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Chair

Mr. Bryan May

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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•(0850)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, everybody. We're going to get started right away.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, June 13, 2016, the committee is resuming its study on poverty reduction strategies.

The first phase of this study is entitled government-administered savings and entitlements programs, and this is meeting four in a series of five on this theme.

I would like to welcome five witnesses today, I believe. We have four, and then possibly one who's not feeling the greatest, and I thank them if they do show.

As an individual we have James Hughes, senior fellow of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

You are here. Thank you very much, sir.

We have Jennefer Laidley, research and policy analyst with the Income Security Advocacy Centre. Welcome.

By video conference, we have...can you see me from Toronto?

Ms. Khadeeja Ahsan (Barrister and Solicitor, Staff Lawyer, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario): I can see you. Hi.

The Chair: Okay, fantastic. That's actually much easier than I thought it was going to be.

We have Khadeeja Ahsan, barrister and solicitor with the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario. Welcome.

Then I believe we have with us Stella Lord.

Is that correct? Can you hear me?

Ms. Stella Lord (Voluntary Coordinator, Community Society to End Poverty in Nova Scotia): Yes.

The Chair: She is a voluntary coordinator with the Community Society to End Poverty in Nova Scotia.

I understand Georgia Barnwell is not feeling very well and—

Ms. Georgia Barnwell (Coordinator, Women's Centres Connect): I'm on the phone.

The Chair: Oh, you are on the phone. Fantastic. Welcome. Sorry; I just didn't see you in front of me.

I really do appreciate your getting up and speaking with us today. Obviously, if you have to excuse yourself for reasons of health, then please don't hesitate, but welcome, Georgia Barnwell, coordinator, from Women's Centres Connect, again coming in from Nova Scotia.

We do have a full slate, so we'd like to keep the opening remarks to a brief seven minutes, if we could, so we can spend as much time as possible with questions.

Without any more pomp or ceremony, let's get right into it with Mr. James Hughes, senior fellow with the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

Welcome, sir.

Mr. James Hughes (Senior Fellow, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to be here.

Good morning to everyone on the committee.

[*Translation*]

I am very happy to be here with you this morning. I look forward to taking part in the dialogue on reducing poverty, a subject that is so important for our country.

[*English*]

I'm absolutely delighted to be here to be talking about a federal poverty reduction strategy. From the sector's point of view, it has really been the Holy Grail to pull in the federal government to a conversation on bringing its powers to bear on this important topic.

Very quickly, my background, for the members of the committee, is that I used to run a homeless shelter in Montreal called the Old Brewery Mission, a fantastic organization right on the ground, doing the important work of helping homeless people get housing and get out of homelessness.

I've also been a senior civil servant in the Province of New Brunswick, Deputy Minister of Social Services, so I'm delighted to be here with friends from New Brunswick and to bring the government perspective to bear on this conversation this morning as well.

I'm currently with the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, a fairly well-known private family foundation that is deeply committed to the issues around poverty reduction, but coming at it from a variety of very interesting and innovative points of view, including indigenous initiatives, urban poverty, post-secondary education, and other thematic areas such as that.

With the very limited time for introductory comments, may I simply say a few words about how important and what a great opportunity I think this is for the country to consider bringing full coherence to bear in the poverty reduction space, which is admittedly a very complicated space—very complex from a data point of view, from a policy point of view, and from a service-delivery point of view? There are a lot of moving parts in the file. I think your mandate, or the issues you're considering here as a committee, reflect that.

I would put it to you that the opportunities to be engaged at the federal level in poverty reduction should be exceptionally strategic. There's a lot of work going on already, a lot of work being done at the provincial level, where probably a majority of the powers constitutionally that come to bear with respect to this subject are vested at the local and municipal level. There are dozens and dozens of communities across this country that are getting organized to reduce poverty in the ways that they can.

What can the federal government do? I would put to you that there are really a few areas where I think federal powers could be brought to bear in a particularly strategic way.

The first one is evidence. I think in this country there is a lot of data but not necessarily a lot of knowledge and information around what works when it comes to poverty reduction.

I would suggest the committee consider a federal role in creating a centre such as they've created in the U.K. on a number of other thematics around poverty reduction. It's what they're calling in the U.K. a What Works centre. It's a trusted centre at arm's length from government, though funded by it with other partners such as family foundations like ours. That would be a place to turn to establish what works in the poverty reduction file from an evidentiary point of view, including what quality of evidence or reliability of evidence is actually available.

It helps everybody to know what works. It helps everybody also to know what doesn't work. I think that's equally important. Disseminating knowledge tools in a way that is simple and accessible by all constituencies would be very valuable.

Also in the evidence area, there are a lot of studies done by Statistics Canada and other bodies on a regular basis. However, from the point of view of trying to know if it's working as quickly as possible, having more studies on labour dynamics, on poverty issues themselves—housing and so on—instead of having studies every two, three, or four years, have them try to increase the frequency and depth of some of these studies through StatsCan and otherwise, so that we have more of an in-time access to information and data as it's becoming available. That would be deeply valuable to the sector, including the provinces and local communities, as I said.

A third and final piece in terms of evidence is experimentation. We still have a lot to learn in the space, and an experimentation fund

around looking for new ways—for instance, to reform welfare at the provincial level—would be deeply appreciated.

● (0855)

We spend over \$12 billion a year, including federal dollars being transferred through our various funding mechanisms. I think we can do a lot better than we're doing now. Frankly, I think there's probably total consensus that our welfare programming needs massive reform, but let's start with innovation and experimentation. I think the evidence area is a big opportunity.

Another area, of course, is as an employer. The federal government is a large employer, and it's also a large purchaser of services and product. Is the government using its power as an employer to ensure living wages are being offered to all of its full-time and consultative-type of staff? That is a question I think it should answer.

It also purchases, as I say, and it's a huge purchasing power in this country. Would it be possible to ask its suppliers to make sure their employees receive living wages? That is another wonderful question. It shows a role-modelling by the federal government, which is overdue. In the area of employment and as a purchaser of products and services, I think it can be impactful.

The third of four areas I'd mention is obviously to set objectives through an engaging national process with provinces and municipalities. It's a unique opportunity. This is a bipartisan space, a tripartisan space. Everyone agrees we have to reduce poverty in this country, but there's so much going on in the country that I think creating an innovative table where we can actually set some common objectives over time would be very appreciated. I think that is a space where creating ententes of a creative and innovative kind would be very valuable.

Finally, in terms of its emphasis, where should the federal government be thinking about setting its own targets with its partners? I think there are some zero-poverty rates that should be targeted, not for a generation but in the next five to 10 years. What are those four areas?

I'll conclude with this, Mr. Chair, and my apologies if I've gone over.

Full-time working people in this country should not be living in poverty. Many are. A 0% poverty for working people is a target we should set. We should have a target of 0% poverty rates for people who have disabilities. As for children, not a single child in this country should live in poverty. We should set a target to do that. I think some recent initiatives by the current government are exceptionally helpful in that regard, and hats off to it, particularly in regard to the Canada child benefit.

Finally, as for seniors, we were close, folks. We were close, 15 years ago, to 0% senior poverty rates, but we're back up again. We, particularly the federal government, should set our sights on 0% poverty in this senior space within the next five to 10 years.

I'll end there, Mr. Chair, with thanks.

I'm looking forward to the conversation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think everyone in this room agrees with those sentiments in your conclusion.

We'll move quickly to Jennefer Laidley for seven minutes. She is the research and policy analyst for the Income Security Advocacy Centre.

Welcome.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley (Research and Policy Analyst, Income Security Advocacy Centre): Thank you very much, and thanks to the committee for inviting us to be part of the panel today. We welcome the opportunity to speak briefly about the important role of publicly administered income security benefit programs in poverty reduction.

We want to urge you in this study to look not only at CPP and OAS, as it says in your mandate, but at all the federal programs and funding mechanisms that have a role in reducing poverty. Poverty can't be reduced in Canada without shoring up in some significant ways the programs and policies that exist to provide income security to Canadians.

We'll comment briefly on the Canada child benefit, the CPP disability insurance program, and the Canada social transfer. My remarks today are preliminary, and we're going to be sending in a written submission that will address these issues in more detail as well as provide some comment on OAS, GIS, and employment insurance, which I know you know a lot about because you've already been through that study.

The Income Security Advocacy Centre is a community-based legal clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario. We have a provincial mandate to improve the income security of people living in Ontario. We do that through test case litigation, through policy advocacy, and through community organizing.

As part of our work, we've been deeply involved in the Ontario government's poverty reduction efforts over the last nine years. We've gained a number of insights into poverty, one of which is that while poverty is certainly a multi-dimensional problem, clearly a lack of income security is foundational. Financial benefits from government can have a transformational impact on poverty, so access to these benefits and benefit levels are critically important.

