Title: Measuring and Responding to Income Poverty: Concepts and Possibilities

Authors: Ron Kneebone, Margarita Wilkins

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to identify how poverty can be effectively measured and understood using data that is readily available to policy-makers and policy advocates. Our focus will be on data describing and measuring poverty in Alberta but what is presented here can be applied to any province. We show that existing measures, including the new "official" poverty line adopted by the federal government, are very blunt and limited measures of poverty. We review how one of the key policy responses to poverty, social assistance, is sensitive to measures of poverty. Finally, we propose a new way of making social assistance more responsive to the needs of individuals and families experiencing poverty. An estimate of the cost of the proposal is provided and shown to be equivalent to less than 1% of the provincial health budget. We conclude that effective tools for reducing the burden of poverty are readily available and easily affordable.