plan for reform that includes aspects of the wider income security system.

Building the workforce of tomorrow

This government has taken a number of steps to help connect Ontarians with employment opportunities. One of these steps includes the development of an Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

Building on the advice of the Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities, the strategy will help connect more people with disabilities to job opportunities and more businesses to a talented labour pool. It's a comprehensive, made-in-Ontario plan that will offer a better service experience for people through streamlined access to employment and training services that recognize an individual's diverse needs and goals. Employers will also be engaged as active partners in breaking down barriers for people with disabilities and promoting inclusive workplaces.

Another initiative connecting Ontarians to employment opportunities is the **Youth Jobs Strategy**.

Ontario launched a new youth employment program under the strategy as part of the ongoing transformation of employment and training services called **Youth Job Link** in 2016. The program helps young people plan their careers, prepare for the labour market and connect to job opportunities by offering access to non-intensive employment and career resources and information (e.g. career management, career exploration, job search).

Youth Job Link complements the fall 2015 launch of the **Youth Job Connection** program, which provides summer, part-time and after-school job opportunities to high school students ages 15 to 18, who face more substantial and complex barriers to employment than their peers. **Youth Job Connection: Summer Component**, launched in April 2016, supports high school students who face challenging life circumstances and are at risk of experiencing poor transitions between education and work.

In addition to the youth programs noted, the Employment Ontario Employment Service is also available to clients of all ages, including youth who may be facing barriers to employment and may benefit from assisted supports.

The combination of programs for youth ensures they have the opportunity to get the training and experience they need to reach their full potential.

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Empowering new Ontarians to reach their full potential

At the Mennonite New Life Centre we strive to give our clients two things: hope and empowerment.

Our clients are immigrant men and women who have faced multiple barriers to employment, including mental health barriers such as stress, anxiety, depression and trauma. They struggle to find meaningful and permanent employment. The goal of our program, HOPES, is to provide them with tools and support to achieve their goals.

In the first phase of the program, participants learn strategies to manage culture shock, decrease stress and

increase hope. In the second phase, they build empowerment through self-knowledge and a goal-oriented action plan. By the third phase, they are developing a strategy and working with a coach who guides them to pursue their goals and supports them in thinking and acting strategically. They gain confidence knowing that throughout the whole experience, they are not alone.

Although we're still in our first year, some participants are already working in meaningful jobs and the rest are accomplishing their short-term goals, including developing the skills necessary for continuing their action plan and obtaining employment.

Of course there are challenges. It can be hard to empower people who have been frustrated for a long time after trying to overcome the barriers to employment. It can take a lot to motivate people and help them come to terms with the idea that, "Yes, I can obtain employment and I can achieve my goals!" Overall, we have received lots of wonderful feedback and we look forward to continuing this program in the years to come.

— Tracy Docheff, Outreach & Communications Coordinator, Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto

Investing in infrastructure that benefits communities

The recently announced Community Benefits Declaration will help people from disadvantaged communities along the Eglinton Crosstown Light Rail Transit (LRT) corridor in Toronto get construction jobs on the largest transit project in Canada. The agreement with government agencies, business, labour and the local community sets a goal that 10% of all trade and crafting hours needed for the project will be performed by apprentices and journey persons who live along the transit corridor and who have had trouble finding jobs. This valuable experience will offer them the opportunity to develop careers in the construction sector.

The **Eglinton Crosstown LRT Community Benefits Declaration** is the first of several major transit projects that will include an agreement to provide a range of social and economic benefits for communities including employment opportunities for youth and training programs.

The government is also working with the City of Toronto on the Construction Pathway, an initiative that will test a streamlined and harmonized model for people to access and navigate employment services, and to get the support they need. Through the Construction Pathway, Ontario and Toronto will provide a reliable pipeline of suitable and well-prepared candidates for apprenticeships.

This work is aligned with the commitment we made in *Realizing Our Potential* to explore opportunities to leverage investments in economic development, infrastructure, skills and training to yield benefits for specific populations at risk of poverty.

Supporting businesses to improve connections to the labour market

In order to support lasting change, our government is working to accelerate the growth of the social enterprise sector with the launch of Ontario's Social Enterprise Strategy: 2016-2021. Across the province, social enterprises are reducing poverty, protecting the environment and building stronger communities – all while creating jobs, growing revenues and attracting investment capital.

What is a social enterprise?

A social enterprise is an organization that uses business strategies to maximize its social or environmental impact.

Ontario is home to approximately 10,000 social enterprises and about 45% of non-profit social enterprises have a poverty reduction focus. Given the emerging nature of the sector, social enterprises can often face difficulties in accessing the capital and support they need to grow. That is why **Ontario's Social Enterprise Demonstration Fund** provides resources through third-party, community-based non-profits to help social enterprises thrive.

The province has also launched a \$4 million **Rate Drop Rebate** program. The Rate Drop Rebate is a partnership between the Government of Ontario and leading banks and credit unions to help Ontario businesses grow by hiring people facing barriers to employment, such as people with disabilities, newcomers to Canada and Indigenous people. Small-and medium-sized businesses who participate would receive a 1% reduced interest rate on a loan, or six months interest-free on a line of credit in the form of a rebate, for each person they hire. Businesses can work with organizations such as YMCA/YWCA, PATH Employment Services and Specialisterne Canada to assess their hiring needs and screen candidates. Since its launch in April 2016 it is expected to help up to 1,100 people facing barriers to employment find jobs.

The **Microlending for Women in Ontario** program is designed to help low-income women build and grow their own businesses. Since 2012, the program has provided entrepreneurship and financial literacy training to more than 1,750 low-income women. These women receive training to gain skills for employment and the necessary skills needed to start and run a business. This program is just one of a suite of programs this government invests in that help improve incomes and promote economic independence for women across Ontario.

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Giving Ontarians a 'leg up' in the labour market

Furniture Bank is a social enterprise that collects gently used furniture from the community and transfers it to

families in need. In addition to helping families get on their feet, we also use funding from Ontario's Social Enterprise Demonstration Fund (distributed through LIFT Philanthropy Partners) to support our LegUp employment program.

The LegUp program helps individuals who face multiple barriers to employment enter or re-enter the workforce by building participants' confidence and helping them acquire the skills they need to find meaningful, long-term employment and financial stability. Through our program we train 25-30 individuals annually. Melanie is just one of those individuals.

A member of the Pinaymootang First Nation, Melanie came to Furniture Bank and found a position in our repair workshop. "I am feeling more confident now with each step, and feel I will get better and faster as time goes on," Melanie says. "Having the team at Furniture Bank make us feel comfortable and an amazing workspace has only further developed my skills."

As Furniture Bank grows, our aim is to help even more participants transition into life-long stability as active contributors to their community. In addition to increasing our capacity, our vision is to deepen the impact of LegUp by offering an expanded program of soft and hard skills training.

