



National Council of Welfare Statement  
on the release of

*Welfare Incomes, 2006 and 2007*

Delivered by  
John Rook, Chairperson  
and  
Glen Shepherd (porte-parole francophone)

Toronto  
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**Good morning everyone, and welcome.**

I'm John Rook, the Chairperson of the National Council of Welfare. My colleague, Glen Shepherd from Quebec, is with me to give remarks in French following my statement. The Council is a federal advisory body and, as our title says, our focus is national and our concern is for the well-being of Canadians, especially those living in poverty.



**John Rook, Chairperson of the National Council of Welfare, speaking at the Driftwood Centre in Toronto.**

Our newest report is about social assistance—a report full of statistics and evidence that action is desperately needed across this country.

But poverty has a human face and tells many powerful stories about the struggle to get ahead. Three women are with us today—Kamela, Nickiesha and Shazia—to give a glimpse of their struggle.

I have a story too because although I live in Calgary, I grew up, in poverty, not far from Toronto. But we decided to release our report here for quite a different reason than my roots.

We chose to be in Toronto knowing that Ontario is embarking on its Poverty Reduction Strategy. This is a daunting challenge and we want and need Ontario to succeed. Our report on welfare incomes, and our meetings with many community and government representatives in provinces that have these strategies, tell us it is an approach to solving poverty that can work.

Our report, *Welfare Incomes, 2006 and 2007*, shows that incomes for most Canadians on welfare were stuck far below the poverty line—but some cracked that line in 2007.

**In Quebec**, in the case of a lone parent with a pre-school age child, welfare income reached 100 % of the Market Basket Measure (MBM). We're using the MBM for the first time to compare with welfare incomes—it's a poverty line that takes into account the cost of meeting basic needs in different parts of Canada.

**In Newfoundland and Labrador**, the lone parent with a pre-schooler had a welfare income that slightly surpassed the MBM, at 103%. This is really groundbreaking because welfare incomes in Canada have historically been only a fraction of the real costs of survival.

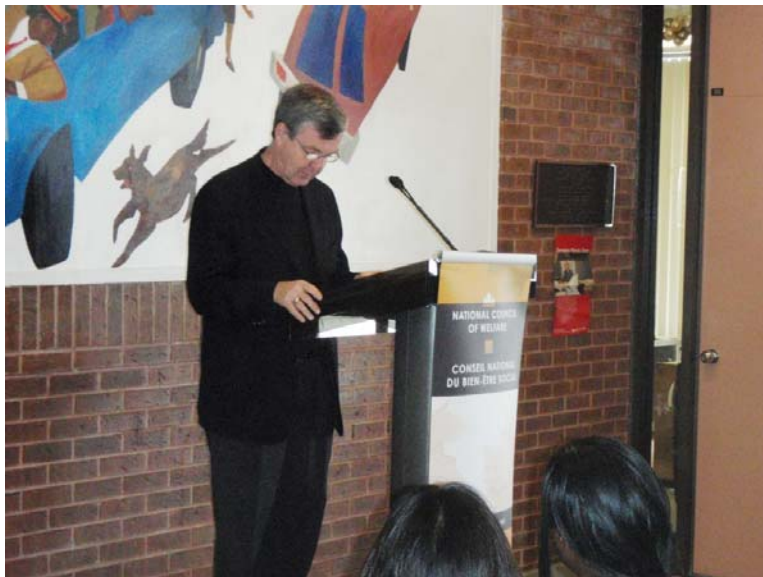
For these families, mainly moms and their children, it means the money they got from social assistance and federal child benefits was finally enough to give them a reasonable chance in life.

Even more encouraging, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador have **poverty reduction strategies** in place. These strategies mean that social assistance is part of a larger, integrated framework with links to child care, health, education and labour market policies. This can truly help people to get ahead.

Sadly, for our other cases on welfare—lone parents in other parts of Canada, couples with children, single employable people and single people with a disability, any good news is small.

Single employable people remained in the worst situations, receiving incomes ranging from a low of 26% of the Market Basket Measure to a mere 67% in the best of cases. This is far below any measure of poverty or decency.

The Council is also concerned about the maze of rules and regulations that can trap welfare recipients. All too often, it just discourages and even forbids people from helping themselves out of poverty.



**Glen Shepherd, porte-parole francophone of the National Council of Welfare**

You have to give up almost everything to get on welfare. And if you find a job, you can keep little or none of your earnings. The rules vary throughout the country, but our report details consistently how qualifying for welfare is a complicated, cumbersome and stigmatizing process.

We're going into some tough economic times. The National Council of Welfare is concerned that the number of Canadians facing hardship will grow.

It will be even harder to really break through and solve Canada's poverty problem, unless comprehensive, nationwide action is taken.

People on welfare aren't the only ones who may face new challenges from the coming downturn. There are also people who manage to leave the welfare system on their own, and others who can't qualify, have been cut off or won't sacrifice their assets or dignity to apply.

The lucky ones might get ahead. Others may be trading one form of poverty for another. That is not good news for Canada anytime, especially not now.

We, as Council members, do not have all the answers. But we are challenging ourselves and others to think more critically, boldly and creatively—and to work together.

We need a comprehensive, pan-Canadian strategy to solve poverty.

We need targets and timelines, a plan of action, accountability and measurable indicators. Many partners are involved and the federal government must also get on board. Canada is not unique. For any nation to solve poverty or foster prosperity there must be government action, political will and a real recognition of the human face of poverty.

Thank you.