



## Opinion



Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development Jean-Yves Duclos is expected to release a national poverty reduction strategy this year. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

## Poverty won't be solved by good intentions alone

A forthcoming poverty reduction strategy must be permanent, have measurable targets, and real funding behind it.

Poverty reduction advocates, including Food Banks Canada, have high expectations for a long-awaited national poverty reduction strategy the federal government is preparing to table in early 2018.

These groups have been pushing for this action for more than a decade and see the new strategy as a pivotal development in the struggle to make Canada a more fair, equal, and prosperous country. However, while waiting for the new strategy to be unveiled, we are mindful that strategies, like good intentions, are important but not sufficient.

If the federal government truly wants to materially improve the lives of Canadians, the national poverty reduction strategy must meet the following three crucial criteria: it must be permanent; it must have measurable, optimistic yet pragmatic targets; and it must

have real funding behind it.

Any poverty reduction strategy worth its salt must be enshrined in legislation that future governments will be required to honour, change, or cancel in the public eye. Far too many strategies are quietly abandoned for partisan and ideological reasons when governments change. This volatility can only be mitigated by entrenching in law the requirement for an evolving poverty reduction strategy, with regular review periods.

Tangible benchmarks and targets must also be established, against which the effectiveness of the poverty reduction strategy can be measured. In addition, by setting clear short-, medium-, and long-term objectives, the federal government can bring together all sectors in the poverty reduction effort to work collectively towards common goals.

Finally, the strategy will fail without adequate funding. The government must be politically bold and brave as it invests in our country's most precious asset: its people. If the status quo

persists, poverty will continue to cost our country tens of billions of dollars every year in health care, social services, and lost opportunities.

The national poverty reduction strategy will follow important steps already taken by the current federal government, which seems to have moved poverty reduction to the front burner. These steps include an expansion of child benefits, investments in supports for low-income workers, and a new approach to affordable housing.

This government is now on the cusp of implementing a poverty reduction strategy that could make a significant, beneficial change in the lives of millions of Canadians. It must not take lightly this rare opportunity to finally and firmly focus on preventing poverty, rather than just managing its devastating repercussions.

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*The Hill Times*



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*Poverty Reduction Strategy*