

JOINT SUBMISSION



Of the **Société québécoise de la déficience intellectuelle**,
and the **Fédération québécoise de l'autisme**,
of the **Confédération des organismes de personnes
handicapées du Québec**,
of l'**Alliance québécoise des regroupements régionaux
pour l'intégration des personnes handicapées**,
and of the **Réseau communautaire en santé mentale**

**Elaboration of the fourth
government action plan
to combat poverty and
social exclusion**



Background information on the process of drafting and approving this brief

The policy directions presented in this brief are the result of a concerted effort by the five signatory organizations. Each organization consulted the members they represent, according to their own internal procedures.

All the orientations presented have received the unanimous support of the signatory organizations and represent the diversity of needs of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions in the fight to eliminate poverty and social exclusion.

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Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
Library and Archives Canada
ISBN : 978-2-921037-44-0
July 2023

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Preamble

Based on the rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Nations Unies, 1976) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2007), our organizations are calling for renewed efforts on the part of the Quebec government to make the eradication of poverty and exclusion a priority. Given our respective missions, the situation of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions is of particular interest to us.

Everyone has the right to "an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions." (Nations Unies, 1976, art. 11) Unfortunately, current last-resort financial assistance programs and measures to combat poverty and exclusion are not sufficient to meet the needs of the persons benefiting from them. These programs all too rarely take into account the social determinants of health, and pay too little attention to the additional costs associated with disability or mental health conditions.

For our organizations, the right to live in dignity is fundamental, and requires access to a sufficient quantity of high-quality, universal public services. Many structuring measures can be used to reduce poverty and exclusion among the persons we represent. It is important that the Quebec government assume its role of coordinating the various measures to be taken in the province. From the outset, these measures must be inter-ministerial and aim for the social and economic participation of persons experiencing poverty or vulnerability in Québec society.

Our recommendations are divided into key areas for government action. For each theme, a set of proposals is put forth. The first theme is financial security in the broadest sense. This is a subject on which our respective organizations have worked extensively as part of the current Government Action Plan for Economic Inclusion and Social Participation (PAGIEPS). The second theme is housing, since Quebec's housing crisis is hitting hard, particularly the most precarious households. Access to transportation and mobility are also addressed, as they are often sine qua non conditions for the social and economic participation of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions. Issues of social participation and post-secondary education are also addressed in this submission. Finally, a series of other measures are proposed to promote the social and economic participation of the persons we collectively represent.

Our organizations remain at the disposal of the Quebec government to make further progress on these issues, and look forward to continuing to work with the various ministries and organizations to make Quebec a more inclusive society.

I. Financial security

Our organizations have worked extensively on financial security issues in recent years. In particular, this involvement has translated into participation in the various committees responsible for creating and monitoring the implementation of the new Basic Income Program (BIP). This program was created by the current PAGIEPS, with the aim of lifting over 80,000 individuals benefiting from the Social Solidarity Program (PSS) out of poverty (Gouvernement du Québec, 2023).

In addition to the work surrounding the BIP, our organizations have also been involved in other issues relating to financial security, including representations on the federal Bill C-22 (Société québécoise de la déficience intellectuelle, et al., 2022), the refundability of the tax credit for severe and prolonged impairment, disability-related extra costs (Ministère des Finances et Gouvernement du Québec, 2020, p. C. 105) and various other policies, notably on caregivers or different government action plans, notably those on autism, mental health and disability.

The financial security of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions is still too precarious (Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2022; Wall, 2017). It is important that a poverty reduction plan contains specific orientations for these populations. This section is divided based on the concerns of our organizations in relation to the various policies and programs that the Quebec government has adopted or created.

A. Improvements to the Basic Income Program (BIP)

The Basic Income Program (BIP) represents a major step forward for persons with severely limited capacity for employment (CSE). However, there is still much room for improvement, and the BIP needs to be made more inclusive and generous.

The following recommendations are grouped into sub-themes and present a set of proposals that could make the BIP more accessible, simpler and more favourable to the social and economic participation of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions experiencing difficulties entering the labour market.

i. Amount of benefit and operation of the Basic Income Program

The Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, a government agency that advises the Minister on poverty issues, indicated that an income equivalent to the MBM, set at \$20,545 in Quebec in 2019, is not synonymous with an escape from poverty (Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion, 2019). Furthermore, the Low Income Measure (LIM) was \$27,352 for a single adult in Canada in 2021 (Statistique Canada, 2023).

In light of this data, the amount of the base BIP benefit is far from sufficient to lift recipients out of poverty (Société québécoise de la déficience intellectuelle, et al., 2022). It is therefore important to aim for a real exit from poverty, and to choose up-to-date indicators in the new PAGIEPS.

Recommendation 1: Set the basic benefit for the BIP at the level of the Low Income Measure calculated by Statistics Canada (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2022).

Recommendation 2: Eliminate reduction rates linked to earnings and work income.

