United Way Centraide Canada

Consultation Response
A Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy

June 30, 2017
United Way Centraide welcomes the invitation by the federal government for Canadians to contribute to a national Poverty Reduction Strategy.

United Way Centraide is Canada’s largest non-government funder of community and social services. Addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion is central to the United Way Centraide Movement’s mission to improve lives and build community by engaging individuals and mobilizing collective action. Motivated by a desire to help others and strengthen communities, Canadians donate over $500 million each year to local United Ways and Centraides.

Poverty reduction is a central purpose of our investments in strategies that reduce homelessness, improve child and youth outcomes and build strong communities. United Way Centraide invests in three key areas to help people move out of, or avoid, the cycle of poverty: housing stability, food security, and employment and financial stability.

Across Canada, the UWC movement brings together a broad coalition of supporters and partners from business (large and small), labour, non-profit organizations, and local communities. Together, the United Way Movement strives to identify long-term solutions in order to create opportunities for a better life for everyone in our communities.

In anticipation of the government’s call for engagement, United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC) formed an ad-hoc Poverty Reduction Strategy Working Group comprised of representatives from more than 25 local UWCs. In addition to contributing an extensive body of accumulated experience, the Working Group organized community conversations on poverty across Canada. The results of these consultations, found in the Appendix, have informed this submission to the federal government.

The factors contributing to poverty are varied and complex, and effectively tackling these requires action by many stakeholders, including governments, non-profit agencies, labour, business, faith groups, people with lived experience, indigenous people, and individual community champions.

United Way Centraide Canada frames the discussion about poverty in terms of promoting four thematic outcomes:

- **Opportunity** - equal access for all to take advantage of the opportunities and the services many of us take for granted, such as social supports, education and training, and health services. While equal opportunities cannot guarantee equal outcomes, it should enable everyone to strive for and reach their full potential. In a country as wealthy as Canada, equality of opportunity, coupled with sound public policies, create a powerful buffer against pervasive poverty, and the basis
for a vibrant economy. Housing, education, health, work and income remain the foundation on which equal opportunity is grounded.

- **Inclusion** - The World Bank defines social inclusion as the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society. People of all backgrounds must be able to take part in broader social life to benefit from and create culture, employment and recreational resources.

- **Reconciliation** - the legacy of colonial practices, and the particularly destructive impact of Residential Schools, shattered families resulting in intra-generational poverty and despair; conditions on too many reserves affront our moral convictions, while those living off reserve far too often face discrimination and hardship. There is a spiritual re-awakening among indigenous youth -- Canada needs to support indigenous communities as they and their members determine their place and future.

- **Prosperity** – a strong economy is essential for the wellbeing of the community, and addressing poverty. Canada's prosperity, however, needs to be shared more broadly. Too many Canadians are falling into poverty. Working hard and playing by the rules, and even a university degree, should but doesn't, free people from a life of poverty. The International Monetary Fund has found that "increasing the income share of the poor and the middle class actually increases growth while a rising income share of the top 20 percent results in lower growth; in other words, a society with an income floor raises the economic ceiling.

**The Legacy of a Prolonged Federal Absence**

Throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s, the federal government transferred substantial funds and tax points to the provinces to encourage adequate social conditions among its peoples. These actions evidenced Canada’s commitment to the United Nations’ International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article 11 of the Covenant recognizes "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”

Unfortunately, in the late 1980s and accelerating through the 1990s, successive federal governments fell away from this commitment to improve social conditions in order to pursue fiscal restraint.

Among other actions, in 1995, the federal government replaced the Canada Assistance Plan with the Canada Health Transfer and Canada Social Transfer. The CHST eliminated most federal standards while reducing yearly transfers by $7 billion. Some provinces took early advantage of the increased flexibility. In 1995, for example, the Ontario government cut social assistance benefits by over 20%, and cancelled all new affordable housing supply initiatives.

