

DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND HOUSING



Poverty Elimination
Strategy Act
Baseline Report

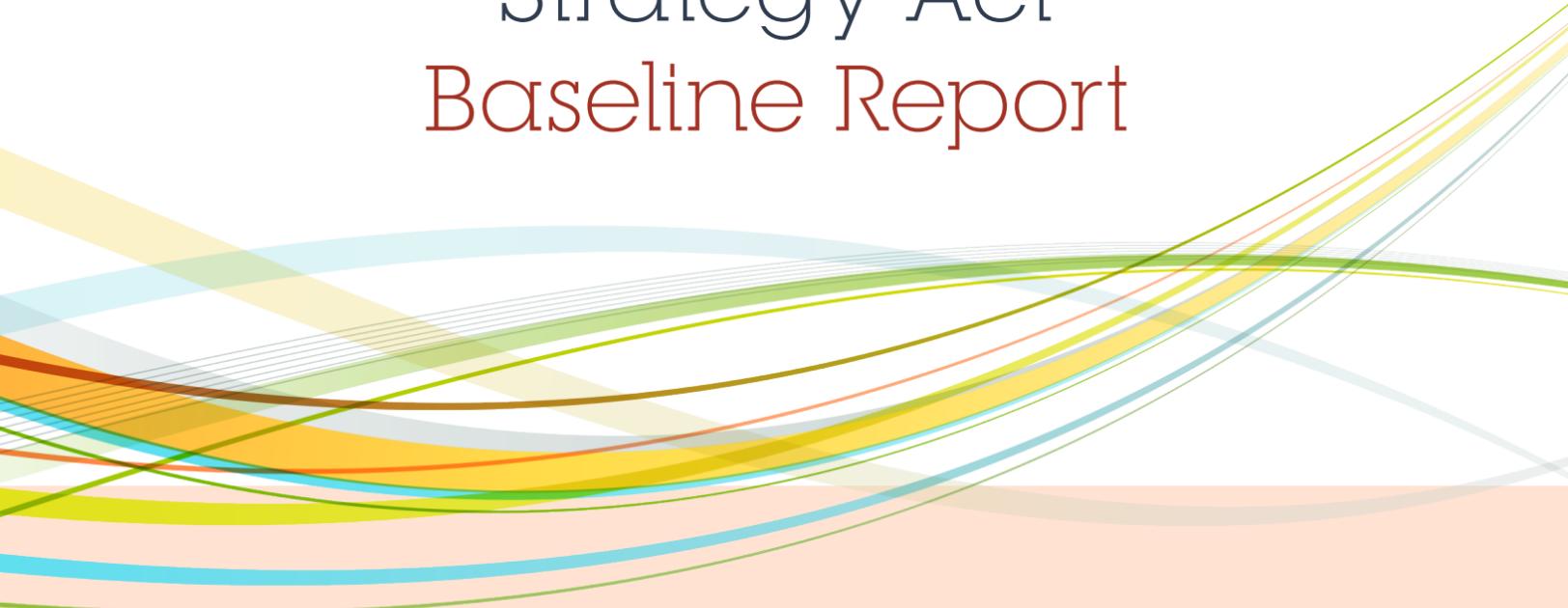


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Note to Readers:

The Prince Edward Island *Poverty Elimination Strategy Act* was enacted in May 2021. This Baseline Report, and future Annual Reports, satisfy Section 7 of the Act.

This report lists indicators set out by the Act to be reported on and baseline data related to those indicators. It also notes achievements of the Poverty Reduction Action Plan to the end of March 2021, while presenting actions planned for 2021/2022.

This report will be followed by the first Annual Report, with data made available during the 2022/23 year, as well as accomplishments in addressing poverty and plans for the next fiscal year.



Message from the Minister



May It Please Your Honour,

I am very pleased to present the Baseline Report to satisfy Section 7 of the Prince Edward Island *Poverty Elimination Strategy Act*.

