

Pathways Forward

Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy



Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Manitoba is located on the Treaty Territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishininewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk Nations.

We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the National Homeland of the Red River Métis.

We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.

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ABOUT THE COVER

Artist Michael Spence gifted the cover artwork at one of the poverty reduction strategy renewal engagement meetings held in Thompson in the fall of 2024. In the Anishinaabe culture, strawberries are also called heart berries and are considered heart medicine. They are tied to the ideas of forgiveness and peace, which reminds people to maintain heartfelt relationships with families and communities. The sweetgrass connected to the long hair in the image reminds one of kindness and healing, and the hair itself represents self-esteem, self-respect and a sense of belonging.

A Message from the Poverty Reduction Committee Co-Chairs



HON. NAHANNI FONTAINE CO-CHAIR
Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet

Poverty affects Manitobans across the province in all aspects of their lives – from housing and employment to health and education. This deeply complex and multi-layered issue, which affects individuals, families and communities in many intersecting ways, requires holistic solutions embedded in the spirit of collaboration and reconciliation.

Pathways Forward is a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that is intrinsically linked to these concepts and ideas. By addressing poverty, we will foster kinder communities where individuals can peacefully move forward with hope. Strong relationships are built when communities work together to lift each other up. As people overcome the hardships of poverty, their healing leads to improved mental and physical well-being. A sense of belonging is then cultivated when everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Together, this helps us build a more inclusive and compassionate society.

On behalf of the Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Manitobans who took the time to participate in engagements and share their important insights. We asked for feedback and guidance from stakeholders, including community organizations, advocates, Indigenous Peoples and organizations, businesses, alongside people with lived experience of poverty. Your feedback and concerns, whether expressed through public meetings, written submissions, surveys or one-on-one conversations, have been instrumental in guiding our collective efforts to produce a comprehensive and inclusive poverty reduction strategy.



HON. BERNADETTE SMITH CO-CHAIR
Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet

Throughout our engagements, we heard stories of resilience, innovation and determination. We listened to individuals with lived experience of poverty who shared their stories of systemic barriers to accessing affordable housing, difficulty in finding employment opportunities and exclusion from decisions that may affect them directly. In tandem, we learned about community driven solutions that highlight the important role of grassroots organizations in helping Manitobans navigate government systems and resources. We are thankful for the important work they do each and every day and look forward to our continued partnership in current and future poverty reduction initiatives.

We are particularly grateful for the wisdom and perspectives shared by our Indigenous relatives, who reminded us of the inseparable nature of physical, emotional, spiritual and community wellbeing. Indigenous knowledge and practices necessitate solutions built upon resilience, cultural identity and traditional ways of supporting one another. By centering Indigenous voices and incorporating traditional values, we envisioned a strategy that went beyond short-term solutions to foster long-lasting and meaningful change.

As co-chairs, we want to acknowledge our community committee members for their valuable guidance and expertise throughout the redevelopment phase of the strategy. For several months, we met and discussed the future of poverty reduction in Manitoba and are now proud to release a strategy that is a shared vision for a prosperous and thriving Manitoba. Together, we aim to create a future where every Manitoban can live in dignity, where families and communities are financially empowered and where the good life is truly within reach for everyone.

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Acknowledgments

Members of the public, Indigenous Peoples, people with lived experience, service providers, advocates and business representatives were invited to participate in the engagement process for Manitoba's poverty reduction strategy renewal. Through this process, more than 3,000 Manitobans shared their insights and recommendations to reduce poverty in the province. Information from these engagements was analyzed with some support from CoPilot for Work, an artificial intelligence tool that facilitated the structure of this report.

The Manitoba government would like to express sincere gratitude to all those who participated and contributed their time, expertise and experience to the development of Manitoba's poverty reduction strategy. Particular thanks are extended to artist Michael Spence of Thompson, Manitoba, whose artwork is highlighted on the cover of this document.

To the numerous community organizations whose unwavering commitment and expertise have been integral in driving Manitoba's poverty reduction initiatives: their dedication, passion and tireless work are the backbone of a shared vision to build a province where all individuals and families can thrive. Providing nutrition supports, shelter and mental health supports, and offering educational resources, job training, recreation opportunities and financial empowerment programs exemplify what it means to take care of one another. These innovative programs have empowered Manitobans to overcome barriers and build a future filled with hope.

Those with lived experience who shared their stories, perspectives and insights have been the heart and soul of this work, offering an invaluable understanding of the challenges faced by those living in poverty. The courage and resilience of Manitobans guide the decisions government makes to ensure its approaches are not only compassionate, but effective. Government officials have been reminded of the importance of listening first and creating solutions that are responsive to the needs of the communities across the province.

Poverty reduction is not just about addressing immediate needs, but also about fostering long-term change that gives everyone the opportunity to live an inclusive and good life. While the road to poverty reduction is complex, it is one walked with a renewed vision because of the knowledge Manitobans have shared.

Collaboration is the driving force behind lasting change. By continuing to listen, learn and act together, Manitoba can build a brighter future for all.



CHAPTER 1:

Introduction



Poverty remains a critical issue, affecting individuals and families across the province.

While global politics continue to cast a shadow of economic uncertainty, the Manitoba government is committed to working with individuals, Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous nations, communities and organizations to build a stronger, healthier province where everyone takes responsibility to ensure no one is left behind. It is through these partnerships and collective action that we can create scalable, effective solutions.

Indigenous worldviews often describe life as a circular journey with interconnected stages and transitions, each with its own teachings, responsibilities and vulnerabilities. Each stage is seen as sacred and essential to the health of the whole community. In early 2024, the Manitoba government's Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet directed that the renewed poverty reduction strategy addresses the needs of three target groups at some of the most vulnerable transition points in their lives.

Babies and Children Zero to Five Years Old, Including the Prenatal Period

- Children are sacred gifts, and this is the time when the brain develops most rapidly. In this stage of life, they begin to form attachments, learn language and start to understand the world. Early nurturing shapes their identity, resilience and connection to culture and community.
- For children aged zero to five, early intervention is crucial. Families and women in their reproductive years who are living in poverty particularly need support to ensure their babies and children are provided with appropriate developmental care. The cycle of poverty is perpetuated if this support is not provided during the critical stage of early life.
- By improving access to quality early childhood education, health care and family support systems, this strategy aims to provide young children with a strong foundation for lifelong success. Supporting families with essential resources and services allow children to feel nurtured in safe and stable environments, breaking the cycle of poverty at its roots.

Youth Exiting the Child Welfare System

- Youth leaving care often face abrupt transitions without support, leading to homelessness, unemployment and disconnection from community. As they learn and test boundaries, they need mentorship from adults and Elders to find their path.
- Youth exiting the child welfare system are particularly vulnerable and face unique challenges, including limited access to stable housing, education and employment opportunities.
- This strategy prioritizes transitional educational supports, skills development and the creation of lifelong networks, empowering youth to navigate their transition to independence and enabling them to thrive in adulthood.