Recommendation 3: Individualize benefits:

a) As a priority, fully individualize the BIP benefit;

b) Alternatively, increase the amount of spousal income, indexing it to the median income in Quebec, and reduce the reduction rate to 15%.

Recommendation 4: Review the method of calculating the personal expense allowance for BIP recipients in the health and social services network, in intermediate resources (IR) and in community housing.

Recommendation 5: Mobilize all ministries and organizations to support the most marginalized individuals in society, to ensure that they meet the new BIP compliance obligations.

Recommendation 6: Index the benefit to reflect actual inflation figures, as the federal government does for the Guaranteed Income Supplement (indexed in January, April, July and October to reflect increases in the cost of living as measured by the Consumer Price Index).

ii. Accessing the Basic Income Program

The Basic Income Program is very difficult to access. One must have spent a considerable number of continuous years as a recipient of the Social Solidarity Program (SSP) before being granted access to the BIP.

This is a problem, as the SSP is particularly punitive and does not allow persons to exercise their full social and economic participation. The SSP is also complex to administer and manage, and does not guarantee that recipients will be lifted out of poverty.

For these reasons, it is important to broaden the criteria for access to the BIP.

Recommendation 7: Give immediate access without having to go through the Social Solidarity Program to :

- Individuals with severely limited capacity for employment, without going through the Social Solidarity Program, **OR** alternatively: reduce the eligibility period to 30 months of participation in the SSP;
- Persons under curatorship and persons subject to a modulated guardianship equivalent to the level of incapacity under the former curatorship regime;
- Parents or significant adults of children or adults with particularly high needs or who do not have access to services and have had to leave their jobs to care for them (Gouvernement du Québec, 2020; Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2021b, 2021a);
- Individuals with severely limited capacity for employment, who have not had access to the SSP because of a spouse's income in the past;
- Individuals with severely limited capacity for employment living in an emergency situation (e.g. domestic violence), but who have not accumulated the months required for admission to the BIP. This measure is intended to promote the financial independence of those living in an emergency situation, by giving them the means to get out of it;
- Individuals with severely limited capacity for employment, benefiting from an employability program, but whose annual income is less than the basic BIP benefit;
- Persons receiving Quebec Pension Plan disability benefits who receive less than the BIP benefit.

Recommendation 8: Continue to work on redefining and identifying severe employment constraints, in order to modernize eligibility for the SSP and facilitate access to the PRB over time. In particular, by :

- Promoting a psychosocial approach to the assessment of severe employment constraints;
- Considering incapacitating illnesses that are not on the list of obvious diagnoses;
- Considering episodic or cyclical conditions.

Recommendation 9: Make the duration of participation in the SSP necessary for access to the BIP cumulative (rather than consecutive).

Recommendation 10: Take into account the cumulative time of participation in the Social Assistance Program with temporary employment constraints when calculating the time required to access the BIP.

Recommendation 11: Retain SSP participation duration in the case of persons incarcerated or in certified addiction resources (substance abuse centers), so that they do not have to start the cumulative period of SSP participation from scratch in order to access the BIP after each incarceration of more than 6 months.

iii. Other BIP-related demands

Finally, a series of other demands relating to the BIP are formulated to improve its operations, ensure its effectiveness and complement the government's action towards beneficiaries.

Recommendation 12: Plan a long-term independent study to assess the impact of the BIP on recipients.

Recommendation 13: Enshrine the existence of a committee to monitor the implementation and evaluation of the BIP in the *Individual and Family Assistance Act*.

Recommendation 14: In collaboration with the disability community, create inclusive employment programs for persons with disabilities, while maintaining access to other employability programs and measures, particularly for BIP recipients who are more remote from the job market.

Recommendation 15: Ensure that the BIP is well aligned with the future Canada Disability Benefit (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, 2021).

B. Recommendations for improving social assistance and social solidarity programs

Last-resort financial assistance programs (the Social Assistance Program and the Social Solidarity Program) are expected to undergo revisions in the coming year (2023-2024). The Minister responsible for Social Solidarity and Community Action has stated that she wants to improve the law and simplify the way these programs operate (Gouvernement du Québec, 2023). The proposals in this section are designed to assist the Ministry and the Minister in updating the *Individual and Family Assistance Act*.

Many of the proposed measures are similar to those currently applied to the BIP, and a number can be substantiated by the joint report on the Basic Income Program tabled in 2019 (Comité conjoint sur l'accès au Programme de revenu de base, 2019).

Recommendation 16: Simplify program administration and management in order to prioritize accompaniment towards inclusion in employment and all other forms of social participation.

Recommendation 17: Increase and annualize the limit on employment income admissible under these programs (currently \$200 per month) to at least the level of the basic benefit under the various last-resort financial assistance programs.

Recommendation 18: Increase the liquid asset thresholds for the various last-resort financial assistance programs.