This report identifies achievements of the Poverty Reduction Action Plan to the end of March 2021, while presenting actions planned for 2021/2022.

In 2021, Islanders called for a bold vision when it comes to reducing and eliminating poverty. Government is working on aggressive yet meaningful targets to not only reduce but strive to eliminate poverty.

The Poverty Elimination Strategy Act uses 2018 as the baseline and sets aspirational targets such as:

- **Decreasing the PEI poverty rate by 25% among all persons by 2025;**
- **Decreasing the PEI poverty rate by 50% among all persons by 2030;**
- **Decreasing the PEI poverty rate by 100% among all persons by 2035; and,**
- **Decreasing child food insecurity and chronic homelessness to zero by 2025.**

These robust targets are the most ambitious undertaken by any provincial or territorial government. As we strive to meet these targets, we must address multiple needs including quality, accessible education, training that prepares persons for employment, employment opportunities, a targeted basic income guarantee and income supports for persons who are unable to fully participate in the labour market, affordable inclusionary housing, supports for mental health and addictions, age-friendly and supportive communities and long-term supports for Islanders with disabilities.

Government with community partners will continue to establish supports to eliminate barriers for full participation by all people in the province's economy and society. Supportive, safe and healthy communities are vital components in bringing this strategy to life.

Poverty is a result of complex, interwoven factors, and it requires effort at every level if we are to reduce and eliminate its presence across the Island. A multi-sector approach — including municipal and provincial governments, community partners, the business sector and stakeholders — will provide the best opportunity to understand the unique challenges and barriers that Islanders face, and to identify how best to meet their needs.

Prince Edward Island is known as a province where people have an enormous capacity for caring for one another. Together, let's put an end to poverty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brad Trivers', written over a light blue and yellow wavy background.

Hon. Brad Trivers,
Minister of Social Development and Housing

Message from the Minister



Votre Honneur,

J'ai le grand plaisir de présenter le rapport de référence exigé à l'article 7 de la *Poverty Elimination Strategy Act* (loi sur la stratégie d'élimination de la pauvreté) de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard.

Le présent rapport cerne les réalisations dans le cadre du plan d'action pour la réduction de la pauvreté à la fin mars 2021, ainsi que les mesures prévues pour 2021-2022.

En 2021, les Insulaires ont réclamé une vision audacieuse en matière de réduction et d'élimination de la pauvreté. Le gouvernement travaille à l'établissement de cibles à la fois énergiques et significatives afin de non seulement réduire, mais aussi de s'efforcer d'éliminer la pauvreté.

La *Poverty Elimination Strategy Act*, qui utilise 2018 comme point de référence, établit des cibles ambitieuses telles que les suivantes :

- Réduire le taux de pauvreté à l'Île de 25 % dans l'ensemble de la population d'ici 2025.
- Réduire le taux de pauvreté à l'Île de 50 % dans l'ensemble de la population d'ici 2030.
- Réduire le taux de pauvreté à l'Île de 100 % dans l'ensemble de la population d'ici 2035.
- Réduire l'insécurité alimentaire chez les enfants et l'itinérance chronique à zéro d'ici 2025.

Ces cibles fortes sont les plus ambitieuses jamais prises par un gouvernement provincial ou territorial. En nous efforçant d'atteindre ces cibles, nous devons aborder des besoins multiples, dont une éducation de qualité et accessible, de la formation qui prépare à l'emploi, des possibilités d'emploi, un revenu de base garanti ciblé et un soutien du revenu pour les personnes qui ne peuvent pas participer pleinement au marché du travail, des logements abordables et inclusifs, un soutien en santé mentale et traitement de la toxicomanie, des collectivités-amies des aînés et bienveillantes, de même qu'un soutien à long terme pour les Insulaires ayant une incapacité.