In 1996, the federal government downloaded social housing programs to the provinces and cities. In the absence of national leadership, the production of affordable housing declined sharply.
Communities, agencies and families directly experienced the negative impacts of this disengagement by senior levels of government. Visible homelessness skyrocketed, temporary food banks became permanent features, and poverty spread to once-middle class neighbourhoods. Paradoxically, unprecedented levels of private sector housing supply were accompanied by price increases far exceeding national income growth. The lack of affordable housing increased the gap between lower and middle-income households from those at the top.

Community Response: Local Strategies

In this vacuum of leadership, communities began turning to their own resources in order to address growing poverty and homelessness and improve the lot of others disadvantaged by changes in socio-economic conditions. Community development organizations including local United Ways and Centraides, Tamarack Institute and Vibrant Communities and others mobilized a diverse range of local actors - business, non-profits, those with lived experienced and municipal governments - to focus on creating solutions at the neighbourhood level. United Ways shifted their funding lens from assuring service levels to building capacity to drive community impact. Over the past decade, the result has been the emergence of locally defined poverty and homeless reduction strategies.

Many communities begin the process by researching local issues, identifying priorities, gathering data on impacts and making adjustments to improve outcomes. The nimbleness of this community-based approach allows responsive adaptation to changes in conditions and understandings of issues. For example, many local community-led tables began with a focus on homelessness, and then broadened to address underlying issues of poverty.

In Montreal, tackling poverty was placed into a broader context of social development, improving conditions and opportunities for all to reach their full potential. Neighbourhood tables, comprised of members from a broad swath, collaborated to identify the most pressing issues and develop sustainable strategies.

Montreal’s Success Network worked in twelve communities targeting schools to work with parents and partners in the health and social services system, the municipality, community organizations and the employment and business sectors in order to reduce the rate of school drop outs and to encourage drops outs to return to secondary schools. Better planning and coordination achieved a more powerful collective impact than isolated or silo programs. Graduation rates increased from 68% to 76%.

In Saint John, government, business, non-profits and neighbourhoods formed a leadership team to establish priorities, develop strategies and implement solutions. Targeting Saint John’s poorest inner city neighbourhoods, Living SJ has mobilized efforts to end generational poverty by removing the education, health and employment barriers to those who live in low-income neighbourhoods.

For Saint John, the development of a community hub offered one such solution. “Being poor is a full time job,” said one person, speaking to the need to travel from one office to another to maintain eligibility for benefits. The community hub in Saint John provides a one-stop centre by integrating government and community services under a common
roof, reducing the barriers for clients to find needed resources and complete the required paperwork.

Other locales also adopted grass-roots processes for developing community solutions. In Edmonton and Hamilton, the municipal governments provide leadership to an alliance of agencies, United Way and citizens to achieve a shared vision and identify local opportunities. In Saskatoon the United Way is quarterbacking efforts with others in the community to reduce poverty, including reconciliation with local indigenous populations. In many cases, provincial and federal governments are represented at community tables; in all cases, local leaderships predominate.

Multi-sectoral collaborations also work to keep poverty on a community's political, social and economic radar. Bringing together diverse partners creates synergies and help drive collective impact, strengthening community capacity to support positive systemic change. In addition, local solutions can pilot innovative projects that senior levels of government would not risk, but can sometimes be scaled or replicated. A side benefit is that integrated solutions can increase efficiency by not needing to report separately to different funders in different ways.

All provincial governments, except for British Columbia and Alberta, have developed poverty reduction strategies, working with the building blocks created by local communities. Similarly, a supportive federal framework needs to nest bottom-up community strategies.

**Re-establishing a Supportive Federal Role**

The federal government has powerful tools through which to address national issues. In its 2016 budget, the federal government used tax expenditures, income transfers, and program spending to begin the process of undoing twenty years of neglect.

The reformed Canada Child Benefit provides a significant tax-free monthly payment for families with children less than 18 years of age. The Guaranteed Income Supplement was increased for the most vulnerable single seniors. The commitment of over $30 billion to housing, including on reserve, is much needed. These are important markers for which we can be appreciative. But much more needs to be done, and can be done.

