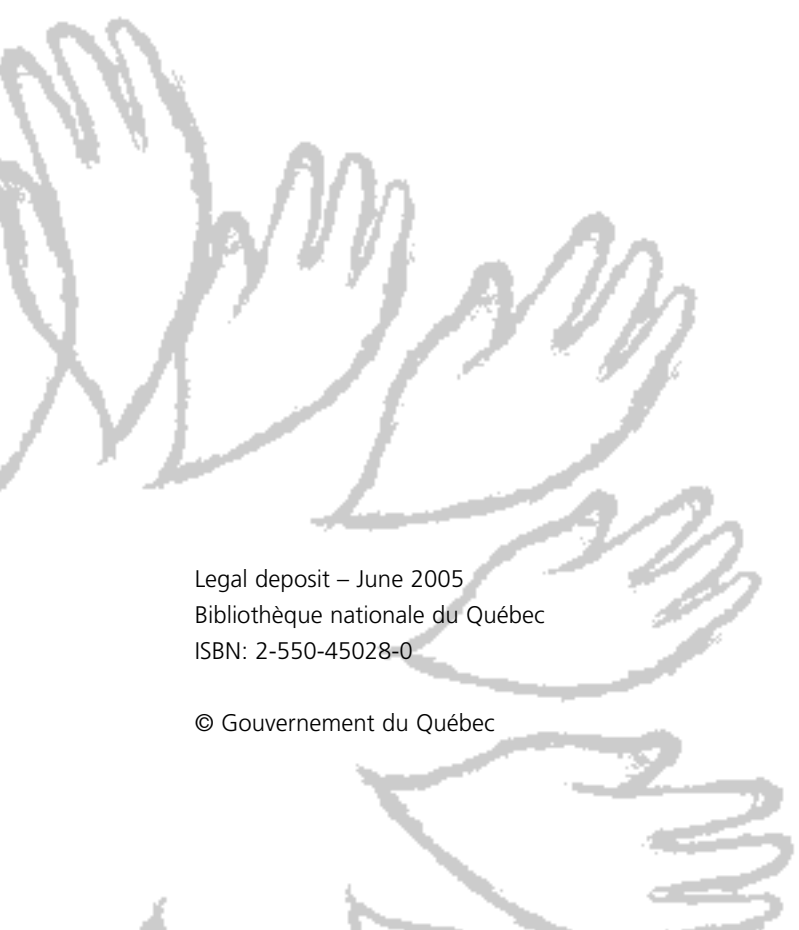


*Government Action Plan
to Combat Poverty
and Social Exclusion*



YEAR ONE REPORT

June 2005



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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



I am pleased to present the first annual report of the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. This action plan reflects the unanimous will of the Québec Parliament enshrined in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, legislation that puts Québec at the forefront of jurisdictions that make greater social justice a developmental asset. The purpose of the five-year plan is to improve the quality of life of Quebecers living in poverty, so that, within the next ten years, Québec will rank among the industrialized states with the least poverty.

The first year of operation saw a number of milestones and, across Québec, projects aimed at eradicating the causes and consequences of poverty alike were initiated and supported. Integral measures were introduced to improve the situation of individuals and families in need, including Child Assistance, the most generous financial assistance ever granted to families, and the Work Premium, which makes employment more attractive to some half-million Quebecers. In addition, construction of low-rental and affordable housing units was speeded up to give more people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods access to decent, affordable shelter.

Preventing poverty and social exclusion will always be a priority for our government, and fostering equal opportunity will remain at the heart of our values.

This is why we are particularly proud of all the measures presented in this report, measures that reach out to families, children and young people at different stages of their life. These include services to families vulnerable as of pregnancy, provision of stimulating environments for children in high-poverty areas, activities and services aimed at improving academic success in schools in socio-economically challenged communities, back-to-school measures for young people who have not graduated, and better coaching and counselling for young people who are having trouble entering the labour market.

These interventions will extend into 2005-2006, the second year of operation, and the groundwork will continue to be laid for the other measures built into the action plan. A revamped income security system will be implemented to enable introduction of a minimum benefit, among other provisions. A medication policy could be adopted in Autumn 2005. Regional and local anchoring of anti-poverty efforts will be ongoing in order to support grassroots initiatives in poverty-ridden areas.

This first report attests to the will of the government to wage an effective battle against poverty and social exclusion. Much work has already been done and we must not slow down. As the Minister responsible for coordinating this collective effort, I cannot insist enough on the importance of rallying all sectors of society in an attempt to achieve the goal of greater social justice and solidarity. The Government of Québec intends to support this mobilization in pursuit of a Québec in which all citizens can be part of community life and social progress.

A stylized, artistic signature of Michelle Courchesne, rendered in a light grey or blue color. The signature is cursive and somewhat abstract, capturing the essence of her name.

Michelle Courchesne

Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity

SUMMARY

In April 2004, the Government of Québec released its *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. Entitled *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*, the action plan consists of a set of five-year measures for achieving the goals set in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. The plan is based on government and multi-sector interaction involving all the players concerned by the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

In Year One of the plan, a number of measures, established to combat the causes and consequences of poverty, improved the financial situation of many individuals and families living in poverty, prevented poverty and social exclusion, and fostered social involvement in the cause. The main measures, under the four objectives of the action plan, are the following.

IMPROVE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

Financial assistance:

- The **minimum wage** rose from \$7.30 in May 2004 to \$7.60 on May 1, 2005. There were 132,000 minimum-wage workers in October 2004.
- The **Work Premium** has been in effect since January 1, 2005. Some 536,000 low- and mid-income households, or 200,000 families with children, will be entitled, that is, nearly nine times more families than under the PWA Program, and over 335,000 childless households that were not eligible for the PWA Program. This means that 500,000 more households will be covered under the Work Premium.
- On January 1, 2005, severely limited capacity for employment allowances were indexed at the same **rate** as that applied under the personal taxation system, 1.43%, while individuals able to work were indexed at half that rate, 0.72%. Some 350,000 households will receive employment-assistance benefits, including roughly 120,000 households with at least one adult with a severely limited capacity for employment. This January indexation cost \$7.2 million for 2004-2005 and will cost \$29 million for 2005-2006.

Employment assistance:

- Further to implementing **Place à l'emploi**, response time has been shortened. Data from February 2005 show that the average wait is now 1.5 days, compared with 1.7 days in March 2004.
- As part of the agreement between the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) and the ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (MICC), the **Programme d'aide à l'intégration des immigrants et des minorités visibles en emploi** (PRIIME) was made public in May 2005. This program makes it possible for new arrivals or members of visible minorities to gain their first work experience in Québec in their field. In the coming year, 325 to 675 people are expected to enter the PRIIME, with annual investments of \$5.3 million.
- The **Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire** received funding that enabled it to support 9 community funds and 10 lending circles in 10 regions of Québec. These bodies issue credit to low-income individuals who want to start up a micro-enterprise. Nearly 70% of the clients were women. Assistance in 2004-2005 was \$1.18 million, to which a one-time amount of \$345,000 was added.

Housing assistance:

- Low-rental and affordable housing initiatives continued in 2004-2005 under the **AccèsLogis Québec and Affordable Housing Québec** programs. As at March 31, 2005, 3196 housing units had been built and 7167 were under construction. Projects for another 1162 are being studied, bringing the total number to 11,525. New commitments were announced in the 2005-2006 Budget Speech, thereby making 18,600 low-cost or affordable housing units available to low-income households.
- In 2004-2005, \$16.8 million was earmarked to ease the effects of the **housing shortage**, either through emergency rent supplements, rent supplements granted under community housing programs, or assistance to municipalities.
- In 2004-2005, a total budget of \$6.4 million was invested by the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) to adapt the dwellings of **people with disabilities**, replace platform lifts and repair equipment for the disabled.
- In 2004-2005, the **Assistance Program for Community Housing Organizations** provided financial assistance for 47 such organizations. The program budget was \$1,440,398.

Food assistance:

- **Food security** projects were implemented in every region of Québec. The projects not only provided persons in need with access to healthy food, but also with ways of improving their dietary habits and food budgeting. Since 2002-2003, nearly 250 projects have been carried out across Québec. In 2004-2005, a \$3.3-million budget was allocated for food security.
- Under the **Club des petits déjeuners** project, breakfast was served every day to 10,000 students in over 165 elementary schools in Québec's disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Government assistance to the Club des petits déjeuners was \$2 million in 2004-2005.

PREVENT POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION BY FOSTERING DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL POTENTIAL

Measures for families:

- On January 1, 2005, the new **Child Assistance** measure, which covers the basic needs of dependent children under 18 years old, was implemented. This financial assistance to families is the most generous ever granted. The measure represents an additional investment of \$112 million for low-income families in 2004-2005. Québec is now the top Canadian province in terms of assistance to single-parent families with children under five years old.
- **Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services**, within the purview of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS), support high-risk families with children aged 0 to 5 years old. In 2004-2005, a \$45.1 million budget was set aside for these services.
- In December 2004, the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale signed a five-year partnership agreement of \$10 million with the **Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon**. A first project called Autonomie Jeunes Familles (AJF), or Program of Support to Young Parents, was instituted for rapid intervention with young pregnant women and first-time families in disadvantaged districts, primarily in east-end Montréal. In 2004-2005, a cost-shared budget of \$500,000 was earmarked for this project.
- The **Assistance Program for Emergent Literacy in Disadvantaged Communities** supports approximately 27 projects in poor communities in Québec's 17 regions. Nearly 1400 literacy activities were carried out with parents, their children aged 0 to 5 years old, and organizations. The total budget in 2004-2005 was \$680,000.
- The **Famille, école et communauté, réussir ensemble** program is an experimental educational community model aimed at the academic success of elementary school students from underprivileged areas. Twenty-eight schools in low-income districts and 4672 students took part. The total budget in 2004-2005 was \$660,000.
- The purpose of the **Homework Assistance** program is to support the homework assistance provided to elementary-level students. The **Healthy Schools** program is aimed at fostering healthy lifestyles among Cycle Three elementary and Cycle One secondary students. In 2004-2005, 1989 schools took part in the Healthy Schools program, which was granted \$4.8 million in appropriations. For the Homework Assistance program, the numbers were 1711 and \$9.4 million. In the 2005-2006 budget, it was announced that the monies earmarked for the latter program will rise to \$20 million a year.
- Since 2004-2005, school boards have been granted a total budget of \$10 million to hire **professional resources for providing support to students at risk** of failure in school. This budget is shared among Québec's 17 regions.