Le gouvernement, avec des partenaires communautaires, continuera de créer du soutien en vue d'éliminer les obstacles à la pleine participation de tous et toutes à l'économie et à la société insulaires. Des collectivités bienveillantes, sécuritaires et saines constituent un élément essentiel de la concrétisation de cette stratégie.

La pauvreté découle de facteurs complexes et interreliés, et il faut des efforts à tous les échelons pour en réduire et en éliminer la présence à l'Île. Une approche multisectorielle – incluant les administrations municipales et le gouvernement provincial, des partenaires communautaires, le milieu des affaires et des intervenants – nous permettra le mieux de comprendre les défis et obstacles uniques auxquels font face les Insulaires, et de cerner la meilleure façon de répondre à leurs besoins.

L'Île-du-Prince-Édouard est reconnue comme une province où les gens se soucient énormément les uns des autres. Ensemble, mettons fin à la pauvreté.

Veuillez agréer l'expression de mes salutations distinguées.

Le ministre du Développement social et du Logement,

L'honorable Brad Trivers

Message from the outgoing Poverty Reduction Council

COVID-19 has challenged our province and ourselves in ways we could never have anticipated. In addition to the health impacts, the pandemic has upended people's lives. During the pandemic we have heard, "we're all in this together." That is true to some degree, however the pandemic has highlighted that those living in poverty have been more affected.

Through virtual meetings during the past year, the Council continued to provide a vehicle for the voices and experiences of Islanders living in poverty. The Council shared these experiences with government to show the impact of the pandemic on low-income Islanders.

Council members provided valuable feedback to government on program roll outs, how to communicate with isolated Islanders, and participated in provincial consultations, such as issues relating to rural healthcare, while keeping the voices and experiences of Islanders living in poverty at the forefront of our minds.

Council members were able to bring helpful information and programs back to their communities based on regular updates from Federal, Provincial, and community-based partners.

When the Poverty Elimination Strategy Act was passed in 2021, the Council provided valuable input in regarding the future make-up of the council moving forward and measures of poverty as required by the Act.

We would like to thank all members for their time, dedication, and commitment to ensuring the experiences of Islanders living in poverty was at the forefront of decision making.

Sincerely,

Andrea MacDonald - *Co-Chair*

Patrick Davis - *Co-Chair*

Scott Annear

Roma Arsenault

Deborah Bradley

Barb Broome

Paxton Caseley

John Cummings

Don MacEachern

Polly Rice

Lori St.Onge

Kayla Watson

Jenny Wood

Regina Younker

The Poverty Elimination Strategy Act

The Poverty Elimination Strategy Act became law in May of 2021. The Act requires that Prince Edward Island have a poverty elimination strategy and that this strategy include targets to eliminate poverty, food insecurity, and chronic homelessness. The Act also mandates the creation of a Poverty Elimination Council and that an annual report will be written and tabled in the Legislative Assembly. The Act can be found here: PrinceEdwardIsland.ca/PovertyElimination

This Report is the first released under this Act and describes recent work to address poverty, as well as sets baseline data for the indicators identified in the Act. Future reports will present progress toward those targets and additional actions taken to achieve the targets.

“The Poverty Elimination Strategy Act creates a council on poverty elimination and social inclusion, referred to as the “Poverty Elimination Council”, which replaces the existing Poverty Reduction Council.”



The Poverty Elimination Council

In 2018, Prince Edward Island appointed the Poverty Reduction Council to oversee the implementation and monitoring of the Poverty Reduction Action Plan 2019-2024. This Council was also tasked to provide advice to the Minister and government as well as to support community networks in Prince Edward Island. Members were appointed for three-year terms beginning in January 2019 and have met regularly to provide valuable input to government on the Poverty Reduction Action Plan, as well as advice on supporting low income Islanders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Poverty Elimination Strategy Act creates a council on poverty elimination and social inclusion, referred to as the “Poverty Elimination Council”, which replaces the existing Poverty Reduction Council. The mandate of the Poverty Elimination Council is as follows:

- Providing advice to the Minister on the content of the Poverty Elimination Strategy as outlined in the Act, possible indicators to measure performance of the strategy, proposed programs, policies or initiatives;
- Monitoring the implementation of the Strategy;
- Facilitating community involvement in the development and implementation of the Strategy; and
- Assisting the Minister in the creation of the annual report.



