

Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy Renewal

Project Overview

Collaboration is the key to enhancing the effectiveness, reach and sustainability of poverty reduction efforts. This public engagement initiative was built on the foundation of collaboration between government and members of the community to inform the redevelopment of Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act was passed in 2011 and requires government to implement a long-term strategy to reduce poverty and increase social inclusion. The act mandates that Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy be reviewed and updated once every five years. Manitoba Families is responsible for the act and leads the work on poverty reduction strategy development.

With the current strategy (Pathways to a Better Future) up for renewal, the Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet, made up of cabinet ministers and community members, directed that particular emphasis be placed on improving outcomes for three vulnerable groups: babies and children aged zero to five years old and including the prenatal period, youth exiting the child welfare system and seniors. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by Indigenous citizens, the engagement sought to amplify their voices alongside broader public and stakeholder input.

The feedback collected through this process will guide the design of targeted and culturally-responsive solutions to reduce poverty and improve well-being for Manitobans. Insights from this engagement will directly shape policy recommendations and program development for the updated strategy.

While the renewed strategy expected to be released in Fall 2025, other government efforts are underway that aligns with the work of poverty reduction in Manitoba. For example, Women and Gender Equity Manitoba released "Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag: All Women Doing Well," a strategy designed to uplift and protect all women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse relatives, including those experiencing poverty. Manitoba Housing, Addictions and Homelessness released "Your Way Home," a strategy created to address chronic homelessness in Manitoba. Additionally, the feedback received through transparency and collaboration with other departments will ensure that the next strategy is rooted in the best interest and well-being of all Manitobans.

Engagement Overview

Under the guiding principle of collaboration, members of the public, Indigenous citizens, stakeholder organizations and individuals (including those with lived experience, front-line

service providers, advocates and business representatives) were invited to participate in the engagement process.

The objectives of the engagement were to:

- gather diverse perspectives on poverty-related challenges and solutions
- ensure Indigenous voices and experiences are central to the strategy redevelopment
- identify actionable, community-driven ideas to address the needs of babies and children aged zero to five years old and including the prenatal period, youth exiting the child welfare system and seniors

A total of four approaches were used to collect feedback from participants.

EngageMB

EngageMB hosted a user-friendly online survey, a quick poll and an idea board to gather input from a wide range of residents on their priorities, experiences and ideas on poverty reduction. To accurately capture the diversity of experiences and views of Manitobans, the online survey was designed with four separate streams, representing four major respondent groupings, including:

- individuals with lived experience stream – input from persons (respondents) living in poverty in Manitoba or who have lived in poverty within the past five years
- general citizen stream – input from persons (respondents) not living in poverty in Manitoba or who have not lived in poverty within the past five years
- organization stream – these are applicable to two types of organizational respondents: those with general interest in poverty reduction and those directly serving clients who are living in poverty
- business stream – input from businesses operating in Manitoba

The survey asked a series of quantitative questions followed by an opportunity to provide qualitative feedback on topics such as access/barriers to resources, measures for a better quality of life and solutions needed to improve the lives of those living in poverty. Survey respondents were also asked questions related to demographics to identify poverty issues relevant to specific demographic groups of Manitobans. As an accommodation, an option to submit paper copies of the online survey was given to address barriers to technology.

A total of 2,803 respondents completed the survey between September 16, 2024 and November 15, 2024. Among the total respondents, 95 per cent were those in the individuals with lived experience stream and general citizen stream, of which 12 per cent identified as individuals with lived experiences of poverty.