Seniors

- All Elders hold knowledge and wisdom that can provide guidance to others, and they must be respected, cared for and included in community life. Seniors, particularly those on fixed incomes, often experience financial insecurity, transportation difficulties, housing challenges and social isolation.
- Traditionally, seniors have been defined as individuals aged 65 and up. However, the Manitoba government recognizes that some older Manitobans may also benefit from programs targeted to seniors, such as individuals who have had to retire early due to a disability.
- By supporting financial empowerment, improving access to affordable housing and fostering community connections, this strategy seeks to uphold the dignity and well-being of Manitoba's seniors.

In Indigenous teachings, what you give at one stage returns to you in another. Supporting others through their transitions ensures that when one's time comes, they too will be supported. These three target groups are highly, if not totally, dependent on the care of their families, communities or service providers to live a good quality of life and are some of Manitoba's most vulnerable in need of support. Each of these transitions is a moment of vulnerability and opportunity, and investing in people at these points:

- **prevents crises before they happen**
- **builds resilience in individuals and communities**
- **creates a culture of care that supports everyone as they age**

Grounded in these perspectives, this strategy redefines how poverty is discussed by emphasizing the effects of colonialism and uses a definition of poverty that emphasizes the importance of community connections and cultural preservation rather than just material wealth. This strategy is also about creating pathways of social inclusion, particularly for groups in moments of transition where supports are particularly important.

Everyone wants to live well, and everyone wants to live in ways that are respected and valued. Government must support people in ways that satisfy their physical, emotional and spiritual needs, and help them build the skills needed to live well.

This work is a sacred responsibility that ensures well-being, and the design of the strategy reflects this worldview, focusing on care, reciprocity and long-term vision.

By working together, addressing the diverse needs of these groups will build a more inclusive and resilient province where the cycle of poverty can be broken and everyone can thrive.





CHAPTER 2:

Foundations

Understanding Poverty in Manitoba

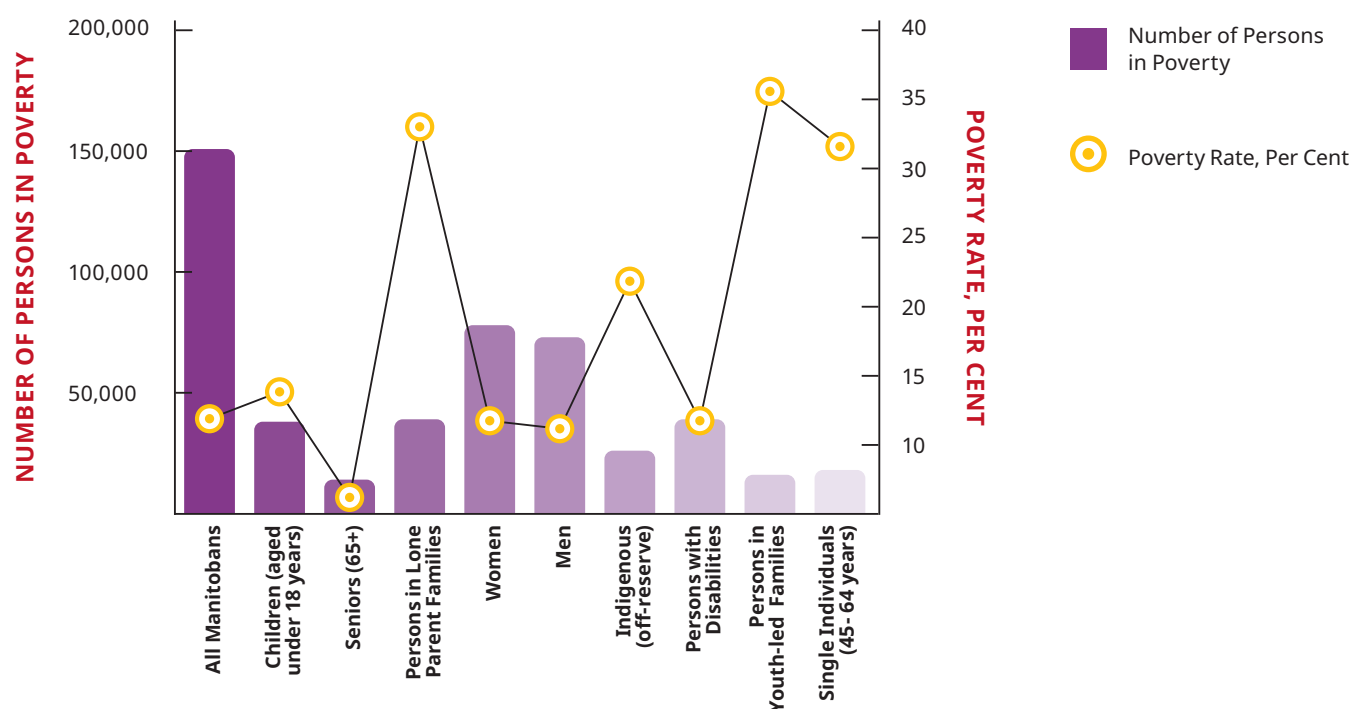
Poverty is a complex issue that goes beyond a lack of financial resources.

It is caused by a combination of systemic, economic and social factors that can affect a person's wellbeing and limit access to opportunities and services that are necessary for a healthy, meaningful and fulfilling life.

Reducing poverty has remained a key priority for Manitoba in recent years. Progress has been made, but certain demographic groups continue to face heightened vulnerability. The Manitoba government remains committed to breaking the cycle of poverty for those most in need of support.

The graph below presents a snapshot of poverty in Manitoba in 2022, based on the most recent data published by Statistics Canada using the 2018 Market Basket Measure.

Low Income in Manitoba, 2022, Statistics Canada, Market Basket Measure



Manitoba's rich diversity brings vibrancy but is also a reminder that poverty reduction initiatives must acknowledge and be responsive to the diverse backgrounds and needs of all Manitobans. Each person's experience with poverty is different. A person's identity is shaped by various factors such as race, gender, class, age, ability and geographic location. Each of these factors contributes to how they experience poverty, and when combined, they can create compounded forms of disadvantage.

This strategy focuses on three target groups, but acknowledges the intersections of individual identities and experiences within each unique group. People with multiple layers of disadvantage face deeper barriers to escaping poverty and require more comprehensive solutions. Addressing poverty effectively means recognizing and responding to the complex ways in which race, gender, ability and other identities overlap, or intersect.

