



Let's get the job done!

Policy paper number 6:

Support for families

January 26, 2012

Dear friend,

When I launched my campaign to be leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada, I offered the view that the key goal of the NDP national government we will elect in 2015 should (and must) be to work, in everything we do, toward building a more equal Canada.

As we set out on this mission, we quickly realize that providing support to families is a fundamental aspect of achieving this vision. This realization also highlights one of the central ironies of modern conservatism: no political group spends more time than modern conservatives do talking about the central role of families (as they narrowly define them) in society. At the same time, no political group works as diligently as modern conservatives do to undermine and destroy the supports our society offers families.

I maintain that the fundamental way in which we must work to help Canadian families, in all their forms, is by addressing income inequality. We must help steer the Canadian economy away from an increasingly greater concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. Sharing our prosperity more widely and equitably will help Canadian families in myriad ways – starting with improved access to the basic elements of a decent life (housing, food, education, and culture), and reversal of the current slide into ever-greater household personal debt.

In addition to this, there is much to do to help Canadian families, including:

- **Re-committing to child care, child nutrition, and to reducing child poverty in Canada;**
- **Safeguarding and renewing our system of universal public health care, and implementing a national pharmacare program;**
- **Addressing serious shortfalls in family reunification in our immigration system;**
- **Addressing serious shortfalls in Canada's income security system, beginning with our pension system;**
- **Continuing to advocate for the rights of LGBTQ families and preserve the rights they have fought so hard to attain.**

This is the sixth in a series of policy papers I've released during this leadership campaign. You can find all of them at www.briantopp.ca. If you liked this one, please forward it to others you think might be interested. I welcome your comments and suggestions. And if I've persuaded you to support my campaign, please get in touch with me through my website to volunteer or donate.

All the best,
Brian Topp

Caring for our children

Successive Liberal and Conservative governments have failed children and families living on low incomes. More than two decades after the unanimous resolution in the House of Commons to end child poverty by the year 2000, Canadian families are still waiting to see sustained action from the federal government on this issue. Campaign 2000's report card shows that Canada has a long way to go to prevent and reduce poverty:ⁱ

- One in 10 children still lives in poverty in Canada. For children living in First Nations communities, the ratio is appalling: 1 in 4 grow up in poverty.
- Employment is not always an assured pathway out of poverty. One in 3 children living in low-income families have at least one parent who works full-time, year round.
- Public investments make a difference. Without the income transfers in 2009, 1 in 4 children would have lived in poverty. Canada's public programs brought the child poverty rate down.
- Canada still has no systemic, socially integrated response to the need for child care. Fewer than 1 in 5 children (0 -12 years) have access to a regulated child care space.
- Housing is the single largest expense for low- and modest-income families. One in 4 households pays more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. And 750,000 children under age 15 live in housing that is either unaffordable, substandard, overcrowded -- or all three.

The 2011 platform had a strong program to address poverty including:

- Combining existing supports like the Child Tax Benefit to create a non-taxable Child Benefit and increase support steadily by up to \$700 per child.
- A commitment to working with provinces and territories to establish and fund a Canada-wide child care and early learning program, enshrined in law.

Introducing a National Student Nutrition program

Too many of our children are going to school hungry. Inadequate childhood nutrition, food insecurity, and poor eating habits lay the foundations for a lifetime of health and other problems. People with lower levels of education have worse health, are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions and have higher rates of mortality than those who have higher levels of educational attainment.ⁱⁱ

Research shows that student nutrition programs contribute to a number of positive academic and health outcomes, including helping children establish healthy eating habits that last throughout their lives.ⁱⁱⁱ ^{iv}

Eating habits developed early in life also have consequences for academic achievement.^v

Student nutrition programs benefit all children who participate, but will provide life-long positive health impacts for children from low-income families. As a result, they reduce inequality over the long run.

I propose our party commit to co-funding a national child nutrition program – addressing one of the fundamental issues of child poverty, and one of the single best ways to improve life outcomes for children living in poverty.