Ontario, for example, has seen progress on child poverty from investments in the Ontario child benefit, and they report that the OCB has played a role in not only lifting children out of poverty but also in preventing children from falling into poverty in the course of this last recession.

With respect to the national view, the new Canada child benefit is a powerful tool in reducing poverty. We commend government for

that, but we recommend a few necessary changes to allow the CCB to realize its potential.

First, the CCB urgently needs to be indexed to inflation before the current projected date of 2020.

Second, take-up among indigenous peoples living on reserve has to be addressed, particularly given that 60% of first nations children on reserve are living in poverty—that's 60%.

Third, the CCB must address significant gaps in eligibility, particularly for those without regularized immigration status.

Fourth, steps should be taken to make sure all children in Canada see the full benefit of the CCB without clawbacks from social assistance incomes.

Finally, the base amount of the CCB should be increased.

With regard to addressing poverty among people with disabilities, CPP disability is the largest public benefit program for people with long-term disabilities in Canada.

I'm going to go way over time. I'm sorry about this, but I have a lot to say.

It's a contributory program tied to labour market participation and it uses a relatively strict definition of "disability" to determine eligibility. However, people with disabilities in Canada have a low labour market participation rate relative to others, and only 15% to 32% of people with severe disabilities actually receive benefits from CPPD. They have a higher incidence of low income than the rest of the population, and there are some equity issues here as well in terms of discrepancies in access to the labour market. People who are more likely to be working in low-quality jobs are, of course, going to be impacted when the programs that they rely on are based on their labour market contributions to that program.

Many CPPD recipients, you'd be surprised to know, receive benefits low enough to allow them to qualify for social assistance benefits in this country. CPPD could be made better at reducing poverty by increasing the monthly benefit, expanding the definition of disability, and increasing access by loosening the contribution requirement.

This committee reviewed the CPPD program in 2003 and made a number of recommendations that we believe should be reviewed at this time to have the CPPD program better deal with poverty.

Finally, I'd like to address the Canada social transfer. This is the primary source of federal funding that supports provincial and territorial social programs, including social assistance. About 5% of Canadians receive social assistance, but they make up about 40% of the people living in poverty in Canada.

Reducing poverty effectively cannot be achieved without addressing poverty on social assistance, so the CST becomes a very important policy lever for the federal government. Federal contributions currently cover only about 10% of the cost of provincial programs, which is down significantly from the historic 50% of cost sharing. Just as importantly, in the transition from the Canada assistance plan to the Canada health and social transfer and now the CST, four of the five conditions for federal funding were eliminated.

• (0900)

The overall objective of ensuring that social assistance programs provide adequate support to people in Canada has been lost, because the provinces and territories no longer have that as a condition of receiving CST funding. We really have no accountability mechanisms or standards to ensure that social assistance programs across the country meet the basic needs of Canadians.

In every jurisdiction and for every family type, the incomes provided to people receiving social assistance fall below, and often far below, accepted measures of poverty. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has recently reviewed Canada's obligations, and it has made comment on the inadequacy of social assistance. It has recommended that Canada work to ensure that rates be raised to allow for a decent living and that accountability provisions be put into the CST to allow monitoring of how the funds are allocated.

We believe that increased and accelerated investment in the CST, as well as requirements for provinces and territories to spend those investments on improving incomes, would represent a significant contribution to poverty reduction in this country.

Thanks for your attention. I'd be happy to answer questions.

• (0905)

The Chair: You have a whole minute left.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Really?

The Chair: You do. I swear. You were fast.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: How did that happen?

The Chair: I think the translators were being put through their paces.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: That's right.

The Chair: You were really quick.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: That's a missed opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you for that. No worries. There will lots of opportunities to answer questions as we move forward.

Moving on, we have Ms. Ahsan, barrister and solicitor in Toronto, Ontario, with the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario. Can you hear me?

Ms. Khadeeja Ahsan: Yes, I can.

The Chair: Excellent. You have seven minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Khadeeja Ahsan: Thank you.

Good morning. Thank you for allowing us to participate in today's meeting.

I am a staff lawyer at the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, or as we like to call ourselves, SALCO. SALCO's a not-for-profit organization established to enhance access to justice for low-income South Asians in the greater Toronto area. Since 1999, SALCO has been working to serve the growing needs of South Asians in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner. Our mandate includes direct legal services, legal education, law reform, and community development work. We do a large volume of advocacy in gender-based violence work, and as a specialty clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario, we provide advice, briefs, services, and legal representation in various areas of poverty law. Part of the work we do also includes advocacy in intersecting issues of poverty, including access to housing, income security, employment, and discrimination.

We have presented a paper here, I believe. I'm not sure if the committee has it in front of them. It was co-authored by the executive director of our clinic, Shalini Konanur. We're presenting that paper to you, focusing on the main points.

In keeping with the intersection of poverty and racialized people, racialized immigrants and immigrant communities have been among the most marginalized and socially excluded communities in Canada. Increasingly over time, social exclusion as experienced by racialized group members and immigrants manifests itself in the racialization of poverty and related issues, coupled with a decreasing level of socio-economic and political participation by the members of these groups, despite their growth in absolute numbers and in their percentage of the overall population of Canada.

Social exclusion as experienced by racialized and immigrant communities is a product of systemic and structural racism, which is prevalent in our society and little benefited by the corresponding governmental response, or lack thereof, to this fundamental problem. We therefore welcome the initiative by the Government of Canada in its review of Canada's poverty reduction strategy, with one of the four targeted areas being housing.

However, we believe that in order for a national housing strategy to be effective and inclusive, it is critical to understand the connection between race and poverty. Any conceptual framework employed by the Government of Canada in examining the housing crisis must be guided by a vision for equity that acknowledges the existence of the multi-faceted intersectional inequities in Canadian society.

While poverty can be a concern for anyone, its causes, forms, and consequences are not the same. Racialized immigrant communities experience disproportionate levels of poverty as a result of structural and systemic discrimination. Employment and Social Development Canada reported in the 2006 census that racialized communities faced higher levels of poverty. It showed that the poverty rate for racialized persons in Canada was 22%, compared with 9% for non-racialized persons.

Two-thirds of the racialized persons living in poverty are immigrants, and a further 8% are non-permanent residents. Almost half the population of racialized persons living in poverty are less than 25 years old, with 27% being 15 years old or less. In Toronto, 62% of all persons living in poverty were from racialized groups.

While racialized persons living in poverty in Canada are more likely to be highly educated, they are underemployed, more so than non-racialized persons living in poverty. Despite the higher levels of education reported among immigrants, poverty rates have been rising in this group and falling in the Canadian-born. In Toronto the number of racialized families living in poverty increased 362% between 1980 and the year 2000, while the poverty rate for non-racialized families dropped by 28% over the same time.

Income levels for racialized persons are significantly lower than for non-racialized persons. Racialized women are further marginalized, as they experience a higher level of poverty than racialized men. These women outnumber men by of 52% to 48%. With respect to employment, marginalized women's participation in the labour force is lower, and they have a higher unemployment rate.

● (0910)

I know I'm reading out a lot of numbers to you. Hopefully they will all make sense.

The higher levels of poverty render racialized persons and immigrants at a higher risk of homelessness. This is our focus in our submission to you.

People of colour accounted for 12% of Canadian households in 2006, and 53% of those people lived in Ontario.

Statistics Canada showed that in 2006 households of people of colour paid, on average, 29% more for shelter than a non-racialized household, and just over 50% of people of colour in Canadian households live in homes that are not affordable.

We've observed greater housing core needs since 2006. In Ontario in 2011, over 16% of immigrants had poor housing, compared to 10% of non-immigrants. However, approximately 30% of recent immigrants and non-permanent residents had core housing needs. It's not surprising, since one study found that most newcomers were spending more than 50% of their income on housing, with 15% of that group spending 75% or more of their income on housing.

A study on precarious housing and homelessness among refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants in Toronto published in December 2011 found that 83% of newcomers are renters. The study also revealed that one in three respondents reported their housing was in need of minor or major repairs and that overcrowding is a common occurrence, as well as poor maintenance and unhealthy housing.

The study we refer to also reported in December 2011 that half the refugee and asylum-seekers stayed in shelters at some point, which indicates this group is at a higher risk of homelessness.

Meeting the needs of vulnerable Canadians requires a conceptual framework that promotes equity and acknowledges these unique barriers. Based on that, we're making a number of recommendations.

The first is that we examine any policy or proposal through the race lens to ensure that the process and impact of any policy or proposal addresses the needs of racialized and immigrant communities who are at a higher risk of poverty.

The second is that we incorporate the collection and analysis of this aggregated data by race, gender, and other socio-demographic information into the development of national housing strategies and measurements and goals associated with such a strategy.

