



Canada Social Report  
Provincial/Territorial  
Policy Monitor

November 2016



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. 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

### BUDGET

The provincial Auditor General expressed concerns regarding the province's ability to sustain the level of deficits forecast in Budget 2016. The province's *2016 Fiscal and Economic Update* showed a deterioration in most economic indicators from the original expectations at the time of Budget 2016. The province's long-term economic forecast indicates a 13 percent drop in employment by 2020, a reduction of 31,100 persons. The government expects program expenses to show modest growth of 0.4 percent per year to 2022-23, lower than the expected inflation rate over the same period. The government has indicated that it intends to achieve a balanced budget by 2021-22 and a surplus by 2022-23.

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### GOVERNANCE

The provincial government launched *The Way Forward: A Vision for Sustainability and Growth in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Its purpose is to make government more efficient, strengthen the province's economic foundation, enhance services and improve outcomes. The Vision includes more than 50 initiatives, all aimed at achieving the Budget 2016 goal of returning to surplus within seven years while maintaining quality programs and services. Phase one of the Vision will be completed in six months, with a report card on progress to be delivered at the end of this phase.

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### HEALTH

The province introduced the *Access to Abortion Services Act* to allow for the creation of safe access zones around health care facilities and the homes of health professionals and clinic owners providing abortion services in the province.

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### MINIMUM WAGE

Effective April 1, 2017, the minimum wage will increase by 25 cents to \$10.75 followed by an additional increase of 25 cents to \$11.00 on October 1, 2017. These increases will bring the Newfoundland and Labrador minimum wage rate in line with other Atlantic provinces.

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## New Brunswick

### GOVERNANCE

The provincial Auditor General expressed concern about the sustainability of the province's finances. For the year ended March 31, 2016, the province incurred a deficit of \$260 million, its eighth annual deficit in a row, and additional deficits are forecast through 2020. Net debt per resident is now about \$18,000 in 2016 (up from \$17,400 in 2015), with the province's net debt climbing to almost \$14 billion in 2016. Long-term sustainability indicators also continue to be unfavourable.

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## LABOUR MARKET

The provincial government announced \$345,000 in funding to Venn Innovation for the implementation of InspireNB, a career exploration and planning resource for young people designed to raise awareness of available employment opportunities. InspireNB also connects 80 participating employers with their future workforce.

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## THRONE SPEECH

The province outlined three priorities in its Throne Speech: economic growth, education and health care, with a special focus on education. The government will:

### Education

- increase opportunities for students to learn coding and the trades
- increase the amount provided to residents to help pay for child care
- provide free tuition to every New Brunswick undergraduate student attending a publicly-funded institution in the province whose family earns up to \$60,000 per year
- improve language-skill outcomes by introducing French immersion in Grade 1 starting in September 2017
- enhance opportunities for adult learners to study a second language
- develop a strategy for increased training for early childhood educators, including a free online curriculum
- implement the first year of the 10-year education plan: literacy, numeracy, early childhood and career and life readiness

### Poverty reduction

- support low- and middle-income families by providing approximately \$100 million in direct financial support through the provincial HST credit
- promote locally produced food and beverage consumption to grow the GDP

### Health

- maximize the services of healthcare professionals, such as nurse practitioners and midwives, through a new framework
- enhance and modernize services for adults with addictions and other mental health issues
- improve primary health care and increase access to healthcare professionals
- focus on healthy aging through the development of new programs and policies for seniors, and improve palliative care services
- address the root causes of public health epidemics such as obesity and smoking.

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## Nova Scotia

### CHILDREN

The provincial Auditor General's report stated that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development needs to do more to monitor licensed agencies that are responsible for family home child care. Such facilities currently serve 1,200 children. The department has indicated that accessibility and affordability of child care are areas of focus, but has not clearly defined what this means or established performance measures. Programs to promote accessibility and affordability have not met their objectives. The department recently released a child care review which included five recommendations to improve accessibility and affordability.

