

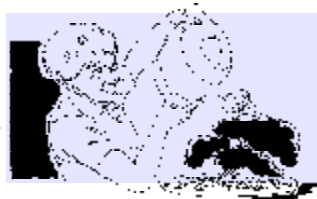
Let's Talk About Poverty

THE URBAN POVERTY CONSORTIUM OF WATERLOO REGION

POVERTY FACT SHEET SERIES - FACT SHEET #4

OCTOBER 25, 2000

“ In recognition of work done in the community related to poverty, the Urban Poverty Consortium seeks to build and extend new and existing efforts on poverty, to raise awareness, share information and data and to catalyze further action on poverty.”



What Lies Ahead

“ ... I think people don't ever expect to find themselves in a situation like this at my age. Sometimes, I think it's good that we don't know what lies ahead of us ... ”

Seniors and Poverty

In Waterloo Region, at the time of the 1996 Census, 40,925 people, or just over 10% of the total population, were sixty-five years of age and older.¹ Statistics Canada uses the term “elderly” in its definition of the senior population. For example, *elderly families* refers to families where either spouse is sixty-five years of age or older.

Over the last two decades, seniors have experienced a decline in poverty, due in large part to government income transfers such as Old Age Security (OAS), Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), Spouse's Allowance (SPA) and Canada Pension Plan (CPP).² However, where seniors' only source of income is government transfers payments, they are living in poverty, as defined by Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-off (LICO). The LICO is adjusted for community size and measures the amount of money needed to live and participate as a Canadian citizen.

Watch For Upcoming Fact Sheets

Through the fall and winter of 2000, the Urban Poverty Consortium will be releasing additional poverty fact sheets on the following topics:

- ✓ Working Poor
- ✓ Sole Support Parents
- ✓ Youth
- ✓ Children

Table One
Low Income Cut-offs for Waterloo Region

Family Size	Monthly	Annual
1 person	\$1,244	\$14,694
2 persons	\$1,555	\$18,367
3 persons	\$1,934	\$22,844
4 persons	\$2,342	\$27,650
5 persons	\$2,617	\$30,910
6 persons	\$2,893	\$34,168

Source: Statistics Canada, *Low Income Cut-offs*,
Cat.No.13-551-XPB, January, 1997

A person or family is considered to be living in poverty if their income falls below the LICO. An unattached senior with no other source of income is eligible to receive a combined OAS/GIS benefit of \$938.38 per month, far below the monthly LICO for a single person of \$1,244.

Table Two
Poverty Rates for Elderly Persons and Non-elderly Persons, Waterloo Region and Canada

	Elderly	Non-elderly
Waterloo Region	11.50%	14.62%
Canada	19.29%	19.74%

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 (custom tabulations)

The data for Canada show that the poverty rates for persons sixty-five years of age and older and persons under sixty-five years of age are similar and, for both groups, the poverty rate is lower for Waterloo Region. Table Two also shows that, in Waterloo Region, the poverty rate for seniors is lower than for non-elderly persons.

The poverty rate for seniors living in the four rural townships of North Dumfries, Wilmot, Wellesley and Woolwich is 4.80%, much lower than the poverty rate of 12.40% for seniors who live in the three urban centers of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo.³ However, elderly residents living in poverty in Waterloo Region’s rural communities may face additional challenges, such as fewer available services and limited public transportation.

Special Considerations

However, the population sample for the 1996 Census included non-institutional residents only.⁴ As a result, the data does not reflect poverty rates for seniors who live in institutions.⁵

Seniors who live in poverty are an especially vulnerable group. A gap in support services or an inability to access necessary supports can have a major impact on the lives of elderly persons living in poverty. Here are some issues poor seniors face:

- physical limitations: with increased age generally comes some degree of physical limitation, and this can make it difficult for a person to get out to service sites.
- medical supports: the additional health supports that seniors may require are not always covered under government programs and benefits. A senior living in poverty must try to find the money within a limited income or do without.
- social isolation: a number of community agencies that provide services to seniors identified social isolation as an important issue. An elderly person who has physical and financial limitations can become house-bound. A senior living in social isolation may be less likely to be aware of supports in the community.
- generational attitudes: according to local agency officials

who provide services to elderly persons, seniors often are reluctant to ask for help.

- fixed income: persons sixty-five years of age and older generally have retired from the labour force, often as a result of mandatory retirement policies. Where seniors wishes to participate in the labour force, their age can prove to be a barrier. In either case, seniors can be extremely limited in their ability to supplement their income.
- the cost of institutional care: elderly couples who are able to manage on their pensions while living together in the family home can face hardship when one of the partners must enter a long-term care residence. Essentially, their income now must cover the costs of maintaining two residences. The partner still living at home may be left living in poverty.

