



Canada Social Report  
Provincial/Territorial  
Policy Monitor

December 2014



CANADA SOCIAL REPORT



The [Caledon Institute of Social Policy](#) regularly scans provincial and territorial government websites in order to follow policy and program developments related to our core work and interests. A partial list includes: disability, education, health, housing, income security, poverty reduction, recreation, seniors and youth. This tracking is intended to inform our analysis of policy trends. Monitors can be searched on the Canada Social Report website by date, jurisdiction and category.

## Newfoundland and Labrador

### CHILDREN

An annual operating grant of \$9.7 million will be distributed among eligible licensed child care centres to offset some of their operating costs. The Operating Grant Program will require participating child care centres to lower their rates for parents to the current Child Care Services Subsidy rates. In turn, the province will allocate an annual operating grant ranging from \$780 to \$3,640 per space, depending on the age of the child. This allocation will compensate centres for their lower rates. Budget 2014 allocated an additional investment of \$11.4 million for child care, bringing the total budget to approximately \$42.5 million. This funding will focus on continuing to implement the 10-year child care strategy, Caring for Our Future. As of June 2014, there were 7,815 regulated child care spaces throughout the province, which is almost a 70 percent increase since 2003.

<http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2014/edu/1205n04.aspx>

## New Brunswick

### GOVERNANCE

Municipalities, rural communities and local service districts will receive a total of \$72.9 million in community funding and equalization grants from the provincial government for 2015, an increase of \$1.2 million from the previous year.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2014.12.1371.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2014.12.1371.html)

### HEALTH

A comprehensive review of the New Brunswick Drug Plan will be completed and the mandatory requirement for residents to have prescription drug insurance will be eliminated. The review is meant to ensure that costs are reasonable for individuals, coverage is sufficient and employers are not subject to a required contribution. The government will also create two new premiums for low-income earners.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2014.12.1381.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2014.12.1381.html)

### HOUSING

The province remains committed to reinstating the home energy retrofit program to reduce energy use and lower costs for consumers. It focuses on helping low-income residents, and creating jobs in the construction industry through support for home renovations that improve energy efficiency.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2014.12.1392.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2014.12.1392.html)

### INCOME SECURITY

The province introduced a legislative amendment to repeal the Minimum Wage Board and establish a new formal mechanism for review and consultation on setting the minimum wage. The new mechanism will ensure employers, workers and stakeholders are engaged in a comprehensive



biennial review process. The review will consider a range of issues including the business impacts and socioeconomic effects of the minimum wage, the cost of living and general economic conditions. The government will conduct its first comprehensive review of the minimum wage by December 31, 2016, and will repeat the exercise every two years.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2014.12.1367.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2014.12.1367.html)

### THRONE SPEECH

The province outlined its plans to create the right conditions for job growth, achieve fiscal balance, and put families and communities back to work. Social policy-related initiatives include:

#### employment

- the establishment of a New Brunswick Jobs Board that will be accountable for all job creation work undertaken by the provincial government. It is charged with improving the coordination of the government's province-wide efforts in job creation and with evaluating its successes and failures
- the government address the job skills gap by improving skills training
- a Youth Employment Fund will be launched in 2015, offering 1,500 job placements annually. Young people will obtain work experience and training, and businesses will have access to young, skilled workers

#### education

- a 10-year plan for education will improve links among the components of the entire system – schools, colleges, universities, and other training programs

#### health

- the New Brunswick Drug Plan will be re-evaluated to ensure fairness and sustainability

#### income security

- the minimum wage will be increased to \$10.30 per hour by the end of 2014

#### housing

- a program that gives tax breaks on renovations costing up to \$10,000 will be developed to help seniors stay in their homes longer and create many jobs
- home energy efficiency retrofit programs will be reinstated to reduce energy use and lower costs for consumers starting in April, 2015. The program will focus on helping low-income residents make their homes more energy efficient

#### women

- the government will take steps to ensure that women's voices are heard on policy-making bodies, including the appointment of more women to provincial agencies, boards and commissions

#### governance

- a comprehensive review of all government programs, services and processes will be launched with a goal of identifying at least \$250 million in savings across government.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2014.12.1363.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2014.12.1363.html)

## Nova Scotia

### HEALTH

The province is streamlining its community drug service program, phasing out the extended pharmacare benefit established in 2001 and enrolling the existing 300 clients in the family pharmacare benefit which has grown to serve 34,000 since it was created in 2008.