Recommendation 19: Individualize last-resort financial assistance benefits to allow marital life and encourage mutual aid between recipients of last-resort financial assistance programs.

Recommendation 20: Do not treat last-resort financial assistance benefits as income for tax purposes, while at the same time taxing the employment income of persons receiving assistance.

Recommendation 21: Make it easier for persons with disabilities who are disaffiliated to access the SSP.

Recommendation 22: Take action to eliminate or reduce last-resort financial assistance debts

- Cancel all debts to social assistance and social solidarity programs;
- Stop collecting interest on debts to social assistance and social solidarity programs;
- Review marital status rules for recipients of last-resort financial assistance to put an end to joint debts;
- Revise the statute of limitations for debts to the Social Assistance and Social Solidarity Programs to 5 years.

Recommendation 23: Ensure that low-income persons with disabilities or mental health conditions who own their home receive assistance in paying municipal taxes. This could be done by expanding and improving existing programs for seniors, or by providing tax exemptions or credits to help these persons pay their taxes.

Recommendation 24: Reinstate bipolarity, schizophrenia and autism in the list of "obvious diagnoses"[1] for access to the SSP.

Recommendation 25: Mandate the Comité consultatif de lutte à la pauvreté et à l'exclusion sociale to conduct research into the possibility of creating a universal benefit for persons with disabilities to promote their social inclusion, financial security and economic participation.

[1] In July 2022, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) published a revised list of obvious diagnoses allowing accelerated access to the Social Solidarity Program. Autism, schizophrenia and bipolarity were removed from the previous list. This has had the effect of making access to the SSP more difficult, as the refusal rate for applications not satisfying an obvious diagnosis is around 65.2%.

C. Fiscal measures

The financial security of persons with disabilities and people with mental health conditions depends not only on the modernization of last-resort financial assistance programs, but also on the adaptation of fiscal measures favorable to these populations.

The fiscal measures put in place by the Quebec government are often underused, because they are not optimized for the situation of persons who could otherwise benefit from them. This is particularly the case for persons who would be eligible for certain tax measures, but who do not report enough income in order to benefit from them (Simpson et Stevens, 2016). This section outlines some options for making these fiscal measures more suitable and attractive for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions.

Recommendation 26: Make the amount for severe and prolonged impairment in mental or physical functions refundable as early as 2023 [2].

Recommendation 27: Harmonize the assessment for access to the provincial Severe and prolonged impairment tax credit with that for the federal Disability tax credit.

Recommendation 28: Increase tax credits for caregivers.

Recommendation 29: Facilitate access to and enhance the Supplement for Handicapped Children (SHC) and the Supplement for Handicapped Children Requiring Exceptional Care (SEHNSE).

- Establish incremental funding tiers for the SHC to better take into account the varying financial support needs of families caring for children with disabilities;
- Use the current SHC amount as a floor for the different funding tiers;
- Simplify access forms and clarify access criteria.

Recommendation 30: Increase the amount of the various tiers of the Supplement for Handicapped Children Requiring Exceptional Care.

Recommendation 31: Improve the Quebec Pension Plan:

- Do not consider disability pensions for persons between the ages of 60 and 65 as retirement pensions;
- Eliminate, with retroactive effect, the penalty applied to the retirement pension paid to persons reaching age 65 who received a disability pension between the ages of 60 and 65 (regardless of the age at which the disability pension began);
- Individualize Quebec Pension Plan benefits.

[2] Persons with disabilities or mental health conditions face additional costs associated with their limitations. These additional costs have a disproportionate impact on the poorest individuals. The idea of making the tax credit refundable has been supported by the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2009, p. 45), the Commission d'examen sur la fiscalité québécoise (Commission d'examen sur la fiscalité québécoise, 2015, p. 47) and the Comité consultatif contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, 2015).

II. Social housing and support, individual funding

Housing is a major component of social inclusion and economic participation for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions (Hulse, 2010, 2011; Tucker et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the housing situation in Quebec is not easy. The housing crisis is profound, and social housing is struggling to keep up (Société canadienne d'hypothèques et de logement, 2022). Homecare services are also limited (Hébert, 2017; Plourde, 2022). These factors mean that persons with disabilities or mental health disorders are often in an extremely precarious situation, especially when they are recipients of last-resort financial assistance programs.

The Quebec government must do more to ensure the housing security of these persons, in particular by ensuring coherent and strong interdepartmental action, focusing on inclusion in the community and the creation of new adapted housing units.

Recommendation 32: Include affordable housing for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions in every new housing project of more than 5 units, and impose penalties on developers who fail to meet this obligation.

Recommendation 33: Include adapted or adaptable housing for persons with disabilities in every new housing project of more than 5 units, and impose penalties on developers who fail to meet this obligation.

Recommendation 34: Grant rent supplement program (PSL) units to persons with disabilities and mental health conditions.