— Dan Kershaw, Executive Director of Furniture Bank

Moving Forward

Ontario has laid a strong foundation of income and employment supports. As a result of our progress and willing federal support, the total annualized income of a single parent with two children (ages 9 and 10), working full time at minimum wage, was \$38,728 per year (before taxes) in 2016, – up from less than \$20,000 in 2003. Our government looks forward to building on this progress to connect Ontarians to employment opportunities and income supports to fully participate in their communities and the economy by:

- developing a plan to implement the Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel's recommendations, including launching an initial round of demonstration projects to benefit all Ontarians, including those underrepresented in the workforce
- launching the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities and implementing a number of initiatives to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities
- reviewing the report on potential amendments to the Labour Relations Act, 1995 and the Employment Standards Act, 2000 as a part of the Changing Workplaces Review
- supporting the federal government on the upcoming increase to the Working Income Tax Benefit for low-income workers to help offset the cost of contributions to the Canadian Pension Plan and

- introducing regulations that reduce the cost of borrowing a payday loan to better protect consumers who use high-cost alternative financial services and consumers with debts in collections

As we look toward the future, we know that we can do more to realize the tremendous potential that exists within the people of Ontario. We must be bold by testing and investing in initiatives that challenge our current systems and look closely at the way we deliver income and employment services on the ground. It is this boldness that will continue to position Ontario as a leader in income and employment supports.

Making an Impact in 2016: Helping People Achieve Employment and Income Security

Providing a foundation to participate in the economy and community life

- increased the general minimum wage for the third consecutive year in a row and as a result, full-time full-year minimum wage earners in the province are making \$2,242 per year more than they did three years ago

Building the workforce of tomorrow

- implementing a new suite of youth employment programming consisting of the launch of Youth Job Connection, Youth Job Connection: Summer Component, and Youth Job Link ensuring youth get the services and supports they need to obtain meaningful employment and succeed in the labour market
- developing an Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities

Investing in infrastructure that benefits communities

- ensuring 10% of all trade and crafting hours needed to develop the Eglinton Crosstown Light Rail Transit project will be performed by apprentices and journey persons who live along the transit corridor and who have had trouble finding jobs

Building businesses up to support those most at risk of falling into poverty

- helping up to 1,100 people facing barriers to employment find jobs through the Rate Drop Rebate Program
- since 2012, providing over 1,750 women with entrepreneurship training and supports as a part of the Microlending for Women in Ontario program

Ending Chronic Homelessness in Ontario

We learned from the report by the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness that a place to call home is more than a roof over your head. For Ontarians, a home is a stable, safe, affordable space connected to communities and sometimes additional supports. To help connect more Ontarians to homes we are changing the housing system and the way Ontarians interact with it. We are looking across the province and at the unique circumstances in each community that contribute to homelessness and we have started investing in integrated supports. We've also committed to making progress by setting a bold target to eliminate chronic homelessness by 2025.

Making Progress

In order to achieve our chronic homelessness target, this year we reflected on lessons learned and updated our approaches to housing and homelessness supports. We are investing in Ontario's communities by increasing access to housing and integrating housing with additional services to help people obtain housing and stay in their homes.

What is Chronic Homelessness?

Chronic homelessness refers to the state of being homeless for six months or more in the past year. ^[2] People in these circumstances often have disabling conditions, such as chronic physical or mental illness, or substance abuse problems. Repeated episodes of violence and abuse cause trauma, which increases people's vulnerability and may lead to chronic homelessness. Life on the streets and in shelters over the long-term also makes people who are chronically homeless vulnerable to serious health crises, violence and criminal justice system involvement. That is why Ontario is focused on providing housing and supports that will eliminate chronic homelessness, along with emergency services that provide a short-term solution.

Increasing access to affordable, transitional and supportive housing

The first step toward preventing and eliminating homelessness is to ensure everyone has the opportunity to live in a home they can afford. With the changing housing market, our government renewed its commitment to investing in affordable housing with the 2016 update to the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS). The 2016 LTAHS update continues the long-term transformation of Ontario's housing and homelessness system to:

- ensure a sustainable supply of public and private housing stock
- support a fair system of housing assistance
- promote coordinated and accessible support services
- encourage effective use of evidence and best practices to inform policy and program development and define and measure outcomes.

Once people gain access to housing they may need support staying housed in the long-term. That is why

as a part of the 2016 LTAHS update the government committed up to \$100 million in operating funding for housing assistance and support services to assist up to 4,000 families and individuals in new supportive housing. Supportive housing assists people in achieving housing stability and living as independently as possible in a community setting. Over the long term, LTHAS capital funding will support the construction of up to 1,500 new supportive housing units.

On December 8, 2016 the *Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016* received Royal Assent. The Act will support improved access to adequate and affordable housing and modernize the social housing system by:

- giving municipalities the option to implement inclusionary zoning, which requires affordable housing units to be included in residential developments
- making secondary suites such as above-garage apartments or basement units in new homes less costly to build, by exempting them from development charges. Secondary suites are a potential source of affordable rental housing and allow homeowners to earn additional income
- giving local service managers more choice in how they deliver and administer social housing programs and services to reduce wait lists and make it easier for people in Ontario to access a range of housing options
- gathering data to measure progress towards our goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2025 through local enumeration of those who are homeless in their communities

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Creating a home for Ontarians to thrive in

Rheal came from Owen Sound, Ontario and was living in the mental health ward in the Sault Area Hospital for a year. The hospital tried, on several occasions, to discharge Rheal to live independently, but his mental health needs were not being met and he kept returning. It was clear Rheal needed extra support to stay off the street and out of the hospital.

The 24/7 supportive housing program, funded by the North East Local Health Integration Network, was the perfect program to provide that support. Rheal was the second resident to be accepted into the program, and it has made a big difference in his life. Physically, he has been able to attend all his appointments and follow his care plan.

But, we have also seen a significant change in Rheal’s behavior. He has had very few outbursts and only one hospital admission for mental health within two years. In his own words, here is what Rheal had to say about the program:

“I am happy here and have made a lot of friends. The staff help me daily and do a great job. Even with all my health issues they really assist me. If I wasn’t living here I would probably be six feet under.”

This program has been really beneficial to Rheal and to this day, he continues to be stable and successful.

— Tanya Bowman, Canadian Mental Health Association, Sault Ste. Marie

Voices from the Community: Improving Transitional Housing for all Ontarians

The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) update committed the government to consult with stakeholders on amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act*, 2006 to support improved delivery of transitional housing. Transitional housing programs provide affordable, time-limited housing and appropriate support services to help people move towards independent and stable housing.

In November 2016, staff from the Ministry of Housing's Residential and Commercial Tenancies Unit conducted in-person consultations with individuals who had lived experience in transitional housing programs. Throughout the consultations, staff in the ministry learned about how transitional housing programs impacted participants' lives, and what improvements could be made. For some, being a participant in a transitional housing program helped them adjust to a new life in Canada and establish the foundations to pursue education and employment goals. For others, it helped them overcome addiction, trauma and other challenges and learn life skills that were lost after years of homelessness and housing instability. Here is just some of what we heard:

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"Everyone who enters the transitional housing program [I am enrolled in] has to attend school or work. And, if you're in school, it's challenging to fulfill your school duties as well as the life skills commitments of the program. We need more time. I think if we had the option to stay longer that would be better."

