



- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -

February 18, 2016

Toronto Budget 2016 falls short on community priorities in poverty reduction

Despite modest last-minute investments in youth, student nutrition and child care, Toronto's 2016 budget still fell short on key community priorities, according to Commitment2Community, a network of more than 80 organizations across Toronto.

In December, over 50 groups wrote to Mayor John Tory and Council outlining \$75 million in new actions needed to move forward with the city's new poverty reduction plan. The 2016 budget approved only a fraction of those new investments.

"By unanimously adopting the City's first ever Poverty Reduction Strategy, councillors made a historic commitment to build a more prosperous and equitable city," said Michael Polanyi, from Toronto Children's Aid Society. "But Budget 2016 was hampered by a lack of revenue tools, too much focus on internal issues and a lack of political will to make the large scale investments needed to make services like transit and child care accessible to the city's most vulnerable"

Municipal investments in 2016 will play an important role in shoring up existing services and stabilizing funding on established programs. However, with a new Poverty Reduction Strategy adopted, communities had pressed for new, critical "down payment" to implement the strategy. With one in four Toronto children living in poverty and thousands of names on wait lists for affordable housing, child care and recreation, the costs of poverty will continue to rise unless City Council takes bold action.

"Stabilizing funding is critically important for community services, but far too much of 2016's poverty reduction funding was focused on keeping the current system afloat," said Leila Serangi, from Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, "We need the investments in poverty reduction to focus on making significant gains on the front line, to ensure long-term livability and prosperity of our neighbourhoods that are falling behind."

Community leaders called on Council refocus the 2017 budget process to include:

- A real, honest plan to address lack of revenues to fund services Torontonians rely on.
- Providing residents adequate time and opportunity to help determine the priorities for investments
- Making progress on systemic, non-fiscal items of TO Prosperity, such as community benefits framework, social procurement policy and a good jobs index; while embedding poverty reduction across all decision making at the city.

Media Contact: Sean Meagher, 416 820 7889, smeagher@socialplanningtoronto.org