What are the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ+) people that should be addressed by Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy (CPRS)?

A joint submission from the
Canadian Coalition Against LGBTQ+ Poverty (CCALP)

Prepared by:

Lori E. Ross, PhD, Associate Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Anita Khanna, MSW, National Coordinator, Campaign 2000;
Director, Social Action and Community Building, Family Service Toronto

On behalf of the following additional CCALP members:

Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services

Alex Abramovich, PhD
Institute for Mental Health Policy Research, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

Simon Coulombe, PhD
Department of Psychology,
Wilfrid Laurier University

Cindy Holmes, PhD
School of Social Work, University of Victoria

John Ecker, PhD
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness,
York University

Egale Canada Human Rights Trust

Charles Fehr, MA
Dalla Lana School of Public Health,
University of Toronto

Hannah Kia, MSW
Dalla Lana School of Public Health,
University of Toronto

Latin American Queer Education Project (LAQEP)

Carmen Logie, PhD
Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Kinnon Ross MacKinnon, MSW
Dalla Lana School of Public Health,
University of Toronto

Margaret Robinson, PhD
Dalhousie University and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario

Robb Travers, PhD
Department of Health Sciences,
Wilfrid Laurier University

Sean Waite, PhD
Department of Sociology,
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Andrea Willson, PhD
Department of Sociology,
University of Western Ontario

Women's Health in Women's Hands Community Health Centre

Contact information:

Dr. Lori Ross

Dalla Lana School of Public Health,
University of Toronto
155 College St. Room 560,
Toronto, Ontario, M5T 3M7

l.ross@utoronto.ca
(416) 978-7514

Summary of Recommendations

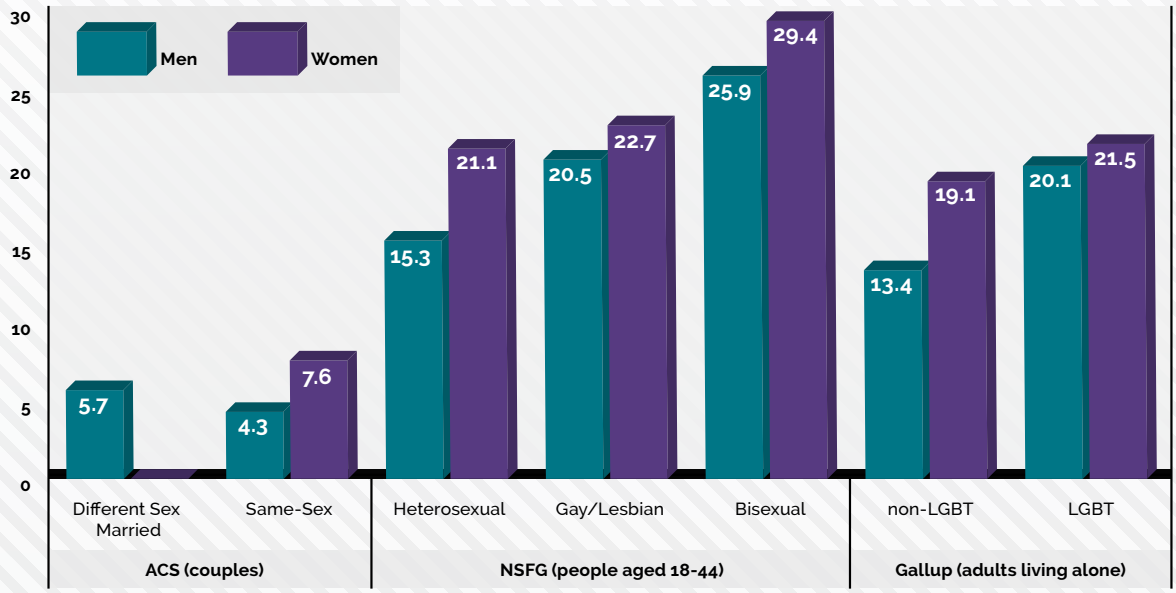
In light of the disproportionate rates of poverty among LGBTQ+ people, CCALP recommends that:

1. LGBTQ+ people be explicitly identified as a group at risk for poverty in the CPRS;
2. LGBTQ+-specific data be collected to measure the success of CPRS activities in addressing poverty for LGBTQ+ people;
3. Preventing, reducing, and ending LGBTQ+ youth homelessness be a priority in the CPRS, including through collaborations with the provinces and territories;
4. Actions to address child poverty in the CPRS be accessible to all families regardless of parental gender and/or marital status;
5. Canada's Employment Equity Act be expanded to include protection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and that these protections extend to private sector employment;
6. Steps be taken to ensure that LGBTQ+ people are able to access the income supports to which they are entitled without fear of discrimination;
7. Poverty reduction initiatives targeting specific groups at risk for poverty attend to LGBTQ+-specific issues within those groups, and measure their success for LGBTQ+ people;
8. Initiatives be developed to enhance availability of Canadian economic data on LGBTQ+ people; and
9. LGBTQ+ people, and particularly those with lived experience of poverty, be consulted and included as key stakeholders in all aspects of the CPRS.

