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Canada

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Too many Canadian children going hungry: group



CTV News Staff

An anti-poverty activist group says the problem of child poverty is worsening and it wants the federal government to boost spending to help poor kids.

In a report released Monday, called The Progress of Canada's Children, the Canadian Council on Social Development says Canada's poor families are getting deeper into the red. It says one in every 10 kids lived in poverty between 1994 and 1998, and many of them rely on food banks each month to survive.

This trend is reinforced by a report released last month by the Canadian Association of Food Banks which shows a 12.5 per cent increase in food bank usage in Canada since 1996.

"Despite the economic boom of the mid to late 1990s, too many Canadian families and their children are barely scraping by and are just one problem away from economic disaster," Louise Hanvey, senior researcher at the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) and author of the report, said Monday.

The report says that families struggle when they live in persistent poverty and that takes a heavy toll on their children. For example, the report reveals that families living in persistent poverty are three times as likely to have a parent suffering from depression. And the despair resulting from persistent poverty may well contribute to the record rate of child runaways in Canada – more than 50,000 in the year 2000.

"What's especially disturbing is the steady erosion of the support system or social infrastructure that low-income families used to rely on," says Marcel Lauziere, President of the CCSD.

"Just as our physical infrastructure, our bridges and roads are crumbling, so too are the key pillars of our social infrastructure which are essential if our poor children are to have a fighting chance in life."

The Council says funding for the national child benefit should be increased significantly. Lauziere says that would make a very real difference in the lives of poor families with children.

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Lauziere also wants Ottawa to increase spending on early childhood development programs run by the provinces. She says investments in affordable housing will also help Canada's impoverished kids.




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