Similarly, a lack of access to quality education and post-secondary instruction creates a poverty cycle that is difficult to break. Policies and programs must account for these intersections to create inclusive and equitable support systems that reduce poverty for all. Within the objectives of each target group, a lens toward the intersection between poverty and experiences of individuals more likely to be living in poverty will be prioritized.

With this in mind, the Manitoba government has taken concrete steps to help lift all Manitobans out of poverty.

Earning exemptions for Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) recipients were increased, reducing the welfare wall that prevents people living in poverty from accessing meaningful employment. Manitoba has steadily increased the minimum wage and implemented greater protections for workers.

Manitobans living with a severe and prolonged disability experiencing poverty will benefit from improvements to the Manitoba Supports for Persons with Disabilities (MSPD), including indexation to the rate of inflation and exempting the new Canada Disability Benefit from income calculations.

The province launched the Access to Menstrual Products Program in partnership with Shoppers Drug Mart, providing free menstrual products across Manitoba, and more than 53,000 people have accessed free birth control since October 2024—reducing costs for those living in poverty and improving health outcomes.

Adult education has proven results in helping reduce poverty for those with education gaps. The Manitoba government has increased investment in adult education for the first time since 2016, and made it easier to access for adults on EIA.

Access to secure and affordable housing is a key element of addressing poverty. The Manitoba government has made historic investments in social and affordable housing, reopened closed units, supported non-profit providers, and expanded the Renters Affordability Tax Credit to \$625 in 2026.

The Manitoba government introduced a historic School Nutrition Program that provides all public school students with free, nutritious food when they need it. This universal approach supports children and families by improving access to healthy meals, boosting educational outcomes, and removing barriers or stigma. Now enshrined in law, Manitoba's School Nutrition Program means students no longer have to worry about where their next meal will come from.

Indigenous populations in Manitoba face unique challenges rooted in historical injustices, systemic discrimination and cultural disparities.

The Manitoba government acknowledges that addressing poverty needs a respectful and collaborative approach that recognizes the distinct needs of Indigenous communities, fosters cultural preservation and promotes self-determination. The actions implemented under this strategy must reflect the issues of colonization and poverty among Indigenous Peoples.

Manitoba is committed to provide equitable job and training opportunities to Indigenous Peoples and intends to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care by providing resources to keep families together and ensure social workers are trained in the impacts of Canada's colonial past. For centuries, Indigenous Peoples in Canada endured policies that were detrimental to their development. As a result, the scar of intergenerational trauma continues to have lasting effects on the lives of Indigenous Peoples today.

The Manitoba government will continue to work on repairing its relationship with Indigenous communities by following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action and prioritizing collaboration with Indigenous rightsholders, Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous-led organizations across the province. Manitobans experiencing poverty are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Whether it is their capacity to cope and/or their ability to adapt to changes brought about by climate change, the Manitoba government recognizes adaptation efforts should consider the needs of those who are more susceptible to its impacts. This will help to create a more equitable, climate-resilient Manitoba for all.

Ongoing collaboration with Indigenous rightsholders, Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous-led organizations, stakeholder organizations, front-line service providers, advocates and businesses is crucial for the success of the new poverty reduction strategy. The Manitoba government will continue work with community to support programs and resources that are aligned with the goals of the strategy.

A Whole-of-Government Approach

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act requires Manitoba to have a poverty reduction cabinet committee made up of ministers responsible for policies, programs and services that affect poverty reduction as well as representation from the community. The purpose of this committee is to provide advice on the development of the poverty reduction strategy, monitor its implementation and facilitate community involvement in strategy development.

Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet currently includes the following members:

Honourable Nahanni Fontaine,
Minister of Families (co-chair)

Honourable Bernadette Smith,
Minister of Housing Addictions
and Homelessness (co-chair)

Honourable Ian Bushie,
Minister of Natural Resources
and Indigenous Futures

Honourable Malaya Marcelino,
Minister of Labour and Immigration

Honourable Tracy Schmidt,
Minister of Education and
Early Childhood Learning

Chief Angela Levasseur,
community member
(Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation)

Janis Irvine,
community member (Brandon)

Jill Wilson,
community member (Winnipeg)

In addition to the Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet, the Manitoba government has created a Deputy Minister's Table and an interdepartmental working group with representatives from key departments, including those that are not included on the Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet.

The goal of these groups is to share information and direction received from the Poverty Reduction Committee that can be used to coordinate a whole-of-government response to poverty reduction. In addition, the tables allow departments to better work together and share information about departmental programs and services to ensure better coordination of poverty reduction initiatives.

Government Strategies and Initiatives

The Manitoba government has also introduced several new strategies and initiatives aimed at tackling issues that intersect with poverty and outline work to create a more equitable society. Many of these strategies outline goals that will have a significant effect on addressing poverty but are not specifically focused on poverty reduction. These other initiatives were considered when drafting this strategy's goals and objectives and when implemented together, will create a comprehensive framework for tackling poverty in the province.

Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag: All Women Doing Well

- *Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag* directs all actions to address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, 2Spirit and gender-diverse relatives based on the understanding and commitment that the safety and empowerment of these relatives must be prioritized for all programs, initiatives, policies and legislation.
- The strategy names critical areas where urgent attention is needed, including access to culture, economic development, education, food security, health services, healthy communities, housing, justice and safety, matriarchal leadership and transportation.

Your Way Home: Manitoba's Strategy to End Chronic Homelessness

- *Your Way Home* outlines the Manitoba government's plan to address chronic homelessness by coordinating and streamlining the efforts of community organizations and municipal governments. The plan is focused on immediate action to move unsheltered people into suitable housing, while also implementing a framework to address the shortage of housing and supports needed to end chronic homelessness.
- Key measures include increasing the supply of social housing with wraparound supports, creating a Housing First program in Manitoba Housing, aligning coordination between organizations and governments, recruiting, training and retaining front-line staff, addressing gaps that lead youth and vulnerable people into homelessness and inspiring hope and developing pathways to success.

Safer Neighbourhoods, Safer Downtowns Public Safety Strategy

- The *Safer Neighbourhoods, Safer Downtowns Public Safety Strategy* creates a roadmap for a safer Manitoba across all regions of the province. It focuses on three areas: being tough on crime, ensuring reintegration and pathways to success and investing in communities by being tough on roots and causes of crime. The strategy acknowledges that violence and violent crime are complicated by poverty, low educational attainment, substance abuse and mental illness. It recognizes the need to invest in communities through community-led justice, reconciliation efforts and ending gender-based violence through programs and services. Additionally, it identifies the importance of empowering and supporting youth to help people find a good path to live well.

Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet (HCCC)

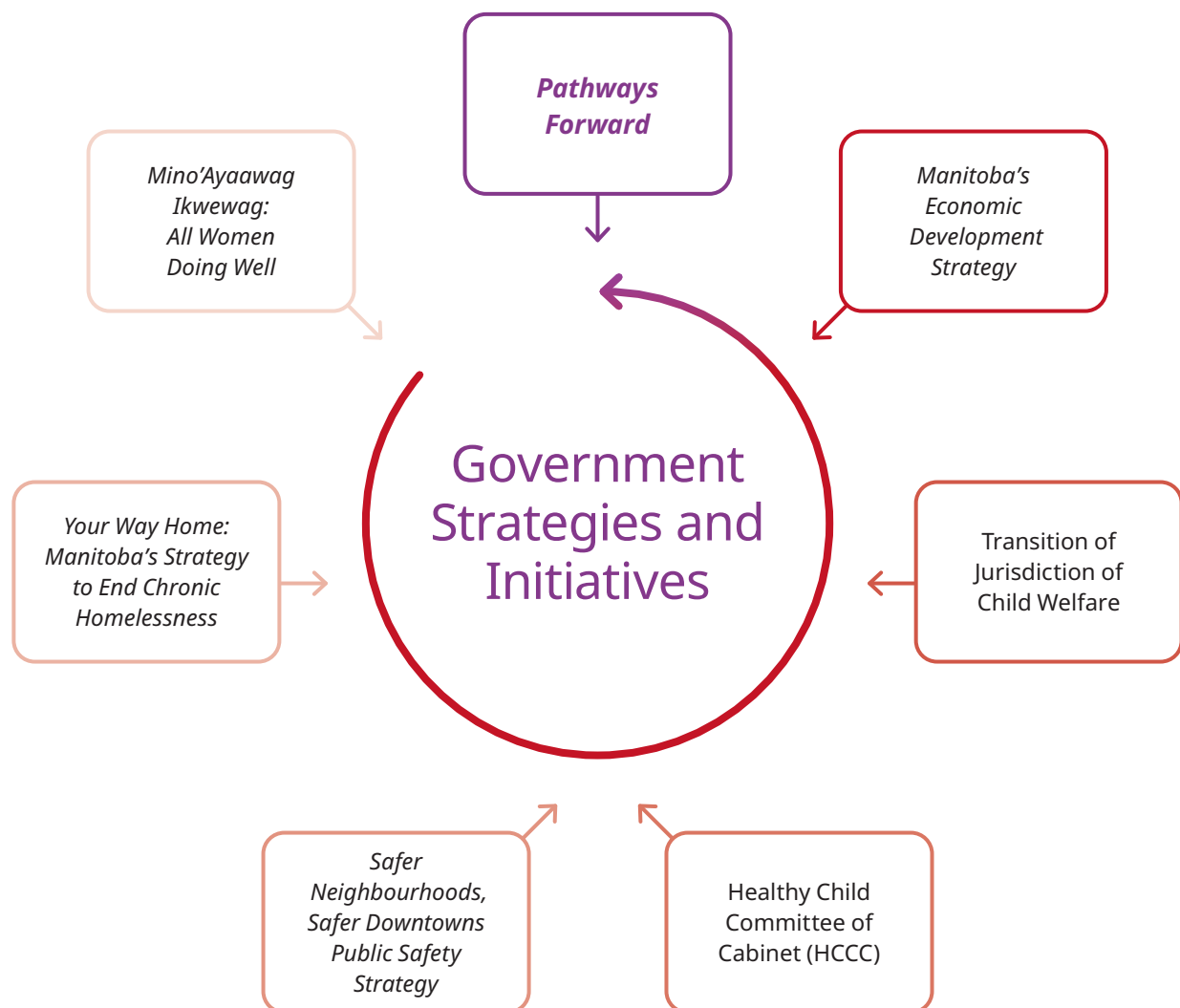
- The Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet (HCCC) is a cross-government initiative established in October 2023 to address the needs of children and families in Manitoba. Guided by its vision to keep children safe, healthy, thriving and included, the HCCC focuses on three primary target groups—children from low-income backgrounds, marginalized families and underprivileged communities.
- With ministers from five departments and two Members of the Legislative Assembly, the committee oversees six working groups that develop and implement evidence-based initiatives ranging from infant mortality reduction to enhancing youth education and recreation opportunities.
- By leveraging expertise across government and partnering with community stakeholders, the HCCC drives collaborative efforts to remove systemic barriers, ultimately helping more children reach their 18th birthday and beyond.

Transition of Jurisdiction of Child Welfare

- When Indigenous young adults transition out of the child welfare system upon reaching the age of majority, many do so without the necessary supports to ensure a stable and successful entry into adulthood.
- Manitoba is committed to supporting Indigenous governments in exercising their inherent rights over child welfare. The Indigenous Jurisdiction Transition Office represents the Manitoba government in trilateral agreements between Indigenous governments and the federal government. These agreements focus on coordinating funding and delivering child and family services to Indigenous children and their families.
- In working with rightsholders, amendments were made to The Child and Family Services Act to facilitate collaboration and information sharing, prioritize placements with family or community, and support new agreement-based initiatives to prevent children from entering care. This approach aligns with the TRC Calls to Action, aiming to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care and affirms Indigenous governments' rights to establish their own child welfare agencies.

Manitoba's Economic Development Strategy

- Manitoba's overall strategy for economic growth and sustained productivity emphasizes workforce development by creating meaningful pathways for workers.
- The strategy includes supporting continuous learning and upskilling to increase workforce participation by modernizing adult literacy and education programs and strengthening partnerships with community organizations that deliver workforce development programs, reducing barriers to work for Manitobans receiving income assistance.
- It also emphasizes making work more accessible for persons with disabilities and exploring specialized programs for people facing persistent barriers to employment. These actions can help lift people out of poverty through strengthening access to meaningful work.





Shared Priorities with Government of Canada

In 2018, the Government of Canada released Opportunity for All - Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy. The strategy introduced the first official poverty line in Canada's history, the Market Basket Measure, and sets out a target to reduce poverty by 20 per cent by 2020 and by 50 per cent by 2030.

Opportunity for All focuses on key areas that align with Manitoba's priorities such as housing, mental health, food security, child care, education and employment training. The Manitoba government is committed to working with the Government of Canada on these shared priorities to reduce poverty and make life better for all Manitobans.

At the engagements, it was clear people believed the TRC Calls to Action should be central to the work of poverty reduction. The Manitoba government has worked to align the goals and objectives outlined in the poverty reduction strategy with these Calls to Action.



CHAPTER 3:

The Strategy

Reducing poverty is a critical step toward building healthier, more inclusive communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Poverty affects every aspect of one's life, and its effects are felt not only by individuals but by society as a whole. This strategy adopts a comprehensive understanding of poverty, focused on a vision of Manitoba where everyone is included in our province's communities. When people are supported in meeting their basic needs and reaching their potential, communities become stronger, more resilient and more equitable.