Senior Women

In Waterloo Region, the poverty rate for women sixty-five years of age and older is more than twice the poverty rate for men in the same age group. (See Table Three.) Because many older women had only limited participation in the labour market, on average received lower rates of pay, and/or often had jobs without benefits, private pensions and CPP are less available for women, which contributes to their higher levels of poverty.

In addition, since men’s life expectancy is lower, many more elderly women than men are widowed, and their husband’s pension may be cut off or drastically reduced. Women sixty-five years of age and older are also almost twice

Table Three
Poverty Rates for Elderly Women and Elderly Men, Waterloo Region and Canada

	Elderly Women	Elderly Men
Waterloo Region	15.19%	6.32%
Canada	23.90%	13.25%

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 (custom tabulations)

as likely as men in the same age group to be living alone.⁶ Poor elderly women then are more likely to be socially isolated than older men.

~ ~ *Our Stories* ~ ~

Because women live longer, elderly women are also more likely to suffer from chronic diseases, such as hypertension. Older men, on the other hand, are more likely to suffer from acute illnesses, such as heart disease. The lack of accessibility to the medical supports and services needed for chronic health problems makes poor elderly women particularly vulnerable.

That senior women are more likely to be living alone and to be in poor health, can mean a greater need for support services. Yet a significantly higher poverty rate may limit senior women's access to necessary services. And, while poverty rates for seniors have declined over the years, the long-term decline in poverty rates has been sharper for men than for women⁸

What the Future Holds

In Waterloo Region, the number of persons sixty-five years of age and older is expected to double over the next twenty years, to 101,269 by 2021.⁹ The projected increase in the senior population means a potentially greater demand on income support programs and health services. As David Foot notes in *Boom, Bust & Echo*, there will be relatively fewer people in the work force to support the increased need for services.¹⁰ Local data for Waterloo Region supports Foot's projection.¹¹

Table Four
Average Total Income and Average Government Transfers, for Elderly Women and Elderly Men, Waterloo Region

	Elderly Women	Elderly Men
Average Total Income	\$17,910	\$30,429
Average Government Transfers	\$10,011	\$11,431

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 (custom tabulations)

Table Four shows that government transfers are a significant source of a senior's income, and senior women derive proportionately more of their income from government sources than senior men. In *Urban Poverty in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, Kevin Lee discussed the "market gap" - where an individual's or a family's income falls below the LICO after government transfers are deducted from total income.¹² A smaller tax base and larger elderly population has implications for the number of seniors who could find themselves "market-poor" in the future.

The following are stories from seniors who live in Waterloo Region and who find themselves living below the poverty line.

I am 67 years old and my husband is 76. About 8 years ago, my husband's health began to deteriorate, and he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. The medication he was prescribed helped for awhile, but then he started having hallucinations. Further medical tests showed that he was suffering from a form of dementia with symptoms similar to Parkinson's Disease and Alzheimer's. We managed at home as best as we could, but eventually, we received home care services. This enabled us to remain together in our home for about another year, but my husband's health continued to get worse. Since March, 1998, my husband has resided in a local long-term care facility.

All of my husband's Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement and Canada Pension is supposed to be turned over to the nursing home, but I need to hold back some of his pension money in order to live. I collect OAS and GIS also, but it's very little, and after I've paid the rent, I'm left with less than 400.00 dollars per month for food, utilities, transportation, clothing, personal and medical needs. When my husband was still at home, our combined pensions were enough for our needs, but now we're basically maintaining two residences on the same income.

My husband needs a special chair, but I don't know how I'll pay my share of \$800.00 toward the cost. Hopefully, the War Veterans will help, as they've done in the past. I have a job, but it's on-call and not well-paid so I really can't budget around it, and I don't know how much longer my health will allow me to work. Also, if I earn over a certain amount, my Guaranteed Income Supplement is reduced and I'm still in a bind. Sometimes I wonder if my husband is more aware of what's going on than he seems but he just can't express it. If he knew how I was struggling, he would be horrified. I think people don't ever expect to find themselves in a situation like this at my age. Sometimes, I think it's good that we don't know what lies ahead of us.¹³



Our story comes from a 79 year old woman who has been widowed for 8 years. She lives on her own in an apartment that does not have subsidized rent. She never worked outside the home, so never paid into any pension plan. She has many physical constraints that add chal-

lenges to her life (she is in a wheelchair due to bad arthritis in her legs, knees, back and hips).

Her limited monthly income consists of half of her husband's CPP, OAS and a supplement - the total is \$1100.00 per month. Her expenses consist of rent, groceries, telephone, basic tv, hydro and donations to her church - very important. Because of her limited income, she cannot afford the costs of transportation on a regular basis, such as a cab or Project Lift. Therefore, she cannot attend church, do her banking and grocery shopping regularly and can't see her family and friends as much as she would like. Because of her limited income, she does not have a lot of money to spend on birthdays, weddings and anniversaries. She is a grandmother and great-grandmother, and this is tough as she wishes she could give more.

