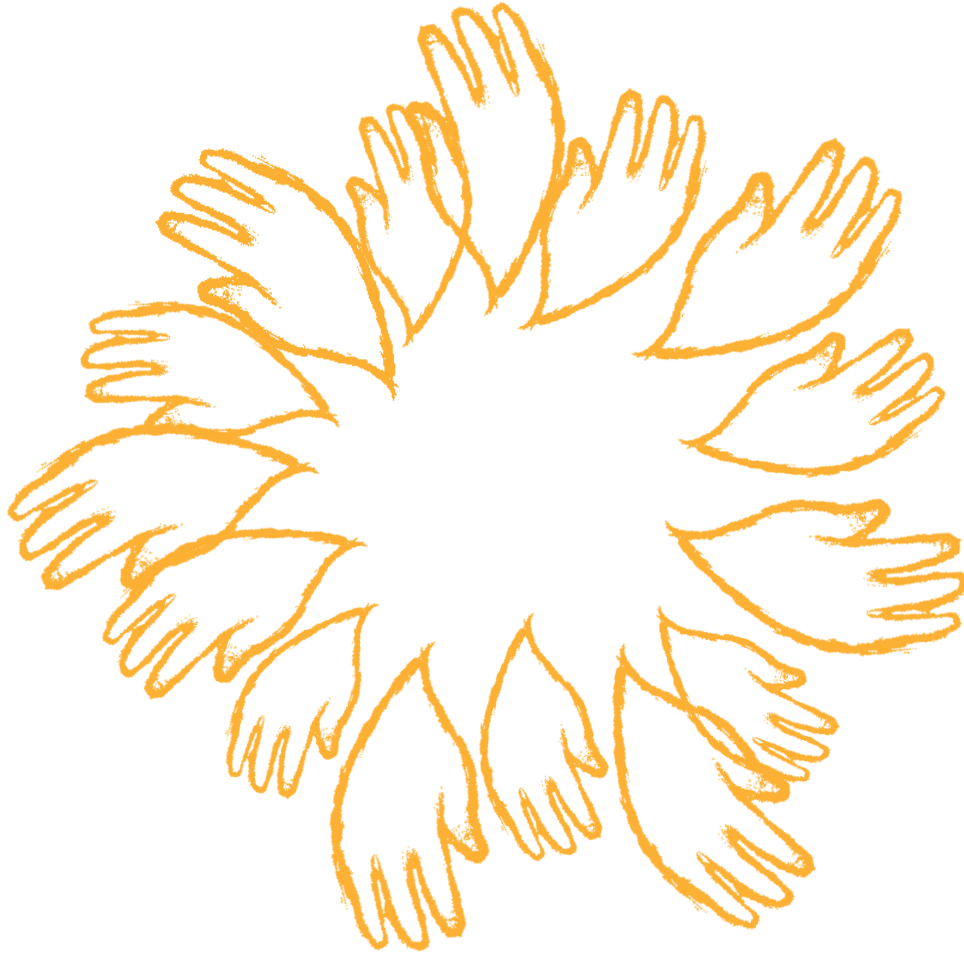


Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future



Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion

Government of Québec
Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

INTRODUCTION	9
IMPLEMENTING THE ACT TO COMBAT POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION ...	10
ADDITIONAL MEASURES: CHILD ASSISTANCE AND SOCIAL HOUSING	11

PART I: A QUÉBEC FOR ONE AND ALL

A promising social contract	13
Improve the lives of people living in poverty	15
Prevent poverty and social exclusion	16
Involve society as a whole	17
Ensure consistent, coherent measures	17

PART II: \$2.5 BILLION INVESTED OVER FIVE YEARS

Measures Announced by the government	21
Raise the standard of living of social-assistance recipients and low-income earners	21
\$329 million invested in housing	27
Significant measures to improve the lives of employment-assistance recipients	28
Impact of measures on the disposable income of low-income households	30

PART III: IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLAN

Improve the lives of people living in poverty	37
Background	37
Measures	39
Enhance employment assistance to meet commitments under the Act	39
Improve the lives of low-income earners: fight poverty by promoting work	42
Step up employment support to better assist job hunters	43
A separate plan for those with severe employment limitations	47
Improve access to decent, affordable housing	48
Ensure access, in dignity, to sufficient, good quality food	51
Access to medication: seeking solutions through a prescription drug policy	52

Prevent poverty and social exclusion by promoting each person's potential	53
Background	53
Measures	55
Support children and their families to ensure equal opportunity	55
Young people's success and integration: building a better future	58
A continuum of services for young people	65
Fight the social exclusion of seniors	67
Involve society as a whole	69
Background	69
Measures	70
A tool for solidarity with underprivileged communities	70
Support local and regional initiatives	71
Support the collective fight against poverty and social exclusion	73
Ensure consistent, coherent action	75
Background	75
Measures	76
Tools to coordinate efforts, involve Quebecers and measure progress	76
Federal cooperation required to support Québec's efforts	77
Adapt intervention to the needs of Native nations	78
 CONCLUSION	 79

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

I am very proud to present Quebecers with this *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. With this Plan, we have achieved the objectives of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, adopted unanimously by the National Assembly.

We wish to improve the lives of individual Quebecers and Québec society as a whole, because only a society with the will and ability to succeed can provide social protection to all of its members. Winning the fight against poverty and social exclusion depends on the efforts we, as a society, make to meet this challenge.

Twenty years ago, there were eight active workers for each retiree in Québec. In 25 years, there will be only two, which tells us that employment is the key to personal autonomy and social integration-and the best way to increase our collective wealth.

This Action Plan is built around two principles: economic security and social inclusion through employment, and increased protection for people with significant employment limitations.

Stressing the value of work by providing employment incentives and support for low-income earners is the cornerstone of this Action Plan. Its measures are designed to make the transition from employment assistance to work more satisfying and beneficial for people living in poverty. They also provide increased protection to those with greater difficulty participating actively in economic life. The best way to prevent social exclusion and break isolation is through participation in community, social, and cultural life. We have therefore chosen to foster personal growth as a means of improving the aptitudes of those suffering from exclusion and isolation.

The measures we have put forward reflect Québec's key priorities, i.e., individual and community health, increased personal income, support for families, and successful, skilled, and gainfully employed young people. These measures will help not only to reduce poverty, but also to strengthen our ties of solidarity as a society, our best hope for facing the challenges of the new millennium.

We must enable all Quebecers to contribute actively to society and go as far as their talents and ambitions allow. This Action Plan is a beacon of hope. It will mean richer lives for all Quebecers, individually and as a whole. It is the key to reconciling freedom of choice and social justice.

Claude Bécharde



Minister of Employment, Social Solidarity and Family Welfare





INTRODUCTION

Québec is pleased to release its *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, "**Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future.**"

For the first time, Québec has an action plan aimed at fighting poverty.

The **Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion** is based on respect for personal dignity. It provides a clearer framework for the exercise of rights and responsibilities, and aims to ensure equal opportunity for all. It is a solid foundation underpinning the commitments of all partners to this collective undertaking.

- The **Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion** is part of an overall vision of the role we, as a society, must play in assisting those who are more disadvantaged and vulnerable.

This overall vision is presented in Part I of this document.

- This Action Plan includes a set of **measures** discussed in Part II representing an investment of **\$2.5 billion** over the next five years.
 - **Funding** for these measures was announced in the *2004–2005 Budget Speech*.
 - They will have a significant impact on the disposable income of low-income households.
 - They **meet the government action plan requirements** enshrined in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*.
- Part III of this document explains how the government intends to implement these measures and incorporate the initiatives of its various departments with regard to the following four objectives:
 - **Improve** the lives of people living in poverty
 - **Prevent** poverty and social exclusion
 - **Involve** society as a whole
 - **Ensure** consistent, coherent action



IMPLEMENTING THE ACT TO COMBAT POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The measures announced in the **Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion** carry out the provisions of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. The government wishes to provide details on how it will follow through on the Act.

Section 13: Establishment and publication of a government action plan

Section 13 of the Act requires the government to establish and make public a government action plan setting forth the actions it plans to carry out to achieve its goals.

The **Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion** makes good on this requirement.

Section 14: Set targets for improving the income of Employment-Assistance Program recipients and full-time workers

Section 14 of the Act stipulates that the government shall set targets to be reached, in particular to improve the income of Employment-Assistance Program recipients and full-time workers.

The **Action Plan** includes such targets. The targets for 2005, indicated in the table on page 31, will be achieved by indexing social-assistance¹ benefits and supplementing them with the Participation Premium, Work Premium, and Child Assistance measures together with a higher minimum wage.

These targets represent **\$2.1 billion** in financial support to low-income households over the next five fiscal years.

Section 15: Propose amendments to the Employment-Assistance Program

Section 15 of the Act specifies that the government must propose amendments to the Employment-Assistance Program, in particular to achieve four specific objectives the Act lays out:

- The government must **put an end** to penalties for shared dwelling and minimum housing costs that reduce benefits under the Program.

This measure is **already in effect**.

- The government must introduce a **minimum benefits** principle, i.e., a threshold below which benefits cannot be reduced by administrative sanctions, deductions, or a combination of the two.

The establishment of a **low-income cutoff** is an integral part of the **Action Plan**.

- The government must permit adults and families to own property and liquid assets of a value greater than that permitted when the Action Plan was established, in order to encourage self-sufficiency and allow for temporary financial difficulties.

1. In the Action Plan, "social assistance" is synonymous with "employment assistance."

The **Action Plan** specifies such a measure.

- The government must exclude a certain amount of child support income for any family with a dependent child.

Under the **Action Plan**, the government offers all families a partial exemption for child support income under the Employment-Assistance Program.

The **Action Plan** measures designed to meet the requirements of Section 15 represent a total of **\$112 million** in funding over the next five fiscal years.

Section 16: Identify the conditions, terms, and schedule for implementing Action Plan commitments

The **Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion** specifies such conditions, terms, and schedules.

It even goes **further** than the Act requires since funding has already been provided for all measures announced in the *2004–2005 Budget Speech*.

Section 17: Identify measures and programs for improving people's economic and social situations

Section 17 of the Act stipulates that the government must introduce measures and programs designed to improve the economic and social situation of individuals and families living in poverty and social exclusion.

The Work Premium established under the **Action Plan** and announced in the *2004–2005 Budget Speech* **fully meets** this requirement. The Work Premium will provide **\$510 million** in funding for recipients over the next five fiscal years.

ADDITIONAL MEASURES: CHILD ASSISTANCE AND SOCIAL HOUSING

With its **Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion**, the government goes further than the Act requires.

Child Assistance and **social housing** measures will receive **\$1.074 billion** and **\$329 million** in funding respectively over the next five fiscal years.

These measures supplement the provisions set forth in the Act. They illustrate the government's commitment to going as far in fighting poverty as public finances and taxpayers' ability to pay will allow.



Part one

**A QUÉBEC
FOR ONE AND ALL**



A PROMISING SOCIAL CONTRACT

Social and economic development are closely intertwined. All societies need their human resources to succeed in these times of mobile capital and global trade. The fact that social development is a major challenge facing the Québec government merits that we question our approach.

The measures proposed in the Action Plan "**Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future**" reflect a long-term vision, but entail short- and medium-term financial commitments. Depending on economic developments, the schedule for implementing these measures may be reviewed and its content changed to reflect work to be done in keeping with the Act.

Aid to employment-assistance recipients has been increased, thereby fulfilling the commitments under the Act. Access to affordable housing has been improved through major investments in social housing, among other things. The incomes of low-income earners have been increased to gradually enable them to better their lot. Support for low-income families has been enhanced. Prevention efforts from early childhood to young adulthood have been stepped up to ensure that individuals develop their full potential. Local and regional initiatives have received support and efforts have been made to foster the emergence of local and regional anti-poverty strategies.

Other challenges can be resolved through discussions with the federal government to increase funding from the Employment Insurance Account to the level allowed by the Act and relax the rules for using this fund. Funding must be used to better help the chronically unemployed enter the labour market.

By simplifying the income security system and incorporating more work incentives, we aim to better meet the needs of those with little hope of regaining financial autonomy through employment.