— Mona, Covenant House

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"When a single woman with children is on the street, she needs help and time to heal. One year is not enough. Women need four to seven months just to calm down, deal with the trauma and want to get out of bed in the morning. It doesn't happen quickly. We need time to stabilize, then we need time to figure out what we want to do."

— Blue Jean, The 519

“I was planning to graduate [high school] this year with my friends, but I’m not – instead I had to leave transitional housing and look for housing. It’s not easy. When I moved out of here, I could barely go to school. I had never lived on my own. But there are people waiting to get into Sojourn House so I knew the right thing for me to do was to leave so that other people could benefit as well.”

— Luwom, Sojourn House

This feedback informed policy development and recommendations to government to update the Residential Tenancies Act to improve outcomes for transitional housing participants and to provide more flexibility to transitional housing providers so that they are able to better deliver programs and services that meet the needs of participants.

Homelessness impacts different communities differently. This is something we heard loud and clear when, between June and August 2016, representatives from eight different provincial ministries visited communities across Ontario to learn about the unique causes and impacts of chronic homelessness as part of the Community Profiles Initiative. The team also learned about innovative practices being adopted in different communities and sought advice about changes needed at the provincial and other levels to achieve the goal of ending chronic homelessness.

Community visits included a combination of group meetings, site visits and community tours with local government officials, emergency shelters, Indigenous partners, Crown Attorneys, local police forces, correctional facilities, healthcare providers, people with lived experience of homelessness and many others.

The information and experiences gathered from each community will help inform future government policies.

Empowering communities to move from crisis responses to homelessness prevention

We are working to empower communities to respond to the unique challenges that lead to homelessness in their regions by investing in flexible, community-based solutions through the **Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)**.

The CHPI is delivered by service managers who have the flexibility to use funding to address local priorities and better meet the needs of individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including those who are on social assistance and those with low income. Funding can be used to support emergency shelter solutions and homelessness prevention initiatives such as supportive housing.

Ultimately, CHPI supports a transition towards a system that is focused on more proactive and permanent

solutions to address homelessness. For example, funding that once had to be used for an emergency shelter bed can now be used to provide stable housing and support services that keep people in their homes.

We are increasing funding under CHPI by \$15 million each year for the next three years. This will bring our annual investment under CHPI to \$338.7 million by 2019-20.

In 2015-16, Ontario's investment under CHPI assisted approximately 39,600 households experiencing homelessness obtain housing and helped approximately 115,600 households at-risk of homelessness remain in their homes.

Targeting the pathways into homelessness

Another key to eliminating homelessness is to look at the systems and situations that can lead people into homelessness. For example, people released from provincial service systems such as correctional and youth justice facilities, hospitals and Violence Against Women shelters are often at risk of homelessness because there is not enough support to ensure they transition into housing. Focusing on transitions from provincial service systems and institutions provides government with a point of contact to support at-risk clients. As a first step to tackling this problem, our government established a multi-ministry working group to find ways to:

- improve transitions planning (including ensuring plans are made early in the process)
- break down barriers and rules that make transitioning out of systems difficult
- improve partnerships within the homelessness sector and more importantly with other relevant service providers outside of the homelessness sector (e.g., corrections, child welfare, hospitals, youth justice, income supports, etc.)
- foster a culture of collective accountability so that everyone is working to end homelessness

Similarly, individuals and families leaving situations of domestic violence may have to stay in a shelter while they await access to rent-geared-to-income housing. While survivors of domestic violence are given priority access to these units, there can be long wait lists and units may not be in their preferred neighbourhood.

To help survivors and their families obtain stable housing we partnered with the federal government to implement the **Survivors of Domestic Violence—Portable Housing Benefit (SDV-PHB) Pilot**—a \$20 million two-year pilot that helps prevent homelessness by increasing access to safe and affordable housing for survivors of domestic violence in 22 communities across Ontario.

The SDV-PHB Pilot changes how survivors of domestic violence interact with housing supports. Instead of

families living in shelters or other precarious housing situations until a social housing unit becomes available, survivors of domestic violence have the option to receive a portable housing benefit so they can immediately find housing in their community. The benefit subsidizes monthly rent costs and service providers can also choose to use the subsidy to support other rental costs, including first and last month's rent.

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New beginnings, stronger families

For survivors of domestic violence, the struggle to leave can be overwhelming. New beginnings are never easy and leaving everything behind to start over can be intimidating.

Finding a safe and secure home may seem like a difficult task when starting your new life. Rental costs can be high, and most landlords ask for first and last month's rent up front when signing a lease. Even with priority access to government assisted housing, some applicants can wait up to six months to obtain a unit.

Help is available. Halton Region is committed to connecting people to the services they require when they need them most. The Portable Housing Benefit for Survivors of Domestic Violence responds to the many challenges faced by those struggling to find a new home. The benefit can not only subsidize high rental costs but clients can choose where they want to live—closer to their children's school, their doctor, their family and all the support they need to begin again. Portability also allows them to move from community to community without having to reapply to government assisted housing waitlists, and keeping them safe from potential harm.

The impact of this flexibility cannot be understated. We are proud to be working closely with Halton Women's Place and Halton Housing Help to help survivors of domestic violence move forward.

— Alex Sarchuk, Commissioner, Social and Community Services, Halton Region

Engaging with partners to lead cross-province initiatives

Ontario is working together with the other provinces and territories and the federal government to develop a **National Housing Strategy (NHS)** that focuses on:

- addressing the full spectrum of needs, from people who are experiencing homelessness to those who rent from the private market or own their own home
- improving the lives of people with the greatest need
- placing housing at the centre of communities

- recognizing the importance of housing to achieving other social, economic and environmental goals.

Ontario is already a leader in this space. This government is promoting an NHS that is flexible enough to address local priorities, aligns with the LTAHS update and meets the goals set out in our Poverty Reduction Strategy. The result will be a national strategy that will build on our progress and have a greater impact on Ontario's families.

Moving Forward

To meet Ontario's 10-year goal to end chronic homelessness, this government needs to demonstrate leadership and undertake transformational change. Ontario looks forward to driving this change in 2017 by:

- implementing the second phase of **Open Minds Healthy Minds, Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy**, to focus on housing programs that help people with mental illness and addiction issues become stably housed
- taking action to identify solutions to reduce transitions into homelessness by encouraging cross-sectoral partnerships and collaboration through continued work with the multi-ministry working group on transitions planning

We often say that homelessness is complex and it is — homelessness affects individuals, families and communities differently and there is no 'silver bullet' approach to solving it. But when we look at our communities, we can see that each region has its own challenges and unique approaches. When we reflect on what we heard from our communities in 2016, we know that what they need is the capacity and power to tackle the challenges that affect them most. Therefore, the future of tackling homelessness in Ontario relies on building up the strength of our communities.

