

## With job losses mounting, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction calls for “Leadership and Action” in Federal Budget

Hamilton: January 23, 2009

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is calling for leadership and action from all federal parties ahead of Tuesday’s anticipated federal budget.

The current economic downturn presents grave challenges for governments, communities and most significantly for the individuals and families who are first to be impacted. According to statistics just released, in Hamilton, Ontario Works applications for the month of December, 2008 were up 19.4% over December of the previous year. The City of Hamilton is also facing increased unemployment due to the changing economy as companies begin to adjust their workforces.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is urging the Government of Canada to address the unacceptable levels of poverty within Hamilton and across country through social investments by investing in people and in communities. “The federal government has an important and pro-active role to play in collaborating with communities to make strategic investments during this time of economic downturn” said Mark Chamberlain, chair of the Roundtable and a member of the National Council on Welfare.

Many of the investments identified require an integrated policy and program delivery approach between all levels of government which can be moved forward through the leadership of the Government of Canada. “The downturn in the economy provides an opportunity to explore innovative approaches” said Liz Weaver, Director of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

The Roundtable met with all local Members of Parliament this week and is strongly urging federal parties to support a number of “prosperity priorities” that would have an immediate and significant impact for Canadian families and encourage the expansion of the economy. These priorities include:

- Reform of the unemployment insurance program to ensure unemployed workers in Hamilton can access benefits and skills development programs (as a result of new eligibility guidelines, currently in Ontario only 30% of people who are unemployed can access EI benefits)
- Support for a national housing strategy and infrastructure investments in affordable housing through capital repairs and retrofits to Hamilton’s deteriorating social housing stock
- Support for a national early learning and child care strategy and renewed investments in childcare to support families maintain attachment to the workplace (close to 900 families are on a waiting list for subsidized child care spaces in Hamilton)
- Investing in skills training for youth and enhancements to the federal youth summer employment program
- Supports for new Canadians and aboriginal populations to align programming and break-down employment barriers
- Investing in municipal infrastructure including much needed repairs to many of Hamilton’s 78 recreation centres to support youth and seniors living in poverty
- Investing in Ontario cities and their workforces through the creation of the “Southern Ontario Economic Diversification Fund” to assist communities create jobs and stimulate local economies.

Over 3.4 million Canadians including 89,000 Hamiltonians live below Statistics Canada's low income cut-off.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is a cross-sectoral community table strategically focused on the impact of poverty in Hamilton through the aspiration of 'making Hamilton the best place to raise a child'. The Roundtable works collaboratively with the City of Hamilton, community partners and citizen leaders to address the root causes of poverty through investments in children, youth and their families.

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Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction

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