Youth measures:

- The **Le plaisir d'apprendre : j'embarque quand ça me ressemble** program, aimed at helping 16- to-24 year-olds return to school, was established in 20 school boards in the 17 regions of Québec. It involved 36,000 young people and the budget in 2004-2005 was \$2 million.
- As part of the **New Approaches, New Solutions** intervention strategy, 196 secondary schools in underprivileged areas instituted measures to foster the academic success of students. Slightly more than 112,000 students took part. In 2004-2005, \$27 million was invested.
- The **Qualification des jeunes** program uses intensive action to prepare young people for a life of self-sufficiency and to help the young people in youth centres become qualified for the labour market. Four regions and 83 young people participated. Funding in 2004-2005 edged over the \$609,000 mark.
- As part of a three-year pilot project, 21 **youth intervention teams** were formed across Québec. Their mission is to systematize a formal and structured partnership among the various providers of services to children and youth with complex, multiple or "grey-area" problems. In 2004-2005, the total investment was \$2.4 million.
- To help young employment-assistance recipients get qualifying papers while working in a regular job, 18 **work-study pilot projects** were implemented in March 2004 in 12 regions of Québec. Some 289 young people participated. The total budget was \$5 million.

INVOLVE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

- A number of initiatives in disadvantaged areas were given support under the **Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales**. Thanks to an agreement between the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and the City of Montréal, 185 projects were backed in 22 boroughs. The budget was \$5 million in 2004-2005. Pilot projects were carried out in the RCMs of Témiscouata and Haute-Gaspésie, with allocations of \$450,000 and \$487,300 respectively. In addition, 226 projects received funding under the measure to support activities to combat poverty and social exclusion, whose total budget was \$4.9 million in 2004-2005.

ENSURE CONSISTENT, COHERENT ACTION

- To help government departments and agencies assess **the direct and significant impact** of their legislative or regulatory proposals on the income of individuals and families living in poverty, the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale crafted a methodology for making it easier to select projects and equip departments and agencies for the evaluation process.
- In March 2005, the governments of Québec and Canada signed an agreement on implementation of Québec's **Parental Insurance Plan**. The program, to be offered as of January 2006, will reach greater numbers of low-income families.
- Discussions are underway with the federal government for budgets to better support the efforts of the chronically unemployed so that they can find sustainable employment.

- In 2005, the groundwork was laid for a **Centre d'études sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale** within the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. The centre will conduct studies and research in partnership with the relevant Québec networks, the Institut de la statistique du Québec, and the main government departments involved in combating poverty and social exclusion.

In 2004-2005, major investments were made to fight the causes and consequences of poverty. The various courses of action pursued in preventing poverty and in improving individuals' and families' financial situations, academic fulfillment, access to affordable housing, and social and occupational integration will continue into the second year. In 2005-2006, work will be done to implement the other measures built into the action plan.

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INTRODUCTION

There is overwhelming consensus in Québec on the need to reduce poverty. The problems connected to poverty are well documented. People living in poverty are at greater risk of certain diseases earlier in their life and of dying younger. Drop-out rates of children from underprivileged areas are higher. Lack of a secondary school diploma is an obstacle to social and occupational integration. People in need also have trouble finding decent, affordable housing. Québec has therefore pledged to reduce poverty so that every citizen can be part of the life of the society and of social progress.

In November 2000, further to a petition by the Collectif pour une loi sur l'élimination de la pauvreté,¹ the National Assembly adopted a motion in which it committed to a strategy to combat poverty. In June 2002, a policy statement entitled *The Will to Act. The Strength to Succeed* was released. The following December, the National Assembly unanimously and proudly assented to the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, aimed at guiding the Government and Québec society as a whole towards a process of planning and implementing actions to combat poverty, prevent its causes, reduce its effects on individuals and families, counter social exclusion and strive towards a poverty-free Québec.²

The Act reflects a worldwide movement. At the Lisbon European Council in 2000, European Union member states made the fight against poverty one of the major thrusts in modernizing Europe's social model. All member countries were called upon to produce a plan to combat poverty and social exclusion. These countries acknowledged that modernizing the economy goes hand-in-hand with efforts to reduce poverty and combat exclusion. Québec's approach was a North American first. By using legislative means, Québec formally and permanently ratified the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and the Government of Québec adopted the goal of making Québec a relatively poverty-free state within the next ten years.

Section 13 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* requires that the government adopt and make public an action plan specifying the activities intended to achieve the objectives sought. In April 2004, the government released the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. Entitled *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*, the action plan consists of a set of five-year measures. Section 21 of the Act also stipulates that the Minister must present an annual report of action plan activities to the government.

This document is therefore a report on the action plan measures carried out in 2004-2005. Section 1 provides an overview of the goals of the action plan and the backdrop for the measures. The following section presents the measures implemented in Year One, showing that Québec is determined to reduce poverty and improve the lives of low-income Quebecers. The last section offers an outlook for 2005-2006.

Note that in addition to the activities described in this report are the local, regional and province-wide initiatives and projects that have been underway for a number of years now. These activities, aimed at bettering the lives of the poor, contribute to achievement of the objectives of the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

1. After the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* was assented to, the organization re-named itself the Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté.

2. Section 1 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*

1. OVERVIEW OF THE ACTION PLAN

“Poverty” means the condition of a human being who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency or to facilitate integration and participation in society.³

Combating poverty and social exclusion means fostering the development of every individual and ensuring that human dignity and the rights of all are respected. The *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* consists of a set of five-year measures for achieving the goals set in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. The plan is based on government and multi-sector interaction involving all the players concerned by the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The action plan is based on two principles:

- employment is the leading solution in ensuring economic security and social inclusion for people able to work
- a higher level of protection must be granted to people with a severely limited capacity for employment.

Acknowledging the value of work through work incentives and assistance for low-income workers is the fundamental principle of the action plan. However, the needs of those who have little hope of regaining self-sufficiency through employment must be better met too.

The measures of the action plan focus on four major thrusts:

a) Improving the lives of people living in poverty

Solutions are offered to workers who cannot escape the clutches of poverty. A Work Premium was introduced and an annual increase in the minimum wage is planned. Various measures are aimed at better support for jobless people as they strive to enter the labour market. There are plans for added support for them as part of the move to modernize the income security system. Lastly, access to decent and affordable housing and to adequate amounts of nutritious food is also slated for improvement.


b) Preventing poverty and social exclusion by fostering development of personal potential

Preventing poverty and social exclusion is, first and foremost, a question of attacking the causes thereof and the disparities that hinder the development of personal potential. Prevention from the outset, at the family level, and then in school, is a prerequisite for promoting health and well-being. Action as of early childhood increases the likelihood of equal opportunity and helps counter intergenerational poverty. The new Child Assistance initiative improves the income of most families, especially those at the lower end of the scale. Various other measures are aimed at the academic success of young people. Those who have trouble making the transition to adulthood and employment must be able to count on access to seamless assistance in order to become productive members of society. Young adults who must resort to government assistance will be able to obtain active assistance tailored to their needs as an alternative to employment-assistance.

c) Involving society as a whole

The fight against poverty and social exclusion requires a commitment not only on the part of the government but from all of society, including people living in poverty. This battle must be waged everywhere in Québec, especially in areas of deep-rooted poverty. An integrated territorial approach under the leadership of the regional conferences of

3. Section 2 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*



elected officers (CREs), along with RCMs and cities, favouring partnership, joint action, consultation, and mobilization and involvement of regional players in order to stem the tide of poverty, is an important factor. The government intends to support local communities, cities and regions that have agreed together on action to improve the lot of people in poverty. Pilot projects that are already up and running will be valuable sources of experience that will point the way.

d) Ensuring consistent, coherent action

To be effective, action aimed at combating poverty and social exclusion must be internally coherent and compatible with government policy as a whole. It must be consistent over time and be based on strong synergy among the partners. An interministerial committee was therefore formed to ensure consistent and coherent implementation of the action plan. Talks are underway with the Aboriginal Peoples to adapt action to their reality and to support the emergence of local strategies in villages and reserves.

The government has committed to investing \$2.5 billion in these measures over the next five years in order to improve the revenues of low-income individuals and families, as well as in social housing measures. Added to this are the budgets allocated by partner government departments for the measures written into the action plan.

2. BACKGROUND

The economic backdrop for Year One of the action plan was positive. In the past two years, over 100,000 jobs have been created in Québec. Over 60% of the active population is working, a record employment rate in the history of Québec. The unemployment rate, 7.9% in April 2005, is the lowest since December 2000. We have to go as far back as March 1976 to find a lower one.

In the past year, trends in the jobless rate have been different for men and women. For women, it dropped by 1.3 points to 6.5%, but held steady at 10.0% for men. The jobless rate also varied by region, with higher rates in the resource regions (Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine,

Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Côte-Nord) compared with more urban regions (Montréal, Estrie, Outaouais).

Economic growth in the late 1990s and early 2000s enabled Québec to partly catch up with Ontario, other provinces and neighbouring States. The employment gap between Québec and Ontario dropped from 5.4 percentage points in 2000 to 3.5 points in April 2005. As for the jobless rate, the gap shrank from 2.7 percentage points to 1.6 points in the same period.

Growth also helped to reduce the number of employment-assistance recipients, which has decreased by 25,000 in the past two years. In February 2005, there were 348,503 households on employment assistance, for a total of 389,920 adults and 127,990 children. Of these 348,503 households, 219,125 (63%) were able to work. However, the employment-assistance rate (the ratio between the number of employment-assistance recipients and the population under age 65) remains high. Québec, at 8.2% in March 2004, ranked ninth among Canadian provinces, only ahead of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Given the positive outlook for economic growth, there should be a brisk demand for manpower in the next few years. Emploi-Québec's Job Prospects document for 2004-2008 reports a possible 640,000 job openings. Job creation generated by economic growth will account for 40% of total manpower demand, while 60% will be due to attrition. Immigration already represents 63% of the increase in Québec's active population, and forecasts are that within 10 years,⁴ it will be responsible for this growth in its entirety, hence the importance of initiatives on the job entry and work incentives front, particularly for immigrants.

However, despite good economic news, some groups have more trouble than others reaping the benefits of a strong economy, and therefore live in poverty. For example, the vast majority of employment-assistance households, 76%, are made up of single adults. Single-parent families are next with 14.4% of recipient households. These same two groups also account for a greater proportion of low-income households⁵, namely, 29.9% for single-parent families with mothers as the head of the household, and 21.8% for single adults. If low-income households are categorized by age, individuals or families under age 25 account for the biggest share thereof, with 24.7%, whereas recipients aged 65 and older represent the smallest slice, with 6.1%. This is why it is important to customize action based on the composition of the groups most affected by poverty or at high risk of becoming poor. The measures of the action plan aimed specifically at prevention among young people and families strive to eradicate poverty within these groups.

4. Shared values, common interests, p. 1

5. Based on the pre-income tax Low Income Measure

Economic prosperity has also had an impact on housing. In the 1990s, households had a vast array of available housing options to choose from, but in 2000 the situation had changed drastically. Now there is a shortage of rentable units in big cities and it is extremely difficult for low-income households to find decent, affordable housing.

Furthermore, there are still too many young people who leave school without being qualified to enter the labour market. Nearly 20% of 20-year-olds have no secondary school diploma or vocational education diploma and are no longer in school. It is imperative that all young people become qualified according to their abilities and ambitions not only so that they can have a future, but also so that they can be productive members of society.