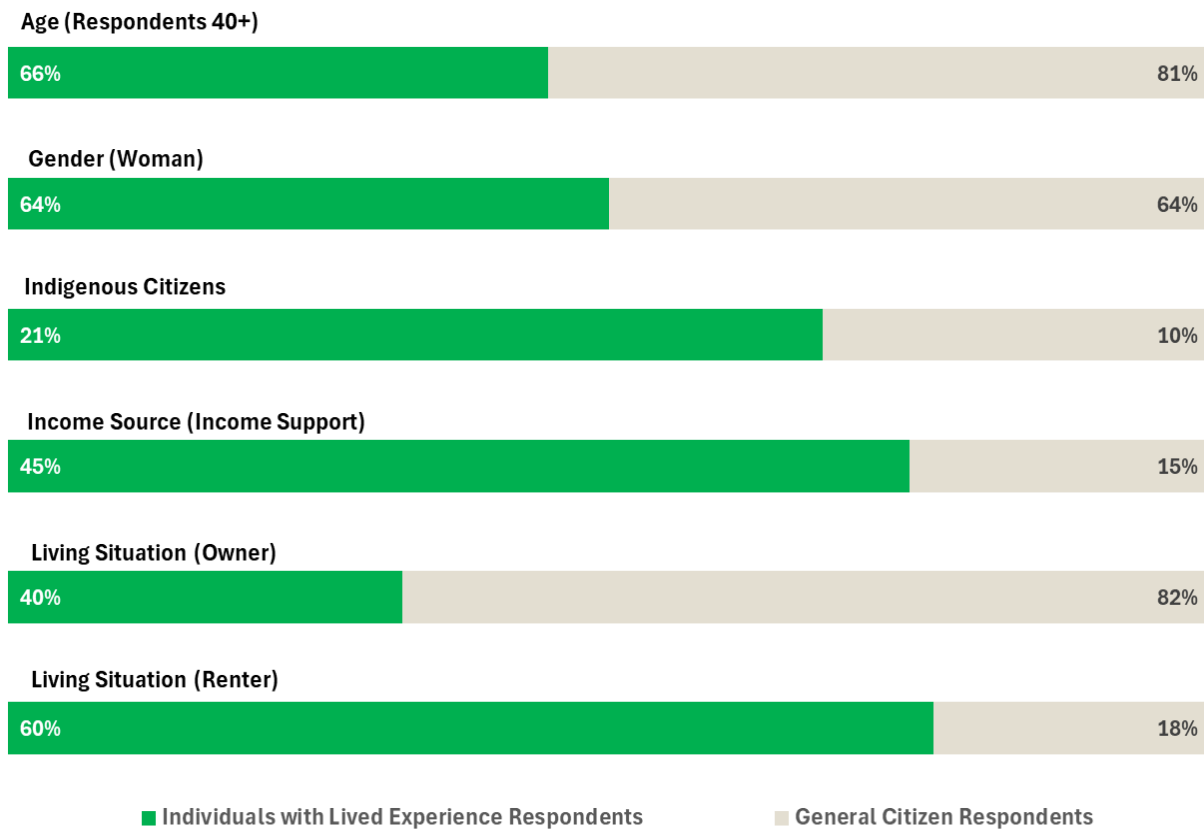
Demographics that stood out in the survey when comparing respondents from the individuals with lived experience stream and the general citizen stream are presented in **Chart 1**.

The findings for the individuals with lived experience stream and the general citizen stream included:

- both streams had more woman respondents compared to other genders
- Respondents in the individuals with lived experience stream (45 per cent) declared income support as an income source, triple the rate of the general citizen stream (15 per cent).

- the homeownership rate among general citizen stream was 82 per cent, nearly double the rate of individuals with lived experience stream (40 per cent).
- twenty-one per cent of individuals with lived experience stream identified as Indigenous. This was nearly double the rate of the general citizen stream, where 10 per cent identified as Indigenous.

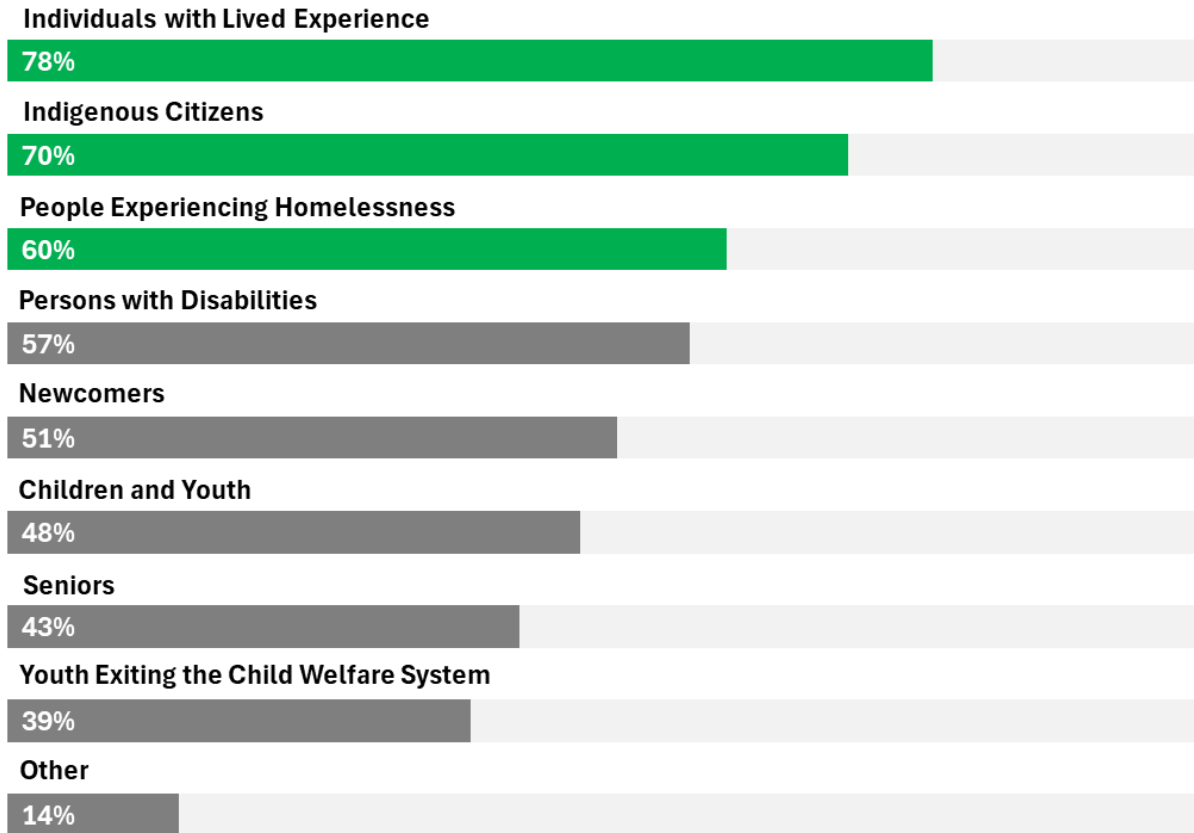
Chart 1: Demographics Comparison between Individuals with Lived Experience Stream and General Citizen Stream



