

**Submission on Bill 152:
Poverty Reduction Act, 2009 to the
Standing Committee on Social Policy**

April 21, 2009

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO)

List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

The Preamble's second sentence be amended to: "The government's poverty reduction strategy is guided by the vision of a poverty-free province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential, and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario...."

Recommendation 2:

Section 2(1) be amended to: "The government of Ontario shall maintain the long-term poverty reduction strategy set out in *Breaking the Cycle—Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* published on December 4, 2008, or another long-term poverty reduction strategy that is guided by the vision of a poverty-free province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario."

Recommendation 3:

Section 2(2) be amended to: "Every new or modified legislation, policy, practice, and poverty reduction strategy is to be based on the following principles"

Recommendation 4:

Section 2(2) principle 7 be amended to: "That a sustained commitment to work together to develop strong and healthy children, adults, families and communities is required to effectively reduce poverty."

Recommendation 5:

Section 2(2) be amended to add principle 8: "Enhanced enforcement of equality rights through the *Ontario Human Rights Code* is required to effectively reduce poverty."

Recommendation 6:

Section 2 (3) 2 be amended to: "Initiatives supported by sustainable funding designed to improve the economic and social conditions of persons and families living in poverty."

Recommendation 7:

Section 3 be amended to add: "At least every five years, either as a result of a review under section 6 or otherwise, the government of Ontario shall establish a specific target for poverty reduction. The target shall represent a substantive reduction in poverty within the next five years."

Recommendation 8:

Section 4 be amended to: “The Minister shall, commencing at the end of 2009, prepare an annual report on the government’s long-term poverty reduction strategy, including the government’s activities to support the strategy and available information relating to the indicators set out in the strategy. The Minister shall table the report in the Legislature within 60 days of its completion.”

Recommendation 9:

Section 6 (2) be amended to include: “The Minister shall appoint an independent person or group, within four years of the release of *Breaking the Cycle—Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy*, to undertake a review of the implementation and effectiveness of the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy. The report of this review shall be tabled in the Legislature within 60 days of completion.”

Section 6 (2) be amended to include: “shall arrange for consultation to be carried out by such means as the independent reviewer believes will facilitate participation by stakeholders, especially those living in poverty, as well as other levels of government, members of the private, public, and non-profit sectors.”

Recommendation 10:

Section 6 (3) be amended to: “Based on the independent review, the government shall issue a new long-term poverty reduction strategy for Ontario.”

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) is the professional organization for registered nurses who practice in all roles and sectors across Ontario. RNAO's mission is to speak out for health, health care, and nursing. RNAO appreciates the opportunity to present this submission on Bill 152, Poverty Reduction Act, 2009, to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

From our nursing practice and from a growing body of scientific evidence, we know that poverty harms health and puts people at a greater risk for early death throughout the life cycle.

^{1 2 3} Every day registered nurses across the province are working with their clients and neighbours as they struggle to meet basic needs for nutritious food, affordable shelter, and human dignity.

As poverty is such a threat to the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities, RNAO welcomed the release of *Breaking the Cycle—Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* in December 2008 as a strong start to building a stronger, healthier, more inclusive society. With the current economic challenges, now more than ever, bold and sustained leadership is required because the promise of this strategy must be fully realized in improved living conditions and healthier, longer lives for all Ontarians.

RNAO urges the Standing Committee on Social Policy to strengthen Bill 152 so that it will more effectively fulfill its purpose of establishing mechanisms to support a sustained long-term reduction of poverty in Ontario. RNAO's recommendations for amendments and their rationales are as follows:

Recommendation 1:

The Preamble's second sentence be amended to: "The government's poverty reduction strategy is guided by the vision of a poverty-free province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential, and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario...."

Recommendation 2:

Section 2(1) be amended to: "The government of Ontario shall maintain the long-term poverty reduction strategy set out in *Breaking the Cycle—Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* published on December 4, 2008, or another long-term poverty reduction strategy that is guided by the vision of a poverty-free province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario."

Rationale for Recommendations 1 and 2:

In order to build a stronger, healthier, more inclusive Ontario, we must work together toward a vision of a poverty free province rather than the more modest and ambiguous goal of reducing poverty. We need to be explicit about the final destination as a province without poverty while recognizing various measures of poverty reduction as necessary intermediate steps towards the ultimate goal.