Making an Impact in 2016: Ending Chronic Homelessness

Increasing access to affordable, transitional and supportive housing

- making progress on implementing the update to the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy
- committing up to \$100 million in funding for housing assistance and support services to assist up to 4,000 families and individuals in new supportive housing spaces.
- introducing the Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016, which received Royal Assent on December 8, 2016. The act will support improved access to adequate and affordable housing and help to modernize the social housing system

Empowering communities to respond to the unique local challenges that can lead to homelessness

- approximately 39,600 households to obtain housing and helping approximately 115,600 households at-risk of homelessness to remain in their homes through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)

- increasing CHPI funding by \$15 million each year for the next three years

Targeting the pathways into homelessness

- providing 22 communities across the province with funding over the next two years to implement the Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Pilot program
- improving transition planning (including ensuring plans are made early in the process) and breaking down barriers or rules that make transitioning out of provincial systems such as hospitals and correctional facilities difficult

Engaging with partners to lead cross-province prevention initiatives

- working together with provinces, territories and the federal government to develop a National Housing Strategy

Working with Indigenous partners

We know that poverty rates are higher among Indigenous people in Ontario. 24% of Ontario's Indigenous population lives below the poverty line compared to 14% of the non-Indigenous population. That is why this government strengthened its commitment to closing the gaps in Indigenous communities by releasing and implementing *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*. In the spirit of cooperation and reconciliation, we are actively listening, collaborating and forming strong partnerships to empower Indigenous people, communities and organizations to reach their full potential.

Making Progress

This year we took the opportunity to go into Indigenous communities to connect with people on the ground and learn about approaches that are working for them. We relied on Indigenous leadership and partnerships to invest in programs and services to support the social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous people.

Building capacity in Indigenous communities

An important step toward closing gaps for Indigenous communities is to ensure that they have the capacity to respond to immediate needs and overcome longer-term challenges that affect First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous people. This includes investing in capacity within communities and across service providers to identify, plan for and respond to community needs.

In 2014/15, Ontario announced a commitment to develop a province-wide Urban Indigenous Action Plan to address the unique needs, strengths and priorities of Indigenous people living in urban settings, as well as

the urban community-based organizations that serve them. The action plan is being co-developed with the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, the Ontario Native Women's Association and the Métis Nation of Ontario, who have facilitated engagement activities in 15 communities across the province. In addition to engagement on the action plan, additional support was provided for community development capacity initiatives, based on locally-identified priorities. The action plan is targeted to:

- enhance the involvement and control of urban Indigenous partners, organizations, and communities in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services
- support community-based approaches focusing on local strengths and assets to provide culturally-relevant services
- support the coordination and alignment of urban Indigenous programs and services between all levels of government to increase the reach and impact of services provided and
- measure progress and outcomes.

Ontario's First Nations Health Action Plan (FNHAP) is one initiative that is building community capacity to respond to both immediate and long-term health needs in Indigenous communities. Ontario's FNHAP includes a commitment to support the *Approaches to Community Wellbeing* public health model developed by the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority. The *Approaches to Community Wellbeing* model is an Indigenous-led, sustainable and community-owned approach to wellbeing in First Nations communities. Ontario's investment in this model builds capacity in the Sioux Lookout region and at the community level to deliver services by increasing public health nursing, planning and service capacity.

When it comes to mental health, and in particular youth life promotion and suicide prevention, many Indigenous communities are in crisis. That is why this government committed to new, annualized funding through the FNHAP and *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples* totalling \$23 million annually at maturity (2018-19), to support:

- holistic response/prevention supports that combine clinical supports and cultural/land-based programming to stabilize communities in crisis and provide training on suicide prevention and life promotion
- an enhancement of the Tele-Mental Health Service to expand outreach and support
- Indigenous mental health and addictions workers supporting students in First Nations schools

The objective is to build community capacity to respond to children and youth in crisis by ensuring they have the right resources and trained staff, as well as a community-informed plan that meets their distinct needs. These initiatives are being co-developed with First Nations and urban Indigenous partners, and will support Indigenous communities and organizations to provide culturally appropriate mental health supports to address the issue of child and youth suicide.

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Painting a Path for Change in Kenora

It's no secret that the youth in our communities are in crisis. For us, we knew that the only solution was to listen to our youth to find out what they need, which is why we established a Youth Executive Council. Despite that work, we learned that in order for the youth to tell us what they need, we had to give them the tools, the power and the voice to do so.

In April 2016, we used funding from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to engage 28 youths from across the region in a Life Promotion and Suicide Prevention workshop. The two-day gathering taught our youth how to do Strategic Path Planning — a group exercise that teaches the group how to communicate their goals and how they want to get there, using a path that is created visually. The result was an easy-to-read visual map that gives direction, not only to our youth, but to the entire community including our schools, social service providers and families.

But the result went beyond this two-day workshop. Those youth went back to their communities with the knowledge and the experience to teach their peers how to communicate their needs using the Strategic Path Planning approach. It gives everyone a common language with which to communicate complex issues across service providers and even generations.

— Debbie Lipscombe, Health Coordinator, Grand Council Treaty #3

Ontario is investing in both the social and economic well-being of Indigenous communities. The **Aboriginal Economic Development Fund (AEDF)** works to provide new resources to Indigenous communities such as job training, skills and investments that contribute to economic growth and innovation. Since launching in 2014, the AEDF has provided funding to 57 projects, sustaining or creating a total of 807 jobs and accessing 538 training opportunities. In addition to creating jobs, the AEDF investments build capacity in communities to identify new and emerging areas of economic and employment opportunity.

Enhancing strong partnerships to align our efforts and increase impact

This government is focused on building strong partnerships with the federal government and Indigenous organizations to develop effective strategies that improve outcomes for Indigenous people. The result is more coordinated and more impactful efforts to address complex challenges facing Indigenous communities today.

For example, we know that Indigenous people living off-reserve are significantly over-represented among the homeless population. That is why the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness recommended that the province prioritize Indigenous homelessness and we accepted this recommendation immediately.

Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update includes a commitment to develop an **Indigenous Housing Strategy** in partnership with Indigenous organizations to address the unique housing challenges and needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit people.

The province is also working with Indigenous organizations and the federal government to inform the development of the **National Housing Strategy**. We know it is important that a National Housing Strategy includes a focus on improving housing outcomes for Indigenous people.

In 2014, the federal and provincial governments jointly announced the **Investment in Affordable Housing Extension** (2014-2019), which includes \$44.1 million in new funding dedicated to an Off-Reserve Aboriginal Housing component. Indigenous organizations are delivering the program that will provide new affordable rental units, home ownership loans and repair funding for off-reserve Indigenous households. The **Social Infrastructure Funding (SIF)** announced in June of 2016, included an additional \$14.2 million in funding for off-reserve Indigenous households.

Violence against Indigenous women is another complex issue facing Indigenous people. To help coordinate efforts to address this serious issue, Ontario and Indigenous partners worked hand in hand to release ***Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women*** in February 2016. Collaboration and shared leadership between government and Indigenous organizations in implementing this strategy marks a powerful next step in reconciliation and improving the relationship between the Crown and Indigenous people in Ontario.

Supporting Indigenous-led approaches to poverty reduction

Since the launch of the **Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF)** in 2015, we engaged with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations for feedback on the application process. In response to their input we created a funding stream within the LPRF designed specifically for projects within Indigenous communities and/or Indigenous-led organizations. In the spirit of co-creation, this government worked together with Chiefs of Ontario on Indigenous Stream design elements, guideline content and an outreach strategy.