Among the total respondents, five per cent were respondents who identified as those in the organization stream and business stream, of which 73 per cent identified as belonging to the organization stream. Among the organization stream respondents, the top three areas that the organization stream support are presented in **Chart 2**.

- people living in poverty (78 per cent)
- Indigenous citizens (70 per cent)
- people experiencing homelessness (60 per cent)

Chart 2: Top 3 Areas that Organization Stream Support



Among the business stream respondents, 21 per cent had poverty reduction as a priority in their business's strategic planning; 24 per cent did not but are planning to include it.

The top three poverty reduction efforts that businesses supported to reduce poverty were:

- collaborate with local non-profit agencies (56 per cent)
- provide on-the-job training (47 per cent)
- make donations to local, national or international charities (42 per cent)

In addition to the survey, an idea board and quick poll were conducted to collect feedback from users. Where the idea board platform allowed participants to submit, upvote or discuss poverty reduction ideas, the quick poll permitted the selection of immediate priorities for the government's consideration. There were 804 quick poll contributions and 152 idea board contributions.

In-Person Meetings

Between October 8 and November 6, 2024, Manitoba Families held in-person meetings with stakeholders, Indigenous citizens and members of the public. Beginning in Thompson, the engagement meetings continued to The Pas, Winnipeg, Brandon, Dauphin, Morden and Arborg. A series of roundtable discussions were held to gather input from participants on their top five priority areas in relation to the three pre-established target groups of babies and children aged zero to five years old and including the prenatal period, youth exiting the child welfare system

and seniors. Additionally, the participants were asked to share gaps in service and program delivery, as well as feedback on what is working for them in their respective communities but could be expanded.

A total of 25 meetings were held with participants ranging from municipalities, school boards, non-profits, social service providers, health care organizations, child and youth advocates, senior care groups, municipal representatives, disability organizations and Indigenous citizens. The public also contributed to the discussions on poverty reduction in Manitoba.

Focus Groups

Manitoba Families held 10 focus group meetings with individuals with lived experience between October 9 and December 5, 2024, to hear first-hand about their experiences navigating the effects of poverty. In partnership with ten community organizations, each an important contributor to making lives easier for many Manitobans, storytelling circles on poverty reduction were held in venues where individuals experiencing poverty felt comfortable sharing experiences and insights. The discussions were also led by representatives from the different community organizations. Members of the government’s poverty reduction strategy renewal team listened and captured notes. Participants were asked to identify top poverty priorities, gaps and programs that are working for them but could be expanded.

Written Submissions

Lastly, to further encourage participation, written submissions could be made. A total of 88 submissions were received from individuals and community organizations in the form of emails and notes. The findings from the written submissions are reflected in the ‘Gaps’ and ‘What is working that could be expanded?’ sections of the report.

PARTICIPATION RESULTS



ENGAGE MB

2803 Survey Respondents
804 Quick Poll Contributors
152 Idea Board Contributors



IN-PERSON MEETINGS

8 Stakeholder Meetings
9 Public Meetings
8 Indigenous Citizens Meetings



FOCUS GROUPS

10 Lived Experience Meetings



WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

88 Emails and Notes

What We Heard

Top Priorities and Gaps

Participants at both in-person and focus group consultations were asked to highlight the top five poverty priorities, gaps and programs that are working but could be improved for each target group (babies and children aged zero to five years old and including the prenatal period, youth exiting the child welfare system and seniors). The key findings are summarized and presented in the following sections of this report.