Recommendation 35: Reintroduce the AccèsLogis program or a similar alternative aimed at setting up projects dedicated to persons with disabilities or mental health conditions, in a socially mixed environment.

Recommendation 36: Fund community living support services in social or community housing for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions.

Recommendation 37: Fund the development in every region of Quebec of a variable-intensity housing support service for all persons with disabilities or mental health conditions.

Recommendation 38: Bring together the various networks (health, social services, Société d'habitation du Québec, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, technical resource groups, etc.) to reduce delays in setting up new residential projects.

Recommendation 39: Ensure the development and adequate funding of community housing resources for persons with disabilities as an alternative to CHSLD housing.

III. Access to transportation and mobility

The ability to access transportation is important for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions, particularly for those with mobility difficulties or living in less accessible locations (Bascom et Christensen, 2017).

Unfortunately, even where transportation systems exist, access can be made difficult due to financial considerations. Efforts have been made in some municipalities in Quebec, and it is important that they be extended across the entire territory (Alliance québécoise des regroupements régionaux pour l'intégration des personnes handicapées et al., 2023; Carmichael, 2023; Porter, 2023).

Recommendation 40: Introduce a social fare system for low-income individuals^[1], allowing them to purchase monthly, annual or individual transit passes.

Recommendation 41: Ensure that on-street parking is free and available to persons with disabled parking stickers.

Recommendation 42: Ensure the availability of regular and adapted public transit services to promote the social and economic participation of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions (van Holstein et al., 2022; Wasfi et al., 2017).

[3] This can be determined by participation in a last-resort financial assistance program, or by the income level established in the previous year's tax assessment.

IV. Social participation, inclusion, tackling stigma and promoting education

The social participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions is still limited by structural factors and negative attitudes towards these persons (Conley et Nadler, 2022). It is important for the Quebec government to act in an intersectoral approach, and for interministerial action plans to be put in place.

This section focuses on the issues of employment and inclusion in the workplace for persons with disabilities and people with mental health conditions, social participation and inclusion, the elimination of prejudice, but also education and post-secondary studies, as well as the funding of the social safety net, including community organizations.

A. Employment and inclusion in the workplace

Although employment is not the only form of social and economic participation to aim for, it remains one of the preferred forms for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions. Unfortunately, these persons still encounter many structural and attitudinal barriers to their inclusion in employment (Lindsay et al., 2023; Mélanie Deslauriers et al., 2020; Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2022). Provincial public employment policies also often lag behind those in the rest of Canada, and could benefit from bolder measures (Institut de recherche et de développement sur l'inclusion et la société, 2021; Vérificateur général du Québec, 2020).

This section proposes recommendations to make the employment of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions more inclusive and sustainable over time. Since some of the recommendations are addressed to different ministries, it is important that the Quebec government adopt a cross-sectoral approach to these issues.

Recommendation 43: Ensure that the future National Strategy for the Integration and Retention of the Handicapped includes measures:

- Aiming at inclusive employment for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions (e.g. mentoring, job coaching, long-term follow-ups, etc.);
- To convert funds allocated to passive measures into active measures to enable persons receiving last-resort financial assistance programs to enter the job market, notably by supporting access to the Contrat d'intégration au travail measure.

Recommendation 44: Invest regionally and cut red tape to better support employers and individuals, in order to facilitate the employability of people with disabilities.

Recommendation 45: Limit the duration of participation in sheltered work and internships programs, and set up monitoring and intervention mechanisms to combat the exploitation of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions participating in programs where they are not paid a real wage (Institut de recherche et de développement sur l'inclusion et la société, 2021).

Recommendation 46: Give equal status with the rest of the population to persons with disabilities in employment or participating in socio-professional programs in which employers generate a profit from their work.

Recommendation 47: Enable persons who have to leave their jobs for reasons related to episodic, cyclical or chronic conditions to return to work after a period of absence, and put in place support measures for employers during the period of absence.

Recommendation 48: Introduce a full-time or part-time job protection and retention measure for family/informal caregivers who must be temporarily absent to care for a person requiring significant care or who does not have sufficient services, for the period beyond the employment insurance coverage period.

Recommendation 49: Increase the minimum wage rate to reach a sustainable income threshold as calculated by the Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques (Eve-Lyne Couturier et al., 2023).

B. Social participation and inclusion

As mentioned, the social participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions should not be limited solely to their economic participation through work. Other forms of social participation and inclusion need to be valued, particularly for individuals with severely limited capacity for employment.

Furthermore, the social participation of disaffiliated persons is often undermined by the lack of adaptation of the justice system. It is important for the Quebec government to take full measure of the difficulties and structural obstacles that certain persons with disabilities or mental health conditions may encounter in the justice system. The over-judicialization of these populations is a major obstacle to their full social participation, and it is important to address this issue.