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### DISABILITY

The government introduced legislation to make the province more accessible and reduce barriers for persons with disabilities. *An Act Respecting Accessibility in Nova Scotia* is a framework for government to work with communities, businesses and nonprofit organizations to create accessibility standards.

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## Prince Edward Island

### GOVERNANCE

The province introduced the *Municipal Government Act*, which modernizes PEI's approach to local governance by establishing consistent rules and procedures for all municipalities. It will raise the standards of service delivery, administration and financial accountability, and provide municipalities with greater authority, flexibility, and discretion.

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The province conducted a 10-day plebiscite to allow residents to express their views on electoral reform. A low voter turnout of 36.5 percent was recorded. Legislators will now determine whether they have sufficient support to proceed with reforms. Among the five options on which voters were asked to express their preference, Mixed Member Proportional Representation received 52.4 percent support during the fourth round of counting.

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### MENTAL HEALTH

The province released *Moving Forward Together*, a strategy that outlines the high-level direction for the province's mental health system through 2026. It identifies some of the challenges the system faces and lays out five strategic priorities that will cut across all areas of government. The priorities include:

- Invest Early: Focus on Children, Young People and Families
- Access to the Right Service, Treatment and Support



- Mental Health Promotion for People of All Ages
- Foster Recovery and Well-being for People of All Ages
- Innovative and Collaborative Workforce.

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In 2017-18, Prince Edward Island will begin a master plan for mental health programming and facilities. This work will bring mental health services more in line with the vision put forward in the recent mental health and addictions strategy *Moving Forward Together*.

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## Québec

### DISABILITY

The province announced it would provide \$1.1 million for a two-year pilot project offering paid internships to young people with disabilities. The project will operate in collaboration with the Québec Council of adapted enterprises and will allow trainees under the age of 30 to develop transferable work experience. Eight companies will welcome 60 participants in 52-week paid internships. A wage subsidy measure will supply participating companies with an equivalent investment of \$300,000.

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### HEALTH

To reduce waiting times for surgery, the government announced an investment of \$20 million to fund 22,450 additional surgeries per year. Currently, 96,000 people are waiting for surgery in Québec. Of these, 14,500 people are waiting for more than six months; 1,000 of whom have waited for more than a year. The immediate objective is to prioritize patients with the longest wait times while respecting the specific wait times for cancer surgery.

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## Ontario

### CHILDREN

As a first step in delivering on its September 2016 commitment to deliver 100,000 more child care spaces within the next five years, Ontario is creating 3,400 new child care spaces in schools this year. The government is also seeking public input on its early years and child care system. Feedback from parents, families, experts and the public will help shape the government's renewed vision and framework for early years programs and services.

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### DISABILITY

The Government of Ontario is expanding ReportON, a new service for reporting suspected or witnessed abuse of adults with developmental

disabilities.

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Ontario is encouraging people to share their ideas on how to help remove barriers, improve opportunities and support the creation of innovative and inclusive housing for adults with developmental disabilities.

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### FAMILIES

Ontario passed legislation that will ensure equal treatment for all parents and children in the province. Bill 28, the *All Families Are Equal Act, 2016*, recognizes the legal status of all parents, whether they are LGBTQ2+ or straight, and whether their children were conceived with or without assistance.

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### GOVERNANCE

The Auditor General of Ontario's *Annual Report* contains results of value-for-money audits of provincial spending in health care, mental health care, the environment, roads and transit construction, government procurement and employment programs. Social policy-related findings include:

- the province's health care sector spent \$8 billion over the last 14 years to implement an Electronic Health Record initiative but the initiative remains unfinished
- Ontario does not have province-wide standards for use by all hospitals relating to the admission, treatment and discharge of people with mental illness, and wait times to access services are increasing
- emergency surgeries have to compete with elective surgeries for operating-room time, resulting in long wait times for patients requiring emergency surgeries
- the incremental cost of patient-enrolment models has not always led to more timely access to a family physician. Enrolled patients are still visiting walk-ins, other physicians and hospital emergency rooms for services treatable by their family physicians
- after audits in 2003 and 2008, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services has still not made changes to ensure that agencies deliver mental health services to children and youth appropriately, cost-effectively and on a timely basis
- Ontario does not prioritize the placement of high-needs individuals into mental health supportive housing, meaning people with less serious needs can get placements first
- the government spends more than \$1 billion annually on employment programs and services, but only 38 percent of people who received them last year were employed full-time when they completed their



programs, and fewer than half of the people who begin an apprenticeship program complete it.