IMPROVE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

Some people are unable to work their way out of poverty. They hold unstable jobs with insufficient hours or workweeks and a salary too low to meet their needs and those of their families. The plan provides solutions to this problem.

Work income is buttressed by an accessible, simple Work Premium that encourages people to increase their workload. We will eliminate the poverty trap. Currently, employment-assistance recipients who live alone have no reason to increase their workload beyond the small number of hours that exemptions allow, because each dollar earned above this amount reduces government assistance by a corresponding amount. The minimum wage must also be increased gradually while still protecting jobs and Québec's economic competitiveness.





The unemployed may become discouraged if their unemployment continues. We must invest in active assistance that gradually leads them toward employment. They must be given access to measures adapted to their needs and guidance to help them acquire skills and realize their potential.

This assistance must be provided in a way that respects personal dignity. We must applaud the efforts people make to improve their circumstances and work together to fight the prejudice that too often serves to exclude the most vulnerable.

The new Child Assistance measure boosts the income of all families. The poorest families will see their income rise, while those who, despite their efforts, are struggling to make ends meet will be better supported by government financial assistance.

Access to affordable housing must be added to these priorities. Too many people spend too much of their income on housing. Countering the lack of affordable housing and implementing projects that combine housing and community services will help reduce poverty. In particular, such projects will help improve the lives of more underprivileged groups such as seniors, people with disabilities, and the homeless.

Social housing measures will provide an integrated solution to this major social problem.

PREVENT POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

A major step toward reducing inequalities in health and well-being tied to poverty

Poverty and social exclusion are major determinants of health and well-being. Considerable epidemiological evidence shows that poor economic and social conditions are linked to increased prevalence of unhealthy behaviors, a rise in physical and mental health problems, significant disparities in life expectancy, and a higher number of premature deaths. These findings point to the importance of reducing inequalities in health and well-being tied to poverty.

Action Plan measures aimed at raising the standard of living of low-income people, as well as those aimed particularly at developing the potential of individuals and communities, are a major step toward reducing these inequalities.

Making children, low-income families, and young people a priority

We must take preventive measures with children living in poverty and their families to ensure equal opportunity. We must also take steps to help young people thrive and succeed. We need to provide ongoing support and services to young people experiencing difficulties in their transition to adulthood and employment as they move toward socioprofessional integration, even if that means taking a "road less traveled."

Helping families is central to government action to allow them to have children if they wish, receive the assistance they need, and juggle the requirements of work and family. As a preventive measure, young children living in poverty and their families

receive integrated support through innovative partnerships based on an overall vision of families' needs. As the basic development unit for individuals and society, families are the cornerstone of social development.

Services and measures better attuned to young people's needs, combined with specific resources in more disadvantaged communities, will help maximize their chances of success. Young adults who depend on government assistance can count on more than just a cheque. They will receive active support tailored to their needs as an alternative to employment assistance. With the commitment of all stakeholders, young people can make progress toward independence and help build a better Québec.

INVOLVE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

The fight against poverty and social exclusion is not only the government's responsibility. It involves all groups in society, including people living in poverty, who must be the first to take steps to improve their situation and that of their families. The fight must be waged throughout Québec, particularly in areas where poverty is more prevalent.

To promote the development of a healthy, caring society, the government will provide strong support to local communities, towns, and regions that have reached a consensus on how to improve the lives of people living in poverty. The cooperative efforts and actions already under way in many regions to improve the lives of people and communities living in poverty and put them back in control of their environments can be stepped up. The Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales will serve as a catalyst, and all Quebecers must contribute. Together, we can achieve tangible results.

In the same vein, the government plans to develop partnerships with big business, foundations, and other levels of government. These partnerships will lead to innovative approaches to fighting poverty and social exclusion.

ENSURE CONSISTENT, COHERENT ACTION

The Action Plan will be reviewed annually in order to gauge progress and work left to do. This will require ongoing commitment and shared effort based on the belief that social justice is fundamental to our future.

In a society like Québec, poverty is not insurmountable. The fact that we have adopted an Act with ambitious objectives aimed at reducing poverty is proof. A society with less poverty, where everyone has a place, is a better society.

We need to work together toward a more cohesive society with fewer social costs that impede development and a greater wealth of human capital that makes it a shining example.



Part two

**\$2.5 BILLION INVESTED
OVER FIVE YEARS**

With its **Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion**, the government commits to a set of measures representing **\$2.5 billion over five years** for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society.

- Funding for these measures was announced in the *2004–2005 Budget Speech*. **A complete breakdown** is given below.
- These measures will help significantly **increase the disposable income of low-income households**, as illustrated below for certain types of households.

MEASURES ANNOUNCED BY THE GOVERNMENT

With its **Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion**, the government commits to a set of measures representing \$2.5 billion over five years.

These measures fall under the following three categories:

- Measures to increase the incomes of low-income individuals and families
- Investments in social housing
- Other significant measures for employment-assistance recipients

Raise the standard of living of social-assistance recipients and low-income earners

The *2004–2005 Budget Speech* set out significant measures that, once implemented, will increase the incomes of employment-assistance recipients and low-income earners in four different ways:

- By fully indexing social-assistance benefits for those with significant employment limitations
- By creating a Participation Premium for social-assistance recipients who are able to work, in addition to partially indexing their benefits
- By establishing a Work Premium for low-income earners
- By enhancing financial support to low-income families through a new Child Assistance measure

In addition to these new measures, the minimum wage will be increased from \$7.30/hour currently to \$7.45/hour on May 1, 2004, and \$7.60/hour on May 1, 2005.

Indexing social-assistance benefits

To maintain the purchasing power of employment-assistance recipients with significant employment limitations, their benefits will be indexed to the cost of living on January 1 every year, starting in January 2005. The same indexing rate will be applied as for the personal taxation system.

For those able to work, basic financial assistance will be only partially indexed. However, financial assistance for seeking employment will be increased, and a participation premium will be added to gradually boost the employment-assistance allowance. In this way, the government wishes to acknowledge recipients' efforts to improve their situation.

For example, without considering the Participation Premium, this measure will increase the annual benefit in 2005 by:

- \$36 for a single person able to work
- \$120 for a single person with significant employment limitations
- \$60 for a couple able to work
- \$180 for a couple with significant employment limitations

INDEXING OF BASIC EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE BENEFITS IN 2005 (in dollars)

	Currently	January 2005 ¹	Increase
ANNUAL BENEFIT			
Single person			
Able to work ²	6,396	6,432	36
With significant employment limitations	9,372	9,492	120
Couple			
Able to work ²	9,900	9,960	60
With significant employment limitations	14,004	14,184	180

1. Assessment based on a projected 2005 indexing rate of 1.3% for households with a severely limited capacity, in consideration of projected inflation for October 2003 to September 2004. This rate is based on an estimate and used for illustrative purposes only.

2. Benefits for people without a severely limited capacity for employment are indexed at half the indexing rate applicable to recipients with a severely limited capacity for employment.

A new work premium

The government has decided to make employment more profitable for low-income earners as well as those receiving employment assistance, whether single or part of a family.

Starting January 1, 2005, a work premium will be offered to all low-income households, including single people and couples without children who are currently ineligible.

The new Work Premium will reach 535,000 low-income households, including:

- 200,000 families with children
- 335,000 single people and couples without children

WORK PREMIUM (in dollars)

	Single Person	Couple Without Children	Single-Parent Family, One or More Children	Couple, One or More Children
WORK INCOME				
1,000	0	0	0	0
2,000	0	0	0	0
3,000	42	0	180	0
4,000	112	28	480	100
5,000	182	98	780	350
10,000	481	448	2,160	1,600
14,900 ¹	0	774	1,670	2,790
15,000	0	764	1,660	2,780
20,000	0	264	1,160	2,280
30,000	0	0	160	1,280
40,000	0	0	0	280
50,000	0	0	0	0

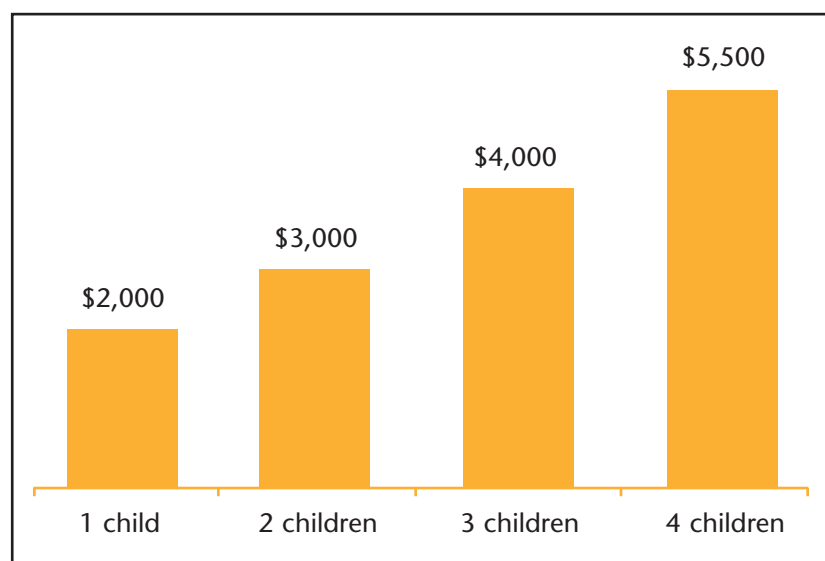
1. Income for a full-time job at the minimum wage of \$7.45/hour effective May 1, 2004, for 2,000 hours of work

A new Child Assistance measure

The government has announced a universal Child Assistance measure that will increase support to low-income families in particular.

Under this measure, a low-income couple will receive \$2,000 for one child, \$3,000 for two children, \$4,000 for three children, and \$5,500 for four children.

MAXIMUM CHILD ASSISTANCE—LOW-INCOME COUPLE WITH ONE CHILD



This new measure will provide more support for families than the current system.

NEW CHILD ASSISTANCE MEASURE—SINGLE-INCOME COUPLE WITH ONE CHILD (2005, in dollars/year)

WORK INCOME	Current System	New System	
	Family Allowance	Child Assistance	Tax Relief
0	625	2,000	1,375
5,000	625	2,000	1,375
10,000	625	2,000	1,375
15,000	625	2,000	1,375
20,000	625	2,000	1,375
25,000	80	2,000	1,920
30,000	80	2,000	1,920

A significant increase in disposable income

The following three measures will help to significantly increase the disposable income of social-assistance recipients and low-income earners.