The development of this strategy was deeply informed by the voices of community members, particularly those with lived experience. Through public engagement, meetings, surveys and one-on-one conversations, Manitobans shared insights about the barriers they face and the supports they need.

Service providers, non-profits, businesses and Indigenous Peoples also contributed valuable perspectives on local problems, system gaps and what is working in their communities. This feedback was instrumental in shaping a strategy that reflects real-world challenges and is rooted in community priorities.

The Manitoba government is committed to making sure programs and services are available as close to home as possible. It is critical for people to have access to these supports, which will ensure the success of the strategy.

Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and being into the strategy involves recognizing the interconnectedness of all aspects of life – land, language, culture, community and spirit.

This more inclusive approach values knowledge systems that have sustained Indigenous communities for generations. It incorporates these perspectives into the strategy's understanding of poverty, its implementation and in determining progress.

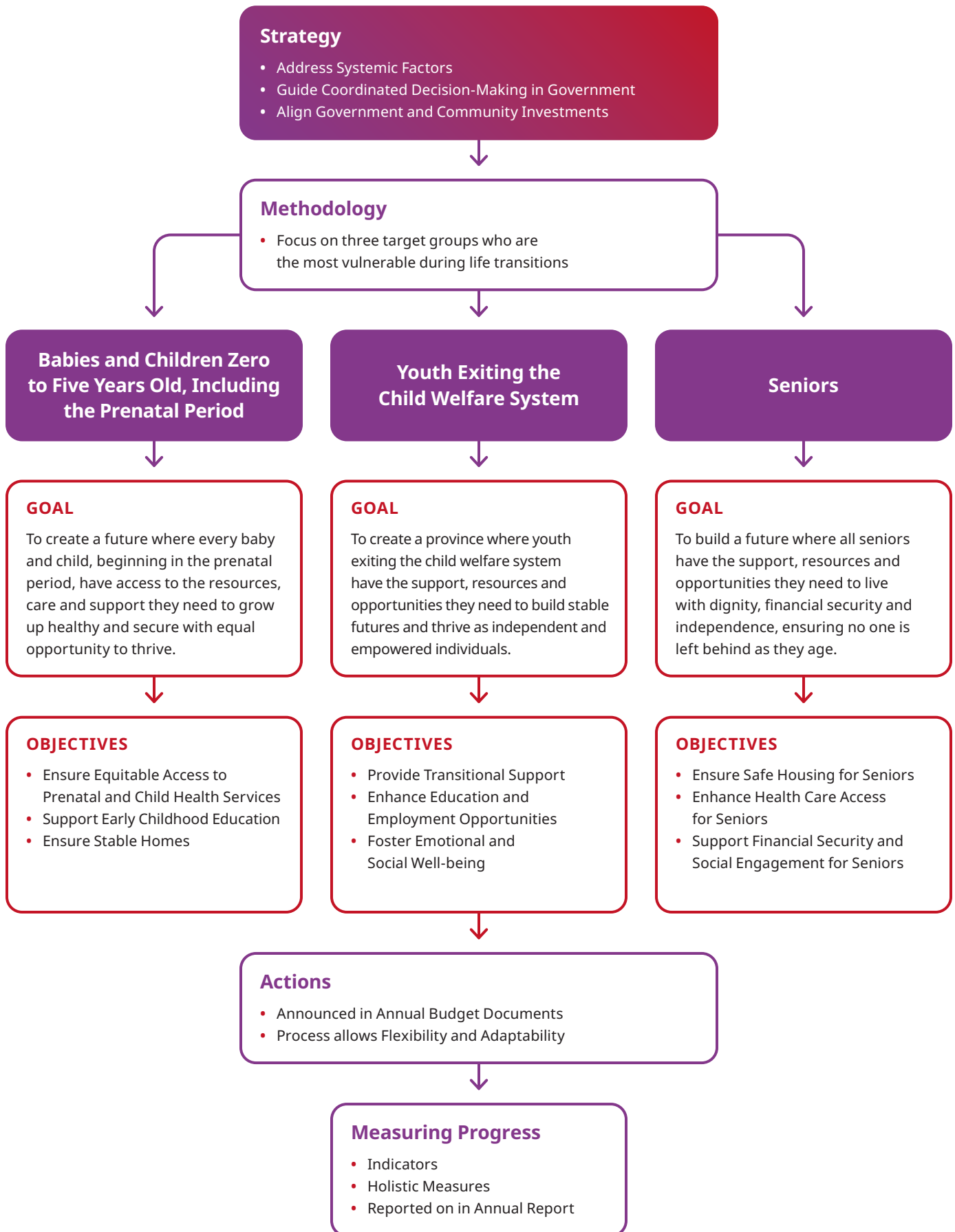
Centering these perspectives in both the design of the goals and objectives and the evaluation of actions in the short- and long-term strengthens the relevance and integrity of the strategy.

Goals and Objectives

Pathways Forward sets clear goals for each target group and outlines key objectives to address poverty for babies and children zero to five years old, including the prenatal period, youth exiting the child welfare system and seniors. These goals and objectives were shaped through a combination of this public input, data analysis and collaboration with experts and stakeholders.

They are designed to address both the immediate needs of people living in poverty and the systemic factors that contribute to it—such as access to childcare, education, employment opportunities and social supports. These goals are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, reflecting the complex and interconnected nature of poverty.

This strategy serves as a roadmap for collective action and aims to help align efforts across sectors and levels of government to achieve meaningful, sustainable change. Its purpose is to guide coordinated decision-making and direct provincial resources where they are most needed, provide a focus for all of government to align programs and initiatives to reduce poverty for the three target groups, and to create accountability for reducing poverty in Manitoba communities. By establishing a shared vision and clear priorities, the strategy will strengthen partnerships and foster a more unified approach to addressing poverty.



Babies and Children Zero to Five Years Old, Including the Prenatal Period

Goal

To create a future where every baby and child, beginning in the prenatal period, has access to the resources, care and support they need to grow up healthy and secure with equal opportunity to thrive.

Poverty has a profound impact on babies and children, starting even before birth during the prenatal period. Expecting parents living in poverty often face increased risks due to barriers in accessing health care, adequate nutrition and other supports, which can affect their children's health and development from the very beginning.

Children living in poverty are more likely to experience inadequate nutrition, unstable housing and reduced access to quality education and health care, which can hinder their ability to grow, learn and thrive. Addressing poverty early is crucial to breaking the cycle and giving all children a fair start in life. Young Indigenous Peoples are one of the fastest growing demographics in Manitoba. This strategy aims to support all babies and children, with a particular emphasis on the unique needs of Indigenous families.

"Health of the children comes from the parents."