The third is that we include a rights-based approach that is guided by Canada's international obligations, including its commitment under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I'm not going to read all of them. They are in front of you. We're referring to all the international obligations that Canada has committed to.

Another recommendation is that we engage a broader range of experts, including agencies that provide housing assistance to newcomers and racialized communities and seek their expertise—am I going over?

The Chair: If you can conclude, I assure you there will be opportunities during questions to elaborate as well.

Now we're going to go to Bedford, Nova Scotia, and Ms. Barnwell, who is the coordinator from Women's Centres Connect.

You have seven minutes.

● (0915)

Ms. Georgia Barnwell: Thank you so much. I appreciate being able to join you by phone, although I certainly would rather be in the room.

Women's Centres Connect is the provincial association of women's centres. There are nine centres in Nova Scotia. They provide a multitude of services on a range of issues. We work on anything from poverty to employability to sexualized violence.

The centres have been around for in excess of 30 years, and we have developed very close ties to our communities. Through our experience, we have a pretty good understanding of what women and girls in our communities need to achieve financial security. Our recommendations follow.

Certainly, in all cases of research, we need to apply a rural lens where appropriate, and in Nova Scotia that is most of the province. In addition to the rural lens, of course, there needs to be a gender lens and an intersectional lens that considers all the diversities, whether it's immigrants, refugees, racialized people, or people living with disabilities, etc.

As far as housing goes, we would say that there needs to be a mix of affordable housing models: community-based social housing, public housing, housing co-ops, rent supplements, affordable home ownership, and, to a lesser extent, subsidized rental housing in the private market.

We would suggest that funding needs to be available to enable community-based organizations to develop non-profit affordable housing. The reason we say this is that many of these organizations work not from an official housing-first framework, but certainly from the perspective that supports need to be available to people to enable them to maintain their housing stability.

We would also suggest that funding for green housing would benefit both the tenants and the planet. We also need research into housing markets and needs, especially in rural areas and small towns, as well as in our urban centres.

We would like to suggest that you restore resource group funding, as it was known 30 years ago, so that non-profit affordable housing developers can maintain consistent leadership and expertise in their communities and steer the development of affordable housing projects.

We also need sufficient capital grants for affordable housing to be truly affordable.

Let's move on to education, training, and employment.

Women, whether they are rural women, racialized women, indigenous women, or immigrants, are more likely to live in poverty than men. Two main factors here are motherhood and caregiving duties and a lack of education or training. In addition, women face a wide range of other barriers to economic security. Certainly practical supports, such as transportation and child care, are essential and are sadly lacking in those rural communities.

The other thing is that many women, particularly in rural Nova Scotia, have histories of violence, sexual abuse, and trauma. This compounds the barriers to financial security and requires a range of supports, whether they are for mental health, practical assistance, health care, counselling, or financial literacy. Programs really have to be comprehensive and address the full range of needs of people.

Also, in rural areas, access to higher education is very difficult. It must be strengthened, and the cost of tuition must be reduced. Nova Scotia's tuition fees are among the highest in Canada. Our students graduate with a high debt load and, due to a poorer job market, they have to leave Nova Scotia. We are training students to go away and help the economies of the other provinces. We would like to keep some of them here.

• (0920)

The other thing we've noticed in some of our communities is that ESL needs to be available for women immigrants, particularly

because they're given secondary consideration with respect to their earning power, and it's not as easy to access the ESL courses.

In terms of government-administered savings and entitlement programs, certainly we agree that the CPP needs to be strengthened, the Canada child tax benefit needs to be indexed, and we would suggest that the social transfers need to be raised to a significant and effective amount. As well, as an earlier presenter said, there need to be some accountability and standards along with those social transfers.

We would urge the committee to add a number of topics to this category.

The first is federal leadership for a \$15 minimum wage, and I would also echo the comments of Mr. Hughes: we think a livable income is really the ideal for employment, and we'd like to see some leadership in that area. We would like to see a universal child care program, a universal pharmacare program, and a fully indexed guaranteed liveable income tied to the market basket measure.

In terms of neighbourhoods, somebody has also suggested that addressing poverty should involve all three levels of government. The centre's staff really works very closely with the municipalities, and we would urge some leadership in that area.

The Chair: Ms. Barnwell, if you could—

Ms. Georgia Barnwell: I have to stop. I'm sorry.

The Chair: We're actually out of time, so we're going to move on, but if you can stick with us, I assure you we have some questions.

Ms. Georgia Barnwell: Okay.

The Chair: Before I move on, there have been a couple of references to submissions. You don't have those in front of you; they're in the process of being translated, so once those have been done, we'll obviously get those out to everybody on the committee.

We'll go very quickly over to Ms. Stella Lord, voluntary coordinator for the Community Society to End Poverty in Nova Scotia, by videoconference from Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Welcome.

Ms. Stella Lord: Thank you very much for this opportunity to present. I was only invited to participate about 48 hours ago, so I'll give it my best try.

The Chair: We really do appreciate your attending on such short notice. Thank you.

Ms. Stella Lord: Thank you.

The Community Society to End Poverty in Nova Scotia, or the CSEP-NS, now working under the name End Poverty Nova Scotia, is a community-based organization with the overall goal of ending poverty in Nova Scotia. We advocate for social policies and programs that reduce poverty and promote the adoption of poverty reduction strategies at all levels of government.

We've been active in Nova Scotia since 2008, operating on a shoestring budget with the assistance of a voluntary coordinator—and that's me—with a board management committee and a long email list of community contacts. We are on the way to developing an organized End Poverty Nova Scotia network made up of individuals and groups in different regions of the province and representing various demographic and social program sectors, including people with the lived experience of poverty who support our mission and goals.

Until about 2013, we spent a lot of time and energy advocating with the provincial government to develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that takes the “social determinants of health” approach and incorporates clear goals, targets, timelines, and reporting mechanisms. Unfortunately, that seems to have dropped off the political agenda here.

Since our inception, we have also paid a lot of attention to advocating on issues that affect people living on income assistance, such as low welfare rates, oppressive regulations, the lack of support and services, and the need for safe, accessible, and affordable housing. In the process, we've learned a lot about what would make an effective poverty reduction strategy in Nova Scotia and about the need for fundamental reform in Canada's social assistance programs.

We've learned what we think are three keys to an effective Canada poverty reduction strategy.

One is to commit to a human rights framework and a social determination of health, or what is now being called a “health in all policies” approach to poverty reduction.

The second key is that poverty is never just about income, but it's always about income, so make it comprehensive. At a minimum, incorporate the six policy areas outlined by Canada Without Poverty and Citizens for Public Justice in their Dignity for All campaign document, which are housing and homelessness, health, food security, jobs and employment, early child development and care, and income security.

Third, be responsive to the needs and the issues, and engage with those with experience and knowledge in all regions of Canada, meaning people with a lived experience of poverty, organizations that serve them, and those who advocate on poverty and policy issues.

In my written presentation, I give two examples of the need for holistic and comprehensive approaches to poverty reduction. The first one is an example of a brief I just wrote on housing and homelessness in Nova Scotia. I'm not going to read all that I've written. It shows the links between the issue of housing and homelessness and the high rates of unemployment, especially in rural areas; the lack of housing programs and services in both urban

and rural areas; the issue of transportation, where gentrification is taking place in some areas of Halifax with people having to move out to suburban areas where they cannot afford proper transportation; mental health issues; disability issues; alcohol and drug abuse issues, all linked into issues of housing and homelessness; demographics—as Georgia pointed out, we have an increasing high age demographic and more seniors, especially in rural areas, are having to maintain large homes and have nowhere to go when they cannot really maintain them—and the income assistance system, and I think this is absolutely core to reducing poverty in Canada, which several of the presenters have already mentioned.

Two major factors in homelessness and core housing in Halifax, as well as in rural Nova Scotia, are low welfare incomes and welfare based on need and constructed as a system of last resort. Currently, depending on family status, the number of dependents, and whether applicants for IA are considered employable or disabled, welfare incomes in Nova Scotia are anywhere between 50% and 25% below the market basket measure of poverty.

● (0925)

Many individuals and families are on income assistance and therefore have difficulty finding or affording rental accommodation that is also safe, secure, and accessible.

In Halifax, some single adults on income assistance who are not eligible for the “disabled” shelter rate must live in old rooming houses owned by slum landlords, who care little about the state of disrepair or condition of their buildings. Families with dependent children may have to live in neighbourhoods where crime or drug abuse rates are high. Indigenous populations in urban centres are not living in culturally appropriate housing. People living in shelters are not even eligible for shelter loans under the provincial welfare program, because those go to the shelter. They're not able to access the private housing rental market because they lack the financial resources and the deposits, and they are turned away because they have no credit rating and insufficient income. This creates a catch-22 in terms of the ability of the transient homeless population to leave the shelter system.

I could talk about a lot of other issues related to housing, but I want to turn to another example—food security.