For example, the last two budgets included unprecedented levels of federal infrastructure investments. These investments, if implemented intelligently, can become a powerful vehicle for leveraging additional assets and opportunities, which benefit the host community and support poverty reduction.

**Bottom Up Meets Top Down – Building on Community-led Initiatives**

In recent consultations (see Appendix A) United Ways throughout Canada heard that communities and agencies expect a renewed federal presence in poverty reduction will respect the hard work and gains created at the local level over the past 25 years. The good news is community partnerships among businesses, anchor institutions, agencies and persons with lived experience have mobilized a non-partisan voice that provides a "safe place" for new federal initiatives to situate, expand and thrive.
Some communities have a long track record in community partnerships; others are newer to it and others have yet to begin. UWCC concludes that the results achieved demonstrate how community-led approaches are critical for successful tackling poverty.

Consequently, new federal initiatives must encourage building capacity at the community level. A workable model could emulate the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), which was designed to support communities in building the capacity, resources and incentives to develop and implement comprehensive strategies to reduce homelessness.

**Recommendation 1:** That the federal Poverty Reduction Strategy recognize and support community-led initiatives by recognizing and building the capacity of local groups to develop and pursue local poverty reduction strategies and solutions.

**Sustaining Public Support**

United Way Centraide Canada envisions a time when the concern for inclusion and shared prosperity for all Canadians moves beyond partisan advantage or shifting policy agendas. In order to entrench social development as a consensus priority, similar to the status of universal health coverage, national leadership needs to quarterback our progress.

The success of many local partnerships - agencies, businesses, United Way and municipal governments and those with lived experience - in creating local tables to mobilize their communities to tackle poverty suggests a relocatable and scalable model for a national oversight body.

Like community tables, this new body needs to be non-partisan, at-arms-length from government, and be broadly representative of the community, in order to garner public confidence for its efforts. Those with lived experience in poverty and, particularly, indigenous peoples, must be seated at the table.

The vital functions need be adequately resourced:

- Act as the public champion for poverty reduction
- Establish measures and benchmarks for poverty reduction in Canada
- Monitor and report on progress against the PRS's goals using established benchmarks and other indicators
- Recommend policy solutions and refinements designed to reduce poverty and promote prosperity and social inclusion.

UWCC has commissioned a separate paper by Michael Mendelson that examines the structure and functions that would best serve this purpose.

**Recommendation 2:** That a new independent national body, similarly structured to local community tables, with diverse leadership, be established to champion poverty reduction and report on progress.
Housing and Income Support

Poverty is not an equal opportunity disabler – gender, race and other factors bear heavily and need to be acknowledged in designing responses. Children in lone-parent families, persons with disabilities and unattached individuals are three times more likely to experience poverty. Indigenous people living off reserve and recent immigrants are twice as likely as average Canadians to be poor.

The cross-Canada consultations, hosted by United Ways, asked about the top three issues that need be addressed in poverty reduction strategies. There was broad consensus that income security topped the list. Housing affordability was identified as the key component of income security.

Indeed, people detailed how the high cost of rent forced them to make significant lifestyle compromises, like eating less healthy foods or seeking help from food banks, and skimping on necessities like prescription medication.

Other issues included mental health, food security, employment and training, childcare, early childhood education, transportation, and community infrastructure. However, housing and income were the clear priorities.

The province of Ontario is piloting a basic income pilot in three municipalities, targeting the working poor and social assistance recipients. This initiative will enrich information about impacts on education and training, employment in an increasingly precarious ‘gig economy’, health, community functioning and costs. The federal government as well as the proposed national body should watch these developments with great interest.

Yet, immediate action is required to relieve the housing affordability challenges confronting our most disadvantaged citizens. UWCC convened the National Housing Collaborative (NHC) – an alliance of non-profit and private housing associations and major foundations – which called for bold steps now to address housing affordability in Canada. NHC recommended introduction of a portable housing benefit (PHB), provided directly to renter households in core need, to increase the affordability of rental housing, and reduce homelessness.