The feedback received from engagements on helping babies and children zero to five years old, including the prenatal period for expectant mothers, highlighted the importance of supporting the whole family unit. Through targeted objectives that support parents and caregivers, this strategy helps reduce the negative impacts of poverty on babies and children and aims to reduce child poverty in Manitoba.

Participants expressed strengthening households through supports such as literacy programs for parents and strengthening Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) to help provide financial relief. There was a strong call for the government to continue to fund more community-led and community-driven programs, prioritize access to affordable child care, especially in rural communities, and invest in more prenatal and post-natal care for mothers facing barriers from poverty.

Breaking the cycle of poverty requires essential prenatal care for mothers, alongside supporting children and youth by giving them hope as well as the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Key Objectives

The following objectives outline key priorities aimed at addressing the inter-connected needs of prenatal care, early childhood education and a stable home life to build a foundation for long-term success and well-being. By focusing on these foundational areas, the strategy aims to create the conditions necessary for children and families to thrive. Together, these supports lay the groundwork for long-term success, health, and well-being across the lifespan.

OBJECTIVE 1

Ensure Equitable Access to Prenatal and Child Health Services

Provide equitable and accessible prenatal care, nutrition, breast- and chest-feeding support and mental health services for parents to promote healthy pregnancies and reduce risks for both mothers and babies.

This objective aims to promote health equity, prevention and long-term outcomes for both mothers and babies. Actions to fulfill this objective will help to ensure mothers can deliver healthy babies and recover well post-birth, while addressing the emotional challenges of parenthood to prevent potential risks. Work will also continue to address other challenges such as transportation, appointment scheduling, access to primary care and cultural safety.

OBJECTIVE 2

Support Early Childhood Education

Expand access to quality early childhood education and offer financial assistance to low-income families to ensure every child has a strong foundation for learning and success.

This objective is rooted in the idea that early childhood experiences have a profound effect on a child's long-term development, learning and success. Actions to fulfill this objective will help to ensure children are given the necessary tools to help kick-start their academic journeys, leading to long-term benefits not only for the individual child, but also for society.

OBJECTIVE 3

Ensure Stable Homes

Provide parenting support, resources and access to essentials like food, recreation opportunities and housing to help families create stable, nurturing environments for children.

This objective aims to support families, especially single-parent families by providing fundamental supports and resources to help foster, healthier, happier and more resilient families. Actions to fulfill this objective will help to ensure families are better equipped to meet the physical, emotional and cognitive needs of their children.

Actions Underway

The Manitoba government has already made investments to support families, children and infants, including doubling the prenatal benefit in 2024. The Manitoba Prenatal Benefit is a monthly financial benefit to help low-income Manitobans meet their needs during pregnancy. The Manitoba government's historic increase made this benefit the highest in Canada. A 2010 study by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy showed the prenatal benefit decreased the number of babies born preterm or with a low birth weight since parents are better supported in the healthy development of children. The Manitoba government also has made regulatory amendments to ensure that more Manitobans can easily access the program. The program also connects new and expectant parents to Healthy Baby Community Support programs, which operate across the province with support from the Manitoba government.

Through these programs, new parents can access practical information and resources on parental and child health issues, prenatal, postnatal and infant nutrition, breast- and chest feeding, healthy lifestyle choices, parenting ideas, infant development and strategies to support the healthy physical, cognitive and emotional development of children.

The Manitoba government is investing in children's futures by implementing \$10-a-day daycare and increasing the wages of early childhood educators. Further, government opened applications for the

Child Care Sustainability Trust, a funding program designed to help child-care centres across the province grow, improve and continue offering safe, welcoming spaces for children to learn and play. Administered by The Winnipeg Foundation, the trust is an endowment fund offering one-time grants to all non-profit licensed child-care providers. The funding supports innovative programming, increased capacity and facility repairs, with the goal of revitalizing and enhancing child-care services for families across Manitoba. More than \$500,000 in funding is available for the 2025-26 intake.

Government has also introduced the From the Ground Up - Safe Healthy Communities for ALL program, which supports the province's commitment to build safe, healthy communities where individuals, children, youth and families can thrive. The program provides application-based project funding to support community-led response and revitalization efforts.

The Manitoba government has helped keep grocery costs for families low. The price of 1 litre of milk will be frozen for 2026, resulting in the lowest price per container in Canada. Government will build on existing efforts to reduce the cost of groceries, such as increased competition, with a grocery price study and further actions throughout 2026. This will help ensure low-income parents can better access healthy food for their babies and children. Future initiatives will build on this work to help support growing families, and ensure babies and children are able to get a healthier start in life.



Youth Exiting the Child Welfare System

Goal

To create a province where youth exiting the child welfare system have the support, resources and opportunities they need to build stable futures and thrive as independent and empowered individuals.

The process of young adults exiting the child welfare system at the age of majority without adequate supports in place has been linked with increased homelessness, involvement with the adult criminal justice system, victimization, increased health care needs, mental health/addictions issues and social assistance use.

These factors contribute to a significantly higher likelihood of living in poverty for youth exiting the child welfare system. By focusing action in this area, this strategy aims to foster long-lasting change.

Indigenous youth are especially experiencing a significant burden of these negative outcomes due to their over representation in the child welfare system. Furthermore, systemic failures ultimately result in increased costs for Manitobans. Without the stability of a permanent home or the support networks that others rely on, young people can struggle to access education, stable employment and safe housing.

The feedback received from engagements on supporting youth exiting the child welfare system emphasized the need to empower youth through education programs that offer financial literacy opportunities and life skills to help them prepare for adulthood.

Participants expressed assisting youth with employment by offering accessible job training and skills development programs would be of significant benefit. It was recommended that government take a deeper look at barriers that youth exiting the child welfare system face when interacting with bureaucratic systems and undertake measures to address the root causes of crime.

“Stop counting how many times this kid came in for food. They come in as they need... not always abusing the system.”

Key Objectives

It is vital that youth exiting the child-welfare system are given the best shot at adulthood as youth are the future of Manitoba. The following objectives outline key targets aimed at ensuring youth have supports and resources to transition to adulthood by having opportunities to access training, education and employment. These objectives are designed to promote independence in youth by investing in essential supports such as education and employment opportunities, alongside helping them develop community connections.

OBJECTIVE 1

Provide Transitional Support

Offer housing, life skills training and support services (like mentorship, health care and emotional support) to help youth exiting the child welfare system become independent.

This objective aims to assist youth exiting the child welfare system by preparing them for the crucial period of transition into adulthood. Actions to fulfill this objective will help to ensure youth have the foundational skills and supports necessary to manage daily responsibilities, develop resilience and gain a sense of belonging.

OBJECTIVE 2

Enhance Education and Employment Opportunities

Provide education grants, scholarships and vocational training, along with workforce training, job placement, and career resources, and support for community organizations and social enterprises that help youth gain skills and secure long-term employment.