Top five priorities

Babies and Children Aged Zero to Five and including the Prenatal Period

1. invest in social housing
2. enhance access to affordable childcare
3. invest in wraparound supports
4. continue funding for school nutrition programs
5. increase access to mental health care

Youth exiting the child welfare system

1. expand supports for youth exiting the child welfare system
2. invest in social housing
3. increase access to mental health care
4. enhance access to high school/literacy upgrading, postsecondary education
5. invest in wraparound supports

Seniors

1. invest in social housing
2. increase access to mental health care
3. invest in wraparound supports
4. provide funding to municipalities to reduce public transit costs
5. increase Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) budgets

Gaps

Participants were asked to identify existing or emerging gaps in policies, programs and systems in relation to poverty reduction in Manitoba. The following insights were shared:

- lack of communication between systems
- incentives to transition off welfare programs
- need for life skills classes/training
- rising food costs in northern communities
- limited childcare options in rural communities
- more supports for people living with disabilities
- adequate income assistance budgets
- funding for community programs
- harm reduction services
- wraparound supports
- health care in the north
- adult literacy programs
- access to affordable housing

- cultural awareness
- reintegration programs for those exiting the justice system
- mental health and addictions support
- public transportation

What is working that could be expanded?

Additionally, participants were asked to highlight programs or services that are working in the community but could be expanded by government. Some of the highlights include:

- inclusion of Indigenous voices in decision-making, through initiatives such as the Matriarch Circle
- community gardens
- school nutrition programs
- continued funding for community organizations
- Healthy Baby program
- after-school recreational programs for kids
- Indigenous healing centres
- Manitoba Supports for Persons with Disabilities
- family reunification programs

Surveys

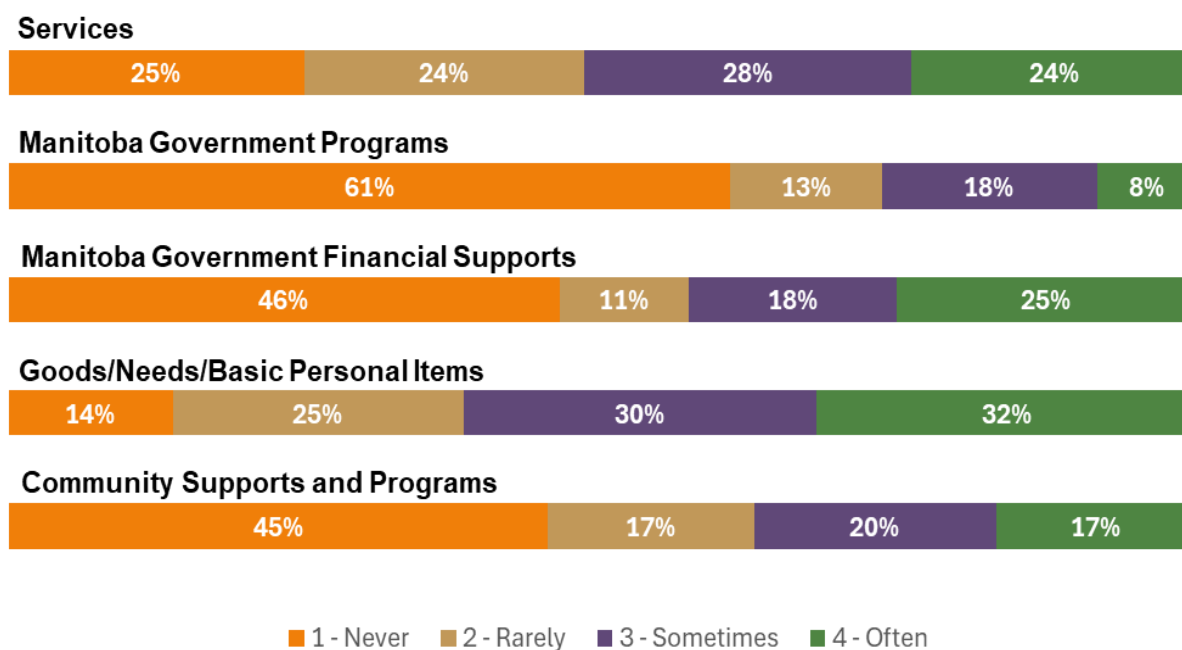
Access Frequency

Individuals with lived experience stream respondents were asked how often they accessed each item listed in the survey. Organization stream respondents were asked about the supports and services most frequently accessed by clients. The frequency was measured by “often,” “sometimes,” “rarely” and “never.” The key findings are summarized and presented in the following sections of this report.

