

POVERTY

Policy Issue: The issue of poverty within Canada remains deep and persistent and the rate and depth of poverty has deepened for many groups including those that are living with mental illness.

Why Is this An Issue?: The issues are complex having to do with the Canadian governments practices, policies and procedures of the system. These issues touch on all domains of life and determinants of health for the Canadian consumer/survivor population.

Components of the Issue: The last decade has seen one of Canada's strongest economic performances, however, all Canadians have not shared this economic prosperity. The national number based on the 2001 Census data indicates that the total number of Canadians who are poor has increased from 4.39 million to 4.72 million from 1990-2000; that the total number of children living in poverty has increased to 1,245,700 which is 40,000 more children living in poverty now than in 1990; that income inequality grew with the income of the richest 10% of Canadians increasing by 14.6% while the income of the poorest 10% of Canadians rose by less than 1%; that the income of many working families has declined; and that earnings of the 20% of low income working Canadians who are just below the median wage actually decreased. The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty 2000 – from the CCSD (Canadian Council on Social Development) states that deep and persistent poverty continues to grow in Canada; that the national pre-tax poverty rate has increased over the last 13 years; that the rate and depth of poverty has deepened for many groups; that young families are more likely to be poor; that vulnerability of children and lone-parent families remains high; and that the poverty gap for working-age households is increasing.

Target Audience of the Policy: All consumer/survivors of mental health services, service providers, all levels of government and the general public in Canada.

Analysis: It is the position of CCAMHR that the answers to this social issue cannot be determined within the narrow scope of the consumer/survivor movement but needs to be addressed by all levels of the social system within Canada. The understanding of who is poor in Canada needs to be addressed at all levels of the system. The poor are people who are living on social assistance; people who are living with disabilities; young families; women; minimum wage earners; working-age households; children and their families; children and immigrant families; new immigrants; visible minority groups; seniors; aboriginal adults and youth; youth in general; and people who live in rural and isolated rural areas. Robert Arnold, President of NAPO (National Anti-Poverty Organization) stated in his response to the National Council of Welfare Report 2003 that it is time for government to raise social assistance rates and stop punitive regulations (NAPO News Release, July 2004). The report showed that welfare rates continue to be below what is required to obtain even basic necessities like food

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and shelter. Arnold states that “this report lets politicians know just how bad things are for those who are living on social assistance, it shows that current social assistance rates help keep people in poverty. They don’t help overcome it. While the extent of poverty has not changed a great deal, the depth of poverty has grown dramatically with social assistance rates in many provinces set at less than half the poverty line. Over the last 10 years, provinces and territories have cut social assistance and introduced punitive regulations that have limited people’s ability to find affordable housing, pay bills and purchase basic necessities such as food. These restrictions and practices are not acceptable. It’s time for governments to address the facts about poverty and low benefits, and start increasing rates. They have an obligation and responsibility to take immediate action on this issue”

Recommendations:

CCAMHR advocates and actively pursues the following recommendations to address the issues of poverty within the mental health consumer/survivor movement within Canada by endorsing the following NAPO National Campaigns:

- 1) Make Minimum Wage a Living Wage:
 - that the federal government reinstate a federal minimum wage and set it at \$10 an hour, indexed to inflation
 - that provincial and territorial governments raise their minimum wages to where someone working full time could escape poverty
 - that employers pay at least \$10. an hour and support the call for raising minimum wages
 - that universities adopt living wage policies that would require procurement of service contractors to pay at least \$10. an hour

- 2) Our Future Now! – End Youth Poverty:
 - to engage youth to take action to achieve meaningful progress on at least three issues that would reduce poverty such as raising the minimum wages; capping and reducing post secondary education tuition; and easing access to Employment Insurance for youth

- 3) Make Poverty History:
 - Here’s what NAPO wants in 14 words: More and Better Aid. Trade Justice. Cancel the Debt. End Child Poverty in Canada.