Why are LGBTQ+ people important stakeholders for Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy?

Despite widespread social misconceptions to the contrary, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other sexual and gender minority (LGBTQ+*) people are more likely than our heterosexual, cisgender (non-trans) counterparts to live in poverty[1]. For example, a recent analysis of three US population-based surveys found a consistent pattern of elevated poverty rates among LGBTQ+ people, with poverty rates being particularly high among female same-sex couples and bisexual people[2] (see Figure 1 below). Although analogous data are scant due to lack of inclusion of sexual orientation/gender identity

Summary of poverty rates from U.S. national surveys by sexual orientation



From Badgett, M.V.L., Durso, L.E., & Schneebaum, A. (2013). New Patterns of Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law: http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGB-Poverty-Update-Jun-2013.pdf Reproduced with permission.

Notes*

We use the acronym LGBTQ+ in recognition that the language used by sexual and gender minority communities is diverse and always evolving. We include within this acronym those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and Two-Spirit, as well as those who choose other identity labels (e.g., pansexual, genderqueer) and who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. In this document, we use the term 'trans' to include all those whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. This includes people who identify as transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, of trans experience, and various other non-cisgender identities.

questions on Canadian population-based surveys, the available data suggest that economic disparities for LGBTQ+ people are also a concern here. Specifically, the limited body of existing research suggests that younger LGBTQ+ people, along with bisexual and trans adults, appear to be particularly at risk for poverty. For example, it has been estimated that approximately 25-40% of homeless youth in Canada identify as LGBTQ+, and at least 20% of youth accessing the Toronto shelter system identify as LGBTQ+[3]. Analysis of data from the 2003/2005 Canadian Community Health Survey found that bisexual people in particular are over-represented in the lowest income quintiles (34.9% of bisexual men; 42.7% of bisexual women, compared to 17.0% and 22.0% of heterosexual men and women respectively)[4]. In a recent Ontario-based study of over 400 trans people, the median income was only $15,000[5].

Further, LGBTQ+ identities intersect with other identities and experiences that put people at risk of poverty, creating particular vulnerabilities for people living at these intersections (e.g., trans women of colour; LGBTQ+ newcomers).

The high levels of poverty within the LGBTQ+ community make LGBTQ+ people important stakeholders for Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy (CPRS). Indeed, a CPRS that does not address the specific needs of LGBTQ+ people could serve to widen economic disparities associated with sexual orientation and gender identity in Canada. CCALP therefore recommends **that LGBTQ+ people be explicitly identified as a group at risk for poverty in the CPRS, and that LGBTQ+-specific data be collected to measure the success of the CPRS activities in addressing poverty for LGBTQ+ people in particular.**

In the sections that follow, we highlight key considerations for LGBTQ+ people that must be addressed in the CPRS, in order to ensure that it will equitably benefit all Canadians.

Issues for LGBTQ+ youth and children raised by LGBTQ+ families

For over two decades Canadian research has indicated that LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented among youth experiencing homelessness[6-8]. However, they are often underrepresented in shelters and housing programs, due to issues of safety, violence, and discrimination[9,10]. Family conflict resulting when a young person comes out as LGBTQ+ is the leading cause of homelessness amongst LGBTQ+ youth[10]. Discrimination in housing, education, and other contexts serves to prevent LGBTQ+ youth from accessing the supports needed to move out of poverty[2].

Prioritizing subpopulations of youth, including LGBTQ+ youth, will promote development of targeted responses and strategies that involve critical attention to the unique and diverse needs of the population because the "one size fits all" approach does not work. Though interest in the issue of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness is growing, there are few housing programs that meet the needs of LGBTQ+ youth across Canada. In 2015, the Government of Alberta became the first province in Canada to prioritize LGBTQ+ youth through a targeted plan reflecting the unique needs of LGBTQ+ youth. Doing so provides stakeholders, government, and communities with a common understanding of the causes of homelessness experienced by this population, as well as the needs of LGBTQ+ youth and service providers, and offers recommendations for solutions[11].