Social-assistance recipients

Considering the combined effect of these three measures, the 2005 disposable income of **recipients with significant employment limitations** with no income will be:

- \$10,034 for a single person (increase of \$123)
- \$14,958 for a couple without children (increase of \$180)
- \$15,989 for a single-parent family with one child (increase of \$895)
- \$23,894 for a couple with two children (increase of \$1,930)

Without considering the Participation Premium, the 2005 disposable income of **households able to work but having no income** will be:

- \$6,929 for a single person (increase of \$36)
- \$10,734 for a couple without children (increase of \$60)
- \$12,929 for a single-parent family with one child (increase of \$811)
- \$19,670 for a couple with two children (increase of \$1,810)

Full-time workers earning minimum wage

Given the planned increase in the minimum wage from \$7.30/hour currently to \$7.60/hour on May 1, 2005, the 2005 disposable income of a full-time worker at minimum wage will be:

- \$13,723 for a single person (increase of \$388)
- \$15,838 for a couple without children (increase of \$1,264)
- \$22,088 for a single-parent family with one child (increase of \$2,605)
- \$26,790 for a couple with two children (increase of \$5,030)

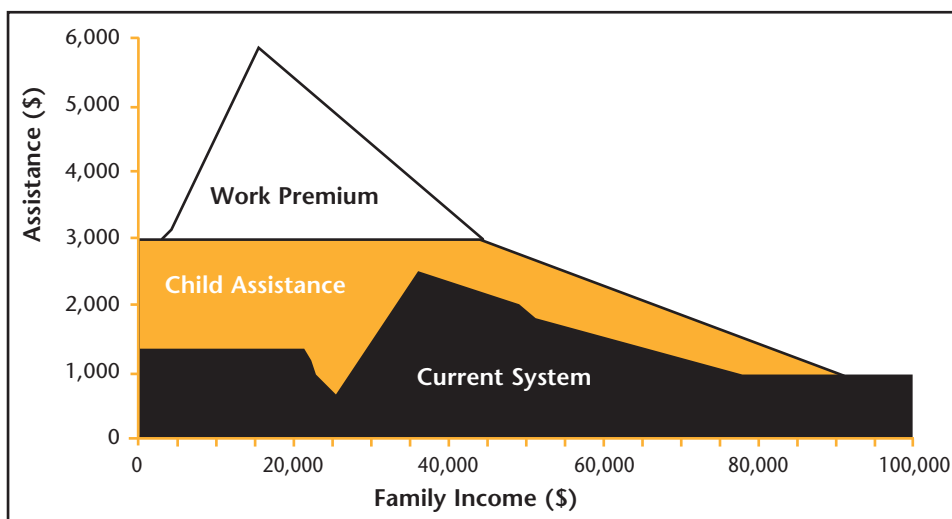
IMPACT ON DISPOSABLE INCOME OF CERTAIN TYPES OF HOUSEHOLDS (full year 2005, in dollars)

	DISPOSABLE INCOME		
	Before 2004-2005 Budget	After 2004-2005 Budget	Impact
WITH SIGNIFICANT EMPLOYMENT LIMITATIONS			
No work income			
Single person ¹	9,911	10,034	123
Couple without children ²	14,778	14,958	180
Single-parent family, 1 child	15,094	15,989	895
Couple, 1 child ²	18,479	20,034	1,555
Couple, 2 children ²	1,964	23,894	1,930
ABLE TO WORK			
No work income			
Single person ¹	6,893	6,929	36
Couple without children ²	10,674	10,734	60
Single-parent family, 1 child	12,118	12,929	811
Couple, 1 child ²	14,375	15,810	1,435
Couple, 2 children ²	17,860	19,670	1,810
Minimum wage, full time ³			
Single person ¹	3,335	13,723	388
Couple without children ²	14,574	15,838	1,264
Single-parent family, 1 child	19,483	22,088	2,605
Couple, 1 child ²	18,275	22,930	4,655
Couple, 2 children ²	21,760	26,790	5,030

1. Unmarried person under age 65 living alone
2. Single work income
3. At \$7.30/hour for 2,000 hours of work

Measures aimed at increasing the income of low-income families not only significantly increase their disposable income, but also correct a number of problems in Québec's tax system.

COMPARISON OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO SINGLE-INCOME COUPLES WITH TWO CHILDREN—2005



Note: Household not requesting benefits under PWA program.

\$329 million invested in housing

For social housing, the *2004–2005 Budget Speech* announced an additional investment of \$329 million, broken down as follows:

- \$256 million to build 16,000 low-cost, affordable housing units
- \$39 million to adapt the dwellings of 6,010 people with disabilities
- \$34 million in rent supplements to 5,276 households to ease the effects of the housing shortage

Overall, this additional investment will help over 27,000 households.

The government intends to achieve the objective of building 16,000 housing units as soon as possible, according to the capacity of community partners.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT IN HOUSING AND NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS ASSISTED-2004-2005 BUDGET

	Investment Over 3 Years (\$ million)	Number of Households Assisted
Build 16,000 low-cost and affordable housing units	256	16,000
Adapt the dwellings of 6,010 people with disabilities	39	6,010
Provide rent supplements to 5,276 households to ease the effects of the housing shortage	34	5,276
Total	329	27,286



Significant measures to improve the lives of employment-assistance recipients

The *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* sets out a number of amendments to the Employment-Assistance Program. In the *2004–2005 Budget Speech*, the government announced the following significant measures in this vein that will be included in the government action plan.

Broaden the partial exemption for child support income under the Employment-Assistance Program to include all families

Broadening the monthly exemption of \$100 for child support income to all families with one dependent child means that approximately 11,600 families will receive a \$100 increase in their monthly benefit.

This measure representing an investment of \$46 million becomes effective on January 1, 2006.

A low-income cutoff for social assistance

To protect employment-assistance recipients from too drastic a cut in their benefits, the minimum benefit principle of the Employment-Assistance Program will be added to the *Act respecting income support, employment assistance and social solidarity*.

Thus, 100% of the basic benefit to which recipients are currently entitled will be protected from administrative sanctions, except in cases of fraud or debt repayment.

This new low-income cutoff following changes to the income security system ties the principle of reciprocity to incentives, rather than penalties. The government has chosen to promote voluntary action by having confidence in people. This measure represents an investment of \$38 million and becomes effective on April 1, 2005.

Encouraging savings by low-income households

Asset recording rules will be eased to promote individual autonomy and make allowance for certain temporary financial difficulties. This measure represents an investment of \$23 million and becomes effective on January 1, 2006.

Stable funding under the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire

To support the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire, the government will grant \$4.5 million to this network over the duration of the Action Plan. This will benefit employment-assistance recipients as well as other low-income groups.

The preceding measures are described in Part III of this document.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION AS ANNOUNCED IN THE 2004-2005 BUDGET

Over the next five years, in millions of dollars

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	Five-Year Total
Increase the income of low-income individuals and families						
Indexing of social-assistance benefits						
Significant employment limitations: full indexing	4	21	45	71	99	240
No severely limited capacity for employment						
• Indexing	3	14	28	43	58	146
• Participation Premium	2	6	21	43	58	129
Subtotal	9	41	94	157	215	515
Work Premium ¹	10	68	144	144	144	510
Child Assistance ¹	112	359	201	201	201	1,074
Subtotal	131	468	439	502	560	2,099
Investments in social housing						
Build 16,000 low-cost, affordable housing units	75	91	91	-	-	256
Adapt the dwellings of 6,010 people with disabilities	13	14	13	-	-	39
Grant rent supplements to 5,276 households to ease the effects of the housing shortage	17	7	4	6	-	34
Subtotal	104	112	107	6	-	329
Other significant measures for employment-assistance recipients						
Offer all families a partial exemption on child support income under the Employment - Assistance Program	0	4	14	14	14	46
Establish a low-income cutoff for welfare	0	10	10	10	10	38
Encourage savings by low-income households	0	2	7	7	7	23
Invest in the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire	1	1	1	1	1	5
Subtotal	1	17	32	32	32	112
Total	236	596	577	540	592	2,540

Note: Amounts have been rounded off.

Source: Ministère des Finances du Québec

1. Includes only the portion intended for low-income households according to the low-income measure (before taxes)



IMPACT OF MEASURES ON THE DISPOSABLE INCOME OF LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

The measures announced in the **Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion** have a significant impact on the disposable income² of low-income households.

Households able to work

In 2005, the measures implemented by the government will increase the disposable income of households able to work.

- The disposable income of households **with no work income** will increase by:
 - \$811 for a single-parent family with one child
 - \$1,186 for a single-parent family with two children
 - \$1,435 for a couple with one child
 - \$1,810 for a couple with two children
- Also in 2005, the disposable income of households at **the employment-assistance eligibility limit** will increase by:
 - \$2,967 for a single-parent family with one child
 - \$3,342 for a single-parent family with two children
 - \$4,195 for a couple with one child
 - \$4,570 for a couple with two children
- **Action plan** measures will increase the disposable income of households with earnings corresponding to **full-time employment at minimum wage** by
 - \$2,605 for a single-parent family with one child
 - \$2,980 for a single-parent family with two children
 - \$4,655 for a couple with one child
 - \$5,030 for a couple with two children

Households with significant employment limitations

In 2005, **Action Plan** measures will increase the disposable income of households with significant employment limitations and no work income by:

- \$895 for a single-parent family with one child
- \$1,270 for a single-parent family with two children
- \$1,555 for a couple with one child
- \$1,930 for a couple with two children

In concrete terms, this means that in 2005, a couple with significant employment limitations and two children will receive \$23,894 in income, i.e., a genuine **guaranteed minimum income**.

2. Total income after deduction of direct individual taxes and various other duties, licenses, and permits, including hospital insurance and health insurance premiums

IMPACT OF MEASURES ON DISPOSABLE INCOME OF CERTAIN TYPES OF HOUSEHOLDS

(Full year 2005, in dollars)

	Current Disposable Income	Impact of 2004-2005 Budget Social-assistance Indexing ¹	Work Premium	Child Assistance	Minimum Wage Increase ²	New Disposable Income	Total Impact
HOUSEHOLDS ABLE TO WORK							
No work income							
Single person	6,893	36	0	0	0	6,929	3
Couple without children	0,674	60	0	0	0	10,734	6
Single-parent family, 1 child	12,118	36	0	775	0	12,929	81
Single-parent family, 2 children	15,603	36	0	1,150	0	16,789	1,18
Couple, 1 child	14,375	60	0	1,375	0	15,810	1,43
Couple, 2 children	17,860	60	0	1,750	0	19,670	1,810
Current employment assistance eligibility limit³							
Single person	9,643	37	504	0	0	10,184	541
Couple without children	14,574	60	773	0	0	15,407	833
Single-parent family, 1 child	14,818	36	2,156	775	0	17,785	2,967
Single-parent family, 2 children	18,303	36	2,156	1,150	0	21,645	3,342
Couple, 1 child	18,275	60	2,760	1,375	0	22,470	4,195
Couple, 2 children	21,760	60	2,760	1,750	0	26,330	4,570
Full-time employment at minimum wage⁴							
Single person	13,335	0	21	0	367	13,723	388
Couple without children	14,574	60	770	0	434	15,838	1,264
Single-parent family, 1 child	19,483	0	1,700	502	403	22,088	2,605
Single-parent family, 2 children	22,968	0	1,700	877	403	25,948	2,980
Couple, 1 child	18,275	60	2,750	1,375	470	22,930	4,655
Couple, 2 children	21,760	60	2,750	1,750	470	26,790	5,030
HOUSEHOLDS WITH SIGNIFICANT EMPLOYMENT LIMITATIONS							
No work income							
Single person	9,911	123	0	0	0	10,034	123
Couple without children	14,778	180	0	0	0	14,958	180
Single-parent family, 1 child	15,094	120	0	775	0	15,989	895
Single-parent family, 2 children	18,579	120	0	1,150	0	19,849	1,270
Couple, 1 child	18,479	180	0	1,375	0	20,034	1,555
Couple, 2 children	21,964	180	0	1,750	0	23,894	1,930

Source: Ministère des Finances du Québec

1. Reflects projected increase from \$7.30/hour currently to \$7.60/hour on May 1, 2005
2. According to a projected 2005 indexing rate of 1.3% for households with a severely limited capacity for employment and half this rate for households without a severely limited capacity for employment
3. Employment-assistance indexing increases the current program eligibility limits
4. At the rate of \$7.30/hour effective on March 30, 2004, for 2,000 hours of work



Part Three

IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLAN

The various measures presented and the initiatives taken by the government departments concerned all centre on four main goals:

1. Improve the lives of people living in poverty
2. Prevent poverty and social exclusion
3. Involve society as a whole
4. Ensure consistent, coherent action

These four goals are a response to the provisions of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*.





1 IMPROVE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

Background

This objective will be approached from four angles:

- Step up financial assistance for families
- Bolster the incomes of low-income earners
- Help employment-assistance recipients find jobs
- Step up financial support for employment-assistance recipients.

As a first step to improving the lives of low-income earners, measures must be implemented to ensure that work is more attractive than employment assistance in that it enables workers to progressively overcome poverty. Increasing the minimum wage is a key strategy in this regard.

In its *2004–2005 Budget Speech*, the government announced both that it would adjust employment-assistance benefits annually and follow through with the employment-assistance commitments set out in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. The government also said it would press on with reforms to simplify the income security system and ensure that it promotes employment and autonomy.