Caring for our families' health

In December 2011, the Harper government announced it would renew the financial terms of federal funding for health care, committing to increase federal support by 6 per cent a year until 2016-17. As far as we can see, this is supposed to take place without either a new round of negotiations or, in fact, any conditions of any kind. Prime Minister Harper has not offered any ideas about how to improve and sustain Medicare.

We can help Prime Minister Harper out. The evidence is clear: our single-payer, publicly-funded and delivered health care system provides the best quality of care, and is the most efficient delivery mechanism.^{vi} It is sustainable.^{vii} What is needed is an expansion of and recommitment to Medicare. The federal government has a crucial role to play in making this a reality, while respecting the roles and responsibilities of provincial governments, who manage health care as their largest single responsibility.

Support for expanded home and community care

An expansion of home and community care would improve our health, our communities, and health budgets. Helping seniors and others with chronic health conditions stay in their homes allows them to remain independent, active and involved. It also keeps hospital beds open and available for those who need them.

I propose that our party commit to supplementing a renewed health accord, in the next Parliament, with a home and community care accord.

National Pharmacare Program

In 2009, spending on drugs accounted for 16.4 per cent (\$30 billion) of health expenditures in Canada.^{viii} The share of health care spending on drugs has nearly doubled over the last 30 years and now makes up the second largest proportion of health care spending, after hospital care. This cost-driver in the health care system should be addressed.

Equally as important, access – or lack thereof -- to pharmaceuticals is a significant gap in our universal health care system. This has been persuasively argued in the Royal Commission on Health Reform (2002) and in many other studies (and, quite compellingly, by my colleague in this leadership race, pharmacist and business leader Martin Singh). In a recent report, Statistics Canada estimated that 24 per cent of Canadians have no pharmaceutical drug coverage, and that over the 12 months prior to the survey, 8 per cent of Canadians went without a necessary prescription because they couldn't afford it.^{ix}

I propose that our party commit to supplementing a renewed health accord, in the next Parliament, with a national pharmaceutical accord. As a first practical step, I propose beginning with catastrophic drug coverage. As another practical first step, I propose the federal government offer a group buying service to provinces on an opt-in basis, to capture efficiencies and purchasing power, and thus reduce costs.

Third, the federal government must play a role of ensuring the integrity and long-term viability of universal public Medicare, mindful that some of the largest and most powerful multinationals in the world have a permanent interest in the privatization of our system.

I propose our party commit to negotiating a renewed Medicare funding accord after the 2015 election, in which a further extension of adequate federal funding for health will be met with commitments from provincial and territorial governments to preserve and reinforce the universality, accessibility and public ownership of Canada's health care system.

Reuniting families

Last year, the Harper government implemented a moratorium on reunification applications for parents and grandparents, offering instead to admit them on temporary visas. This denies them citizenship, and access to basic services like Medicare.

This stealth elimination of reunification with parents and grandparents shows a lack of understanding of how important families are to the settlement process -- as well as the economic contribution these elders make. Most importantly, perhaps, it stands as another example of Conservatives paying lip service to the value of families, while attacking them at their root.

I propose that our party commit to reversing this moratorium; to devote the resources needed to clear up the backlog of family reunification applications quickly; and to review admission levels with the intent to promote, rather than undermine, family reunification.

Caring for our seniors

One of Jack Layton's most cherished commitments, repeated in every federal election campaign he fought, was to take better care of our seniors. The home and community care accord I refer to above figured prominently in his work on these issues – ensuring that seniors can live in dignity. Another key issue is the adequacy of our pension system.

The number of private sector employers that offer pension plans is down sharply. And, experience has shown us that there is much more volatility in the economy than in the past. Now, the company you are working for in your 30s likely will not exist when you retire. Additionally, this generation of workers will change jobs more often than their parents did. What is on offer from private employers – “defined contribution” pension plans – require high, steady returns from stock markets to provide adequate retirement income. As we've seen in recent years, the markets are a place for sophisticated investors – and are not a reliable, consistent place to look to for basic income security for most families.

The conservative response? A populist attack on pension plans in the public sector – a campaign designed to get people angry, to divide them from each other, and to help pay for more tax cuts for rich people. Breaking public pension plans won't help people in the private sector -- it will only make more seniors poor.