Finally, living with a disability can represent significant additional costs. These costs are only partially offset by the various programs offered by the Quebec government. Year after year, the Quebec government has claimed to be conducting research into these costs, yet no announcement has been made about compensation for these costs. It's time for the government to act on this front.

To this end, we call on the Quebec government to begin using capacity-differentiated analysis (CDA+), to properly account for the effects of public policies on persons with disabilities or mental health disorders (Institute for Research and Development on inclusion and society, 2012; Prince, 2009).

Recommendation 50: recognize that social and economic participation is not just about employment, but also about volunteering, community involvement, activism, etc.

Recommendation 51: Implement an interdepartmental plan to reduce the number of people with disabilities or mental health conditions being prosecuted in the courts, and to facilitate access to the justice system by adapting processes and procedures.

Recommendation 52: Compensate the additional costs of disability for all persons concerned, regardless of age.

Recommendation 53: Take into account capacity differentiated analysis (CDA+) and social inequalities in health in reports, research, studies, surveys, assessments, action plans, etc., concerning the eradication of poverty and social exclusion.

C. Combating stigma

In addition to causing great suffering for the individuals affected, stigmatization hinders the social participation of some persons with disabilities or mental health problems (Conley et Nadler, 2022), and makes them reluctant to use the services to which they are entitled.

Funding must be made available for actions to reduce stigma and discrimination.

Recommendation 54: Implement an awareness-raising campaign on poverty, to deconstruct prejudices about last resort financial assistance program recipients.

Recommendation 55: Implement an awareness campaign to combat stigmatization, discrimination and prejudice against persons with disabilities or mental health conditions, in order to promote their social inclusion and economic participation.

Recommendation 56: Develop and implement a national strategy based on recognized best practices. The fight against stigmatization and discrimination must be examined and entrusted to a national committee, made up of persons with disabilities or living with or having experienced a mental health condition, members of their entourage, representatives of the community and the government sector.

D. Education and post secondary education

Education is one of the main determinants of financial security and health. Yet in Quebec, access to secondary and post-secondary education is not always guaranteed for students and persons with disabilities or mental health conditions. Major efforts must continue to be made.

Recommendation 57: Increase School Service Center budgets to offer students with disabilities a program adapted to their needs, by equipping school teams with innovative and inclusive teaching practices.

Recommendation 58: Legislate to make the school-to-work transition approach (TEVA) mandatory in the *Education Act* in all regions of Quebec, to ensure the social inclusion and economic participation of young adults with disabilities, social or learning difficulties.

Recommendation 59: Increase services for students with disabilities or mental health problems in post-secondary institutions to foster their academic success and future social participation, notably by ensuring separate, direct funding for these persons.

Recommendation 60: Provide support for community organizations that assist persons with disabilities or mental health problems in their studies.

E. Supporting community organizations and funding the social safety net

Funding for the social safety net needs to be re-examined and increased. In recent years, community organizations have too often taken the place of the state in helping society's most vulnerable persons. Waves of austerity and service cuts have weakened many populations, jeopardizing their social and economic participation. Although the Quebec government has made significant reinvestments in the community sector over the past four years, the fact remains that these sums are still too far from the targets that community organization stakeholders are pursuing.

According to a study by the Institut de recherche et d'information socioéconomique published in 2017, access to community life for persons with disabilities is limited. This report indicates that to make community life accessible in the nonprofit sector, organizations were investing more than \$13 million at the time, but an additional \$1.9 million would have been needed in order to finance the lack of accessibility and accommodations (Fortier, 2017).

It is also clear that the State must intervene to reduce growing social inequalities. These inequalities are particularly visible for populations living at the intersection of several systemic oppressions. This is particularly true in indigenous communities, remote regions and rural areas. It is crucial that communities be provided with the appropriate means to meet their needs for support, assistance, transportation, housing and social and economic inclusion.

Finally, the state must resist populist temptations to reduce taxes at a time when demand for public services is exploding, and civil servants are negotiating collective bargaining to secure decent working conditions. A series of related measures must also be taken to limit the effects of inflation and food insecurity, while reinforcing access to universal, quality public services.

Recommendation 61: Adequately fund health and social services:

- Invest \$18 million^[4] to fund the access and accommodations necessary for persons with disabilities to ensure their participation in community organizations (Fortier, 2017);
- Support organizations that help develop and maintain the empowerment of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions;
- Fund and better recognize community organizations, particularly organizations without service delivery contracts and with limited sources of funding (aid, mutual aid, living environments, popular education);
- Better fund and recognize advocacy organizations;
- Emphasize and recognize the importance of peer helpers and establish a job title for them.

Recommendation 62: Make public health and social services accessible (SAD, psychotherapy, nutrition).

Recommendation 63: Guarantee access and accessibility to food services (grocery stores, food banks, etc.) for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions, to ensure their food security.

Recommendation 64: Don't cut taxes at a time when service costs and needs are exploding.

Recommendation 65: Guarantee the universality of public services, notably by abolishing direct user contributions.