The items were divided into five categories. Each category consisted of multiple subcategories. The five categories were:

1. good/needs/basic personal items
2. services
3. the Manitoba government financial supports
4. the Manitoba government programs
5. community supports and programs

Chart 3: Survey Respondents' Access Frequency



The notable findings of access frequency responded as “often” were:

- 32 per cent of respondents had goods/needs/basic personal items as “often” access, which was the highest among the five categories
- within the goods/needs/basic personal items category, 39 per cent of respondents responded that they often access affordable food
- 48 per cent of respondents had healthcare services accessed as “often”, which was the highest among the 34 subcategories

The notable findings of access frequency responded as “never” were:

- 61 per cent of respondents had Manitoba government programs as “never” accessed, which was the highest among the five categories
- within the Manitoba government programs category, 68 per cent of respondents responded that they “never” access mentoring programs, which was the highest among the 34 subcategories

Ease of Access

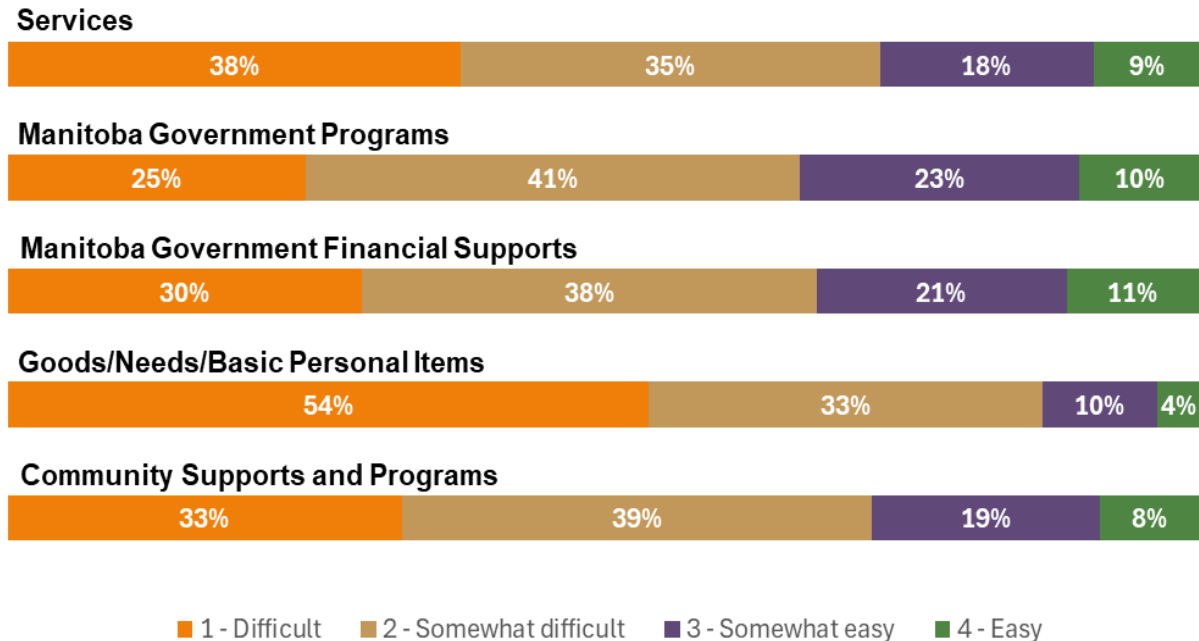
Survey respondents were asked how easily they could access each item listed in the survey. The ease of access is measured by “difficult,” “somewhat difficult,” “somewhat easy” and “easy.” The key findings are summarized and presented in the following sections of this report.

The items were divided into five categories. Each category consisted of multiple subcategories. The five categories were:

1. good/needs/basic personal items
2. services
3. the Manitoba government financial supports

4. the Manitoba government programs
5. community supports and programs

Chart 4: Survey Respondents' Ease of Access



The notable findings of ease of access responded as “easy” were:

- a low percentage of respondents selected “easy” to access items listed in the survey, with an average of 8.8 per cent. Eleven per cent of respondents had Manitoba government financial supports as “easy” to access, which was the highest among the five categories
- within the Manitoba government financial supports category, 25 per cent of respondents responded that Manitoba child benefits were “easy” to access

The notable findings of ease of access responded as “difficult” were:

- 54 per cent of respondents had goods/needs/basic personal items as “difficult” to access, which was the highest among the five categories.
- within the goods/needs/basic personal items category, 80 per cent of respondents responded it was difficult to access affordable housing, which was the highest among the 34 subcategories.

When analyzing access frequency together with ease of access, individuals often accessed the goods/needs/basic personal category, but it was difficult.

In addition, the respondents ranked affordable housing as the fourth highest “often” accessed and ranked it the highest in “difficult” to access.

Barriers to Access

Survey respondents were asked to identify barriers they faced when accessing each item listed in the survey.

The top five barriers faced when accessing each item listed in the survey were:

1. don't know where or how to access/difficult to access (69 per cent)
2. struggling with mental health (68 per cent)
3. struggling with addictions (62 per cent)
4. not enough money, or it is too expensive (56 per cent)
5. lived in an area where it is unavailable or difficult to access (rural/northern) (54 per cent)

Poverty Reduction Priorities

Survey respondents were asked to highlight the top five poverty reduction ideas in Manitoba. The key findings are summarized and presented in the following sections of this report.