Recommendation 3:

Section 2(2) be amended to: “Every new or modified legislation, policy, practice, and poverty reduction strategy is to be based on the following principles”

Rationale for Recommendation 3:

In order for the government’s approach to be truly comprehensive, it is important that the goal of poverty reduction and the articulated principles be incorporated into the work of government including legislation, policies, and practices.

Recommendation 4:

Section 2(2) principle 7 be amended to: “That a sustained commitment to work together to develop strong and healthy children, adults, families and communities is required to effectively reduce poverty.”

Rationale for Recommendation 4:

While RNAO fully supports the need to reduce child and family poverty, it is also essential that single adults not be excluded from a comprehensive approach to addressing poverty.

Recommendation 5:

Section 2(2) be amended to add principle 8: “Enhanced enforcement of equality rights through the *Ontario Human Rights Code* is required to effectively reduce poverty.”

Rationale for Recommendation 5:

Consistent with principle 3’s recognition that not all groups share the same risk of poverty and to give teeth to this important principle, it is essential to make an explicit link

with human rights legislation as a mechanism to address discrimination. A human rights approach would also be consistent with Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of him[her]self and of his[her] family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his[her] control.”⁴

Recommendation 6:

Section 2 (3) 2 be amended to: “Initiatives supported by sustainable funding designed to improve the economic and social conditions of persons and families living in poverty.”

Rationale for Recommendation 6:

In order to make substantial progress toward poverty eradication and improving social inclusion for all Ontarians, there must be substantial ongoing investments that include funding initiatives that are central to this strategy.

Recommendation 7:

Section 3 be amended to add: “At least every five years, either as a result of a review under section 6 or otherwise, the government of Ontario shall establish a specific target for poverty reduction. The target shall represent a substantive reduction in poverty within the next five years.”

Rationale for Recommendation 7:

As the purpose of this proposed legislation is to enshrine into law a long-term commitment to reducing poverty that would extend beyond any one government’s mandate, it is important to explicitly state the expectation of substantive reduction. To achieve the vision of a poverty free Ontario, we need ambitious, achievable targets linked to coordinated action across ministries.

Recommendation 8:

Section 4 be amended to: “The Minister shall, commencing at the end of 2009, prepare an annual report on the government’s long-term poverty reduction strategy, including the government’s activities to support the strategy and available information relating to the indicators set out in the strategy. The Minister shall table the report in the Legislature within 60 days of its completion.”

Rationale for Recommendation 8:

In order to enhance transparency, accountability, and public engagement, this annual report, based on the findings of an independent person or group, should be publicly tabled in the Legislature.

Recommendation 9:

Section 6 (2) be amended to include: “The Minister shall appoint an independent person or group, within four years of the release of *Breaking the Cycle—Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy*, to undertake a review of the implementation and effectiveness of the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy. The report of this review shall be tabled in the Legislature within 60 days of completion.

Section 6 (2) be amended to include: “shall arrange for consultation to be carried out by such means as the independent reviewer believes will facilitate participation by stakeholders, especially those living in poverty, as well as other levels of government, members of the private, public, and non-profit sectors.

Rationale for Recommendation 9:

An independent review with timelines that is tabled in the Legislature would enhance accountability, transparency, and credibility. It is essential that a meaningful consultation process be initiated so that those who have direct experience with poverty and social exclusion would be encouraged and have the opportunity to fully participate in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the poverty reduction strategy.

Recommendation 10:

Section 6 (3) be amended to: “Based on the independent review, the government shall issue a new long-term poverty reduction strategy for Ontario.”

Rationale for Recommendation 10:

Revised planning should be based on findings of the independent review.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario thanks the Standing Committee on Social Policy for the opportunity to provide these recommendations that we hope will help realize the vision of a poverty free Ontario.

References

¹ Marmot, M. & Wilkinson, R. (Eds). (1999). *Social Determinants of Health*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

² Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008). *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health. Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

³ Raphael, D. (Ed.) (2009). *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, Inc.

⁴ General Assembly of the United Nations (1948). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Accessed April 19, 2009 at <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>