So what is to be done? We must return to a committed and determined fight that has been at the heart of our work as a party since our earliest days as a farmer-labour ginger group, led in Parliament by the redoubtable Stanley Knowles: the fight for an adequate, sustainable public pension for every citizen.

Building on our recent election platforms, I propose our party commit to building a renewed, doubled Canada Pension Plan (and discuss a parallel reinforcement of the Quebec Pension Plan, if the

Government of Quebec wishes to enter into such a discussion). And, I propose that the Old Age Security system be reinforced to ensure no senior lives in poverty.

LGBTQ Families

We unequivocally affirm our party's support for same-sex marriage. But we cannot stop there—we must continue to seek full equality for LGBTQ Canadians. New Democrats are always at the forefront of positive change for the LGBTQ community, with strong policy, out and proud leadership, and positive action.

Members of the LGBTQ community still face discrimination and bigotry on a daily basis - from the schoolyard to the courtroom, from workplaces to hospital rooms. In a recent national survey, more than one in five (21 per cent) LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.^x More than 25 per cent of youth with LGBTQ parents reported being physically harassed about the sexual orientation of their parents. We must ensure that our response is not merely reactive, but proactive. We need to ensure that equality for LGBTQ Canadians is enshrined in all areas of federal jurisdiction.

When a child is bullied because she or he is LGBTQ, it is a family issue. When a trans person cannot access health care, it is a family issue. When a LGBTQ senior's partner goes unacknowledged as such in a long-term care facility, it is a family issue.

In asserting our support for LGBTQ families, we must take the following steps:

- Fully implement the long-overdue Trans Rights bill that would explicitly protect transgender and transsexual Canadians by including gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Act and in the sentencing and hate crime provisions of the Criminal Code.
- Implement a national strategy to challenge bullying.
- Initiate a review of legislation and policy on assisted human reproduction to ensure that they are informed by up-to-date research and provide access to LGBTQ families.
- Provide federal financial support to initiatives to assist the provinces to deliver inclusive, non-discriminatory health care to our seniors.

ⁱ Campaign 2000 **Revisiting Family Security in Insecure Times (2011 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada)**<http://www.campaign2000.ca/reportCards/national/2011EnglishRreportCard.pdf>, November 2001

ⁱⁱ Bierman, A. (Ed.) (2010). Project for an Ontario Women's Evidence-Based Report: Burden of Illness. *Ontario's Women's health Equity Report*. Volume 1 Chapter 3. Page 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health School Nutrition Workgroup Steering Committee. (2004). *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*. Page 5, 9. Retrieved from: http://www.osnpph.on.ca/pdfs/call_to_action.pdf

^{iv} 21 Toronto Public Health. (2010). *Student nutrition programs in Toronto*. Page 1. City of Toronto. Retrieved

from:http://www.toronto.ca/budget2010/pdf/briefingnote_2010_tph_snp.pdf

^v McCain, M.N., Mustard, J.F., & McCuaig, K. (2011). *Early Years Study 3: Making Decisions, Taking Action*. Page 49. Toronto: Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation.

^{vi} Devereaux, P. J., et al. (2002). A systematic review and meta-analysis of studies comparing mortality rates of private for-profit and private not-for-profit hospitals. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 166(11), 1399-1406. and Devereaux, P. J., et al. (2002). Comparison of mortality between private for-profit and private not-for-profit hemodialysis centers: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 288(19), 2449-2457

^{vii} Devereaux, P. J., Heels-Andell, D., Lacchetti, C., Haines, T., Burns, K. E. A., Cook, D. J., et al. (2004). Payments for care at private for-profit and private not-for-profit hospitals: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 170 (12), 1817-24.

^{viii} Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2010). *Drug Expenditure in Canada, 1985 to 2009*. Ottawa: Author.

^{ix} Gagnon, Marc Andre (2010) *The Economic Case for Universal Pharmacare*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

^x Egale Canada 2009 Youth Speak Up about Homophobia and Transphobia