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## HOMELESSNESS

Additional investment from the province will further support municipalities in delivering housing- and homelessness-related services tailored to meet the needs of their communities through 2020. The additional \$15 million in the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative will bring the government's annual contribution to \$338.7 million by 2019-20, an increase of \$92 million since the program launched in 2013. This funding builds on the \$15 million in each of 2017-18 and 2018-19 that was announced in October 2016. The program is also providing municipalities with \$293.7 million in 2016-17, \$308.7 million in 2017-18, and \$323.7 million in 2018-19.

Services include:

- financial assistance and education programs to help prevent eviction
- long-term and transitional housing with related supports
- emergency shelters for those experiencing a crisis.

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## HOUSING

Ontario is proposing to double the maximum Land Transfer Tax refund to \$4,000 for eligible first-time homebuyers, as of January 1, 2017. If passed, the proposal would mean that no Land Transfer Tax would be payable on the first \$368,000 of the cost of a first home, and more than half of first-time homebuyers would pay no Land Transfer Tax on the purchase of their home.

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## INCOME SECURITY

From November 2016 to January 2017, Ontario is seeking input on a basic income pilot project. Discussion will be guided by a paper written by the Hon. Hugh Segal, *Finding a Better Way: A Basic Income Pilot Project for Ontario*.

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## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Ontario has established a new Elders Council that will provide advice to the Attorney General to make the justice system more responsive to the needs of Indigenous people and support the reclamation of Indigenous legal systems.

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## Manitoba

### GOVERNANCE

Premiers of Canada's four western provinces announced that Manitoba has joined the New West Partnership Trade Agreement, strengthening and expanding Canada's largest, barrier-free interprovincial market. With the inclusion of Manitoba, the partnership creates an open, common market of more than 11 million people, with a combined GDP of more than \$750 billion.

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### HEALTH

A new, palliative care program specialist will lead the development, coordination and delivery of palliative care education to health care providers and volunteers across the province. The creation of the position is expected to provide a strong foundation toward the integration of palliative care education and best practices across the continuum of care.

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### HOUSING

The provincial and federal governments agreed to measures aimed at increasing Manitoban's access to affordable housing. These include the doubling of current funding under the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) agreement, supporting affordable housing for seniors and victims of family violence and addressing repairs of existing social housing. Under the two-year agreement, \$67.7 million from the federal government and \$21.7 million from the provincial government will be committed to affordable housing investments in Manitoba. In addition to existing funding under the IAH, the funding levels by the governments of Canada and Manitoba have been doubled to almost \$43.5 million over two years. The new funding is in addition to approximately \$166 million joint eight-year funding provided by the both governments under the IAH agreement to help create more affordable housing options in Manitoba.

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### INCOME SECURITY

The Manitoba government has introduced proposed legislation that would enable the creation of pooled registered pension plans (PRPPs) to offer options to encourage people to save for retirement. PRPPs would be defined contribution-style plans that are set up and administered by federally licensed providers. The proposed *Pooled Registered Pension Plans (Manitoba) Act* would build on federal legislation and set out the rules and processes for establishing these types of plans in Manitoba.

