

**CASW Speaking Notes for the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities’
Study on Poverty Reduction**



Founded in 1926 the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) is the national association voice for the social work profession.

CASW has adopted a pro-active approach to issues pertinent to social policy/social work. It produces and distributes timely information for its members, and special projects are initiated and sponsored. With its concern for social justice and its continued role in social advocacy, CASW is recognized and called upon both nationally and internationally for its social policy expertise.

The mission of CASW is to promote the profession of social work in Canada and advance social justice. CASW is active in the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

Good morning,

On behalf of the Board of the Canadian Association of Social Workers and our President, Jan Christianson-Wood, I thank you for inviting the association voice of the social worker profession to this consultation.

In considering this study's guidelines, the words 'new and innovative' emerge over and over again. CASW would propose that the first step to innovation is in better measuring and assessing existing systems and strategies, allowing us to lift up and build upon best evidence and practice.

To elaborate, CASW is often asked which provinces and territories are leading in poverty reduction or where in fact federal dollars for the provision of social services – allocated through the Canada Social Transfer – are being most effectively spent.

We simply don't know. No one does. At present, there is no requirement that the provinces ensure recognition of the federal payments or provide information to the federal government about how the CST is spent. Dollars flow into general revenue.

With the introduction of the Canada Health Act, the Government acknowledged that certain principles should be upheld across Canada in the delivery of health care services. Far from hard laws or regulations, the Canada Health Act serves as a set of guiding principles, meant to ensure that Canadians have access to equitable, quality care regardless of where they reside.

This is why CASW proposes the adoption of *A Social Care Act* as a key piece of a national poverty reduction strategy. As with the Canada Health Act, the proposed Social Care Act would establish common principles to help comprehensively address poverty, such as public administration, universality, and portability, setting the stage for a framework for reporting on how the CST and other federal social investments are spent.

Enabling a framework for reporting will not only provide government a record of return on investment, it will serve as a catalyst for the sharing of best practices and evidence between provinces and territories.

However, onto this study's specific questions.

Education, training, and employment: Further on the CST and accountability – the portion of federal dollars intended for post-secondary education should be separated in some way from the rest of the CST, which is intended to address Canadians' dignity and basic needs. This does not necessarily mean separating it from the transfer altogether, but rather better delineating the funds' intended purposes, which would also be facilitated by a Social Care Act.

We also ask that the profession of social work be included under the Canada Student Loan forgiveness program, which is the case for Nurses, for instance: not only are social workers' skills greatly required in many rural and remote regions across Canada, but they are trained mental health professionals whose expertise often comes at a much more cost effective price point than psychologists or psychiatrists.

Housing and homelessness: CASW supports the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association's (CHRA) ask to continue and increase direct supportive housing investments, noting that the 2016 federal Budget introduced targeted funding to increase affordable housing for seniors and victims of violence. CASW recommends that these programs be continued beyond their two year mandate, and to extend the program to include other forms of supportive housing, targeted to seniors, LGBTQ* Canadians, veterans, and previously incarcerated individuals. Funding for these targeted programs should be set at a minimum of \$150 million per year. Ideally, these funds would flow through a social policy framework established by a Social Care Act.

Government administered savings and entitlement programs: In tying the Canada Child Benefit to income, the Government of Canada took a bold step towards developing a comprehensive basic income for families with children. Budget 2016 enhanced the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) which, combined with Old Age Security (OAS), moves forward basic support for seniors, which we commend, and we encourage the federal government to continue progressively with the concept of a basic income.

We were also very pleased by the CPP expansion in Bill C-26, but we remain concerned that it lacks the so-called dropout provisions for those that leave the workforce for child-rearing or disability, and call on the government to address this.

Social Investments: CASW recently issued a paper on Social Investments titled "The True Cost of Capital." Keeping in mind this government's mandate to develop a *Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy*, CASW urges that any approach be guided by social principles *as well as* economic ones, and implement strategies that are based on evidence, and not on the assumption of efficiency and innovation, ubiquitous as these assumptions may be. Since social finance tools have the potential to impact the most vulnerable members of our society, it is imperative that they are not further economically exploited by private investors.

CASW advises that:

- Any social finance initiatives meant to address poverty or vulnerable populations be guided by a social conscience, and use as a framework the principles proposed by

CASW's *A New Social Care Act for Canada*, such as public administration, accessibility, fairness, effectiveness, accountability and transparency, to name a few.

CASW hopes that the federal government heeds the view provided in the supplementary opinion in this committee's report on Social Impact Bonds: that when it comes to social services for vulnerable Canadians, "it is important to ensure that the government prioritizes their needs and success above all."

- Finally, that private profit has no place in the provision of services to vulnerable Canadians.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering any questions.