

## Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction: Policy Brief – November 2008

### 2009 Ontario Government Pre-Budget Consultation

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction commends the Ontario government on their leadership and investments in supporting the most marginalized in our communities. We continue to encourage the Minister of Finance to invest in human capital and social resources despite these tough economic times as they are critical to both the short and long-term prosperity for Ontario.

- **Continued Commitment to the Ontario Poverty Strategy**

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction commends the leadership of the Government of Ontario in establishing the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction and dedicating resources to the development of an Ontario Poverty Strategy. Clearly the participation of thousands of Ontarians in community consultations and around collaborative tables indicates significant support for this policy direction. We believe that government plays a critical role in poverty reduction and alleviation. This role includes **reforming the rules** which keep individuals and families living in poverty, **investments** in the lives of children and their families, and investments in communities. Difficult economic circumstances impact the most vulnerable and marginalized more severely and leadership and investment is a critical support and lifeline to 1.8 million Ontarians below the poverty line.

- **Support for Cities and Municipalities**

Cities and municipalities are key economic drivers for government and a critical factor for citizens. However, most municipalities have limited abilities to generate additional resources during difficult economic circumstances and yet are the first impacted by increased citizen demand for support services and resources. The Government of Ontario has long recognized the importance of local government, however, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction emphasizes the need for directed support for cities and municipalities to weather the economic challenges we are facing.

- **Continued Investments in the Social Infrastructure**

Finally, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction requests that the Government of Ontario continue to invest in the social infrastructure of our province including support for those agencies and organizations which daily respond to the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. Across the province, thousands of volunteers and staff contribute tirelessly to the quality of life in Ontario. These volunteers and organizations look to the Province for continued leadership and investment.

## **2009 Ontario Budget Considerations**

Research conducted by the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction identifies that investing in the lives of children; youth and their families living below the low-income cut off will have a significant and positive impact. The Government of Ontario recognizes the importance of this investment through the investments and policy changes enacted in 2008 including the **Ontario Child Benefit** which can be accessed by Low-Income and Working Poor families.

We also commend the Government for its recent investments in the **Ontario Dental Benefit** and **social assistance rates**. The Hamilton Roundtable commends the Government of Ontario on these steps forward to support vulnerable families but we know that many low-income and working poor families live in precarious financial circumstances. We urge the Government of Ontario to consider a shorter timeline for the full implementation of the Ontario Child Benefit and to consider a stronger investment in social assistance benefits to build a stronger Ontario for our most vulnerable families. The Ontario Child Benefit is one of the strongest tools available to reduce child poverty in our province.

Finally, the Hamilton Roundtable believes that place matters. Investing in cities, communities and neighbourhoods is critical. Our poorest families often live in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods in communities. The Government of Ontario is a critical partner in ensuring that neighbourhoods and communities are healthy.

## **Specific Investments in Children, Youth and their Families**

Quality Early Learning and Parenting:

- Continued support and increased investment in the provincial Best Start Initiative and the Ontario Early Years Centre
- Commitment to implement the recommendations outlined in the three expert panel reports commissioned under the Best Start initiative
- Commitment to work with Best Start Networks and CMSMs/DSSABs to understand and plan for the transition to full-day JK/SK (which will have a huge impact on the current child care system)
- Expand and enhance the integration of programs directed at children and families in the early years with a particular focus on low-income and marginalized families; including increased investment in child care subsidies to assist CMSMs/DSSABs. Research proves that an investment in the 0 to 6 age range makes a significant impact on the child and their family.

Skills through Education, Activity and Recreation

- Increased access recreational activities by children in the middle years through before and after school programs; support for sports, recreation and the arts; and support to schools to increase their availability to the community.
- Reinvestment in community-based recreation infrastructure in communities.

Targeted Skills Development:

- Support for targeted training and mentoring programs for at-risk youth to increase their opportunities and attachment to the workforce. At risk youth traditionally fall between the margins in being able to access appropriate employment training programs. A unique pilot project is being undertaken in Hamilton through the Skills Development Flagship and community partners which provides at-risk youth with employment supports, mentoring and social supports to ensure employment success.

Employment:

- Continued support for new immigrants to obtain appropriate credentialing and access to employment opportunities which will increase the earning capacity of these families. In Hamilton, 50 % of new immigrants fall below the poverty line. Many of these individuals have skills and capacities which would strengthen the Ontario economy but are not able to access employment because of credential and Canadian experience barriers.
- To assist Ontario's working poor families; the Government of Ontario has identified increases in the **minimum wage** to \$10.25 by 2010. We acknowledge this commitment but know that even a \$10.25 minimum wage would continue to place many working families below the low income cut off. All working families should be able to benefit from their contributions to a stronger Ontario and a **living wage approach** will achieve this end. It will enable all Ontarians to work, build and dream about a positive future together.

Asset Building and Wealth Creation:

- Investment in increasing the affordable housing stock in communities and supporting low-income families to maintain their current housing status. In many low income neighbourhoods, families often move several times during the course of a year leading to increased costs to the family, disruption to the school system and disorientation within neighbourhoods. Supporting families to build assets including home ownership can have a significant impact on the stability of a family.

Respectfully Submitted:      Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction  
Hamilton Best Start Network  
School Aged Solutions  
Skills Development Flagship  
Affordable Housing Flagship  
Jobs Prosperity Collaborative

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