Research out of the Mount Saint Vincent University FoodARC project—and I would advise you to look them up; they have some great research—has also demonstrated the relationship between food insecurity, inadequate income security, and housing, whether income security is due to low wages or poor income security programs.

For example, in order to pay utilities and rent, which are non-negotiable expenditures, individuals and families relying on minimum wage or low-wage jobs and income security programs such as income assistance, unemployment insurance, guaranteed annual income, or OAS often cut down on healthy food and/or use food banks on a regular basis.

The research also demonstrates that for low-income families in particular, expenditures for health care not covered within our health care system. That includes dental care, medications, physiotherapy, and so on. As well, as the high cost of child care also eats into their budgets and has an impact on food security.

Access to free post-secondary education and skills development programs that lead to better jobs and employment opportunities, together with a higher minimum wage or a living wage, would help improve the situation of those currently in low-wage jobs or people in transition from income assistance. We think the federal government could provide a basis for a higher minimum wage by increasing the minimum wage.

● (0930)

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I'll ask you to conclude. I'm sure there's tonnes more—

Ms. Stella Lord: I'll just move to the conclusion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Stella Lord: As the above examples demonstrate, we need a coordinated and comprehensive approach to poverty reduction. We need enhanced federal income security programs, but the federal government could also help with more effective public transportation as well.

The federal government could also play a stronger role in helping the provinces deliver better social and income security programs. We believe that a coordinated plan between the federal government and the provinces is required. This plan should include enhancing federal investments through transfers to provinces for income assistance and social services, while at the same time establishing standards and conditions for delivery of programs—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry—

Ms. Stella Lord: —that at a minimum would ensure that the provinces could close the gap between welfare incomes and any standard measure of poverty.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lord. I do apologize for cutting you off, but we do have a lot of questions. We have such a limited time.

Ms. Stella Lord: My seven minutes went very fast.

The Chair: It does go quickly, and I let you go a little bit longer. Ms. Laidley had given us a minute, so I gave it to you.

Thank you very much to all of the witnesses today. There's a lot for us to chew on.

I have a note before we get into the questions. A lot of the witnesses kind of crossed over our whole study. I'll just give you a friendly reminder that the phase we are in is government-assisted savings and entitlement programs. Obviously, you can ask whatever question you like, but I encourage us to stay in the runway that we're in.

First up, we have MP Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Thank you very much, everyone, for being here.

To Ms. Laidley, you had seven or eight recommendations for the committee with respect to increasing income support programs. Can you just give us the full total costing of all of your recommendations, please?

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: No, actually, I can't. I'll answer that succinctly.

If you're looking for a full costing, I can certainly attempt to do that in our written submissions.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Please. If you could do that, it would be very helpful.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: I would also maybe refer you to the alternative federal budget process that the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives does.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Sure. We will look at that.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: I think that will be coming out in February.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: We just have to be mindful that every dollar we spend as government has to come from somewhere.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Sure. Yes.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Most of it comes from income taxes. To increase income taxes by tens of billions of dollars would threaten the income security of millions of Canadians. We just want to be mindful that the money does come from real human beings who earned it. There's no free money out there.

I noticed you talked a lot about increasing income programs, but I didn't hear you talk a lot about rewarding people for earning income through work. We know that the majority of disabled people want to work. We have statistical data now showing that. We have a million Canadians who are disabled who do work. We have 300,000 Canadians who are severely disabled who work. We know that the best ticket out of poverty for people, whether they are disabled or not, is a job.

Do you agree that all other things being equal, it is preferable for someone to have earned income versus government-administered income?

● (0935)

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: I want to start by I guess challenging the notion that the best way out of poverty is a job.

We know, and I'm sure you heard this in the course of discussions around employment insurance, that many people who are working full time in this country are living in poverty. For many people, work is just not sufficient. The labour market has changed significantly over the last 25 to 30 years. We can't necessarily any longer say that the best route out of poverty is a job.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Would the solution be to make work pay?

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Certainly, but as we're doing that—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I didn't hear any proposals in your submission to make work pay. I heard a lot of proposals for government to give people money.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: I don't think it's a simple—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Perhaps I could just finish.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Sure.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: We know that a lot of government-administered income programs actually punish work, because they are clawed back at a rate that is so steep that sometimes people who leave government assistance to go into a job actually end up worse off economically.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Yes.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Do you have any specific proposals to reduce the phenomenon of government punishing work through high levels of marginal effective tax rates?

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: We don't have a proposal on that outlined, and I'm certainly not prepared to speak to that today.

There are others who feel that, for example, the working income tax benefit is an important piece of the puzzle, and some believe that a guaranteed annual income that does lower marginal effective tax rates to people on social assistance is a way to go. As I said in my remarks, income security is a fundamental piece of reducing poverty.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Right. I guess your answer is that you don't have proposals for reducing marginal effective tax rates for low-income people.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: I'm sure there will be others who would want to appear before this committee who might want to address that issue.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you. We will look forward to hearing them.

I think another element here is that income is one part. Outcome is the other, and outcome depends also on the cost of living. We know that anything that raises the price of food and fuel increases poverty. A Stats Canada witness told us that, and that's what leads me to the motion that I will propose to move now, Mr. Chair. It reads:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development, and the Status of Persons with Disabilities study the effects of a federally-mandated carbon tax on low-income families, and that Employment and Social Development Canada and Statistics Canada fully report to the Committee on the number of people the carbon tax will cause to fall below the low-income cut-off line.

That motion would be in order. There has been notice granted, and it was provided to the clerk and the committee administration about two weeks ago.

This motion, Mr. Chair, would allow the committee to add this subject to the existing study. It does not propose to fundamentally alter the committee's agenda, but really augment what is already a worthy study that we are undertaking now, in large part due to your leadership.

I think we have an enormous policy decision before Canadians right now on the imposition of a \$50-a-tonne carbon tax, and that tax would increase costs for the average Canadian by \$1,028. It would increase the cost of basic staples of human life, such as food, fuel, and electricity. We know that poor households spend a third more of their income on those staples than do rich households, so the tax is extremely regressive and would disproportionately affect those with the least. The result is that we could see an increase in the number of people below the low-income cut-off line. We could also see an increase in the number of people who fall below the market basket measure of poverty.

That is not speculation. It's based on the testimony that this committee has heard. There was a witness from Stats Canada who indicated that any time you increase the price of fuel, electricity, or food, you raise the threshold of the low-income cut-off line and the market basket measure, and therefore you increase the number of people who fall below that threshold and by extension the number of people who are deemed to be living in poverty.

Therefore it falls to us to study these impacts rigorously. This tax is federally mandated. While the money it raises will be provincially administered, it is mandated by the federal government, and poverty is a national issue. We have a duty to study the impacts on the less fortunate of all the policies, especially one of this magnitude.

We know from the experience in Ontario that the Green Energy Act has transferred massive sums of money from the low-income population to the extremely wealthy. It is probably the biggest wealth transfer from poor to rich that has been enacted by any government in my lifetime. The Auditor General of this province has indicated that it has caused an overpayment for electricity of \$37 billion over eight years. Over the next 30 years, it's supposed to lead to an overpayment of another \$137 billion, all of those extra costs and unnecessary costs being put on the electricity bills of everyday Ontarians. The evidence is mounting that a very small number of well-connected insiders are being made into instant millionaires as a result of the subsidies they enjoy under that program.

I realize, Chair, that is a provincial program, but the federally mandated carbon tax can be expected to have very similar redistributive effects, and as a result, we as a committee that studies poverty have a duty to determine what impacts it will have.

• (0940)

I note that the data presented by Stats Canada of low income and the low-income cut-off on the provincial level shows that Ontario has the worst record of any government in Canada between the years 2003 and 2014. Poverty levels dropped by one-third in British Columbia, the Prairies, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada, but in Ontario they barely budged. The number of people living on less than half the median income in Ontario actually increased during that time period, while it fell in every other province but two.

Ontario has demonstrated that some of these green policies can have an enormous impact on poverty. They can increase disparities. They are particularly harmful to the people who can least afford to pay for them.

I move this motion.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I hope that the committee will see to it to study this impact. A society is judged by how it treats its least fortunate. There is significant evidence to suggest that the least fortunate will be the most harmed by this policy. Therefore, the least we can do is study those impacts and find out how they can be mitigated or avoided altogether.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have a point of order from Ms. Tassi. Then we have Dan, Bob, and Mark.

Go ahead.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Chair, with respect to that, we have witnesses here. The member's comments.... I really want to address the witnesses who are here. They have valuable information and input to give to us today. I would like to get to the point where I can ask questions of the witnesses who are here.

• (0945)

The Chair: That's fair enough.

Dan, go ahead.

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): It's much the same thing. The program you are referring to is kind of like putting the cart before the horse right now. This is something we can discuss at a later date.

