

# Manitoba's Strategy for Sustainable Employment and a Stronger Labour Market

## *Enabling Independence and Realizing Manitoba's Workforce Potential*

Manitoba's economy continues to grow at a steady pace in the face of global economic decline. From 2006 to 2011, Manitoba's average annual growth rate was 1.9 per cent, the second highest in Canada. During the same timeframe, the national average rate was 1.2 per cent.

Coupled with steady growth, Manitoba has experienced relatively low unemployment rates over the past number of years that have resulted in skilled labour shortages throughout most employment sectors and regions in the province. Employers consistently report that their biggest challenge is finding and hiring enough skilled and unskilled workers to fill jobs.

At the same time, some Manitobans are not currently included in the workforce or reaching their full potential in the labour market. Among these individuals are persons with disabilities, Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) recipients and others who are economically disadvantaged. Many of these Manitobans have the ability and desire to enter, re-enter or advance in the labour market. But they also face challenges. A renewed focus on helping people gain knowledge, skills, qualifications, and

supports to succeed in the workforce will help meet growing demand for labour in coming years. At the same time, it will increase the financial and social well-being of individuals and their communities, contributing to a higher overall quality of life in our province.

Work is healthy and, for those who are able, is the best way out of poverty. The Manitoba government, in partnership with its labour market stakeholders, recognizes the importance of investing in programs and services to help people with some challenges find and keep good jobs. Significant progress has been made through initiatives like *Rewarding Work*. We now have an opportunity to make further progress by delivering services and providing supports that maximize the potential of Manitoba's untapped pool of workers.

**Employers need workers with specific skills and abilities, and many Manitobans need sustainable, meaningful employment. This strategy is about connecting these two complementary priorities, to build a prosperous future for the entire province.**



## A New Approach

In 2012, the Manitoba government merged its income support programs with workforce development services for individuals and employers. The new *Workforce Development and Income Support Division* falls under Manitoba Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, the department with lead responsibility for labour market development.

The change is an important step toward helping EIA participants and other economically disadvantaged Manitobans find and keep good jobs and toward helping employers access skilled workers. By more closely aligning income support programs with employment and skills training, there is opportunity to capitalize on the human resource potential of the entire population.

This strategy involves building upon existing partnerships with employers, industry, training providers, adult learning centres and community agencies, as well as other government programs. Moving forward, we will also be looking to ensure that partnerships respond to community needs. We will be looking to cooperative models that create employment and generate income for those in need, while also investing in the community and supporting social goals. Strengthening these partnerships ensures public and private investments and activities respond to labour market needs. It also involves shifting the focus of the EIA program so it provides a pathway to independence for participants who are able to work, while continuing to provide financial assistance to those who need it most.

## Modernizing Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance Program

The EIA program provides financial help to Manitobans who are unable to support themselves or their families, on a temporary or longer term basis. For those who are unable to work, income assistance is essential to meet basic needs like food, shelter and participation in community life to the greatest extent possible. For those who have the capacity to work and be financially independent, short-term reliance on income support can turn into long-term dependency and poverty without active planning and support.

While EIA must provide a safety net for people when they are out of work, shifting the program to focus on labour market re-entry, where possible, will benefit individuals, families, communities and the economy as a whole. It will provide more Manitobans with healthier, sustainable options to meet their personal and family needs while also addressing a growing need to build the provincial workforce.

This shift focuses on providing people with challenges the support they need to move off assistance. Policies and programs must ensure

that people who have the potential to work are always better off if they are working or training for work. Income assistance policies will shift to promote labour market entry and attachment, commencing with the Rentaid Transition Bonus announced in Budget 2013. This will assist non-disabled adults without children, who are renting in the private market, with \$110 per month for two years after they leave welfare for work or training. Policies, practices and service delivery systems will focus on building people's strengths, fostering financial independence and aligning individual skill development with pathways to real jobs.

Over the long term, savings that result from EIA participants moving into the workforce can be re-invested into enhancing portable benefits, better supporting transitions to financial independence.

**Modernizing Manitoba's system of income support will enable our safety net to act like a spring board, helping people realize their own independence and social inclusion.**

## Strategy Principles

- **Co-ordination and Partnerships**

Working in partnership with employers, service providers, training institutions and community agencies is critical to ensure co-ordinated, complementary, effective efforts to get people into meaningful jobs.

- **Enabling Independence**

The longer people are out of work, the more difficult it can be to recover their financial independence. The sooner people can get back on their feet, the less likely they will come to depend on income assistance.

- **Work is Healthy**

In addition to generating income, work provides a sense of identity and purpose, structure to daily life, social relationships and opportunities for personal growth. Policies that encourage and support work, whenever possible, help Manitobans reach their full potential and build healthier, stronger communities.

- **Mutual Responsibility**

Eligibility criteria must be clear and individuals must be advised of their responsibilities while receiving benefits. Higher expectations for participants must come hand-in-hand with greater supports.

- **Focus on Capacity**

Recognize individual strengths as a foundation for job success rather than assuming people cannot work due to disability or other life circumstances. Assess capacity and connect individuals to opportunities that maximize their potential, while providing support to help deal with challenges they face.



- **Building Pathways to Employment**

Personal action plans must be based on accurate, current information about Manitoba's labour market needs and in line with individual abilities, career goals and personal situations. With supports and training, some EIA participants will quickly be ready to take advantage of work opportunities. For others, work experience will be a first step. And for others, part-time work may be the best solution over the long term.

- **Focus on Employer Needs to Ensure Long-term Employment Outcomes**

At the core of this strategy is the need for close collaboration with employers and industry. Training and employment must be directly tied to real labour market needs and opportunities for long-term success.