Top five priorities

Individuals with Lived Experience Stream

1. increase access to mental health care (53 per cent)
2. raise the minimum wage (41 per cent)
3. invest in social housing (37 per cent)
4. fund workforce training initiatives to reduce barriers to employment (33 per cent)
5. increase Employment and Income Assistance budgets (31 per cent)

General Citizen Stream

1. increase access to mental health care (59 per cent)
2. fund workforce training initiatives to reduce barriers to employment (44 per cent)
3. invest in social housing (38 per cent)
4. continued funding for school nutrition programs (38 per cent)
5. enhance access to high school/literacy upgrading, postsecondary education (35 per cent)

Organization Stream

1. invest in social housing (77 per cent)
2. increase access to mental health care (71 per cent)
3. invest in wraparound supports (58 per cent)
4. increase Employment and Income Assistance budgets (45 per cent)
5. fund workforce training initiatives to reduce barriers to employment (44 per cent)

Business Stream

1. increase access to mental health care (61 per cent)
2. fund workforce training initiatives to reduce barriers to employment (56 per cent)
3. enhance access to affordable childcare (44 per cent)
4. continued funding for school nutrition programs (39 per cent)
5. enhance access to high school/literacy upgrading, postsecondary education (39 per cent)

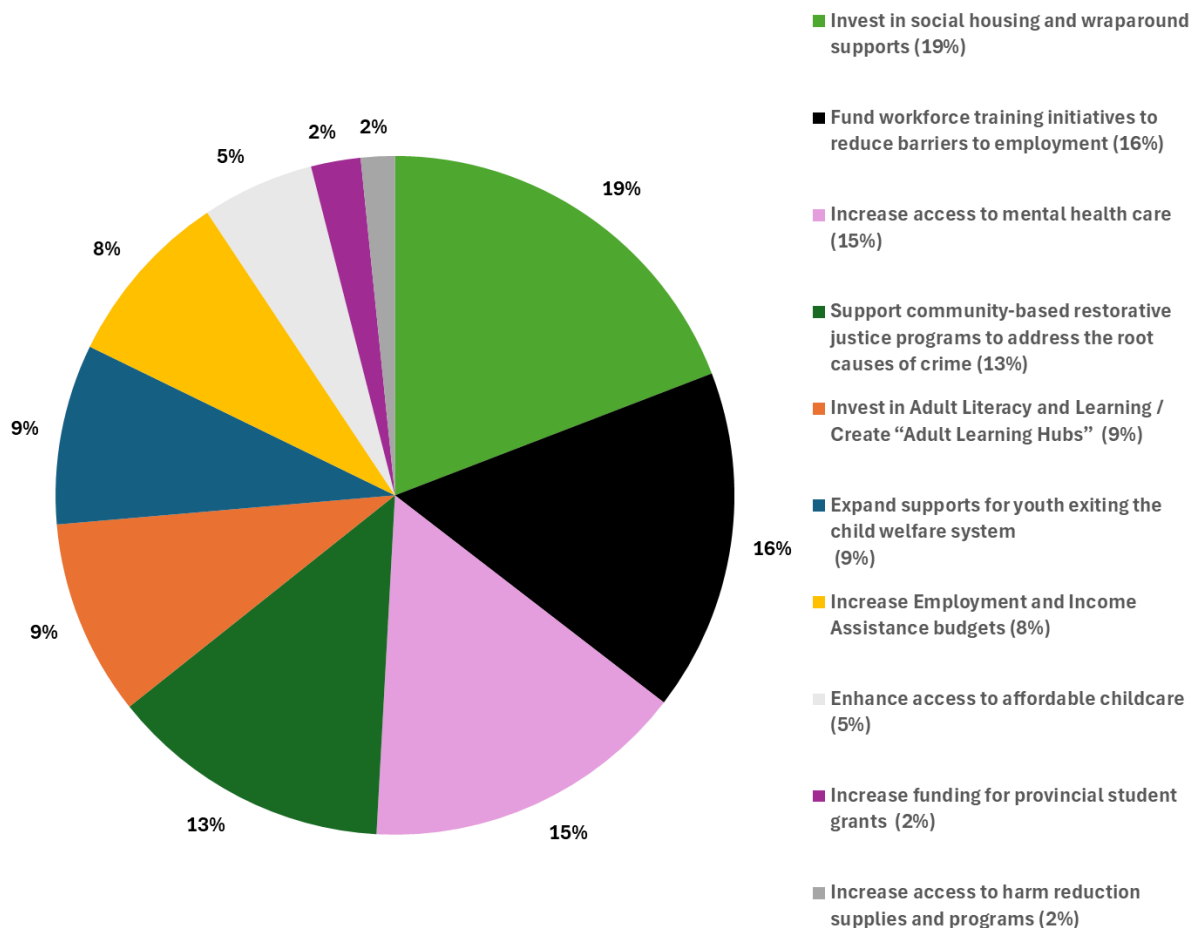
Notably, there were two shared priorities between each stream: increase access to mental health care and fund workforce training initiatives to reduce barriers to employment. Invest in social housing was also a priority in three out of four respondent streams.