However, we do have a lot of people right now. Indeed, we are talking about very complex issues with a lot of moving parts. Some of the people here live in the trenches. We can discuss your motion at any time. I would really like to discuss it, at any time. However, I value their information, and I would really like to hear it and be able to pose questions.

The Chair: I don't know whether I have the capacity to do this or not.

I'll get to you in a second.

Can I propose that we move on with the questions—I think we have to have a motion for that— and carve out some time at the end of today to address the motion on the table?

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): With respect, Chair, we would like to get to the vote on the motion. The motion is important to us, and it is important to the mover as well, so I think we need to deal with the motion, and in order. We have to deal with the motion, as it is on the table.

The Chair: We do, and that is why I am saying that we would have to either pull it and put it in committee business—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: We are prepared to vote on it. It was presented to the committee.

The Chair: I am not suggesting that anything is being done out of order. I am just saying that I want to respect the witnesses who are here. If we can have a moment, I'll discuss with my guys what we want to do, and we'll go from there.

Mark, did you have a point?

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Yes. Am I on the speakers list? Is it my turn to speak?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I think it's a good motion, but in a practical sense we could include this within the mandate of what we are discussing on poverty. I think that's the point that Pierre is making. As we hear about the importance of housing, will a carbon tax increase the cost of housing? Absolutely. How about heating those homes? Where they are on a fixed income, it will increase that. It will increase transportation costs for a person, but we also heard that the public transportation costs will increase. The costs of food, drugs, meds, and education will increase dramatically too.

If we could have that as part of this study and increase our mandate—a question through you to Pierre—would you accept that, so we don't have to have a separate study? It would be part of this study.

The Chair: That's the question.

Mr. Ruimy, go ahead.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn the debate.

The Chair: Okay. It's non-debatable.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: This means you're just saying—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: As a point of order, Chair, that would mean this meeting is adjourned, if that's where Mr. Ruimy is going, and I thought you wanted to hear the witnesses today.

The Chair: No, we're talking about the debate on this motion. I believe we can, but we would have to deal with his motion first, because it supersedes—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: That's a debatable motion, though. This motion is debatable.

The Chair: I'm trying to think of the quickest way to get to where we need to get to on this, and as I said, I want to—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: We just want to vote on it, so—

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I moved to adjourn the debate on this motion.

The Chair: Okay. I think they're done. I'm not sure that we need to do that. We're prepared to vote on this particular....

Now I just question.... Normally, this would be considered committee business, and we would be doing this in camera. Is this an issue? No? Okay, I just want to make sure I'm not breaking any rules there.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I believe I can.... I'm not attempting to disrupt the discussion here—

The Chair: Well, you are.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: —but I do believe this matter should be discussed in public and not in camera.

The Chair: I'm not suggesting that. I'm just saying—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I guess what I'm suggesting is a compromise. Maybe we could return to the subject at another time, as long as there's agreement that we could discuss it out in the open. I would put the matter to—

The Chair: I think there's appetite to—

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the motion—

The Chair: —vote on this now.

Mr. Wayne Long: The motion shouldn't be debatable now, though. Can we just not call a vote?

The Chair: I think this was sort of the attempt. I think this is what was asked of us, and I think that's what we should do at this point. That's fair. Can we move to vote, or must we have Mr. Ruimy pull the motion?

● (0950)

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Mr. Chair, we don't have to vote.

The Chair: Just give me a second.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Okay, so we do have a motion on the floor to adjourn the debate on this, and—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: That's what I want to speak to.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: We would like a recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Mr. Chair, it's a dilatory motion. It's non-debatable.

The Chair: No one's debating.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: No one's debating. It's a vote.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: It's a vote.

The Chair: We have to vote on it. The way you've put this forward, we have to vote on this now to end the debate. We would then go to vote on the motion that is on the floor. To get back to where we need to be in terms of witnesses, I'd like to suggest that we vote on the motion to adjourn the debate. All those in favour?

Mr. Dan Ruimy: It's on that motion.

The Chair: Yes, it's on that motion.

Mr. Mark Warawa: It's a recorded vote.

The Chair: All in those in favour?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 3[See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Now to the motion of Mr. Poilievre. Again, this is just an open vote in terms of his motion. I need to read this.

The motion that is on the floor is:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

As I understood Mr. Ruimy's motion, he moved to adjourn the debate, which doesn't necessarily mean that we go to a vote on the original motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It means that the debate ceases to proceed at this time, and perhaps at another time it could be revisited, but the vote on the motion is delayed until that happens.

The Chair: We can do that, and then we would just move on.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: We could move on then, yes.

The Chair: Are we in agreement that this is what we'll do?

Okay, fair enough.

Thank you, everybody.

Witnesses, I appreciate your patience and I do apologize for the delay, but we are moving on, and I believe to Mr. Ruimy.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: So little time is left.

I'm going to focus on Ms. Laidley.

First of all, I want to recognize your work in the trenches. I think you're the kind of folks who we need here to help us understand in Canada what it is that we're trying to accomplish. I've got so much that I want to ask you, but Stats Canada, when we had them here, talked about measuring poverty using the LIM and the LICO. Are you familiar with those two? Okay.

My first question to you is, do you think that's sufficient for us, or does it really adequately measure poverty? Is there something else we should be looking at?

● (0955)

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: There was a big debate in Ontario around this very issue when Ontario was putting together its poverty reduction strategy.

I'm not saying that Ontario is getting everything right. I think that there are some significant areas in which the Government of Ontario needs to make progress on poverty reduction and where, in fact, it has not met its own targets for poverty reduction, but I would say that one of the things that's very good about their strategy is that they take a multi-dimensional approach to the measurement of poverty. We know that poverty is about income, but it's also about.... Poverty is both a relative and objective kind of experience, so I think it's important to look at not only the relative measures of poverty, but also measures like, say, the market basket measure.

The Ontario government put some other measurements into place. They created a deprivation index, and I think it was the Daily Bread Food Bank that did the majority of the work on that. They worked with Statistics Canada to ask questions like "Have I been able to feed my children a meal of meat in a given week?" for example. There are a number of different measures.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: With the measures that are in place right now, do you feel that's sufficient to really...?

In order to move forward, we have to really understand poverty and how we define it. Somebody living on the streets is obviously poor, but we know there are a lot of working people who are poor as well. In order to make progress here, we have to be able to be accountable for the things that we do and how we do them, and that's where the measures come in.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Sure.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Very quickly, you mentioned a report from 2003, with recommendations.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Yes, it was one that this committee did on CPP disability.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Would you be able to submit that to the clerk as evidence?

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: I sure can. Yes.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Okay, great. Thank you.

Moving on, you talked about zero poverty, and disabled is a big one. We do know, as my colleague across the hall mentioned, that there are many disabled folks out there who want to work. What do you think are some of the barriers that are preventing this?

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Oh, boy; that's a big question.

I think one of the tricks with addressing the poverty of people with disabilities, and addressing their labour-market participation, is around acknowledging the fact that labour market participation for people with disabilities exists sort of on a spectrum. We think about this in terms of eligibility for benefit programs.

The question of whether or not you can work is the wrong question to be asking. It's not an on/off switch, right? There are folks who are able to work on an intermittent basis. Folks with episodic disabilities can work one week and not another week. The experience of disability is not just about your medical condition: it's about the ways in which society, and our infrastructure and our expectations, are structured to create barriers for people's participation.

When trying to understanding labour market participation for people with disabilities, there needs to be a nuanced approach to that issue, I think.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

Going to the CCB—I'm glad you like it—you mentioned the uptake is not very high by indigenous folks. That's money in the bank. Why would that not be—

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: This is a challenge when you're delivering benefits through the tax system. It's not set up to be a benefit delivery mechanism.

One of the barriers that exists is the requirement to file your taxes. There are first nations people, indigenous people on reserve and others, who don't file their tax returns for a number of different reasons. I think in the case of first nations and addressing child poverty and poverty levels on first nations, there is the question of tax filing.

I don't know that the answer to that issue is to get everybody to file their taxes. I think the committee should probably do some outreach to first nations and indigenous communities and ask them what the best approach would be.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

I think I have time for one more question.

● (1000)

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: You mentioned clawbacks.

I find that really frustrating, because you take a single mom who has a very minimal income and wants to get a job, but as soon as she does that, the money starts coming off. Do you have any comments and thoughts on clawbacks?

The Chair: Be very quick, please.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Again, it's a very large issue.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I could spend a whole day with you.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Let's do it. Let's talk about clawbacks.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: That's fantastic.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: In this instance, we're talking about provincial and territorial governments clawing back from social assistance benefits the gains that were made in the Canada child benefit. So far, the Northwest Territories is the only province or territory that's done that. You may have seen stories in the paper in the last week and a half to 10 days that they have reduced amounts for children for food and clothing after the Canada child benefit was increased. There are no mechanisms in the CCB right now to prevent that, and we would encourage government to think about that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we move over to MP Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First I would like to thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

They all showed us that we must take a broad view in studying income support programs. Ms. Laidley raised the topic of provincial programs. Ms. Barnwell pointed out that we have to take action at the neighbourhood and municipal level, and raised the importance of pharmacare and daycare services, which are provincial. So all levels of government are involved. Ms. Lord also said that we need a comprehensive and coordinated approach. So I think it is inevitable that we will go in that direction.

