

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What do we mean by the term 'child poverty'?

Kids under the age of 18 years living in families with low income are considered to be in poverty. While Canada does not have an official "poverty line," Statistics Canada produces several measures of low income that are widely used to measure the rate of child and family poverty. Using the Low Income Measure (LIM) enables us to compare Canada with other industrialized countries. LIM is a fixed percentage (50%) of the median adjusted household income in Canada and is updated annually. LIM takes into account the size of the household. The 2012 LIM After-Tax for one parent and one child is \$23,755 per year.

2. Why does poverty exist in a wealthy country like Canada?

A lack of government action is a major contributor to poverty. Despite the House of Commons 1989 and 2009 resolutions to end child poverty in Canada, nearly 1 in 5 kids still live in poverty and there is no national strategy to end poverty. Child poverty has actually worsened since 1989, which speaks to a lack of government action on this issue. A 2012 UNICEF study shows that government action provides the foundation for a reduction of poverty in industrialized countries.

3. What causes poverty?

It is important to view poverty as a systemic and institutional problem beyond the power of an individual's ability to respond. Currently, the skyrocketing costs of living such as transportation, food, and especially housing in urban areas are exceeding the incomes of low income Canadians. Our low social assistance rates, child benefits, lack of employment opportunities and low minimum wages are all contributing factors to large-scale poverty.

4. Who is affected by poverty?

It is crucial to take into account that historically disadvantaged groups are disproportionately affected by poverty. In other words, those groups who have experienced systemic discrimination and injustice in society are more likely to experience poverty. Poverty impacts Canadians with disabilities, Canada's kids, Indigenous Canadians, single parents, racialized groups and new Canadians the hardest.

5. Why do certain groups experience poverty more than others?

Poverty can be linked to systemic and historical discrimination and must not be viewed as the fault of individuals. For example, Canada's Indigenous population experiences poverty at alarming rates. This can be linked to the traumatic history of colonization, residential schools and an over-representation within the child

welfare system experienced by current and past generations. Indigenous education, child welfare and housing infrastructure, to name a few, are grossly underfunded despite this historical discrimination. Racialized groups and recent newcomers face specific barriers due to racism and social exclusion, still very apparent in Canadian society. Acts of legislation, such as employment equity, provide more employment opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups. Many newcomers to Canada are highly skilled and educated but employers here do not recognize their international training and credentials.

6. Why do we think we can eradicate child poverty?

It has been proven repeatedly that good social policy, government intervention and available, convenient community resources can substantially decrease poverty. In Ontario, for example, the overall child poverty rate decreased by 9.2% or 40,000 kids and families between 2008 and 2011. This has been attributed to increases to the Ontario Child Benefit and the minimum wage. Countries can have low poverty rates while remaining globally and economically competitive. Studies have shown that countries with higher taxes, a devotion to strong social programs and investments in affordable housing have achieved reductions in poverty while maintaining high economic growth and GDP. Nordic countries have ranked higher in these studies than Canada.

7. Can we afford to eradicate poverty or end child poverty?

Poverty should be viewed as an economic concern as well as a moral concern. We often forget that poverty actually costs more to society than implementing policies that aim to eradicate poverty. For example, low-income people are more likely to experience poor health conditions due to a lack of adequate housing, nutrition or dental care. Studies have proven that it costs less to invest in social programs aimed to prevent poverty than the costs of treating the symptoms of poverty such as urgent health care, mental health concerns, shelter and the criminal justice system. It has been estimated that poverty costs Canada \$72 to \$86 billion per year. This includes potential loss of tax revenue due to the exclusion of low-income people from the labour market.

8. Is employment a pathway out of poverty?

Employment is not always a pathway out of poverty. Many of Canada's low-income population are working part time for minimum wages under precarious work conditions. For those who can find stable employment, it is not enough to offset the high cost of living. For example, two in five kids in Ontario are still living in a household with full time, full year work. This clearly demonstrates that stable employment alone is not necessarily a ticket out of poverty. Furthermore, a lack of affordable and available childcare is a barrier for single parents (very often women) seeking education, training or employment. Many people who experience poverty are unable to work due to a disability, and current disability rates are not enough to sustain families.

9. Why child poverty? What about women in poverty, homeless men, seniors in poverty?

Child poverty must be viewed within the greater context of poverty as a systemic issue that affects people of all ages. In short, kids experience poverty because their families experience poverty, and the roots of family poverty must be addressed if child poverty is to be eliminated. However, kids are particularly vulnerable to the effects of poverty. For example, kids are more vulnerable to health concerns due to inadequate housing and nutrition. Kids represent 37% of food bank users in Canada. Advocacy around child poverty has been strategically directed towards holding government accountable to their promise to end child poverty. In 1989, all parties in the House of Commons made a resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

10. How does poverty impact educational outcomes?

As important as they are, statistics cannot begin to convey the stark reality of child poverty. Teachers see first-hand the consequences of poverty in their classrooms and schools – students too hungry or too tired to concentrate; students who feel excluded because they can't participate in school programs and activities; students in low income families with two working parents struggling to pay the rent or buy food, often forced to turn to food banks. Poverty's negative impact on student learning and development is well established. According to the Canadian Education Statistics Council "family income can influence various developmental outcomes, academic results, and life transitions. For example, living in low-income circumstances may impede the school readiness of preschool kids, reduce the likelihood of success in educational achievement throughout the educational trajectory, reduce the ability to afford post-secondary education, and increase the likelihood of living in low income circumstances as an adult."