By 2006, there will be over 640,000 new job vacancies to fill in Québec³. Nearly 300,000 will be new jobs related to economic growth and—a unique occurrence in Québec history—over 340,000 will be jobs vacated because of retirement due to an aging population. Now more than ever, we must all work together to promote economic development and support those who need it the most so that as many people as possible can benefit from this prosperity. The fight against poverty and social exclusion must be waged by ensuring that all those capable of working are employed. Only this way will people attain financial autonomy and take their places as full-fledged citizens.

To improve the lives of low-income earners, initiatives must also be taken to support the unemployed in their efforts to develop their potential and find jobs. Public employment services and active job-seeking measures play key roles in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion by tying in with the economic development efforts of Québec's regions and large cities. The same holds true for community organizations working in the field of labor and employment.

The ongoing participation of labour market partners is also essential. For jobs to be a veritable priority, employers must incorporate job maintenance into their growth strategies. Moreover, in cooperation with worker associations, they must encourage the integration of disadvantaged groups into the workforce. On the other hand, we need a clear picture of companies' worker requirements in order

3. Perspective sectorielle du marché du travail au Québec 2002–2006



to tailor professional and vocational training to their needs and thereby help those in training develop the skills they need to find jobs.

The contribution of the social economy is also of key importance, as much for the services it offers to persons living in poverty as for the job potential it represents.

A new program, the Income support program for workers affected by collective dismissals in the resource regions, is now in place. The resource regions were targeted to prevent workers from having to leave their regions, use their savings, or liquidate a portion of their assets. This program will help curb the exodus of skilled workers from these regions. Under the terms of the program, workers will receive income support for one year after their employment assistance runs out, without the value of their assets or severance pay being taken into account.

Access to decent, affordable housing and an adequate supply of nutritious food at reasonable cost is also essential for personal welfare. These concerns will be addressed by specific provisions of the current government action plan to help increase the disposable income of people living in poverty.

Measures

ENHANCE EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO MEET COMMITMENTS UNDER THE ACT

Once the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* was adopted, the Employment-Assistance Program was revamped to abolish reductions due to shared accommodation and the calculation of accommodation costs. In addition, the government indexed all employment-assistance benefits in January 2004.

Measure 1.1

Adjust employment-assistance benefits annually

The government will adjust employment-assistance benefits annually for the next five years, based on the same scale as that used for the personal taxation system. This will tie together the two main components of Québec's income redistribution system. For those who are able to work, basic financial assistance will be only partially indexed, but support for job integration efforts will be increased to reward participation. The result will be a gradual increase in employment-assistance allowances.

This measure will benefit some 350,000 recipient households, including 220,000 recipients who are able to work and 130,000 who have a severely limited capacity for employment.

Measure 1.2

More flexibly account for assets under the Employment-Assistance Program

Numerous studies have shown that possessing liquid assets, personal property, and real estate has a positive impact on the ability of people living in poverty to become more financially autonomous. While not questioning the principle that those in financial need should use their own resources before turning to government measures, the government, as part of a new income security plan aimed at fostering personal autonomy, intends to amend the current rules to encourage the poorest Quebecers to save and acquire assets.

The government intends to encourage those living in poverty to save to buy a home, go to school, or become self-employed. Beneficiaries will be able to undertake personal development projects (housing, training, employment) without affecting their eligibility for employment assistance or diminishing the amounts to which they are entitled.

With this in mind, the government will re-examine the way assets are treated and make the rules more flexible in order to account for transitional financial difficulties and promote autonomy. As in Measure 1.5, the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire will also receive more support from the government so that it is able to better help employment-assistance recipients achieve autonomy through savings.



Measure 1.3

Protect recipients' employment-assistance benefits

Currently, employment-assistance recipients may see their financial support cut back for numerous reasons, notably if they owe amounts to the Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale, et de la Famille (MESSF) or if a penalty is imposed. While recognizing the fact that all citizens, employment-assistance recipients included, have obligations, such reductions can decrease employment assistance cheques dramatically. For this reason, the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* sets out that the government action plan must propose amendments to the Employment-Assistance Program "to introduce the minimum benefit principle, a threshold below which benefits cannot be reduced by reason of the application of administrative sanctions, deductions or a combination of both."

To protect employment-assistance recipients and comply with the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*⁴, the minimum benefit principle of the Employment-Assistance Program will be added to the *Act respecting income support, employment assistance and social solidarity*. Thus, 100% of the basic amount to which recipients are entitled will be protected against this type of reduction, except in cases of fraud or debt repayment.

With the introduction of this type of low-income cutoff as part of changes to the income security system, the principle of reciprocity will be based on incentives rather than punishment. Trust and rewards are the government's chosen course.

Measure 1.4

Broaden the partial exemption for child support income in the Employment-Assistance Program to include all families

The current rules of the Employment-Assistance Program stipulate that child support income for families with at least one child under age five is exempt from benefit calculation purposes, up to a maximum of \$100/month per household. In accordance with the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*⁵, under which a portion of child support income for any family with a dependent child of any age under its care is to be excluded from calculations, this \$100/month exemption will be broadened to include all families with a dependent child in their care, thereby increasing the support available to nearly 11,600 families, most of them single-parent families headed by women.

As discrepancies currently exist in how various government programs classify child support income, the coherence of Québec policies in this regard should be verified. The *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* requires that by March 5, 2005, the minister responsible for its application⁶, in conjunction with the other ministers concerned, submit a report and make recommendations on the best approach to take with regard to child support income in all government programs. An interdepartmental committee will be created to review this matter, which will eventually lead to more consistent, equitable government action. The new income security system will incorporate committee conclusions.

4. Section 15

5. Section 15, subsection 4

6. Section 61

Commitments

Under the Action Plan, as prescribed in section 15 of the Act, the government will implement the above measures as part of a more positive approach to social assistance that puts fostering personal autonomy first.

Measure 1.5

Provide funding to the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire

The Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire is made up of 17 organizations—nine community funds and eight lending circles in 11 administrative regions of Québec.

These organizations grant credit to people with low incomes who want to start their own businesses. They manage "micro-credit" projects to promote the financial autonomy of an at-risk clientele that often has little access to conventional financing.

Loan amounts vary from \$500 to \$20,000. Technical assistance is also available to help prospective entrepreneurs structure their projects.

The government will inject about \$5 million (4.5) in funding to support the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire during the course of this Action Plan. This measure will benefit both employment-assistance recipients and other low-income earners.

Beginning April 1, 2004, support for the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire will be transferred from the Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome to the Ministère du Développement économique et régional.



IMPROVE THE LIVES OF LOW-INCOME EARNERS: FIGHT POVERTY BY PROMOTING WORK

Measure 1.6

Annually adjust the minimum wage to reflect changes in average income in Québec

The government has already announced its intention to increase the minimum wage from \$7.30/hour to \$7.45 on May 1, 2004, and from \$7.45 to \$7.60 on May 1, 2005. Similar increases will be made on the same dates for gratuity workers, whose minimum wage will rise from \$6.55 to \$6.70, then from \$6.70 to \$6.85. These increases will affect nearly 200,000 workers, primarily women.

Measure 1.7

Provide better support for low-income earners by introducing the new Work Premium

Currently, many part-time workers receiving employment assistance may see little financial advantage to working, since above a certain income each dollar they earn is deducted from the financial assistance they receive.

The government intends to provide additional financial assistance to low-income earners and employment-assistance recipients who declare employment income in order to make employment more attractive. This assistance will take the form of a work premium, which will replace the PWA program and be available to all low-income earners, whether they receive employment assistance or not and whether they have a family or are single.

The Work Premium will improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and fairness of current employment income support measures. The assistance will reach all those in need.

It is estimated that over 500,000 households not currently receiving PWA program benefits will be eligible for this tax credit. The maximum annual premium will range from nearly \$500 for individuals to \$2,800 for couples with children, paid in four quarterly installments.

This measure represents \$510 million in additional support over the next five fiscal years.

STEP UP EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT TO BETTER ASSIST JOB HUNTERS

Québec will increasingly convert passive support measures (in the form of employment assistance) to active support measures that help people enter the job market. To further its efforts and ensure that no one is left out, the Québec government and its labour market partners agree that the federal government must bring all labour force and employment development resources together into a unified package so they can be better adapted to people's needs. Among other things, the federal government will have to step up its contribution to the Fonds de développement du marché du travail (FDMT) to the maximum permitted under the *Employment Insurance Act*⁷ and adjust Employment Insurance Account eligibility so the fund can be more widely used to assist those who are unemployed for long periods of time. Discussions are under way on the matter.

These additional resources will be used to develop the services available to those affected by poverty and implement innovative approaches and strategies. The process will fall under efforts to harmonize existing measures and be backed by a unified employment support and income security network that will facilitate access to such services so that those who are jobless but able to work regain their autonomy as quickly as possible.

Effective immediately, Québec will boost its investment to better support those who commit to active employment measures. This additional investment will be used to increase the benefits available to those who take part in active employment support measures and improve access to employment through faster, more effective job placement initiatives.

Measure 1.8

Participation Premium: increase minimum employment-assistance allowances for employment-assistance recipients

To further encourage employment-assistance recipients to develop their job readiness and better reward their efforts to do so, employment-assistance allowances for those participating in active measures will be raised from \$130 to \$150 a month to begin with. This allowance is to cover participation-related expenses (additional clothes, meals away from home, etc.).

Under the Action Plan, the allowance will be gradually increased in the form of a participation premium to better support people in their efforts to enter the job market.

Measure 1.9

Intervene early with new employment-assistance applicants able to work

Early intervention heightens a person's chance of entering the job market quickly. This was the underlying principle behind the "Place à l'emploi" program introduced in July 2003. In keeping with this new philosophy, Emploi-Québec will step in early to help employment-assistance applicants who are able to work. The public employment service helps applicants identify training and jobs available immediately, and the approach will direct employment-assistance applicants into many of the 640,000 jobs that will be available by 2006.

7. Increase in the federal government's contribution by nearly \$200 million/year



This new philosophy of early intervention will make the system much more effective for applicants, who will be assisted much sooner than in the past.

Priorities for Additional Investment in the FDMT

If the federal government provides funds that can be used in a flexible manner, Emploi-Québec will be able to develop the services it offers to a number of the groups most affected by poverty.

Measure 1.10

Increase participation and improve access to employment assistance for groups most affected by poverty

More specifically, federal government funds would be used to support:

- Families with young children
- Workers aged 55 and over
- People with a severely limited capacity for employment

Families with young children

Most employment-assistance households with children under age five face a great many obstacles to entering the job market—childcare, transportation, time management, etc. In 2002-2003, some 35,600 households receiving employment assistance had children under five. Of them, 65% were single-parent families, 95% headed by women.

Where employment assistance is concerned, additional efforts must be made to reach out to this clientele and help these individuals attain financial autonomy. Impact studies show that the heads of single-parent families are among those who benefit most from participation in active employment-assistance measures.

The Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille (MESSF) is currently looking at a variety of ways parents with young children could be encouraged to take part in active measures on a voluntary basis, while still recognizing the need for additional support.

As part of this initiative, subject to federal funding, the government will take innovative approaches to employment support in conjunction with the integrated support measures the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) offers young parents at risk vis-à-vis chronic poverty. It will also implement measures to promote the integration of female heads of single-parent families into non-traditional jobs and jobs with future potential so they can improve their financial autonomy. The "Ma place au soleil" program already provides such services to young mothers under age 25.

These efforts fall under Emploi-Québec's intervention strategy for women workers.

Workers aged 55 and over

Again depending on federal funding, Emploi-Québec will tailor active employment assistance to the needs of workers aged 55 and over and experiment with a measure that pairs up income supplements with employment assistance.

People with significant employment limitations

The implementation of an overall strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion must be used as an opportunity to expand the services offered to those with personal constraints and significant employment limitations or who need long-term support for job entry. With appropriate assistance, these people can one day hope to play a role in society and achieve personal success in a productive activity, if not in the regular job market then at least in the social economy.

Job integration enterprises help marginalized groups learn a trade in real-life work situations while enjoying full-time employee status.

The "Vocational Integration Contract" measure is designed to encourage the hiring and job integration of persons with a disability by compensating employers for additional expenses incurred as a result of a new employee's impairment.