She will ask for help from family and friends if she finds something physically difficult to do. She will not ask for financial help from anyone as she is very proud. She feels fortunate to be able to live independently as long as she has. She attends the Home Support Day Program two times per week at a subsidized rate. If it were not for this financial assistance, she could not attend and would be isolated. Physical ailments of aging require prescriptions which often are not covered by OHIP. Where is she to find the money for this? She gets by on her sense of humor. Without it, she would not survive. When she is feeling low or discouraged, she thinks about people who are more disadvantaged than her.¹⁴

References

1. Statistics Canada, 1996 Census (custom tabulations).
2. *Urban Poverty in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, by Kevin K. Lee, Canadian Council on Social Development (2000), pg. 30.
3. Statistics Canada, 1996 Census (custom tabulations).
4. Ibid.
5. *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada*, by Colin Lindsay and Marcia Almey, Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 89-519-XPE (1997) pg. 27.
6. Ibid, pg. 30.
7. "Dependence-free life expectancy in Canada", by Laurent Martel and Alain Belanger, from *Canadian Social Trends*, Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 11-008 (Autumn 2000), pg. 28.
8. *Poverty Profile 1997: A Report by the National Council of Welfare*, Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, (Autumn 1999), pg. 101.
9. Province of Ontario, Ministry of Health, HELPS data base (Autumn 2000)
10. *Boom, Bust & Echo: How to Profit from the Demographic Shift*, by David K. Foot with Daniel Stoffman, Macfarlane, Walter & Ross (1996), pg. 208.
11. Province of Ontario, Ministry of Health, HELPS data base (Autumn 2000).
12. *Urban Poverty in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, by Kevin K. Lee, Canadian Council on Social Development (2000), pg. 73.
13. Urban Poverty Consortium, Personal Stories File (October, 2000).
14. Victoria School Centre, Personal Stories File (October, 2000).

~ For More Information ~

Contact the Members of the Urban Poverty Consortium of Waterloo Region:

Opportunities 2000

Mark Cabaj 579-7586 x131
mcabaj@bond.net

Social Planning Council of Kitchener - Waterloo

Trudy Beaulne 579-3800
spckw@waterlooregion.org

Social Planning Council of Cambridge & North Dumfries

Gloria DeSantis 623-1713
spccam@sentex.net



Produced and Published by the
Regional Municipality of Waterloo

HDP&EP001

Waterloo Region Community Health Department

Barb Powell 883-2258
pbarbara@region.waterloo.on.ca
Bryan Embree 883-5167
ebryan@region.waterloo.on.ca
Terry Goodenough 883-5322
gterry@region.waterloo.on.ca

Waterloo Region Social Services Department

Lynn Randall 883-2190
lrandall@region.waterloo.on.ca
Jean Latham 883-2173
ljean@region.waterloo.on.ca
Paula Stuhlmacher 883-2040
stuhlmap@region.waterloo.on.ca

Let's Talk About Poverty

Resources and Initiatives - Fact Sheet #5

The following is a listing of some of the community resources available to people living in poverty in Waterloo Region. Please contact them for additional information on their various programs and services. Many of the community agencies operate through the efforts of their volunteers and welcome your support. In order to obtain information about other services in Waterloo Region, please call:

Community Information Waterloo Region - (519) 579-3800

Information Cambridge - (519) 740-3030

Woolwich Community Information Centre - (519) 669-5139/1-800-661-7918

Government of Ontario Ministry of Labour

Employment Standards Branch
155 Frobisher Drive, Unive G
Waterloo ON N2V 2E1
Tel.: (519) 885-5191
Fax: (519) 883-5694

Social Planning Council of Cambridge & North Dumfries

24 Queen's Square
Cambridge N1S 1H6
Gloria DeSantis, Executive Director
Tel: (519) 623 - 1713
spccam@sentex.net

Opportunities 2000

35 Dickson Street
Cambridge ON N1R 7A6
Mark Cabaj
Tel: (519) 579-7586 ext. 131
mccabaj@bond.net

Human Resource Development Canada

Employment Centre
409 Weber Street West
Kitchener ON N7M 6B2
Tel.: 1 - 800 - 277 - 9914
TTY: 1 - 800 - 255 - 4786
www.canada.gc.ca

Social Planning Council of Kitchener - Waterloo

68 Queen Street North
Kitchener, Ontario N2H 2H2
Trudy Beaulne
Tel: (519) 579-3800
Fax: (519) 578-9185
spckw@waterlooregion.org

The Working Centre

58 Queen Street South
Kitchener, ON N2G 1V6
Joe Mancini, Director
Tel: (519) 743-1151
Fax: (519)743-9452
genmail@theworkingcentre.org