To address the specific needs of LGBTQ+ youth, the CPRS must **make preventing, reducing and ending LGBTQ+ youth homelessness a priority, including through collaborations with the provinces and territories**. Targeted strategies should support the development and delivery of LGBTQ+-specific housing options in every province and territory and of integrated provincial training for staff of youth serving organizations for all aspects of LGBTQ+ cultural competency. These considerations should be addressed in Canada's National Housing Strategy, currently under development.

Children are also disadvantaged by the economic disparities faced by their LGBTQ+ parents. As a result of the wage gap for women, female couples with children are particularly likely to live in poverty (in US Census data, 7.6% compared to 5.7% for heterosexual married couples)[2]. CCALP therefore endorses Campaign 2000's recommendations to address child poverty in the CPRS[12], and urges careful attention to **ensure that actions to address child poverty in the CPRS are accessible to all families regardless of parental gender and/or marital status**. This could include federal leadership in mandating LGBTQ+ cultural competency training for those who work in delivery of social services, childcare workers, teachers, and others who are likely to be working with the children of LGBTQ+ parents. Such training will benefit not only the children of LGBTQ+ parents, but will also work towards broader social goals of challenging discrimination in Canadian society.

Issues for working age LGBTQ+ adults

Recent evidence from Canadian Census data indicates that sexual minority people experience wage inequities relative to our heterosexual counterparts, with partnered gay men earning approximately 5% less than heterosexual men[13]. This is consistent with US data, which indicates that gay and bisexual men earn 10-32% less than similarly qualified heterosexual men[14]. Canadian and US studies also find that employers discriminate in the hiring process, preferring to hire heterosexual applicants over gay men and lesbians[15,16]. Trans people are particularly vulnerable to employment discrimination and documentation challenges (e.g., having their education or work experience under a different name)[17], and report high levels of unemployment and underemployment as a result[5]. A recent study in Ontario found that 13% of trans people had been fired because of their gender expression and another 15% were unsure if being trans was the reason their employment was terminated[5]. An Ontario-based mixed methods study of bisexual people also revealed issues of unemployment and employment discrimination as key concerns in their mental health and economic well-being[18]. To address these issues and to encourage acceptance and workplace diversity, CCALP recommends that **Canada's Employment Equity Act be expanded to include protection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and that these protections be extended to include private sector employment**. The private sector has an important role to play in addressing issues for working age LGBTQ+ adults; identifying and promoting private sector practices that build diverse work places and provide opportunities for marginalized people should be a priority.

Further, because LGBTQ+ people may be particularly likely to require income supports, CCALP endorses Campaign 2000's recommendations to ensure the adequacy of these supports[12], and urges careful attention to **ensure that LGBTQ+ people are able to access the income supports to which they are entitled without fear of discrimination**. To our knowledge, no research has examined the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in accessing income supports in Canada or elsewhere. Indeed, a 2014 report from the US Department of Health and Human Services identified income support access as a significant research gap, and encouraged research to determine (a) whether there are differences between eligible LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ people in receipt of income supports; and (b) how LGBTQ+ people experience the processes for access to supports (e.g., interviews with case managers)[19]. Considering there is ample evidence that many LGBTQ+ people avoid engaging with public sector services due to fear of discrimination or experiences of discrimination[20,21], research is urgently needed to determine whether this is also the case for income support services.

Finally, as a group disproportionately at risk for poverty, LGBTQ+ working age adults will benefit from policies that make transit, housing, and other necessities accessible and affordable. For this reason, we fully endorse Campaign 2000's recommendations to ensure housing for all[12], and encourage adequate federal support of the transit systems LGBTQ+ people rely on. Further, we encourage federal leadership in addressing housing discrimination in the private sector, which could improve safety and accessibility for LGBTQ+ and other marginalized people.

