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National Council
of Welfare

Conseil national
du bien-être social

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Solving Poverty – it actually can be done!

In a report to the federal government made public today, the National Council of Welfare (NCW) advises Canadian governments that a workable solution to poverty is within their reach and that Canada can have the kind of success that other countries are achieving.

“Whether solving poverty is approached as an issue of fairness, human rights or economic productivity, there are common elements that are working in different societies and they can work in Canada”, says Council Chairperson John Murphy, stressing that *“this is not a partisan issue but it is definitely political; we have the capacity and what we need now is the will to do it.”*

The report, *Solving Poverty: Four cornerstones of a workable national strategy for Canada*, highlights that Canada in general is out of step with important developments in preventing and reducing poverty. Many other countries, and two Canadian provinces, have had the same debates about the same issues, including how to measure poverty, but they have found ways—remarkably similar ways—to move on to action and to achieve measurable progress. They are bringing poverty levels down, replacing human misery with opportunity and building stronger societies in the process. The NCW thinks it is necessary and possible for Canada to do the same.

Solving Poverty’s four cornerstones focus on: 1) creating a national anti-poverty strategy with targets and timelines; 2) developing a coordinated plan of action; 3) ensuring accountability; and 4) establishing official poverty indicators. *“The Council believes most Canadians understand how practical this is”,* says John Murphy. *“We do it in our daily lives—if you are serious about a goal, you develop a plan to reach it, you put it in place and you assess how well it is working. You usually discover that it is not perfect so you learn and you get better as you go. You know things will not necessarily be quick or easy but you start anyway, otherwise you get nowhere”.*

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The NCW also found that governments may be underestimating the level of concern and knowledge Canadians have about poverty. Over 5,000 individual Canadians and more than 400 organizations responded to the NCW's questionnaire on poverty and income security. Across diverse demographic and income groups, respondents strongly agreed that governments should put a higher priority on fighting poverty and on the practical ways to do it. This does not surprise the Council. Two comprehensive NCW reports in 2006 showed that our tattered patchwork of programs is not working. The risk of poverty among children and working-age adults has remained stubbornly high over the last 25 years in Canada and some of the income losses for people living in deepest poverty have been staggering.

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The report and a background document with the statistical results of the questionnaire are available at <http://www.ncwcnbes.net>

The National Council of Welfare is an independent body established to advise the federal Minister of Human Resources and Social Development on issues of importance to low-income Canadians.

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