Achievements

The Poverty Elimination Strategy Act sets 2018 as the baseline year to measure progress toward eliminating poverty. The Poverty Reduction Action Plan 2019-2024 is recognized in the Act as the strategy in effect at this time. Government has taken significant actions to address poverty in PEI across its departments, some of which are described here:

Initiated the 211 PEI service

- Worked with United Way of PEI to launch a free, confidential service that provides information and referrals to social, health, and government services.
- Since its launch in 2020, the service has helped people through almost 30,000 calls and website sessions.
- Government provided over \$870,000 over three years to develop and launch the service.

Increased Social Assistance and Assured Income rates

- Shelter rates for recipients of Social Assistance and AccessAbility Supports were increased 6% in November 2018.
- Food rates were increased November 2018 (\$600k investment), January 2019 (\$1.1M investment), and very significant increases in January 2020 (\$6.4M investment).
- These latest increases caused food rates for single individuals to go up by \$109 per month, from \$233 to \$342. For two parent, two

children families the rates went up \$241 per month, from \$795 to \$1,036.

“
Since its launch in 2020,
the 211 PEI service has
helped people through
almost **30,000 calls and
website sessions.**”

Expanded the Seniors Independence Initiative

- This program provides up to \$1,500 annual funding to older adults to help them stay in their homes by paying for practical services like grass cutting and snow removal, light housekeeping, meal preparation and home maintenance.
- Following a 2020 review, enhancements were made to the program including:
 - Increased the income below which people are eligible for the program (singles thresholds increased from \$22,133 to \$26,500; couples from \$31,301 to \$34,000)
 - Removed the categories so more recipients receive the maximum funding.
 - Added Lifeline Medical Alert System to allowed expenses.

Launched a School Food Program

- Government invested \$1.8M and delivered 275,000 healthy lunches to students in PEI schools during the 2020/21 school year on a pay-what-you-can basis.

Delivered Summer Food Program

- During school closures due to COVID-19 and throughout the summer of 2020, healthy lunches were delivered to PEI students from self-identified families.
- Over 110,000 meals were delivered and 1,420 gift cards across PEI in 2020. An average of 732 students participated per week.
- Government invested \$620,000 in an effort to increase food security among Island children.