A number of government strategies have paved the way for implementing anti-poverty measures. This first Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion is part of the government's reiterated will to review the role of the State and make it more efficient. There are basic underlying values at play, such as confidence in citizens' ability to assume responsibility for their lives, commitment to social justice, and the conviction that sustainable economic development is needed.

The document entitled *Shine among the best* posits that Québec society as a whole is responsible for the citizens that compose it and that this cohesive society must pay particular attention to the lot of the disadvantaged and support them in the manner most appropriate to their situation. More generally speaking, a cohesive society is one that enables development of individuals and of the whole, while ensuring equal opportunity for all and the well-being of all.⁶

In January 2005, the Government of Québec made public the strategic goals of the government plan entitled *Employment: Passport for the future*, a continuation of *Shine among the best*. Its goals focus on improving manpower qualifications, increasing the employment rate of certain segments of the work force, including employment-assistance recipients, and using regional and economic development as a means of supporting job development.

However, today's economic context is such that the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* cannot proceed as quickly as intended to eradicate poverty and social exclusion. A good many societies are grappling with increasingly intense fiscal pressure that is casting doubt on their social and economic safety nets. In Québec, an aging population and a declining working-age population only exacerbates the situation.

In April 2005, the Directeur national de santé publique presented Québec's first health report card, entitled *Rapport national sur l'état de santé de la population du Québec, Produire la santé*. It describes changes in the state of public health and discusses socio-economic conditions as major determinants in public health and well-being. Reducing poverty is seen as a major contributor to public health improvement. The report also argues that to be effective, the war against poverty and disparity must be fought on several fronts, in particular, income, employment and education. Such a society-wide project would clearly make it possible for individuals, families and communities to enjoy better health and to live better. The inevitable outcome would be greater solidarity and productivity.⁷

6. *Briller parmi les meilleurs*. The full document is available in French only.

7. *Rapport national sur l'état de santé de la population du Québec, Produire la santé*. Available in French only

3. YEAR ONE ACTIVITY REPORT

The purpose of the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* is to create powerful synergy among the various partners concerned by poverty and exclusion and to lay the groundwork for innovation, institutional integration and continuous improvement in practices. In June 2004, an interministerial committee was set up under the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. The committee is composed of the following departments and agencies: the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, the ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine, the ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions, the ministère du Travail, the Société d'habitation du Québec and the Secrétariat à la Jeunesse. The committee has met several times over the past year to ensure that the measures of the action plan are implemented coherently and consistently, and to mobilize its partners for this purpose.

Over the first year, a number of action plan measures were carried out. They are presented below. Efforts geared to individuals and families were made in each of the four major areas of the action plan.

3.1 Improve the lives of people living in poverty

Inarguably, employment is a major trump card against poverty. Measures have been introduced to help people enter the labour market and stay there. People without resources can count on financial assistance and other measures to help them meet their basic needs.

EMPLOYMENT: A PASSPORT TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

For some people, work alone cannot enable them to break out of the cycle of poverty. Their jobs may be unsteady or offer too few hours or weeks of work. Their wages are insufficient for their needs and those of their dependents.

An increase in the minimum wage

The minimum wage has been increased twice by \$0.15 per hour since May 1, 2004, when it went from \$7.30 to \$7.45 and from \$6.55 to \$6.70 for gratuity workers, and then to \$7.60 and \$6.85 for gratuity workers a year later. In Autumn 2005, a review will be begun to determine whether the minimum wage should be changed in 2006.

In October 2004, 132,000 workers, mostly women (62%) and young adults aged 24 and under (55%), were employed at minimum wage.

Increased assistance to low-income workers

The Work Premium, which replaces the PWA program, has been available since January 1, 2005. It is a new income tax credit for households with low- to mid-income workers, with or without children. Its purpose is to encourage those who are able to work to enter or re-enter the labour market or to remain in it. The ministère des Finances has forecast

that the Work Premium will benefit approximately 536,000 low-to mid-income households, 200,000 of them with children, which is nearly nine times as many as under the PWA program, and over 335,000 households without children that were not eligible for PWA. This means that 500,000 more households will benefit from the Work Premium.

In January 2005, 35,375 households received an advance payment for the Work Premium. However, since it is a tax measure, it is only after 2005 tax returns have been processed in Spring 2006 that we will know the exact number of households that have benefited and the amounts that have been granted. Note that an additional \$10 million was allocated to this measure in 2004-2005.

A Web tool has been designed so that individuals can calculate the amount of Work Premium for which they may be eligible. The tool, [Calcul@ide](http://www.calculaide.gouv.qc.ca/index.asp), is accessible at <http://www.calculaide.gouv.qc.ca/index.asp>. This tool does not determine the exact benefit, but instead provides a general idea of the amounts people can expect.

Work Premium amounts vary according to income and can reach \$511 annually for a single individual, \$784 for a couple, \$2190 for a single-parent family, and \$2800 for a couple with children. Workers request the Work Premium in their Québec tax returns. Workers who have children and believe they will be eligible for an annual premium of over \$500 may receive, upon request, advance quarterly payments in January, April, July and October.

Actively assisting unemployed persons

The unemployed face discouragement if their joblessness persists. An active supporting role as they move towards employment is a valuable investment. It is important to provide easy access to measures adapted to their requirements and to provide them with the accompaniment they need to acquire skills and realize their potential.

Place à l'emploi was set up in 2003 to provide quick intervention for employment-assistance recipients, thereby favouring their entry into the job market. This strategy is especially intended to catalyze the complementary actions of Sécurité du revenu and Emploi-Québec by quickly taking charge, and guiding and following up on the employment-seeking activities of persons who are able to work and who have applied for or are currently receiving employment-assistance benefits. The Agence de la Sécurité du revenu carries out summary assessments of the capacity of recipients for seeking employment and encourages them to use the services of Emploi-Québec. The response time is improving constantly, with an average 1.5-day wait according to February 2005 data, compared with 1.7 days according to March 2004 data.

Emploi-Québec's slate of services is adapted to the characteristics of the individual and may consist in:

- assessing the person's employability;
- identifying one or more suitable occupations for the person;
- performing self-serve and assisted service pairing and placement activities, such as:
 - logging onto "Online Placement";
 - seeking job offers in "Online Placement" that correspond to the person's profile and providing contact information about the available position;
 - consultant-assisted job search (such as assistance in preparing resumé or coaching on interview techniques);

- drafting an intervention plan for the job search or improving employability using Emploi-Québec's active measures;
- guiding and following up on persons in their job search.

In 2004-2005,⁸ Emploi-Québec helped 259,215 persons participate in 421,150 activities during the year (including employability assessments). Employment-assistance recipients initiated 154,043 activities and employment-insurance recipients, 259,972.

An assessment of the effectiveness of employment measures provided to individuals, conducted in 2004, reveals that participation generates a significant net impact. This is particularly true of employment-assistance recipients.

In the 18 months following their participation, large numbers of these recipients have found their way into the job market, have seen their employment income increase, and have spent less time on employment assistance. The active employment measures studied were the job training measure, wage subsidies, job-readiness projects, job-assistance services and self-employment support.

Efforts to increase the entry of immigrants and visible minorities into the job market

Immigrants and visible minorities sometimes face specific obstacles when seeking employment. To make it easier for them to enter the job market, the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) and the ministère de l'Immigration et des communautés culturelles (MICC) signed a three-year agreement in May 2004 with a view to enhancing interdepartmental cooperation. This agreement comprises nine measures aimed at promoting socio-economic integration and job-market entry for immigrants and members of visible minorities. Nine technical committees were formed to implement these measures.

The Programme d'aide à l'intégration des immigrants et des minorités visibles en emploi (PRIIME) was made public in May 2005. This program will enable new arrivals or members of visible minorities to begin their Québec career in their field of specialization. The employer will be compensated for a portion of: the participant's salary; the cost of the attendant assigned by the company to help the new employee adapt to the workplace; the costs incurred in integrating the new employee (such as preparing training personnel, promoting diversity awareness, or adapting reception material); the cost of upgrading the employee's skills; and, if necessary, francization costs.

The goal of this measure is to encourage employers to hire these individuals and generate favourable conditions in the workplace for keeping them beyond the subsidy period. Between 325 and 675 persons are expected to benefit from PRIIME. The annual investment in the program is assessed at \$5.3 million.

Technical committees are working to carry out the other measures included in the interdepartmental agreement. A guide to assist in the earliest steps of integrating landed immigrants is now available. A new selection grid, which takes better stock of the needs of the labour market, is also being prepared. In addition, the regional directorates of the MICC and Emploi-Québec are expected to enter into agreements on referral mechanisms for immigrants newly arrived in the region so they can receive appropriate public services as soon as possible.

8. The data are preliminary. The official data for 2004-2005 will be available as of the June update, which will take into account delays due to retroaction and the entry of new activities in department records.

Micro-enterprise start-up support

Financial support has been granted to the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire (RQCC). Community credit is an instrument for social and economic development. The RQCC has developed specialized approaches and practices, including loans, guarantees and accompaniment, for creating and sustaining micro-enterprises. The following clientele are particularly suitable for community credit: employment-assistance recipients, the unemployed, workers with unsteady jobs, and persons who already own a business. Assistance granted in 2004-2005 supported nine community funds and ten lending circles in ten regions of Québec. Nearly 70% of the clients of these funds and lending circles are women.

In 2003-2004, the MESS paid \$1.18 million into the Fonds d'aide à l'action communautaire autonome to support the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire and its members. On April 1, 2004, as announced in the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, responsibility for supporting community credit agencies was transferred to the ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation (MDEIE). Transfer credits amounting to \$1.18 million from the MESS accompanied this new responsibility in 2004-2005. Special non-recurrent funding totalling \$345,000 has also been granted for the same year, under the program to assist community organizations in the field of economic development.

The Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire comprises 20 organizations: nine community loan funds and eleven lending circles, based in eleven of Québec's administrative regions. These organizations provide credit to persons with low incomes who want to start up a business. They manage "micro-credit" undertakings to promote the financial self-sufficiency of high-risk clientele whose access to the usual sources of financing is limited.

Businesses were launched in areas such as horticulture, metal forging, photography, sewing, production of decorative items, weaving and llama farming, day care, and bakery and chocolate production.

PRACTICAL MEASURES IN HOUSING, FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND FOOD ASSISTANCE

Efforts have been made to modernize the income security system, improve financial assistance granted to persons on income security, provide access to decent, affordable housing, and ensure that Quebecers have sufficient amounts of healthy food.

Modernizing the income security system

In Autumn 2004, a parliamentary commission debated Bill 57 on income security reform, the *Individual and Family Assistance Act*. This legislation stems from the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* and enables implementation of a number of its measures. It favours enticement over coercion by focusing on acknowledgement of the value of work and on efforts to integrate individuals into the labour market. During its public hearings, the Commission des affaires sociales received 76 briefs and met with some 60 groups. This consultation process resulted in proposed amendments on non-payment of rent, right of recourse and the MESS Bureau de renseignements et plaintes.