My question is for Mr. Hughes. You pointed out, as did our chair, that we share objectives in eliminating poverty among working people, persons with disabilities, children and seniors. I would also add that, for each of these four groups, we should show particular concern for aboriginal persons, given our federal responsibilities.

Your testimony is especially interesting given your experience running a shelter. Having run a community housing agency myself, I know we are concerned by everything happening at the municipal level. You also have a provincial perspective, since you are developing a strategy for New Brunswick in your current position. You were also a member of the National Council on Welfare. Please tell us about your experience in your reply.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their indulgence. I do indeed have many opportunities to talk about Bill C-245, which I introduced. In your testimony, you touched on some interesting aspects. You talked about an observation centre on poverty data, to see what is working well and what is not working. Professor Notten spoke about an observatory on social indicators. From the testimony we have heard, it is clear that we need evidence regarding poverty. We need a mechanism to measure effectiveness. Action at the federal level is essential: the government must show leadership on a strategy.

Please tell us more about how you could make the data collection centre operational.

Mr. James Hughes: Thank you very much.

I am very pleased that you mentioned the National Council on Welfare, which has worked very hard on poverty reduction. In fact, New Brunswick's entire poverty reduction plan is in part based on the report the national council produced at that time. This report indicated that four main elements were needed to create an effective plan, including a comprehensive vision. Intervention priorities are also needed, delivery mechanisms—that is, who will be responsible for them—and, finally, performance indicators.

I would like to say a few words about your previous question. New Brunswick uses 12 indicators to track the plan's progress. That might be worth noting.

Getting back to the whole question of what is happening, what is working and what isn't, where are the gaps in factual information, in basic data, in research that has not yet been done. What is the quality of the evidence?

These are good questions for all stakeholders, including the federal government, the provinces, municipalities, and non-profit organizations. We all want to know, for our own information, what has been done elsewhere, what the results were, and whether that evidence is reliable.

As MPs, you hear all kinds of proposals on how to reduce poverty. The question, however, is whether the solutions proposed have been successful elsewhere and whether the evidence is reliable as regards future initiatives.

In England, where I was a month ago, they have developed a network of centres called the What Works Centres, a very interesting name. There are currently seven centres but they are considering doubling that number. These centres are government-funded, receiving over 200 million pounds sterling per year to give the appropriate stakeholders the tools they need to make informed decisions. Their work is based on certain themes, including aging, early intervention, local economic development, crime reduction, and so forth. The centres are managed by people who are recognized in their sector of activity, but they are funded separately.

So they are not controlled by the government's political agenda or by the university or academic agenda. The centres have an objective mandate to disseminate and share with the appropriate stakeholders what is happening around the world. They look at what has been done around the world in a specific field and analyze the quality of the evidence. They can then determine whether they can use that specific evidence to create trials or pilot projects, or not pursue it because it has not worked elsewhere.

●(1005)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm afraid—

[*Translation*]

Mr. James Hughes: These centres have been a very positive initiative.

[*English*]

The Chair: I apologize. We are way over time on that one, but I am hopeful that we have somebody who will ask you another question and we can continue with that. It was very interesting.

We'll go over to Mr. Long, please.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests. It's great to see so many Atlantic Canadians represented on the panel today. I don't have to explain our situation in Saint John.

My questions are actually for you, Mr. Hughes.

I read one of your reports here, and you talk a lot about early intervention and early learning and how important that is in the fight against poverty. I'd like you to elaborate a little more on early intervention, how important it is, and what government can do from a federal perspective. Again, you speak in your report about lining up both levels of government, federal and provincial. I'd like you to elaborate a little more on early learning, early prevention, and what that can do. What ideas do you have for us?

Mr. James Hughes: Thank you very much.

Maybe I'll be slightly self-serving off the top here and say that there's a great book that has been written on that. It's called *Early Intervention* and is published by Nova Scotia publishers.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Who wrote that? What is the author's name?

Mr. James Hughes: Yours truly wrote this last year. It's the James Lorimer publishing—

The Chair: He's going to be signing copies later.

Mr. James Hughes: Signing copies? There's one left here. We're going to do an auction, maybe, and see what we can get for it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wayne Long: Obviously the book speaks for itself, but I want you to elaborate on how important this is and what you think we can do to aid in that from the federal perspective.

Mr. James Hughes: I think that when you study, as I have—although not as a professional scientist—the issues of poverty and others, you realize fairly quickly that the earlier one intervenes in terms of people with vulnerability.... As soon as we have signs of vulnerability and fragility, and as soon as there are signs of problems, we know that those risks are getting bigger. If we can equip ourselves to intervene earlier, a couple of really great things happen.

First of all, individuals and families are better off. This is based on research in areas that go everywhere from poverty reduction to homelessness to early intervention in child care, school violence, and autism. The topic of health is probably the best example overall of intervening early for the benefit of individuals and families morally, clinically, spiritually, and physically, but so often we find that early intervention also is good for the state. Because we are actually intervening early and paying early, we're not paying later on.

I know that's notional. Everyone says that intervening early saves us money, but this is a compendium of some examples of that.

I think the best evidence is ahead of us in terms of how we actually use health economics to predict those savings going forward, because there really are savings, but in terms of a federal perspective on this, it's always been my view that in negotiating with the provinces in particular, because that's what the federal government is really good at.... We get our transfers to individuals and transfers to provinces. Historically it's not necessarily the best in terms of service delivery, but negotiating with provinces based on an early intervention lens actually can bring significant benefits to both federal and provincial governments in terms of savings over time periods that sometimes exceed political mandates and budgets, but that often are the best investments overall.

●(1010)

Mr. Wayne Long: You could envision negotiations between the feds and the provinces, maybe with some strings attached, focusing the provinces more on early learning. You can look at examples in Finland and Germany, where children basically are wrapped into the school system from years two, three, and four. Can I have your thoughts on whether you think that's possible?

Mr. James Hughes: I think it is.

It doesn't even have to be in terms of straight-up transfers. It can also be in terms of loan-type programs. Remember, if these are supposed to pay for themselves, then provincial savings can actually return the money to the federal government. It can be a really interesting conversation in terms of how to build an early intervention fund that benefits the federal government, provinces, and individuals and families.

I think your example of early intervention in education in Finland is a really interesting one. The results are phenomenal by having that very thinking, so I'd encourage the creation of a body and a fund that may have different pieces to it.

I know that social innovation and social finance work may be a great place to park that reflection. I know that work is going to be starting. I know also that the philanthropic sectors are really interested in that kind of thing as well.

Mr. Wayne Long: Very quickly, in Saint John we've obviously met extensively with a lot of community groups, neighbourhood groups, corporate entities, health care workers, and police. They all list mental health as one of the major problems that's linked to poverty.

What are your suggestions as to what we can do from a government perspective in aid for the mental health problem?

Mr. James Hughes: It's the orphan of the health care system, of course, and it's treated unequally with regard to other forms of health. Some people don't even think it's a health issue.

I think the commission's work has been excellent, but I think there's a huge void to fill. I think federal leadership in the area of mental health, through the Canada health transfer, ring-fencing mental health funding, and focusing on integrated care, particularly at onset for young people aged 18 to 25, is absolutely the best early intervention you could possibly make. The savings to the system, from criminal justice to homelessness and housing, are off the chart. Also, as I say, it's very low-hanging fruit.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go over to MP Tassi, please.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I'd like to thank all the witnesses today for your valuable input and for your patience.

Ms. Barnwell, are you still with us?

Ms. Georgia Barnwell: Yes, I am.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Oh, you're a champ. Thanks so much.

My question is directed to you, but Ms. Lord, you may wish to answer too.

We've heard from you today, as well as from other witnesses, that poverty disproportionately impacts Canadian women. I know that you both have first-hand experience in this. I'm just looking at commenting on some of the barriers that lead women into poverty. A couple have been mentioned: education and training, and motherhood and child care. Have you any to add to the list, and are there solutions that might help address these issues that women face?

• (1015)

Ms. Georgia Barnwell: Thank you very much for that question.

We feel that, again, there's a term that's being recognized around the table, "holistic and comprehensive approaches", that recognize the full range of health, social, and economic needs of people living in poverty. In that way, if those broad areas are addressed, then we can create a foundation on which to build economic security, given that there's a job market available to the person.