Increased social housing supply

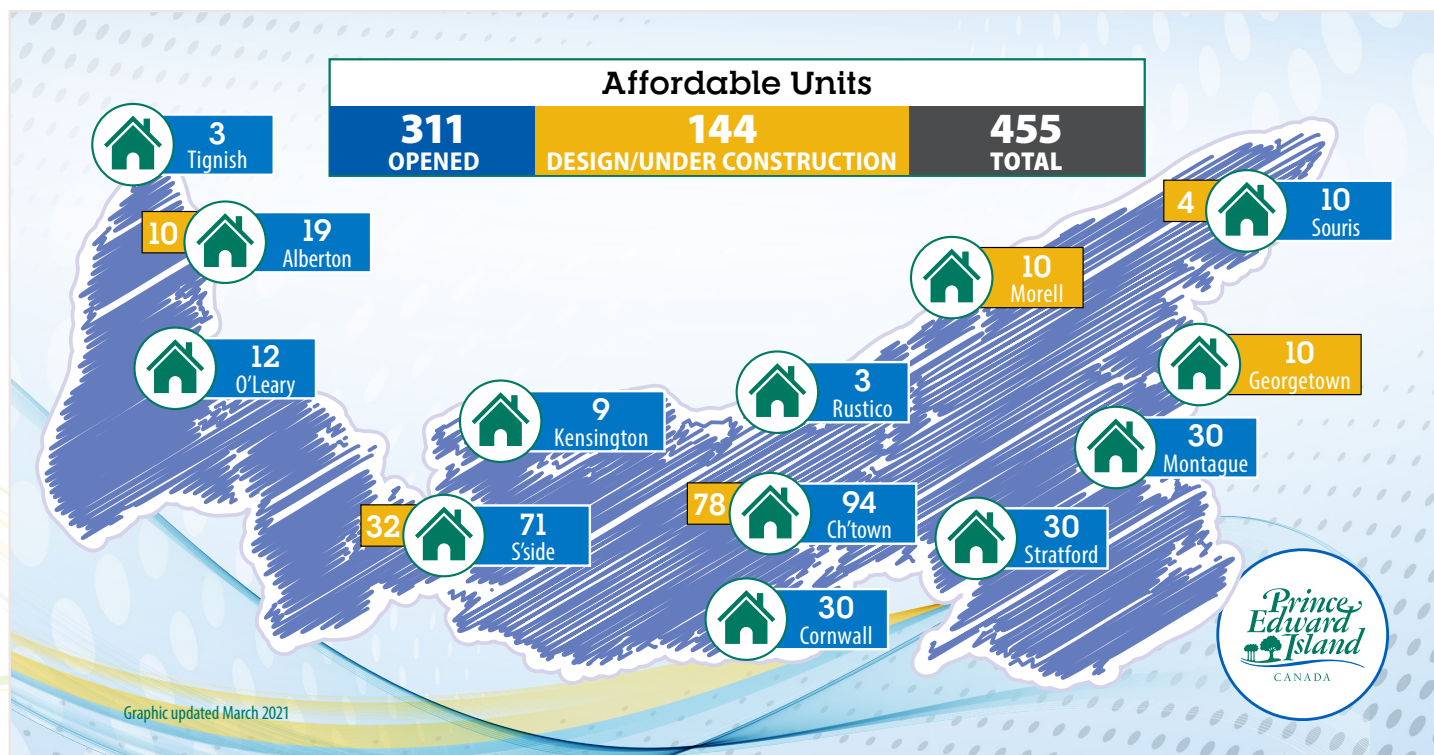
- Since 2018, government launched 455 social housing units in Prince Edward Island through builds of government owned units and long term leases with non-profits and private developers who built new units. Of these units, 311 were open by March 2021:

Increase Mobile Rental Vouchers

- Supported an additional 1,150 families with Mobile Rental Vouchers (MRVs) to reduce housing costs for low income renters.
- A client with a MRV pays 25% of their gross income for rent.

Evidence based research to make informed decisions

- In 2019, government hired a third party to complete a comprehensive review of provincial emergency shelter supports understand the environment and current and projected level of need across the province.
- In 2020, government announced funding to the Canadian Mental Health Association through the Community Housing Fund to complete a Needs Analysis of Housing Supports in the Prince County Region.



Established the Community Outreach Centre

- In 2020, government launched the province's first Community Outreach Centre along with 14 community partner organizations. The Centre connects Islanders struggling with poverty and housing security with services like Social Assistance, support in finding appropriate housing, Mental Health and Addictions, shelters, legal and tenant information, and access to computers and laundry facilities.
- Government provided \$398,600 in 2020-21.

Opened Women's Shelters

- Government worked with community members to open Blooming House, an 8 bed women's shelter in Charlottetown.
- Government supported the Boys and Girls Club of Summerside to open LifeHouse Women's Shelter, the first of its kind in the City of Summerside.

Opened transitional and supportive housing units

- People experiencing homelessness and family violence benefit from transitional housing, with wrap-around supports and affordable rents, as a middle step to more permanent housing.
- Government supported:
 - nine government-owned units for people experiencing homelessness, at Smith Lodge
 - 20 government-owned units - 10 units for women leaving domestic violence, and 10 units for youth aging out of care,
 - 10 units in partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association to support Islanders with mental health needs as they transition back into community life.

Created Tenant Support Office

- Funded Community Legal Information to create a Tenant Support office and Tenant Guide.

Continued increases to minimum wage

- April 1, 2019 – increased to \$12.25 (from \$11.55)
- April 1, 2020 – increased to \$12.85
- April 1, 2021 – increased to \$13.00

Supporting People with health-related costs

- Through a National Pharmacare Demonstration Initiative, secured \$35M funding from the federal government over four years to improve access to necessary drugs for Islanders.
- Established an Ostomy Supplies Program to provide eligible Islanders 60% to 90% of out of pocket costs associated with supplies, to a yearly maximum of \$2,400.

In 2020, government announced funding to the Canadian Mental Health Association through the Community Housing Fund to complete a Needs Analysis of Housing Supports in the Prince County Region.

Looking Forward

Government is committed to eliminating poverty in Prince Edward Island. Work will be advised by the Poverty Elimination Council and guided by evidence. Here are some planned actions for the fiscal year 2021-2022:

- Implement a Targeted Basic Income Guarantee Program for persons on Assured Income and Social Assistance. This pilot will provide a basic income of 85 percent of the Market Basket Measure to persons with multiple barriers to employment as well as youth who have aged out of the care.
- Partner with Skills PEI on an employment strategy for Islanders in need of support securing employment.
- Support UPEI Master's students to research the impact of poverty elimination efforts on food security, food availability, hardships and coping strategies among clients.
- Increase Social Assistance and AccessAbility Supports benefits rates for shelter, pregnancy allowance, funeral costs, optical coverage and school allowances.
- Work with the Federal Government to improve poverty measurement data and indicators.
- Continue working with CMHC on the implementation of the National Housing Strategy including supporting access to the National Co-Investment Fund and the implementation of the PEI-Canada Housing Benefit.
- Implement government's commitment to double home renovation program grants.
- Work with community partners to initiate Coordinated Access to better support people facing homelessness and to collect data to better understand the quantity of Islanders facing various levels of housing insecurity and the scope of their needs.
- As part of the Sustainable Transportation Action Plan, launch a rural public transit pilot project with routes to Souris and Montague from Charlottetown. These routes, as well as the existing Charlottetown to Summerside route will cost \$2 per one-way trip. This pilot will help guide decisions about an Island-wide fixed route transit system for the future.
- Begin work with the federal government to provide \$10 per day regulated child care spaces for children under the age of 6, and increase the number of spaces in PEI.



As part of the Sustainable Transportation Action Plan, launch a rural public transit pilot project with routes to Souris and Montague from Charlottetown. These routes, as well as the existing Charlottetown to Summerside route will cost \$2 per one-way trip.

