

Hannah Bell
MLA

CONSULTATION DRAFT

POVERTY STRATEGY AND ELIMINATION ACT

BILL NO.

2021

WHEREAS poverty is a primary social determinant of health;

AND WHEREAS poverty is a complex issue and requires bold and creative approaches to understand and address the real causes and consequences of poverty in Prince Edward Island;

AND WHEREAS there is a need to establish clear definitions and measures of poverty in PEI, so as to set appropriate legislative and policy targets;

AND WHEREAS there is significant expertise available from community organizations that have studied this issue and can provide invaluable insights, analysis and data;

THEREFORE BE IT ENACTED by the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows:

PART 1 - INTERPRETATION

1. Definitions

(1) In this Act

- (a) **“children”** means persons under 18 years of age;
- (b) **“chronic homelessness”** refers to the condition of a person who is currently experiencing homelessness and

- (i) has a total of at least 180 days of homelessness over the past year, or
- (ii) has had recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past 3 years, with a cumulative duration of at least 545 days;
- (c) **“Council”** means the Poverty Reduction Council established under section 5;
- (d) **“Minister”** means the Minister of Social Development and Housing;
- (e) **“PEI poverty rate”** means the poverty rate for the province measured under subsection 3(3);
- (f) **“poverty”** means the condition of a human being who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency or to facilitate integration and participation in society;
- (g) **“strategy”** means the strategy to reduce and eliminate poverty and increase social inclusion implemented under section 5;
- (h) **“youth”** means persons between 18 years of age and 24 years of age.

Chronic homelessness further clarified

- (2) Chronic homelessness includes time spent
 - (a) staying in unsheltered locations, such as public or private spaces without consent or contract, or places not intended for permanent human habitation;
 - (b) staying in emergency shelters, including overnight shelters for people experiencing homelessness, shelters for people affected by family violence, and emergency shelters for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation; and
 - (c) staying temporarily with others without guarantee of continued residency or the immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing, or short-term rental accommodations without security of tenure.

2. Purpose

- (1) The purpose of this Act is to guide the Government of Prince Edward Island toward a process of planning and implementing actions to combat poverty, prevent its causes, reduce its effects on individuals and families, counter social exclusion and strive towards a poverty-free province.

PART 2 – POVERTY REDUCTION

3. PEI poverty rate reduction targets

- (1) The following targets are established for the purpose of reducing and eliminating poverty in Prince Edward Island:
 - (a) by 2025 and for each subsequent calendar year,
 - (i) the PEI poverty rate will be reduced below the PEI poverty rate for 2019 by 25% among all persons,
 - (ii) the PEI poverty rate will be reduced below the PEI poverty rate for 2019 by 50% among persons under 18 years of age,
 - (iii) food insecurity among all persons will be reduced by 50%,

- (iv) food insecurity among children will be reduced to 0%, and
- (v) chronic homelessness among all persons will be reduced to 0%;
- (b) by 2030 and for each subsequent calendar year,
 - (i) the PEI poverty rate will be reduced below the PEI poverty rate for 2024 by 50% among all persons,
 - (ii) the PEI poverty rate will be reduced below the PEI poverty rate for 2024 by 100% among persons under 18 years of age,
 - (iii) food insecurity among all persons will be reduced to 0%;
- (c) by 2035 and for each subsequent calendar year, the poverty rate in PEI poverty will be reduced below the poverty rate for 2029 by 100% among all persons.

Additional targets

- (2) The Minister may establish additional poverty reduction and elimination targets for other years or periods, but any targets established under this subsection shall not be less stringent than the targets in subsection (1).

Poverty rate measurement

- (3) For the purposes of subsection (1), the poverty rate in the province shall be measured using the market basket measure published by Statistics Canada as the "Market Basket Measure" or "Canada's Official Poverty Line".

Food insecurity measurement

- (4) For the purposes of subsection (1), food insecurity shall be measured using the Canadian Community Health Survey published annually by Statistics Canada.

PART 3 – POVERTY ELIMINATION STRATEGY

4. Poverty elimination strategy

- (1) The Government shall
 - (a) implement a strategy to reduce and eliminate poverty and increase social inclusion across Prince Edward Island;
 - (b) establish or adopt poverty and social inclusion indicators to be used in measuring the progress of the strategy; and
 - (c) provide annual reports to the public on the progress of the strategy in accordance with subsection 7(2).

