

## **More Hamiltonians having trouble meeting basic needs**

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Hamilton – There's evidence that there's a recent increase in the number of Hamilton families and individuals having trouble meeting their basic needs such income, food and housing, according to a new report.

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton launched a new bulletin series today, titled Hamilton's Social Landscape, and the first topic is trends in basic needs. The two page report, funded in part by the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton, gives updates to the Hamilton community regarding adequate income, healthy food and affordable housing.

"The latest Statistics Canada data shows that poverty rates have increased sharply in this most recent recession period. In the Hamilton CMA which includes Burlington and Grimsby, the latest data shows that between 2007 and 2009 poverty rates increased by almost a third. The Hamilton CMA poverty rate was 15.4% in 2009, compared to 11.8% in 2007. We know that poverty rates in the city of Hamilton proper are substantially higher than in the larger Hamilton CMA, but no specific data is available at this time," explained SPRC Executive Director Don Jaffray.

"Looking at historical poverty rates in Hamilton, compared to the 1990s recession, the poverty rates are still lower, which is good news. The Hamilton CMA poverty rate peaked at 20.8% in 1996. The bad news is that the social safety net is weaker than it was in the 1990s. Social assistance rates are substantially lower and it is more difficult for laid-off workers to qualify for EI. So poverty is quite a bit deeper than it was in the 1990s, making it all the more difficult to climb back up and return to work," said Mr. Jaffray.

"Recent provincial cuts to the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit program will lead to a further weakening our social safety net if the city decides to pass on the cuts to Hamilton's most vulnerable residents. The cuts are short-sighted as the province will end up paying more through increased health care costs and the social and economic costs related to increased homelessness that will result," said Mr. Jaffray.

"It is commendable that Hamilton city councilors unanimously voted yesterday to maintain the full budget for the social assistance discretionary program despite the provincial government recently cutting the funding in half. This program provides support for vocational training, psychological assessments, bus tickets for job interviews and other necessary benefits that help Hamilton residents regain entry into the labour market so they can better meet their own basic needs," said Mr. Jaffray.

"This bulletin was presented last week to a meeting of the Best Start Network to help them in developing an action plan to help their clients with addressing basic needs. Basic needs is a topic of concern for the Best Start network as their agencies are concerned with parents that have trouble making ends meet," said Mr. Jaffray.

"We encourage other organizations to use this report to develop steps to improve our community, whether through policy advocacy or better service planning and coordination," added Mr. Jaffray.

To download a copy of the bulletin, please visit <http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/Reports.php>.

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