Since a lack of money sits at the root of housing affordability challenges and homelessness, UWCC believes that a PHB should become a common element underpinning Canada’s National Housing Strategy and Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Federal funds can be targeted to those with the greatest need and be done within budgetary constraints. As fiscal room allows, a PHB could expand to help more low-income renters. Eventually a mature PRB could also be folded into a successor income initiative. It’s not one or the other; it’s a matter of first steps.

Recommendation 3: That the federal government introduce a portable housing benefit to reduce "housing poverty".

Community Benefits

Governments at all levels in Canada are investing about $500 billion in major infrastructure projects over the next decade. These investments can create opportunities
to address poverty and social development by leveraging additional benefits for the host communities in which infrastructure projects are situated. The potential benefits include employment, training, apprenticeship, local supplier, social procurement, or various community amenities.

For example, some indigenous communities have successfully negotiated community benefit agreements with mining and oil sands development companies. In Toronto, the provincial Metrolinx has included community benefit agreements to create employment, training and apprenticeships for priority groups. Other benefits could include drop-in centres, playgrounds and parks. We need to lever our investments in physical infrastructure to maximize social outcomes and community asset building.

UWCC has commissioned economist, Armine Yalnizyan to prepare a separate paper discussing community benefits within a poverty reduction context.

**Recommendation 4:** That Canada’s infrastructure initiatives include a poverty reduction lens and mechanisms that enable communities to organize and secure specific social benefits by incorporating these into the contracting process.

**Respecting Indigenous Voices**

One of the major themes in the UW consultations was the imperative to include persons with lived experiences. Most concisely, “Nothing about us, without us”.

This is particularly true for indigenous communities and individuals. The injustices committed against indigenous peoples have created unacceptable impoverishment and marginalization. To rebuild trust, we must acknowledge these wrongs, and listen and learn from those who have suffered.

Prior to the arrival of the European settlers, the rich cultural and spiritual practices of the indigenous people allowed them to thrive and survive for thousands of years in this harsh climate. There is a new spirit of resilience and renewal as indigenous peoples seek to reclaim their rightful place among us. The numbers of indigenous persons with post-secondary degrees is unprecedented. With one of the highest birth rates, the indigenous population is poised to become a major source of skilled workers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders.

Whether on- or off-reserve, indigenous peoples are claiming the space allowing them to recreate the socio-economic conditions necessary to realize their full potential. Canada is largely populated by citizens with a diverse set of ethnicities from around the world. It is time to acknowledge past wrongs and reconcile with the cultural values of those whose lands we co-inhabit.

**Recommendation 5:** That the PRS recognize the disproportionate poverty of Canada’s indigenous peoples, and incorporate and build on the TRC’s calls to action.

**Building Social Infrastructure**

211 is an easy-to-remember information and navigation system connecting people to a wide range of social services, community resources and health-related programs. 211
telephone service is available in over 150 languages, including those of Indigenous peoples on a 24/7 basis. United Way is a proud founding partner of 211 in Canada, providing funding and support.

Currently, 65% of Canadians can use 211 online and telephone channels to help them find needed services. Increasingly, 211 is also accessible via text and social media channels. Expanding 211 service to all Canadians is now within reach and is achievable with the partnership of the federal government.

211 and community hubs are effective means of bringing citizens and services closer together, with the goal of making a serious impact on poverty by offering ongoing support to those seeking to transform their lives.

As well, 211 business intelligence capacity is increasingly recognized as a major contributor to system planning. Caller and internet data acts as a social barometer, offering a unique set of social indicators on a virtual near-time basis. Its ability to monitor shifting signals in need patterns can be organized as data sets for analysis about trends and progress. Its database of service providers has been used by planners to reduce the hopscotch nature of service development and delivery.

211’s infrastructure is increasingly being leveraged to generate even more impact. The newest 211 social innovation is a more intensive, and targeted service for persons at greatest risk. With funding from Green Shields Canada Foundation 211 successfully modeled a deeper support relationship with working poor households to improve health outcomes by increasing access to health supports. In the U.S., the United Way of Houston is using 211 to lift single moms out of poverty through a program of proactive ongoing outreach, life coaching, and wrap-around support.