Because of their limitations, workers with disabilities are sometimes less productive and may require more guidance from their employers. Other possible expenses include adapting the workplace or work station to their needs. The funding granted compensates employers for reduced productivity and special needs related to integrating people with disabilities into the workplace.

This program is essentially aimed at providing equal opportunity in the job market for people with disabilities.

Adapted work centres develop and sustain jobs that are adapted to the professional needs of people with disabilities and increase their employability. Québec's 44 adapted work centres are not-for-profit organizations recognized as social economy enterprises.

During the course of this Action Plan and with federal support through the Employment Insurance Account, additional resources may be allocated to these measures aimed at groups affected by poverty.

Support the socio-occupational integration of immigrants

Under this Action Plan, enhanced cooperation between Emploi-Québec, the MESSF and the Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration (MRCI) will help better harmonize the socio-occupational integration services available to new immigrants and members of visible minority groups.

Measure 1.11

Better support the socio-occupational integration of immigrants and members of visible minority groups

Depending on their situation, immigrants and members of visible minorities (born here or abroad) sometimes face obstacles to employment, including a poor grasp of French, the cultural mores of Québec society, and the way the job market works, difficulty getting their training and experience recognized together with various forms of discrimination.

To assist with job market entry, the MESSF and the MRCI will sign an interdepartmental agreement to step up their cooperation, especially at the local and regional levels. This agreement will seek to harmonize all services for immigrants and visible minorities—for refugees and women in particular—to better resolve the problems they face and foster their socioprofessional integration.

This agreement will soon be made public by the MESSF in conjunction with the MRCI.

A SEPARATE PLAN FOR THOSE WITH SIGNIFICANT EMPLOYMENT LIMITATIONS

Measure 1.12

Create a separate income support system for those with significant employment limitations

Not all Quebecers can achieve financial autonomy through work. Some have significant employment limitations. However, that does not mean they are not or cannot be active members of society. There are many other ways to contribute to society than through paid employment.

Services must be adjusted to encourage innovative approaches to assistance and guidance—either to help find employment for those who wish to work, or find another form of active participation. We must also provide more generous benefits to those who are unable to hold a job. Whatever the circumstances, we must always promote inclusion and social participation.

This special system will have a simple structure that adapts services to the needs of those with significant employment limitations, notably with regard to owning and accumulating assets.

The system's goal will be to implement mechanisms to improve the way the community views those who cannot work and to step up the amount of assistance these people receive as society grows more wealthy.

Support innovation in employment and social integration and long-term support

Many people living in poverty—notably those who have been on employment assistance for a long time—have serious trouble finding employment and experience exclusion and marginalization. This makes it paramount to innovate and develop new formulas that go beyond the employment assistance currently available.

Recipients with serious psychosocial obstacles to social integration will be encouraged and supported through cooperation agreements between the MESSF, the health and social services network and community organizations to ensure that these needy clienteles have access to continuous, integrated services in their communities.

The poor and socially marginalized are not all at the same point on the continuum from social to occupational integration. Many may have the potential to hold down regular, special-needs, or even "solidarity jobs," while others will never have this ability. A variety of methods and a flexible approach are needed to reflect the many differences and help them break out of their current situation and realize their potential at their own pace. Although skills development programs already exist, they must be improved and remain available.



IMPROVE ACCESS TO DECENT, AFFORDABLE HOUSING

For many low-income households in Québec, housing is the biggest yearly expense. Any rise in the cost of housing has a direct impact on their ability to meet their other needs. Often, those living in poverty devote over half of their incomes to putting a roof over their heads. For them, finding decent, affordable housing is particularly difficult, especially in cities where housing costs are higher. This is why housing assistance in many countries is one of the cornerstones in the fight against poverty.

Although affordability is the main problem, it is not the only one households face when seeking housing—some have other needs because of physical, psychosocial or family factors. These households often require special programs adapted to their needs.

Public housing support therefore has a sizable social dimension and must be seen as a necessary, integral part of the effort to fight poverty. It is strongly linked to improving health and revitalizing urban and rural communities, which puts it in an increasingly intersectoral light.

The government has undertaken to craft a Québec housing policy under the aegis of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Sports and Recreation, in order to better coordinate its short- and long-term actions in this regard and lessen the effect of the housing crisis on underprivileged groups.

Measure 1.13

Increase the number of public housing and other low-cost units and step up their construction

The government has committed to investing \$256 million to build 16,000 public and low-cost housing units.

To this end, the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 measures under the "AccèsLogis Québec" program were moved forward and launched on May 28, 2003, and April 1, 2004, respectively. This will result in the construction of 2,600 public and community housing units.

Measure 1.14

Grant rent supplements to 5,276 households to offset the effect of the housing shortage

This program will have a total budget of \$34 million and will benefit 5,276 households over the next three years.

Measure 1.15

Adapt the homes of over 6,000 people with disabilities

The Residential Adaptation Assistance Program (RAAP) helps people with disabilities cover the cost of renovations needed to adapt their homes to make them accessible. The program covers the full cost—up to \$16,000 for an owner, \$8,000 for a renter and \$4,000 for a boarder. The average subsidy is \$11,461 per person.

To help the program process new files and those on the waiting list more quickly, its budget will be increased by \$28.8 million over three years to cover 2,550 more applications.

Since the program was put into place, the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) has funded the installation of 3,460 platform lifts.

Over the last few years, there have been a number of accidents involving this type of equipment. To prevent such accidents, the SHQ has begun systematically inspecting platform lifts to take any corrective measures necessary.

So the organization can continue inspecting and repairing platform lifts, the program's budget will be increased by \$10 million over three years.

Measure 1.16

Adopt an integrated management framework for public housing support services in the community

The Société d'habitation du Québec and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux have formed a joint committee to better oversee the development of public and community housing projects for those with diminishing abilities or in need of support. This type of service aims to help them remain in their home or take steps toward social reintegration. The committee ensures that existing public housing facilities have the services they need to remain viable. Ongoing support will be provided by local health and social services network development agencies and CLSCs.

Measure 1.17

Foster community housing initiatives

Through the Programme d'aide aux organismes communautaires (POAC) program, the SHQ aims to foster joint community housing initiatives. The program provides funding to community housing organizations that work specifically to:

- improve the living conditions of all Quebecers
- encourage people to take charge of their living conditions.

Those with housing problems are not only excluded from the housing market, but also experience social integration difficulties. That is why the SHQ has also decided to continue with its community and social initiatives assistance program, Programme d'aide à l'initiative communautaire et sociale (PAICS).

The result of a partnership between the SHQ and the MESSF, this program funds ad hoc community-based projects to give subsidized housing residents more control over their housing.

Measure 1.18

Improve the services available to those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

The phenomenon of homelessness in Québec is very real⁸. Over the years, measures have been implemented to fight homelessness, attenuate its effects and reduce the number of homeless people. These measures must now be intensified to ensure the accessibility, complementarity and continuity of services. Coordinating the efforts of public, private, and community organizations, government departments and health and social services providers who work with the homeless and encouraging them to work together remains a considerable challenge.

8. See Aliaga, Christel, Cécile Brousse, Louise Fournier, and Nathalie Plante, "France-Québec : une comparaison de la population des sans-domicile usagers des services d'hébergement ou de distribution de repas," in *Santé, Société et Solidarité*, a journal of Observatoire franco-québécois de la santé et de la solidarité (OFQSS), No. 3, 2003. The study used Enquête Santé-Québec data on homeless people (Québec only). Homelessness remains hard to measure, but Enquête Santé-Québec numbers are the best to date.



The government is committed to strengthening preventive measures for those at risk of homelessness, improving health and social services at temporary shelters, providing greater community follow-up and making it easier for the homeless to re-enter society's mainstream⁹.

Measure 1.19

Use the contribution of community organizations

Under the POAC's special projects component, the SHQ issued a call for proposals, particularly to develop community budget consulting services to help households unable to pay their rent because of an unexpected event such as illness, accident or temporary loss of employment.

Temporary agreements between budget counselors and financial institutions are in place to help such families stabilize their financial situations. Through pilot projects, these services will be offered to a greater number of tenants.

The government will also use various means to improve the way housing information is made available to individuals and families with low incomes.

9. The Community Action Partnership Initiative (CAPI) Program has been carried over for 2003-2006. The federal government has put up \$56.7 million in funding for this period in addition to the funding already allocated by the Québec government. From 2003 to 2006, non-recurring funding of \$3.1 million will also come from a second federal program through the Regional Homelessness Fund (RHF). Given that this program is non-recurring, new avenues for ensuring ongoing funding must be explored.

ENSURE ACCESS, IN DIGNITY, TO SUFFICIENT, GOOD QUALITY FOOD

The *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* suggests two complementary ways to ensure that everyone has access to enough nutritious food. The first is to gradually empower people through medium- and long-term intervention that provides structure and promotes personal responsibility. The second involves short-term solutions to address urgent needs.

Access to food support in the community

It is essential that people have access at all times and in a dignified way to enough nutritious, affordable food, as well as reliable, easy-to-understand information that gives them the skills and ability to make informed dietary choices. To this end, the Action Plan aims to foster cooperation with community and local partners to help poor families take charge of their own food security through structured community projects.

Measure 1.20

Continue to support community food security projects in communities and underprivileged areas

In order to support the development of alternative approaches to food security, the MSSS will update Québec's policy on nutrition in cooperation with all interested partners. Food security should be one component of the policy.

Contingency food aid

Measure 1.21

Continue to support contingency food aid projects, particularly for children

Along with food security initiatives aimed at providing permanent solutions to hunger and promoting a healthy diet, many organizations address the here and now with immediate aid for those in need. They provide rapid stopgap assistance for people in crisis situations due to a lack of food. This type of emergency support can also help users take more responsibility for their long-term survival in combination with other, more permanent solutions.

An illustration on the left side of the page shows a series of hands, one above the other, in a light orange color. The hands are positioned as if they are gently holding or supporting a heart shape in the center. The background of the entire page is a solid orange color.

ACCESS TO MEDICATION: SEEKING SOLUTIONS THROUGH A PRESCRIPTION DRUG POLICY

Québec's Prescription Drug Insurance Plan makes prescription drugs widely available to all Quebecers. It was founded on the principle of equality. By making prescription drugs more accessible to those not covered by private insurance schemes, the program sought to secure greater equality for low-income earners, employment-assistance recipients and seniors, who received their medication free of charge before.

Measure 1.22

Improve access to medication for low-income earners

To re-establish cost control and make the Prescription Drug Insurance Plan sustainable, the MSSS will draw up a prescription drug policy that incorporates far-reaching solutions to the current challenges under the plan. It is crucial that the solutions be all-encompassing.

"This policy will foster the well-being of all Quebecers—particularly more vulnerable groups—by guaranteeing fair and reasonable access to prescription drugs."¹⁰

10. *Briller parmi les meilleurs*, p. 86



2 PREVENT POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION BY PROMOTING EACH PERSON'S POTENTIAL

Background

To combat poverty and social exclusion, we must begin by attacking the causes and inequalities that prevent people from developing their full potential. Prevention begins with the family, then carries on in the school. It is intimately tied to conditions of health and well-being. It is a lifelong process that continues through education, recreation and sports, contact with culture and access to information and communication technology. Developing the full potential of all Quebecers is central to any strategy to prevent poverty and social exclusion.

In a society striving for gender equality and facing the challenges of an aging population and a low birth rate, it is critical that conditions be implemented to make it possible for those who wish to have children to do so and for the children they have to develop fully. The government thus intends to make supporting families a high priority for the future.

Government action must focus on a number of aspects of family life: supporting families financially, supporting parents in their role, adapting living environments to the needs of families, and reconciling work and family responsibilities. One of the top priorities of the latest budget was to increase family incomes, especially for low-income families. A new Child Assistance measure has been implemented to ensure straightforward, coherent action in the fight against poverty. The measure provides a universal child allowance supplemented by selective assistance in order to provide a real increase in disposable income to families living on the poverty line.