The bill was analyzed by a parliamentary commission with a view to enacting it in 2005. Enactment was deferred, however, which in turn delayed implementation of certain measures, including the basic benefit and extension of the \$100 monthly income exemption for child support to all families under the Employment-Assistance Program. This exemption is currently applicable only for children under the age of five.

A flexible measure adapted to the reality of resource regions

The purpose of the Income Support Program for Workers Affected by Collective Dismissals in the Resource Regions is to grant temporary monthly financial assistance to workers who have been collectively laid off. This program was implemented in resource regions to help the workers avoid leaving these regions, draining their savings or liquidating a portion of their property. It also makes it possible to prevent an exodus of qualified workers who have become unemployed as a result of a company's downsizing or closure and to reduce recourse to employment assistance by these workers.

For the 2004-2005 fiscal year, the program's expenditures were \$2.6 million, with 4687 eligible workers. In March 2005, the average monthly benefit was \$729.68.

Indexed employment-assistance benefits

On January 1, 2005, benefits for persons with a severely limited capacity for employment were indexed at the same rate as that applied under the personal taxation system, namely, 1.43%, whereas benefits for persons capable of working were indexed at half that rate, or 0.72%. Some 350,000 households were receiving employment assistance at the time. Of these, about 120,000 had at least one adult with a severely limited capacity for employment. The January 2005 indexation represents a cost of \$7.2 million for 2004-2005 and \$29 million for 2005-2006. In addition, as stated in the action plan, the MESS intends to index employment-assistance benefits on a yearly basis.

An increase in the number of affordable dwellings

The AccèsLogis Québec and Affordable Housing Québec programs were supplemented so that they could handle a greater caseload and provide more social housing. Total funding cleared for this purpose will make it possible to provide 16,000 such dwellings.

AccèsLogis Québec is a financial assistance program that pools public, community and private resources. It is aimed at promoting the development of social and community residences for low-to modest-income households and for special-needs clientele experiencing difficulties.

The Affordable Housing Québec program provides affordable dwellings for modest-income households.

By March 31, 2005, 3196 dwellings had been built, with another 7167 under construction and 1162 projects being studied, for a total of 11,525 dwellings.

The AccèsLogis Québec and Affordable Housing Québec programs are operable until 2007. In its 2005-2006 Budget Speech, the government announced that \$145 million would be invested in the construction of 2600 new dwellings for the AccèsLogis Québec program. These new commitments will therefore raise the number of affordable or low-cost dwellings for low-income households to 18,600. In addition, \$15 million will be earmarked for renovating existing social housing units.

Assistance to mitigate housing shortages

Rent supplements were granted to households whose subsidy would otherwise have come to an end and households that would have been unable to find housing on the private rental market due to the housing shortage.

3700 one-year emergency rent supplements were granted for the period from July 1, 2004, to June 30, 2005. Of these, some 2500 were reserved for the recipients of emergency rent supplements granted in 2001, 2002 or 2003 and that were still active in 2004. An extension (3500, after adjustments) was authorized for another year and 800

others were recently announced for a total of 4300 emergency rent supplements in 2005-2006. In addition, 1576 emergency rent supplement subsidies granted under community-based housing programs were extended to 2008.

Municipalities affected by the housing shortage are also entitled to assistance measures for temporary housing for the homeless and transportation and storage of their belongings. By passing by-laws, municipalities can adopt a complementary program for providing emergency assistance services until December 31, 2006. The total budget granted in 2004-2005 was \$16.8 million.

Dwellings adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities

Adapting dwellings to the needs of disabled persons can be costly. Under the Residential Adaptation Assistance Program, a \$38.8 million budget allowance spread over three years will be granted to adapt another 2550 dwellings, and a further \$10 million will be granted over three years as a preventive measure for compliance checks and upgrades of platform lifts in dwellings for disabled persons. This amount is in addition to the \$4.2 million per year in ongoing funding allocated to the Residential Adaptation Assistance Program.

The Residential Adaptation Assistance Program provides financial assistance to disabled persons for the cost of labour to make their residence accessible and to adapt it to their needs

In 2004-2005, the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) committed \$5,230,397 to adapt 429 dwellings inhabited by disabled persons. During the same period, \$476,990 was earmarked for replacing 33 platform lifts. In addition to platform replacement, the SHQ provides funds to repair equipment used by disabled persons. In 2004-2005, total commitments for these activities came to \$706,513. The total budget invested in 2004-2005 was therefore \$6.4 million. In addition, on March 31, 2005, 2218 applications for adaptations were being processed. These will be finalized during the current fiscal year (2005-2006) or later. They represent an estimated \$30.6 million in commitments that will be ongoing into 2007.

The development of community initiatives in housing

Community action in housing can enable citizens to gain autonomy and emerge from their isolation. In 2004-2005, the Assistance Program for Community Housing Organizations provided financial assistance to 47 such organizations, with a budget allowance of \$1,440,398.

The goal of this program is to stimulate the development and integration of community housing initiatives. It provides financial assistance to organizations that carry out housing projects, notably for improving living conditions and promoting citizen self-empowerment in that regard.

The Community and Social Initiatives in Low Rental Housing Program provides financial support for one-off community action programs aimed at helping people in low-rental housing take charge of their own environment.

Under this program, from 1998 to 2004, 86 projects were implemented on behalf of families in low-rental housing. Sixty-seven projects were also set into motion for the elderly, as well as 74 mixed (family and elderly) projects and two for independent adults. The program's budget in 2004-2005 was \$400,000, half of which was provided by the Société d'habitation du Québec and half by the ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine.

Examples of projects under the Assistance Program for Community Housing Organizations are:

- Awareness-raising and lobbying activities on the housing front;
- Information provision and training of members or the population served.

Examples of projects under the Community and Social Initiatives in Low Rental Housing Program are:

- community garden projects to reduce the alienation of the elderly;
- homework assistance and projects designed to help school children living in low-rental housing achieve academic success.

Better services for the homeless or people at risk of becoming homeless

Homelessness in Québec is a fact. Over the years, measures have been established to counter this phenomenon and mitigate its consequences, and to reduce the number of people in the grips of this problem. Under the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), community strategies have been adopted in twelve regions. Implementation of 2003-2006 community strategies is ongoing.

The Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) is a key component of the Canadian government's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). Its goal is to address the fundamental causes of homelessness and to provide immediate and long-term solutions to the problem. To meet this goal, it will support the work of local communities in setting priorities, in drafting community strategies to direct efforts to reduce and prevent homelessness, and in providing suitable solutions.

The SHQ and the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) are responsible for selecting projects financed under SCPI. Social housing for persons at risk of becoming homeless is also provided. In 2004-2005, some 230 projects were approved. According to those involved, SCPI has made it possible to better equip organizations dealing with homelessness, to reduce pressure on shelters and to increase supported housing. The program enabled new joint efforts and raised the health network's awareness of the various facets of homelessness.

The measure is fully funded by the federal government under SCPI (roughly \$50 million in 2004-2005), and by the regular budget of AccèsLogis Québec for property related to certain projects.

Some examples are:

- direct intervention on behalf of clientele (human resources, street workers);
- projects for property renovation or for purchase and renovation, or for the cost of equipment (40% to 50% of amounts);
- action research projects supporting community strategies.

Pilot projects in budget planning

The SHQ has called for proposals for supporting budget planning organizations that help households unable to pay their rent due to an unexpected event such as disease, accident or temporary loss of employment.

Subsidies have been granted for seven projects, including two to budget planning organizations. Budgets invested in 2003-2004 were for \$80,000. Final reports on the seven projects are to be tabled in September 2005.

Example of projects:

Organizations and organization workers have been approached to set up information sessions on budgeting, credit and debt. These sessions are mainly intended for community workers and their clients. The goal is to prevent emergency situations, mitigate social problems, and provide access to affordable micro-credit to low-income persons in order to stave off eviction. Interventions are geared towards consumer awareness of tools for better budget management and of the perils of parallel credit. Budget planning activities are also available.

Improved access to sufficient amounts of nutritious food

In addition to providing food per se, the food security measures managed by the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux help fight poverty and social exclusion by fostering community self-empowerment and development of the ability of communities to resolve community-wide problems. In addition to improving general health and well-being through nutrition, support for this concerted action provides knowledge about the collective management of community resources along with a multitude of spin-off benefits for vulnerable communities.

Investments in food security are investments against poverty. Support for pooled action on this front helps improve access to a healthy diet for all and improves the lives of individuals and communities alike.

Projects are underway in all regions of Québec. These projects not only give disadvantaged people access to healthy food but also help them improve their meal preparation and food budgeting skills. The projects also help the poorer members of society become a genuine part of the community.

Examples of projects:

Projects aimed at individuals and communities include consolidation or establishment of community kitchens, community gardens, community grocery stores, self-help food banks, cooking workshops in school settings, buyers' groups, workshops on thrifty cuisine, workshops on budgeting, and publication of a directory of food resources.

Local and regional joint efforts already underway make it possible for everyone concerned with food security within their community to find lasting solutions together. Nearly 250 projects have been carried out across Québec since 2002-2003. A side benefit has been greater mobilization and community awareness. The subsidized projects were not designed to develop services for low-income individuals, but rather to identify lasting, community-based solutions for developing food security. Some communities therefore conducted studies on the food security needs in their area. Others opted to strengthen existing action in order to meet a need identified by the community. Many partners joined

forces to target sustainable solutions, including community organizations, citizens' groups, health and social service centres, municipalities, schools, women's centres, volunteer action centres and grocery stores. Overall, the projects seem to have had an impact mostly on women and young families.

A \$3.3-million budget has been allocated for 2004-2005. This amount is in addition to that invested in 2002-2003, i.e. \$3.4 million, and in 2003-2004, i.e. \$3.3 million, for a total investment of \$10 million. A progress report is scheduled for Autumn 2005.

Food assistance for children

One-off food assistance measures are an immediate way to deal with hunger. In 2004, the government renewed a financial agreement with the Club des petits déjeuners to grant it funding for a two-year period (\$4 million total subsidy). The mission of the Club des petits déjeuners is to ensure that elementary-level students in schools within communities with a high deprivation index have an equal chance of personal success.

The mission of the Club des petits déjeuners, a non-profit organization that raises money to serve breakfasts in schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, is to give elementary-school children in these areas equal opportunity for success by providing them with nutritious breakfasts throughout the school year. Every child in the school is invited to partake of these breakfasts so that socialization rather than ghettoization occurs.

A daily breakfast service is now provided to over 10,000 schoolchildren in more than 165 elementary schools in poverty-stricken areas.

The sources of the \$4-million subsidy break down as follows: \$2.7 million from the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale; \$1.0 million from the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux; and \$0.3 million from the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. In 2004-2005, the contribution of the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale was \$1.6 million, that of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, \$300,000, and that of the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, \$100,000. Talks are underway to renew this agreement, which expires on June 30, 2006.

