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Saskatchewan's deep income poverty related to education outcomes

A Statistics Canada paper highlighted Saskatchewan's high rate of deep income poverty, which one United Way representative said could be tied to education.

Brody Langager

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Saskatchewan has a high rate of deep income poverty, but a United Way representative says we can be proactive in its prevention in the classroom. PNimg

Saskatchewan has one of the highest rates of deep income poverty in the country, but for one United Way representative, that's not a shock.

A paper from Statistics Canada described deep income poverty as a household being unable to afford 75 per cent of the goods and services outlined in the market basket measure (MBM), which is Canada's official poverty measurement.

The MBM includes the cost of things like food, clothing, transportation, shelter and other needs to represent a modest, basic standard of living.

The paper takes data from 2022, when it was reported that 9.9 per cent of Canadians lived in poverty. A report from January anticipates that poverty rate has increased by more than 13 per cent in the 2023 data.

The paper said five per cent of Canadians fell into deep income poverty in 2022, which is roughly 1.95 million people — more than half of the people who fall below the poverty line. While deep income poverty has a baseline of 75 per cent, the paper said many people who fell into deep income poverty couldn't afford even 50 per cent of the MBM.

An example given in the report says the MBM for a four-person family living in Ottawa was roughly \$54,177, which meant that the family was living in poverty if it didn't have that much disposable income, and was in deep income poverty if it had less than \$40,632 in disposable income.

The paper said it aimed to identify groups with a higher likelihood of deep income poverty, showing that the rate is higher for certain demographics — like living in Saskatchewan, being younger than 24, or being single.

Other demographics listed that are more likely to experience deep income poverty are people with disabilities, one-parent families, Indigenous people and immigrants who have been in Canada for less than five years.

Saskatchewan has the second-highest representation of deep income poverty among Canadian provinces (6.7 per cent), only ahead of Manitoba (6.9 per cent).

"It's not surprising; it's been something we've seen coming in my line of work for 25 years," said Gary Beaudin, the director of community impact and strategic partnerships for United Way Saskatoon.

He said the problem is growing progressively worse, year after year.



An exterior photo of Saskatoon Community Service Village where the United Way of Saskatoon is located. Photo taken in Saskatoon, Sask. on Friday Feb. 14, 2025. PHOTO BY MICHELLE BERG /Saskatoon StarPhoenix

He pointed to the educational outcomes of kids in K-12 schools, saying that is one indicator for whether someone struggles with poverty or not, adding that there are stark differences in the graduation rates of Indigenous students compared to non-Indigenous students.

A provincial auditor's report in 2023 showed less than 50 per cent of Indigenous students graduate Grade 12 within three years of beginning Grade 10.

"We know that is a predictor for whether or not those kids will access post-secondary, which is something you need to do to get a job," Beaudin said.

“We’ve seen those differences and disparities, those gaps, increase year after year.”

Improving graduation rates can have a strong impact on poverty, Beaudin said, adding that we’re already starting to see generational poverty in some communities.

“We’re seeing kids whose great-grandparents were poor and now they’re fourth-generation kids being poor.”

Beaudin said the United Way’s partner organizations have had to increase the scope of their services, noting that counselling or housing services have been added to some agencies because of the growing need.

“A lot of organizations or agencies that we fund and partner with have increasingly picked up the slack where public sector services haven’t met the needs of the community.”

Beaudin said there’s an increased need, but fewer funds available for organizations trying to help.

A significant social policy approach is needed from the government, he said.

Beaudin said more right-leaning or fiscally conservative governments often lack a significant focus on social programs, but noted that preventing poverty costs less than responding to it.

“It’s way cheaper to prevent it, if you can keep kids out of care, out of prisons, or young folks or people out of shelters,” he said.

“There are kids in Grade 9 that we know will not graduate from high school. Guess what, they’re going to be homeless, and then we’re going to have to build more shelters.”

<https://leaderpost.com/news/saskatchewan/saskatchewan-deep-income-poverty-related-to-education-outcomes/wcm/0c3f21fc-de34-4cb2-a118-c83790e4948f>

As someone who teaches Alternative Education to high school students in Northern Saskatchewan, I see this play out every day. One Alt Ed credit on your high school transcript rules out postsecondary education, polytechnic as well as university. I am to teach them Life Transitions 30 for life after school. Any suggestions? Gangs will come to look like the only option to some. TJB