This objective is directed at removing barriers to education and employment for youth exiting the child welfare system by providing them with opportunities to pursue higher education, alongside gaining the essential skills for long-term employment and financial stability. Actions to fulfill this objective will help to ensure youth feel empowered and equipped to enter the job market and secure meaningful employment.

OBJECTIVE 3

Foster Emotional and Social Well-being

Create mentorship programs and encourage community engagement to support youth's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, while ensuring access to health care and mental health services.

This objective aims to assist youth exiting the child welfare system by strengthening their emotional health through mentorship and community engagement opportunities. Actions to fulfill this objective will help to ensure youth can successfully build a support network beyond formal systems by forming connection and positive relationships in the community.

Actions Underway

The Manitoba government has launched a strategy to support Indigenous governments in exercising their jurisdiction over child welfare. This work included amendments to The Child and Family Services Act to help facilitate collaboration and information sharing, prioritize placements with family or community, and to support new agreement-based initiatives to prevent children from entering care.

This approach aligns with Manitoba government's commitment to the TRC Calls to Action, aiming to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care and affirms Indigenous governments' rights to establish their own child welfare agencies.

Future initiatives will build on this work to help support youth in or exiting care and ensure they can successfully transition from care to the community.



Seniors

Goal

To build a future where all seniors have the support, resources and opportunities they need to live with dignity, financial security and independence, ensuring no one is left behind as they age.

Seniors face unique challenges when it comes to poverty, as many are living on fixed incomes. With barriers to accessing health care, housing instability and the inability to work, many older adults find themselves struggling to meet basic needs. As Manitoba's population continues to age, targeting support to address poverty among seniors is part of this strategy's focus on long lasting change and planning.

It is important that seniors feel supported every step of the way, especially when navigating challenges accompanied by poverty. Poverty among seniors not only affects their financial well-being but also their health, independence and overall quality of life. Addressing this issue requires efforts to ensure older adults can live with dignity, security and the opportunity to age with stability and care.

"Lots of grandparents are taking on the role of the primary parent."

The feedback received from engagements about seniors living in poverty expressed the need for government to make information about programs more accessible for seniors. Participants emphasized more senior-centred programs and services, employment opportunities and opportunities for social inclusion for seniors living in poverty.

Several participants also expressed the need for supports for medical transportation, especially for seniors living in rural communities with medical appointments in Winnipeg.

Key Objectives

The following objectives outline key targets aimed at supporting seniors and helping them age with proper stability and care. These objectives are designed to increase access to adequate housing for seniors as well as maintenance and preventative health care resources.

OBJECTIVE 1

Ensure Safe Housing for Seniors

Expand senior-friendly housing options that are safe, accessible and promote community connections, especially for those on fixed incomes.

This objective aims to support seniors, especially those on fixed incomes, by increasing access to suitable housing. Actions to fulfill this objective will not only help to ensure an improved quality of life for seniors, but it will also allow them to age with dignity, safety and connection.

OBJECTIVE 2

Enhance Health Care Access for Seniors

Make health care more affordable and accessible by reducing prescription costs, supporting transportation options for appointments and ensuring easy access to recreation services, home care, preventive care and mental health services.

This objective is directed at removing common obstacles that lead to delayed care and worsening health outcomes for seniors by lowering costs of prescription medications and supporting reliable transportation to appointments. Actions to fulfill this objective will help to support the well-being of seniors and help promote early intervention, reducing strain on critical emergency and acute services.

OBJECTIVE 3

Support Financial Security and Social Engagement for Seniors

Offer financial education supports and create programs to help seniors manage their finances, stay socially connected and find flexible work opportunities.

This objective aims to promote independence and high quality of life amongst seniors by providing them with opportunities to feel financially empowered through financial literacy programs, flexible work hours and community engagement initiatives. Actions to fulfill this objective will help to promote social inclusion, stability and dignity amongst seniors.



Actions Underway

In early 2025, the Manitoba government announced the creation of a new independent seniors' advocate, who will represent and advocate on behalf of seniors in Manitoba. The independent advocate will report to the legislative assembly and will identify and evaluate issues faced by seniors and Elders and make recommendations to government.

The Manitoba government will work with federal and provincial governments to ensure that the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) continues to provide financial security for retired workers. Federal and provincial Ministers of Finance are jointly responsible for the CPP. In 2016, the CPP was enhanced to address the challenges that Canadian workers face in saving for retirement by increasing the amount of pre-retirement income covered by the plan.

More recently, as part of the 2022-24 Triennial Review of the CPP, several other improvements were made to the plan, including a death benefit of \$5,000 in cases where no other CPP benefit has been paid (with the exception of the orphan's benefit). These improvements came into effect in January 2025.

The Manitoba Enhanced Pharmacare Program (MEPP) provides eligible Manitoba residents with no-cost coverage of most medications for diabetes, HIV prevention and treatment, and hormone replacement therapy. This program helps support all Manitobans, including seniors who often have higher prescription costs.

Future initiatives will build on this work to help support Manitoba seniors to ensure they can live well as they age.



CHAPTER 4:

Measuring Progress

A comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed to address poverty in Manitoba. This strategy focuses on implementing key actions focused on the three target groups and supportive legislation and regulations to ensure meaningful progress on eight robust indicators.

Tracking progress is essential to understanding the impact of poverty reduction initiatives. By tracking advancements, the Manitoba government creates a sustainable framework that addresses the multifaceted nature of poverty and promotes social and economic well-being for all.

The government has adopted a set of indicators that measure various aspects of poverty, such as food insecurity, housing needs and employment rates. These indicators provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of our programs and help identify areas that require additional focus.

In addition, supportive legislation and regulations have been enacted to reinforce these efforts, ensuring the strategy is backed by a strong legal framework that promotes accountability and long-term commitment. To view this information, visit **Manitoba.ca/PovertyReduction**.

Poverty is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires wide-ranging data to measure success. Data collected by the federal government and Manitoba government will be used to measure the poverty reduction strategy's progress.



Indicators

To gain a comprehensive understanding of how Manitoba is moving forward, the Manitoba government will be using eight economic and statistical indicators to measure the strategy's effectiveness and progress.