3.2 Prevent poverty and social exclusion by fostering development of personal potential

The *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* recognizes that people living in poverty must be the first to act to change their and their loved ones' situation. It is fitting that we work with them to help them develop their potential. Action must be taken as early as pregnancy to foster and support the education of children from families in need. Greater support, supervision and guidance are also offered to young people in order to promote their academic success and make it easier for them to obtain work qualifications.

FAMILIES: AT THE HEART OF GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Families are among the government's top priorities. The financial assistance granted to Québec families is the most substantial they have ever received. Children living in poverty are entitled to support through the family, childcare, or school.

More generous financial assistance for families

On January 1, 2005, the new Child Assistance measure was introduced to cover the basic needs of dependent children under 18 years old. Child Assistance replaces and

The maximum amount per year of Child Assistance is \$2000 for a first child, \$1000 for a second, and \$1500 for each additional child. The minimum amount per year is \$561 for a first child and \$517 for each additional child. Single-parent families are entitled to a supplement of at least \$280 and of up to \$700 a year. A supplement of \$121 is issued across the board for children with disabilities.

improves upon three measures – family allowances, a non-refundable tax credit for dependent children and tax cuts for families. The format used is a quarterly refundable tax credit issued to mothers. Families can also request monthly payments. Amounts depend on the family's net income for the preceding year.

This new measure provides more generous assistance, particularly to low-income families, as illustrated by the following example.

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY WITH 1 CHILD

Net family income	2004 system ⁹	New system Child Assistance	Gains
\$0	\$1 925	\$2 700	\$775
\$5 000	\$1 925	\$2 700	\$775
\$10 000	\$1 925	\$2 700	\$775
\$15 000	\$2 262	\$2 700	\$438
\$20 000	\$1 428	\$2 700	\$1 272
\$25 000	\$2 017	\$2 700	\$683
\$30 000	\$2 033	\$2 700	\$667

Since January 2005, Québec has moved up in terms of its provincial ranking for financial assistance to families on employment assistance. Québec is now the number one Canadian province for assistance to single-parent families with children under five years old.

As for two-parent families with two children aged 10 and 13, Québec has gone from sixth to second place, and from ninth to fourth place for single-parent families with the same profile.

In 2004-2005, Child Assistance meant supplementary investments of \$112 million earmarked for low-income families.¹⁰

Family support as of pregnancy

Poverty and premature parenthood are among the major determinants in children's development and social adaptation. The ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux's Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services support vulnerable families with children aged 0 to 5 years old.

These services have two components:

- Support for young parents (young pregnant women and mothers under 20 years old, and fathers and their children 0 to 5 years old);
- Support for families living in extreme poverty (pregnant women and mothers under 20 years old, and fathers and their children 0 to 5 years old in extreme poverty).

Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services are aimed at decreasing mortality and morbidity in the unborn, children, pregnant women, and mothers and fathers, at fostering the optimal development of children, and at improving the living conditions of vulnerable families. They are also meant to lower the intergenerational transmission of health and social problems such as child abuse, neglect and violence.

9. Allocation familiale, crédits d'impôt pour enfants à charge et pour famille monoparentale, et réduction d'impôt à l'égard des familles.

10. Selon la mesure de faible revenu (avant impôt).

These services are two-pronged. They provide family guidance and supervision in the form of home visits by the appropriate workers (nurses, social workers or other, depending on the family's needs) and they foster the creation of environments conducive to the health and well-being of these families. Training was provided to staff members in 2004.

Prenatal care:

- Home visits lasting 60 to 90 minutes each, every two weeks as of the 12th week of pregnancy.

Postnatal care:

- 0 to 6 weeks: every week.
- 7 weeks to 12 months: every two weeks.
- 13 to 60 months: once a month, plus group activities for children, parents or families.

The visits centre on the various elements related to child development, parenting skills, and the family's living conditions. Health, nutrition, and the psycho-social features of family life are monitored and child development or economic or material support provided.

The ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) and the Association des CLSC et des CHSLD du Québec work together to offer financial assistance to destitute pregnant teenagers under Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services.

Since September 2002, more than 4000 young mothers have received services under the Support for young parents program. Data for the family component will be available in Autumn 2005.

In 2004-2005, the budget allocated by the MSSS to the Support for young parents component was \$23 million. For the component intended for families living in extreme poverty, the budget was \$22 million in 2004-2005 (MESS and Agences de santé et de services sociaux appropriations).

Evaluation of implementation and of the short-, mid- and long-term effects of the Support for young parents component will begin in Autumn 2005.

Partnership geared towards prevention

Alongside prevention on the institutional level is a new partnership that encourages community initiatives aimed at early intervention for children from disadvantaged families. The ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) has joined forces with the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon to support action to prevent child and family poverty. A five-year partnership agreement was signed by the parties in December 2004. The purpose of the agreement is to prevent child poverty using a global approach with parents and children early on (from conception to 6 years of age). The main objective is to ensure that these children's development is at par with the Québec average when they begin school.

The Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon was created in 2000 for the purpose of contributing to the development and improvement of health by preventing poverty and disease mainly in children and their parents.

The first project supported further to signature of the partnership agreement was Autonomie Jeunes Familles (AJF), or Program of Support to Young Parents, whose main goal is rapid intervention in impoverished districts where young pregnant women and families expecting their first child live, primarily east-end Montréal.

The project is managed by a non-profit corporation whose board of directors is composed of government and Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon representatives. The corporation supports prevention and the transfer of preventive practices based on an innovative model that pools all interventions aimed at young parents. Programs and interventions have been offered since June 2005.

The project will be evaluated for methodology and the effects of the interventions on the parents and children. MESS and the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon will each contribute \$5 million for the duration of the agreement. For 2004-2005, the two parties issued \$250,000 each, and unused funds will be carried over into 2005-2006.

Two new projects will be developed in 2005-2006:

- Young Aboriginal parents: intended for young parents whose social and emotional development has been haphazard or traumatic.
- Young immigrant parents: intended for young parents (in the Montréal region) having trouble because of their recent immigration.

A stimulating environment for very young children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Children must have access to a stimulating environment where they can acquire the skills they need for success in school. In 2002, a framework agreement was signed by the ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine (MFACF), the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) and provincial representatives of early childhood centres. The goal of the agreement is to facilitate access to early childhood centres (CPE) for children whose family has been referred by a CLSC in order to receive the early stimulation the children need for their development.

Under CLSC-CPE agreements, places are reserved for these children. As at April 18, 2005, 295 CLSC-CPE agreements were underway with 84 CLSCs and 295 CPEs, with CLSCs free to sign an agreement with more than one CPE in their area. Under this agreement, the MFACF funds temporarily unfilled reserved places.

Evaluation of the agreements began in April 2005. The methodology used in introducing the agreements and the results of the services offered by both networks will be evaluated. This process will also provide more information on the clientele receiving the services. The evaluation report should be tabled sometime in Summer 2006.

Better preparing children for school

Not all children have the same opportunity to see people reading in their immediate environment, interact with adults through written language, enjoy written material, or take part in activities related to reading and writing. Children who have done so, whether at home or at daycare, learn to read more easily, are the best readers, and get better grades in mathematics. This is why it is important to instil a love of reading in children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods as early as possible and to get them involved in activities that awaken their interest in reading and writing.

The Assistance Program for Emergent Literacy in Disadvantaged Communities stems from the *Action Plan for Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*, which was produced by the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and implemented in collaboration with the ministère de la Culture et des Communications, the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine and the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux.

Emergent literacy activities are aimed at helping children aged 5 and under discover the written language within their surroundings and at developing a love of reading and the desire to learn to read and write.

The program hinges on rallying ministerial, institutional, and community partners provincially, regionally and locally. Its purpose is to integrate sustainable emergent literacy activities within the practices of these partners at the provincial, regional and local level. Joint action has been introduced at all these levels.

The various organizations within a given municipality or district work together to identify the literacy activities they can include within their own activities, in keeping with their mission. These activities must be designed to outlive the program.

For example:

- libraries could develop a system for large-scale lending of youth literature to the community's organizations and institutions so they can make it available to families as part of their slate of services;
- local employment centres (CLEs) could set up a reading corner in their multiservice area, transmit information to parents about the importance of whetting their children's appetite for reading, and refer them to organizations equipped to support them;
- health and social service centre (CSSS) workers could make literacy activities part of their family interventions (read a story and leave a book with the family during their visits);
- a youth centre could wind up a family intervention by reading a book;
- family centres or daycare services could review their program to include emergent literacy activities;
- an adult education centre could add parental skill training to its roster.

Instituted in 2003, the program supports partnership projects in the 17 regions of Québec and at least one project for English school boards. Once completed, the projects will make it possible for public and community organizations that work with children aged 5 and under in disadvantaged communities, as well as with their parents and grandparents, to seamlessly and sustainably incorporate literacy activities into their mandates, policies, action plans, and programming in the places attended and services used by the target population.

The projects are carried out in communities with schools ranked 9 and 10.¹¹ The program supports approximately 27 projects in the 17 regions. Nearly 1400 literacy activities are being conducted with parents, with their children aged 0 to 5 years old, and with organizations.

The projects cover 112 municipalities and 175 school territories. Regional committees are entrusted with implementing the program. In addition, 27 local teams have been created, the members of which include representatives of elementary schools, adult education, health and social service centres (CSSSs), local employment centres (CLEs), municipalities, libraries, early childhood centres (CPEs), and community organizations in the territory of the schools in question. Regional committee members and local participants alike were given training.

The total budget was \$680,000 in 2004-2005. Each administrative region has an annual budget of \$40,000 to back local projects in targeted territories.

11. The elementary and secondary schools in each school board were given a decile rank based on the following data: mother's level of education (2/3 of the decile value) and the parents' economic activity (1/3 of the value). The most disadvantaged schools were ranked 9 or 10 .

The budget allocated to each project (from \$8000 and \$40,000) is used to support joint action among organizations and to organize the project and forge the partnership required for activities to outlive the program.

Implementation of approximately 20 new local projects will continue throughout Autumn 2005, as will training of new local teams. Lastly, evaluation of the program is two-pronged - evaluation of program implementation by the 75 regional partners and 350 local organizations, with the report tabled in Summer 2005, and evaluation of program effects, which began in Spring 2005.

Activities to improve academic success in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Academic success is more difficult to achieve in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where low graduation rates, high drop-out rates, parents with scanty resources for helping their children succeed, and teachers overwhelmed by an array of daily problems abound. To be effective, tactics for fostering academic success must be synchronized and carried out in class, in school, within the family and within the community, in other words, any place where a child's development is influenced.

Since 2003, the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport has been trial testing the Famille, école et communauté, réussir ensemble program, aimed at families, children, classrooms, schools and communities. Its purpose is to experiment with a template for an educational community that fosters the success of elementary-level children (2 to 12 years old) from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The expected lifespan of the project is four years.

Eleven school boards are involved, and 24 schools in communities with poor socio-economic profiles (ranked 9 or 10), that is, 2 schools per participating school board territory. The number of young people concerned is 4672.