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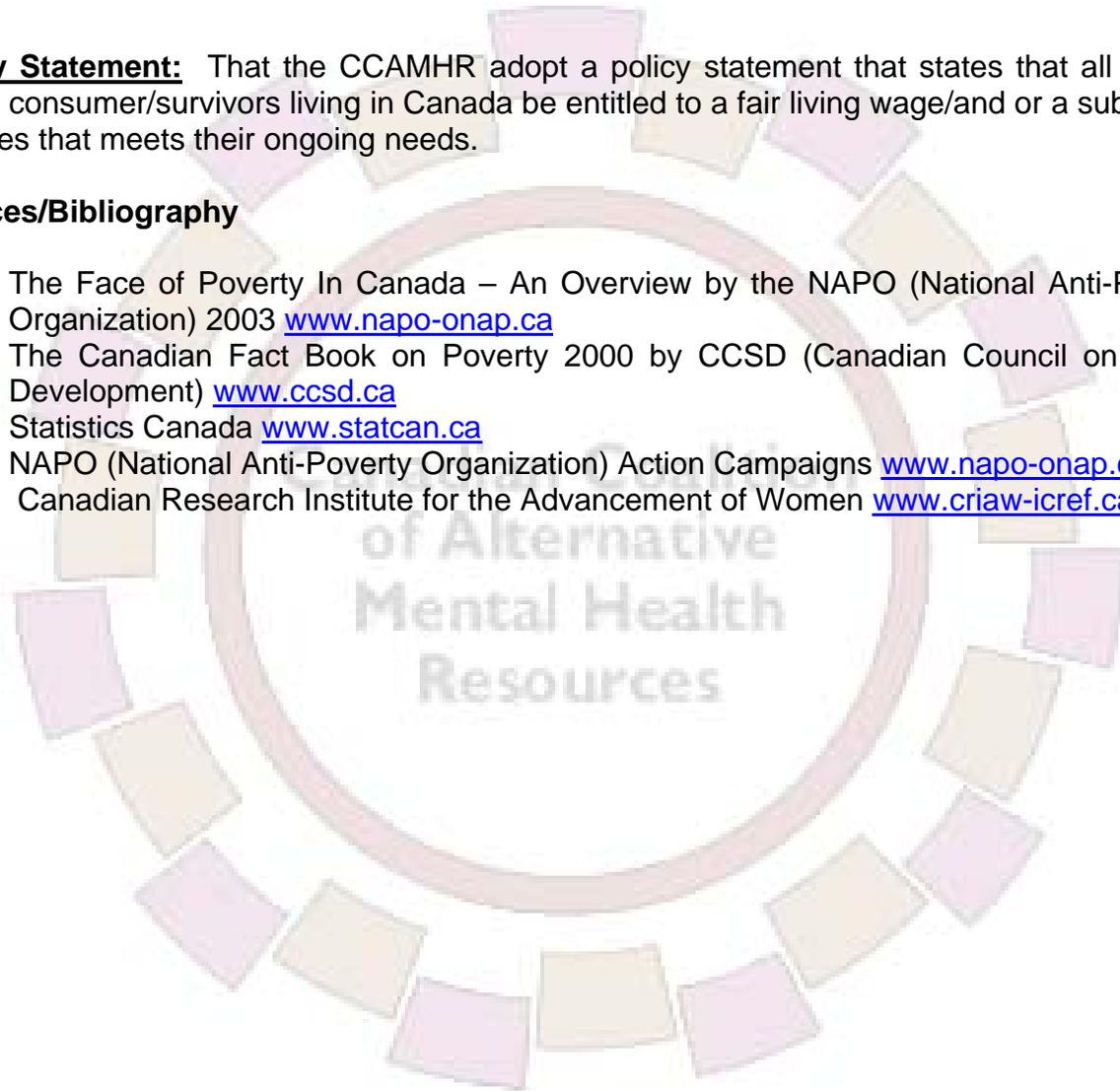
4) Stop the Claw back of the National Child Benefit Supplement:

- that the federal government do 2 things: End the claw back of the National Child Benefit Supplement from families on social assistance and fund the reinvestment programs that work for low-income families out of other provincial and federal revenues

Policy Statement: That the CCAMHR adopt a policy statement that states that all mental health consumer/survivors living in Canada be entitled to a fair living wage/and or a subsidy of services that meets their ongoing needs.

Sources/Bibliography

- 1) The Face of Poverty In Canada – An Overview by the NAPO (National Anti-Poverty Organization) 2003 www.napo-onap.ca
- 2) The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty 2000 by CCSD (Canadian Council on Social Development) www.ccsd.ca
- 3) Statistics Canada www.statcan.ca
- 4) NAPO (National Anti-Poverty Organization) Action Campaigns www.napo-onap.ca
- 5) Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women www.criaw-icref.ca



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