Monitoring Poverty in Prince Edward Island

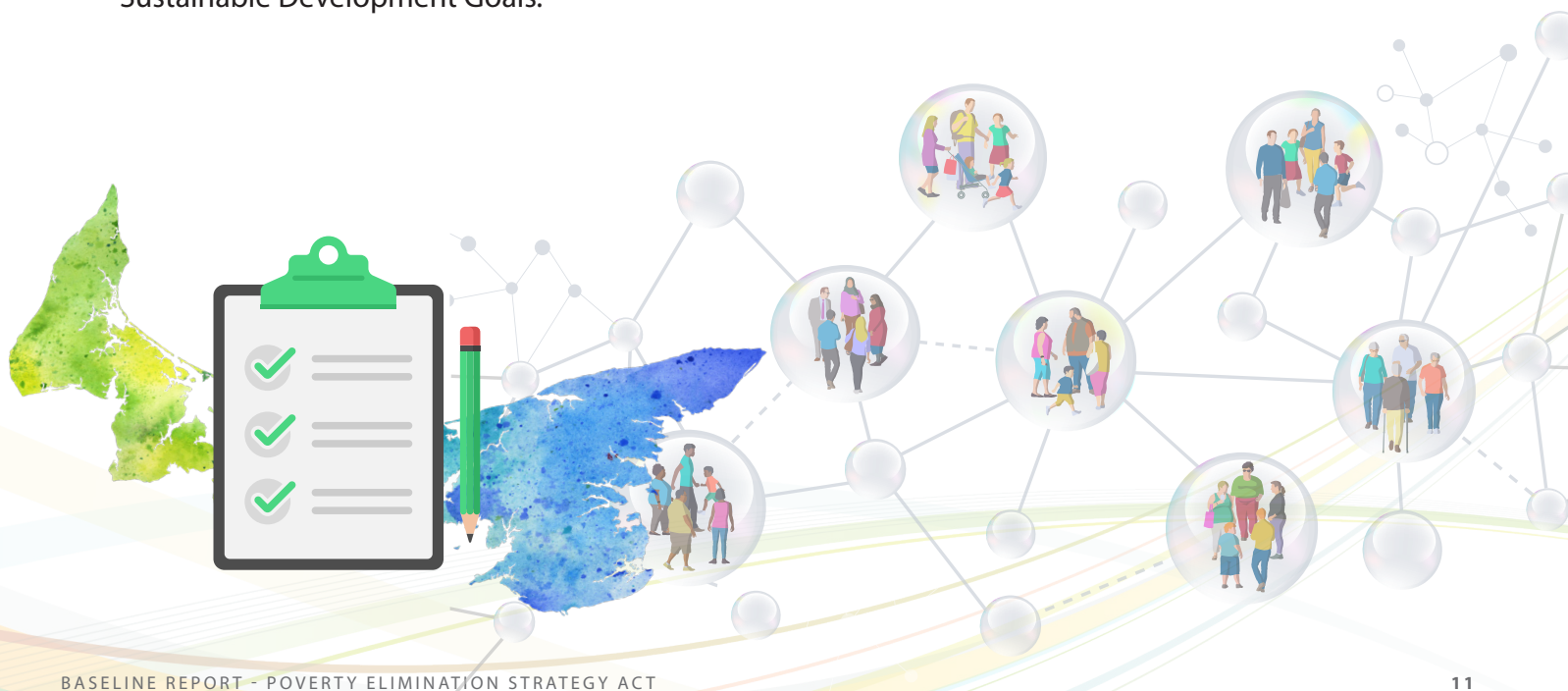
Poverty is monitored in Prince Edward Island primarily through information provided by Statistics Canada surveys such as the Census and the Canada Community Health Survey. This approach has several advantages for PEI including:

- Proven survey methodologies;
- Information that has been collected and compiled by experts in the field of statistical analysis;
- Low costs to PEI as these surveys are conducted for all of Canada under Statistics Canada's mandate;
- Data that is comparable over time and among provinces, and
- A data framework that integrates with Well-being (Quality of Life) indicators and UN Sustainable Development Goals.

However, there are also disadvantages to this approach. For one, the surveys are complex and take time to complete. Poverty indicators for PEI, and Canada in general, are two to three years behind when released.

PEI's small population, and therefore small sample sizes (the number of persons surveyed in a jurisdiction) often leads to issues with the accuracy of the data, especially when looking at sub-groups as is the case with this report's indicators on children under age 18.

Officials from Prince Edward Island's Departments of Finance and Social Development and Housing are engaging Statistics Canada to improve the data quality for poverty measurement in the province, and expect that this will lead to more accurate information and better ability to look at sub-populations in future reports.