<http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20141216008>

## Prince Edward Island

### INCOME SECURITY

Minimum wage in Prince Edward Island will increase to \$10.50 per hour effective July 1, 2015.

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/newsroom/index.php?number=news&newsnumber=9981&dept=&lang=E>

## Québec

### BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The provincial government delivered an economic and financial update which confirmed that, without any interventions, its deficit would have reached \$7 billion in 2015-16. It identified \$3.6 billion in spending cuts and additional expenditures of \$2.5 billion. The government anticipates reducing the deficit to \$2.35 billion in 2014-15 and achieving a balanced budget in 2015-2016. It announced measures to support economic recovery, including new initiatives to increase private investment, facilitate the transition to a green economy and assist farmers. Spending cuts totalling \$1.9 billion include:

- limiting the factors that contribute to increases in state compensation expenses (estimated savings: \$689 million)
- spreading out increases in physician compensation (estimated savings: \$194 million)
- suspending bonuses to management and supervisory employees of ministries and agencies (estimated savings: \$42 million)
- reducing the transitional tax pact with Québec municipalities (estimated savings: \$300 million)
- conducting a review of health programs, including changes to the governance of the province's health network (estimated savings: \$205 million)



- undertaking a review of the funding of care (estimated savings: \$193 million).

[Link](#)

## EDUCATION

A report by the province's Higher Council of Education outlined three areas for improvement:

- greater collective commitment to curricular reform
- periodic review of controversial educational issues with a view to arriving at concerted action and accountabilities
- a more gradual and iterative approach to curriculum development that draws upon wide and varied expertise.

[Link](#)

## GOVERNANCE

As of January 1, 2015, fuel distributors and fossil fuels will be subject to the Québec California cap-and-trade program. This measure has been applied to large industrial companies since 2013. The new measure will cover 85 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Québec. It will reduce the province's greenhouse gas emissions at the lowest possible cost to business and consumers while allowing the province to structure its economy and promote the transition to a more responsible carbon level. All carbon market revenues, estimated at \$3.3 billion by 2020, will be invested in greenhouse gas reduction and adaptation measures listed in Québec's 2013-20 Action Plan on Climate Change.

[Link](#)

## HOMELESSNESS

The province released its first-ever portrait of homelessness in Québec, in accord with measures listed in the Plan d'action interministériel en itinérance 2010-13 (2010-13 interdepartmental action plan against homelessness). Entitled *L'itinérance au Québec: premier portrait* (Homelessness in Québec: first portrait), the report indicates that homelessness occurs major centres and small cities throughout the province and among women and youth.

Report: <http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/acrobat/f/documenta-tion/2014/14-738-01W.pdf>

## INCOME SECURITY

Child assistance payments will increase by 1.06 percent on January 1, 2015, affecting approximately 864,000 families. The increase is the result of an indexing scheme for personal income tax.

[Link](#)

On January 1, 2015, benefits paid by the Québec Pension Plan will be indexed at 1.8 percent. This annual adjustment affects recipients of

pensions, surviving spouses, people with disabilities and their children, orphans and beneficiaries.

[Link](#)

Minimum wage will rise to \$10.55 on May 1, 2015, an increase of \$0.20 per hour.

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## Ontario

### EDUCATION

Additional funding is being provided to Ontario's 31 Preschool Speech and Language lead agencies. These organizations provide services to children with communication challenges from birth to the time they start school. The province anticipates reduced wait times for up to 10,000 children with speech and language difficulties.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mcys/en/2014/12/reducing-waitlists-for-pre-school-speech-and-language-programs.html>

The province is increasing the annual maximum amount of financial aid available to college and university students, and introducing new measures to help students repay their Ontario Student Assistance Program loan.