A team of development officers was established on the territory of each school board. These officers receive ongoing training. In addition, a team of local partners (local employment centre, school board, youth employment centre, community service centre, community organizations, municipalities, etc.) was formed on the territory covered by each school or by two schools (at least one per target school board).

The local team is mandated to analyze the situation, draft a success plan, help carry out the plan, and assess the results. Over 300 partners from 35 different categories of organizations are involved in the local teams.

Examples of activities:

- Francization classes to the parents of children enrolled in a welcoming class in elementary schools. Several partners participate in offering this service (collaboration by adult education, community organization, local employment centre, municipality, etc.).
- Municipal library opening hours were changed to accommodate elementary school groups during regular class time (collaboration by the school, municipality, library).
- School daycare services through a CPE (collaboration by the school and the early childhood centre).
- School open house enabling all partners to showcase their services (collaboration by all member organizations in the local team).

Every school board receives \$60,000 annually. The total budget in 2004-2005 was \$660,000. The program is evaluated in two phases. The evaluation report for the implementation phase will be tabled in Autumn 2005. Evaluation of program relevance and effectiveness will begin in November 2005, and the report should be available in Summer 2006.

Assistance to increase student motivation and success

In May 2004, two new programs were announced: Homework Assistance and Healthy Schools. The former is aimed at bolstering the homework assistance needed in order for elementary-level students to remain interested in school, to rally the school community to the cause, and to stimulate local initiatives in finding formats tailored to each school community. The purpose of the Healthy Schools program is to educate Cycle Three elementary school and Cycle One secondary school students in healthy lifestyle habits, including regular physical activity and proper nutrition. The two programs increase student motivation and improve students' academic performance. Unlike the programs geared specifically to a disadvantaged clientele, these programs are intended for the school population at large, which creates a ripple effect that often pays off most for children from low-income families.

Examples of Homework Assistance projects:

- Support for students who want to stay after class to do their homework. Development of proper work habits. With the participation of teenagers, retired teachers, and other members of the community.
- Parent training in home reading. Use of the "Lire et écrire à la maison" (LÉA) and "L'apprentissage de la lecture en première année" programs to support parents in helping their young children develop reading skills and acquire the habit of reading at home.
- Home visits by the person in charge of the project to coach the parents who cannot leave home.
- Introduction of a home reading program for the summer through end-of-school activities involving teachers and parents of Cycle One students.

The projects presented under these programs must be approved by the school's governing board and submitted to a school board selection committee. Schools are responsible for implementing the projects, which are integrated within the school's success plan, while complying with the objectives of the respective programs.

Examples of Healthy Schools projects:

- Cooking workshops given once a month in class, with parents participating, and sports activities for parents and children, in partnership with a neighbourhood community organization.
- Project that brings together the schools in the same district: improved slate of noon hour activities offered by secondary schools (one hour a day); training given during special health and nutrition days in the school cafeteria or public meeting room. For elementary schools, improved slate of activities outside the school setting, both in terms of frequency and variety (swimming, tennis, rock climbing, etc.).

- Neighbourhood-wide organization of sports activities for boys on pedagogical days. Participation of teachers-in-training, the municipality, recreational organizations, and student volunteers from the international education program.

Sixty-nine school boards in Québec's 17 regions are involved. The approximate number of schools covered is 1711 for the Homework Assistance program and 1989 for the Healthy Schools program.

For the 2004-2005 school year, a total of \$9.4 million was allocated for the 69 school boards under the Homework Assistance program and \$4.8 million under the Healthy Schools program. It was announced that the budget for the Homework Assistance Program in 2005-2006 would be increased to \$20 million a year.

Better support through additional professional resources for students at risk

Difficulty in school is the cause of many students dropping out before getting their first diploma. Starting this year (2004-2005), school boards have a total budget of \$10 million for hiring professional resources, e.g. guidance counsellors, speech therapists, psychologists, remedial teachers, assigned specifically to help students having trouble in school.

This measure makes it possible for schools to provide students with better guidance and supervision and extra support for parents and teachers by hiring extra professional staff for elementary and secondary schools. It enables schools, as part of their success plan, to consolidate services likely to counter academic troubles, enhance a sense of belonging to the school, encourage retention, and support student guidance.

The annual budget of nearly \$10 million is shared among the 17 regions of Québec.

A total investment of \$50 million will allow the hiring of more professionals over a five-year period.

BETTER SUPPORT FOR YOUTH IN DIFFICULTY

Lack of a secondary school diploma can be an obstacle to the social and occupational integration of young adults. The family and personal problems that some young people face can hinder their academic success. Repeated failure in school causes many students to drop out without having gotten any occupational qualifications. Greater guidance and support are offered to these young people to help ease their difficulties.

A project to qualify young people in youth centres

The services offered to young people under youth centre supervision are not always seamlessly coordinated to give youths an adequate transition to adulthood. Qualification des jeunes is a pilot project that uses intensive intervention to prepare young people for self-sufficiency and to ensure they have work qualifications. The lifespan of the project, which began in 2001, is four years.

The clientele targeted are 16-year-olds who were placed, who have no specific plans for the future, and whose prospects of social and occupational integration are for the most part limited. Qualification des jeunes is different from regular youth centre services in that young people continue to benefit after they have turned 18, and in that it is more intensive (10/1 client-worker ratio instead of 16/1).

Examples of projects:

- An intervention plan is drawn up in conjunction with the young person based on the two components of intervention: preparation for self-sufficiency, and interventions aimed at qualification.
- The young people learn how to budget (bank account, financial planning, etc.), prepare for a job interview (resumé, interview techniques), find an apartment, etc.
- « Défi-Mois »: an instructional tool in the form of a board game. The idea is to live for a month on the income granted under employment-assistance.

In the first year, the project was established in three regions of Québec, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Laval and Outaouais. The region of Montréal was added in 2002.

Between October and December 2004, 83 young people were active in the project. Preliminary results indicate that the retention rate is 80%. In addition, 73% of the young people who found a job kept it for at least a year.

The project is funded by various partners: the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (\$300,000), the Fonds de lutte contre la pauvreté (\$300,000), the Fonds jeunesse Québec (\$300,000), participating youth centres (\$314,351) and the Centre national de prévention du crime (\$951,130).

For fiscal 2004-2005, investments reached \$609,061. A non-recurrent amount of \$360,197 was added by MSSS to ensure project continuity. The first cohort of young people finished the project in June 2005. Project evaluation results should be available in Autumn 2005. If results are positive, the project could be offered across Québec.

Teams for greater continuity and meshing of youth services jeunesse

Young people in difficulty require ongoing access to services that are best adapted to their situation. Youth intervention teams were formed in 2003-2004 as part of a three-year pilot project in the wake of the action strategy for young people in difficulty and their families. These teams are the centerpiece measure.

Their mission is to systematize a formal and structured partnership among the various providers of services to children and youth with complex, multiple or "grey-area" problems. They cover the health and social service centre territories in every region of Québec. The teams are headed by a coordinator who oversees liaison officers in every establishment that offers services to children and youth (health and social service centres, youth centres, rehabilitation centres for intellectually and physically impaired clients and for clients with addictions, child psychiatry services, schools, early childhood centres, etc.).

Introduction of the youth intervention teams is being evaluated by Université de Montréal. A progress report was released in December 2004 showing that:

- In nine months of activity, EIJs received 760 consultations, 360 of which involved discussion with parental consent.
- The youth and children served experienced complex problems for which an average of 3.4 establishments were involved in seeking a solution.
- The clientele had better access to services and the courses of action undertaken were better coordinated.
- Thanks to these youth intervention teams, parents did not have to attend meetings repeatedly, there was no overlap in evaluation, and solutions for meeting client needs were found.

The final report will be tabled in Spring 2006. \$ 7.2 million over three years was allocated to form and organize the youth intervention teams, in other words, annual investments of \$2.4 million.

As at March 31, 2005, 21 youth intervention teams were operational in the 17 regions of Québec.

Better meeting the needs of 16-to-24 year-olds

Many young people quit school without their first diploma. Nearly two thirds are boys. Action has been taken to enable these young people to go back to school, including the program *Le plaisir d'apprendre : j'embarque quand ça me ressemble*, which is geared to 16-to-24 year-olds who are working full time, receiving employment insurance or employment assistance, without a source of income, or who stay home for lack of any other solution. Some are parents and others are homeless. The ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport is responsible for the program, which is implemented in collaboration with the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and the Secrétariat à la jeunesse.

On the local level, the program is under school board jurisdiction. It has been established in 20 school boards in the 17 regions of Québec. The program is implemented in collaboration with a local team through a partnership agreement, among other mechanisms. This local team is composed of school board, local employment centre, youth centre, social service centre, and Forum Jeunesse representatives, and representatives of businesses and organizations such as *carrefours jeunesse-emploi* and external manpower resources. This team is crafting a common action plan for 2005 to 2007 and ensures implementation of intended activities and service continuity.

In 2004-2005, the total budget for the program was \$2 million. The budgets were used to hire a development officer and produce action plans for 2005-2007, among other purposes. According to 2001 data, nearly 36,882 16-to-24 year-olds without a diploma were targeted.

Implementation will continue in other school boards in the coming year, and program evaluation will be carried out in 20 school boards. The report will be tabled in Autumn 2005.

A strategy for secondary-level students with difficulties

The drop-out rate is higher in underprivileged districts than in other neighbourhoods. This is why a decision was made to intervene within select secondary schools whose students are from the most disadvantaged communities. The schools were identified using a school population map and a deprivation index rate based on mothers' level of education or lack thereof, and parents' labour market activity or lack thereof. The *New Approaches, New Solutions* programs was established in these schools to enable them to institute customized measures for fostering student success. School boards receive the allocations and divide them among the schools concerned.

New Approaches, New Solutions is in its third year of implementation (2004-2005). From the outset (2002-2003), an evaluation team was formed to monitor the implementation process and the effects of the strategy on students. The team sees to it that results are forwarded to the schools, school boards and the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.

Training and guidance and supervision services tailored to the situation and needs of young drop-outs or young people with little schooling, aged 16 to 24, were established to help them obtain a secondary school diploma, thereby allowing them to continue their schooling or begin the process of becoming productive members of society.

Examples of projects:

- Better student supervision through tutoring or the homeroom system.
- Addition of specialized resources whose expertise is passed on to the permanent staff.
- Introduction of educational practices that foster learning and motivation.
- Addition of extracurricular, sports or cultural activities.
- Greater collaboration between families and schools in achieving student success.

The intervention strategy continues in the schools where it was introduced in 2002-2003. The number of participating secondary schools is 196 and allocations were issued to 55 school boards. A little over 112,000 students were reached.

Investments of \$125 million over a five-year period (until 2006-2007) were set aside as part of this intervention strategy. In 2004-2005, nearly \$27 million was spent. Evaluation reports on implementation in the first two years of operation will be available sometime in Summer 2005.