Quick Poll

Quick poll contributors were asked to identify ideas they would like to prioritize to reduce poverty in Manitoba. The key findings are summarized and presented below.

The top five ideas prioritized to reduce poverty in Manitoba were:

1. invest in social housing and wraparound supports (19 per cent)
2. fund workforce training initiatives to reduce barriers to employment (16 per cent)
3. increase access to mental health care (15 per cent)
4. support community-based restorative justice programs to address the root causes of crime (13 per cent)
5. invest in adult literacy and learning / create “Adult Learning Hubs” and expand supports for youth exiting the child welfare system (nine per cent)



Idea board

A broad list of ideas ranging from housing concerns to mental health were shared on the Engage MB idea board platform. The top five most-liked ideas include:

1. increase the minimum wage to a liveable basic income
2. cover mental health services and all prescriptions under Manitoba public health
3. create employment opportunities for seniors/persons with disabilities
4. invest in social housing and increase access for homeownership to lower-income individuals
5. prioritize children in care before they age out by hiring more case workers and collaborating with schools to cater to their specific needs

Themes

The input collected throughout the engagement has been synthesized into the following key themes that highlight the needs of those affected by poverty and that the participants believed require necessary action to derive meaningful change.

Challenges Faced by Babies and Children aged Zero to Five and including the Prenatal Period

- **Supports for parents** – Participants expressed concern about the lack of supports for parents, especially single parents. It was recommended that supports such as literacy programs for parents and an increase in Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) budgets to help alleviate financial stress would benefit the entire family, including babies and children.

“I see a whole bunch of mothers taking their kids a long way to child care so they can go to school.”

- **Community supports** – The importance of community supports was highlighted in conversations about babies and children. Feedback emphasized that families benefit significantly when the resources are based on community input and experience. Participants stressed the need for government to fund more community-based, community-led and community-driven programs.

“Because of those resources [food, shelter], they’re not getting into crime. They’re not stealing food. They’re not getting into trouble.”

- **Child Care** – Many reported frustrations with either a lack of access to child care in their community or having difficulty getting in due to long waitlists and affordability. Not having access to adequate child care has trickling effects on the whole family system. Participants recommended that government prioritize access to affordable childcare, especially in rural communities.

“Often times I have to choose between going back to work and a huge childcare bill or staying home.”

- **Health Care** – Parents are primarily responsible for the health and well-being of babies and children. Participants raised the need for an increase in prenatal and postnatal care for mothers facing barriers due to poverty.

“Health of the children comes from the parents.”

Supporting Youth Exiting the Child Welfare System

- **Education** – Participants expressed a strong desire for education systems to prepare youth exiting the child welfare system for life after care. Many young contributors shared not knowing how to adequately budget for essentials or learning how to balance income and other resources in school. There was a clear call for education systems to offer students financial literacy opportunities and life skills to get them prepared and ready to thrive as independent individuals in the community.

“We need to be talking about banking, how to become independent.”

- **Employment** – Many indicated challenges finding employment due to either a lack of work experience or employment opportunities. There was a strong demand for creation of accessible job training and skills development programs, particularly in the fields that offer long-lasting and stable employment opportunities.

“I don’t know where to get work experience.”

- **Bureaucratic systems** – Participants emphasized the barriers that youth exiting care face while interacting with bureaucratic systems, including governments and businesses. Particularly, many highlighted that identification requirements are a huge barrier for youth exiting the child welfare system that do not have proper documentation. Others stressed the need to expand EIA income thresholds to help youth exiting care build a foundation.

“Some kids come out of care with no identification, so they struggle to prove even who they are.”

- **Justice** – Participants voiced the need for stronger supports for youth interacting with the criminal justice system. There was a consensus between participants for more restorative justice driven and community-based approaches to helping youth transition out of prison and into the community. Participants also stressed the importance of government to address root causes of crime that make youth more prone to having encounters with the justice system.

“What I’ve done is not who I am.”

Addressing Senior Poverty

- **System navigation** – There was a strong sentiment that seniors experiencing poverty often have difficulty navigating systems. Participants emphasized barriers to technology as well as a lack of knowledge about programs and supports available for seniors. Many expressed that government should adopt practices to make information more accessible for seniors facing poverty.

“I feel lost between the systems.”

- **Community supports** – Participants expressed a lack of community supports for seniors living in poverty. Specifically, participants recommended more senior-centered programs and services to ensure seniors are not left behind.

“It has to come from the people and the communities, to take care of each other.”