Probably more important is the need to balance the inequity and disparity that comes with capitalism by providing social programs and initiatives. The federal government really should be working with Canadians to devise a progressive tax system that enables the implementation of social programs. We really do need a paradigm shift in our collective thinking. Many of us realize this.

Certainly poverty is created by policies. Federal and provincial policies create and maintain women and all low-income Canadians in poverty. Through education policies, people end up with high student loans, which prevents people from getting education and prevents people from paying off student loans. People are very reticent to make that huge investment when there's a poor job market.

Employment insurance is shrinking. Eligibility for people in precarious employment is shrinking every day. Social assistance policies obviously do not provide adequate support—we've had a lot of talk about that—and certainly pension policies have an effect. The Canada pension plan is geared to someone who has a lifelong connection to the workforce, someone who is not taking time out to look after children or for elder care.

These programs need to be strengthened to recognize the diversity of our experience and needs, rather than just presuming everyone is going to work nine to five for 47 years, or whatever the time is.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Thank you, Ms. Barnwell.

Ms. Georgia Barnwell: Yes, so—

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Sorry, Ms. Barnwell; it's just that time is tight, and I'm trying to get in as much information as possible.

Ms. Georgia Barnwell: Absolutely.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Ms. Lord, can you comment on that as well?

Ms. Stella Lord: Yes.

I'd agree with everything that Georgia Barnwell just said. We have to remember that early learning and child care are key. I think that was mentioned by the previous speaker as well. Let's remember that women are also a diverse group, and racism is a factor for some communities in Nova Scotia. Women also account for a main population of people with disabilities, be they physical disabilities or mental health disabilities or other issues.

Many of these women are on income assistance, and I'd like to really stress what I was trying to say before about income assistance and the need to try to transform that into an income-based program. Nova Scotia's employment support and income assistance program, ESIA, is going through a transformation process. As I understand it, there are a number of concerns there, one of them being transitions from income assistance to employment, which was also referred to earlier. One of the main things they want to address—and this is only in terms of proposing a business plan, so I guess it will have to go to the Nova Scotia government cabinet to address it—is a marginal effective tax rate, and they're also talking about trying to reduce the barriers within the income assistance system itself. If you look at the various federal and provincial tax credits, you see they're up and down like a yo-yo, so there are all kinds of financial barriers in the system that need to be addressed.

The refundable tax credit developed under the Canada child benefit is a great program and really needs to be built on, in my view. I think we do need a disabilities refundable tax credit similar to that. The Nova Scotia government has a few refundable tax credits in its income assistance program, but these need to be coordinated to develop an income-based program that is not creating false barriers, that actually moves to an income-based program rather than a needs-based program based on punitive regulations around employment, around cutting people off, and all that kind of stuff.

• (1020)

The Chair: Unfortunately, I'm going to have to cut you off.

Ms. Stella Lord: Yes, but please, please look into this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Sorry about that.

We will go over to Mr. Warawa for six minutes.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I've taken a number of notes, as I've listened intently to each of the presenters, and the challenge for government is to fund all of the needs that we have heard about from different stakeholders.

I served 14 years in local government, and there was a constant flow of requests. It was a legal requirement under our municipal act that we have a balanced budget, so we had to live within our means; it was illegal not to. Whenever a group asked for a property tax exemption, then the rest of the community had to pay a little bit more.

I share that with you, to say that at the federal level, there is the same principle, but we do not have to balance our budgets. We should, I believe, but the government is taking the approach that we are borrowing from the next generation to provide services today.

Ms. Laidley, you've already answered Pierre that you didn't cost your request. Each of you presenters has provided a number of recommendations. Did you cost your requests? Is there an approximate estimate for things like senior housing, food security, income security, free post-secondary education, public transportation improvements, child care, and on and on? These are all really important things to discuss and consider, but have they been costed?

The Chair: Who is the question for?

Mr. Mark Warawa: It's for all the other presenters.

The Chair: Which presenter would you like to go first?

Mr. Mark Warawa: It doesn't matter.

The Chair: Weigh in, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. James Hughes: I think it's a really fair question. It's important to understand the implications of spending. I think we have to understand all of the various impacts it will have, including on government budgets and the capacity to sustain them over time.

I would use the analogy of investment as being really fair on the social side, which I don't think is actually discussed enough. We're very quick to replace a Champlain Bridge, for instance, and other physical infrastructure. Ultimately we see those as investments, because we yield benefits over time to the population. On the social side, I'd say that we haven't been very good at actually doing the health economics necessary to understand the full range of implications in all areas.

In some areas we have. You mentioned child care. In terms of child care, we know from the Quebec model that a lot of money is being spent on that every year, over \$2 billion. According to one study, however—although I know there's some controversy over it—we know that in terms of the number of women in particular, single moms especially, who because of access to affordable child care will get back into the workforce, with the lowering of social assistance payments to them, as Pierre Fortin calculated, it's about *kif-kif*. The spending and the investment over time achieved an increase in revenue and a reduction in cost that about offset each other. That's not counting the benefits to the children going to quality day care, hopefully, in most cases, and all of the positive benefits that come out of that.

That's just one example, but I would just like to say that there are others. We need to do more of that kind of—

• (1025)

Mr. Mark Warawa: I'm sorry for cutting you off, Mr. Hughes, but I have a number of speakers in a short period of time.

Perhaps we could hear from the others on whether they've costed their requests. If so, perhaps we could hear some suggestions on how we can pay for this. Can we find efficiencies, as I think Mr. Hughes alluded to?

Have you costed this, and if so, how are we going to pay for it?

The Chair: Ms. Ahsan, would you like to respond to that?

Ms. Khadeeja Ahsan: Sure.

I can briefly say that the recommendations we've made in our submissions don't necessarily speak to increasing funding in a particular area. They speak more to involving agencies that are

experts. Our submission, of course, focuses on racialization of poverty in the field of homelessness, so it would mean involving agencies and consultants from the front lines, as someone termed it, who engage with people who need these services. Costing that would be a little difficult.

As well, our approach is that we would ask the federal government to work with both provincial and municipal governments to ensure that the services that are already being provided are looked at through a race lens, that those needs be assessed at a different level, based on the programs that are being offered and that we look at what other programs need to be offered.

Costing that at both a municipal level and a provincial level is a little broader. We did not have that analysis in the submissions we made, so I don't have those kinds of figures or estimations.

The Chair: That's actually time, but I'd like to give Ms. Lord an opportunity for a very brief response.

Ms. Stella Lord: Thanks for that question.

No, we haven't costed out the recommendations we want to make, but there is a lot of information out there on the costs of polity, especially for the health care system. Somebody might want to look at that. It's out there somewhere.

The other comment I'd like to make is that we're assuming here that we have a fair tax system. We don't. I think the federal government is already doing some work on that. There was a discussion on *The Exchange* last night on CBC about the unfair tax system and the fact that corporations are not paying their fair share.

I'd just like to talk about the Canada child benefit, which I mentioned before—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We are way over time.

Ms. Stella Lord: I just want to make one point.

The Chair: Please do so very quickly.

Ms. Stella Lord: The Canada child benefit is going to result...in fact, the old national child benefit resulted in fewer single parents on income assistance. In fact, it was halved in Nova Scotia. Most of those people are now employed and contributing to the tax system, so benefit programs do not necessarily cost money. There are beneficial effects in terms of revenues. Just remember that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Robillard is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): My time is limited so I would like to ask Mr. Hughes a question.

My riding of Marc-Aurèle-Fortin is in Laval, near Montreal, so I am well aware of your work as the former head of the Old Brewery Mission. I commend you on that work.

A number of witnesses to whom we asked questions about seniors living in poverty in urban areas talked about the problem of isolation. Over and above financial problems, they said the isolation of seniors is also a major problem.

Since your organization works with private and public community partners, what do you see as a solution to the isolation of the most vulnerable people?

Mr. James Hughes: That is an excellent question.

We are seeing an increase in the isolation of seniors, not only in Montreal, but in all urban areas. On the whole, is it primarily an urban effect, which we see everywhere? Is it because of the loss of a partner or a mental health problem? Like it or not, it is an issue we have to deal with.

The federal government has a number of interesting programs, such as the new horizons for seniors program. In my sector, I know it has a major impact. An agency like meals on wheels and other similar services are very effective. They are underfunded, however. There is certainly a major gap between the scale of the problem and the current measures to address it. There is a great deal of capacity at the local level that does not receive enough support right now, in my opinion. In the future, additional support must be provided and in various ways. I strongly encourage you to consider this aspect with a view to reducing poverty.

Thank you very much for your question.

• (1030)

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Chair, I'll share my time with my colleague.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Sangha.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, everyone, for coming here and giving valuable information.

My question is to the South Asian Legal Clinic and Ms. Khadeeja Ahsan.

You people are doing a very good job, as we heard during your presentation. Do you provide any type of pro bono or legal aid assistance to the needy people to remove poverty? If so, how helpful is it?