Acquiring first qualifications through work-study arrangements

To help young employment-assistance recipients obtain their first qualifications while employed, pilots projects were established in March 2004.

Within the purview of Emploi-Québec's Recherche et innovation measure, these pilot projects are aimed at testing various work-study formulas (work schedule arrangement, coaching, leave during exam periods, financial assistance, etc.) for facilitating the acquisition of basic training or first qualifications, while earning a living.

Coordination is entrusted to a steering committee co-chaired by the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.

Projects must combine qualification activities and work. In some projects, participants are paid by a business subsidized to cover training periods. In others, participants receive an Emploi-Québec allowance and a salary.

Example of a project:

- To enable participants to study towards obtaining a secondary school vocational diploma to become an industrial machine operator without hindering the companies concerned, two young people shared the same job by alternating training weeks with work weeks.

In March 2004, 18 projects had been approved in 12 regions, with expected participation by 289 young employment-assistance recipients. The budgets earmarked for these projects represented slightly more than \$5 million. Two types of evaluation will be carried out. The report on implementation was produced in Spring 2005, and the report on results will be available in Spring 2006.

3.3 Involve society as a whole

To wage an effective battle against poverty, all regional and local instances and stakeholders called to action: people living in poverty, cities, RCMs, private companies, public corporations, and community groups. The State must create conditions conducive to rallying all the forces concerned and aim for better coordination of the various sector-based strategies for improving the lives of people in disadvantaged areas.

A TERRITORIAL APPROACH: MEETING THE NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES

Poverty tends to be concentrated in certain areas. That is why communities must be counted on to take charge of themselves and why grassroots and local initiatives must be supported. Government action should also be adapted to reality as experienced by the First Nations.

Supporting grassroots initiatives in areas tagged for priority action

Local strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion are funded by the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (FQIS), in addition to resources assigned to local strategies by the various players (private, public and community organizations) in the territories deemed priorities. In 2004-2005, the FQIS made it possible to support a number of initiatives by disadvantaged districts.

A ten-sector agreement between the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) and the City of Montréal (2003-2007 city contract) was signed to fund social and community development projects and projects to combat poverty and social exclusion: integrated urban renewal, socio-urban issue resolution, food security, gender equality, drop-out prevention and social and occupational integration for 15-to-30 year-olds, support for community life, social integration of clientele at risk, support for families and young children, urban safety, and universal accessibility.

Thanks to this agreement, some 185 projects in 22 of the city's boroughs were funded in 2003 and 2004, all of them designed to combat poverty and social exclusion.

In 2004-2005, Montréal received funding of \$5 million, and the agreement is currently being reviewed. It is made up of four components: an overall evaluation of the integrated territorial approach in five pilot areas (neighbourhood renewal); assessment of joint action initiatives in the 22 boroughs; a yearly review of two or three of the funded projects over the five years covered by the agreement; and training to help stakeholders and organizations self-evaluate their achievements.

The Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (FQIS) is one of the main tools aimed at fostering the emergence of local strategies for combating poverty and social exclusion in the territories deemed priorities. The Fonds enables new partnerships among the various private, public and community players and provides leverage for pooling the different resources with a view to the human, social and economic development of the community.

Examples of projects supported as part of the agreement with the City of Montréal:

- Implementation of a community gardening program to enable the underprivileged population to better provide for their dietary needs.
- Support for street workers in areas where young people are prone to various social problems.
- A support program for families living in low-rental housing, which includes the following weekly agenda: an activity for parents accompanied by their children; a parenting skills workshop; a stimulation workshop for children aged 0-5; and recreational activities designed to promote prevention and socialization for youngsters aged 6-12.
- Creation of workshops on sound and lighting techniques and continuation of silk-screening, sewing and furniture-manufacturing activities for street youth.

- Examples of projects being supported in the two RCMs:*
- *Group transportation for persons living in poverty*
 - *Activities to develop alternatives to emergency food access: community gardens, community kitchens, etc.*

In this regard, pilot projects have been set up in two areas of Québec. In 2003, MESS signed a four-year agreement to combat poverty and social exclusion with the Haute-Gaspésie RCM, and a similar three-year agreement in 2004 with the Témiscouata RCM.

Each RCM drew up an action plan. In concert with the authorities in their respective territories, both RCMs reached agreements with various organizations equipped to help them meet the objectives of their action plans. Thus, 14 projects were supported in Haute-Gaspésie and five in Témiscouata. In addition, the coordinators of the two pilot projects sit on various committees responsible for social development and the fight against poverty and social exclusion with a view to establishing partnerships with stakeholders capable of making the projects underway in their respective regions sustainable.

In 2004-2005, the FQIS awarded \$487,300 in funding to the pilot project of the Haute-Gaspésie RCM and \$450,000 to the Témiscouata RCM. Both projects are well into the second years of the agendas of their respective action plans and will undergo assessment, both in terms of development and implementation of the action plans and community involvement, and of initiatives designed to promote income security.

MESS also backed a number of projects as part of the measure to support activities to combat poverty and social exclusion for 2004-2005. All told, 226 projects in 16 regions of Québec received funding (projects in the Montréal area were funded under the agreement reached between MESS and the City of Montréal). The projects were selected based on priority sectors and territories. In 2004-2005, this measure received funding in the amount of \$4.9 million.

- 17 statistical compendiums based on the Pampalon and Raymond deprivation index were published, one for each region of Québec. Their purpose is to provide local and regional stakeholders with data enabling them to identify the most disadvantaged territories and support the development of joint action initiatives.*

As stated earlier, the project *Autonomie Jeunes Familles* (Program of Support to Young Parents) received a budget envelope of \$250,000 under a partnership agreement between MESS and the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, and assistance in the amount of \$1.6 million was awarded to the Club des petits déjeuners du Québec project.

For 2004-2005, the FQIS thus granted a total of \$13.4 million (including administration fees). Discussions are currently underway with the Department of Social Development for a possible federal contribution to the funding of the FQIS.

A government strategy adapted to the reality of Aboriginals

In Québec, off-reserve Aboriginal Peoples are more vulnerable to persistent poverty, while the low-income rates of Aboriginals living on reserves remain extremely high. Problems in First Nations communities include low average household incomes, worrisome social and medical problems, low levels of schooling, a lack of skilled workers, violence against Aboriginal women, isolation, and the remoteness of major economic corridors.

During 2004-2005, efforts were made to step up dialogue with Aboriginal Nations in order to support the emergence of local strategies in Native villages and reserves. Discussions are currently underway with Aboriginal representatives of the Social Development Office (SDO) of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL).

The AFNQL will assume leadership, and the SDO intends to hire an information officer mandated to establish an operating structure and draw up an action and information plan in collaboration with local groups.

Preliminary meetings with representatives of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), the AFNQL and senior officials of the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale have highlighted a mutual interest in forming partnerships for action.

3.4 Ensure consistent, coherent action

In order to be effective, measures to combat poverty and social exclusion must be consistent among themselves and with the various government policies. It is also important to set up a place where research can be done and documentation kept on poverty-related issues.

Assessing the impact of legislative or regulatory proposals

Section 20 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* stipulates that each minister shall, if he or she considers that proposals of a legislative or regulatory nature could have direct and significant impacts on the incomes of persons or families who, according to the indicators retained under this Act, are living in poverty, shall, when presenting the proposals to the Government, give an account of the impacts he or she foresees.

During the year, the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) crafted a methodology for making it easier to select projects and equip departments and agencies for this assessment process. This methodology, which was presented to all the departments and agencies concerned, specifies an income threshold below which households are considered to be living in poverty, and defines income that should be taken into account in applying the impact clause and "direct and significant impacts."

Stepping up dialogue with the federal government

On March 1, 2005, the governments of Québec and Canada signed an agreement setting up the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP), which will be offered as of January 1, 2006.

This new plan will henceforth be accessible to self-employed workers who are subject to assessment, and replaces and improves upon the measures currently offered to new parents under the Employment Insurance program administered by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC).

Discussions with the federal government will continue in 2005-2006 in order to obtain adequate funding to better support the efforts of the chronically unemployed to find sustainable employment. As part of negotiations recently begun by MESS with HRSDC, the former reiterated a request for increased funding for active measures, expanded eligibility for active measures, and the transfer of new federal funds. This aim of this proposal is to broaden the scope of public employment services in order to assist other segments of the labour force and respond more effectively to current and future needs. This proposal also follows up on a unanimous request made by the provinces and territories that are members of the Forum of Labour Market Ministers.

Broadening of the eligibility framework would allow Québec to provide services to an additional 16,500 claimants under the same active measures that are currently funded by the Employment Insurance Account, representing an increase of approximately 40% in the proportion of employment-assistance beneficiaries who are potentially eligible for these measures.

A place of observation, research and exchange

In 2005, the groundwork was laid for a Centre d'études sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale within the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. The centre will conduct studies and research in partnership with the relevant Québec networks, the Institut de la statistique du Québec, and the main government departments involved in combating poverty and social exclusion.

The QPIP provides for the payment of a financial benefit to all eligible workers on unpaid maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave.

In 2004-2005, a budget envelope of \$250,000 was granted for the start-up phase, which includes production of an inventory of measures to combat poverty and social exclusion and a compendium of statistical data and preparation for getting the new centre off the ground. The centre is designed to be a place of observation, research and exchange devoted to providing dependable, objective information on matters concerning poverty and social exclusion. A management committee made up of government representatives, researchers and persons working with the poor will also be set up and mandated to oversee the work carried out by the Centre d'études sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion and to provide it with direction.

4. OUTLOOKS

A five-year horizon has been set to implement the measures contained in the action plan. The preceding section has shown that several measures have been offered during the first year and that major investments have been made to fight the causes and consequences of poverty. The various courses of action pursued in preventing poverty and in improving individuals' and families' financial situations, academic achievement, access to affordable housing, and social and occupational integration will continue into the second year. In 2005-2006, work will be done to implement some of the other measures built into the action plan.

Projects that are well underway

Certain measures of the action plan called for work that was undertaken in the course of the first year and that will continue in 2005-2006. Other measures are linked to Bill 57, the *Individual and Family Assistance Act*, which is slated for adoption in 2005. This section looks at the status of the initiatives undertaken with regard to these different measures.

Reform of the income security system

Bill 57, the *Individual and Family Assistance Act*, will enable the government to deliver on the commitments made in the action plan and modernize the income security system. The measures undertaken will improve the income security system and be implemented in the months following adoption of the new Act.

