

# APPENDIX B: POVERTY REDUCTION LENS

## CONSIDERING POVERTY REDUCTION WHEN DEVELOPING POLICIES AND PLANS

Are you developing policy, programs or events that impact your community? This document is designed to help you consider how your work affects people living in poverty, and how it can contribute to reducing poverty. Below are some planning questions to consider, followed by information about poverty.

### Questions to consider when developing a policy or project:

- Who will benefit from this policy or project? Will it benefit low income and other marginalized people?
- Who might be excluded from benefiting? Who might be harmed?
- How does it contribute to equity for all? Does it recognize the dignity and potential contributions of every person?
- Have important decisions been made with the direct input of those who will be most affected?
- From whose perspective will the policy/project be evaluated? Have those most affected been involved in setting evaluation criteria?
- Will the policy or project unfairly burden some groups now or in the future?

### Questions to consider when planning public events:

- Does the admission/registration fee encourage low-income and other marginalized people to participate?
- Is the venue easily accessed via public transportation?
- Is the venue physically accessible? How will you accommodate various disabilities?
- If online, does it presume universal access to a computer and internet link? To a printer? How will you include and support those without access?
- If online, does your program incorporate accommodations for those with disabilities?
- Does the event provide child care (service or funding) for participants?

## WHAT IS POVERTY?

Many people may believe that poverty is the result of a person's "bad choices" or "bad planning." But we know that how a person manages any life challenge or crisis depends on the resources and power they have access to. These include supportive family and friends, education, social position and contacts, mobility, access to services, lifelong experiences (being valued or not, experiencing discrimination), and freedom to make independent choices. These advantages are not distributed equally.

Governments usually measure poverty by income level, but they also recognize that it is more complicated than that. The federal government defines **poverty** as follows:

**Poverty means lacking the resources, means, choices, and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic living standard and to participate in society.**

As a community, we often don't see the poverty around us, because people who are living in poverty may feel shame or blame and be reluctant to talk about it. Though the most dramatic forms of poverty may be visible, poverty also has many hidden forms.

Here are some examples:

- Audrey is a single mother who is self-employed and owns her house, but cannot find child care for her two children, one of whom has high needs. Therefore, she can only work part-time and struggles to pay the bills. Her career has been held back by the lack of child care. Though she is barely getting by, she is perceived as "doing ok" because she owns a home and has a business.



- Gerry is a senior living alone who had to leave his part-time job due to health issues and now stretches one meal over each day because his pension will not cover housing, food, and the medications he needs.
- Rosa and Manuel both work minimum wage jobs but still cannot feed their three children without help from the Food Bank.
- Parminder is a recent immigrant without a work visa who is trying to escape an abusive husband but has no source of income.
- Melinda is in her 30s with an invisible disability. She survives on disability income assistance and occasional employment and lives in a recreational vehicle in an RV park because she cannot afford an apartment.
- Doreen lives on a fixed pension has been evicted from her rented apartment and cannot find another place she can afford. The waiting list for affordable seniors' housing is double the existing capacity.
- Sarah and Justine have two children and have been evicted from their rented house due to the sale of the property. They are unable to find another home and are living out of a motel. They are considering moving off the Coast.



## WHAT CAUSES POVERTY?

Everyone relies on various supports that enable them to thrive - family & friends, employment, secure income, housing, food, health care, social connection, etc. When any of these supports falls away (through unemployment, loss of housing, lack of child care, a health crisis) then a person may experience a cascade effect that leads to poverty - if one support falls, others begin to fall too.

People do not choose to be poor. Poverty has many contributing causes that are beyond an individual's control:

**People do not choose to be poor.**

- housing market conditions that place home ownership out of reach for most people, and set rents so high that many people are spending more than 50 percent of their income on housing, while others cannot access housing at all

- lack of services that enable people to work – for example child care and public transportation
- discrimination and inequality – racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, colonialism, etc. – that create traumatic experiences, place social and economic barriers in people’s way, and keep people marginalized (unemployed, unsupported, undervalued)
- social policies that set income assistance rates well below the poverty line, and that send messages about who among the poor is “deserving” or “undeserving” of help
- unanticipated personal circumstances for which there is an inadequate social safety net – for example, a health crisis that forces a person to stop working, family breakup, or an abusive partner.
- lack of consistent support for those with mental health or substance use issues
- a widening gap between rich and poor, caused by broader economic policie

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS POVERTY?

Poverty has an impact on whole communities. When the gap between wealth and poverty widens, communities become fragmented and exclusive, where some enjoy great privilege while others are excluded, isolated, and treated without dignity.

When too many people are struggling to make ends meet and cannot afford to live in our community, the work force is depleted and services like health care, food provision, businesses, and cultural and recreational activities suffer. Working people can no longer afford to live here and contribute to the community.



## THE GOALS OF POVERTY REDUCTION

- Sustain a healthy and diverse community with dignity for all
- Increase access to affordable housing, child care, food security, transportation, support services, opportunities, and social participation
- Eliminate social inequities and discrimination that marginalize certain groups of people, create traumatic experiences, place barriers in their way, and put them at greater risk of poverty
- Increase income supports to eliminate a hierarchy of deserving/undeserving poor and integrate a lens of social justice, rights and a decent standard of living for all
- Enhance the dignity, autonomy and choices of those affected by poverty
- Reduce shame and blame related to poverty
- Reduce the isolation and social exclusion that accompanies poverty
- Build a more cohesive social fabric with a shared collective commitment to ensure everyone in our communities can thrive

The National Advisory Council on Poverty's 2020 progress report on federal poverty reduction states:

The Government of Canada should incorporate an **equity lens** when it reviews, develops and implements strategies, policies and programs. It should ensure Canada's poverty reduction efforts work as well for those at the highest risk as for everyone else and meet the unique needs of marginalized populations, including immigrants, refugees, ethno-cultural and racialized groups, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ2S individuals and people experiencing homelessness.

*Building Understanding:  
First Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty,  
2021, p. 6*