## Strategy Objectives



### 1. Develop a comprehensive system to connect EIA participants to sustainable employment.

\$3 million was added in Budget 2013 to enhance training and pre-employment programming and develop wrap-around supports to ensure income assistance participants can move into sustainable employment and achieve financial independence. EIA participants who are able to work can successfully move into sustainable employment and away from future welfare dependency when the right services and supports are in place to assist them. These services and supports include:

- a new service model with single window access to provincial workforce development services, including a “one stop” service centre in Winnipeg
- identifying needs, readiness to work and personal goals through better screening and assessment tools (ex: essential skills and employability assessments)
- a new team of service specialists to support individuals by ensuring appropriate supports and plans are in place for participants
- a range of programming that includes basic skills, job readiness skills, counselling, job placement, on-the-job and technical training, as necessary, to help individuals overcome challenges to being employed
- this new approach incorporates best practices of providing client focused services with post-employment supports, while playing an intermediary role, linking training providers and employers
- financial help including wage subsidy or a living allowance will be available to more EIA participants as they participate in employment development activities
- internships and work experience opportunities to help participants gain needed experience and move towards employment
- job retention and post-employment supports for new hires and employers to ensure long-term success
- third-party service provider investments that effectively complement participant and labour market needs

## 2. Engage employers to match qualified candidates with available jobs.

Close connections with employers are essential to understanding and meeting their human resource requirements. Manitoba's strategy for sustainable employment and a stronger labour market will:

- support industry and sector-specific projects that provide direct connections to employers and career advancement prospects for workers
- increase work incentives, wage subsidies, internship opportunities and human resource planning and development supports for employers
- assist employers to invest in workforce skills training and development to create entry-level openings for new hires and advancement opportunities for existing workers

## 3. Simplify the income support system so it focuses on enabling people to become independent through employment while also meeting their basic needs.

Making income assistance rules and regulations less cumbersome to administer will allow program staff to invest more time helping clients move into good jobs and gain financial independence. Manitoba's strategy will address this by:

- working towards restructuring the EIA benefit system so it focuses on enabling participants to achieve self-sufficiency while continuing to help those unable to work to meet their basic needs
- redesigning program rules to ensure more staff time is spent on supporting individuals to move into work
- helping more participants become independent by expanding employment planning activities
- continue to develop policies that aid labour force entry (or re-entry)

## 4. Improve co-ordination and supports for those who cannot work due to complex needs or multiple challenges.

Underlying this strategy is the recognition that some Manitobans must continue to rely on income assistance due to complex needs or multiple challenges. For individuals who are unable to work, Manitoba's strategy will improve the co-ordination of supports that enhance personal well-being and stability (ex: health, housing, finance, addiction treatment).



## Key Actions

This strategy builds on our greatest assets: our strong economy and our people. While some actions can be achieved in the shorter term, many are complex, requiring substantial change over the longer term.

### 2013

- Engage stakeholders in identifying what works to help connect disadvantaged people to sustainable employment
- Build a new integrated service model, including expanded programs/supports for EIA participants
- Review and shift program delivery activities so staff can focus more time on working with individuals to move them into training or work
- Develop supports for EIA participants who are assessed as employment/training ready (ex: pre-employment services, job retention supports, work experience opportunities, an alternate living allowance for those participating in training, *Rewarding Work* health benefits)
- Develop new approaches to support single parents with young children in preparing for and succeeding in the workplace
- Develop a new funding model for third-party training agencies that aligns with this strategy and emphasizes results
- Provide more opportunities to gain valuable experience within the provincial government for Manitobans who have challenges accessing employment

### 2014

- Explore collaborative ways to engage youth 18 and older leaving the child welfare system, and those whose families receive income assistance, to help guide these young people towards work and independence
- Explore opportunities for a new definition of disability with programming focused on capacity rather than deficit; at the same time, provide improved supports for those unable to work due to severe, prolonged disability
- Work to ensure that the decisions made regarding eligibility for disability benefits are made in a consistent fair and efficient manner
- Continue to develop partnerships with business, labour, non-profits and government to help people with disabilities access meaningful employment
- Explore opportunities to adapt the apprenticeship model to address the needs of varied clients and target more disadvantaged Manitobans

### 2015 and beyond

- Begin developing a simplified income security framework that enables employment while providing for those who are not able to work
- Streamline and simplify EIA benefits, with savings achieved through efficiencies and lower caseloads supporting the development of enhanced portable benefits, such as portable rent supplements.
- Examine options to adjust income tests for government programs to allow individuals a smooth transition from assistance to independence
- Increase collaboration and co-ordination with labour market services that support newcomers, Aboriginal Manitobans and youth

## The Way Forward

We recognize the success of this strategy will depend on strong, continued partnerships with all labour market stakeholders, including employers, industry, individuals, community service providers, training institutions and other levels of government, particularly the Government of Canada. Working together, we can ensure that Manitoba has the workforce required to build a prosperous future for all.

The best route out of poverty is through a well-paying job. Expanding job, education and training opportunities are key priorities of the Manitoba government. Helping people get and keep good jobs so they can provide for themselves is a fundamental element of *AllAboard*, Manitoba's poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy.

*Manitoba's Strategy for Sustainable Employment and a Stronger Labour Market* is our action plan focused on "building blocks for employment," one of seven key priority areas identified in the *AllAboard* strategy. There is tremendous potential for success in combining the philosophy behind *AllAboard* with addressing the need for a more robust skilled labour force. Connecting these two mutually reinforcing goals, Manitoba's new strategy for sustainable employment and a stronger labour market will help our economy continue to grow and ensure that all Manitobans benefit.





# Manitoba's Strategy for Sustainable Employment and a Stronger Labour Market

**ALL**Aboard:

**Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy**