

Changes

1. What might be core principles of a renewed system of income support? What about specific tools, policies and approaches?

- A core principle should be to help people rise out of poverty.
- A renewed system should have:
 - Dignity
 - One that enables privacy and doesn't require too much intrusion into someone's private life while being able to give people the support they need
 - Caseworkers need more empathy and there should be a change in the current punitive approach emphasizing increased trust instead
 - Acknowledges that being able to afford the cost of living is also a requirement for dignity
 - Dignity has to be measured in social and economic security
 - Respect
 - 'Welfare' has a bad name. A broader audience needs to hear what is really going on in order to change people's attitudes toward the poor.
 - Break down the stereotypes and educate the public
 - Get rid of the distinction between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor
 - Human rights
 - Human rights refers to how we treat other but also includes basic level of income so individuals can participate in community
 - OW should be realistic. It isn't enough money. Rent is expensive, food is expensive, and transportation is expensive. Therefore, it should create essential services for transportation and diet.
 - Separate the various benefits – income replacement, other support systems, housing benefit, dental and drug benefits – now it's all a patchwork – make it more rational – anybody who needs support, not just those on OW or ODSP should be able to access it
 - Subsidies through the municipalities should be essential, not require volunteering
 - Shelter allowances and rents must be more realistic – adjust to normal rents, there must be both more subsidized housing and better rent allowances
 - Be proactive

- “If people are disadvantaged, give them an advantage”. Social assistance payments are barely enough to get by. Allow people who depend on social assistance to save for the future so they can get out of the poverty. “Let them thrive, not survive”.
- The burden on our healthcare system in the long run is possibly greater than preventative care – there is a clear need for a cost-benefit analysis on this matter
- Marshall resources to show the long-term benefit of assisting people – it creates a healthier society; get the public’s attention for the need to change attitudes

2. How can barriers to entering the labour market be addressed, particularly clawbacks and loss of benefits?

- Separate income replacement and other supports. People move in and out of employment with often no benefits and can hardly manage, even if employed
- When people on ODSP find a job, they shouldn’t lose their benefits. They should be able to use whatever additional income they receive in order to save for the future. Many people with disabilities still need extra financial support whether they have a job or not. Having a job doesn’t eliminate someone’s physical (and sometime’s invisible) disability. Therefore, social assistance should be more individualized. It is important to keep in mind that prospect of clawbacks and loss of benefits discourages people to work or look for work.
- Social assistance programs should give money to people who are in University or College, so that when they graduate, they can get a career. This is important because jobs are impossible to get without a university degree or college degree/diploma.

3. How could we ensure that social assistance benefits together with other income security programs amount to a decent standard of living? What are some possible standards of decent living? What are some factors in determining this level?

- People discussed that a decent standard of living is often affected by taking away beneficial programs that were already in place. Many people at the conference complained of beneficial social assistance programs that were scrapped by the government. If something must be changed give the public fair notice so people can plan accordingly.
- There need to be expanded eligibility for benefits such as the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) so that it can reach more low income and poor people and make an impact on income.

- ODSP and OW should redefine the term poverty and define what an acceptable standard of living looks like. The definition of poverty should include both economic and social factors. This should be done through a census.

4. What are the limits to what the present social assistance system can provide in terms of the changes people need?

- The ODSP and OW systems on their own don't help people escape poverty. People on ODSP on OW barely survive from payment to payment. The system should facilitate as much as possible getting extra income from employment.
- All sectors of society need to be involved. Non-profits, the private sector/businesses/corporations, the government and the community have to work together to provide supports and opportunities.

5. How can lived experience and peer research continue to inform and guide the development of social policy? Are there opportunities for further work?

- Projects like the People's Blueprint are really important and show reality
- Empowerment is key for those with lived experience to make contributions to guide social policy. Create the circumstances with which that can happen.
- Those with technical knowledge and those with lived experience should be working together
- Hire people with lived experience to work in Community and Social Services
- Peer research is essential in helping develop good policy