The **Indigenous Stream** of the LPRF was launched in April 2016. It was supported by continued outreach and engagement and strong partnerships with the Chiefs of Ontario and other Indigenous-led organizations. The Indigenous Stream launch garnered a significant number of submissions from Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations.

Ontario is investing more than \$4.5 million in seven innovative, community-driven programs from Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations that measurably improve the lives of those most affected by poverty. This exceeds Ontario's commitment to provide a minimum of \$2 million of support. The programs are:

- Matawa First Nations Management culturally-appropriate entrepreneurship program
- The North Bay Indian Friendship Centre Housing First model for the urban Indigenous homeless population
- Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board's 10-week life skills and career development "Journey Program"
- The M'Chigeeng First Nation Community evaluation of the implementation of the Healing and Wellness Strategy through providing education, training and economic development opportunities
- The Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto Healing Paths Project
- Kenora Chiefs Advisory Life Skills Program
- The Native Men's Residence evaluation of the Mino Kaanjigoowin housing, care and case management program

In addition to the initiatives listed above, the General Stream of the LPRF also supports projects that are either Indigenous-led or will also serve Indigenous clients.

Moving Forward

Overcoming the social and economic challenges faced by Indigenous communities after centuries of colonization and discrimination will be a long process. With the release of *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*, Ontario has committed to initiatives designed to bring meaningful change to the lives of Indigenous people and communities. We will continue to walk hand-in-hand with Indigenous partners, and build trusting, respectful and mutually beneficial relationships.

Moving forward Ontario will work to:

- develop an **Urban Indigenous Action Plan** that will support Ontario's response and overall approach to addressing the unique needs, strengths and priorities of urban Indigenous communities and organizations, including poverty reduction
- work with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous partners to learn more about challenges to food security and solutions that they have identified for addressing food insecurity in their communities
- work with Indigenous communities to identify community priorities for children, youth and families through the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy
- expand five existing child and family programs on-reserve
- partner with Indigenous communities to create more victim services programs specifically for Indigenous peoples

By focusing on those in greatest need we can make immediate changes in the lives of Indigenous people across the province and lay the foundation for broader changes to help overcome the legacy of residential schools and related social and economic challenges faced by Indigenous communities after centuries of colonization.

Making an Impact in 2016: Working with Indigenous partners

Building capacity in Indigenous communities

- providing funding to 57 projects which has created or sustained a total of 807 jobs through the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund
- committing \$4.5 million in 2016-17 to First Nations and urban Indigenous partners to support community capacity building, and to lay the groundwork for ongoing youth life promotion and suicide prevention investments

Enhancing strong partnerships to coordinate efforts

- developing an Indigenous Housing Strategy in partnership with Indigenous organizations
- embedding collaboration into Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women

Supporting Indigenous-led approaches to poverty reduction

implementing the Indigenous Stream of the Local Poverty Reduction Fund to fund seven Indigenous-led projects and programs that support all of the components in the Poverty Reduction Strategy

Measuring our Success

We are committed to investing in programs that work, measuring our progress and making adjustments when we need to. To do that, we developed a framework of indicators that measures the impacts of poverty on health, education, income security, housing security and employment. Using the Poverty Reduction Strategy indicators, we can measure our progress and focus our work. With a common set of priorities, we will challenge ourselves and our partners to work collectively towards better outcomes.

We are also building capacity within our communities to focus on evidence so that we can learn from each other — both our successes and our failures. In this way we will empower our communities and the people on the ground who have first-hand knowledge of what their community needs.

Making Progress on the Indicators



What are the poverty reduction indicators?

The poverty reduction indicators measure things that are either indicative of the state of poverty in Ontario today or that are proven risk factors that increase the chance a person will experience poverty at some point in their life.

Ontario has made substantial progress on some of our indicators this year. This progress suggests that we are on the right path. We have also identified areas where we need to improve and expand, and we look forward to working with our partners to do so.

Update on the Child Poverty Target

In 2008, we set a bold target to reduce child poverty by 25% in five years. In 2014, we renewed this commitment when we launched the renewed Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The following experts were consulted on how to report on the child poverty target going forward:

- Kwame McKenzie, Wellesley Institute (Host and chair of session)
- Miles Corak, University of Ottawa
- Michael Mendelson, Caledon Institute
- Mike Moffat, Ivey Business School
- Jessica Mustachi, Campaign 2000
- John Stapleton, Open Policy Ontario
- Armine Yalnizyan, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Noah Zon, Maytree Foundation

We want to thank the esteemed experts for their time and advice to government on this issue.

Last year, we identified a challenge reporting on the target: in 2012, Statistics Canada changed the national income survey that provides child poverty data. This caused concern that we could no longer reliably track progress continuously against the original 2008 child poverty target. In the face of this uncertainty, the 2015 annual report represented progress on child poverty over two separate periods (pre- and post-2012) and committed to consulting with external experts to determine the best approach to measure child poverty going forward^[3].

A year later, and drawing on advice from the experts, we have decided to update the child poverty target to a 2012 base. The government is thereby committing to reduce the number of children living in poverty in 2012 by 25% in five years. Since there were more children in poverty in the new 2012 base year, this means that we are committing to lifting 20,000 more children out of poverty to meet our '25-in-5' goal.

Updating the target to a 2012 base is the right thing to do for several reasons. First, they advised that it is methodologically cleaner to use data from a single survey, rather than combining data from two different surveys. Second, the new national income survey is widely seen as a better data instrument than its predecessor because it more accurately captures income information and poverty among newcomers. Finally, the original 2008 base year is almost a decade out of date now.

In addition to their advice and in line with our reporting last year, Statistics Canada confirmed that it is not possible to know the exact impact the survey change had on tracking progress. By moving to a 2012 base year, we avoid the uncertainties of reporting across the data break.

Looking to the next Poverty Reduction Strategy, the experts offered other options for measuring child poverty, such as a market based measure or a deprivation measure. In particular, Campaign 2000 indicated that we could consider using data collected from the T1 Family File (T1FF), another Statistics Canada Survey that calculates relative, rather than fixed Low-Income Measure (LIM).

This is useful advice as we move forward with federal-provincial discussions about measuring and reducing poverty to support development of a federal Poverty Reduction Strategy and future provincial strategies.

For the purposes of transparency and continuity, we are committed to reporting on progress between 2008 and 2011 separately over the life of the child poverty target.

Year	Number of children below Fixed LIM-50	Percent reduction in child poverty since 2008
2008	423,000	Base Year
2009	423,000	N/A
2010	408,000	-3.5%
2011	402,000	-5%

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance, using Statistics Canada's revised dataset for Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (2008 to 2011)

Year	Number of children below Fixed LIM-40	Percent reduction in deep child poverty since 2008
2008	248,000	Base Year
2009	202,000	-18.5%

2010	202,000	-18.5%
2011	228,000	- 8%

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance, using Statistics Canada's revised dataset for Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (2008 to 2011)

* The number of children has been updated since 2008 due to revisions of the SLID data made by Statistics Canada.