Ms. Khadeeja Ahsan: Most of what we do is pretty much considered pro bono. We're funded by Legal Aid Ontario, so we are a community legal aid clinic.

We have parameters for how we define low income, which is different from the traditional or certificate program that Legal Aid Ontario has. We have our income guidelines. We serve only low-income South Asians in the greater Toronto area which, for us, really extends sometimes to even Niagara Falls and up to the Newmarket area, if you're familiar with the GTA.

To remove poverty, we work toward helping with income maintenance issues, and that can touch on so many areas of the law that we practise. We do a variety of administrative law, which

includes appeals in immigration issues or, as I said, income maintenance. To remove poverty, we do outreach. We do legal reform, as this would be considered community development.

To remove poverty is too broad of a task to tackle all at once, but we do outreach and programs like that, so we can assist the communities we serve with understanding what their rights are, with understanding the programs they have, and how to appeal any decisions that are made against them. We represent those clients in front of tribunals, boards, and such to assist with that.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: You talked about racialization, systematic discrimination, and marginalization of immigrants in getting jobs, and when they are on the job, they are being discriminated against there. In my riding I have constituents who sometimes approach me with those types of problems. My question to you is this: what steps do you suggest the committee take to remove poverty so that they are not being discriminated against, they are not being marginalized? What types of steps do you suggest to the committee, please?

• (1035)

The Chair: Answer very briefly, please.

Ms. Khadeeja Ahsan: I'll just go back to what I said before. I think it needs to be a multi-pronged approach whereby the federal government works with provincial and municipal governments to analyze the programs that do and don't work and spends time in engaging the community and the agencies that already exist to gain expertise on what they see so that we can work on actual policies and on change.

I don't know if that's brief enough for you. That's as much as I can do.

The Chair: That's great. Thank you very much.

Now we go over to MP Zimmer.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Again, thank you to everybody for coming today. It's important for us to hear all your opinions and views. Hopefully we can provide some strategies to do what we're trying to do here and eliminate poverty in Canada.

I have a couple of questions for Ms. Lord and Jennefer.

Just to clear up the record, we're talking about the financial obligations of some of the programs that you're suggesting. I think often we're branded as, "You brought up money, so that means you don't care." I counter that by saying that I'm a dad with four children, three sons and a daughter, and I care about their livelihoods and their futures, and I care about other families that have a lot less income than I do to pay bills.

I've been through university. We had all our children when I was university. We had four kids while I was school, so you can imagine we ate a lot of Kraft Dinner—and I still like it today; I actually do.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Ketchup, yes or no?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: No.

We asked you to class the programs that you've suggested this morning. What's troubling to a guy like me is you're making a lot of suggestions, but at the end of the day you have to pay for them. Sometimes we point at the big building that's Parliament Hill or we point to the big steel buildings in the big cities that say government has to pay the bill, and has to pay more. However, the government doesn't have any money. We have taxpayers' money. When we come and ask questions about who's going to fund this—

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Sure. Yes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: —we're talking about the very people you're talking about, who are close to the poverty line, who are going to be asked to pay. We often talk about the tip of the iceberg. That's the ones in poverty today. That's the tip we're talking about, but what's often not referenced is that group below the surface of the water that's close to poverty, the middle-income earners who have to pay this bill. That's why we ask those questions. It's not just because we care about the money. We're not all accountants here. That's why we ask and why we care about it.

I will ask you a question. Do you think your proposals would be much more credible if you would cost the programs and just have a fuller understanding of the cost yourself?

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Thank you for that question. I don't know that I intended to give any kind of implication that this was your position.

Fundamentally, the recommendations that we're making are not about spending billions of dollars more; they're about let's spend these dollars in ways that address equity concerns that exist as structural outcomes of the ways in which these programs are set up.

There are women, folks from racialized communities, and others who are systemically disadvantaged in our society. In terms of the benefit programs that I'm talking about, that is a result of the ways in which the labour market doesn't work very well. We see that women, people from racialized communities, and people from historically disadvantaged groups have differential access to the labour market. When you have benefit programs that are based on labour market participation, you're necessarily going to get a disproportionate, negative impact on those people who are already negatively impacted.

I understand your point about costing. Again, I would point to the Alternative Federal Budget, which is a document that attempts to address issues around social spending from a financial and a budgetary perspective—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Sorry, Ms. Laidley, but I have to get to Ms. Lord quickly to hear her opinion.

Ms. Jennefer Laidley: Sure. I understand.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you.

Ms. Stella Lord: I'd just reiterate that I haven't costed the program. I'm a voluntary coordinator, not an economist. I do read a lot on the costs of poverty, and I would refer you to that literature. I will probably be writing a—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Ms. Lord, I have a question for you.

You've made some proposals this morning that ask to see increases in different things. I would say that to add credibility to

what you're requesting is to have an understanding, even yourself, of really what you're asking for in terms of what the obligations are. I've said that before. People are probably getting sick of me saying that it's Joe and Jane Taxpayer. What you're asking for has to be paid for by a real person and real people and real families.

Ms. Stella Lord: I'm very much aware of that.

● (1040)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'm not just asking you to be deflective to say there is lots of stuff on this that explains all this. I'm asking you as a person who presents to committee to come prepared next time to understand the full cost of what you're asking for.

I think that's a reasonable request. We're asking for it out of... We want to fix this problem of poverty too, but we need to have realistic proposals so that it can be affordable for everybody. We can really fix this thing that way. I think that's what we're trying to suss out. That's all of my recommendation.

Ms. Stella Lord: Can I have time to respond to this question, or comment?

The Chair: Be very brief, please.

Ms. Stella Lord: Thank you. The questions are longer than the comments.

I would say that I had 48 hours to prepare this brief. We will be doing a longer submission to your committee. When you're talking about costs and who pays for it, you have to also take into account the costs that you are saving through addressing poverty. That was the point I was trying to make. We do know that the costs of poverty are extremely high.

Jennefer made mention of the Alternative Federal Budget. We also have an alternative provincial budget that looks very carefully at tax rates. I think if we had a more progressive tax system in this country, we would not be penalizing the near-poor or people who are just at the poverty line. We'd be actually having a much fairer tax system.

It's not that I dismiss this question, but I think you are evading the basic issue, which is also the cost of poverty.

The Chair: Thank you. I have to cut you off there.

For what will be the final three minutes, we go to MP Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Following the last speaker, I would say that, as to the budgets and programs that we choose to fund, we as parliamentarians are all concerned that these are public funds and that our role is to represent all taxpayers. I was aware of this responsibility as a municipal councillor and I am aware of it here now as an MP.

Ladies and gentlemen, having been in your position before, I know that, in this regard, we see much more what it costs not to take action to fight poverty and to live in a society without full employment. We do hope, however, to see full employment one day so that everyone can enjoy a good quality of life and the self-esteem that comes from having a job. We hope that all citizens can make a contribution to our society, but we are not there yet. At this time of transition, I think we need to take action so we can get there.

Mr. Hughes, you said that in order to reduce poverty or to completely eliminate it in certain groups we need to set objectives for the next five years rather than the next ten years. You also said that, in order to measure progress on our objectives, data and frequent analysis of that data are important. I would like to hear more about that specifically.

Mr. James Hughes: We have studies dating from 2006, 2010, and 2011. So they go back far enough and we see the trends in poverty and in other areas as well.

Federal support, which means funding from Statistics Canada, would enable us to continue these studies, to increase their frequency, and to expand the type of information we are looking for. We mentioned aboriginal persons in this regard earlier.

So we have a good amount of data, but we have little tax data and need to find more creative approaches. That takes funding. In many cases, Statistics Canada, which is recognized around the world, does not have the necessary resources to do everything it should and could do to help all of us who are responsible for policy and other things, to know whether our efforts are producing results.

• (1045)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Representatives from Statistics Canada have appeared before our committee. They said that we do not have

a definition of poverty in Canada, but we do have several indicators. I think that should be one of the tasks of our committee to determine which indicators we can follow up on yearly.

If we compare different indicators or different measures of poverty from year to year, we will not get anywhere. We can see that with employment insurance. It is all well and good to question the unemployment rate, as long as we are at least comparing apples to apples from one year to the next.

What I understand from your testimony is that, with regard to poverty, we need measures that enable us to track progress from year to year. That will in turn allow us to monitor whether we have achieved the objectives we have set. Is that correct?

Mr. James Hughes: You are absolutely right.

[English]

The Chair: Very briefly, we're over time here and unfortunately I have to cut us off, but I wanted to wrap up by thanking all of the witnesses who are present here as well as on the phone, and kudos to Ms. Barnwell for sticking it out.

Thank you very much for being with us today despite your health issues.

Ms. Georgia Barnwell: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, everybody. Thank you to all the committee members, and as always, the translators and everyone who make today possible. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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