The *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* clearly reflects this priority by providing a full series of measures to assist families living in poverty or at high-risk. These preventive measures seek to step up intervention with families and children in underprivileged areas and establish a continuum of services. In order to be successful, these actions must be part of an all-encompassing, integrated approach. Research has shown that initiatives are most effective when they address the needs of the entire family—both parents and children.

Progress toward a more integrated approach to family support—especially for young families living in poverty—will be made in part by increasing assistance to community organizations in the field. Parents often feel ill-equipped or unprepared for the situations they face. For families living in poverty, particularly single-parent families with weak support networks, community organizations are an extremely important frontline resource.



The government will hold consultations with a view to developing a true policy on work-family balance. The new policy will buttress the government's efforts on behalf of families living in poverty and promote child development in underprivileged areas by providing easier access to first-rate educational childcare services.

The education reform under way to improve academic success requires global promotion and prevention initiatives in cooperation with local organizations. More joint efforts by the various stakeholders will make it possible to select the best possible programs, services, and promotion and prevention activities for schools, families and the community. This undertaking—part of a healthy schools approach—is based on a number of simultaneous, complementary strategies to promote personal and social skills development, healthy life practices, safe behaviors, and an environment conducive to the health, well-being and success of young people. These strategies also seek to prevent various problems related to health and welfare. They are complementary and extend beyond the school environment.

The Québec government recognizes that unemployed young people aged 16 to 24 with little education face specific obstacles to social and professional integration and firmly believes that these youths must take an active role in their own integration. As part of their commitment to youth, government departments and agencies will go beyond a sectoral approach and coordinate their actions around common objectives promoting the social and professional integration of young people, encouraging joint action both locally and regionally through partnership agreements. This will provide local and regional communities with ongoing government support to offer a full range of services for youths.

Through its action program, "the government will mobilize all possible resources to ensure that society helps young people get a good start in life."¹¹ The continuum of services will reach all young people from early childhood until they are fully integrated into society as adults.

Other manifestations of poverty cannot be overlooked, such as a lack of community involvement, isolation and lack of means of transportation, which prevents the elderly from participating actively in society through community activities, especially in rural regions. Seniors are also vulnerable to stereotypes—a form of discrimination resulting from attitudes and behaviors that can have a negative impact on their health and psychological well-being.

11. *Briller parmi les meilleurs*, page 164.

Measures

SUPPORT CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES TO ENSURE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Measure 2.1

Create a Child Assistance program targeting primarily low-income families

The new Child Assistance program, announced in Part II of this Action Plan, represents an investment of \$1.1 billion over the next five years.

The government is merging the family allowance program, nonrefundable tax credits for dependent children and tax reductions for families into a new Child Assistance program to increase equality among families. This universal aid is supplemented by selective assistance based on family income, which particularly benefits families living on the poverty line. This new measure will considerably improve the circumstances of vulnerable families facing poverty.

Measure 2.2

Promote the development of underprivileged children by providing easier access to high quality educational childcare services

The government is continuing to develop high quality educational childcare services, with a goal of 200,000 places by March 2006. This government initiative seeks to promote childhood development and foster equal opportunity in a stimulating environment where children can acquire the skills they need to set out on a course of academic success. As part of childcare development, the government is particularly concerned about the needs of parents with nonstandard schedules since many are also low-income earners.

In addition, a multipartnership framework agreement mostly involving early childhood daycare centres (CPEs) and CLSCs facilitates access to childcare services for parents participating in parental support programs. For example, a minimum of 5% of places in CPEs will be set aside for children registered with CLSCs and considered vulnerable due to their family or personal situations.

The MEQ also assists with school childcare and has allocated a further \$86 per child in underprivileged environments for snack programs.

Measure 2.3

Provide vulnerable families with integrated support services for pregnancy and early childhood

In accordance with its 2003-2012 national public health program and its action strategy for young people experiencing difficulties and their families, the MSSS will step up efforts to develop and consolidate an integrated system of preventive services for pregnant women, parents and children under age 6 in vulnerable situations. The MSSS's goal is to better meet the needs of parents and their children through a broad-based "family" approach targeting cooperation, complementarity and continuity of services.



Giving form to these integrated services is the "Programme de soutien aux jeunes parents" (PSJP), a support program for young parents that targets pregnant teens, teenage mothers, their spouses and their children up to age 5. The program's goal is to promote children's overall growth and development, foster parent/child bonding, encourage healthy lifestyles, and create communities and living conditions conducive to health and well-being. It also seeks to prevent and reduce social adaptation problems and developmental delays in children, reduce child abuse and neglect and support parents in their parental roles.

The services include:

- intensive prenatal and postnatal home visits by a specialized support worker, nurse, social worker, or other caseworker, depending on the family's needs
- help for participants in setting and achieving life goals as young parents
- steering families toward community resources able to help them with their social and professional integration
- infant stimulation activities
- support for collective and intersectoral projects that create environments conducive to child development.

Young parent support services now available at all CLSCs are meant to reach 3,000 families a year. The MESSF, in cooperation with the MSSS, also pays allowances to underprivileged pregnant teens taking part in the PSJP.

The program has been linked to Emploi-Québec's intervention strategy for women workers to provide PSJP participants better access to active employment support measures.

Measure 2.4

Help develop and implement innovative prevention activities for young children (up to age 6) and their families

In addition to prevention measures by the formal networks, a new fund will be established to promote community initiatives aimed at young children of underprivileged families. This partnership between Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon and the Gouvernement du Québec will be based on concrete enjoying community support. The agreement will be an important step in the development of private-public partnerships to fight poverty and social exclusion.

FONDATION LUCIE ET ANDRÉ CHAGNON

The Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon was created in 2000. It is one of the largest organizations of its kind in Canada, with some \$1.4 billion in assets. The foundation's mission is to improve the physical and social health of individuals, their families and their communities by focusing on the causes of illness and social and economic exclusion rather than their consequences. The foundation works with the Québec government in the project "Québec en forme," which promotes physical activity among young people.

Negotiations are currently under way on an agreement in principle to have the MESSF and the Fondation Chagnon fund specific projects in equal parts. This agreement will provide for intense, concentrated, continuous action in support of underprivileged children aged 6 and under and their families, addressing their challenges, helping them permanently overcome poverty and, most importantly, preventing intergenerational poverty.

The agreement will primarily support integrated preventive action for young children and their families living in poverty, including access to recreational activities, and encourage innovation in this regard. To be accepted, projects must enjoy community consensus and have the financial support of community stakeholders. In addition to financial assistance, the fund will provide technical assistance to help carry out the projects.

All projects will be systematically evaluated in order to glean insight into the most effective approaches. There will be two objectives: to ensure that the children in the program reach the same level of development as the average Québec child by the time they begin school and to foster their parents' financial independence. The Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon and the government will each invest an initial \$5 million in the fund.





YOUNG PEOPLE'S SUCCESS AND INTEGRATION: BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

In a knowledge economy where the quality of human resources is the prime asset for economic progress, the academic success and socioprofessional integration of youth are key government priorities. Young people's circumstances vary greatly depending on where they live and whether they are in school, have dropped out or are employment- assistance recipients.

In recent years, we have seen a substantial improvement in their employment situation and a significant drop in the numbers receiving employment assistance. Nevertheless, a large number remain at risk of exclusion if nothing is done to support their efforts at socioprofessional integration and help them obtain the training and tools they need to hold down jobs. Such is the case for many youths who leave school before properly preparing for active life, often having lost confidence in their ability to succeed.

A good number of them are on income security—all too often a multigenerational phenomenon. Of the 19,800 young people receiving employment assistance in December 1999, 73% were from families who were also receiving or had received benefits. Among those who were fully able to work, this proportion was 80%.

Considerable effort has been made in recent years to support them in their personal and work lives, both under the "Solidarité jeunesse" action research project and its satellite projects and the Individualized Integration, Training and Employment Plan, the mandatory job training program for youth under age 25 and without dependent children. Thanks to Emploi-Québec's commitment to job preparation, job integration, sustainable employment, job stability, and job creation, young people have access to training or social and professional integration programs.

"Solidarité jeunesse" and the job training program have shown us that support for these young people can only be successful if services are ongoing, which requires considerable cooperation among government departments. Studies show that the multiple challenges facing youths (low self-esteem, lack of education, little family support, etc.) require personalized action that addresses all their needs.

Under the June 2003 budget, the government decided to invest \$15 million a year to continue "Solidarité jeunesse" and even broaden it. This extension is part of the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. In addition, the MESSF announced its intention to devote \$5 million to pilot projects seeking to reconcile work and education, financially support businesses that hire young people on income security and develop concrete measures to help youths go back to school or continue their studies to obtain their first occupational certification.

Over the next five years, the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* will focus support for young people—particularly troubled youths—around three main thrusts:

- Early intervention to prevent school dropouts
- New measures promoting the continuity of services for youths aged 16 to 24 experiencing difficulties
- Progressive implementation of a youth alternative to employment assistance.

Early intervention to prevent school dropouts

Various government departments and community organizations are working together to provide young people from preschool to secondary school with services that are better adapted to their needs in order to reduce dropout rates and encourage and facilitate success in a wide range of academic disciplines from the earliest years. In this sense, the MEQ's policy *Adapting Our Schools to the Needs of All Students* and its strategy *Agir autrement* illustrate the desire to work together with particular emphasis on helping students overcome a wide range of difficulties, including those related to growing up in an underprivileged environment.

In order to adapt schools to the needs of all students, the MEQ plans to make a recurring investment of \$180 million a year in projects targeting over 120,000 preschool, elementary school, and secondary school students.

The *Agir autrement* strategy is directed at secondary school students in underprivileged environments and will reach over 100,000 students. Nearly 200 schools will share a \$125 million budget over five years.

Agir autrement calls on the education community to identify risk factors that can have repercussions on young people's success, but that can be addressed and influenced. This group effort is intended to improve educational practices and school climates as well as strengthen the ties between school, family and community. Assessment of the strategy's implementation and success will be ongoing.

This strategy is supplemented by the Supporting Montréal Schools Program, which will have an annual budget of \$10 million to provide needs-based intervention for elementary school students on the Island of Montréal. Food aid for children in underprivileged areas represents an additional \$7 million investment per year.

For young girls and women, the MEQ is pursuing informational and promotional activities that steer them toward selected fields of science, engineering and computer technology as well as traditionally male-dominated trades to help diversify their career options.

As part of the MEQ-MRCI action plan for school integration and intercultural education, the MEQ will step up its support for new immigrant children with educational delays through adapted pedagogical tools, pilot projects and information and support seminars for parents and teachers.

In addition to the above projects, the MEQ will invest a \$7.2 million in the following new measures to support academic success among youths.

Measure 2.5

Run the pilot project *Famille, école et communauté : ensemble pour la réussite scolaire*

The MEQ developed this program as part of its Policy and Action Plan on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training in cooperation with the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications (MCC), the MESSF, the MSSS, the MRCI and the Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance. It involves testing a new model of education community on an intersectoral basis, using community involvement as a building block. The program's goal is to promote the academic success of elementary school students in underprivileged areas through early intervention with children between ages 2 and 12 and their families, by



developing partnerships between family, school and community.

The program aims to strengthen support for children and students in their personal and academic success and reinforce parental involvement in good school performance. The five-year program began in September 2003. Twenty-three schools in eleven school boards are now taking part in the pilot project. Schools were selected according to deprivation ratings on the MEQ's school population map.

Measure 2.6

Implement the "Programme d'aide à l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture" in underprivileged areas

The government recognizes the importance of acting as early as possible to introduce the written word to children, making it part of family life and helping parents fulfill their role in this regard, especially in underprivileged areas.

This MEQ program is being implemented in cooperation with the MCC, the MESSF and the MSSS.

The purpose of the program is to help integrate reading and writing awareness activities into family life and into the services and places used by underprivileged children aged 5 and under and their families.

The program targets families with children aged 5 and under as well as organizations working on their behalf (CPEs, CLEs, CLSCs, community-based family organizations, libraries, preschools, adult education centres, etc.).

