

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget

By the Antigonish Poverty Reduction Coalition

August 2020

Recommendation 1: That the government implement a targeted basic income guarantee for low-income working-age adults and persons with disabilities that provides a livable support for those not being served by current programs already in place. We recommend that the government provide funding of \$4.6 billion annually or approximately \$1800-\$2000/monthly for the targeted basic income guarantee program.ⁱ

Recommendation 2: That the government, through the National Housing Strategy and along with provincial/territorial, municipal governments, and Indigenous communities, ensure that funding previously allocated for modernizing and building affordable housing in smaller communities is fast-tracked to meet the immediate needs. We recommend that the assessment of not for profit, smaller community housing organizations need to be assessed with appropriate criteria reflecting the rural and regional context as opposed to being assessed nationally along with for-profit developers. In addition, we support the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommendation that the government create “300,000 new permanently affordable and supportive housing units over 10 years and [provide] enhanced rental support for low-income Canadians.”ⁱⁱ

Recommendation 3: That the government fully support a universal, accessible, high-quality child care program. We join the CCPA in calling for a \$1 billion investment in child care to help parents (mostly mothers) get back to work.

Recommendation 4: That the federal government collaborate with provinces and territories to develop a funding framework that would fully support affordable rural transportation systems.

Recommendation 5: That the government enact a national minimum wage and set a national living wage standard that is indexed to the Consumer Price Index.

Established in 2010, the Antigonish Poverty Reduction Coalition (APRC) brings together organizations, groups and individual community members committed to alleviating poverty in Antigonish Town and County. Our mission is to reduce and eliminate poverty by working with communities to address the root causes through advocacy, education, and organizing for collective action. We have a vision of healthy and inclusive communities where everyone is able to participate fully and has access to opportunities and support to live with dignity and choice, free from inequality and poverty.

A significant proportion of the people who access our member organizations' services and supports live on low income, which often renders them socially isolated, marginalized, and profoundly disempowered and discouraged. In addition to poverty, experiences of various traumatic and stress-inducing situations are prevalent here, such as sexualized violence, domestic violence, racial discrimination, mental illness, addictions, disabilities, and chronic health conditions. It is unusual for someone seeking assistance to present with only one of these conditions, and it is hard to overstate the difficulty of dealing with many simultaneously. Public policies and programs that are designed to address them are far from adequate.

Our member organizations provide a wide range of services and supports to people in Guysborough and Antigonish Counties. We lead initiatives in community development and public education. Some of our organizations provide health care services and direct support for individuals in crisis or life transitions. We deal with a range of issues unrelated to income status, however, a major focus of our service work is helping individuals to cope with poverty. As part of this work, we advocate for people when systems fail them or treat them unfairly, and through the Coalition, we advocate for public policy changes that we believe would more effectively address poverty and other issues in our community.

Our region is a mainly rural section of Nova Scotia's northeastern mainland. There are small communities throughout the area where Europeans settled on land that has been home to the Mi'kmaq for thousands of years. Today, Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation is located 50 kms east of the town of Antigonish. There are also historic African Nova Scotian communities and Acadian communities in the region. The Town of Antigonish (pop. 5,000) is the regional centre for accessing services and other amenities. The combined population of the region is 27,000. The addition of some 4,000 university students between September and May profoundly affects the town's economy and real estate and rental housing markets.

After decades of outmigration, withdrawal of services, and economic decline, rates of unemployment are high in the region. Housing stock is aging and sometimes poorly maintained. We have high rates of chronic health conditions and disability, and low educational attainment.

The 2016 Census revealed the following:

	Antigonish County	Guysborough County
households with income below After-Tax Low Income Measure	14.1%	21.8%
official unemployment rate in May 2016	11.6%	18.3%

This is the context of the people served by our organizations. Addressing their unmet needs and filling the gaps in inadequate programs is the focus of much of our work.

Income security

The APRC urges the federal government to introduce a basic income guarantee as soon as possible. As advocates for people living on low income, our primary concerns are that people have an income sufficient to meet their basic needs, and that other income and social support programs remain intact. We advocate for a model which has a minimum threshold that begins above the market basket measure for poverty, so even someone earning no income has a livable income after the benefit.

While we advocate for a basic income program, we also recognize the continued necessity for other income and social supports for specific groups and communities. There is value in social programs that address needs such as emergency and transitional shelter, supports for people with disabilities, supports for seniors and older adults, early child care and education, and women's organizations.

Many proposals for designing a complementary basic income program have been put forward. Cost estimates and funding sources have been proposed. Pierre Stevens, a Dalhousie University Mathematics and Statistics professor (retired), argues that based on the cost estimates of the Parliamentary Budget Office the revenues could be raised through minimal changes to personal and/or corporate income taxes, sales taxes, or both – a simple matter of redistributing resources from the very well-off to the very poor.