The remainder of this report will focus on measuring and reporting on child poverty from 2012 onwards.

PRS Indicator #1: Child poverty target (Fixed LIM-50) – Progress

The Poverty Reduction Strategy measures child poverty through a measurement method called the PRS fixed Low-Income Measure (PRS LIM-50). PRS LIM-50 measures the percentage of children under 18 living in a family with a household income of less than half of the median household income. The most recent data on child poverty in Ontario indicate that there were 97,000 fewer children in poverty in 2014, compared to 2012 according to the LIM fixed to a base year of 2012. The data show the number of children in poverty fell from 505,000 in 2012 to 401,000 in 2014, a reduction of almost 20% or 104,000 kids. This represents substantial progress against the 25-in-5 target.

Year	Number of children below Fixed LIM-50	Percent reduction in child poverty since 2012
2012	505,000	Base Year
2013	498,000	-1.4%
2014	401,000	-20.6%

*Updated Base Year

Source: Ministry of Finance based on Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey.

PRS Indicator #2: Depth of poverty (Fixed LIM-40) – Progress

Another positive trend is seen with the Low-Income Measure 40, a measure of deep poverty. The Low-Income Measure 40 looks at the percentage of children under 18 living in a family with a household income of less than 40% of the median household income, fixed to a baseline of 2012.

This is down from 316,000 children in 2012 to 220,000 in 2014, a reduction of 30% or 96,000 kids.

Year	Number of children below Fixed LIM-40	Percent reduction in deep poverty since 2012
2012	316,000	Base Year
2013	289,000	-8.5%
2014	220,000	-30%

*Updated Base Year

Source: Ministry of Finance based on Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey.

It is likely that the reduction in the number of children in poverty (both LIM-40 and LIM-50) is due to the large increases in incomes in 2014. After-tax household income for persons in the bottom fifth of the population with the lowest incomes rose by 5% between 2013 and 2014. The increase in household income was both the result of an improved economic environment and the cumulative impact of multiple government programs.

In 2013 the Ontario Child Benefit was increased to \$1,210 annually per child under 18 and 184,000 students were enrolled in full day kindergarten – 62,000 more students than the previous year. The Student Nutrition Program was also expanded to serve 60,800 more children and youth. These initiatives have worked together to support children and families in Ontario.

PRS Indicator #3: Birth weight – Steady

We measure the percentage of newborns born at what is considered

to be a healthy weight because babies born to low-income families are more likely to be below or above normal weight. Babies with birth weights outside the normal range may face risk factors that can increase their chances of poor health later in life.

The proportion of babies born at a healthy birth weight was steady, from 80.5% in 2014-15 to 80.8% in 2015-16. Of the 135,000 babies born in 2015-16, 12,600 were *under* what is considered a healthy weight and 13,000 were born *over* a healthy weight for their gestational age.

PRS Indicator #4: School readiness – Steady (No New Data)

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a questionnaire completed by teachers for senior kindergarten children in their classes. It is a population measure of children's development across the five areas of early child development:

- physical health and well-being
- social competence

- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive development
- communication and general knowledge

The EDI is collected once every three years in Ontario and was last collected in 2015. As reported in last year’s annual report the percentage of children considered developmentally ready when they enter grade 1 in 2015 was 70.6%. This was a slight decline from the 2010-2012 results where 72.4% of children in Ontario were on track. In 2015, children in Ontario improved in two areas of development that are significant indicators of school readiness: communication and general knowledge; and language and cognitive development. At the same time, there were declines in the other three areas of development.

As 2015 was the first province-wide EDI collection in a single year, it is possible that the change in data collection process may have contributed to these results.

Our government will work with school boards and community partners to continue developing a responsive, accessible, high-quality child care and early years system that supports healthy child development, readiness for school and academic success. This includes creating 100,000 licensed child care spaces beginning in 2017 and the transformation of Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres in 2018.

PRS Indicator #5: Educational Progress – Steady

Educational progress is important because children have a better chance to succeed as students and later in life when they achieve literacy and numeracy milestones. We track educational progress by measuring student literacy and numeracy rates using the data collected by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). Specifically, we look at the combined overall results on grade 3 and grade 6 students’ EQAO reading, writing and math assessments.

Data from the last school year (2015-16) show that the combined EQAO score for grade 3 and 6 was 71%. This is a decrease of 1% from two years ago when the combined score was 72%. There was no data available in the 2014-15 school year. Over the long-term there has been considerable progress towards meeting our target of a combined score of 75% on the EQAO assessments for Ontario’s elementary students.

School Year	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Combined scores on Grade 3 and 6 for reading, writing and math assessments.	67%	68%	69%	70%	71%	72%	N/A	71%

Source: Education Quality and Accountability Office.

PRS Indicator #6: High School Graduation Rates – Progress

Students who graduate high school are more likely to find meaningful employment and will have greater earning potential throughout their lives compared to those who do not graduate. In fact, a recent evaluation by the Boston Consulting Group found that graduating from high school is essential to breaking the cycle of poverty in Canada. With seven out of every 10 new jobs in Canada requiring some form of higher education or specialized skill, graduating high school is integral to improving employment outcomes for Ontarians. That is why we strive to improve high school graduation rates in Ontario.

In 2004, 68% of students were graduating from high school within five years of starting grade 9. Ontario's high school graduation rate increased to 85.5% in 2015, this represents approximately 129,000 graduates from the cohort of students who started grade 9 in 2010-2011.

Source: Ontario School Information System

PRS Indicator #7: The Ontario Housing Measure – Progress

The Ontario Housing Measure helps highlight the pressure the cost of housing places on the most vulnerable families in Ontario. It measures the percentage of households with children under 18 with incomes below 40% of the median household income and paying more than 40% of their income on housing.

The Ontario Housing Measure showed improvement in 2014 (the most recent data available) in both the number and percentage of households meeting the income and housing cost criteria. For 2014, 6.3%, or 92,000 households, met both the household income and shelter criteria out of 1,459,000 Ontario households with at least one child under 18. In 2013 7.3%, or 108,000 households, met both criteria. This represents a decrease of one percentage point. In other words, 16,000 more households in poverty are better able to pay for shelter.

Source: Data used for the Ontario Housing Measure is a custom run data purchased annually by the Housing Division from Statistics Canada.

Our government understands the importance of ensuring Ontarians can access affordable housing to prevent homelessness. That is why in 2011 the provincial and federal governments reached an agreement to provide combined funding of \$481 million between 2011 and 2014 under the Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario program. As a result of this investment in 2013 alone, 571 new rental units were created and 357 households were assisted in purchasing a home. Since the launch of the program, 3,120 new rental units have been created and 1,492 households have received assistance purchasing a home. [\[4\]](#)

PRS Indicator #8: Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training – Progress

Young people who are not in school or training and who do not have a job are at risk of becoming stuck in a cycle of poverty. We measure the percentage of young people aged 15-29 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) to ensure the programs targeted at youth are having the greatest impact.

The percentage of NEET youth has decreased from 11.9% in 2015 to 11.1% in 2016 . The number of NEET youth decreased from 325,000 in 2015 to 304,000 in 2016, a decline of 21,000 or 6.5%.