Over the next four years, the "Programme d'aide à l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture" will be implemented to support projects in underprivileged areas in all administrative regions of Québec. The projects selected will draw on the mobilization and cooperation of all government, institutional and community stakeholders at the Québec, regional, and local levels to help public and community organizations coherently, convergently and sustainably integrate their reading and writing awareness initiatives directly into their action plans and programs in the various places underprivileged children 5 and under, their parents and their grandparents frequent.

Measure 2.7

Support schools in developing homework assistance activities

The government intends to encourage schools to develop homework assistance activities, particularly for the elementary grades and the early grades of secondary school. By organizing these activities more systematically, schools will help better reconcile the demands of work and family. Parents are often exhausted and pressed for time at the end of the work day, overwhelmed by school problems that seem beyond their abilities as parents to help, or at a loss and feeling incompetent in the face of instructions, textbooks and teaching methods.

To develop homework assistance activities, schools must mobilize their communities as well as their own staff. A number of schools have already taken laudable steps:

- Homework assistance in school daycare
- Help from student teachers, volunteers or retired teachers
- Pairing older and younger students.

These formulas must be further developed and must more effectively take into account family schedules. Above all, they must be designed to specifically address students' and families' needs.

Measure 2.8

Support secondary schools developing mentoring programs to foster academic success

Among the problems facing young "Solidarité jeunesse" participants is a lack of sufficient family support for their efforts at socio-occupational integration. The trouble many of these students have in school—and even their decision to drop out—could be prevented if they had the direct support or supervision of a mentor. Pairing up volunteers and at-risk high school students supports the efforts of teachers and family by providing a role model, applauding perseverance and effort and acting while youths are still in the school environment. In implementing *Agir autrement*, the government will encourage school boards to develop mentoring programs and work with them to arrange means of better supporting volunteers.

Step up measures and support services for youths experiencing difficulties

Measure 2.9

Provide job training for adolescents in youth centres

A pilot project running in four youth centres is helping 80 young people develop the knowledge and skills they need to find jobs and avoid marginalization once they reach the age of majority and/or set out on their own.

More specifically, the project has the following goals:

- Employment or enrollment in vocational training programs for 75% of youth centre residents when they reach the age of majority
- Preparation and guidance toward autonomy
- Development of personal support networks.

The project is an initiative of the Association des centres jeunesse du Québec (ACJQ).

Once the pilot project has run its course, the government will develop a job skill training approach for young people in youth centres as part of interdepartmental efforts to ensure a continuity of services for them and promote their socio-occupational integration. A tripartite cooperative agreement has already been signed between the MESSF, the MEQ and the ACJQ to accelerate the processing of student loan applications in order to ensure that no young adult in transition is left without resources after leaving a youth centre. This agreement has made it possible for partners to take targeted action to identify those youths whose resources will be exhausted before they receive their loans and to quickly grant financial assistance.

Measure 2.10

Take action through CLSCs to help youths in great difficulty

Youth support teams systematize and reinforce continuity and complementarity of action in the youth network so that youths in difficulty receive the most appropriate services for their situation and are not left to fend for themselves.



These teams are the cornerstone of the the MSSS "Stratégie d'action pour les jeunes rencontrant des problèmes psychosociaux ou comportementaux et leur famille". They represent an extension of the cooperative agreement between the CLSCs and youth centres, which requires that all actors be available to work together with other partner organizations. As such, these youth support teams spearhead coordination within CLSC service areas. They are built around a coordinator, whose responsibilities include ensuring that the organizations involved offer sufficient resources tailored to the circumstances of young people and their families. Nineteen youth support teams are now in place, covering one CLSC service area per Québec region.

Measure 2.11

Adapt training and guidance services to the needs of youths from age 16 to 24 who have dropped out of school or who lack education

The *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* and the resulting action plan calls on the MEQ and the MESSF, in cooperation with Québec, regional and local partners, to establish concrete means of helping young dropouts and other young Quebecers with little education go back to school to obtain their first diploma and work toward stable integration into society and the job market.

The four-year "Programme d'aide à l'adaptation des services de formation et d'accompagnement pour les jeunes adultes ages de 16 à 24 ans" reflects the government's desire to adjust training and support services for youths aged 16 to 24, thereby considerably augmenting the basic education level of Quebecers. The program will be carried out through a partnership agreement between the school boards, CLEs, external young adult education resources and other partners such as youth centres, CLSCs, CJE and businesses. It will be based on the "Solidarité jeunesse" approach.

These training and support services will take a variety of forms depending on the needs and characteristics of each school board's population of young people aged 16 to 24 without high school diplomas. These youths may be employed, unemployed, receiving employment assistance or receiving employment insurance. Some are parents, while others live at home or on the streets. The services will be implemented based on an analysis of the young people's circumstances and the services available on each school board's territory.

These services will be developed progressively in all school boards over the first three years. They will be implemented first in the school boards with the greatest number of underprivileged areas.¹² Partners will be encouraged to provide training and support services, with disadvantaged areas as a priority. In 2003-2004, twenty school boards took part in the program. For 2004-2005, another twenty have joined. The remaining thirty will be added in 2005-2006.

Measure 2.12

Balance work and school to encourage young people to get occupational certification

In order to help as many young people as possible acquire basic training or qualify for their first trade and to meet private-sector labour demands, pilot projects combining work and school will be implemented.

12. The figures used for progressive implementation in the school boards are determined by the following data in each school board: mother's education level (which counts for 2/3 of the value) and parents' economic situation (1/3 of the value). Each elementary and secondary school in the school board is given a decile rank based on this data.

These projects will make it possible to explore a variety of means of supporting young people and businesses and fostering a relationship of mutual consideration (flexible work hours, financial support, work leave during exam time, etc.), eliminating the obstacles to training and helping young people continue their education while working. This will provide young people just off employment assistance with real job opportunities at partner businesses, yet still allow them to go back to school.

In conjunction with partners in education and the job market, Emploi-Québec's regional offices will develop one-year pilot projects for various regions in Québec. Priority will be given to projects in sectors facing recruitment problems and regions suffering out-migration of young people.

The MEQ will contribute financially to such projects by paying allowances to students enrolled full time in educational programs and financially supporting educational institutions that offer work-study programs.

A youth alternative to employment assistance

Actions to prevent young people from dropping out of school and improve and expand "Solidarité jeunesse", along with measures to improve the continuity of youth services, are all paving the way to positive alternatives that will help youths experiencing difficulty begin their adult lives without recourse to employment assistance. The *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* requires that the MESSF produce a report on job integration, training and parental contributions, as well as the measures and programs put in place under the government action plan to address the specific needs of young adults requiring financial assistance to live.

In the meantime, the first steps will be taken toward an income support alternative for income security recipients under age 25 through personalized intervention helping them find direction, put together personal action plans for autonomy and offering them the social and professional integration services required to achieve this autonomy.

Measure 2.13

Create a youth alternative to employment assistance for those under age 25 and able to work

To expand on efforts to better support youths on the road to socio-occupational integration, based on the principle that Québec can offer more than a mere social-assistance cheque, young employment-assistance applicants who are able to work will first be offered alternative solutions. The "Alternative jeunesse" program will draw on the principle of shared responsibility between the government and the individual, with the government taking on more of a coaching role with Québec youths.

"Alternative jeunesse" will be managed by CLEs and financed by converting passive measures into active ones, combined with the funding currently available for youth support. It will be implemented in close collaboration with youth organizations such as Carrefour Jeunesse-emploi (CJEs). When people under age 25 and able to work apply for employment assistance, they will first be directed to "Alternative jeunesse".

After an initial needs assessment, youths will be directed to a guidance phase at the CLE or a youth organization (modeled after "Solidarité jeunesse"). They will then be directed to the most appropriate alternative (apprenticeship, work-



study program, guided job search, training, parenting skills development, etc.). While taking part in "Alternative jeunesse", they will benefit from income support at least equivalent to what they would receive from employment assistance, plus a participation allowance that will vary depending on the activity. This income support will take the form of a salary (work study, partner companies), student assistance (training) or an employment-assistance allowance (job readiness, "Solidarité jeunesse").

This measure will be implemented gradually and will be thoroughly evaluated to assess the possibility of developing a separate financial support system for youths.

"Solidarité jeunesse"

"Solidarité jeunesse" has been in place for two years as a pilot project. After studying its results and considering the findings at a special forum in October 2002, the decision was made to pursue the project. "Solidarité jeunesse" is now offered across Québec to employment-assistance applicants under age 25.

Considered a social-assistance alternative for young people experiencing difficulties, "Solidarité jeunesse" provides personalized, individual guidance on a voluntary basis to help participants with their socio-occupational integration. Young participants get help developing personal action plans, including medium-term self-improvement goals or longer-term goals such as going back to school, finding a job or taking part in other structured projects. This personalized service is offered by youth organizations, primarily CJs, which help youths implement their action plans.

Through solid partnerships, various other government players and independent organizations also help these youths achieve their goals. These partnerships are embodied in local review committees made up of representatives of youth organizations, Sécurité du revenu and Emploi-Québec. The committees work with the young people for up to 52 weeks as they seek to become autonomous.

A number of "Solidarité jeunesse" satellite projects reach out to specific groups to offer solutions specifically tailored to their needs:

- "Ma place au soleil" provides young parents on employment assistance (mostly women) individual and group support to begin or continue their education while adjusting to their new parental responsibilities.
- The "Espoir" projects for street kids in Montréal and Québec City target young people at risk of homelessness. The goal is to give them positive experiences and help them make long-term plans for social and professional integration.
- A project for young Quebecers in the black English-speaking community created in cooperation with the Black Community Resource Centre (BCRC) reaches out to the community's young people aged 18 to 20 in the Montréal area to help them forge a place in society and the work force. The project's target group faces particularly high dropout and unemployment levels as well as more systematic job discrimination.

A CONTINUUM OF SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Above and beyond these initiatives for young children living in poverty and their families, as well as young adults experiencing difficulties, an interdepartmental collaborative process will be put into place to make youth guidance initiatives the main thrust of government intervention. Its youth action plan stipulates that "the government wants every effort to be made to ensure that society does not lose a single youth. To do so, we must take concrete, concerted action. Québec must adopt a youth strategy."¹³

The government intends to further develop interdepartmental cooperation to provide a true continuum of services for young people. Such a continuum of services targeting all youths is the very core of the youth action plan and reveals a determination to improve the coordination and cooperation of all government and private partners.

Providing ongoing youth services means more than just helping young people with little education and no jobs. Broader action coordinated by the Secrétariat à la jeunesse must be taken to achieve a more integrated approach that will make youth services truly continuous and no longer sector-based.

Measure 2.14

Draw up an interdepartmental agreement on youth development

As part of the MSSS-MEQ agreement currently being implemented, an interdepartmental agreement pairing up these two partners will be signed to help ensure youth service continuity. The agreement's objective will be to help all young people achieve their full potential to enable them to play their full-fledged role in society when they reach adulthood, with special priority given to youths experiencing difficulties.

Measure 2.15

Adopt a commitment to youths aged 16 to 24 with little education or unemployed

The MEQ, the MSSS, and the MESSF will join up with the MRCI, the Secrétariat à la jeunesse and municipal and community partners—notably youth employment centres (CJEs)—to develop *Engagement jeunesse*, a youth commitment intended to improve the sustainability of services for young people aged 16 to 24 with little education or no jobs. Through better service coordination, the commitment aims to more quickly integrate youths experiencing difficulties into the job market and help young dropouts in the same age group get occupational certification. This is an example of the will to move beyond a silo approach toward a restructuring of public services that puts citizens first.

In order to be successful, support for young people experiencing difficulties, like that for other groups, must be broad-based, integrated and thus better coordinated. This initiative will also help ensure ongoing action and reduce the risk of youths falling between the cracks or becoming discouraged and trapped

13. Briller parmi les meilleurs, page 164.

An illustration on the left side of the page shows a series of hands in a light orange color, overlapping each other in a vertical stack. The hands are drawn in a simple, sketchy style, with fingers slightly spread. The top hand is at the top left, and the bottom hand is at the bottom left, with others in between, creating a sense of support or a chain of hands.

in a cycle of dependence. The measures we discussed earlier fit in with this perspective.

