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Some Positive Steps Forward Towards Reducing Poverty in Ontario, But Systemic Transformation Lacking

The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network applauds the release of the second Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and is encouraged by the province's continued commitment to reducing poverty and building a fairer, more equitable society.

"We are pleased to see several important measures in the new five-year strategy such as annual indexing of the Ontario Child Benefit to meet the rate of inflation, a commitment to ending homelessness, and the creation of a local poverty reduction fund to support innovative community work", says Elisabeth Zimmermann, Chair of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network.

"However, the Network is concerned that the new strategy does not dig deep enough to address many root causes of poverty. Despite an increase in minimum wage to \$11/hour, too many working Ontarians continue to live below the poverty line, as full-time jobs with benefits are not the norm anymore. Social assistance, an important social safety net, continues to maintain poverty-level benefits and there are no significant rate increases promised. \$4 billion has been invested in affordable housing since 2003, yet we are nowhere near solving homelessness", adds Zimmermann.

The cost of the consequences of poverty in Niagara, which include higher health care costs and lost productivity, has been estimated to be over \$1.3 billion annually, according to a 2012 report from the Brock Observatory. High rates of poverty negatively affect everyone and we must do much more than apply short-term, band aid solutions that only buffer the outcomes of poverty. Comprehensive and concentrated investments in public policies are needed to address the systemic causes of poverty, including housing, childcare, and income security.

"No one government institution can do this alone; it requires all levels of government working together, along with the private and not-for-profit sectors, to create a more coordinated, defined, and sustained plan to reduce and, ultimately, prevent poverty", says Zimmermann.

The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network encourages you to learn more about poverty issues and solutions by visiting its website www.wipeoutpoverty.ca.

The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network consists of 30+ organizations – health and social service agencies, boards of education, faith-based groups, the business community, regional government, and individuals who live in poverty – working collectively to reduce poverty in Niagara through information sharing, changing attitudes, and compelling Niagara citizens to take action. For more information on the NPRN, or to get involved, visit their website at www.wipeoutpoverty.ca

Media Inquiries can be directed to:

Elisabeth Zimmermann, Chair, Niagara Poverty Reduction Network

905-988-3528 ext. 3839

ezimmermann@ywcaniagararegion.ca