- 1. Canada's Market Basket Measure (MBM):** This low income-based measure is used to track Manitoba's poverty rate. The MBM corresponds to the cost of a basket of goods and services representing a modest standard of living. A person is said to be living in poverty if they cannot afford this basket. The MBM develops poverty thresholds based on the cost of a basket of goods and services that individuals and families need to meet their basic needs and achieve a modest standard of living in communities across Canada. Data is available through Statistics Canada's Canadian Income Survey, which is updated annually with a two-year lag.
- 2. Core Housing Needs:** This indicator is the percentage of Manitoba households who are in housing that is below one or more of standards of adequacy, suitability and affordability. Data is available through the Census of Population and is updated every five years.
- 3. Food Insecurity:** This indicator measures the percentage of persons living in households that experienced moderate or severe food insecurity. Data is available through Statistics Canada's Canadian Income Survey, which is updated annually with a two-year lag.
- 4. Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) Rate:** This tracks the percentage of youth aged 15 to 24 years who are not in employment, education or training. Data is available through Statistics Canada's Canadian Labour Force Survey, which is updated annually.
- 5. Employment Rate:** This indicator measures the percentage of individuals (aged 15 years and over) who are employed. Data is available through Statistics Canada's Canadian Labour Force Survey, which is updated annually.
- 6. Infant Mortality Rate:** This indicator is the rate of infant death per 1,000 live births in children under the age of one year. Data is available through Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, and is updated annually.
- 7. Child Mortality Rate:** This indicator reflects the rate of death per 100,000 children aged one to 19 years. Data is available through Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, and is updated annually.
- 8. High School Graduation Rate:** Manitoba tracks high school graduation rates for those who graduate within six years of entering Grade 9 for the first time. Data is available through Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning and is updated annually.

These data markers will provide detailed information on how Manitobans are faring related to income, essential needs, their health and with employment, education and training.

Holistic Measures

The actions taken as part of this strategy must also address the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual measures to ensure each action is addressing poverty in a good way for all Manitobans. This is part of the strategy's focus on social inclusion.

Holistic measurement approaches for actions taken to fulfill the goals and objectives of this strategy must account for these needs of individuals, families and communities. Investments in culturally- and socially-grounded supports are critical to improving well-being. These elements are not peripheral to poverty reduction—they are foundational. Recognizing and resourcing what matters to communities allows for more meaningful and lasting change.

Indigenous-led approaches to measurement and evaluation reflect these core principles by allowing communities to define success on their own terms, build capacity and strengthen relationships grounded in trust and mutual respect.

When people are empowered to shape their own path and see their values reflected in outcomes, motivation and engagement increases—leading to deeper, more sustainable progress. Ultimately, embedding Indigenous knowledge systems into the strategy's measurement framework is not only a matter of equity but a pathway to innovation and resilience. It invites a broader understanding of what it means to live well and offers insights that benefit all communities.

By including Indigenous-led approaches to measuring success in each and every one of the actions that will be implemented over the next five years, the strategy will honour identity, promote healing, contribute to the full realization of Indigenous rights and self-determined futures and ensure all Manitobans have the opportunity to live well.

Legislation and Regulations

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act requires Manitoba to have a long-term poverty reduction strategy to reduce poverty and increase social inclusion. Under this legislation, the strategy is to be renewed every five years.

The act also requires that poverty reduction and social inclusion indicators be established to measure the progress of the strategy. The Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Indicators Regulation sets out these indicators, which will be updated to reflect the indicators outlined above.

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, smiling and looking towards the camera. She is wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and denim overalls. She is standing in what appears to be a kitchen or food service area, with shelves and equipment visible in the background. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent red overlay.

CHAPTER 5:

Looking Ahead

The Manitoba government envisions a province where all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal access to opportunities, resources and support to lead fulfilling, sustainable lives.

Creating a Manitoba where poverty is eradicated, and every person is financially empowered to thrive, will ensure they have access to quality education, health care, meaningful employment and a safe, supportive community.



Implementation

The objectives of this poverty reduction strategy paint a roadmap of the important work ahead for the Manitoba government. This strategy will guide a phased approach to implementation, focusing on foundational initiatives while building momentum for long-term change.

Every year, government is required to draft a budget paper highlighting its funding priorities to address poverty. Each budget paper will set out specific actions for that year to achieve the strategy's goals and objectives.

As action items are introduced, each item will have its own holistic and quantifiable criteria and success metrics, allowing the strategy to be customized to meet diverse community needs.

The province will then issue annual reports on poverty reduction, and these reports will follow-up on each project, initiative and investment to evaluate progress and share results to ensure accountability.

The annual report will include a breakdown of information that aligns with the strategy's target groups, as well as the experience of poverty for Indigenous Peoples and others, such as newcomers and persons with disabilities, where information is available.

By rolling out initiatives over time and evaluating them annually, the government can learn what works and what doesn't. This staggered implementation allows for better allocation of resources and more timely evaluation, allowing government to be nimble and adapt to changing needs as new information is received and conditions change.

This approach also aligns with Indigenous teachings that emphasize cyclical learning, reflection and adaptation. It respects the idea that solutions must evolve with the people and the land, and not be imposed as static blueprints.

By working together and staying grounded in evidence and lived experience, steady, measurable progress will be made toward reducing poverty and improving quality of life for Manitobans.



Community Engagement

Communities, organizations and businesses are encouraged to use this strategy as a guide when developing projects, programs and initiatives to support poverty reduction. Aligning local efforts with the goals and priorities outlined in this provincial strategy will help strengthen coordination and amplify collective work.

It will also help identify opportunities for partnership and collaboration with government through joint initiatives and shared learning to achieve lasting, inclusive change with contributions from all.

The next phase of this strategy's implementation will focus on deepening collaboration across sectors to ensure a unified and sustained approach to poverty reduction. A key priority will be engaging communities—including businesses, non-profit organizations, advocates and service agencies—to align efforts, share resources and co-develop solutions that reflect local realities and lived experiences.

Government will facilitate dialogues to share information about the strategy and encourage alignment to strengthen the collective effects of this work. This inclusive approach will help ensure that poverty reduction is not only a government responsibility, but a shared commitment across all sectors of society.

Ongoing Work

The Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet will continue to meet and discuss the strategy implementation, alongside monitoring its progress. The committee will also continue to engage with community and stakeholders to hear front-line perspectives and feedback on the success of the new strategy.

The Manitoba government will continue its work on poverty reduction across government departments through discussing changes to policies and programs at the Deputy Ministers' Table and the inter-departmental working group. These tables are made up of representatives from key departments, including those that are not represented on the Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet, and help coordinate cross-departmental initiatives that will support the goals and objectives of the poverty reduction strategy.

Conclusion

This strategy represents a long-term commitment to reducing poverty by addressing the interconnected needs of individuals and families across all stages of life.

By focusing on critical transition points, such as prenatal and early childhood development, youth exiting child welfare and the well-being of seniors, a foundation is being built for a more equitable, resilient and compassionate province.

Rooted in the understanding that care given at each life stage returns to each person in the future, this strategy is not only a plan for poverty reduction but a vision for shared prosperity and intergenerational well-being.

Through collaboration, innovation and commitment, a Manitoba will emerge where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

