

# Community Dispatch

An InfoFax of Community Development Halton

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## MAJORITY OF CANADIANS AND ONTARIANS WANT ACTION ON POVERTY

*Investment in poverty reduction strategies is an essential part of a stabilization plan in times of economic turmoil by stimulating demand in local economies across Ontario. This Community Dispatch comes on the eve of the Government of Ontario's plan for poverty reduction which is to be released by Minister Deb Matthews before year's end. It will be of comfort to those in the throes of policy development to know that a majority of people across our land and province support reducing the number of people living in poverty and, importantly, believe that government should provide the leadership to combat poverty and income inequality now and in hard times. I thought it useful to share with you the highlights of polling results conducted by Environics Research Group on perceptions and attitudes on poverty reduction held by Canadians and Ontarians. Community Dispatch summarizes the reports: "Ready for Leadership: Canadians' Perceptions of Poverty" and the "Ontarians Waiting for Leadership on Poverty Reduction."*

*Joey Edwardh*

### Introduction

How do members of our national and provincial communities feel that governments, provincial and national, should proceed with initiatives related to poverty in Canada and Ontario? How do Canadians and Ontarians perceive poverty at home? How do they perceive their own standard of living and personal economic situation? As well, how well prepared do they feel for their futures?

### Context

It is no secret that we are living in times of economic instability and change. In the best of times, poverty and its affects on the individuals and communities has not improved. Community Development Halton believes that poverty will grow with Canada and Ontario entering recessionary times. Statistics Canada reports that 10.6% of Canadians lived below low-income cut offs in 2006. That number has not improved much from years prior: 10.8% in 2005, 11.4% in 2004, 11.6% in 2003, and 11.6% in 2002.<sup>1</sup>

### Perceptions: Personal Financial Concerns

The reports indicate that:

- About half of Canadians worry about their financial future.
- Only 40% of Canadians and 38% of Ontarians feel that their standard of living is better than it was 10 years ago. However, about one in four Canadians and Ontarians (26%) maintain that they are worse off now than they were 10 years ago.
- 83% of Canadians and 82% of Ontarians are concerned with the rising cost of living.
- 47% of Canadians and 51% of Ontarians report that they struggle to keep personal debts under control. Lower income

<sup>1</sup> The Low Income Cut offs (LICO's) are published by Statistics Canada. Persons and families living below these income levels are considered to be living in "straitened circumstances". There are different LICO's according to family size and size of community. They are more popularly known as Canada's poverty line.

households are more likely to report a struggle with personal debts than high-income households.

- 44% of Canadians and 47% of Ontarians do not believe they will be able to afford a comfortable retirement. Canadian young people (18-29) are especially pessimistic with 54% reporting that they don't think they can afford a comfortable retirement.
- Household debts are at a record high in Canada while household savings are at a record low.

### **Perceptions: Government Should Reduce Poverty and Inequality**

The reports indicate that Canadians and Ontarians believe that governments should provide strong leadership and act to reduce poverty and inequality.

- 81% of Canadians and 54% of Ontarians think our governments should reduce poverty by at least 25% in 5 years. However, 26% of Canadians and 25% of Ontarians think this is not enough and we should aim to do more.
- 92% of Canadians and 93% of Ontarians agree that if other countries can dramatically reduce the number of poor people then Canada also can.
- 77% of Canadians are more likely to support a political party that made poverty reduction a high priority. Furthermore, 89% of Ontarians said they would feel proud if their Premier took a lead in Poverty Reduction.
- About nine in 10 Canadians and Ontarians want Canada to distinguish itself as a country where no one lives in poverty.

Across this land and in the province of Ontario people want their governments to do more. Also, 77% of Canadians and 81% of Ontarians report that in a recession helping the poor should be a priority. People believe that a recession is not an excuse for inaction on poverty reduction.

### **Perceptions: Poverty Reduction Strategies**

Members polled across Canada and Ontario were reminded that investments in poverty reduction programs could mean higher taxes or cuts in spending in other areas. Notwithstanding, people supported government action in a number of areas:

- 89% of Canadians and 87% of Ontarians support raising the minimum wage to enable those who work full time to be raised above the poverty line.
- 86% of Canadians and 83% of Ontarians support programs to assist poor families with children.
- 85% of Canadians and 86% of Ontarians support government funding of low-cost child care spaces.
- 92% of Canadians and 90% of Ontarians want to create more affordable housing units.
- 77% of Canadians and 74% of Ontarians want welfare rates to match annual increases in the cost of living.
- 96% of Canadians and 97% of Ontarians would like to see increased government investment in more job and skills training for those between jobs.

**Sources:**

Hennessy Trish and Armine Yalnizyan, *Ready for Leadership: Canadians' Perceptions of Poverty*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. October 2008

Hennessy, Trish. *Ontarians Waiting for Leadership on Poverty Reduction*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. November 2008

Support poverty reduction. Share your ideas. Register your desire for action. Join us in a community conversation on the Blueprint for Poverty Reduction. We need your feedback.

**Blueprint for Poverty Reduction:  
Legacy for an Inclusive Ontario  
With Kevin Flynn, MPP**

**Speaker: MARVYN NOVICK**

**Closing Remarks: Gary Beck,  
President Local 707**

**DATE: Thursday, November 27, 2008**

**TIME: 7 – 9 p.m.**

**PLACE:** 707 Galaxy Banquet Hall  
475 North Service Road East  
Oakville

**Sponsors:**

Advancement of Women Halton  
Community Development Halton  
Halton Multicultural Council  
Make Poverty History – Burlington & Halton  
Chapter

To register your attendance and for more  
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