Issues for LGBTQ+ older adults

LGBTQ+ people experience unique considerations as they age, since they may be estranged from families of origin and less likely to have children to serve as informal caregivers[22]. For many older LGBTQ+ people, poverty can result from the cumulative effects of lifetime employment discrimination. For example, an analysis of US Census data reported that 9.1% of elder lesbian and 4.9% of elder gay couples were living in poverty, compared to 4.6% of elder heterosexual couples[23]. As a result of these differences, LGBTQ+ older adults may rely on government supports, including housing and income supports[24]. CCALP therefore endorses Campaign 2000's recommendations to strengthen income security programs for seniors[12], and further urges careful attention to **ensure that LGBTQ+ seniors are able to access the income security programs to which they are entitled without fear of discrimination**. This is particularly necessary considering that many older LGBTQ+ people have not disclosed these identities to their formal or informal care providers[24]. Further, safe housing that permits members of same-sex couples to stay together as they age is a priority for older LGBTQ+ people; for this reason, LGBTQ+-specific needs should be addressed in the National Housing Strategy currently under development.

Important considerations

Intersecting identities: LGBTQ+ people may also be Indigenous people, women, people with disabilities, racialized people, newcomers, refugees, people with precarious immigration status, single parents, and members of other communities that have been identified as at risk for poverty. Further, poverty is experienced uniquely at each of these intersections; for example, LGBTQ+ newcomers to Canada are disadvantaged by both racism and homophobia[25], and Two-Spirit people experience extremely high rates of poverty and homelessness[26]. To attend to this, CCALP recommends that **poverty reduction initiatives targeting groups at risk should attend to LGBTQ+-specific issues within those groups, and measure their success for LGBTQ+ people in particular**. Further, considering the role of colonialism and systemic discrimination in producing shockingly high rates of poverty among Indigenous people in Canada, and in light of the related Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, CCALP fully endorses Campaign 2000's recommendations to eradicate poverty among Indigenous peoples[12].

Need for better data: At the same time as we recommend that any monitoring or evaluation conducted as part of the CPRS collect data particular to LGBTQ+ people, we note that our understanding of LGBTQ+ poverty on a national level is greatly hindered by the lack of available data. To address this, we recommend **initiatives to enhance availability of Canadian economic data on LGBTQ+ people**. Specifically, we recommend that sexual orientation and gender identity questions be added to the Canadian Income Survey (CIS), and that data linkages be made possible between CIS, taxfiler data, surveys such as the Canadian Community Health Survey, and other surveys that collect data on related issues (e.g., housing, food security). We note that the absence of a gender identity question on any Canadian population-based survey makes trans poverty (and trans people in general) invisible in Canada; this invisibility reflects discrimination against trans people, which contributes to their challenges in employment, housing, and other domains important for economic security. Questions on gender identity should therefore be added to surveys such as the Canadian Community Health Survey that, at present, collect only data on sexual orientation. Similarly, we currently have no population-based data that enable us to understand the economic situation for intersex people in Canada; questions currently asked about sex should therefore be revised to allow for collection of these data. Further, options for collection and analysis of disaggregated data need to be developed, in order to allow for improved understanding of how multiply marginalized LGBTQ+ people experience poverty; including, for example, LGBTQ+ people who are living with disabilities, LGBTQ+ newcomers and LGBTQ+ racialized

people. These disaggregated data will ensure that we are able to monitor and address poverty among those who are the most vulnerable. Finally, **support and incentives should be provided to Canadian researchers to address gaps in knowledge about LGBTQ+ poverty in Canada**. This could entail specific research funding opportunities offered in partnership between the CPRS and funders such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, and Employment and Social Development Canada.

Bring LGBTQ+ voices to the table: LGBTQ+ people are the best experts in how our communities experience poverty, and what actions are needed to move LGBTQ+ people out of poverty. For this reason, CCALP recommends that **LGBTQ+ people, and particularly those with lived experience of poverty, be consulted and included as key stakeholders in all aspects of the CPRS**. Specifically, when formal advisory groups are struck to advise the development, implementation, and evaluation of the CPRS, LGBTQ+ people with lived experience of poverty should be included as members.

Conclusion

LGBTQ+ people disproportionately live in poverty, and are important stakeholders for Canada's new poverty reduction strategy. We have highlighted key considerations for ensuring that LGBTQ+ Canadians can benefit equitably from the CPRS. LGBTQ+ people will be disproportionately represented among individuals receiving the income supports to be addressed by the CPRS. It is essential that systems delivering income supports be accessible for LGBTQ+ people without fear of discrimination. The CPRS can proactively take steps to ensure that income supports and other initiatives are appropriate and accessible for LGBTQ+ people. Explicit recognition in the CPRS of LGBTQ+ people as a group at risk of poverty, together with inclusion of LGBTQ+ people as key stakeholders in the development and implementation of the CPRS, are necessary first steps to alleviate the consequences of poverty for LGBTQ+ people.

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