Strategy to address multiple needs

- (2) The strategy shall recognize that poverty has multiple causes, and be designed to address various needs, including but not limited to the need for
 - (a) quality, accessible education that develops knowledge and skills;
 - (b) training that prepares persons for employment;
 - (c) employment opportunities;
 - (d) income supports for persons who are unable to fully participate in the labour market;
 - (e) affordable housing and accessible housing;

- (f) mental health and addictions supports;
- (g) long-term supports for persons with disabilities;
- (h) supportive and safe communities; and
- (i) supports for strong and healthy families.

Recognition of higher risk groups

- (3) The strategy shall
- (a) recognize that certain groups face a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion; and
 - (b) ensure that programs and initiatives to reduce poverty and increase social inclusion are accessible to all persons who require them.

Principles

- (4) The strategy shall be based on the principles that
- (a) there is untapped potential in Prince Edward Island’s population that needs to be drawn upon by establishing supports for, and eliminating barriers to, full participation by all people in the province’s economy and society and, in particular, persons who face discrimination on the grounds of their race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or a disability;
 - (b) strong, healthy communities are an integral part of the poverty reduction strategy; their potential must be brought to bear on the reduction of poverty;
 - (c) not all groups of people share the same level of risk of poverty, there is heightened risk among groups such as immigrants, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and racialized groups;
 - (d) families must be supported so that they can play a meaningful role in the reduction of poverty and in promoting opportunity;
 - (e) all people in the province, including those living in poverty, deserve to be treated with respect and dignity;
 - (f) members of the province’s community’ particularly people living in poverty, are to be involved in the design and implementation of the strategy;
 - (g) sustained commitment to work together to develop strong and healthy children, youth, adults, families and communities is required to effectively reduce poverty; and
 - (h) the third sector, including non-profit, charitable and voluntary organizations, are integral to a poverty reduction strategy by delivering the programs and services that matter to people, by strengthening communities and by making a positive contribution to the economy.

Groups to be considered

- (5) In developing the strategy, the Government must consider the following groups:
- (a) children;
 - (b) youth;
 - (c) women and persons of all genders;
 - (d) Indigenous peoples;
 - (e) persons living with disabilities;
 - (f) persons living in rural communities;
 - (g) immigrants and refugees;

- (h) LGBTQ2S+ persons;
- (i) seniors;
- (j) persons and families working and earning low incomes;
- (k) persons living with or fleeing abuse;
- (l) persons living with mental illness or addiction;
- (m) Black persons; and
- (n) persons of colour.

Strategy to be coordinated

- (6) The strategy shall be designed to ensure that programs and initiatives to implement the strategy are coordinated across the Government.

Review

- (7) The strategy shall be reviewed and updated at least once every five years or at such times as requested by
- (a) the Minister; or
 - (b) the Council

Strategy to be publicly available

- (8) The Minister shall ensure that a detailed description of the strategy is published on a government website.

PART 4 – COUNCIL**5. Council on poverty reduction and social inclusion**

- (1) A council on poverty reduction and social inclusion, which may be referred to as the "Poverty Reduction Council", is established, and is to consist of at least 7 persons, but not more than 11 persons, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Responsibilities

- (2) The responsibilities of the council include
- (a) reviewing and providing advice to the Executive Council and the Minister on
 - (i) the content of the strategy,
 - (ii) poverty and social inclusion indicators, and
 - (iii) proposed programs, policies or initiatives;
 - (b) monitoring the implementation of the strategy;
 - (c) ensuring that programs, policies and initiatives of the Government to reduce poverty and increase social inclusion are coordinated and consistent with the strategy;
 - (d) facilitating community involvement in the development and implementation of the strategy; and
 - (e) assisting the Minister in the preparation of the annual report under section 7.

Chair of Council

- (3) The Council shall appoint a chair from among its members.

Meetings

- (4) The council shall meet at least four times each year, at the call of the chair.

PART 5 – BUDGET PROCESS

6. Role of strategy in annual budget process

For each fiscal year, the government shall

- (a) take the strategy into account when preparing the budget for that fiscal year;
- (b) prepare a statement that summarizes the strategy and sets out the budget measures that are designed to implement the strategy, and
- (c) table the statement referred to in clause (b) in the Legislative Assembly at the time of tabling the budget for that fiscal year.

