MAKE POVERTY HISTORY MANITOBA
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Seeking One Manitoba: Dignity for All

Rally to End Poverty, October 15, 2026, Manitoba Legislature

On October 15, Make Poverty History Manitoba will bring people together to demand stronger action to reduce and ultimately end poverty in Manitoba. The Premier and the Manitoba government use the "One Manitoba" analogy to reject division and unite us during these challenging times. Nothing divides us more than the rich getting richer, and poor people getting left behind. **If we are truly One Manitoba, then no Manitoban should be left behind.** That is why we are seeking **One Manitoba: Dignity for All on October 15th.**

The rally takes place just two days before the United Nations' **International Day for the Eradication of Poverty**, observed every year on October 17. The United Nations established the day to recognize that poverty is not simply a matter of individual circumstances. It is an issue of dignity, human rights, social inclusion and public policy. The UN's history of October 17 emphasizes the importance of hearing people experiencing poverty and including them in the struggle to end poverty.

Make Poverty History Manitoba is rallying because **poverty is not inevitable**. Government choices about income, housing, employment, public services, and community investment shape whether people can live with dignity and fully participate in their communities.

You don't have to be poor to be affected by poverty. When tens of thousands of Manitobans can't find or afford housing, food, child care, or basic necessities, it puts more pressure on public services, creates more precarious communities, drives labour shortages, worsens health outcomes, and increases insecurity for families already one unexpected expense away from trouble.

The affordability crisis has hit people living below the poverty line hardest. Poor and modest-income families spend nearly every dollar on immediate needs—94.6 percent vs 55.7 percent among those in the top 20 percent, according to CCPA research. Accumulated price hikes in core necessities like shelter, food, and energy have permanently reduced lower-income families' disposable income.

Manitoba has made some important investments in recent years. The provincial government has introduced new supports for people with disabilities, increased the amount that people on assistance can earn before it is clawed back, invested in housing and homelessness initiatives, made child care free for those low-income families who have a licensed space, addressed the province's illegal clawback of the federal Child Benefit in 2023, and renewed Manitoba's poverty reduction strategy. But these measures have not gone far enough to uphold the human right to dignity during the affordability crisis.

For too many Manitobans, government income transfers leave people well below what it costs to live. The province has not fully reversed changes to Rent Assist made under the former Progressive Conservative government, including the move to a two-tier system that provides lower maximum benefits to people receiving income assistance than to other low-income renters. A recent CCPA analysis found that these changes continue to leave many low-income households with substantially less support than they would have received under the previous structure. While Rent Assist is indexed to 75% of the Median Market Rent, few housing units are available at that rate. Indexing an inadequate benefit does not make it adequate.

The same applies to income assistance. Manitoba's current Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) system provides a basic needs allowance, but the amounts remain far below the actual cost of food, clothing, household necessities, transportation and other essentials. **For example, the province's 2026 rates give a single adult receiving general assistance $245 per month for basic necessities, excluding shelter costs. This has been frozen for the past four years, resulting in a 9 percent loss of purchasing power due to inflation, so they have $25 less per month now than in 2022.**

EIA has many other problems. The amount does not cover the actual costs of healthy food, a cell phone, internet, a bus pass and utilities. Manitoba also has very low liquid asset caps. A new EIA or disability benefit recipient must use up their cash and savings, like GICs and RRSPs, until they have only $4,000 left. Other provinces have much higher limits. This forces people to use up a lot of their savings before they can get assistance.

People cannot escape poverty when the income floor itself is below the cost of living.

At the same time, Manitoba cannot address poverty simply by increasing individual benefits. Poverty is concentrated in particular communities and is connected to inadequate housing, unemployment and precarious work, food insecurity, barriers to education and child care, inadequate transportation, discrimination, poor health outcomes and a lack of investment in neighbourhoods.

This is why Make Poverty History Manitoba is calling for a broader approach. **Make Poverty History Manitoba invites the province to meet and partner with us, in the spirit of collaboration and co-creation, to work on the asks below.**

Poverty is a policy issue — and we can change the policies

Manitoba needs a human-rights approach to poverty reduction. Everyone should have access to adequate income, housing, health care, food, education and meaningful participation in community life. Indigenous rights must be respected as inherent rights, including through implementation of the United

Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. **Poverty reduction must support Indigenous self-determination and Indigenous-led solutions.**

Make Poverty History Manitoba is focusing on five priority areas:

1. Income security: Everyone should have enough to live with dignity.

Manitoba's income assistance system should be a bridge out of poverty — not a system for managing people in poverty. Food bank use in Manitoba has more than doubled since 2020, up over 150 percent. Make Poverty History Manitoba is calling for substantially higher EIA rates and a clear pathway toward a **livable basic income**.

In the immediate term, government should make the following changes to EIA:

- substantially increase EIA benefit rates and pay for the actual costs of utilities, a cell phone, internet and public transit;
- restore Rent Assist to a level that reflects the actual cost of housing, including increasing maximum benefits to 100 percent of CMHC's Median Market Rent;
- substantially increase the liquid asset exemption for all on EIA;
- eliminate rules that discourage people from working, studying or volunteering; and
- simplify eligibility and reduce administrative barriers, including a “one-stop shop” for Provincial income benefits; and
- Provide people transitioning off EIA Medical Barriers to Full Employment onto CPP disabilities two years of continued coverage.

2. Living wages and good jobs: Work should provide a way out of poverty.

A person working full time should not remain poor. While in opposition, Premier Kinew said: “I have never met anyone in Manitoba who feels it's fair that someone who works full time should have to live in poverty... We'll change that".

The 2026 living wage in Winnipeg is now $20.31 per hour, according to the most recent update published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Manitoba should make the minimum wage a living wage and establish a provincial **Living Wage standard**, progressively applying it to government-funded programs, contracts and services.