This youth commitment must lead to a permanent process for improving action aimed at young people. It is first and foremost a means of ensuring that all those offering services for youths aged 16 to 24 at any level work more effectively to support young people's efforts at achieving autonomy, based on common objectives. Given this, the government departments concerned will work toward the following goals:

- Make selected services accessible or more accessible to young people in order to offer them suitable support while they are learning job skills or working toward social or job integration
- Make certain measures or programs more complementary in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency of action and better guide young people
- Reduce the amount of red tape required for youths to access any given service, easing their transition from one program or service to another and eliminating or minimizing the administrative wait or transfer times.

FIGHT THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF SENIORS

As mentioned earlier, quality-of-life impediments all too often place seniors in extremely difficult situations of great vulnerability. Poverty among the elderly, especially women and singles, primarily leads to a lack of participation in society and isolation that results in social exclusion. Most seniors are in good health, but health problems and disabilities tend to increase with age, creating expenses and a need for special services.

To improve the lot of the elderly, the government has already made commitments on a number of related fronts, from employment initiatives for elderly workers to the development of services for seniors with diminishing abilities (home care, natural caregivers, quality housing, etc.) and a greater variety of housing options for this elderly clientele.

More specifically, the government plans to take the following action as part of its fight against social exclusion.

Measure 2.16

Support community initiatives that promote the social participation of low-income seniors

Through the MSSS, the government will fund community organizations and social economy enterprises that offer services or run programs to help the elderly break out of their isolation and better support them in their daily lives. Examples include the "meals on wheels" program, home help, citizen advocacy, community integration, transportation, support groups, etc. These initiatives may be part of broader local strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion, and thereby help better mobilize community networks to support the most vulnerable elderly groups.





3 INVOLVE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

Background

Involving society as a whole is one of the keys to success for the *National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. This commitment must first take root in communities—in the regions, neighbourhoods, and immediate environments where poverty rears its ugly head—as well as in workplaces, which must provide favourable work conditions and welcome people struggling with social and professional integration.

This orientation is in line with the government's wish to "place its trust in the regions." Social development, like all forms of development, must be rooted in the regions themselves. "We must trust them and give them the powers, responsibilities, and resources they need to take care of their own development. Moreover, these powers and responsibilities must be granted to elected officials so that voters have a say on how they are used."¹⁴

As part of a strategy seeking the involvement of all parts of society to reduce poverty and promote the inclusion of all Quebecers, an integrated regional approach is essential. This entails having all stakeholders work together, intervening in various sectors in a way that places the focus on improving the circumstances of community members, and empowering both communities and the individuals that compose them. It is an approach that enhances the synergy between local economic development and social development and better coordinates the various sector-based strategies aimed at improving living conditions in underprivileged areas.

The territorial approach is the cornerstone of the *National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. It requires that all regions and municipalities combine their strategies and agree on priority actions and disadvantaged areas, as determined at regional conferences of elected officials.

14. *Briller parmi les meilleurs*, page 142.



Measures

A TOOL FOR SOLIDARITY WITH UNDERPRIVILEGED COMMUNITIES

The Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (FQIS), created under the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, will be one of the main tools used to promote the emergence of local strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion in designated priority areas.

Measure 3.1

Invest in community initiatives through the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (FQIS)

The FQIS will serve as a catalyst to bring together the resources of all private, public, and community partners in a way that fosters the human, social and economic development of each community.

It will also help establish new business, government and community partnerships and alliances to help the underprivileged. This will, for example, allow us to provide children in underprivileged environments with genuine equal opportunity in their education by working preventively with children and their families, notably through the joint MESSF-Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon undertaking.

For 2004-2005, the government has earmarked \$16 million for the FQIS.

SUPPORT LOCAL AND REGIONAL INITIATIVES

Regional action

Measure 3.2

Agree on priority sectors and areas and support regional action

A comprehensive review is currently under way in all regions of Québec at the regional conferences of elected officials (CREs). It focuses on structures for regional and local cooperation and action as well as decentralizing government action. The results of this process will determine how the regional approach to poverty and social exclusion is structured.

The CREs will work to develop cooperative strategies with their various regional partners—including cities, towns and RCMs—regarding regional priorities and areas requiring more intensive action. To this end, they may also take the appropriate steps to include organizations representing the poor.

These priority sectors and areas identified at the regional level may lead to special agreements between the regions and the government on social development and the fight against poverty.

Local strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion

Measure 3.3

Support the emergence of local strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion in priority areas

Local strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion will receive financial support from the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales in addition to the contributions of various stakeholders. These local strategies, which will be overseen by the RCMs and elected officials, will come under all-partner agreements and draw on existing consensus-seeking bodies in order to focus efforts and increase the synergy of local development activities.

These local strategies will encompass the efforts of all those working to prevent poverty, improve the conditions of those living in poverty and promote their autonomy.

They may address issues as diverse as local development; the revitalization of communities; access to training, employment, housing, health and social services, recreation and culture; longer-term support for those who need it; and participation in society by people suffering from social exclusion.

Organizations that work with the poor will be involved in developing these local strategies. In less organized areas, the minister responsible for the fight against poverty and social exclusion can lend a hand in bringing people together to develop local strategies that are mindful of the need for complementarity among the various sector-based funds.



Government in synergy with local and regional action

Measure 3.4

Get Québec government departments and agencies to develop resources for priority areas as determined in cooperation with the regions and municipalities and set targets for these areas

Over the course of the coming years, all government departments and agencies concerned will be called on to support local strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion and help develop conditions conducive to integrated action focused on people's needs and local realities.

All departments and agencies involved will be asked to do the following to support local strategies addressing poverty and social exclusion:

- Identify within their existing budgets the specific steps they plan to take in priority areas, as identified with the regions and municipalities, and pursue the objectives agreed on with them
- Identify the means they plan to put into place to improve cooperation between sectors at the local level
- Propose objectives they would like to work toward in their own areas of intervention to improve conditions in priority areas.

SUPPORT THE COLLECTIVE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Measure 3.5

Fight prejudice against people living in poverty

The importance of fighting prejudice against those living in poverty and social exclusion was raised time and again during the parliamentary committee hearings, which led members to incorporate fighting prejudice into the goals of the Act.

What better way to fight prejudice against those living in poverty than to point out the efforts the poor are making to improve their lives and those of their families? This approach will be incorporated into a campaign highlighting the efforts made by people living in poverty.





4 ENSURE CONSISTENT, COHERENT ACTION

Background

To be effective, the measures implemented must be consistent among themselves and with government policy overall. They must be ongoing and rooted in strong synergy among partners. The *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* is based on this philosophy.

Specific means will help ensure a consistent, intersectoral approach at the Québec, regional and local levels that reaches all Quebecers, including, of course, members of Native nations. For instance, all government action will be assessed in terms of its direct impact on the incomes of those living in poverty, in keeping with the Act's impact clause. The need for coherence will also entail certain actions at the intergovernmental level.

It is essential that the government inform the general public of the results of its initiatives, the positive impact on all Quebecers and the changing face of poverty in Québec. In addition to meeting its obligation to report on its anti-poverty efforts, the government will provide regular updates to the public to spur active participation in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.





Measures

TOOLS TO COORDINATE EFFORTS, INVOLVE QUEBECERS AND MEASURE PROGRESS

Sections 22 to 44 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* discuss the establishment of an advisory committee and observatory. This portion of the Act is not yet in effect.

As part of an extensive review of the government's structures and programs, the implementation of these future organizations will be examined to ensure that they do actually fulfill their intended goals. The research and observation components will be carried out immediately by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

Measure 4.1

Assess the impact of proposed statutes and regulations on the incomes of those living in poverty

Proposals for new statutes and regulations will be analyzed in terms of their effect on people and families living in poverty. These impact analyses concern all government departments and agencies.

Thus, if ministers believe that certain legislative or regulatory provisions could have a direct, significant impact on the incomes of people or families who are poor—according to the chosen poverty indicators—they will advise the government of this when making such proposals.

Measure 4.2

Ensure effective, coordinated interdepartmental leadership

The government will create an interdepartmental committee to ensure the participation of all partners across Québec and the synergy required to coordinate implementation of the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*.

In addition, this measure will require that each department and agency concerned be fully able to coordinate and focus action on the priorities in the fight against poverty within its own ranks and its sphere of influence. It will also require that they create conditions conducive to the success of the measures and active involvement of all concerned. As such, the interdepartmental committee will help channel the energies of the various partners to achieve the desired goals.

At the regional and local levels, regions, cities and regional county municipalities (RCM) will work to coordinate action for maximum synergy, create the structures they need to ensure thorough follow-up and share the results as per the agreements signed with the government.

In this vast undertaking, the steering mechanisms put into place will thus coordinate, track and adjust processes and measures as needed to achieve the goals set by the government.

FEDERAL COOPERATION REQUIRED TO SUPPORT QUÉBEC'S EFFORTS

Measure 4.3

Step up discussions with the Government of Canada

The *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* puts Québec at the forefront in Canada, and even internationally. For Québec to pursue its fight against poverty and social exclusion, the federal government must provide financial support while respecting Québec's areas of jurisdiction.

Beyond the contributions expected,¹⁵ the Québec government is negotiating with the federal government on transferring parental leave employment insurance funds to Québec to finance the Québec Parental Insurance Plan, which would better support the efforts of people facing long-term unemployment and help them enter the work force and remain there.

In addition, the Québec government will step up discussions with other OECD members on fighting poverty and social exclusion to seek inspiration from their innovative experiments. The government also intends to assert its right to participate fully in all international forums that could improve its ability to combat poverty and social exclusion.

15. As discussed in Part 1.

ADAPT INTERVENTION TO THE NEEDS OF NATIVE NATIONS

In February 2002, the "Peace of the Brave" was signed in Waskaganish by the Québec government and the Grand Council of the Crees. An agreement was also signed with the Inuit to develop Nunavik's potential while protecting the environment. Among the measures resulting from the Sanarrutik agreement with the Inuit, Minister Benoît Pelletier coordinated and signed an interdepartmental agreement on general funding in cooperation with Minister Claude Béchar and the Kativik Regional Government, among others. In addition, a general agreement in principle was signed with the First Nations of Mamuitun and Nutashkuan of the Innu nation. Lastly, the Grand Council of the Crees and the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador have been invited to talks on problems related to poverty and social exclusion. These new relationships of trust will make it easier to adopt measures for fighting poverty and social exclusion tailored the needs of the Native nations.

On June 17, 2003, Québec Premier Jean Charest and Ghislain Picard, Regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador, signed an agreement to create a joint council of elected officials. The agreement has been enacted and the council is made up of an equal number of Native and non-Native representatives and now provides a preferred forum for discussing the following issues:

- Territory and resources
- Taxation and economic development
- Services to Native people on and off reserves.

The council could lead to the creation of a permanent mechanism for political discussion.

Measure 4.4

Step up dialogue with Native nations and support the development of local strategies in Native villages and on reserves

The government will meet with representatives of the Native nations to tailor the Action Plan to their realities and requirements.

The talks will exemplify the new relations of trust, mutual respect and dialogue between Québec and the Native nations, further to the new agreements or draft agreements between them.

In cooperation with the partners involved, the government also intends to give band councils the resources they need to implement local strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion on reserves and in Native villages across Québec, which are, for the most part, hit hard by poverty.¹⁶

16. According to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, over 40% of Indians living on reserves have incomes under the low-income cutoff (LICO).



CONCLUSION

The *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* demonstrates the government's unwavering resolve to address both the causes and effects of poverty. It is part of a vision that places individual and family well-being at the heart of government action.

This Action Plan represents a substantial investment of \$2.5 billion, which will have a considerable impact on the disposable incomes of low-income families, and fulfills the commitments set out in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*.

With participation and work premiums, the new Child Assistance program and other measures recommended in the plan, Québec has taken its place among those nations that firmly believe they are stronger if all members of society are included and permitted to contribute to the collective well-being to the best of their ability.

As we move toward a more dynamic, caring Québec where economic and social development go hand in hand, we can be true leaders in solidarity. Finding a place for all Quebecers will enrich Québec society and lessen poverty overall.

