



**New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice  
News Conference  
Tuesday, March 20, 2018**

Hello and thank you for attending the launch of our campaign, *Let's Mend our Social Net!*

**Introduction**

As you all know, New Brunswick has over the years slowly built up a system of public programs and services which together provide essential support for all of the province's citizens. This system is our social safety net.

One of the components of this social net is without a doubt the Department of Social Development's programs that are in place to help citizens living in poverty.

Unfortunately, in recent years, different governments have caused this net's mesh to fray, and holes have appeared. We want them repaired.

In a little over six months, citizens will be called to vote to determine which direction our province will take in the coming years. Currently, all political parties are deciding which essential elements are to be included in their electoral platform. We want to submit some proposals to be part of their program, in order to start fixing our social net.

**The situation**

Based on the most recent data (2015), 100,000 citizens have low income in the province, one third of them on social assistance. For many years, their economic situation has deteriorated.

These thousands of women, men, and children often get left out during election campaigns, because they do not have the political weight. We want to change this.

## Our proposals

### 1. Basic Rate

**Increase, in 2018-2019, the basic monthly rate of all categories of recipients and index it.**

**Adopt the Market Basket Measure to calculate the total annual income.**

**Modify the department policies**

The basic rate (\$537 per month) for the single employable on social assistance has not increased since 2010. For all others, it has not increased since 2014. Inflation has gone up each year. It means for all of them that they can only pay for a can of soup in 2018, the same amount of money they were paying in 2010 or 2014. Their purchasing power has decreased. They need to have in 2018-2019, an increase in their basic rate to compensate for the inflation. The increase for single employable should be 13 % and 5% for the others and index it after.

Presently, the government has no way of evaluating what should be the revenue to give social assistance recipients. We are proposing that it adopt the Market Basket Measure to help them calculate the total annual revenue to provide social assistance recipients. This amount would be a combination of the basic rate and all other sources of revenue. This would be done on a ten years base

There are a number of Social Development Department policies that need to change.

We need to modify in 2018-2019 the first three policies:

- ✓ Deduction of Employment Income
- ✓ Recognized disability
- ✓ Appeal System

Then we need to revise the following policies:

- ✓ Adult Children living with parents
- ✓ CPP deduction at 60 years old
- ✓ Special Benefits
- ✓ Economic Unit
- ✓ Termination of assistance

### 2. People with a disability

**Create a new program: *New Brunswick Assured Income for the disabled.***

**Increase the basic rate by 5% in 2018-2019 and index it to inflation**

**Adopt the Market Basket Measure to calculate the total annual revenue for disabled recipients.**

The NB Common Front for Social Justice published, November 2017, a report, *Disability and Deep Poverty in New Brunswick*, which brushes a dark picture of the situation that citizens with a disability on social assistance are living in our province.

In the provincial plan to fight poverty, it was proposed: a *new regime more appropriate for persons with disability*. The province must put in place the *New Brunswick Assured Income for the Disabled*. This new program would be apart from social assistance. Alberta and Saskatchewan have special program for citizens with disability. Québec is proposing changes and Ontario is looking at making changes also.

Citizens with disability don't have enough revenue. The province must increase their basic rate by 5% in 2018-2019 and index it. The province must also decide that their total annual income would be equal to the Market Basket Measure.

### **3. Housing**

Housing cost is one of biggest expenses of an individual's or a family's budget.

When analyzing the amount citizens on social assistance have to pay for an apartment, it is quite clear that they can't afford adequate housing.

We are proposing that a significant portion of the \$78 million investment by the federal and provincial governments be used to renovate social housing,

Also, that a significant portion of the money be reserved for social housing managed by the cooperative or the not-for-profit sectors, rather than the private sector

### **4. Prejudices**

**The government should start a provincial advertising campaign to combat prejudices toward people living in poverty.**

As we all know there are a lot of prejudices against citizens living in poverty, especially those who are social assistance. If we are serious in attacking poverty, we have to organize, as recommended by the NB Poverty Plan adopted in 2010, a provincial campaign to debunk these prejudices.

If we want to have any chance of getting our proposals adopted, we need to change the public mentality. This cannot be done easily and cannot be done by community groups or individual. It needs to be done by our government. We have public campaigns or events on different issues, (Workplace violence and harassment, Health and Safety, Wellness, Economy, etc. ), why not on poverty.

We are proposing that the provincial government start a public relation campaign to combat prejudices specifically related to citizens living on social assistance.

### **Our Actions**

We believe that our political parties, MLA's, and future candidates do not understand the situation people living in poverty are going through, let alone those on social assistance.

In order for them to better understand the present situation, we have developed a number of Fact Information sheets that we will be sending to them. We also have publish a document: *Guaranteed income for people with a severe handicap in New Brunswick*, and we are presently updating our document on minimum wage workers.

In the coming months, we will be meeting with political parties to discuss our proposals. We will meet MLA's, candidates and community organizations, and also raise public awareness of the situation.

We are committed to do what is necessary to convince our elected officials to focus on repairing the holes in our social net as quickly as possible.

## **NB Common Front for Social Justice**

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