Source: Ministry of Finance based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Ontario is one of four provinces to show progress on NEET in 2016. Canada is among the best performing countries in the OECD in terms of the reduction of NEET. [\[5\]](#)

Ontario continues to focus on employing youth through programs such as Youth Job Connection, Youth Opportunities Fund, Youth Mentorship Program, Youth Outreach Worker Program and more. This strong network of support could have contributed to better employment outcomes for Ontario's youth to following the economic downturn of 2008 in comparison to youth in other countries.

PRS Indicator #9: Long-Term Unemployment – Steady

Long-term unemployment is defined as the percentage of adults in the labour force aged 25-64 who have been unemployed for 27 weeks or more. We focus on long term unemployment because a person's ability to find a job becomes increasingly difficult the longer that they remain unemployed, making it difficult to leave poverty.

Long-term unemployment rates have remained steady. Among adults participating in the labour force, 1.3% were unemployed for more than 26 weeks in 2016, unchanged from 1.3% in 2015.

Source: Ministry of Finance based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

PRS Indicator #10: Vulnerable groups with high poverty rates – Steady

We focus on vulnerable population groups because they have significantly higher poverty rates – about three times higher than the rest of the population. They are also prone to be in persistent poverty – that is poverty over a number of years. We measure the percentage of adults in five populations considered to be vulnerable who have a household income of less than half the median. The five vulnerable groups include: recent immigrants, persons with disabilities, female lone parents, and unattached individuals aged 45 to 64 and Indigenous people living off-reserve.

Percentage of the Population Below LIM50 (Age 16 and older)



Year	2012	2013	2014
Total Percentage of the Population Below LIM 50	13.6	13.3	13.2
Persons with Disabilities	20.8	19.9	18.2
Recent Immigrants	30.8	27.0	32.4
Persons in Female Lone Parent Families	38.6	37.9	38.9
Indigenous Persons off-reserve	25.4	20.8	20.9
Unattached Individuals 45 to 64	31.6	37.1	32.2
Total Percentage of Persons in Vulnerable Groups ^[6]	31.4	30.8	32.6

The average poverty rate for the vulnerable populations tracked under the Strategy was 32.6% in 2014, a slight increase from 30.8% in 2013. The rate for persons with disabilities was 18.2% in 2014, which is a decrease from 19.9% in 2013. Overall progress is marked steady because of the opposing directions of these two main indicators.

Examining the subpopulations, persons in female lone parent families (38.9%), recent immigrants (32.4%) and unattached individuals 45 to 64 (32.2%) had the highest poverty rates in 2014. The poverty rate for Indigenous persons was 20.9%.

Individually, the vulnerable population groups are relatively small in size and therefore the estimates can be very volatile over time due to small sample sizes. For this reason, caution should be exercised in interpreting changes between years in these subpopulations.

PRS Indicator #11: Homelessness Target – New Indicator

Working Towards Ontario's Commitment to End Chronic Homelessness by 2025

Someone who lacks a safe and stable home has no foundation on which to realize their potential. That is why Ontario is committed to ending homelessness, starting with a target to end chronic homelessness by 2025.

We are now introducing a key performance indicator to measure progress on this target. The indicator is defined as the rate of chronic homelessness per 10,000 people. [\[7\]](#)

A number of communities in Ontario have conducted local enumeration of those who are homeless. Using available results of local enumeration from six communities in 2016, we estimate that the prevalence of

chronic homelessness across Ontario ranges from a rate of 0.67 to 11.6 per 10,000 people.^[8] These numbers give us a sense of the extent of chronic homelessness in some communities. But to ensure we are getting a more complete picture of chronic homelessness in Ontario, we need more data. That is why in December 2016 we passed legislation that requires Ontario's 47 service managers to conduct local homeless enumeration starting in 2018.

We have more work to do to build capacity in communities to measure chronic homelessness and ensure the way we measure is consistent. We have spent the last year working with community partners to develop a flexible but rigorous methodology to support the enumeration process. The methodology ensures we collect information on chronic homelessness, youth homelessness, Indigenous homelessness, and homelessness following exit from a provincial institution. We look forward to continuing to build capacity in municipalities with workshops and training sessions over the coming months.

Local enumeration data will be available in late 2018 and will be used to calculate a baseline rate of chronic homelessness for Ontario to help us measure results and drive progress towards our target to end chronic homelessness by 2025.

Building a Body of Evidence

Research has shown the importance of place and identity to experiences of poverty. The experience of living in poverty in Sioux Lookout is different than in North York. We also know that some groups experience poverty at higher rates than others, including female lone parents, Indigenous persons, and racialized persons. That is why we set out to identify the community-based approaches to poverty reduction that have the greatest impact on those who need it most through the **Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF)**.

To determine what is having the greatest impact, we need to understand what's working, and why. A key component of the LPRF is providing resources to support evaluation to identify key program outcomes and successful delivery methods. The LPRF evaluation supports an evidence base for social policy and program design. The evidence base will allow us to develop informed practices that we can share across government and non-governmental sectors. We invested \$16 million in [30 new projects](#) through the Local Poverty Reduction Fund in October 2016.

Voices from the Community: The Importance of Evaluation

We asked 2016 recipients of the Local Poverty Reduction Fund about the role that evaluation plays in their projects, here is what we heard:

“

“To solve complex problems, you need to focus on achieving your outcomes and make evaluation a part of the conversation from the very beginning. By bringing together people from across sectors and forming lasting

partnerships, we can ensure that organizations that don't have the resources or the knowledge to conduct meaningful evaluation are connected to the right people to have the best results."

— Cheryl Forchuk, Assistant Director at Lawson Health Research Institute

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"The Vanier Social Pediatric Hub will be the first of its kind in Ontario and hopes to serve as a model pilot site for the province – so evaluation will be key to assess and demonstrate the impact of the project. Regular performance measures will ensure that the project is reaching its targets and outcomes and meeting its objectives as well as providing input so that necessary adjustments can be made to ensure the Vanier Social Pediatrics Hub will be both efficient and effective in its practices."

— Stéphanie Fragman, Ps.Ed, Director of Family Services, Vanier Community Service Centre

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"Funding provided by the Local Poverty Reduction Fund has allowed us to develop a strong community partnership with the City of Mississauga's Department of Recreation through our evaluation of the Active Assist program, which is a fee assistance program to help individuals and families living in low income to access physical activity and recreation programs within their community. Through our evaluation of the Active Assist program, we have been able to identify ways to improve the program and increase access to physical activity and recreation. As a result of our work we are engaging in ongoing talks with the City of Mississauga about the policies and programs in place to support individuals living in low income."

— Katherine Tamminen, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Toronto

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"We had applied to the Poverty Reduction Fund in 2015. Working through the application for funding stimulated creativity and collaboration between the community program and the evaluation teams. Our teams actually had fun working on the application. This collaboration is being carried throughout the implementation of our project and helps us work in an integrated manner. We think the partnerships developed between the community program and the evaluation teams will enhance the evaluation capacity of the community program well beyond the life of this specific grant."