[4] The amount originally estimated in 2017 was \$15 million, equivalent to \$18 million in current 2023 dollars.

V. Conclusion

The fight to eradicate poverty is a collective endeavor, involving all parts of society. The Quebec government must do its part, as an instrument of wealth redistribution, to reduce social inequalities and ensure that all our fellow citizens live in dignity, enjoy adequate financial security and are included in society.

For persons with disabilities or mental health conditions, the situation is decidedly less than perfect. Although the previous PAGIEPS greatly improved the daily lives of tens of thousands of individuals, much remains to be done. Whether by improving financial assistance programs, promoting social housing or enhancing existing tax measures, the Quebec government has many options at its disposal.

And yet, these measures are only part of the puzzle: to be socially included and participate economically, one must be able to move around freely, to have access to regular or adapted public transport services when needed, without financial barriers; one must be able to be included in the workplace without being discriminated against; one must have access to quality public services; one must be able to attend school and post-secondary studies at one's own pace, and so much more.

Government anti-poverty strategies have often focused on achieving silo objectives in recent years, with one or two major measures. This approach must change, and emphasis must be placed on inter-ministerial collaboration, setting clear objectives with well-defined responsibilities, and involving the persons targeted by these policies and their representatives. Nothing should be done for us without us.

The fight against poverty is everyone's business. All ministries and organizations have a role to play. It's high time Quebec put its proud ideals of social justice and inclusion into practice.

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List of recommendations and ministries concerned

Number	Recommendation	Ministry
Improving the Basic Income Program		
1	Set the basic benefit for the BIP at the level of the Low Income Measure calculated by Statistics Canada (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2022).	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
2	Eliminate reduction rates linked to earnings and work income.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
3	Individualize benefits: a) As a priority, fully individualize the BIP benefit; b) Alternatively, increase the amount of spousal income, indexing it to the median income in Quebec, and reduce the reduction rate to 15%.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
4	Review the method of calculating the personal expense allowance for BIP recipients in the health and social services network, in intermediate resources (IR) and in community housing.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
5	Mobilize all ministries and organizations to support the most marginalized individuals in society, to ensure that they meet the new BIP compliance obligations.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
6	Index the benefit to reflect actual inflation figures, as the federal government does for the Guaranteed Income Supplement (indexed in January, April, July and October to reflect increases in the cost of living as measured by the Consumer Price Index).	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale / ministère des Finances

Number	Recommendation	Ministry
7	Give immediate access without having to go through the Social Solidarity Program to : • Individuals with severely limited capacity for employment, without going through the Social Solidarity Program, OR alternatively: reduce the eligibility period to 30 months of participation in the SSP; • Persons under curatorship and persons subject to a modulated guardianship equivalent to the level of incapacity under the former curatorship regime; • Parents or significant adults of children or adults with particularly high needs or who do not have access to services and have had to leave their jobs to care for them (Gouvernement du Québec, 2020; Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2021b, 2021a); • Individuals with severely limited capacity for employment, who have not had access to the SSP because of a spouse's income in the past; • Individuals with severely limited capacity for employment living in an emergency situation (e.g. domestic violence), but who have not accumulated the months required for admission to the BIP. This measure is intended to promote the financial independence of those living in an emergency situation, by giving them the means to get out of it; • Individuals with severely limited capacity for employment, benefiting from an employability program, but whose annual income is less than the basic BIP benefit; • Persons receiving Quebec Pension Plan disability benefits who receive less than the BIP benefit.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
8	Continue to work on redefining and identifying severe employment constraints, in order to modernize eligibility for the SSP and facilitate access to the PRB over time. In particular, by : • Promoting a psychosocial approach to the assessment of severe employment constraints; • Considering incapacitating illnesses that are not on the list of obvious diagnoses; • Considering episodic or cyclical conditions.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
9	Make the duration of participation in the SSP necessary for access to the BIP cumulative (rather than consecutive).	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
10	Take into account the cumulative time of participation in the Social Assistance Program with temporary employment constraints when calculating the time required to access the BIP.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale

Number	Recommendation	Ministry
11	Retain SSP participation duration in the case of persons incarcerated or in certified addiction resources (substance abuse centers), so that they do not have to start the cumulative period of SSP participation from scratch in order to access the BIP after each incarceration of more than 6 months.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
12	Plan a long-term independent study to assess the impact of the BIP on recipients.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
13	Enshrine the existence of a committee to monitor the implementation and evaluation of the BIP in the <i>Individual and Family Assistance Act</i> .	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
14	In collaboration with the disability community, create inclusive employment programs for persons with disabilities, while maintaining access to other employability programs and measures, particularly for BIP recipients who are more remote from the job market.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
15	Ensure that the BIP is well aligned with the future Canada Disability Benefit (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, 2021).	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
Improving Social Assistance and Social Solidarity Programs		
16	Simplify program administration and management in order to prioritize accompaniment towards inclusion in employment and all other forms of social participation.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
17	Increase and annualize the limit on employment income admissible under these programs (currently \$200 per month) to at least the level of the basic benefit under the various last-resort financial assistance programs.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
18	Increase the liquid asset thresholds for the various last-resort financial assistance programs.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
19	Individualize last-resort financial assistance benefits to allow marital life and encourage mutual aid between recipients of last-resort financial assistance programs.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
20	Do not treat last-resort financial assistance benefits as income for tax purposes, while at the same time taxing the employment income of persons receiving assistance.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale / ministère des Finances
21	Make it easier for persons with disabilities who are disaffiliated to access the SSP.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale

Number	Recommendation	Ministry
22	Take action to eliminate or reduce last-resort financial assistance debts • Cancel all debts to social assistance and social solidarity programs; • Stop collecting interest on debts to social assistance and social solidarity programs; • Review marital status rules for recipients of last-resort financial assistance to put an end to joint debts; • Revise the statute of limitations for debts to the Social Assistance and Social Solidarity Programs to 5 years.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale / ministère des Finances
23	Ensure that low-income persons with disabilities or mental health conditions who own their home receive assistance in paying municipal taxes. This could be done by expanding and improving existing programs for seniors, or by providing tax exemptions or credits to help these persons pay their taxes.	Ministère des Finances / ministère des Affaires municipales
24	Reinstate bipolarity, schizophrenia and autism in the list of "obvious diagnoses" for access to the SSP.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
25	Mandate the Comité consultatif de lutte à la pauvreté et à l'exclusion sociale to conduct research into the possibility of creating a universal benefit for persons with disabilities to promote their social inclusion, financial security and economic participation.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale / Comité consultatif de lutte à la pauvreté et à l'exclusion sociale
Making tax measures more attractive		
26	Make the amount for severe and prolonged impairment in mental or physical functions refundable as early as 2023.	Ministère des Finances / Revenu Québec
27	Harmonize the assessment for access to the provincial Severe and prolonged impairment tax credit with that for the federal Disability tax credit.	Ministère des Finances / Revenu Québec
28	Increase tax credits for caregivers.	Ministère des Finances / Revenu Québec

Number	Recommendation	Ministry
29	Facilitate access to and enhance the Supplement for Handicapped Children (SHC) and the Supplement for Handicapped Children Requiring Exceptional Care (SEHNSE). • Establish incremental funding tiers for the SHC to better take into account the varying financial support needs of families caring for children with disabilities; • Use the current SHC amount as a floor for the different funding tiers; • Simplify access forms and clarify access criteria.	Revenu Québec
30	Increase the amount of the various tiers of the Supplement for Handicapped Children Requiring Exceptional Care.	Revenu Québec
31	Improve the Quebec Pension Plan: • Do not consider disability pensions for persons between the ages of 60 and 65 as retirement pensions; • Eliminate, with retroactive effect, the penalty applied to the retirement pension paid to persons reaching age 65 who received a disability pension between the ages of 60 and 65 (regardless of the age at which the disability pension began); • Individualize Quebec Pension Plan benefits.	Revenu Québec
Social housing and support, individual funding		
32	Include affordable housing for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions in every new housing project of more than 5 units, and impose penalties on developers who fail to meet this obligation.	Ministère des Affaires municipales
33	Include adapted or adaptable housing for persons with disabilities in every new housing project of more than 5 units, and impose penalties on developers who fail to meet this obligation.	Ministère des Affaires municipales
34	Grant rent supplement program (PSL) units to persons with disabilities and mental health conditions.	Ministère des Affaires municipales
35	Reintroduce the AccèsLogis program or a similar alternative aimed at setting up projects dedicated to persons with disabilities or mental health conditions, in a socially mixed environment.	Ministère des Affaires municipales

Number	Recommendation	Ministry
36	Fund community living support services in social or community housing for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions.	Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux / ministère des Affaires municipales
37	Fund the development in every region of Quebec of a variable-intensity housing support service for all persons with disabilities or mental health conditions.	Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux / ministère des Affaires municipales
38	Bring together the various networks (health, social services, Société d'habitation du Québec, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, technical resource groups, etc.) to reduce delays in setting up new residential projects.	Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux / ministère des Affaires municipales / autres organisations et partenaires
39	Ensure the development and adequate funding of community housing resources for persons with disabilities as an alternative to CHSLD housing.	Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux / ministère des Affaires municipales
Access to transportation and mobility		
40	Introduce a social fare system for low-income individuals, allowing them to purchase monthly, annual or individual transit passes.	Ministère des Transports / municipalités
41	Ensure that on-street parking is free and available to persons with disabled parking stickers.	Ministère des Transports / municipalités
42	Ensure the availability of regular and adapted public transit services to promote the social and economic participation of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions (van Holstein et al., 2022; Wasfi et al., 2017).	Ministère des Transports / municipalités
Employment and workplace inclusion		
43	Ensure that the future National Strategy for the Integration and Retention of the Handicapped includes measures: • Aiming at inclusive employment for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions (e.g. mentoring, job coaching, long-term follow-ups, etc.); • To convert funds allocated to passive measures into active measures to enable persons receiving last-resort financial assistance programs to enter the job market, notably by supporting access to the Contrat d'intégration au travail measure.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale

Number	Recommendation	Ministry
44	Invest regionally and cut red tape to better support employers and individuals, in order to facilitate the employability of people with disabilities.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
45	Limit the duration of participation in sheltered work and internships programs, and set up monitoring and intervention mechanisms to combat the exploitation of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions participating in programs where they are not paid a real wage (Institut de recherche et de développement sur l'inclusion et la société, 2021).	Ministère du Travail / ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale / ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux
46	Give equal status with the rest of the population to persons with disabilities in employment or participating in socio-professional programs in which employers generate a profit from their work.	Ministère du Travail / ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale / ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux
47	Enable persons who have to leave their jobs for reasons related to episodic, cyclical or chronic conditions to return to work after a period of absence, and put in place support measures for employers during the period of absence.	Ministère du Travail / ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
48	Introduce a full-time or part-time job protection and retention measure for family/informal caregivers who must be temporarily absent to care for a person requiring significant care or who does not have sufficient services, for the period beyond the employment insurance coverage period.	Ministère du Travail / ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
49	Increase the minimum wage rate to reach a sustainable income threshold as calculated by the Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques (Eve-Lyne Couturier et al., 2023).	Gouvernement du Québec
Social participation and inclusion		
50	recognize that social and economic participation is not just about employment, but also about volunteering, community involvement, activism, etc.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
51	Implement an interdepartmental plan to reduce the number of people with disabilities or mental health conditions being prosecuted in the courts, and to facilitate access to the justice system by adapting processes and procedures.	Ministère de la Justice / ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux / Office des personnes handicapées du Québec / Curateur public / ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale

Number	Recommendation	Ministry
52	Compensate the additional costs of disability for all persons concerned, regardless of age.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale / ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux / Office des personnes handicapées du Québec
53	Take into account capacity differentiated analysis (CDA+) and social inequalities in health in reports, research, studies, surveys, assessments, action plans, etc., concerning the eradication of poverty and social exclusion.	Gouvernement du Québec
Combating stigma		
54	Implement an awareness-raising campaign on poverty, to deconstruct prejudices about last resort financial assistance program recipients.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
55	Implement an awareness campaign to combat stigmatization, discrimination and prejudice against persons with disabilities or mental health conditions, in order to promote their social inclusion and economic participation.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale / ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux / Office des personnes handicapées du Québec
56	Develop and implement a national strategy based on recognized best practices. The fight against stigmatization and discrimination must be examined and entrusted to a national committee, made up of persons with disabilities or living with or having experienced a mental health condition, members of their entourage, representatives of the community and the government sector.	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale / ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux / Office des personnes handicapées du Québec
Education and post secondary education		
57	Increase School Service Center budgets to offer students with disabilities a program adapted to their needs, by equipping school teams with innovative and inclusive teaching practices.	Ministère de l'Éducation
58	Legislate to make the school-to-work transition approach (TEVA) mandatory in the <i>Education Act</i> in all regions of Quebec, to ensure the social inclusion and economic participation of young adults with disabilities, social or learning difficulties.	Ministère de l'Éducation

Number	Recommendation	Ministry
59	Increase services for students with disabilities or mental health problems in post-secondary institutions to foster their academic success and future social participation, notably by ensuring separate, direct funding for these persons.	Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur
60	Provide support for community organizations that assist persons with disabilities or mental health problems in their studies.	Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur / ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux / Office des personnes handicapées du Québec
Supporting community organizations and funding the social safety net		
61	Adequately fund health and social services: • Invest \$18 million to fund the access and accommodations necessary for persons with disabilities to ensure their participation in community organizations (Fortier, 2017); • Support organizations that help develop and maintain the empowerment of persons with disabilities or mental health conditions; • Fund and better recognize community organizations, particularly organizations without service delivery contracts and with limited sources of funding (aid, mutual aid, living environments, popular education); • Better fund and recognize advocacy organizations; • Emphasize and recognize the importance of peer helpers and establish a job title for them.	Gouvernement du Québec
62	Make public health and social services accessible (SAD, psychotherapy, nutrition).	Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
63	Guarantee access and accessibility to food services (grocery stores, food banks, etc.) for persons with disabilities or mental health conditions, to ensure their food security.	Gouvernement du Québec
64	Don't cut taxes at a time when service costs and needs are exploding.	Gouvernement du Québec
65	Guarantee the universality of public services, notably by abolishing direct user contributions.	Gouvernement du Québec