<http://news.ontarionewsroom.com/tcu/en/2014/12/making-postsecondary-education-more-affordable-in-ontario-1.html>

### HEALTH

Bill 21, the *Safeguarding Health Care Integrity Act, 2014*, passed third reading. This new legislation protects Ontario's current voluntary blood donor model and prohibits payments to individuals for their blood and plasma, including reimbursement of expenses or other forms of compensation. It will also strengthen the safety of drugs provided to patients in the province's hospitals by allowing for the inspection and licensing of hospital pharmacies by the Ontario College of Pharmacists.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mohltc/en/2014/12/safeguarding-the-integrity-of-ontarios-health-care-system.html>

### INCOME SECURITY

The province introduced the *Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2014*. If passed, the Action will lay out a framework for the creation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and commit the government to establishing the plan by January 1, 2017. The essential plan components include defining a comparable workplace pension plan, establishing a minimum earnings threshold and supporting the self-employed.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mof/en/2014/12/province-taking-next-step-in-developing-ontario-retirement-pension-plan.html>

### WOMEN

The province will increase the number of women in high-ranking positions in the workforce by approving securities law rule amendments that will encourage greater representation of women on corporate boards and



in senior management teams. In order to promote the inclusion of more women in senior roles, companies will now be required to disclose:

- the number of women on the board and in executive officer positions
- policies regarding the representation of women on the board
- the board's or nominating committee's consideration of the representation of women in the director identification and selection process
- Director term limits and other mechanisms of renewal of their board.

Enforced by the Ontario Securities Commission, the new amendments will promote a proactive approach through a "comply or explain" model rather than prescribed diversity quotas. The rule changes will come into force on December 31, 2014, in time for the required information to be included in 2015 annual reports.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mof/en/2014/12/increasing-gender-diversity-in-corporate-leadership.html>

Ontario is launching a public education campaign to help immigrants learn the warning signs of woman abuse. Ontario's Neighbours, Friends and Families – Immigrant and Refugee Communities Campaign will reach out to diverse communities by developing products and activities that are accessible and relevant to newcomers. The government is investing \$836,500 over two years to support 10 programs across the province.

<http://news.ontario.ca/owd/en/2014/12/diverse-communities-take-action-on-violence-against-women.html>

The province will work to raise awareness of sexual violence and harassment; enhance prevention initiatives to combat sexual discrimination, harassment and violence; and improve support for victims. Initiatives include a public education campaign; measures to improve government caucus policies, procedures and training; the creation of a standing Roundtable on Violence Against Women; and work across several ministries to improve support for victims of sexual violence. In early 2015, the government will launch a multi-media public education campaign to:

- challenge norms, behaviours and myths around sexual violence and harassment
- raise awareness of the supports available to victims of sexual violence and harassment, beyond the criminal justice system.

<http://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2014/12/taking-action-against-sexual-violence-and-harassment.html>

## Manitoba

### DISABILITY

Workers with agencies providing services for people living with intellectual disabilities will see an increase in minimum wages to \$12.50 an hour

starting January 1, 2015, and to \$13.00 an hour in July 2015, followed by a third increase in 2016 that is currently being negotiated.

<http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=33592&post-ed=2014-12-19>

### HOUSING

The province will introduce a new initiative to improve consumer protection for families undertaking home improvement projects. To address higher-than-negotiated prices and lengthy project delays by contractors, the Manitoba government will:

- require written contracts for most home improvement projects
- ensure contracts lay out the project, the price, payment terms and timelines
- see consumers receive a copy of the contract before any work can begin.

<http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=33454&post-ed=2014-12-04>

## Saskatchewan

### CHILDREN

The province announced the enactment of *The Public Guardian and Trustee Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2)*, which establishes the Counsel for Children program. This initiative is intended for situations in which children and youth benefit from having their views and best interests represented in child protection proceedings by independent legal counsel.

<http://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2014/december/02/new-legislation-to-help-children-and-youth>

### EMPLOYMENT

The province launched SaskCareers.ca. This career development website will allow users to discover and explore career paths and learn about education and training opportunities in the province.