UWCC proposes 211 develop and deploy across Canada an enhanced support service, similar to case management, addressing individuals and families in poverty. Persons with at risk poverty factors would be invited to participate in a service offering assessment, and follow-up on a case basis. Building on its social capital of data and service, this enhanced service would provide an 24/7 intensive resource via multiple communications platforms – text, social media, telephone – for low-income individuals and families to find the solutions to take them to the next step and transform their lives. The support worker would have access to the full history of the person's referral history in order to provide the most effective next step.

Recommendation 6: That the Federal government partner with UWCC and Municipalities to extend 211 service to all Canadians, and launch a new enhanced support service, targeted at helping lift Canadians out of poverty and/or homelessness.

**A Time to be Bold**

Pervasive poverty has a negative impact on us all - it affects children, their nutrition, and their ability to learn and grow. It makes our communities less inclusive; it drives up costs for health care and infrastructure; and it limits our country’s economic growth and competitiveness.
When all Canadians have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to society, to feel included in the fabric of our communities and to achieve their dreams, our country becomes more prosperous. We all share the benefits associated with improved health, happiness and well-being.

Canadians believe that we are obliged to help others in our communities. Bold action by the federal government would be a game changer. Together, we can build a stronger Canada. Together we are possibility.

**List of Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1**: That the federal Poverty Reduction Strategy recognize and support community-led initiatives by recognizing and building the capacity of local groups to develop and pursue local poverty reduction strategies and solutions.

**Recommendation 2**: That a new independent national body, similarly structured to local community tables, with diverse leadership, be established to champion poverty reduction and report on progress.

**Recommendation 3**: That the federal government introduce a portable housing benefit to reduce "housing poverty".

**Recommendation 4**: That Canada’s infrastructure initiatives include a poverty reduction lens that enables communities to contract for specific social benefits by incorporating these into the contracting process.

**Recommendation 5**: That the PRS recognize the disproportionate poverty of Canada’s indigenous peoples, and incorporate and build on the TRC’s calls to action.

**Recommendation 6**: That the Federal government partner with UWCC and Municipalities to extend 211 service to all Canadians, and launch a new enhanced support service, targeted at helping lift Canadians out of poverty and/or homelessness.
Appendix A: Voices from the community

United Ways and Centraides from across Canada convened community conversations – most during the week of April 24th – to take the community’s pulse on Poverty using a common set of questions. The reports from these community conversation helped inform and ground UWCC’s submission.

Question A. Propose a guiding vision for Canada’s Poverty Reduction Strategy. Describe what success will look like in your community, and how it is best assessed and sustained.

Many of the people United Ways and Centraides convened, identified the elimination of poverty as the ultimate guiding vision, and viewed poverty reduction as important first step towards achieving that goal. This bolder more ambitious goal was seen as being in keeping with Canada’s values, and enabling people of all backgrounds to participate in their communities as full citizens.

Consistent with this, many cited the need to shift the focus from what helps families survive to what makes them thrive in a rapidly changing world.

"Everyone is entitled to the realization of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for their dignity and well-being… healthy and vibrant communities where basic needs are met and people are empowered to participate fully in community life.”- United Way of Halifax and Region

"The fight against poverty must be able to convey a vision and clear, precise and coherent objectives to reduce both prejudice and social inequalities, social exclusion and poverty.”- Centraides of Quebec

"Children, families, and individuals contribute to our community, creating a country where we all prosper.” - United Way Greater Saint John

Similarly, setting clear goals was identified as key to advancing any strategy. United Way of Calgary and Area suggest a vision with four key benchmarks:
• Every one in Canada has the income and assets needed to thrive
• All Indigenous people are equal participants in Canada’s prosperous future
• All communities in Canada are strong, supportive and inclusive, and,
• Everyone can easily access the right supports, services and resources.