- **Employment** – Many seniors find themselves back in the workforce due to difficulty in trying to make ends meet. Participants expressed a lack of employment opportunities for seniors as well as feelings of discouragement due to fear of judgement. It was recommended that employers not only undertake necessary action to create more jobs for seniors, but also make it a priority to address stereotypes in the workplace to help uplift seniors.

“Seniors are between a rock and a hard place.”

- **Social inclusion** – It was shared that financial struggles often result in social isolation for seniors living in poverty. Several participants emphasized experiencing a sense of embarrassment and shame over having to ask for help. It was recommended that more work is required around social inclusion for seniors to help them feel included in conversations and decisions that may affect them directly.

“Poverty knows no age.”

Shared themes amongst the three target groups

- **Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action** – The effects of the colonial past continue to affect people in the present. Many expressed that poverty and its effects are common in Indigenous communities and more work is required to lift Indigenous citizens out of poverty. Participants shared the importance of culturally-centred approaches that are community-based and rooted in traditional ways of healing. It was stressed that people feel hesitant accessing programs and supports due to distrust in government systems. Participants recommended that government continues to work on repairing its relationship with Indigenous communities by following the TRC Calls to Action and through prioritizing collaboration to address poverty in a meaningful way.

“[The] majority of our people that are on the streets have that trauma.”

- **Disability** – Participants believed that while poverty comes with numerous challenges of its own, adding a layer of disability creates additional barriers and challenges for many individuals. Many expressed concerns related to lack of awareness around programs and access to supports for people living with disabilities. Some also shared experiences of mistreatment and recommended educational training for front-line workers to better understand disability. Participants encouraged the government to implement more programs and supports for people living with disabilities as they fall under each target group.

“Having a disabled kid can lead families to poverty.”

- **Mental health and addiction services** – Mental health issues and addictions were repeatedly identified as either sources of or consequences of poverty. Participants shared concerns related to limited access and supports related to mental health and addiction services. Particularly in rural communities, people shared that many do not receive mental health supports when they need it most due to longer waitlists. While some recommended that mental health supports be re-designed to meet the specific needs of youth exiting the child welfare system, others shared the need for an increase in postpartum supports for women. Some participants also emphasized the importance of making supports accessible to seniors who may be hesitant to ask for help.

“If you’re not mentally well, you’re not eating right, you’re not choosing right...it cascades into all areas of your life.”

- **Affordability** – The issue of affordability remains a critical one amongst the three target groups. Many participants expressed difficulty in trying to afford essential items while also struggling to balance other expenses. Particularly, it was shared that current income assistance budgets are insufficient due to rising costs from inflation and post-pandemic shortages. Many also stressed the increased cost of essential goods in northern communities, further pushing people into deep poverty.

“It’s concerning when we hear the word affordable, affordable, affordable. What’s affordable?”

- **Transportation** – A primary concern that emerged among all three target groups was of a lack of access to adequate transportation. It was highlighted that public transportation is necessary in getting people to work. Particularly, some participants stressed a complete absence of public transportation in certain rural communities while others expressed longer wait times due to limited public transportation options. Several pointed out shortages in municipality budgets playing a role in the ongoing issue of access to transportation. The need to provide medical transportation for seniors was also mentioned at various meetings.

“[With] public transportation, more people would work.”

- **Housing** – Participants repeatedly expressed support for an increase in affordable, accessible and improved housing. The majority agreed that government needs to invest in affordable housing initiatives, including implementing rent control measures and dedicating resources to help develop low-income housing. The government was encouraged to prioritize housing for all as people are often having to decide between paying for rent or other essentials.

“[The] housing that we have is not accessible. They say it is accessible; it is not.”

- **Food security/nutrition** – Participants raised challenges related to food security and nutrition for all three target groups. Many expressed that government needs to take action to address food costs, particularly in northern communities. Others expressed barriers to accessing food banks due to distance or a lack of identification sometimes required by certain food banks. Some participants encouraged implementation of nutrition programs for seniors struggling to meet basic needs.

“Prevent a woman stealing baby food by supplying them with the food instead.”

Next Steps

Following the engagement and feedback analysis, the next steps include:

1. Drafting Strategy Updates: Develop a draft strategy incorporating community and stakeholder insights.
2. Stakeholder Review: Share the draft strategy with key advocates/agencies for feedback.
3. Implementation plan: Finalize the new strategy and outline timelines for program rollouts.

Regular updates on strategy progress will be shared through media responses, a website and government announcements.

Timelines

- March 2025: Engagement summary report published.
- Summer 2025: Draft strategy presented to stakeholders for feedback.
- Fall 2025: Final strategy announced with implementation roadmap.

This detailed and collaborative approach aims to ensure that Manitoba’s Poverty Reduction Strategy reflects the lived experiences and aspirations of people from across the province, particularly those most affected by poverty.

Questions?

Please email lspb@gov.mb.ca with any questions.

Please contact lspb@gov.mb.ca if you require this report in an alternate format.