Government should also **strengthen employment standards and enforcement to cover precarious and gig workers, require predictive scheduling, require 10 paid sick days per year, expand opportunities for people facing barriers to employment, support social enterprises and ensure major public investments to create good local jobs.**

Community Benefit Agreements can ensure that major infrastructure and development projects generate local hiring, training, apprenticeships, Indigenous participation and community investment.

Manitoba's innovative social enterprise sector trains people with barriers to employment, creates jobs, strengthens local economies, and addresses social and environmental challenges while keeping wealth circulating in communities. **Targeted supports such as training dollars, procurement opportunities, financing, capacity-building and technical assistance could help social enterprises grow and deliver public value while reducing pressure on government programs.**

3. Social housing: Everyone has a right to a safe, affordable home.

Housing needs and homelessness continue to grow, not shrink, in Manitoba. **Manitoba needs a major expansion of social housing, along with adequate Rent Assist and stronger renter protections**. The Right to Housing Coalition's Action Plan outlines five pillars to solving Manitoba's low-income housing problems.

Research shows that 1,000 units per year are required for ten years to address the crisis. To date, the Manitoba government has committed to creating 350 units in 2024, 670 in 2025, and 215 in 2026. The Right to Housing Coalition recommends the province spend $150 million annually to repair and maintain the 35,000 units of public housing it owns, but it has committed less than half of that in each provincial budget.

Rent Assist should be part of the solution — but it cannot substitute for building enough social and non-market housing.

4. Community development: Invest in communities before problems become crises.

Some neighbourhoods experience concentrated poverty alongside inadequate housing, fewer services, limited employment opportunities, and barriers to education, recreation, and transportation. For example, the poverty rate in the inner city of Winnipeg is double that of the City as a whole. Research shows that place-based, community development initiatives can help neighbourhoods and communities improve health, wellbeing, belonging and reduce crime. Government needs to invest in communities before problems become emergencies.

Manitoba used to have Neighbourhoods Alive! (NA!), a community development program with various funding streams targeted to neighbourhoods in need. NA! was described in an Ekos evaluation as a "best-practice example of a comprehensive, community-led revitalization program." The Progressive Conservative government cancelled NA!, brought in "Building Sustainable Communities" funded at $25.7 million in 2022/2023. When the NDP government came in, it cancelled "Building Sustainable Communities" and brought in "From the Ground Up" at $13.5 million/year. **Manitoba should return to supporting adequately funded five-year, place-based community development plans** and NA!, in neighbourhoods experiencing concentrated poverty. These plans should bring together housing, employment, education, child care, health, recreation, public spaces, community safety, food security, transportation and community organizations.

This is also a crime-prevention strategy. Addressing poverty, homelessness and social exclusion means addressing some of the conditions in which crime and crisis can take root. Investments in stable housing, income security, youth opportunities, recreation, employment and strong community organizations can help prevent problems rather than responding only once they become emergencies.

5. A real poverty reduction plan: Set targets and be accountable.

Manitoba has poverty-reduction legislation, which requires a provincial poverty-reduction strategy. The legislation requires the government to maintain a long-term strategy, establish indicators, and publicly report on progress.

Manitoba's renewed **Pathways Forward s**trategy sets out a vision of a province where people can live in dignity and have access to education, health care, meaningful employment and supportive communities. The strategy states that Manitoba's government is committed to ensuring "no one is left behind." Yet, this poverty reduction strategy is targeted to only three groups (children aged 0 to 5, youth aging out of care, and seniors). Manitoba's poverty reduction strategy must work for all Manitobans experiencing poverty.

The next step is to make that vision measurable by including:

A clear poverty reduction target. Manitoba should commit to substantially reducing poverty within a defined period, with the goal of ending deep and persistent poverty. **A timeline.** The government should establish measurable milestones for 2027, 2030, and 2035. **A budget.** Every commitment should identify the committed amount and timelines. **Equity measures.** Progress should be reported for groups disproportionately affected by poverty, including children and youth, people with disabilities, lone-parent families, Indigenous Manitobans, newcomers, seniors, people experiencing homelessness, racialized communities and people living in high-poverty neighbourhoods.

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Dignity for All: Leaving No One Behind

The October 15 rally is about the kind of Manitoba we choose to build - one where everyone has their basic needs met before any regressive tax cuts are doled out.

How can we pay for it? The Manitoba government's gas tax cuts cost $340 million; PST cuts on prepared foods cost $30 million. These cuts did more for people who can afford cars and prepared foods than for those below the poverty line, who have to walk or bus, or who rely on food banks to survive. **Regressive tax cuts need to stop.** Manitoba's annual equalization payments have grown by about $1.53 billion since 2023–24. This provides the province with substantially more fiscal capacity to fund action on poverty.

The provincial government has taken some steps. But the persistence of poverty, homelessness and deep inequality tells us that more fundamental change is required.

Several provincial governments, including British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador, have increased income supports or targeted financial transfers for low-income residents during the affordability crisis. These measures include higher disability benefits, expanded rental assistance, increased social assistance payments and enhanced refundable tax credits.

A province cannot be affordable if people receiving income assistance cannot afford enough food. It cannot address homelessness if people lack access to affordable homes. It cannot address crime while leaving the underlying conditions of poverty and exclusion unaddressed. And it cannot be a serious poverty-reduction strategy without clear targets, timelines, investments, and accountability.

Poverty is not a personal failure. It is shaped by the choices we make as a society.

We can choose to build a Manitoba where everyone has enough to live with dignity, a safe, affordable home, meaningful opportunities, strong communities, and the supports they need to thrive.

Then we will be closer to One Manitoba.