In both United Way of London-Middlesex and Elgin and United Way of Windsor-Essex County consultations, people suggested the goals should be to eliminate poverty within the next 20 years. Acknowledging the challenge one participant noted “20 years will be difficult, but it is tougher to live in a community with poverty.”
What Success would Look Like

While recognizing that adequate incomes were fundamental to reducing poverty, a common thread among participants was an understanding that poverty is multi-dimensional in nature.

"Success would be a Canada where no one is hungry, forced to homelessness or unemployed . . . every citizen in Canada has the right to human dignity, which includes affordable access to: healthy food, safe housing, timely healthcare, post-secondary tuition, good jobs, efficient transit systems, free recreational and leisure activities to enjoy a quality standard of living". - United Way of Toronto and York Region

United Way of Winnipeg concludes that an effective strategy must include investments in addressing early and underlying causal factors, rather than "downstream problems" in health, justice, child welfare and other systems.

"Complete eradication of homelessness, ...a basic or guaranteed income for Canadian citizens". - United Way of Greater Victoria

The importance of measurable results was also highlighted by many. For example, United Way of Calgary and Area identified:

- Reductions to: crime rate, untreated mental health issues, addictions, domestic violence, food banks and shelter usage, unemployment
- Increases to: earnings, life expectancy, educational levels, social mobility, affordable housing, access to nutritious foods and prescriptions,

How Best Assessed and Sustained

United Ways believe that meaningful data must form the foundation for enduring, sustainable strategies. Longitudinal data is recognized as a superior means of measuring outcomes realized only over the longer-term (e.g. employability or social mobility.) Shorter-term measures are also important to indicate activity levels (e.g. high school graduation rates.) 211’s real-time data can support this business intelligence function by reporting on inquiries on an immediate or daily basis or as long as comparison of annual results.

While proven initiatives require core funding, innovative approaches require an evaluation framework to ensure that resources are directed to the most effective programs.

Participants in Calgary and Halifax suggest that national measures of success need to be sensitive to regional variations. Large communities may have more resources than smaller ones. Rural and remote areas face more severe issues for affordability in housing and food, while transportation obstacles prevent full access to necessary health and social services.
Several communities noted that partnerships must be at the very heart of any proposed strategy. The Government of Canada’s poverty reduction strategy should recognize that working in silos is not effective, and stressed the need to align its work with pre-existing community strategies.

“We need to leverage and expand funding towards effective solutions while disinvesting in those that do not show impact. These investments decisions must be insulated from political interference.” - United Way Greater Saint John

Centraide of Greater Montreal reports that the de-centralization of many provincial ministries has created greater opportunities for cross-sectoral approaches to local issues. This strengthening of communities supports them in their collective aspirations and helps to counter silos. The impact of their resolve and resources on poverty reduction is multiplied.

A number United Ways cited the relationship between sustainability and accountability. Data analysis and reporting can helps ensure that investments are directed to places of greatest impact. Communicating the effectiveness of initiatives is critical to sustaining public support throughout periods of flux in policy agendas.

"National Poverty Reduction Strategy needs to be an accountable, multi-year strategy that is comprehensive and has funding attached to it, with clearly defined targets and annual reporting. Regular data collection, and scheduled monitoring and evaluation cycles will be essential to sustaining a successful strategy. Current circumstances call for 'boldness in action', a commitment to make changes, an openness to explore new ideas, and a shift away from the 'fear, competition and scarcity mentality'”. - United Way of Toronto and York Region

Several United Ways stressed the need to involve those with lived experience in poverty, not simply through consultation, but in the design, testing and adapting of initiatives and programs. "Bring them into the decision process".

**B. Identify successful local community solution(s) that might be adapted and replicated elsewhere to reduce poverty.**

Community agencies and United Ways are often the 'first responders' to emerging social deprivation. Many municipalities, large and small, have developed poverty reduction strategies, often in response to pressing homelessness. In many communities, agencies, United Ways and citizens have convened community tables through which to identify priorities, coordinate services and develop solutions.