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### THRONE SPEECH

The Manitoba government's Throne Speech focused on policies and programs that will deliver transparent and responsible fiscal management, improvements to and sustainability of services, and opportunities for long-term economic development in the province's northern and rural regions. Social policy-related commitments include the government's



plans to:

- address the needs of Manitoba’s most vulnerable children by developing a plan that will act upon the many outstanding reports and recommendations that have followed tragedies within the child welfare system
- improve access to justice and to reducing unreasonable court delays with a system-wide review focused on the efficiency of the justice system
- reform Manitoba’s Employment and Income Assistance program and release a new provincial housing strategy to address homelessness, affordability and repairs to existing housing stock
- complete a comprehensive assessment of the health system via the Health Sustainability and Innovation Review
- focus on public education measures and other steps to counteract the opioid crisis facing Manitoba and warn Manitobans about the dangers of fentanyl-laced drugs
- form a provincial agency for doctor recruitment aligned with province-wide priorities of doctor recruitment and retention
- create pooled retirement pension plans to provide a new option of saving for retirement for those Manitobans who do not have access to a workplace pension.

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## Saskatchewan

### EDUCATION/INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Following Their voices, a new initiative aimed at improving educational achievement and graduation rates of First Nations and Métis students led to a 10 percent increase in the number of First Nations and Métis students attending at least 80 percent of the time. A made-in-Saskatchewan initiative, the model was field tested in six schools from January to June 2015 and expanded in 2015-16. The initiative is currently being implemented in 16 provincial and First Nations schools.

Using a train the trainer model in each school, it allows teachers to adapt to the individualized needs of their students. In 2015-16, in addition to the 10 percent increase of First Nations and Métis students attending at least 80 percent of the time, average attendance rose four percent for First Nations and Métis students while average attendance rose two percent for all students. This rise also led the way for a one percent increase in credit attainment, which can lead to increased graduation rates.

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### INCOME SECURITY

Changes proposed to Income Assistance programs will not be implemented as announced earlier this year, while the province proceeds to

review and redesign its programs to better serve those in need. The 2,700 clients who received letters from Social Services this summer will not have their benefits affected by these policy changes unless their individual circumstances change (e.g., they move). The program changes will continue to apply to new program applicants or to existing clients whose circumstances change.

Social Services has begun working on Income Assistance Redesign, following through on a commitment made in the *Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy*. The Redesign will be based on four principles: Income Assistance is citizen-centred, simple, transparent and sustainable.

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## Alberta

### CHILDREN

In the first step toward \$25-per-day child care in Alberta, the government is inviting nonprofit organizations to apply to develop 18 new Early Learning and Child Care Centres across the province. With a focus on capping fees at \$25 a day, this initiative will address gaps in the existing child care system, including:

- flexible child care options for parents doing shift work
- accessible locations, such as hospitals and other public buildings
- supports for children with diverse needs.

Each new child care centre will receive up to \$500,000 in operating funding in the first year, with the opportunity to receive two more years of funding. The locations of new child care centres, targeted to where demand is greatest, will be announced early in 2017.

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### INCOME SECURITY

About 110,000 families have received their first payment under the new Alberta Child Benefit program, including an estimated 200,000 children. All families earning less than \$41,220 per year in net income, including those receiving Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped and Income Support, are eligible. The maximum annual benefit is \$1,100 for families with one child and \$2,750 for families with four or more children.

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### WOMEN

Alberta Status of Women will support organizations that improve the lives of women and girls through \$500,000 in grants. These grants create opportunities for community groups to pilot an innovative idea or expand successful projects to help Alberta women reach their full potential. Eligible organizations include registered charities, registered not-for-profit and community-based coalitions and networks.

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## British Columbia

### LITERACY

A total of 85 communities will receive \$2.4 million in support of community adult literacy programs. Funds are distributed to nonprofit community groups to offer free training in easily accessible locations such as schools, Aboriginal friendship centres and community centres. In 2016-17, 91 grants will be funded, supporting 9,000 adult learners. Since 2001, the province has invested more than \$27 million in community adult literacy programs, helping approximately 109,000 adults improve their reading, writing and math skills.

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### POVERTY REDUCTION

The government outlined the areas in which it has worked to address high rates of child poverty. These include its Jobs Plan, investments in affordable housing, the Single Parent Employment Initiative, minimum wage increases, Medical Services Plan rate reductions and exemptions for lower-income families, investments in child care and a lower overall tax burden.

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## Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

*No updates this month.*