

Position Statement from the Council of Community Living Ontario Re: Poverty

Introduction:

We are members of the Council of Community Living Ontario. The 12 elected members are self-advocates, people who have an intellectual disability, representing all geographical regions across Ontario. The Council is recognized in the constitution of Community Living Ontario. As the voice for self-advocates, Council collaborates with the Board of Directors to find solutions for issues that will improve the lives of people who have an intellectual disability.

We would like to address the issue of poverty and the harm it causes. Poverty, for many people who have an intellectual disability, is the biggest barrier to living a decent life. 75% of people who have an intellectual disability, who do not live with their families, live in poverty. People are not able to feel safe and secure when they don't have enough money to meet their basic needs. Being poor is not an acceptable way to live. When people are poor nothing else matters. Living in poverty is stressful and affects our health, self-esteem, and our ability to live independently. Once the Government focuses on lifting people who have an intellectual disability out of poverty, it will ensure their basic needs are met. Basic needs like being able to afford safe and accessible housing, access to reliable transportation, nutritious food, health care, social connections and inclusion within our communities, and access to jobs for a fair wage.

We didn't choose to have a disability. We didn't choose to be poor. We didn't choose to be stigmatized and segregated in our schools, limiting our educational opportunities. We didn't choose to face bias and discrimination in the labour market or pushed to the sidelines of our communities. This is the history that we have endured, and it continues to be forced upon us.

Issues and areas of concern:

- Living in poverty increases stress, (i.e., not having enough money for groceries and paying bills)
- Living in poverty negatively affects mental health, (i.e., increases depression and suicide)
- Living in poverty affects health, (i.e., not having access to medical care and treatments)
- Living in poverty decreases the ability to buy nutritious food (i.e., fast food is cheaper and easier to get than preparing meals)
- Living in poverty makes it difficult to find safe, affordable and accessible housing.
- Living in poverty increases the chance of abuse, fear, and isolation.
- Living in poverty breaks down self-confidence making it harder to advocate.

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- Living in poverty restricts personal network, social contact, and support.
- Living in poverty decreases the ability to participate in community activities.
- Living in poverty reduces participation in decision making, at home, and in the community.
- Living in poverty means people cannot protect themselves against violent natural disasters.
- Living in poverty reduces access to transportation.
- Living in poverty restricts education and employment opportunities (only 25% of people who have an intellectual disability have been able to break barriers and achieve employment)
- Living in poverty reduces the ability to protect oneself, (i.e., Covid 19)
- Living in poverty leads people to make poor decisions.

What needs to change:

- Provide an amount above the poverty line according to the cost of living.
- Increase the amount as the cost of living and inflation goes up.
- Allow people to keep the money that they earn without claw backs.
- Decrease the multiple applications, forms, and documents.
- Reduce the department run-around making it easier to communicate.
- The attitude that people are poor because they choose not to work needs to change.
- The place where a person lives should not affect the funding they receive.
- The attitude that the “extra” things are not needed or that people do not deserve things like pets or hobbies or to have the ability to go to a movie for entertainment.
- Increase the medical coverage for Diabetic testing strips and dental care, so that people do not have to pay out of pocket and wait to be paid back.
- Information needs to be in plain language, so they are easily understood and there needs to be one place to go to for questions to be answered.

Next Steps:

- Provide a federal monthly support amount of a minimum of \$2200.00, **WITH NO PROVINCIAL CLAWBACK.** (CERB showed that \$2000/month is the base amount that people need to live and yet people who have a disability are expected to survive on \$1200/month or less)
- Allow people to keep the all the money that they earn.
- Reduce the applications, forms, and documents.
- Be open about, provide support and useful information for the various pockets of money available (i.e., money for transportation to medical appointments, Trillium, discretionary funds, special necessities benefit, assistive devices program)
- Increase communication by using plain language and having one person to report to.
- Include us in decisions and problem solving.
- Develop a positive attitude towards ALL people.

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Conclusion:

We, the Council of Community Living Ontario, know that change can happen if organizations and government officials work with us, and our allies. We need to collaborate and communicate to find solutions to ensure people who have an intellectual disability receive an adequate and equitable income. Inclusion in our community depends on having the money needed to afford accessible housing, healthy food, transportation, participation in social and political activities, an education and employment. Our lives depend on change. Change can happen and change will benefit everyone...us, our families, friends, and neighbourhoods.

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