Winnipeg’s focus on indigenous populations is a key part of broader reconciliation process with those facing the fewest opportunities and the worst conditions. United Way Winnipeg’s Aboriginal Relations Council, established in 2005, is building knowledge, relationships, capacity and engagement within the Indigenous community and beyond.
"Our region is both rural and urban. Driver programs allow for those who are living in rural areas/food deserts to come into urban areas to access health services, get to more affordable food options (grocery stores, food centres vs. having to buy from a nearby convenience store)." - United Way of Greater Moncton and Southeastern New Brunswick

The United Way Calgary's 'all in for youth program' has incorporated Success Coaches, transit subsidies, math tutorials and career forums to improve graduation rates among high school students, increasing their employability and income prospects. Calgary has also established community hubs and gardens, low-income transit pass, and a single-entry point for all municipally subsidized programs and services.

In Windsor and Essex County, local skills training and apprenticeship programs have improved access to the labour market; Computers for Kids refurbishes and recycling's electronic to increase access to computers by children and youth; using creative arts, such as drum circles, art, spoken word poetry, dance and music lessons have improved general well-being.

"Involved in a number of anti-poverty initiatives including basic income, social procurement, free tax clinics, job fairs, and host many different community engagement opportunities (e.g. community consultations for Ontario's Basic Income Pilot, and the federal government's Poverty Reduction Strategy)." - Halton Poverty Roundtable (anchored by UW of Halton & Hamilton)

In Saint John, the United Way was a partner in creating Living SJ which mobilized local communities, business to develop a common agenda, measure outcomes, share information while sustaining broad stakeholder involvement. One result has been an additional $10 million over 5 years from the provincial government to reduce intra-generation poverty.

One participant at the Winnipeg consultation observed that the OAS and CPP programs have worked well for our seniors. This form of income security should be available to families with young children. The need for a basic income was echoed at many other consultations.

United Ways have encouraged the creation of community groups to mobilize support for anti-poverty initiatives. Many municipalities across Canada have developed poverty reduction strategies, in league with these community partners. All provincial and territorial governments, with the exception of British Columbia and Alberta have announced poverty reduction strategies. Consequently, a federal poverty reduction strategy, building on these existing assets, could be a game-changer.
C. What are the top three issues in your community that Canada’s Poverty Reduction Strategy must address? To effectively reduce poverty, what initiatives or innovations must the Strategy include?

Top three issues:

The number one priority for most United Ways is income security, which for many includes affordable housing.

Affordable housing is key to providing secure environments in which families and individuals can establish stability and flourish. Housing benefits and anti-homelessness initiatives are important solutions to improving housing security. A portable housing benefit would provide immediate relief to families and individuals in deep core housing need and improve their housing choices.

In an era of precarious employment (the "gig" economy), income support, training and opportunities remain fundamental to poverty reduction by offering security for individuals while they obtain the skills required by a changing labour market.

In rural and remote communities, the lack of affordable transportation is a major obstacle to accessing work and training opportunities, healthy foods, health resources, etc.

Increasing consumer attention to food quality has increased awareness of the need for affordable, nutritious foods for all strata of society. Food security is emerging as a powerful theme in mobilizing poverty reduction efforts, not just in urban 'food deserts' but in our rural and remote communities.

United Way of Edmonton Capital Region is concentrating its efforts on education, income and wellness. Investment in early childhood education and increasing the rate of high school graduation lessens the chance of poverty. Adequate income improves food and housing security while financial stability and job skills restores hope and dignity. Wellness, meaning personal well being and safety, means easy access to services and sustained help to build stronger lives and healthy communities.

In short, adequate incomes and affordable housing top the list of concerns expressed in many consultations. A variety of other issues, such as food, mental health, early childhood, were also brought forward, reflecting the variety of local needs and concerns.

Required Initiatives for PRS

Changing economic conditions and labour markets have eliminated several rungs in the ladder to success. New responses are needed, grounded in local conditions and community assets. The voices of those with lived experience in poverty, especially indigenous persons, must be empowered.