<http://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2014/december/08/saskcareers>

### GOVERNANCE

The proposed *Saskatchewan Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2014* will clarify that discrimination against transgender people is and has been against the law, and will strengthen the rights of renters, regardless of sexual orientation.

<http://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2014/december/02/human-rights-code-act>

### HEALTH

After a one-year public consultation phase, the province endorsed *Working Together for Change: A 10-Year Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan for Saskatchewan*. It outlines 16 recommendations that fall into



seven categories:

- enhance access and capacity and support recovery in the community
- focus on prevention and early intervention
- create person and family-centred and coordinated services
- respond to diversities
- partner with First Nations and Métis Peoples
- reduce stigma and increase awareness
- transform the system and sustain the change.

<http://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2014/december/01/mental-health-action-plan>

### POVERTY REDUCTION

The province announced an 11-member Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction. In addition to conducting research, the advisory group will be holding a poverty roundtable with community groups and the public, and will provide its recommendations to government in May 2015. The group's recommendations will help inform the development of the Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/saskatchewan-government-creates-advisory-group-on-poverty-reduction-1.2881472>

## Alberta

### CHILDREN

The province introduced Bill 10, the *Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children*. It will provide students with a safer learning environment while respecting parental rights and the autonomy of school boards. The legislation supports a zero-tolerance attitude towards bullying and discrimination based on sexual orientation or any other grounds. It also enshrines the right of parents to make informed decisions regarding the education of their children, and the responsibility of elected school boards. Bill 10 will ensure students who wish to establish clubs that promote caring, respectful and safe learning environments, including gay-straight alliances, have clear recourse if their request is denied. Students and/or their parents will have the ability to appeal any such decisions to their elected school boards.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=374374EB8905C-F968-D5E8-0164EE004E58ABF7>

### INCOME SECURITY

The province approved two changes to the Employment Pension Plans Regulation, which applies to private sector pension plans. One of the changes allows defined benefit collectively-bargained, multi-employer pension plans to continue a moratorium on solvency funding until permanent legislation addressing their funding concerns is in place. The second change deals with pension-splitting rules in cases of marriage

breakdown for supplemental plans registered under the Employment Pension Plans Regulation.

<http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=37534E9DBF94B-FBF7-01E6-15421511296CE739>

## British Columbia

### CAREGIVING

New adult guardianship rules will strengthen the rights of adults who may be unable to make financial decisions independently due to mental incapability and, as a result, may require the assistance of a statutory property guardian. Changes are being made to the Adult Guardianship Act that relate to the certificate of incapability process. Related regulations, which include procedures for conducting assessments of incapability to manage financial affairs, are also coming into force.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2014/12/bc-moves-forward-in-protecting-the-rights-of-vulnerable-citizens.html>

### DISABILITY

Starting in January 2015, BC will become the first province in Canada to ensure people receiving disability assistance will be able to calculate their earnings on an annual basis instead of monthly, reducing barriers to employment. Annualized earnings exemptions are particularly helpful for people with disabilities whose ability to earn fluctuates during the year. For example, if a person earns more than \$800 in a month, he or she can keep all of that money up to \$9,600 for the year. There is no monthly maximum. The new annualized earnings exemption is the result of a successful pilot project, which was introduced to 1,500 people in 2013. About 900 of these people accepted work shifts that they would otherwise have turned down, earned more money and described the change as an incentive to work.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2014/12/flexibility-helps-people-with-disabilities-earn.html>

### HEALTH

The province announced the opening of a unique mental health treatment facility. It will deliver:

- ongoing support and assessment
- crisis intervention, coordinated psychiatric and medical treatment
- life and social skills building
- drug and alcohol recovery programs and counseling job skills training and education
- peer support
- advocacy and coordination along with other needed resources, like housing and social services.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2014/12/first-for-bc-recovery-program-helps-addiction-and-mental-illness.html>



## HOUSING

To help ensure housing affordability, the province is keeping the current allowable rent increase for residential tenancies at 2.5 percent for 2015. For manufactured home park tenancies, the rate is 2.5 percent plus a proportional amount for the change in municipal and utility fees.

<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2014/12/province-maintains-low-allowable-rent-increase.html>

## Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

*No updates this month.*