Key Indicators

The five key indicators for measuring poverty as mandated by the Poverty Elimination Strategy Act are:

1. Low Income of the whole population and
2. Low Income of children under 18,

as measured by the Market Basket Measure (MBM), Prince Edward Island and Canada's official poverty line. The MBM looks at the actual costs of a basket of goods that would be required to live a modest lifestyle in regions across Canada. Persons who do not have enough income to afford this basket of goods are considered to be living in poverty;

3. Food Insecurity of the whole population, and

4. Food Insecurity of children under 18,

as measured by the Canada Community Health Survey. This survey asks a number of questions relating to the amount of food available to parents and children in the home. Based on the answers, persons can be food secure, or experiencing marginal, moderate or severe levels of food insecurity; and

5. Chronic Homelessness,

as measured via the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). This system is now being integrated in PEI and is expected to be operational by April 2022. The John Howard Society of PEI, as the Community Entity for the Government of Canada's Reaching Home Strategy, is responsible for the implementation of HIFIS throughout PEI. A number of access points, operated by community partners, will serve as the data collection points for HIFIS in PEI.



Results

Percentage of Persons in Low Income 2018 and 2019, Market Basket Measure

All Persons

Region	2018	2019
PEI	11.9	10.9
Canada	11.0	10.1

Persons Under 18 Years in Low Income 2018 to 2019, Market Basket Measure

Region	2018	2019
PEI	9.8*	13.7*
Canada	10.8*	9.7*

Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0135-01, March 23, 2021

*Low sample size, use this data with caution

2019 Market Basket Measure Thresholds, Prince Edward Island by family size and region

Region	One Person	Family of four
PEI - Rural	\$21,142	\$42,284
PEI - Under 30,000	\$21,528	\$43,056
PEI - Charlottetown	\$22,014	\$44,027

Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0066-01, March 23, 2021

Percentage of Persons Food Secure and Insecure, 2017/18

	Food Secure	Food Insecure
PEI	86.0	14
Canada	87.3	12.7

PROOF – Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18, 2020 Report

*Combination of persons reporting marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity

Percentage of Persons under 18 Food Secure and Insecure, 2017/18

	Food Secure	Food Insecure
PEI	80.8	19.2
Canada	82.7	17.3

PROOF – Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18, 2020 Report

*Combination of persons reporting marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity

Officials from Prince Edward Island's Departments of Finance and Social Development and Housing are engaging Statistics Canada to improve the data quality for poverty measurement in the province, and expect that this will lead to more accurate information and better ability to look at sub-populations in future reports.

Chronic Homelessness

In the absence of HIFIS data, the 2021 and 2018 Point in Time Counts are presented here. Staff at the John Howard Society complete surveys with people on the streets in Charlottetown and Summerside. In 2021, to reduce risks related to COVID-19, additional methods were used. Government departments, agencies, health institutions and housing programs were asked to review their files on the same day during the week to identify their clients' housing situation. Shelters were asked to count numbers of guests on one day during the week and were given surveys for guests to complete voluntarily. HIFIS data will begin being collected in fiscal year 2021-2022.



Results of 2018 and 2021 Point in Time Surveys

	2018	2021
Number of people experiencing homelessness identified through street count, file review and surveys:	86	147
Surveys completed Of those surveyed:	118	59
Gender:	Male: 53% ; Female: 47%	Male: 57% ; Female: 41% ; Two- spirit: 2%
Age:	16-18: 7% ; 18-54: 86% ; 55+: 7%	16-18: 2% ; 18-54: 93% ; 55+: 5%
Other characteristics:	Indigenous: 14% Immigrant or refugee: 1% Veteran: 6%	Indigenous: 1% Immigrant or refugee: 1% Veteran: 1%
Housing:	Transitional housing: 49% Emergency shelter: 15% Systems (<i>hospital, jail</i>): 13% Hidden homeless (<i>couch surfing, staying with a friend</i>): 23%	Transitional housing: 52% Emergency shelter: 18% Systems (<i>hospital, jail</i>): 13% Hidden homeless (<i>couch surfing, staying with a friend</i>): 17%

Data provided by The John Howard Society of PEI.



“Government is committed to eliminating poverty in Prince Edward Island. Work will be advised by the Poverty Elimination Council and guided by evidence.”



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