"In the past, traditional pathways out of poverty allowed people to find their way out. Today, these pathways are not working anymore. Increasingly, education doesn’t always
lead to decent jobs, jobs don’t lead to economic stability, and social supports are not meeting basic needs. An effective National Poverty Reduction Strategy needs to address the root causes of such issues and be embedded to ensure access to both choice and opportunity. It must address immediate needs, and generate pathways to prosperity.” - United Way Toronto and York Region

A key goal should be citizen empowerment. A large number of United Ways emphasized the need to include persons with lived experience of poverty, giving the marginalized a voice to re-balance needed programs and priorities. Indigenous participants were especially insistent about the need to respect socio-cultural norms including their healing processes.

"Nothing about us without us.” - participant at Calgary consultation

United Way Greater Victoria emphasized the need for early intervention and prevention to break the cycle; include the voices of those with lived experience; improvements to living conditions on reserves; EI needs strengthening for workers in the new labour market.

Halifax noted that public education is vital to broaden understanding and support of solutions. Commitment from citizens, the private and non-profit sector and all levels of government will strengthen the needed political will.

Several United Ways identified that sustained core funding for proven initiatives leads to better and more lasting outcomes. Enduring strategies must be based on meaningful data and processes developed to measure outcomes and share information amongst all levels.

Other Issues

Poverty is not simply a matter of individuals and families; it has neighbourhood and demographic elements that result in broader deprivation and isolation. Many United Ways drew attention that available community and social services are difficult to find and that navigating complex systems presents a serious obstacle for newcomers, indigenous peoples and others experiencing social isolation.

"Deep geographic concentrations of generational poverty. Social subcultures and physical ghettos result in co-occurring social challenges that become very difficult to untangle (high incidence of addictions, violence, homelessness and substandard housing, high teen pregnancy, low education, low workforce participation) and result in few aspirations.” - United Way Greater Saint John

Many United Ways identified the need for reconciliation with Canada’s indigenous peoples. Historical practices of colonialism have hampered the potential of indigenous peoples, as has lack of access to spiritual and cultural resources.
"Reconciliation needs to focus on providing the deep 'work' required to help heal the fracturing of indigenous peoples." - United Way of Greater Victoria

"Healing should be done in a holistic way through song, dance, storytelling, formal education and other ways." - Indigenous elders at a healing circle with United Way of Calgary

"The indigenous population is very young and growing rapidly. This presents an opportunity to expand the focus of settlement services to those coming to urban areas from reserves. Underfunding on reserves has been well documented with regard to child welfare, education and health and basic needs such as housing, water and food." - United Way of Winnipeg

Another concern was the need to improve access to services.

The United Way of Greater Victoria noted that many in poverty do not know how to access services that the rest of us take for granted, e.g. banking, medical coverage, or completing application processes. Halifax Region concluded that some form of navigation support is required to connect citizens with the services they need to participate fully.

"Community hubs were identified as crucial to reducing poverty. Hubs provide a space for people to connect to reduce social isolation, enhance service provision, and develop resident leadership. ...provides a crucial community space for residents ... to gather, and has a crucial role in addressing food security in the community." - United Way of Halifax Region,

Several United Ways, including Toronto-York Region, Edmonton and Moncton, also identified community hubs as a solution for urban neighborhoods. Community hubs improve access to essential services while promoting social inclusion, community cohesiveness and development of local leadership. Community hubs can take a variety of forms, including community and seniors' centres, schools, libraries, etc.

The Centraide of Greater Montreal emphasized that 211 is of particular importance to those lacking familiarity with the social context, including the older elderly, the functional illiterate, and immigrants lacking French or English language skills.

211 is a proven means to connect people with the services they need and to support efforts to reduce poverty and homeless. 211 and community hubs complement each other in linking individuals and families to the broader community.

Poverty reduction is not simply a matter of delivering income supports and support services to individuals and households. Poverty is concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, which often lack social infrastructure such as community hubs. Intragenerational poverty requires special initiatives to break the cycle of hopelessness and dependency. Immigrants, refugees and indigenous people need settlement services in order for them to adapt to life in Canada’s urban centres.