- The minimum benefit principle will be established in order to guarantee absolute protection of the amount of last-resort financial assistance paid against reductions applied for failure to take steps to enter the labour market, in particular for refusal to take or keep a job.
- Assets will be more flexibly accounted for under the Employment-Assistance Program. This measure is designed to encourage those living in poverty to become more financially autonomous. Beneficiaries will be able to save toward personal development projects (housing, training, employment) without affecting their eligibility for employment assistance or cutting into the amounts to which they are entitled.
- The monthly exemption of \$100 applicable to support income for children under five will be broadened to include all families who receive benefits under the Employment-Assistance Program, regardless of the age of their child. Furthermore, as stipulated in section 61 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, a report and recommendations on the best approach to take with regard to child support income in all programs will be tabled in 2005.
- A separate income support system for persons with significant employment limitations will be created. The Social Solidarity Program will replace the severely limited capacity for employment allowance. In addition to granting last resort financial assistance to persons whose capacity for employment is severely limited within the meaning of the current Act, the purpose of this program is to foster the social inclusion and participation of such persons and their active contribution to society, with the support they require. To achieve these objectives, the program provides for more generous benefits, more flexible rules, appropriate assistance and accompaniment and a more positive perception of this clientele on the part of society.

- The Youth Alternative Program, for young employment-assistance applicants under age 25, will be created. Managed by local employment centres (CLEs), this program will draw on the principle of shared responsibility between the government and the individual and offer coaching to participants. After an initial needs assessment, youths will be directed to the alternative most likely to lead to their socio-occupational integration. During their participation in the Youth Alternative Program, they will receive basic financial assistance as well as a participation allowance. Participants will be assisted in carrying out their action plans by CLE authorities in conjunction with external resources who specialize in working to help this clientele achieve socio-occupational integration. In Autumn 2005, the Youth Alternative Program will be tested in the CLEs that participated in the youth services integration project. This test is intended to validate the program's main parameters in places that have already reviewed all the operational procedures pertaining to reception, assessment and referral of the young people under age 25 who are eligible for employment assistance.

A new look at people living in poverty

Adoption of Bill 57 on assistance for individuals and families is the perfect opportunity to emphasize the importance of coaching to help individuals achieve social and vocational integration. Recognition of the efforts made by these individuals to take steps and to persevere in receiving adequate assistance will help overcome preconceived notions and highlight their contribution to Québec's prosperity. By putting in place various communication activities focusing on Bill 57 and the resulting measures, on the Government Employment Plan, and on highly favourable job prospects for the coming years, businesses, the population at large, and the individuals concerned will be made aware of the importance of working together to combat poverty and social exclusion.

Broader access to medication for low-income individuals

To facilitate access to medication for low-income individuals, a draft medication policy was tabled before the National Assembly in December 2004 and is currently undergoing public hearings. The new policy would make medication free for senior citizens who receive the maximum amount of the guaranteed income supplement. Subsequently, the draft policy will extend free coverage to other low-income clientele or reduce their contributions in pace with the efficiencies achieved thanks to optimum use measures and partnership agreements.

Close to 45,000 seniors are targeted by this measure, 42,000 of whom take medication covered by the public plan. The cost of this measure is estimated at \$7.1 million per year, and the policy could be adopted in Autumn 2005.

However, seniors who receive the maximum amount of the guaranteed income supplement will have access to free medication beginning in July 2005.

More complementary, coherent youth services

When confronted with an array of problems, certain young people have trouble becoming socially and vocationally self-sufficient. Numerous services are offered to these young people by different government departments and agencies to support them in their endeavours, but programs that deal with individual problems in a piecemeal fashion have limited success.

Engagement jeunesse, a commitment to youths aged 16 to 24 who are unemployed or undereducated, aims to ensure more complementary, coherent services to achieve greater efficiency.

Engagement jeunesse is based on an interministerial agreement signed by the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the

Thanks to its Youth Action Strategy for 2005-2008, the government aims to improve the support offered to young people, improve their health and well-being, foster their educational success and entry into the workforce, and increase their presence in society.

ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and the ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles. Its purpose is to foster the personal, social and vocational autonomy of the target population aged 16 to 24 by helping them learn job skills or work toward job integration, in particular by improving the seamlessness, efficiency and coherence of youth services.

The Engagement jeunesse action plan will be developed as part of the Youth Action Strategy currently being drawn up and which should be made public in Autumn 2005. An interministerial committee, coordinated by the Secrétariat à la jeunesse, is tasked with developing this strategy. Engagement jeunesse is considered a centrepiece of the Youth Action Strategy, and this youth commitment could be implemented sometime in Autumn 2005.

Community support services for social housing

The ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and the Société d'habitation du Québec have joined forces to develop and implement a province-wide management framework designed to offer community support services in the area of social housing to persons with special needs or those losing their capacity to take care of themselves. This type of service will give these clients access to decent, affordable housing or allow them to remain in their current dwelling, thereby enabling them to focus on their re-integration. These efforts are part of a multi-sector approach partnering the health and social services network and the housing and municipal sectors.

A place for civic participation

Given the importance of the contribution of civil society to the fight against poverty and social exclusion in Québec, the imminent creation of an advisory committee on the prevention of poverty and social exclusion, the members of which will be drawn from various sectors of civil society, constitutes one of the government's major steps in the area of solidarity and cooperation at all levels. The main function of the advisory committee will be to advise the Minister on the planning, implementation and evaluation of action taken within the scope of the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Toward the development of community solidarity

To support local strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion, all government departments and agencies concerned are called upon to propose objectives in association with the partners in their respective territories and to specify the resources they intend to deploy, according to their financial means.

Discussions on implementing an integrated territorial approach were undertaken by the interministerial committee created to ensure follow-up of the measures contained in the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. A working group within the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale also reviewed this issue and submitted proposals to the interministerial committee.

Work will continue in 2005-2006 to identify, jointly with local and regional partners, the approach to be taken to step up the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the territories where it is most needed, taking into account the initiatives already underway. This approach also aims to foster the development of innovative financial partnerships by maximizing the leverage of the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (FQIS). Over the next year, the regional conferences of elected officers (CREs) will be particularly solicited as premier partners in exercising leadership with a view to establishing concerted strategies with different collaborators in their respective regions.

It should be recalled that the pilot projects of the Témiscouata and Haute-Gaspésie RCMs, as well as the agreement with the City of Montréal (described above), are part of

the joint-action approach to combating poverty and social exclusion, and will thereby contribute to fuelling debate on the issue.

Furthermore, in the Aboriginal community, efforts will be made to forge the partnerships required to adapt anti-poverty actions in order to encourage the emergence of pivotal projects, while respecting the culture and history of Aboriginal Peoples.

Finally, the Québec government sees the action of community organizations and social economy enterprises as an essential alternative to supporting communities through civic participation. In recent years, various things have been done to simplify and harmonize government support for community organizations in different sectors to help them more easily respond to the needs of the population. Thus, efforts to implement the government policy entitled "Community action: a crucial contribution to the exercise of citizenship and the social development of Québec" will result, in the coming year, in better support for social initiatives to fight poverty and social exclusion. From this perspective, the contribution of social economy enterprises remains vital, both for their contribution to integrating beneficiaries and for the services they provide to the population.

Cultivating synergy

The interministerial committee responsible for the fight against poverty and social exclusion, set up to ensure implementation of action plan measures, is continuing its work.

As mentioned earlier, discussions will deal mainly with the integrated territorial approach. In addition, assessment of the action plan will begin in 2005-2006 and will be carried out by a working group made up of evaluation specialists from the departments and agencies concerned by the different measures. The interministerial committee will supervise this assessment process, which will be conducted over a period of five years.

Moreover, the ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune and the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale are working together to examine the problems experienced by certain energy consumers. A working group was set up, in partnership with the departments and agencies concerned, to explore possible ways of providing government support to low-income households that have trouble paying their energy bill. The working group tabled its report in March 2004 and a subcommittee, made up of representatives of the ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune, the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and the Société d'habitation du Québec, is tasked with ensuring implementation of the working group's proposals. The entire endeavour will be overseen by the interministerial committee responsible for the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Key government policies

Implementation of the measures set out in the action plan will be marked, in the course of the coming year, by government directions and policies whose objectives often dovetail with those targeted by the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Eight working groups were created in the wake of the Forum des generations, held in Autumn 2004 to find solutions to Québec's two main challenges, namely, the state of public finances and the declining birth rate. One of these working groups is mandated to develop community-based schools, based on the tenet that schools should be a focal point for public services and that government and community organizations should be partners in the primary mission of schools, student success. This group is also tasked with making recommendations as to the grouping of services in schools with a view to delivering these services to young people and their families. The measures offered in the education sector will thus converge toward this approach, and its objectives coincide with key issues in the fight against poverty by targeting young people's educational success.

A working group was also set up to examine the recognition of prior learning and skills acquired by persons educated abroad. This group is commissioned to pinpoint the main obstacles to quicker recognition of these people's training and skills and identifying ways of overcoming these deterrents. Action aimed at making employment more accessible for immigrants according to their field of study or qualifications meets the objective of preventing poverty. Yet another group was set up to rally prevention efforts, and was mandated to develop approaches aimed at fostering healthy lifestyle habits among young people. This group is particularly concerned by the omnipresent health gap between affluent and more disadvantaged citizens.

Government action in the housing sector is closely linked to combating poverty. A housing policy is currently being drafted and public hearings will be held in the near future. Although broad in scope, the future housing policy will take into account the orientations of the *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, especially as concerns sustainable solutions for facilitating access to decent, affordable housing for low-income households.

In the coming months, the Québec government will also draw up a sustainable development plan in which all departments and agencies will be obliged to specify the goals to be achieved in their spheres of activity, as well as the steps they intend to take to reach these goals. Sustainable development refers to a continuous process to improve living conditions and meet the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is based on the harmonious integration of the environmental, social and economic aspects of development. Thus, the fight against poverty and social exclusion through improvement of the quality of life of individuals and communities is one of the basic elements in ensuring sustainable development. The objectives to be attained through the social dimension of sustainable development are clearly compatible with those targeted by the action plan.

The government context for action plan measures is conducive to their implementation and continuity over the next four years. The outcomes presented in this activity report are thus an incentive to pursue efforts in this regard.

CONCLUSION

The *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* concluded with a promise to find a place for all Quebecers, in order to enrich Québec society and lessen poverty overall. Much remains to be done to achieve the targets and objectives set in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, which was adopted unanimously to guide the actions of the government and society as a whole, but significant milestones have been reached.

Already, thousands of families, employment-assistance beneficiaries and low-income workers have seen their income rise. Thousands of children and young people have, thanks to an array of projects, better chances of success and integration.

In all regions of Québec, projects have been started up and supported in a systemic approach to dealing with the causes and the consequences of poverty alike. Over the next year, by relying on local and regional leadership, priority will be given to managing action at a local level, especially in areas where poverty is concentrated. This pooling of action and greater synergy among those involved are guarantees of success in the development of individuals and of all of society.

This is a report on what the government has done, but it should be recalled that the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* forcefully underscores “the desire of Québec society as a whole to act in a coordinated manner and pursue a course of action designed to combat poverty and social exclusion.”

This concerted action must continue, and the government intends to contribute actively thereto. Such a collective endeavour reconciles social and economic development, and personal and collective growth. Its pursuit brings out the best in our society, a commitment to solidarity and a desire for equal opportunity. Let us therefore continue our efforts so that personal dignity and the participation of all citizens in the development of our society does indeed become our greatest asset.

