

NSHRF PROJECT FACT SHEET

Poverty, Policy and the Health of Children in the Maritimes

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Children in the Maritime Provinces are more likely to have asthma (18 vs 13.5%), more likely to be obese (22.3 vs 17.8%), more likely to have ear infections (58 vs 52.9%), and more likely to have chronic health problems (26.3 vs 24.1%) than children elsewhere in Canada. They are also poorer – 40.2% of Maritime children were poor at least once between 1994 and 1998 compared to 32.7% of other Canadian children – and 10% were poor throughout those four years compared to 5.7% living outside the region.

Dr. Shelley Phipps of Dalhousie University discovered this unsettling information while investigating the socioeconomic determinants of children's health. As long-term poverty has an impact on a person's health, she wanted to assess the difference in chronic poverty experienced by Maritime children compared to children living elsewhere in the country.

Using data from Statistics Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, she followed children over a period of time to distinguish between children who are touched only briefly by poverty from those who experience long-term poverty. Dr. Phipps's research team then compared a wide range of health indicators for children living in the Maritimes to children living in the rest of Canada. They then conducted a more detailed study of the links between chronic poverty and the higher prevalence of childhood asthma in the Maritimes.

The bottom line: Higher unemployment and under-employment of parents are the major reasons for differences in child poverty throughout Canada – and poverty has a direct effect on children's health.

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