— Sanjeev Sridharan, Director, The Evaluation Centre for Complex Health Intervention, St. Michael's Hospital

What we've heard and where we're going

We are almost halfway through the implementation of this second poverty reduction strategy. We are listening to our stakeholders and learning from their input. We are relentless in the pursuit of our goals and we are always expanding our efforts to tackle poverty from all angles.

We are transforming our approach to providing income supports. Ontario is working to design and implement a pilot program that would test whether a basic income is a more effective way of delivering income support and improving health, housing and employment outcomes.

What is Basic Income?

Basic income, or guaranteed annual income, is a payment to eligible families or individuals that ensures a minimum level of income.

Voices from the Community: What We Heard from the Basic Income Pilot Consultations

Between November 3, 2016 and January 31, 2017, Ontario sought input from people across the province, including people with lived experience, municipalities, experts, academics, and the general public. We are also working with Indigenous partners to engage with First Nations, urban Indigenous, Métis and Inuit communities in culturally appropriate ways.

Many individuals who participated in the consultations support the idea of a Basic Income Pilot. In general, they want the Pilot to:

1. Include a representative sample of participants
2. Have representative locations
3. Lift people out of poverty
4. Run efficiently
5. Measure specific outcomes

A summary of the consultations was prepared and released on March 16, 2017 in the [What We Heard report](#).

We are also identifying additional challenges that need to be tackled. In September 2016 we committed to working with our partners to develop a **food security strategy** that addresses physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. We look forward to working closely with our partners both within the government and in the community in order to develop this strategy.

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Focusing on Food: Food Security and Social Inclusion

For 31 years, FoodShare Toronto, has advocated for public policies and programs that improve access to healthy affordable food for those who currently experience the most food insecurity. Through funding from the Local Poverty Reduction Fund, FoodShare has been able to hire Harry Cummings Consulting (HCA) to develop a survey to determine the impact of our programs. So far we have interviewed more than 800 participants in our good food and community garden programs. Here is some of what we've heard:

“The main reason I am involved is for the sense of serenity I get from it! In the sharing of knowledge and learning from others in the garden.” – Market Garden respondent (62 year old female)

“I am on low income and I have some mobility issues. It helps me stretch my low, fixed income and eat healthy food.” – Good Food Box respondent (54 year old female)

“We are a green community. Shut-ins have come out to the garden and have had their lives changed. Their health has improved.” – Community Garden respondent (66 year old male)

People are telling us that our food programs are helping them stretch their income and improve their health. We hope the research we are doing now will expand the understanding of the benefits of community food programs as one component of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy in Ontario.”

— Debbie Field, Executive Director, FoodShare Toronto

Some communities have a higher proportion of young people who are disconnected from school and work. The barriers for these disconnected youth are complex and require multiple sectors to share knowledge and develop solutions. That is why Ontario is taking a different approach to solving this complex issue through the **Collective Impact for Disconnected Youth (CIDY)** initiative.

What is Collective Impact?

The Collective Impact approach to problem-solving is premised on the belief that no single policy, government department, organisation or program can tackle or solve the increasingly complex social problems we face as a society. The approach calls for multiple organisations or entities from different sectors to work towards a common agenda, shared measurement and alignment of effort.

A number of jurisdictions are already using Collective Impact to tackle different complex social, economic and environmental issues that cannot be addressed by a single sector or program. One notable example of Collective Impact in Canada is Calgary's Plan to End Homelessness. By engaging with government, non-

profit and other service providers Calgary developed a coordinated system of care where no matter what point a client enters the system they are directed to the right services. Since 2008, the plan has successfully delivered a 15 per cent reduction in homelessness in Calgary.

Ontario's CIDY initiative will take a similar approach by bringing together the private sector, non-profit organizations, philanthropic groups and the broader public sector to improve outcomes for youth who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) using a made-in-Ontario approach to Collective Impact. By rallying diverse partners and using an evidence-based, data-driven approach, CIDY aims to move the needle on outcomes for NEET youth in Ontario.

The **Community Transportation Pilot Grant Program** is currently helping 22 municipalities across Ontario improve transportation services for seniors, persons living with disabilities, youth, and other residents who need transportation. Until March 2017 this \$2 million grant program will help municipalities partner with community organizations to coordinate local transportation services and resources. The objective is to evaluate the community transportation delivery model to determine its effectiveness in meeting the mobility needs of small, rural or northern communities that are not served or underserved by public transportation.

Conclusion

We have built a solid foundation from which to lift people from poverty, and prevent them from falling into poverty. We are learning more about what works, and we have the evidence to prove it.

We have made meaningful and measurable progress on our target to reduce child poverty by 25% as identified by our indicators. We know that this progress is linked to increased incomes of parents and families. Our investments in increases to the minimum wage, the collective income support of the OCB and full day kindergarten worked together to help parents participate in the labour market and earn higher incomes.

Moving forward, we will focus our efforts on income supports and universal programs that are grounded in evidence and working towards measureable outcomes.

But these investments will only take us so far. We must also be bold – bold enough to look at the systems we use to deliver services and be willing to disrupt them, turn them on their head and try something totally new. And in testing new approaches we may find new solutions or realize that those solutions don't work, but in both cases we are growing and adapting to the changing environment Ontarians live in every day.

Being bold also means being humble and listening to the advice of people on the ground. We want you to know that we hear you, we're listening, and we are committed to giving you the tools and capacity to solve the most pressing challenges your communities face.

Finally, boldness for us means setting challenging and ambitious targets and relentlessly working to achieve those goals. We will continue to work towards our targets to reduce child poverty and end chronic homelessness and look forward to communicating that progress as we move forward. As we achieve each milestone, we will be bold enough to set new ones, and continue to seek your input to help shape the direction of strategies to come.

Our momentum is building. With a willing federal partner and strong relationships with our communities we can only build on this progress. As we boldly approach the final two years of this strategy we are committed to building an Ontario where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

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Footnotes

- [1] [^ Canadian Occupation Projection System \(COPS\)](#) (Projections are from 2015 to 2024)
- [2] [^ Ontario has adopted the definition of chronic homelessness recommended by the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness in 2015. It is the same definition used by the federal government, which is: “\[c\]hronic homelessness refers to people, often with disabling conditions \(e.g., chronic physical or mental illness, substance abuse problems\), who are currently homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year \(i.e., have spent more than 180 cumulative nights in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation\).”](#)
- [3] [^ Poverty Reduction Strategy \(2015 Annual Report\)](#), pg. 42
- [4] [^ Investment in Affordable Housing Program: Year Five Report \(2015-16\)](#)
- [5] [^ Society at a Glance 2016, OECD Social Indicators](#)
- [6] [^ Persons with disabilities can no longer be included in the overall vulnerable population indicator due to Statistics Canada survey changes in 2013, and is therefore reported separately.](#)
- [7] [^ The chronic homelessness indicator will be calculated based on the sample of municipalities that conduct enumeration beginning in 2018.](#)
- [8] [^ These rates are based on select communities that shared enumeration data with the Ministry of Housing and information about the population covered by enumeration.](#)

Rate

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