We can easily envision the positive results of a basic income guarantee for the people who use our services. This would empower them to participate in their community and contribute to the local economy. Renters could choose from a better selection of accommodations (though further affordable housing is desperately needed - see below), and the burden of food insecurity would be lessened. Local volunteers and donors could instead focus on promoting human well-being and betterment of society, rather than simply helping desperate people scrape out an existence. There can be no doubt that health and productivity would improve, as would the quality of life for everyone, and the local economy, as was strongly suggested by the Manitoba "Mincome" pilot.

Much research on reducing the polarization of wealth and income illustrates the benefits to the entire society. To not do this and to expect desperately impoverished people to continue to suffer needlessly seems completely irrational and immoral in our highly developed and wealthy country, especially since we have the resources and the administrative capacity to introduce a basic income.

Housing

Much of the need for affordable, subsidized housing development in our area has been ignored by governments. Apart from a flurry of public, social, and cooperative housing development in the 1970s and 1980s, very little has been done to help people who cannot afford regular market housing. Nova Scotia's housing stock is among the oldest in Canada, especially its rural housing stock. As the need cried out for affordable housing solutions, development of new public housing stock has been stalled for decades. Some of the existing buildings are in desperate need of renewal, repair, or replacement. There is now some investment in rent supplements, however, these do little to improve any of the housing stock.

One of our member groups has managed to build 14 new apartments in 2017-2018 and plans to build 14 more to meet at least some of this pressing need. This particular initiative focusses on the availability of sustainable affordable housing in Antigonish and specifically for families with school age children. The 2019 Strait Regional Vital Signs Report (a community checkup report covering the counties of Antigonish, Guysborough, Richmond and Inverness), reports that Antigonish has the highest number of

people spending more than 30% of income on housing with 1,330 people living in unaffordable housing. 9% of these people are home owners and 42% are renters. 17% of households are headed by single parents of which 73% are women.

Since the establishment in 2001 of the bi-lateral framework agreements for affordable housing, Nova Scotia developed a program that provides inadequate capital grants and no funding to support community organizations to develop projects. Any such initiatives are highly dependent upon volunteer and donor contributions. Unfortunately, these volunteers and donors are already straining to support the very people who live on inadequate incomes and who rent unaffordable, poor-quality housing. The situation for everyone has been at a point of desperation for a long time.

Canadian researchers report that the proportion of Canada's stock of subsidized housing within our overall housing universe is tiny compared to similarly well-off OECD countries. Subsidized housing makes up between 13% and 34% of the housing markets in these countries compared to 4% in Canada. Where subsidized housing has been provided, it is not available to non-elderly single people or childless couples or various non-standard households (e.g., adult relatives or friends sharing a home). People who have lifelong disabilities are trapped in deep poverty until they are eligible for seniors' benefits. All of these people need affordable, good-quality housing.

Child care

CCPA Policy Analyst Katherine Scott observed, "There is simply no recovery without child care...Now is the moment to invest in comprehensive, high-quality, caring services and more robust labour standards (including paid sick leave) across the country."ⁱⁱⁱ We completely agree and we support the CCPA Alternative Federal Budget call for a \$1 billion investment into child care and early learning. As we look to the recovery from Covid-19, now is the time to invest in social infrastructure and the care economy. Investing in child care, long-term elder-care, and home care will not only allow people to go back to work but will also create jobs and improve the quality of life of many Canadians.

Transportation

In the communities that are more than 40 kilometres distance from the Town of Antigonish - virtually all of them - there is no public transportation. This powerfully affects people's educational, social, and employment prospects. It compromises their food security and makes it difficult for them to purchase necessary personal and household supplies. It severely limits their civic engagement and their access to health care and other public services. Our limited, community-based transportation service (Antigonish Community Transit) would require much more public investment to enable it to adequately respond to the need throughout the region. Investment from any other source, such as philanthropists or business interests, seems very unlikely.

Living Minimum Wage

While income security is a way to guarantee that poverty is not legislated in Canada, we also must ensure that those who are able to work are paid a living wage. Piecemeal and inadequate wages have led to working-aged adults needing to have multiple jobs in order to afford housing and pay for basic needs. As we have seen with the present pandemic, many jobs considered "essential" and in the caring industries, are vastly underpaid. Often, these jobs do not provide benefits that would cover medications or medical needs, which end up being additional costs. CCPA NS has calculated the living wage for Antigonish to be \$17.30/hour, while the actual minimum wage is \$12.55/hour. The federal government can lead by example by setting federal minimum wage standards that are livable.

ⁱ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative, Alternative Federal Budget 2020's "Dignity Dividend": <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2020/03/AFB%202020.pdf>)

ⁱⁱ Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Presentation to HUMA Committee, June 2020: <https://caeh.ca/caeh-presents-to-huma/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Katherine Scott, Behind the Numbers, June 2020: <http://behindthenumbers.ca/2020/06/11/needed-now-a-feminist-recovery-plan/>