PART 6 – ANNUAL REPORT

7. Annual report

- (1) Within six months after the end of each calendar year, the Minister, in consultation with the committee, shall prepare a report that describes
- (a) the actions taken to implement the strategy in that year; and
 - (b) the progress of the strategy using the poverty reduction and social inclusion indicators contained in the Schedule to this Act and any additional indicators prescribed by regulation.

Report to be tabled

- (2) The Minister shall table the report in the Legislative Assembly upon it being completed or, if the Assembly is not sitting at that time, within 15 days after the next sitting begins.

Referral to standing committee

- (3) When the report is tabled in the Legislative Assembly, it stands referred to the standing committee on Health and Social Development, or such other standing committee as the Assembly may order at the time.

Consideration of report by committee

- (4) The committee referred to in subsection (3) shall begin considering the report within 60 days after it is tabled in the Assembly.

Publication on website

- (5) When the report has been tabled in the Assembly, the Minister shall ensure that the report is published on the website on which the description of the strategy is published under subsection 4(7).

PART 7 – GENERAL PROVISIONS

8. Regulations

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations

- (a) prescribing indicators of poverty reduction and social inclusion for the purposes of this Act, in addition to the indicators contained in the Schedule to this Act;
- (b) determining remuneration for attendance at each meeting of the Council and reimbursement for expenses necessarily incurred by a member in connection with the work of the Council, and any other remuneration the Lieutenant Governor in Council deems appropriate; and
- (c) respecting any matter necessary or advisable to carry out the purposes of this Act.

9. Existing poverty reduction strategies

- (1) A poverty reduction strategy in effect at the time this Act comes into force shall remain in effect
 - (a) until the end date provided for that strategy; or
 - (b) until such other earlier time as the that strategy is ended.

Existing action plan is not a strategy

- (2) For greater certainty, *Belonging and Thriving: A Poverty Reduction Action Plan for Prince Edward Island (2019-2024)* is not a strategy for the purpose of section 4.

SCHEDULE

Indicators of Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion

Indicator	Source of Information
Market Basket Measure	Statistics Canada
Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET)	Statistics Canada
Availability of Licensed Child Care	Department of Education and Lifelong Learning
Number of children in care	Department of Social Development and Housing
Premature Mortality	Health PEI
Employment	Department of Economic Development, Skills PEI
Core Housing Need	Department of Social Development and Housing
Food Insecurity	Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey
High school graduation rate	Department of Education and Lifelong Learning
Income inequality	Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey
Literacy (reading skills)	Program for International Student Assessment
Numeracy (math skills)	Program for International Student Assessment
Chronic Homelessness	Department of Social Development and Housing

EXPLANATORY NOTES

SECTION 1 establishes definitions to be used for the purposes of the Act, including definitions of “children”, “chronic homelessness”, “Council”, “Minister”, “PEI poverty rate”, “poverty”, “strategy” and “youth”

SECTION 2 sets out that the purpose of the Act is to guide the Government in planning and implementing actions to combat poverty, prevent its causes, reduce its effects, counter social exclusion and strive towards a poverty-free province.

SECTION 3 sets out targets for reduction in poverty rates, food insecurity and chronic homelessness, for the periods 2025-29, 2030-34 and from 2035 on. It also provides that the Minister may establish additional targets and sets out how the poverty rate and food insecurity are to be measured.

SECTION 4 requires the Government to implement a strategy to reduce and eliminate poverty and increase social inclusion, to establish or adopt poverty and social inclusion indicators to be used in measuring the progress of the strategy, and to report progress annually to the public. The section also sets out the multiple needs that the strategy must address, a requirement for recognition of groups at higher risk, the principles on which the strategy is to be based, groups that must be considered and a requirement that the strategy be designed to ensure that programs and initiatives to implement it are coordinated across the Government. The Section also requires regular review and updating of the strategy and that it be published on a website.

SECTION 5 establishes the Poverty Reduction Council and how many members it may have and sets out its various responsibilities in the reduction of poverty. The section also provides for the choosing of a chair of the Council and a minimum of four meetings each year.

SECTION 6 sets out the role that the poverty reduction strategy must have in the province’s annual budget process.

SECTION 7 requires the preparation of annual reports on the strategy, their tabling in the Assembly, referral to a standing committee and consideration by that committee. The section also requires the reports to be published on the same website as the strategy.

SECTION 8 establishes regulation-making powers for the purposes of the Act.

SECTION 9 provides that any existing poverty reduction strategy in effect at the time the Act comes into force shall remain in effect until it is ended and specifies that an existing poverty action plan does not constitute a strategy under this Act.